Ronald F. Feldstein
Indiana University

An Introduction to William Pokhlebkin and his Contributions to Russian Culture

I. Introduction.

The goal of this paper is to present a brief introduction to the Russian historian, culinary expert, and cultural figure, Vil'iam Avgust Vasil'evich Pokhlebkin[1] (Вильям Август Васильевич Похлебкин), 1923-2000.[2] To date, no full-length biography of Pokhlebkin exists, in Russian or other languages. Therefore, it is hoped that this introduction might be of interest to readers who might never have heard of Pokhlebkin and who may wish to delve more deeply into the subject after discovering him. One of the most complete treatments of Pokhlebkin's life is a 44-minute documentary film, directed by Mikhail Rogovoi and released in 2005 on St. Petersburg television channel 5, entitled *Vil'iam Pokhlebkin: Death of a Food Writer* (*Вильям Похлебкин: Смерть кулинара*). The alternative title, *The Mystery of the Death of the Food Writer Pokhlebkin* (*Тайна гибели*

[1] In view of the general nature of this topic, the Library of Congress system of transcription will be used, rather than the specialized system of linguistic transcription, unless the name is already known in English under a different spelling, e.g. Anastas Mikoyan.

[2] My own, personal interest in Pokhlebkin dates back to the late 1970's, when I ordered his 1978 book, *The Ethnic Cuisines of our Peoples* (*Национальные кухни наших народов*). Although nominally a cookbook, with a chapter on the cuisine of each constituent Soviet Republic, plus additional chapters on the cuisines of some Soviet autonomous regions, the books stood out for its comprehensive and interesting descriptions of the historical background of each Soviet region's cuisine. At a later date, I searched for additional titles by Pokhlebkin, for use in a Russian translation course, and discovered his book, *A History of Vodka* (*История водки,* in *История важнейших пищевых продуктов, pp.41-316*). A subsequent search, after the year 2000, revealed numerous other publications by Pokhlebkin, covering a wide range of fields, from cuisine to heraldry, and Scandinavian history to the history of Stalin's pseudonym. My later searches also revealed that Pokhlebkin was murdered in 2000 and that his body was not discovered for several weeks after the crime. When I discovered the 2006 documentary about Pokhlebkin, it gave me a somewhat complete account of his life story, although with gaps and inaccuracies. This led to many further searches on the Internet and the library. Additional holes in the story were filled in by Pokhlebkin's son Avgust, who met with me on several occasions in Moscow, in October and November, 2009. I eventually presented my findings in a semester-long course on the life and work of Pokhlebkin, taught in the Honors Program of Indiana University, in the Spring 2010 and 2011 semesters.

кулинара Похлебкина) can also be found in the press and the Internet. In addition to the documentary, sources include a variety of short essays, articles, and chapters about specific topics related to the subject. Following a general summary, several specific topics about Pokhlebkin will be presented, which will alert the reader to publications and points of special interest and which will correct some misinformation in certain popular sources of information about him.

Vil'iam Pokhlebkin was born on August 20, 1923. Let us begin with some general facts about Pokhlebkin and what makes him unique. In the first place, his food-related last name always attracts attention and if Russians have not previously heard of him, they often assume that he is a fictional character. The related noun, *pokhlebka (похлёбка)* is defined as 'soup, potage'. The last name was indeed a pseudonym. However, it was not created by the food writer himself, but by his father, Vasilii Mikhailovich Mikhailov, a member of the Russian revolutionary movement. The coincidence is that Vil'iam Pokhlebkin eventually became a famous food writer, long after his father took the pseudonym as his last name. Pokhlebkin's name is also notable for his two given names, Vil'iam (Вильям, English William) and Avgust (Август, English August). Russians generally have a single given name and use a patronymic as a middle name, but Pokhlebkin had two given names plus a patronymic and last name, giving us the full name of Vil'iam Avgust Vasilyevich Pokhlebkin (Вильям Август Васильевич Похлёбкин). Since the names Vil'iam and Avgust are very rare in Russia, several theories exist as to how he came to be named Vil'iam Avgust. According to one theory, the first name reflects the fact that his father admired William Shakespeare. In view of his father's Leninist background, a second theory notes that the first three letters of the Russian name Vil'iam are the initials of Lenin's full name (Vladimir Il'ich Lenin). Yet a third theory notes that Vil'iam's brother's name is Robert and that his parents simply gave their sons common English first names. As to the second given name, Avgust, some sources name August Bebel, the German Marxist, as the inspiration for the name, while others simply attribute it to the fact that he was born in the month of August.

Pokhlebkin saw military service first in the Russo-Finnish War, in 1939, and later, in World War II, from 1941-44. After receiving a concussion, very early in World War II, Pokhlebkin was sent away from the front and worked in the area of food preparation, devising new dishes from the limited ingredients that were available to him and obtaining his first practical experience in the field of cuisine. Pokhlebkin's culinary experiences in the military service are sometimes mentioned without attribution, such as in the 2005 documentary film. The actual source is the first chapter of the book *Secrets of Good Cuisine* (*Тайны хорошей кухни)*, in which Pokhlebkin traces his interest in food all the way back to early childhood, but without specific references to himself. Instead, he tells readers that he will narrate the story of a "certain boy" ("один мальчик," p. 13) who had an unusual interest in food and later worked as an army chef. The fact that this so obviously refers to Pokhlebkin himself can be seen in the fact that the documentary film takes many citations of Pokhlebkin about the unnamed "boy" and states them as facts about Pokhlebkin's own biography, especially as relates to his experiences in the army.

Following World War II, Pokhlebkin is engaged in historical and diplomatic studies that ultimately lead to a 1953 Candidate of Sciences degree. Pokhlebkin's special areas are Scandinavia and the former Yugoslavia. However, after the political break between the U.S.S.R. and Tito's Yugoslavia, Pokhlebkin had to abandon and destroy his work on Slovenian Carinthia, in 1949. This led to a clear choice of Scandinavia as an area of concentration. In 1949, he received a diploma from the famous foreign relations institute, MGIMO (МГИМО), i.e. the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations. Over the course of the next several years, he was associated with the journal, *Scandinavian Collection (Скандинавский сборник)*, which he founded, and *Military Thought (Военная мысль)*, on which he was an editorial board member. He was also a researcher at the Institute of History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Based on the accounts of many contemporaries and of Pokhlebkin himself, he had a difficult personality and often quarreled with colleagues and supervisors. He notes that there was a dispute about the topic of a possible doctoral dissertation, and that the academic council rejected it in 1957. He felt that with his combination of superior knowledge and difficult personality, he was not able to find appropriate employment ("With this knowledge and with this personality

I could not serve anywhere" ("Я с такими знаниями и таким характером нигде не мог служить." Kolodnyi, 2008). The documentary film shows the reminiscences of contemporaries who recall Pokhlebkin's inability to get along with superiors at the Institute of History. Pokhlebkin felt that they wasted too much time and did not devote themselves to their work as they should have done. He gave a speech at the academy, threatening to go on strike as a protest against their lax work habits, which was unheard of and a shock during that period of the Soviet Union. Ultimately, it led to Pokhlebkin having to leave the Institute, without any obvious means of earning a living as an historian, other than some minor teaching jobs.

At this point, Pokhlebkin turned from his profession of historian to his hobby of cuisine and began a long series of works in the culinary field. This led to the 1968 publication of his book on tea (*Tea: Types, Properties, and Use (Чай, его типы, свойства, употребление*, in *История важнейших пищевых продуктов*, pp. 317-520), which became quite popular and was given non-authorized translations into both Polish and Tatar languages. The book, devoid of ideological and political content, stirred the ire of the KGB, and it was officially denounced in the press, which led to further restrictions on Pokhlebkin's access to archives. Some claim that Pokhlebkin was reduced to penury after this and that his diet did not include much more than tea and cooked cereal for a time. Nevertheless, he continued to write articles and books on many varieties of food and on the cuisine of many ethnic groups. Using his knowledge of Finnish, he served as the Russian translator of an entire book on Finnish cuisine in 1982, for which he wrote the preface (H. Uusivirta, *Finnish Ethnic Cuisine*; Х. Уусивирта, *Финская национальная кухня*). One of his best known publications was a compendium of the cuisine of each Soviet republic, plus the cuisine of selected autonomous regions, which first appeared in 1978—*The Ethnic Cuisines of Our Peoples (Национальные кухни наших народов)*. Most of Pokhlebkin's works on cuisine are not strictly cookbooks, which emphasize recipes and offer very little historical and cultural background. In the work of Pokhlebkin, it is close to the reverse, with much more interesting historical and cultural detail than is usually found in such books. This makes him a unique historian of cuisine, certainly in the Soviet Union of the 20th century. It is often said that there were three major Russian

cookbook authors, starting from the work of Elena Molokhovets, in the mid-19th century: Molokhovets, *A Gift to Young Housewives (Подарокъ молодымъ хозяйкамъ)*; the author of the 1939 *Book about Tasty and Healthy Food (Книга о вкусной и здоровой пище)*, commissioned by Anastas Mikoyan; and Pokhlebkin. An attempt was made to translate and simplify Pokhlebkin's *The Ethnic Cuisines of Our Peoples.* This resulted in the re-named English publication, *Russian Delight*, which removed most of the interesting historical detail, but left virtually all of the recipes intact.

The next major period in Pokhlebkin's career begins in 1977, when Poland institutes a lawsuit, claiming that vodka was originally Polish, not Russian, and that the Russians should be required to pay a license fee for every bottle of vodka sold abroad. The Soviet Institute of History was called upon to produce a counterargument about the historical priority of Russian vodka. Although Pokhlebkin had been relieved of his duties in that institute and forced to seek work outside of the historical field for many years, he was summoned by the Institute of History and asked to write a history of vodka which would help the Soviet Union defend its case against Poland. This effort eventually resulted in Pokhlebkin's book, *A History of Vodka (История водки)*, which was written in the late 1970's, but was only published in 1991, with translations into many languages, including English. Pokhlebkin was successful in his efforts and Russia was not forced to pay a duty to Poland for every bottle of export vodka. Many Russians consider this to be an important patriotic deed of Pokhlebkin, which saved many millions of dollars in potential export fees. On the other hand, there have been fierce debates about the historical merits of Pokhlebkin's actual work on the chronological periods of vodka and distilling in Russia. In spite of certain critical articles in the press (both inside and outside Russia), Pokhlebkin was internationally recognized for both his historical and culinary writings. In 1986, he received the Urho Kekkonen Medal for his work on Finnish history and in 1993, he received the Langhe Ceretto Prize for his culinary works, particularly his *History of Vodka*.

The next period includes Mikhail Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign of the 1980's and the ultimate breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Pokhlebkin was a strong critic of the

way the anti-alcohol campaign was managed and expressed his views very openly, especially in his book on the History of Vodka, which also dealt with the social and political problems of alcohol in Russia. Pokhlebkin was an extremely prolific author and he also wrote a combined introduction and dictionary to the field of symbols, emblems, and heraldry, which was first published in 1989, with an early title, *International Symbols and Emblems* (*Международная символика и эмблематика*), and later was re-published with a title change, indicating that it was a dictionary of the subject: *Dictionary of International Symbols and Emblems* (*Словарь международной символики и* эмблематики). The book introduces and discusses hundreds of symbols and even evaluates all of the state flags and symbols of the United States, in terms of their correct or incorrect adherence to the principles of symbol and emblem creation. At approximately the same time, in 1988, the first edition of Pokhlebkin's culinary dictionary was published, at first under the title, *On Cuisine from A to Z* (*О кулинарии от А до Я)*, and later expanded, in 1994, with the new title, *Culinary Dictionary (Кулинарный словарь).* In the same period, Pokhlebkin also published his unique study of food in the major Russian dramas of the 18th and 19th centuries, *Dinner is Served! (Кушать подано!)*. He was also the author of a controversial book about Stalin's pseudonym, *The Great Pseudonym (Великий псевдоним)*, which appeared in 1996. Near the end of the 20th century, Pokhlebkin was chosen to write one of the volumes of a series that summed up the 20th century's achievements in a number of fields. Pokhlebkin's assigned volume was *The Cuisine of the Century (Кухня века).* Only the first half of the book was finished and edited when Pokhlebkin was found murdered in his Podol'sk apartment, in April, 2000. The second half was posthumously reconstructed from the unedited second half of the manuscript and published together with the first half, as Pokhlebkin's final publication. The reason for the murder remains a mystery to this day. Some speculate that Pokhlebkin's opinions about the Caucasus or against the government may have played a role, but no definitive answer exists. In the remaining sections of this paper, I will highlight some of the unique and noteworthy aspects of Pokhlebkin's life and body of work. These topics include an assessment of the major biographical sources about Pokhlebkin, comments on the author's proscriptive definitions in the culinary dictionary, information on the eight short Pokhlebkin videos on the YouTube website, a

brief look at a representative chapter in the book on cuisine in Russian drama, a note on Pokhlebkin's unusual historic role in the presentation of Jewish cuisine, comments on bread in the work of Pokhlebkin, and a review of the stark contrasts found in reviews of Pokhlebkin's work, which run the gamut from considering him a culinary and literary genius to doubting his competence and documentation in the field of history.

In order to provide the reader with more complete details, a chronology of Pokhlebkin's life is provided in figure 1. This does not exactly reproduce any extant chronology, but attempts to unite the online Russian chronology compiled by Fatekh Vergasov (http://www.pseudology.org/Poxlebkin/index.htm) with the timeline compiled by Pokhlebkin himself, in his self-published bibliography of 1999 (printed in a run of only 100 copies and kindly provided to me by Pokhlebkin's son, Avgust Vil'iamovich).

1923 – August 20. Date of birth. Father: underground revolutionary Mikhailov, who took the pseudonym Pokhlebkin.

1939 – Soviet-Finnish War. Army private in intelligence.

1940 – Begins Scandinavian studies.

1941 – Goes to the front (sent away from front after a concussion).

1944 – Discharged with rank of private.

1944 – Moscow State University. International Faculty. Student.

1944 – October 14. Moscow International Faculty becomes the independent Moscow State Institute of International Relations: MGIMO.

1947-1949 Listed as "Period of Study at MGIMO" in his bibliography.

1949 – His work on Slovenian Carinthia is destroyed, after the break with Tito.

1949 – Receives MGIMO diploma. Due to a "4" (=B) in Marxism-Leninism, cannot become a diplomat.

1949-1962— Listed as "Period of Research in the Institute of History and work on the journal *Scandinavian Collection (Скандинавский сборник)*."

1949 – Graduate student in the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

1952 – Becomes a member of the All-Union Geographical Society.

1952 – On the board of the journal *Military Thought (Военная мысль)*

1953 – Candidate of Historical Sciences. Consulting Editor for several encyclopedias.

1953 – Scholarly worker in the modern history section of the Institute of History.

1956 – Founder of the journal *Scandinavian Collection* (*Скандинавский сборник*).

1957 – Leaves the journal *Military Thought (Военная мысль)*.

After rejection of proposed doctoral thesis, states, "With my knowledge and personality, I could not find anyplace to work."

1961 – Leaves the journal "Scandinavian Collection."

1962 – Joins the editorial board of the international journal *Scandinavica*, published in England.

1963 – Leaves the Institute of History.

1963-1968 – Listed as "Period of Teaching at MGIMO, Moscow State University and the Diplomatic School of the Foreign Ministry."

1968-1990 – Listed as “Freelance Period in the USSR.”

1968 – *Tea: Types, Properties, and Use (Чай, его типы, свойства, употребление).*

1971- Beginning of a long series of articles on foods, published in the magazines *Sovetsky Soyuz (Soviet Union), Nedelia* (*The Week, Неделя)* during 1970’s-1980’s, and *Ogonyok* in the 1990’s.

1972 – *Finland as Foe and Friend (Финляндия как враг и как друг)*

1972?- Second marriage to Yevdokiya Buryeva.

1974 – *Everything about Spices* (*Все о пряностях).*

1975 – Birth of son, August Pokhlebkin.

1975 – *USSR-Finland. 260 Years of Relations, 1713-1973 (СССР — Финляндия. 260 лет отношений 1713—1973).*

1978 – *The National Cuisines of our Peoples (Национальные кухни наших народов).*

1978 – Writes *History of Russian Vodka (История водки)*. Not published until 1991.

1979 – *Secrets of Good Cooking (Тайны хорошей кухни).*

1981 – Edits and writes preface to Li Tsin’s book, *Chinese Dishes (Блюда китайской кухну).*

1983 - *Cooking for Fun (Занимательная кухня)*.

1984 – Abridged English translation of *National Cuisines of our Peoples*, titled *Russian Delight.*

1986 – Urho Kekkonen prize for works on Finnish history.

1988 – *Culinary Dictionary (Кулинарный словарь).*

1989 – Dictionary of heraldry: *Dictionary of International Symbols and Emblems* (*Международная символика и эмблематика).*

1989 – *Foreign Policy of Rus’, Russia, and the USSR for 1000 Years in Names, Dates, and Facts (Внешняя политика Руси, России и СССР за 1000 лет в именах, датах, фактах).*

1990 - *The National Cuisines of Our Peoples (Национальные кухни наших народов).* Second, expanded edition.

1991 – *Condiments (Приправы).*

1991 - *A History of Vodka (История водки).* First Russian edition.

1992 - English translation of *A History of Vodka*, with chapter "Vodka and Ideology," not published in first Russian edition.

1993 – *Dinner is Served! (Кушать подано!)* Repertoire of food and beverages in classical Russian dramas. 1993 – Awarded Langhe Ceretto Prize (Italy) for books on cuisine.

1996 – *The Great Pseudonym (Великий псевдоним)* (Names used by Joseph Stalin).

1997 – *The Great War and the Peace that Never Happened (Великая война и несостоявшийся мир).*

1999 – *My Cuisine and My Menu (Моя кухня и мое меню).*

1999 – Elected member of New York Academy of Sciences

1999 – *Complete Bibliography of Works Published from 1948-1999 (Полная библиография опубликованных работ 1948-1999)*.

2000 – *Cuisine of the Century (Кухня века).*

2000 – Murdered in Podolsk, Russia, sometime during the period March 27-31. Still unsolved.

2000 – April 13. Body discovered in the Podolsk apartment.

Figure 1. **Chronology of Major Events and Books in the Life of Vil'iam Pokhlebkin (many published articles are not listed, but appear in the Pokhlebkin bibliography.)**

II. Major biographical sources about Pokhlebkin.

Rogovoi's documentary film about Pokhlebkin is the only source that makes an attempt to relate a continuous narrative about Pokhlebkin's life, from birth to death, although many details are omitted, very cursory or simply wrong. Two main sources appear to be used—articles written by Pokhlebkin himself. A narrator relates information about Pokhlebkin and his works, without any statement about the origin of the prose. However, a search of many of the narrator's Russian phrases reveals that they are taken from various short biographical pieces written by Pokhlebkin himself. In fact, these searches have helped me to identify several biographical items which formed a part of various essays, introductory pieces, and books on cuisine. In addition to entire sentences taken from the work of Pokhlebkin, there are statements by many people who knew Pokhlebkin, such as colleagues in the field of history, editors who worked on his manuscripts, and Pokhlebkin's former wife. A rather inaccurate bibliographical statement is made in the film, concerning the book, *The Large Encyclopedia of Culinary Art (Большая энциклопедия кулинарного искусства),* which was posthumously published in 2002. The film states that he had been working on this "encyclopedia" since the 1970's and that the author never got to see it in its complete form ("the author was not to see this book in its complete form ("в полном объеме сам автор этой книги не увидит")). In reality, this "encyclopedia" was a collection which reprinted many of Pokhlebkin's individual books and articles on cuisine, but which had all been published previously, during his lifetime. Since the book consisted only of reprints, it would seem that the forceful statement about the author not ever being able to see his completed work should have applied not to the reprinted "encyclopedia," but to the volume that Pokhlebkin only half-completed at the time of his death and which was published completely only after his death. As mentioned above, this book was *The Cuisine of the Century*, which is not mentioned as such in the documentary. It might also be noted that the posthumous publication of a one-volume collection of Pokhlebkin's works was merely a subset of the six-volume set of his collected works, which was published during the author's lifetime, from 1996-1999, and listed by the author on page 73 of his bibliography.

Pokhlebkin's preface to an edition of his book on tea, plus articles on soy and buckwheat, first bore the title "The Circumstances of Creating Books" ("Обстоятельства создания книг"), and was later slightly modified, with a title change to "Author's Preface" ("Авторское предисловие"), in the 2008 combined edition of Pokhlebkin's books on tea and vodka. It has significant biographical material, containing the author's first-hand statement about how he established a collection of many tea varieties and wrote his first culinary monograph, *Tea. Its Properties, Types, and Use (Чай. Его свойства, типы, и употребление).* It deals with the difficulties he had in writing the book and afterwards, due to a negative article about the book in the newspaper *Socialist Industry (Социалистическая индустрия),* by an agent of the KGB, who first used the pseudonym Aleksandrov, and later was revealed as Mar'ianovskii. This was Pokhlebkin's first publication after being forced out of the Institute of History and he was blamed for the fact that the non-ideological book about tea appealed to dissidents, even though he never considered himself one at all.[3] Many of the details in this article appear verbatim in the documentary film, but the viewer can only guess that the text is directly out of a piece by Pokhlebkin and not the work of the script writer.

Elena Mushkina, Pokhlebkin's editor at the weekly newspaper supplement *Nedelia* (*Неделя),* gave an extensive interview in the documentary film about the hiring of Pokhlebkin and the difficulties of working with him as an editor. A more extensive biographical treatment of Pokhlebkin appears in print, in two publications by Mushkina. The accounts overlap to some extent, but are not identical. The first account appears in the 2001 book, *A Century of One Family (Век одной семьи),* in the chapter "Pushkin Square Can be Seen from Our Window" "А из нашего окна площадь Пушкина видна"). Mushkina's second account is an entire chapter devoted to Pokhlebkin, in the 2008 book, *The Secret of the Courland Pie (Тайна курляндского пирога).* The chapter is entitled "Vodka Saved by Pokhlebkin" ("Водка, спасенная Похлебкиным") and

---

[3] Avgust Pokhlebkin related the story to me about that fact that when his father was hospitalized for a real illness, representatives of the United States government contacted him and asked if he was being kept in the hospital against his will and whether he wanted his case brought to the attention of the Soviet leaders in talks with the United States representatives. Pokhlebkin responded that he did not consider himself a dissident and that he wanted no such intervention.

portrays its subject as a brilliant thinker and writer who was extremely difficult to get along with on a day-to-day basis. For example, his work for *Nedelia* was hailed as groundbreaking and ingenious, since it combined culinary topics with serious historical analysis, which previously was treated merely as a non-serious household subject. On the other hand, the personality difficulties were related to Pokhlebkin's superior attitude to his fellow writers. Many instances are cited in which Pokhlebkin quizzes others about historical and culinary facts, eager to demonstrate that he has knowledge that they do not. A train trip to a famous Moldovan winery is recounted, on which the Nedelia group all ate together and spent their time together in Chisinau, except for Pokhlebkin, who felt that he did not want to share in the inferior food the others were eating, but preferred to eat what he had brought from home and what he could procure himself at a food market. At the winery itself, he tried to take over for the official guide, showing everyone that his knowledge was superior to that of the others. Two characteristic passages from Mushkina's first work on Pokhlebkin, *A Century of One Family,* are as follows:

> He was small, frail, graying and balding. He had a gray, flowing beard going in all directions—you just couldn't help giving it a tug. A worn out coat and tie off to the side. And a briefcase too heavy to lift, where he carried his ingenious articles. (Russian: Маленький, хиленький, полуседой, полулысый... Бороденка серая, жидкая, в разные стороны; так и хочется подергать. Пальто потертое, галстук на боку. И неподъемный портфель; в нем он носил свои гениальные статьи.)
>
> I immediately understood that they were ingenious. He quickly wrote his first article: "The festive pie." I read it and couldn't believe my eyes. Of course, there were recipes, that was a given! But, in our practice, the recipes usually were the main body of the article, its essence. That's why the articles were written in the first place. But, for Pokhlebkin, the recipes were secondary. Necessary, but not the main thing. And the main thing was **what had never existed before in the Soviet press—a culinary history and culinary journalism.** (Russian: То, что они гениальные, я поняла сразу. Первую статью написал быстро: "Праздничный

пирог". Читаю - глазам не верю. Конечно, рецепты - как же без них?! Но обычно в наших кулинарных материалах рецепты составляли тело статьи, фактуру, суть. Ради них статья и писалась. У Похлебкина рецепты как бы между прочим. Это хоть и нужное, но вторичное. А главное - то, чего в советской печати до него не было: история кулинарии и кулинарная публицистика.)

Another important source of information, covering Pokhlebkin's boyhood fascination with cuisine and his culinary experiences in the army, can be found in the first chapter of his book, *Secrets of Good Cooking (Тайны хорошей кухни)*. Pokhlebkin starts the chapter by commenting on the generally low level of culinary literacy, claiming that little attention is paid to this topic, preventing young people from choosing it as a career. Somewhat coyly, Pokhlebkin gives the example of a nameless "boy," who was fascinated by cuisine in his childhood and went on to devise unusual dishes as an army chef. Although not specifically identified, it is clear that Pokhlebkin is speaking autobiographically. In the film, portions of this chapter are quoted verbatim as part of Pokhlebkin's biography, especially in reference to the author's culinary experiences in the military service, and no mention is made of the fact that this information comes from a chapter about an anonymous boy.

Thus, the bits and pieces of the Pokhlebkin biography are scattered across the works of several people and not always specifically identified as biographical. It remains for a future biographer to bring these disparate accounts together into an integrated whole.

III. On Pokhlebkin's proscriptive culinary definitions.

Pokhlebkin's work, including his culinary dictionary, presents several instances in which his definitions are somewhat at odds with standard Russian literary usage. This paper will not present a thorough study of this lexical divergence, but two lexical groups of words will be used to illustrate this aspect of Pokhlebkin's work. The first lexical group refers to

roasting and frying, and the second group differentiates the Russian words for spices and condiments.

In the most reputable Russian dictionaries, such as the most recent four-volume and 17-volume Academy dictionaries, the word *žarit' (жарить)* is used for cooking without water at a high temperature, corresponding to the English words 'roast', 'grill', and 'fry'. In other words, while English 'roast' and 'grill' imply cooking by means of heated air, 'fry' refers to cooking in hot fat or oil. However, Russian *žarit'* can refer to both, as evidenced by the examples in the 17-volume dictionary, one of which refers to roasting or grilling shashlyk over coals ("жарили шашлык") and the other refers to frying in sunflower oil ("жарили в подсолнечном масле"). However, Pokhlebkin maintains that the verb *жарить* should properly refer only to cooking in fat or oil, but that the verbs *обжигать, гриллировать, запекать* should be used for roasting or grilling.

The very same dictionaries of the Russian Academy equate three words that vaguely refer to spices, seasonings, and condiments: *специи, пряности, приправы.* In fact, if one looks up the first word in either of these dictionaries, the definitions are given in terms of the latter two terms. In other words *специя* 'spice' is defined as *пряности* or *приправы*. Yet, Pokhlebkin has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that the meanings should be different for each of these three words, although he does admit that these words are confused in standard Russian. In his two monographs on this topic, *Spices and Condiments (Специи и приправы)* and *Everything about Seasonings (Все о пряностях), специи* are defined as thickeners, yeasts (including lactic cultures), and active chemical substances that are primarily inorganic. Pokhlebkin's list of such "spices" includes salt, soda, potash, ammonium, vinegar, citric acid, monosodium glutamate (MSG), alum, starch (potato flour), alcohol, sugar, yeast, agar-agar, gelatin, licorice, boric acid, etc. In other words, most of these contribute a general effect on food without an obviously specific flavor addition. They are used to "modify the taste" and "have no aroma" of their own (*Специи и приправы,* p. 56). *Пряности* are defined as being highly flavorful portions of plants, with very specific flavors common only to them, which are added to foods in small quantities. Examples of *пряности* include the pepper family (white, black,

red, etc.), ginger, various types of cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg, various types of citrus zests, bay leaf, rosemary, turmeric, etc. The third category of condiments (*приправы*) is defined as substances which can add a sour taste and make the consistency softer and more tender. The category of *приправы* is for adding "nuances" to foods. Examples include sauces which themselves have more than one ingredient, e.g. Russian horseradish with the possible addition of other ingredients, French Béarnaise sauce, English Worcestershire, Indian chutney, Chinese soy and hoi-sin sauces, etc.

Thus, there is an element of linguistic proscriptiveness in Pokhlebkin's culinary terminology, about which we have only scratched the surface. It is a complex issue and one wonders whether Pokhlebkin is reflecting the jargon of Russian chefs or whether he is proposing a new system for more precise definitions of culinary terms. This can ultimately be established by a fuller study of Pokhlebkin's culinary definitions, especially those that attempt to correct normative Russian usage.

IV. Pokhlebkin's appearance in eight YouTube videos.

The documentary film about we have been discussing contains only a very brief audio selection of Pokhlebkin himself. However, eight short videos of Pokhlebkin discourses can be found on the YouTube website.[4] I have made English subtitles for half of them and work is ongoing to create subtitles for all eight videos. The total length of all the videos is around one hour, approximately the same as the length of the documentary. Viewing the documentary film plus the eight YouTube videos is perhaps the quickest way for a person

[4] Cf. the links by the original poster who created the Pokhlebkin videos:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj6-ZMK4M2M
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJJyfMxJIZs
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i14pY21TFO4
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEFTF-xUOmI
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9ru3UICgBY
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKyqGVqx1BM
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu6LfIufVz0
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBL2Z7QKoMs

A second YouTube poster has combined several videos into one long file:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ_CD4tsVFA

to obtain a visual introduction to the subject. The eight short videos cover such topics as the history of vodka, the historical significance of hunting for Russian leaders, the differences between different Russian eating establishments, and an illustration of why the study of culinary history can be important for scholarship. In the latter video, Pokhlebkin makes an interesting point, but also commits a factual error. Therefore, I will review the basic content of Pokhlebkin's video, entitled "Culinary Hoaxes" ("Кулинарные мистификации"). The video is about the Bayeux tapestry, which was purported to depict the Norman conquest of England at roughly the same time as the 11th century event. However, the originality of the tapestry was doubted by the British scholar Robert Chenciner, in a scholarly paper delivered in 1990. Chenciner's proof was the depiction of shish-kebabs on the tapestry, which only became known in France at a much later date than that of the Norman conquest. In the video, Pokhlebkin himself makes an error concerning Chenciner. He erroneously states that Chenciner discovered the tapestry in the 19th century and that a nameless food historian discovered the shish-kebab error, while it was actually Chenciner who stated that the tapestry was a fake at an Oxford conference on the history of cuisine. (Curiously, Julia Child was in the audience and later stated that Chenciner's paper was the highlight of the entire conference for her. It also had special meaning for Pokhlebkin, in spite of his error.)

After discovering the collection of videos of Pokhlebkin, I contacted the YouTube poster of the videos and ascertained that the one hour was part of a much larger set of videos that were made of Pokhlebkin in the 1990's. Apparently, they were intended for use on Russian television, but not all of them were used. The poster also informed me that he was seeking a buyer for the approximately ten hours of additional video that he did not post on the YouTube website.

V. Pokhlebkin's treatment of cuisine in Russian drama.

Pokhlebkin was so prolific that his work not only deals with history, politics, cuisine, and semiotics, but Russian drama as well. A large number of Russian dramas, from Fonvizin to Chekhov, are subjected to a culinary analysis. In order to give the flavor of this book,

without going into excessive detail, I will note a few salient points found in the author's analysis of Chekhov's play, *Ivanov (Иванов).* Pokhlebkin attempts to connect the use of food and drink to themes of the play. In each act, the predominant beverage is either tea or vodka, and thematic elements can be linked to each. Writing about the scene in which the characters discuss their favorite foods to accompany vodka, Pokhlebkin notes that there are six critical culinary errors that are made in the descriptions of the play's characters. They are presented in figure 2 below.

Pokhlebkin: Chekhov's Culinary Errors in Ivanov

1. Shabelskii says that pirozhki should be fried.
2. Vegetable filling (onion) is used with vodka.
3. Perch (*окунь)* and ruff (*ёрш*) are eaten dried, not gudgeon (*пескарь*). Dried fish were used with beer, not vodka.
4. One does not fry until "dry," as the characters state, since the oil means it is not dry.
5. Vodka appetizers should be cold, not hot (Shabelskii talks about mushrooms having steam from the pan).
6. Shabelskii mentions mushrooms pickled with bay leaf. However, bay leaf is used for vinegar marinades, which are not Russian. Salt pickling must be done for vodka appetizers. Only onion, pepper, and oil are used.

Figure 2. Pokhlebkin's list of six culinary errors in Chekhov's *Ivanov*.

As is well known, the basic theme of *Ivanov* is anti-semitism. Pokhlebkin has a curious commentary about this topic. He notes that Chekhov's term for "Jewish-style pike" uses the non-derogatory term "*щука по-еврейски,"* rather than a derogatory term for "Jewish" that can be found in the work of certain Jewish food writers of Chekhov's time. Pokhlebkin uses this small fact (or, perhaps the fact that many Russian food writers were Jewish), to make sweeping conclusions about Russian anti-semitism, as follows:

> "This little nuance, by the way, is an excellent confirmation of the fact that in Russian society, the genuine Russian intelligentsia was not anti-Semitic. This is just more evidence of the great national tolerance of the Russian people, compared to all other nations in the world. It confirms that nationalism was brought into Russia only from the West (from Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Poland), first with the penetration of the so-called "European civilization" and racism and later, with the American variety in the 20th century." (*Из истории русской кулинарной культуры,* p. 386) (Russian: "Этот небольшой "нюансик", между прочим, служит блестящим подтверждением того, что в русском обществе у подлинно русской интеллигенции отсутствовал антисемитизм. Это лишний раз говорит о величайшей национальной терпимости русского народа, как никакого другого народа в мире, и о том, что национализм был занесен в Россию только с Запада (из Австро-Венгрии, из Германии, из Польши) с проникновением к нам именно "европейской", а потом и американской так называемой цивилизации и расизма в XX веке."

This genre of patriotic writing is actually quite common in the work of Pokhlebkin. In fact, it helps to define his specific style, in combination with many of the other attributes that have been mentioned. Petr Vail' makes reference to it: "Patriotism elevates him to high poetry, but sometimes it clouds his vision in the same poetic manner" ("Патриотизм возносит его к высокой поэзии, а иногда поэтическим же образом затмевает взгляд." *Кухня века,* p. 8).

VI. Pokhlebkin and the presentation of Jewish cuisine.

Having touched on the theme of Pokhlebkin and Jewish topics, we can observe that the author included a section on Jewish cuisine in his 1978 publication, *Ethnic Cuisines of Our Peoples.* In an Internet article, the Russian-Israeli writer Ze'ev Wolfson (Vladimir Vol'fson) made the point that this was the first known Soviet book chapter on Jewish cuisine ("Народ мой" №19 (407) 15.10.2007 and http://www.jew.spb.ru/ami/A407/A407-031.html). In the 1978 book and its 1991 second

edition, the inclusion of each ethnic group's cuisine was based on a specific geographical location of a republic or autonomous zone. In the case of the 15 Soviet republics, each one received its own section. However, Jewish cuisine posed a problem, since the only geographical area was the Birobidzhan Jewish Autonomous Oblast. Such small zones did not receive a complete chapter in either edition of the book and were grouped with adjacent geographical zones. Since the Jewish population did not originally come from Birobidzhan, this led to strange chapter headings for the section on Jewish cuisine in both editions. Thus, the first edition has a chapter called "Subarctic, Mongolian, and Jewish Cuisine," while the second edition modifies this slightly, and has a chapter with the heading "Polar, Mongolian, and Jewish Cuisine," as depicted in figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Chapter heading for Jewish cuisine in the 1978 edition of *Национальные кухни наших народов.*

Figure 4. Chapter heading for Jewish cuisine in the 1991 edition of *Национальные кухни наших народов.*

Wolfson also relates an anecdote about Pokhlebkin's personality, along the same lines as those told by Mushkina, in her books. Wolfson had been involved in a film project about Russian cuisine and invited Pokhlebkin to the premiere in the Moscow Chef's Club. This would have been of great interest to Pokhlebkin, but it later turned out that he arrived and immediately left for home. When Wolfson inquired as to why he suddenly left, Pokhlebkin answered that he saw a misspelled sign about the "showing" of the film ("паказ" instead of "показ"), and that he wanted nothing to do with it if the people there could not spell correctly ("Вот-вот... А я пришел, когда еще было светло, и на плакате было написано: 'Первый пАказ фильма...' Я ушел. В места, где пишут с такими ошибками, я вообще не хожу.")

VII. Pokhlebkin and bread.

It seems curious that Pokhlebkin devotes relatively little space to the important topic of Russian sourdough rye bread, including Borodinsky and other world-famous varieties. This history was covered extensively by such bread writers as Lev Auerman, in numerous publications, but especially the 1948 *Technology of Bread Baking (Технология хлебопечения)*, where the special requirements for sours and scalds are discussed in detail and the avoidance of poor, sticky crumb is the technical explanation of the need for sours. Pokhlebkin's coverage of bread mainly includes chapter 5 of *Тайны хорошей кухни,* in which a quick recipe for yeast-risen white bread is given for beginners, and chapter 7 of the posthumous second section of *Кухня века,* in which the author laments the decline of bread by the end of the 20th century and the fact that Russia has copied the West in producing airy, light breads that look voluminous, but have little weight and stale quickly. One looks in vain for a Pokhlebkin discussion of the truly distinctive properties of Russian rye breads. I can only speculate about the absence of this topic in the work of Pokhlebkin. I would speculate that it may be due to such reasons as the rarity of making sourdough rye in urban Russian homes, which were the primary market for his books, the difficulty of correctly producing such bread at home, and the fact that Pokhlebkin himself never developed this expertise and, therefore, may have been unable to guide the reader through the intricacies of the process.

VIII. Some positive and negative reviews.

Review of Pokhlebkin's work runs the gamut from high praise to scorn. Reviewers are seldom indifferent to his writings, perhaps since Pokhlebkin forcefully voices his opinions and does not always meet the standards of unbiased narration and full documentation in the opinion of reviewers.

Some of the most positive opinions are voiced in the documentary film. Mikhail Kozhuxov states that at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, only two worthy books on Russian cuisine stand out: the Mikoyan sponsored *Книга о вкусной и здоровой пище* and Pokhlebkin's books. Val'ter Kisliakov emphasizes the "erudition" of Pokhlebkin and the fact that everyone was taken with his vast knowledge on a variety of

subjects (“У нас поражал, буквально засыпал своей эрудированностью, своим необычным подходом, даже вглядом на те или иные вещи.”). Petr Vail’ refers to Pokhlebkin as a true poet in his stylistics and writing (“А Похлебкин—конечно, поэт: и в стилистике, и в отношении к предмету.” In *Кухня века,* p. 7. In the documentary film and her writings, Mushkina readily uses the word “ingenious” (“гениально”) for her impression of Pokhlebkin’s work.

On the other side of the coin, we find some Western reviews of *A History of Vodka,* such as that of David Christian, who states “the book contains many errors of fact,” and that Pokhlebkin does not offer evidence to back up his claims about the history of vodka. Christian comes closest to the truth in stating that the book on vodka was not a “scholarly monograph,” but that it belongs to the genre “of polemics on vodka.” Since the goal was to raise doubts about the Polish claim of priority in the production of vodka, Pokhlebkin performed the role of a lawyer, successfully arguing that strong doubt exists about the Polish claim, even though the proof was not airtight.

Other contradictions can be found. The book on tea was felt to be to objective and non-ideological for the Soviet period and dissidents came to value it for the absence of the required praises of the “classics of Marxism-Leninism.” On the other hand, an unquestioning Russian patriotism, not necessarily related to Marxism-Leninism, can appear to reduce objectivity in Pokhlebkin’s writing.

IX. Conclusion.

The topic of Pokhlebkin is very large and complex. Since he was the author of 464 printed works, including 54 books at the time his 1999 bibliography was compiled, the total number of printed books and articles is even more vast today, over a decade after the bibliography came out. We briefly touched on a number of topics, including sources about Pokhlebkin, some more obvious and others a bit more concealed on the Internet. We did not touch upon many very interesting issues, such as the murder of Pokhlebkin and theories about it, including the presence of his book about Stalin’s pseudonym at the

scene of the crime. The topic of Pokhlebkin, vast as it is, still awaits its ultimate statement. It is hoped that this paper may help some readers to discover his body of writing and remarkable contribution to Russian scholarship and culture.

References

Christian, David. Review of Pokhlebkin, V.V., *A History of Vodka*, in *Slavic Review*, Spring 1994, pp. 245-7

Pokhlebkin, V.V. *A History of Vodka*. Translated by Renfrey Clarke. Verso: London, New York, 1992.

Pokhlebkin, V.V. *Russian Delight.* Translated by Theresa Prout. Pan: London and Sydney, 1984.

Wolfson, Ze'ev. "Вильям Похлебкин и еврейская кухня." *Народ мой* №19 (407) 15.10.2007 (see also: http://www.jew.spb.ru/ami/A407/A407-031.html.

Ауэрман, Л.Я. *Технология хлебопечения.* Издание 5-е. Пищепромиздат: Moscow, 1948.

Колодный, Лев. "Драмы и сюжеты" *Московский комсомолец.* No. 204. September 15 2008. See also http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/18899645

Молоховецъ, Елена. *Подарокъ молодымъ хозяйкамъ.* Типографія Н.Н. Клобукова: St. Petersburg, 1901.

Мушкина, Елена. *Век одной семьи.* Издательство Крюк: Moscow, 2001.

Мушкина, Елена. *Тайна курляндского пирога.* Северный паломник: Moscow, 2008.

Опарин, А.И., ed. *Книга о вкусной и здоровой пище.* Пищевая промышленность: Moscow, 1969.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Большая энциклопедия кулинарного искусства. Все рецепты В. В. Похлебкина.* Полиграф. Moscow, 2002.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Великий псевдоним: как случилось, что И.В. Джугашвили избрал себе псевдоним "Сталин".* Юдит: Moscow, 1996.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Все о пряностях.* Центрполиграф: Moscow, 2009.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Из истории русской кулинарной культуры.* Центрполиграф: Moscow, 2008.

Похлебкин, В.В. *История важнейших пищевых продуктов.* Центрполиграф: Moscow, 2008.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Кулинарный словарь.* Второе издание. Русская беседа: Novosibirsk, 1994.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Кухня века.* Полифакт: Итоги века: Moscow, 2000.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Международная символика и эмблематика.* Опыт словаря. Международные отношения: Moscow, 1989.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Национальные кухни наших народов*. Издание второе. Агропромиздат: Moscow, 1991.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Национальные кухни наших народов*. Пищевая промышленность: Moscow, 1978.

Похлебкин, В.В. *О кулинарии от А до Я.* Полымя: Minsk, 1989.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Полная библиография опубликованных работ 1948-1999 г.г.* Издание автора: Moscow, 1999.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Словарь международной символики и эмблематики.* Второе издание. Международные отношения: Moscow, 1994.

Похлебкин, В.В. *Специи и приправы.* Центрполиграф: Moscow, 2008

Похлебкин, В.В. *Тайны хорошей кухни.циональные кухни наших народов*. Центрполиграф: Moscow, 2008.

Роговой, Михаил (Director) *Вильям Похлебкин: Смерть кулинара* (*Тайна гибели кулинара Похлёбкина*) Документальный фильм. http://www.5-tv.ru/films/1503143/

Уусивирта, Х. Финская национальная кухня. Translation and preface by V.V. Pokhlebkin. Легкая и пищевая промышленность: Moscow, 1982.