

Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, the French mystic author, whom Barchenko had chosen as his occult mentor, was also known for his work *Archéomètre* in which he tells of the invention of a special magic device that enables people to predict history and fatal events in the future. The same author was also the founder of the occult political concept of Synarchy.¹⁵ The essence of his theory was the idea that in the depths of Asia there exists an inaccessible underground country called Agartha, populated by political telepaths and magic leaders, who are able to influence life on earth using incantations and the power of thought. These powerful creatures allegedly live in caves in the Himalayas and from time to time send out emissaries to the powerful of this world. Saint-Yves d'Alveydre claimed that the existence of this brotherhood in the heart of Asia had been known to the mystical sects of ancient times and to the Templars. It was this claim of the French occultist, in Barchenko's re-telling, which would later become the starting point of the research carried out under the auspices of the OGPU. Long before Lenin's speech *What is Soviet Power?* and the first workers' soviets in Ivanovo, Saint-Yves d'Alveydre had introduced the concept of the council as the ruling political organ, central to the Synarchic Supreme Board, that is, an organ exercising total, unlimited power. For d'Alveydre, the words "council" and "dictatorship" were practically synonymous. In his many books, entitled *Missions*, we encounter the *Council of Prophets*, the *Council of Priests* and the *Council of Emperors*. At the same time, the idea of the new order itself that is expressed in the concept of Synarchy is addressed to the hegemon of the Revolution, i.e. the workers, to whom d'Alveydre turns in his book *The Mission of the Proletariat (Mission des Ouvriers, 1882)*.

The Bolshevik Revolution put a temporary stop to Barchenko's research in the field of telepathic connections and a direct link to the Synarchic brotherhoods of Asia. During the Civil War, like many other scientists, he gave educational lectures on the ships of the Baltic Fleet in the hope of getting a ration card. In these lectures he permitted himself to mention the powerful country of Shambhala.

In his mystical presumption he reckoned that the key to the solution of social problems was to be found in Shambhala-Agartha, this conspiratorial Eastern site, where elements survived of the knowledge and experience of a society that had reached a higher stage of social, material and technical development than contemporary society. And because of that it was very important to find ways to reach Shambhala and establish ties with it. The people best suited to this task were probably

15 See Markus Osterrieder's chapter in this volume.

those who were free from any attachment to material things, property, personal enrichment, free from egoism, that is, people who had reached the heights of moral perfection.¹⁶

His public appearances were so inspirational that a group of sailors expressed the desire to join the scientist in forcing a way into Tibet and, once they had reached Shambhala, establishing ties with the great leaders of the world. The sailors wrote several letters to various officials, including to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, but received no answer.¹⁷

In 1920, Barchenko was invited by the Petrograd Institute for Brain-Research and Psychic Activity to give a series of conference papers. His paper *The Spirit of Ancient Teachings from the Point of View of Contemporary Natural Science* (*Dukh drevnikh uchenii v pole zreniia sovremennogo estestvoznania*) was considered worthy of publication in the Institute's Newsletter. At that time Barchenko was working on the creation of a universal doctrine of rhythm (gamma) that could be applied in cosmology, cosmogony, geology, mineralogy and crystallography, as well to social life and the bio-psychological manifestations of the individual. Later he would call his discovery a "synthetic method based on ancient science". The doctrine would be expounded, in compressed fashion, in the author's treatise *Diunkhor*.

The Institute for Brain-Research hosted a special Learned Commission, which invited not only scientists as speakers, but also mystics and members of secret societies. Barchenko was not the only such mystic. There was also Leonid Vasil'ev,¹⁸ a psychologist and psychiatrist and corresponding member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR, who would later publish two books in the USSR on paranormal phenomena.¹⁹ This is what Leonid Vasil'ev remembers about the "commission for psychic research" at the Institute for Brain-Research:

The most significant feature of this commission was the fact that it was composed of representatives of science as well as of adepts of occultism—

¹⁶ TsA FSB From the transcript of the interrogation of A.V. Barchenko, 10 June 1937.

¹⁷ AVP RF [Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation] f. 100, op. 1, d. 1, l. 8 ff.

¹⁸ Leonid Leonidovich Vasil'ev (1891–1966), Russian psychophysicologist. Graduate of the Faculty of Natural Sciences of St. Petersburg University. Head of the physiology laboratory at the Institute for Brain-Research. Professor of physiology and zooreflexology. In 1932 he began to research the possibilities of telepathy.

¹⁹ Leonid Vasil'ev, *Tainstvennyye iavleniia chelovecheskoi pishkiki*, (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1959); idem, *Zametki fiziologa* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1962).

spiritists Nilov, G. O. Loboda, the medical doctor Aleksandr I. Iablon-skii), theosophists (Likhov, who was also in charge of the Institute's premises and hosted the commission's sessions); other occultists also sometimes attended Pogorel'skii, also a medical doctor, the biologist Antonovskii and the journalist (Barchenko)."²⁰

In late 1923, Barchenko attracted the attention of the OGPU in Petrograd, at first because the secret police habitually observed various occult associations whose sessions Barchenko sometimes attended. The secret police was worried by the existence in Petrograd of organizations such as the "Order of the Holy Grail" (*Orden' sviatogo graalia*), "Russian Autonomous Masons" (*Russkoe avtonomnoe masonstvo*), "Resurrection" (*Voskresen'e*), "Brotherhood of True Service" (*Bratstvo istinnogo sluzheniia*), "Order of the Light" (*Orden' sveta*), "Order of the Spirit" (*Orden' dukha*), "Order of Templars and Rosicrucians" (*Orden' tamplierov i rozenkreitserov*), and "Order of Martinists" (*Orden' martinistov*). The OGPU aimed to be informed about everything that was going on at these sessions, especially since participants summoned spirits from the netherworld who predicted political dramas to come: the impending death of Trotskii at the hand of a woman and the impending reign of Nicholas III. Consequently, Barchenko received a confidential visit by secret police officers.

They were rather sympathetic to Barchenko's tales about his research in the field of paranormal phenomena and the possibility of applying his discovery to enhance the Soviet Union's defence capability, and even more so about his plans to organize an expedition to Tibet to visit the keepers of the secrets of ancient science. Barchenko remembers: "The comrades told me that my work was so significant that I had to write a report to the government and to the chairman of the Supreme Council for the National Economy, comrade [Feliks] Dzerzhinskii. On their advice I wrote to Dzerzhinskii and told him about my work."²¹

The path to Dzerzhinskii's office was not an easy one. The OGPU workers spent a long time discussing different possibilities and decided that the shortest way was through the Special Section (Spetsotdel)—an institute headed by Gleb Ivanovich Bokii,²² and that Bokii himself was the person who had the power to realize their secret project. (fig.3)

²⁰ Cited after Andreev, *Okkul'tist strany Sovetov*, 123.

²¹ TsA FSB, transcript of the interrogation of A. Barchenko, 23 May 1937.

²² Gleb Ivanovich Bokii (1879–1937), Communist Party activist and prominent apparatchik of the Cheka/OGPU/NKVD, Commissar of State Security third class (1935). One of the founders of the GULag system of labor camps. Shot on 15 November 1937. Rehabilitated in 1956.



Fig. 3: Gleb Ivanovich Bokii (1879–1937)

The secret police who visited Barchenko knew Bokii very well. In the autumn of 1918, when Bokii had been the head of the Petrograd Cheka, they had all worked in counterintelligence and were the harshest investigators of the era of the Red Terror. It did not take the well-wishers long to deliver Barchenko's letter to the head of the OGPU, Dzerzhinskii himself, while a copy of the document ended up on the desk of Iakov Agranov, the deputy director of the Secret Section and Lenin's former secretary. He was responsible for a particularly important set of operations concerned with secret societies.

Only a few days after he sent the letter, Barchenko was invited to a secret location of the OGPU on Krasnykh zor' Street where Agranov awaited him. The fact that Agranov had travelled from Moscow for this confidential conversation indicates how excited he was by the news. He took in every word Barchenko uttered. Barchenko remembers that "in the conversation with Agranov I explained to him in detail my theory of the existence of a closed scientific collective in Central Asia and my project for establishing contact with the owners of this knowledge. Agranov reacted positively to my report."²³

23 TsA FSB, transcript of the interrogation of A. Barchenko, 23 December 1937.