

“PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM” AND “GREAT COLONISATION”: CREATING A NEW NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE USSR IN THE 1920s AND 1930s*

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Abstract. *The article discusses the role of a prominent politician and theorist on the establishment of a federation of all the Turkic peoples of the USSR, M. H. Sultan Galiev, in the policy of the RCP (b)/ CPSU (b) on the formation of a new Soviet identity. It provides an explanatory model of the transformation of Soviet state national policy entering into a new phase both of modernisation and of struggle for the party leadership. The article aims to analyse the importance of the national factor in the period of intensified repressions in the USSR in the second half of the 1930s.*

Keywords: *USSR, national policy, autonomy, repressions, M. H. Sultan-Galiev.*

Introduction

The establishment of the Soviet Union in December of 1922 proved both the importance of the nationalities issue and its amorphous, heterogeneous and conflicting interpretations in the policy enacted by the party of Bolsheviks. A further factor that deepened the tensions in the process of establishing the national state, especially between the centre and the periphery, was the restoring, basically, of a capitalist economic model, on the basis of the transition to the New Economic Policy. Thus, according to theorists of Russian national communists, the nationalities issue was the primary reference point for colonial countries and peoples in their fight for communism and social transformation. All other spheres of revolutionary changes were deemed instrumental and complied with the task of liberating the suppressed.¹ At the same time, the demands of the New Economic Policy drew forward the economic efficiency of regionalism, relying on “proletariat centres,”² and contributed to the decentralisation of government.

It has to be taken into account that, objectively, the Socialist Revolution opened up new vistas for Russia in its transformation into a modern society

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¹ Muhametdinov 2010, p. 137.

² SARF, fund R. 5677, opis 1, delo 7, p. 114.

and the realisation of ideas of liberalisation and emancipation. However, after the restrictions were lifted and the “suppressed nations” liberated, the natural result was an opposing movement towards the perception of a previously alien, but more perfect and powerful imperial model, which resulted in the growth of movements of young nationalists.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the study is hermeneutics as a method for interpreting text - which allows us both to isolate objective information from documents of an ideological nature and to avoid using historiographic clichés - as well as a historical and situational method that reveals cause and effect relationships based on both a real historical situation and an analysis of the world picture that is authentic to the epoch in question.

Results

The above mentioned conditions in their totality led the party forums to include the nationalities issue on the agenda. An agreement on the recurring nationalities problem was to be achieved at the 12th Congress of the Russian Communist Party that was to take place between 17 and 25 April 1923. The main speaker who talked on the issue was Iosif Stalin, who discerned the essence of the conflict in the governing system and used it shrewdly in his fight for the party leadership. In his speech Stalin linked the “New Economic Policy conditions” and the restoration of Great Russian chauvinism, as well as local chauvinism, which threatened to create discord “between the proletariat of the former empire and the peasants.”³ The fact that the Russian emigrants’ political movement supported centripetalism was accepted as indirect proof of the spread of chauvinism.⁴ The basis for “cooperation and fraternal co-existence” of separate nations, according to Stalin, was to be the building of the Union on the principles of the free will and legal equality of the peoples that joined it, as well as a fierce fight against Great Russian chauvinistic ideas in Soviet state organisations. The future dictator listed the factors that hindered the solution of the nationalities issue, among them the absence of actual equality of the nations (not only in terms of education and culture but in industrial development as well) and the growth of nationalism in the republics, directly caused by the return of private capital into the economy.⁵

The communist leaders’ appeal for actual equality of the peoples of the Soviet Union found support among the national elite and gave rise to the

³ Stalin 2014, p. 160.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162, 167.

hope of broadening local authority and the gaining of more rights locally. The official resolution of the 12th congress was termed “the charter of liberties” in the national republics and regions.⁶ Alongside the declaration of the fight against chauvinism, the Communist Party leadership, with the support of the secret police service, the OGPU, started a campaign of political “teaching” of the national leaders in the union and autonomous republics. They strived to build the vertical axis of power into a rigid, centralised government model, which stripped the national leaders of any opportunity of disagreement. Soon after the 12th congress, the Communist Party began to get ready for the special meeting on national and state development, planned for 4 June 1923. One of the key questions planned to be discussed at the meeting was the report of the Central Control Commission of the Communist Party on Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, who was accused of anti-party and anti-Soviet activities and was expelled from the Communist Party. It is significant that Sultan-Galiev, a member of the People’s Commissariat of Nationalities and representative of the Tatar Republic at this Commissariat, was arrested by the secret police service a short time before the start of the Congress, on 4 March 1923. He was charged with no less than the betrayal of the party and secret correspondence with Kemalism supporters and leaders of Basmachi revolt, as well as the establishment of the counter-revolutionary organisation outside the USSR.⁷ Sultan-Galiev was arrested on the grounds of information provided by a student of the Communist University of Workers in the East on discussion between “A. Yanbaev” (obviously, A. Yenbaev), deputy head of the People’s Commissariat in the Tatar Republic, and M. Sultan-Galiev. The above mentioned talked on the restoration of justice and the redistribution of land considering prior discriminations against Tatar people: “before the Soviet Revolution the best lands in cities and by the rivers belonged to the Russian land-owners, after the revolution they were taken by Russian peasants” (A. Yenbaev) and “the need to unite small Turkic nationalities (Tatarstan, Turkestan, Kirghizia, Bashkiria and others) into a single autonomous republic to be included in the USSR” (M. Sultan-Galiev).⁸

The arrest of the leading representative and protector of Turks’ autonomy was a shock for the authorities of the Tatar Republic. Trying to protect Sultan-Galiev, the leaders of the Tatar Republic - K. Mukhtarov, A. Yenbaev and others - in a letter addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party said that there were moments before the 12th Congress when they were “lost” trying to find the answers to the question “What is our national policy?” The New Economic Policy led to the rise of nationalist

⁶ Sultanbekov 2012, p. 147.

⁷ RSARH, fund 3, opis 32, delo 4, p. 143.

⁸ Ibid., delo 5, p. 9.

ideas by the peasants, intelligentsia and other people, and seemed to completely suppress the rights of national minorities, they said in the letter. They were worried by the appearance of “colonisation institutes” at the People’s Commissariat of Nationalities of The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), where the ultra-nationalist Black Hundreds established themselves disguised as specialists and researchers.

The call for the unity and indivisibility of Russia was publicly handed down from mouth to mouth and “every official considered it his duty to threaten with his fist all Stalin’s autonomies, breaking the unity of the great Russian economy.”⁹ However, when the local authorities asked for the release of Sultan-Galiev, their request remained unanswered.

Being a hero of the Islamic world and a supporter of pan-Turkism, actively promoting a strong Turan agenda on the establishment of the federation of all the Turkic peoples in the USSR,¹⁰ he selflessly argued with the leaders of Bolshevism, gradually turning himself into a political outcast, and the mere mention of his name ultimately became the equivalent of, at best, the destruction of one’s own political career.

In this light, the appeal of Stalin in March of 1926 to Sultan-Galiev, by now a Communist Party-expelled rebel, to both launch a message in the newspaper *Pravda* and to denounce and decry G. E. Zinoviev and L. B. Kamenev as the forgers of the Leninist national policy look to be monstrous hypocrisy. Stalin twice “invited” - which we may take to “ordered” - a Hunting Union instructor, the same M. H. Sultan-Galiev, to talk in person, but it should be noted that Stalin’s order was never implemented.¹¹ The arrest of one of the most recognized authorities and ideologists of the Russian Turkic peoples (the central leadership repeatedly tried to send Sultan-Galiev away from Moscow, offered him a job in a party organisation in one of the Caucasian regions, and more than once in May of 1923 addressed the listing requests to the Central Committee for the release of a “distinguished revolutionary”) was well-planned and conducted by the OGPU.¹²

According to the party platform project on the nationalities issue, approved at the Politburo meeting on 4 June 1923, the regional party structures were to “grow and develop young communist organisations in national republics and regions from proletarian and semi-proletarian units.”¹³ Instructions that were received by the participants of the meeting were unambiguous - concessions to regional national units that “wish and are able

⁹ Ibid., delo 4, p. 30.

¹⁰ Muhametdinov 2010, p. 138.

¹¹ Sultanbekov 2013, p. 161.

¹² Sultanbekov 2012, p. 147.

¹³ RSARH, fund 3, opis 32, delo 5, p. 66.

to work loyally within the framework of the Soviet system” do not exclude but rather suggest the “regular ideological struggle for Marxist principles and true internationalism against nationalist tendencies.”¹⁴ Here we also see a definitive programme on developing the required identity: purging the state and party executive organisations of nationalist members (Russian, as well as anti-Russian and other nationalists); continuous and unflinching work on nationalising state and party organisations in the republics and regions (document management in native languages); “searching for and employment of more or less loyal members of local intelligentsia in Soviet organisations and, at the same time, training party officials from party members”; “organising conferences for non-party workers and peasants with reports made by People’s Commissars and leading party figures on the most important actions of the Soviet power.”¹⁵

At the same time, the party leadership acknowledged that Sultan-Galiev’s case was, to some degree, “a reaction to Russian colonialist ideas that appeared among Russians both in the national republic organisations and in central authoritative bodies.”¹⁶ It had been stated already in the project of the party platform that the meeting had shown “absolute unanimity in understanding the need to fight resolutely against colonialist manifestations both in the country’s centre and in the regions.”¹⁷

After defeating all the separatists, any activity in the sphere of extending the rights of autonomies was relentlessly quashed. Thus, in 1925 a special committee of the Communist Party was sent to the Penza region to denounce the activities of “a group of autonomists.” The committee was headed by T. V. Vasiliev from the nationalities bureau at the Central Executive Committee (accompanied by S. S. Shikhanov, member of the department of national minorities at the Penza regional executive office, and G. N. Mironov, member of the regional executive office). The accusations included the organisation of meetings “aimed to inspire the public opinion of the Mordvins in favour of immediate setting-up of an autonomous unit.” The hearing of the case of the “autonomists” was conducted at an extended session of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party but it did not have any serious consequences. The breach of party discipline, “failure to conform,” only resulted in the dismissals of the key participants in the case.¹⁸

However, the strengthening of the internal party struggle at the turn of the 1930s caused the fabrication of new charges against the nationalists. On

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Abramov 2007, p. 99-100.

28 July 1930 the OGPU Collegium adopted a resolution on “Sultan-Galiev’s counter-revolutionary organisation.” In total, 77 people were being prosecuted in this case, 21 of whom, headed by Sultan-Galiev, were sentenced to death by firing squad and the confiscation of property in whole. The scheduled execution was delayed until later, and on 13 January 1931 the death penalty was replaced by a ten-year term of imprisonment in a concentration camp, and then by exile. However, on 19 March 1937 Sultan-Galiev was arrested again, and on 8 December 1939 was sentenced to death by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. The sentence was executed on 28 January 1940.¹⁹

In 1937, the level of repression reached its most extreme hostility and became uncontrollable, and thus the thesis on proletarian internationalism lost its sense: in spite of its pro-communist background, its recognition of ethnic identity was considered to evidence adherents’ membership of a fifth column.

If the struggle against separatist activities aimed to achieve its objectives through repression and political ostracism at the beginning of the NEP,²⁰ the late 1930s saw a return to a previous scenario in which irrational reasons had led to social collapse.

Discussion

The first victims of the Stalinist Moloch were Poles, above all the members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland, the Polish section of the Executive Committee of the Communist International and Poles who served in the Red Army and the NKVD Administration.

According to NKVD order No. 00485 of 11 August 1937 they were accused of sabotage and espionage and rebellion under the leadership of the Polish military organisation. According to O. B. Mozohin 106,666 Poles were arrested on the basis of this order during the year (the directive demanded the arrest of all the Poles on the aforementioned committees), of which 84,471 people were sentenced to death.²¹

By the end of the year, horrifying NKVD statistics reveal a great many clichéd expressions pointing to the ethnic origins of the repressed, and that the mass operations of the NKVD targeted “national contingents” such as Poles, Germans, Harbins, Greeks, etc.

But the evidence suggested that the zeal of the local authorities (in order to avoid accusations of connivance with the enemy forces) in detecting spies and saboteurs among Polish, German, Latvian and other nationalities

¹⁹ Mozohin 2011, p. 240-241.

²⁰ Sultanbekov 2013, p. 161.

²¹ Mozohin 2011, p. 172-174.

was so excessive that it in fact led to criticism from the NKVD administration.

Therefore, the First Deputy of the NKVD, M. P. Frinovsky, in his cipher telegrams to the head of the NKVD of the Sverdlovsk region, voiced concern that the level of fighting with the enemy remained extremely low and that as a result only 390 out of 4,142 people detained during the German offensive operation were ethnic Germans, a mere 42 out of 1,249 arrested in Harbin were Harbins, and no Finns at all were arrested during the Finnish operation.²²

Conclusions

Thus, the administration of the Russian Communist Party did not so much solve its national issues, but rather tried to strengthen its power and achieve its own legitimisation. The adequacy and reasonableness of its choices of means to achieve these goals remain open to debate. The ominous label “sultangalievism” was born to mark any deviations from the major party policy line, the term becoming synonymous with “counter-revolution.” It should be noted that charges could be brought on the basis of questioning the resolutions of the 12th Congress of the Communist Party or criticising government orders.

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²² Ibid., p. 171-172, 186-187.

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| ActaHASH | - Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae. Budapesta. |
| ActaMN | - Acta Musei Napocensis. Muzeul de Istorie a Transilvaniei. Cluj-Napoca. |
| Adevărul | - Adevărul. București. |
| AÉ | - Archaeologiai Értesítő a Magyar régészeti, művészt-történeti és éremtani társulat tudományos folyóirata. Budapesta. |
| AF | - Altorientalische Forschungen. Institut für Archäologische Wissenschaften, Abteilung Vorderasiatische Archäologie. Berna. |
| AH | - Archaeologia historica. Masarykova univerzita, Filozofická fakulta. Brno. |
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| AIEFCB | - Anuarul Institutului de Etnografie și Folclor „Constantin Brăiloiu”. Academia Română, Institutul de Etnografie și Folclor „Constantin Brăiloiu”. București. |
| AIAC | - Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Cluj-Napoca. (este continuat de AIIGB). |
| AIIAI/AIIX | - Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie „A. D. Xenopol” Iași (din 1990 Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A. D. Xenopol” Iași). |
| AIIGB | - Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu” Cluj-Napoca. (continuă AIAC). |
| AIIN | - Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Națională. Cluj-Sibiu. |
| AISC | - Anuarul Institutului de Studii Clasice. Cluj. |
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| AM | - Arheologia Moldovei. Institutul de Istorie și Arheologie „A. D. Xenopol” Iași. |
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- BJJS** - The British Journal of Sociology. London School of Economics and Political Science. University of London.
- BMA** - Bibliotheca Musei Apulensis. Muzeul Naţional al Unirii Alba Iulia.
- BOR** - Biserica Ortodoxă Română. Patriarhia Română. Bucureşti.
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- BR** - Budapest Régiségei. Budapesti Történeti Múzeum. Budapesta.
- Britannia** - Britannia: A Journal of Romano-British and Kindred Studies. Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies. Londra.
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- BSNR** - Buletinul Societăţii Numismatice Române. Bucureşti.
- BTh** - Bibliotheca Thracologica. Institutul Român de Tracologie. Bucureşti.
- BudRég** - Budapest Régiségei. Budapesti Történeti Múzeum. Budapesta.

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| MN | - Muzeul Național. Muzeul Național de Istorie a României. București |
| Mots | - Mots. Les langages du politique. ENS Editions. Paris. |
| Muzeológia | - Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo. Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave. |
| Múzeum | - Slovenské národné múzeum. Bratislava. |

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| Natura | - Natura. Revistă pentru răspândirea științei. București. |
| NK | - Národní knihovna: knihovnická revue. Národní knihovna České republiky. Praga. |
| Numizmatika | - Numizmatika. Slovenská numizmatická spoločnosť. Bratislava. |
| PA | - Patrimonium Apulense. Direcția Județeană pentru Cultură Alba. Alba Iulia. |
| PBF | - Prähistorische Bronzefunde. München. |
| PolSci | - Romanian Journal of Political Science. Societatea Academică din România. București. |
| Pontica | - Pontica. Muzeul de Istorie Națională și Arheologie. Constanța. |
| PQCS | - Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society. University of San Carlos. Cebu. |
| PZ | - Prähistorische Zeitschrift. Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, Institut für Prähistorische Archäologie. Berlin. |
| Rațiunea | - Rațiunea. Revistă bilunară de liberă cugetare. București. |
| RB | - Revista Bistriței. Complexul Muzeal Bistrița-Năsăud. Bistrița (continuă File de Istorie). |
| RES | - Review of European Studies. Canadian Center of Science and Education. Toronto. |
| RevHisto | - Revista de Historiografia. Instituto de Historiografía Julio Caro Baroja. Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. |
| RHA | - Revue historique des armées. Ministère de la Défense. Paris. |
| RHSEE/RESEE | - Revue historique du sud-est européen. Academia Română. București, Paris (din 1963 Revue des études sud-est européennes). |
| RI | - Revista de Istorie (din 1990 Revista istorică). Academia Română. București. |
| RIR | - Revista istorică română. Institutul de Istorie Națională din București. |
| RMM-MIA | - Revista muzeelor și monumentelor. Monumente Istorice și de Artă. București. |
| Romantisme | - Romantisme. Revue du dix-neuvième siècle. Editeur Armand Colin. Paris. |
| România liberă | - România liberă. București. |
| Rossiyskaya istoriya | - Rossiyskaya istoriya. Akademicheskii nauchno-izdatel'skiy, proizvodstvenno-poligraficheskiy i knigorasprostranitel'skiy tsentr Nauka. Moscova. |
| RRH | - Revue Roumaine d'Histoire. Academia Română. București. |
| RRSE | - Revista română de studii eurasiatice. Centrul de Studii Eurasiatice, Universitatea „Ovidius” Constanța. |
| SA | - Sociological Analysis. Oxford University Press. Oxford. |
| SAA | - Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica. Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași. |
| SAI | - Studii și articole de istorie. Societatea de Științe Istorice și Filologice a RPR. București. |
| SArcheologiczne | - Sprawozdania Archeologiczne. Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN. Cracovia. |

Lista abrevierilor

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| Sargetia | - Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis. Muzeul Civilizației Dacice și Romane Deva. |
| SC | - Studii și comunicări. Asociația Folcloriștilor și Etnografilor din județul Sibiu (din 1992 devine Studii și Comunicări de Etnologie). |
| SCB | - Studii și cercetări de bibliologie. Academia RPR. București. |
| SCIV(A) | - Studii și cercetări de istoria veche. București (din 1974, Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie). |
| SCN | - Studii și Cercetări de Numismatică. Institutul de Arheologie „Vasile Pârvan” București. |
| SJ | - Saalburg Jahrbuch. Bericht des Saalburg Museum. Mainz am Rhein. |
| SJAHSS | - Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Scholars Academic and Scientific Publishers (SAS). |
| SlovArch | - Slovenská Archeológia. Nitra. |
| SlovNum | - Slovenská numizmatika. Národný numizmatický komitet Slovenskej republiky a Archeologický ústav SAV. Nitra. |
| SM | - Svobodnaya mysl. Obshchestvo s ogranichennoy otvetstvennost'yu Politizdat. Moscova. |
| SMIM | - Studii și materiale de istorie modernă. Institutul de Istorie „Nicolae Iorga” al Academiei Române. București. |
| SMIMed | - Studii și materiale de istorie medie. Institutul de Istorie „Nicolae Iorga” al Academiei Române. București. |
| Socialismul | - Socialismul. București. |
| SP | - Studii de Preistorie. Asociația Română de Arheologie. București. |
| SS | - The Social Sciences. Western Social Association. Dubai. |
| Stâna | - Stâna. Revistă profesională și de cultură. Organ al oierilor din întreaga țară. Poiana Sibiului. |
| Steaua | - Steaua: literară, artistică și culturală. Uniunea Scriitorilor din România. Cluj-Napoca. |
| StudiaTC | - Studia Theologia Catholica. Universitatea „Babeș-Bolyai” Cluj-Napoca. |
| StudiaUBBH | - Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Series Historia. Universitatea „Babeș-Bolyai” Cluj-Napoca. |
| Studii | - Studii. Revistă de istorie. (din 1974 Revista de istorie și din 1990 Revista istorică). Academia Română. București. |
| Suceava | - Anuarul Muzeului Județean Suceava. |
| SUCH | - Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis, Serie Historica. Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” Sibiu. |
| Syria | - Syria. Archéologie, art et histoire. Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie. Institut français du Proche-Orient. |
| Századok | - Századok. A Magyar Történelmi Társulat folyóirata. Budapest. |
| TAD | - Türk Arkeoloji Dergisi. Ankara. |
| Telegraphul | - Telegraphul. București. |
| Terra Sebus | - Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis. Muzeul Municipal „Ioan Raica” Sebeș. |
| Thraco-Dacica | - Thraco-Dacica. Institutul Român de Tracologie. București. |
| Transilvania | - Transilvania. Centrul Cultural Interetnic Transilvania. Sibiu. |

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| Tyragetia | - Tyragetia. Muzeul Național de Arheologie și Istorie a Moldovei. Chișinău. |
| UPA | - Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie. Berlin. |
| Vestnik Moskovskaya | - Vestnik Moskovskaya gosudarstvennaya khudozhestvenno-promyshlennaya akademiya imeni S. G. Stroganova. Moscova. |
| Vestnik Omskogo | - Vestnik Omskogo universiteta. Seriya Istoricheskiye nauki. Omskij Gosudarstvennyj Universitet. Omsk. |
| Vestnik Tatarskogo | - Vestnik Tatarskogo gosudarstvennogo gumanitarno-pedagogicheskogo universiteta. Filologija i kul'tura. Kazan. |
| VI | - Voprosy istorii. Institut russkoy istorii Rossiyskoy akademii nauk. Moscova. |
| VF | - Voprosy filosofii. Izdatel'stvo «Nauka». Moscova. |
| VTT | - Veszprémi Történelmi Társaság és Veszprém Megyei Múzeumi Igazgatóság kiadványa. Veszprém. |
| WASJ | - World Applied Sciences Journal. International Digital Organization for Scientific Information. Deira, Dubai. |
| Xenopoliana | - Xenopoliana. Buletin al Fundației Academice „A. D. Xenopol” Iași. |
| Ziridava | - Ziridava. Muzeul Județean Arad. |