



Pseudo History/Weird History: Nationalism and the Internet

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Abstract

One of the most important developments in the production of history in the early twenty-first century has been the capacity of ‘weird history’ or ‘pseudo history’ to have a large impact on the public sphere. Pseudo history mimics professional history in the way that it presents itself to the public but its arguments defy any reasonable assessment of the evidence. In this paper, we examine the phenomenon of pseudo history through a consideration of its origins in travellers’ tales and its current manifestation with particular reference to two practitioners: Anatolii Fomenko and Gavin Menzies. One can attribute much of their popular success to their capacity to appeal to both democratic principles and nationalism, and to make effective use of new media, especially the internet.

The question of what distinguishes genuine history from pseudo history, or what we also call ‘weird history’, has become a major issue in an age when weirdness, in the shape of such things as the Da Vinci code and the purported discovery by the Chinese of America, sells so well in bookshops and at the cinema. By ‘pseudo history’ we mean the interaction of two related things. The first is an appeal to evidence that is conjectural, impossible to verify and/or based on documents that are dubious. The second is a speculative approach to this evidence that allows arguments and narratives to be constructed that would seem to defy what would best be described as a ‘reasonable’ interpretation of the evidence. The issues surrounding pseudo history are not to be confused with any discussion regarding whether history is a form of fiction. There can be no doubt that pseudo historians regard what they are doing as writing a true story, a true story that corrects the errors of mainstream professional historians who are trapped by the limitations of their profession. The question of ‘weird history’ or pseudo history raises the issue of what it is that is central to the ‘normal’ study of both history and archaeology. How do we distinguish between a new and revolutionary historical interpretation that might be vindicated by evidence and one that is simply ‘weird’?

A second set of questions relates to why it is that certain attempts at pseudo history succeed and others do not. Obviously, a successful work of pseudo history cannot be just any story; it has to be a good tale. Modern readers expect at least the appearance of scholarship to establish that the story rests on good authority. Successful pseudo history mimics the work of professional historians. There are ‘facts’ and arguments, primary sources and literature reviews. Pseudo history inevitably takes on the role of subverting established truths. Its authors, who generally come from outside the History profession but often possess some other form of professional training, seek to attack the conventional wisdom of the professionals and to demonstrate its folly. They move to use their particular expertise to establish a new, allegedly superior explanation, usually founded on highly speculative, and invariably unreliable, interpretations of evidence. The key is that the new evidence and explanation acquire plausibility, not least because the reader readily

wants the weird explanation just as there is an audience desperately seeking evidence to justify its belief in UFOs (unidentified flying objects). Pseudo history is founded on this collusion between author and audience.

Pseudo history also depends upon two other factors. One of these factors might be described as the *zeitgeist*. Stories about the past speak to modern concerns. These concerns can include national identity, fears of global catastrophes or perhaps a desire that the world should be a more wondrous and magical place than it actually is, such as fuels science fiction and fantasy. The second factor is the tendency of pseudo history to reflect the preoccupations and concerns of specific political cultures. Consequently, pseudo history also raises the issue of the role and responsibilities of the professional historian in a democratic public culture awash with what Damian Thompson terms 'counterknowledge'.¹ The electronic media and the internet provides a home for such knowledge, and the techniques of modern advertising and public relations often provide it with a considerable head start over the more cautious professional given to hedging explanations with qualifications.

This article will focus primarily on two contemporary examples of weird or pseudo history. The first comes from Russia and revolves around the ideas of Anatolii Fomenko and the 'New Chronology' movement, whose members argue that mediaeval Russia was at the heart of a vast and forgotten world empire. The second, the popular account of the alleged Chinese discovery of the world put forward by Gavin Menzies and his supporters, emerged in the English-speaking world. These two examples of pseudo history are strikingly similar in their methods and popular appeal, but represent two different ideal types or paradigms reflecting different political cultures. Fomenko's reinterpretation of Russia sits squarely within the nationalist paradigm; it is an attempt to show that Russia once dominated the world and was responsible for its achievements and discoveries. Menzies' situation is more complex. In the West Menzies is able to evoke a globalised, post-nationalist paradigm where the hero of the story is a hitherto despised 'other' whose achievements deserve to be restored to the centre stage of history. In his most recent work *1434*, where he makes claims regarding the Chinese origin of much European technology, at one level Menzies is doing little more than popularising quite reasonable arguments in this matter that have been already made by professionals academics such as Jack Goody.² Where he goes astray is in his argument that such technology transfer was the consequence of a single, imaginary visit. At the same time Menzies is able to appeal to Chinese nationalism and its desire for recognition. Menzies emphasises his early years in China.³ This appeal to nationalism resonates with the Chinese government. Chinese president Hu Jintao told the Australian parliament in 2003 about how the Chinese had visited Australia in the 1420s.⁴

Pseudo history exists largely in that world where the evidence is slight and the opportunities for the human imagination to roam are consequently large. In earlier times there was a market for exotic traveller's tales that were difficult to verify. In the contemporary world two factors have shaped the way pseudo history has developed and been allowed to flourish. The first has been the development of history in a visual form in the shape of documentaries made for television. This has fed the public appetite for history, including history about topics for which there is little empirical evidence. The second has been the growth of the internet as a forum in which both the learned and the ignorant can express their views. These developments have encouraged writers with little exposure to professional historical training to engage in speculative historical enterprises, invariably in areas of history about which little is known or can be known. These developments pose a real challenge to the professional historian who may be trained in historical methodology but who struggles in the rhetorical battles that are part of the marketplace of ideas.

One example of a work in this genre, *Catastrophe*, indicates some of the difficulties involved in evaluating the claims that are made in them. In this work David Keys argued that a massive volcanic explosion in the 530s changed the course of world history.⁵ According to Keys, this event caused the Justinian plague, the migration of the Avars across Eurasia to harass the weakened Roman Empire and contributed to the rise of Islam. Some of the claims of *Catastrophe* are fanciful, but the evidence, both scientific and literary, indicates that there was some sort of major climate event that occurred sometime in the 530s or early 540s.⁶ The problem in reading a work like *Catastrophe* (and watching the accompanying documentary) lies in sorting out the plausible from the far fetched. *Catastrophe* raises a number of interesting matters related to 'pseudo history'. The first is there are large areas of human history in which the amount of available evidence is slight. The second is that it is possible to put pieces of evidence together in quite creative ways and to generate patterns of causation that appear to be quite plausible, especially to those who do not have specialised expertise in the area concerned. The third is that it is possible to appeal to new forms of scientific analysis that are very difficult for scholars trained in the humanities to evaluate.

We shall now look at two examples of pseudo history, one Russian, and one from England, that seem to embrace a heady mix of wild hypothesis, historical fabrication, and scientific innovation. The additional element in the pseudo-historical accounts described next is the important role of nationalism for those seeking to fabricate history in a globalising world.

Fomenko and the Russian World Empire

Anatolii Fomenko (1945–) is one of Russia's best-known and respected mathematicians. He belongs to the academic staff of Moscow State University, is a member of Russia's Academy of Sciences and a professor with a doctorate in applied physics and mathematics. He has served as head of the Mechanical-Mathematical Department of Moscow State University, and is the author of 180 scientific works. He has written 26 monographs and textbooks in his specialist field of mathematics. Fomenko was awarded Russia's State Award in 1996 for his scientific achievements.⁷

In Russia, Fomenko is reasonably well known as a scientist, but much better known for his bold hypotheses in the arena of history. Fomenko turned his hand to historical investigation in the 1970s, undertaking research that was discouraged by the Communist authorities. Together with his colleague, Gleb Nosovskii (1958–), whose qualifications include a PhD in physics and mathematics, Fomenko embarked upon a wildly speculative rewriting of world history. Fomenko and Nosovskii have spawned a significant number of like-minded amateur historians, many of them scientists turned pseudo-historians like themselves.⁸ Gary Kasparov, one of Russia's most celebrated chess grand masters and presently Russia's most celebrated dissident politician, along with Alexander Zinoviev, one of Russia's best-known writers, have written glowing introductions to Fomenko's seven-volume magnum opus.⁹

In Russia they call Fomenko the 'terminator' because of his tendency to claim that whole eras, such as the ancient world, never existed. According to Fomenko, chronologists from the West elongated historical time with the aim of fabricating over-achiever societies like Greece and Rome, the alleged forebears of Western civilisation. In reality, Fomenko claims, the famous ancient historical figures and empires are duplicates and triplicates, copies of the one historical personage known in different contexts and eras by different names. Thus, Roman history was a hollow retelling of the story of the Holy

Roman Empire. Much to the alarm of the Orthodox Church, Fomenko claimed that Jesus Christ and the eleventh-century cleric, Pope Gregory VII, were one and the same person. The chief culprit in this fraud was Scaliger, the famous Dutch scholar and astronomer, who, Fomenko alleged, established the framework both for modern chronology and the fictional ancient world of Greece and Rome.¹⁰

Fomenko and his supporters rode to the rescue of a demoralised Russia that, in the 1990s, had shrunk in influence and prestige after the collapse of Communism and which, in the ensuing decade, was forced to endure new humiliations at the hands of market capitalism. Fomenko trawled through the history of Eurasia, Byzantium and Rome to show that historians all around the world had appropriated the achievements of Russians to boost the prestige of their own national histories. Fomenko's greatest imaginative achievement is the invention of a Slav-Turk empire that allegedly dominated world history until the seventeenth century. This 'Russian Horde' as Fomenko named it, was based in the area that we normally associate with the Empire founded by the Mongol Khans in the thirteenth century.

In the early 1990s, books, television programmes and a neophyte internet in Russia proclaimed the birth of a new science – New Chronology. Professional historians scoffed, but instead of retreating to his scientific specialisations, Fomenko broadened his attack on conventional history with the result that book sales and his notoriety soared. His publisher boasted in 2003 that 300,000 copies of Fomenko's books had been sold; Wikipedia in 2009 claimed that sales were in the millions in Russia. A print run of 10,000 copies for an academic book published in Russia is regarded as evidence of commercial success. Fomenko's glossy multi-volume history has been published in English, a sign that Fomenko's ambitions are truly global.

Fomenko insisted to an increasingly receptive audience that the Mongol invasion of Russia was nothing but a civil war between Russian princes in which a small number of Mongols acted as hired mercenaries for both sides, that Columbus was a seafaring Cossack adventurer and that Ivan the Terrible was not one, but four different tsars.¹¹ Let us look a little more closely at Fomenko's claim that the Mongol Empire was in fact a Russian Empire. Serious historians, most famously Lev Gumilev, have argued that Russian history was part of Eurasian history and that the various hordes that moved along the steppe – whether they were described as Mongols, Tatars, Kipchaks, Polovtsy or Turks had much more in common with one another and with the Slavs than modern historians writing in an era of nationalism and nation-states might think. There are descriptions of Genghis Khan that suggest that he had blue eyes and it is widely accepted that the Mongol invaders of Russia comprised mainly Turks and other steppe peoples recruited during the long march to Kiev Rus. The Mongol invaders of Russia did not write down their history – almost all of what we know about the Mongols comes from foreigners, while relatively few of their descendants and little of their language survives in the Russian lands that conventional history claims was part of the Mongol Empire for two hundred years.¹² Fomenko enlists the testimony of travellers like William of Rubruck, who reported that Russians and Tatars lived peacefully side-by-side and Plano Carpini who claimed that the Russian clergy lived 'in the horde with the emperor'. Why, Fomenko asks, would the Mongols have imposed such a reasonable rate of taxation (10%) upon the Russian land? If the Mongols, as Western historians claim, viewed Russia as the periphery of their empire, why did they welcome Alexander Nevskii, the most famous mediaeval Russian warrior, into their horde as the adopted son of Batu Khan? Far more likely, claims Fomenko, that Russia was the centre of this world empire and that the term 'Mongol' or 'Tatar' merely referred to a military caste, like Cossacks, who were in service to their

Russian masters. Fomenko turned Gumilev on his head by arguing that the commonalities that linked the steppe peoples with the Slavs constituted strong evidence that these were all elements of a single empire, the Russian Horde. Crucially, Fomenko enhanced his case by arguing not only that the evidence for the conventional account of the Mongol invasion is thin, but also by suggesting that conventional historians were part of a plot to hide the truth about Russia's past greatness. Fomenko's task was made easier by the fact that a serious controversy over sources relating to the Mongol era has raged in Russia literally for centuries. The first academic historians of Russia were Germans hired by the Romanovs, a dynasty whose Westernising tendency was most apparent during the reign of Peter the Great. There have been complaints ever since from Russian scholars that the Germans tended to underrate the state-building capacities and civilisational level of the Slavs. The Soviet era, in its efforts to glorify its own achievements, also had, from Fomenko's perspective, a motive for hiding the truth about the once mighty Russia.

With his seductive emphasis on Russia's past greatness and foreign plots which concealed the truth, Fomenko can be looked upon as an ideal type when it comes to the nationalist paradigm of pseudo history. He is not by training a historian; but he does have academic credibility and a capacity to use science, or at least scientific jargon, to push conventional historians out of their comfort zones. He has conjured into existence not just a good story, but also a story that is in tune with the *zeitgeist*, at least from a Russian nationalist perspective. It is a story about a magical Russian past and a paradise lost. The villains are Western academics and their local accomplices in the Western-oriented Russian elite.

The number of New Chronology publications has increased exponentially despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that Russia has begun to regain its lost prestige and confidence in the Putin era. Fomenko has been able to expand his readership through the building of a community of like-minded supporters and friendly critics who have used the latest technology to preach the message. When criticised or attacked, New Chronology writers mostly graciously defer in the face of charges that cannot be easily countered, while manoeuvring the debate on to their own territory when an opportunity arises. In particular, Fomenko uses mathematical and linguistic evidence to awe his opponents.

Fomenko's growing internet audience is, roughly speaking, divided into two groups. The first includes amateur historians, lay readers and enthusiastic supporters. The second group consists of converts from the Russian academic community who have gone over to 'Fomenkoism' for a variety of reasons, whether searching for the truth about history, seeking personal aggrandisement or fleeting glory or perceiving the opportunity for a quick rouble. There is also a smaller third group that includes those Russian and non-Russian academics who are seriously interested in questions of chronology and who face the daunting task of confronting what, for the non-expert, are Fomenko's impenetrable diagrams and equations.¹³

Because Fomenko's online community has become so extensive, there have appeared so-called 'mega'-portals where those interested can debate the issues at length. One recent forum on 'Chronology and Para-chronology' posted 3000 discussion topics, with no less than 144 discussion pages saved in the archives.¹⁴ The range of discussion topics is huge: those with sufficient staying power can engage in debates about the implications of Fomenko's findings for students of Tycho Brage, Tamerlane, carbon dating, climate change, the histories of the United States and Britain, imperial successions in China and Byzantine politics. Fomenko's success is, paradoxically, good commercial news for his critics as well. While conventionally trained Russian historians languish in under-resourced academies, a whole anti-Fomenko library run by the 'Anti-Fomenko Society' can be found on the internet.¹⁵

Fomenko's official site¹⁶ offers a link entitled 'other research', where other authors – and there appears to be no mechanism to assist the reader to discriminate between the more and less plausible – can present their hypotheses and findings. The leaders in New Chronology along with their acolytes and neophytes hold annual conferences and meetings, and publish their own periodicals. In other words, New Chronology has become 'a thing in itself', operating independently from mainstream history, and, interacting with it.

Fomenko offers, from the perspective of a Russian nationalist, a compelling picture of the ancient and mediaeval world. He has gained credibility from the fact that he has fought against the officialdom of the Soviet state and the Russian academy. Conventional historians have found it exceedingly difficult to counter the public relations success enjoyed by New Chronology. They find themselves as astonished by the success of Fomenko as they are by the claims themselves. Yet, for his readers, Fomenko has breathed more life into historical debates than all of the Imperial historians and Marxist-Leninists put together.

Menzies and the Chinese Discovery of the World

Gavin Menzies is an unlikely historian, weird, pseudo or otherwise. A British retired naval officer with no professional historical training, he has become a successful writer whose works have attracted the ire of professional historians, one of whom, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto described Menzies' work as 'the drivel of a two year old'.¹⁷

Gavin Menzies has now written two books, both about the Ming Chinese admiral Zheng He and the voyages that the fleet under his command made in the early fifteenth century. Whereas the available evidence indicates that the fleet sailed around the Indian Ocean, Menzies argues that it not only discovered America and circumnavigated the world but also sailed to Cairo and into the Mediterranean where an unspecified Chinese ambassador met the Pope in Florence.¹⁸

Menzies is essentially promoting a fantastic traveller's tale about the Chinese fleet, a modern equivalent of the extraordinary stories that appear in Herodotus. His major achievement is to make his account of the Zheng He voyages appear to be not only plausible but also to cover it with a veneer of scholarly respectability. He has a number of techniques that allow him to attain that goal. The most important thing to note is that Menzies has considerable freedom because much of the written evidence regarding Zheng He has been destroyed. This means that he is free to speculate using a range of other evidence, especially maps and a variety of physical and scientific evidence, especially that relating to DNA. In the absence of other forms of documentary evidence maps and other forms of pictorial evidence become the crucial form of written evidence for Menzies. In 1421 he made use of a map made in 1424 that he claims contains some islands in the Caribbean.¹⁹ From this initial claim he moved to the idea that someone had to have been there before the Spanish and the only possible contenders are the Chinese. In a similar fashion in 1434 he compares diagrams of Chinese and European machines and concludes that the only way that the Europeans could have developed their machines was after a Chinese visit in 1434.²⁰ On the basis of flimsy evidence, he constructs speculative causal chains that he claims are factual. He uses DNA evidence in a similar fashion. For example he claims that the presence of some DNA material from Asia in the Adriatic is 'proof' that Chinese visitors visited there in the fifteenth century.²¹

One of his key techniques is the way that he moves from supposition to fact. Generally he states something 'would' have been the case before finally moving back to stating that something 'is' the case. This is combined with a technique of mixing up quite speculative

arguments with fairly routine factual material, embedding the unacceptable within the acceptable. Then there is the variety of evidence that he presents, which makes any critical evaluation quite difficult. For example, at the end of the *1421* documentary based on the book, Menzies is asked to answer a number of criticisms of his argument.²² The documentary makers go through about half a dozen points, using a range of experts including archaeologists, linguists, historians and map experts. On nearly every point Menzies has to concede that his argument may be wrong but will not concede that this makes any difference to his basic thesis which he says 'everyone' will eventually accept because 'it's commonsense'.²³ For example, he is forced to concede that the only evidence he has that Niccolò da Conti, the Venetian who Menzies supposed was the means through which Chinese maps reached Europe, had contact with Zheng He's fleet is a statue of someone who looks European found in China. There is no documentary evidence.

In a way Menzies' unshakeable faith in his argument is his strongest point. He will only concede detail. Moreover, he has a powerful rhetorical strategy that enables him to defend his position. He uses a conversational style combined with his 'special' knowledge as an ex-Navy officer to establish trust in the reader that what he is saying is true. His history is combined with a travelogue as he describes personal visits to central places in his story. Given that he is apparently a poor writer, and was aided by some 130 people to write *1421*, it would appear that the book has successfully manufactured a 'Menzies persona'.²⁴ The careful approach taken to crafting *1421* has been a success as the book has sold well worldwide and been translated into several languages.

Menzies' attitude to professional scholars is also revealing. On the one hand, he claims massive academic support from 200 scholars, including some 30 from China. He lists pages of acknowledgements at the beginning of *1421*. On the other hand, he is often quite disdainful of 'professionals' and asks for any lay person who has relevant information to email him with additional evidence. In the *1421* documentary he claims to have received 36,000 emails with evidence. On the website he claims 13,000 subscribers to his newsletters and the support of 300 experts.²⁵ One of Menzies' major innovations has been his use of the internet through the establishment of his own website. Menzies himself admits that 'the internet has revolutionized the historian's profession'.²⁶ The internet has allowed him to appeal to the wider public and to pose as an individual who wants to make historical knowledge 'democratic' and not just the preserve of professional historians.

Menzies nevertheless craves academic recognition and respectability while also taking a populist approach. He is portrayed on the website as being the leader of a 'research team'. He has spoken at a number of universities, including the University of Melbourne, and more recently at Wittenberg College in 2008 and the tape of his talk at Wittenberg is available on the internet.²⁷ On a You Tube video recorded during the question time of this talk Menzies comments that the 'Chinese government has accepted our arguments' and that his critics 'are now fighting for their professional lives'.²⁸ In a 2004 CNN interview Menzies admitted that he had had difficulty convincing Chinese historians about his argument and expressed his hope that 'the Chinese government will say that it is necessary to resolve this question of who's right'.²⁹ While Menzies would like academic recognition, he is quite happy to use whatever support he can drum up, be it that of the Chinese government or of those members of the general public willing to take him on trust.

For Menzies it is a sound policy both to ingratiate himself with the Chinese government and to pose as a populist who is 'taking on' the historical establishment. Hence, his final comment in the Four Corners documentary 'Junk History' was 'The public are on

my side, and they are the people that count'.³⁰ Menzies certainly has a wonderful, if outlandish, story to tell, and a market that wants to believe such stories. After all, he has sold over a million copies of *1421* worldwide. However, it is not clear the extent to which populism is anything more than a tactic and a marketing technique for Menzies.

What is clear is that Menzies does not want to be seen as either a 'popular historian' or some sort of post-modernist who conflates fact with fiction. He wants to be the real thing. The consequence is to create the impression that Menzies and his supporters are engaging in serious scholarship. However, when one examines the evidence provided on his website it is difficult to maintain that such is the case. He relies on a number of supporters. One of the chief ones is Wang Tai Peng, a journalist who has a Masters degree from the Australian National University. Wang has a number of articles on the website which form the foundation for Menzies' second book that claims that a Chinese delegation from Zheng He's fleet visited the Pope in Florence.³¹ Unfortunately none of these articles have been refereed. Curiously in his 2004 CNN interview Menzies claims that Zheng He visited Italy in 1408 leading to the production of a master chart in 1410. This is supposedly based on the 'official Chinese history'.³² By 2008, 1408 had become 1434.

The interesting issue is the sort of people to whom Menzies appeals. It has been observed that the ideas of Menzies have been quite popular in China, in particular at a political level. His views fit very nicely with a resurgent and nationalist China. The *1421* DVD was made in China. His arguments also fit very nicely with a West that wants to apologise for and minimise its past and acknowledge the significance of other world civilisations. Oddly it taps into both the new nationalism of China and the anti-nationalism of the West.

A comparison with David Keys *Catastrophe* is illuminating. Keys wrote a book and made a documentary in a similar fashion to Menzies. The argument of the book was considered unproven by many reviewers but the central aspect of the work, the weather event of the 530s, continues to be debated in scholarly circles.³³ This is because there is both scientific data and written evidence, some of it contradictory, which indicates that there is something that needs to be explained that happened in the 530s even if it did not bring about the 'Dark Ages'. While Keys uses a similar mix of evidence to Menzies, some documentary, some scientific, some popular legend, he did not seek to set himself up as an alternative to the academic establishment, nor to exploit the opportunities that the internet could provide for someone seeking to push an 'alternative' interpretation of history.

It has been Menzies' capacity to capture public space through his use of both traditional media and the internet that marks out his work. Its success must be attributed, in part, to the clever means that have been used to market it and can also to the fact that Menzies' agenda fits nicely with the desire of the Chinese government to create a past in which China had a dominant role.

Conclusion

People have always been interested in the fantastic and the exotic. In contemporary popular culture the desire for the fantastic is met in a number of ways including stories about alien abductions or the belief that the descendants of Jesus still walk among us. Professional history of the past 200 years has sought to distinguish what it sees as sensible interpretation based on evidence from fanciful stories, no matter how good the stories may seem. That would seem to be a crucial aspect of the historian's role as a 'good citizen' in a modern democracy.

The public, however, still loves good stories and want to have history that fits their identities. They can also find professional histories to be somewhat stodgy and dull, and its practitioners to be more interested in their professional status than in communicating their stories to the wider public. In the age of the history documentary and the internet there is a much greater imperative for historians both to present their findings in a lively and attractive fashion and to involve the public in the exciting process of historical discovery. Both Fomenko and Menzies seem to have an instinctive appreciation of the contemporary cultural environment. They are able to tap into the popular consciousness by simultaneously appearing to be experts while also standing in opposition to the historical establishment. Most importantly, they are able to exploit the democratic potential of the new electronic media and to involve a wider audience in what looks like ground breaking research. At the same time the work of both Fomenko and Menzies appeals to the nationalism of countries that would like the world to have a much higher opinion of their roles in shaping world history. The national pride of the present demands a past worthy of that pride and in different ways Fomenko and Menzies provide a worthy past.

Professional historians might find pseudo history horrifying but they will not get very far by attacking it on particular points of detail. Pseudo history cannot be refuted that way. The professionals should be prepared to live with it as a constant irritant, and to devise techniques for making their own stories more attractive to the public. In a democracy it is necessary to practise the art of persuasion. The coming of the internet has made it even easier for frauds to find a home. If it is a tool of democracy, then it is also a haven for the ratbag. Like everyone else, historians have to live with that reality and learn the techniques that are necessary to win what is often as much a battle of rhetoric as one about facts. It is the task of professional historians to ensure that pseudo history does not prevail.

Short Biography

Greg Melleuish teaches and researches in both History and Political Science with a particular interest in the history of political ideas and world history. His book *Cultural Liberalism in Australia* (Cambridge 1995) and his more recent *The Power of Ideas* (Australian Scholarly Publishing 2009) explore large segments of Australian intellectual history. His most important excursion into World History has been an essay on the Clash of Civilisations published in Arjomand & Tiryakian (Eds.) *Rethinking Civilizational Analysis* (Sage 2004). Current research focuses largely on issues related to democracy and secularisation. In 2008, he organised colloquium on Weird History at the University of Wollongong. Greg also occasionally publishes opinion pieces in the *Australian*. He holds an MA from the University of Sydney and a PhD from Macquarie University and before coming to the University of Wollongong held positions at the University of Melbourne and the University of Queensland.

Dr Konstantin Sheiko is an ethnic Russian born in Kazakhstan: he moved to Moscow with his family in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He studied Law and History at the Moscow Institute of Economics, Politics and Law before receiving a Masters in International Relations from the United States International University and a PhD in History from the University of Wollongong, Australia. His interests include post-Soviet Russian nationalism and Eurasian politics. He is the author of *Nationalist Imaginings of the Russian Past: Anatolii Fomenko and the Rise of Alternative History in Post-Communist Russia* (Ibidem-Verlag: Stuttgart, 2009). This is the first major study of Anatolii Fomenko, one

of the most important Russian exponents of pseudo history or what the Russians call 'alternative history' in the post-Soviet era.

Dr Stephen Brown lectures in Russian history at the University of Wollongong. His interests include Soviet patriotism in World War Two, the revival of nationalism in the post-Soviet space and comparative nationalist mythologies in Europe and Asia. He has written extensively on the subject of Cossacks, the role of cavalry in Russian and Soviet history, and the hero-cults developed in the Stalin era.

Notes

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¹ D. Thompson, *Counterknowledge: How we Surrendered to Conspiracy Theories, Quack Medicine, Bogus Science and Fake History* (London: Atlantic, 2008).

² Jack Goody, *The Theft of History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³ For example this is mentioned in the flier for his talk to the Royal Geographical Society–Hong Kong lecture on 1434, <http://archive.reasonablespread.com/1276-12847/Royal_Geographical_Society.newsletter/RGS_Lecture_29_May_Gavin_Menzies_1434_The_Chinese_start_the_Renaissance?> accessed 10 March 2009.

⁴ Quoted in Thompson, *Counterknowledge*, 65.

⁵ D. Keys, *Catastrophe: An Investigation into the origins of the Modern World* (London: Arrow, 1999).

⁶ Mike Baillie in *Exodus to Arthur* (London: Batsford, 1999) maintains that it was not a volcanic eruption but a comet hitting the earth. Nevertheless historians, and archaeologists, recognise that volcanic eruptions and the impact of comets do affect climate in terms of lowering temperature and that, in turn, this has an impact on such things as agricultural production.

⁷ A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Novaia khronologia i kontseptsia drevnei Rusi, Anglii, Rima. Fakty, statistika, gipotesy*, II vols. (Moscow: Moscow State University press (MGU), 1995, 1996); A. Fomenko, *Novaia khronologia Gretsii. Antichnost' i srednevekov'e*, II volumes (Moscow: MGU, 1996a); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Imperia: Rus', Turtsia, Kitai, Evropa, Egipt. Novaia matematicheskaia khronologia drevnosti*, (Moscow: Faktorial Press, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Rus' i Rim. Pravilno li my poimnaem istoriuy Evropy i Azii?* II vols., Olimp (Moscow: ACT Print House, 1997a); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Novaia khronologia Rusi* (Moscow: Faktorial Press, 1997); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Matematicheskaia khronologia bibleiskikh sobytii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997b); A. Fomenko, 'Smysl russkogo dela v sokhraneni Imperii', *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 21 November 1996b; A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Bibleiskaia Rus'*, II vols. (Moscow: Faktorial Press, 1998a, 2000); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Rus'-Orda na stranitsakh bibleiskikh knig* (Moscow: Anvik, 1998b); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Vvedenie v novuiu khronologiuu, kakoi seichas vek?* (Moscow: Kraft+Lean, 1999a); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Rekonstruktsia vseobschei istorii. Issledovaniia 1999–2000* (Moscow: Delovoi Ekspres, 1999b); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Kakoi seichas vek?* (Moscow: Aif-Print, 2002).

⁸ Among the many popular works who cite Fomenko or his associates are A. Abrashkin, *Predki russkikh v drevnem mire* (Moscow: Veche, 2001); A. Bushkov, *Rossia kotori ne bylo*, 'OLMA-Press' (Moscow, 1997); A. Guts, *Mnogovariantnaia istoria Rossii* (ACT, 2000), 'Poligon' (Moscow, 2001); A. Guts, 'Mif o vosstanovlenii istoricheskoi pravdy', *Matematicheskie struktury i modelirovanie* (Omsk, 1998); V. Demin, *Tainy Russkogo naroda* (Moscow, 1997); V. Kandyba and P. Zolin, *Real'naia istoria Rossii* (St-P, 1997); M. Adzhi, *My-iz roda Polovetskogo* (Moscow, 1992); M. Adzhi, *Polyn' polovetskogo polia* (Moscow, 1994).

⁹ See 'Introduction' to A. Fomenko, Anatoly, T. *History: Fiction or Science* (Paris: Delamere Publishing, 2003).

¹⁰ A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Bibleyskaia Rus*, vol. I, 21–4; for mathematical-statistical critique of Skaliger/Petvius, see also A. Fomenko, *Metody statisticheskogo analiza narativnykh tekstov i prilozhenie k khronologii* (Moscow: MGU, 1990); second reprint 1996; A. Fomenko, *Globalnaia khronologia* (Moscow: MGU, 1993); A. Fomenko, V. Kalashnikov, G. Nosovskii, *Geometrical and Statistical Methods of Analysis of Star Configurations. Dating of Ptolemy's Almagest* (USA: CRC Press, 1993); A. Fomenko, *Empirical-Statistical Analysis of Narrative Material and its Application to Historical Dating*, II vols. (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publications, 1994); A. Fomenko and G. Nosovskii, *Kakoi seichas vek?*, 16–33.

¹¹ See K. Sheiko, *Nationalist Imaginings of the Russian Past: Anatolii Fomenko and the Rise of Alternative History in Post-Communist Russia* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2009).

¹² For a good description of what we do not know about Genghis Khan and the Mongols, see J. Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), xxi–xxvii.

¹³ <<http://fatus.chat.ru/foma.htm>> accessed 15 March 2009.

¹⁴ <<http://hbar.phys.msu.ru/gorm/wwwboard/>> accessed 15 March 2009

- ¹⁵ <<http://hbar.phys.msu.ru/gorm/library.htm>> accessed 15 March 2009.
- ¹⁶ <<http://chronologia.org/>> accessed 15 March 2009.
- ¹⁷ Four Corners Program Transcript, 'Junk History', 31/07/2006, <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2006/s1702333.htm>> accessed 29 March 2009.
- ¹⁸ G. Menzies, *1421: The Year China Discovered the World* (London: Bantam, 2003); Gavin Menzies, *1434: The Year a Magnificent Chinese Fleet Sailed to Italy and Ignited the Renaissance* (London: HarperCollins, 2008).
- ¹⁹ Menzies, *1421*, 29–38.
- ²⁰ Menzies, *1434*, 177–96.
- ²¹ Menzies, *1434*, 66–72.
- ²² *1421: The Year China Discovered the World*, DVD, David Wallace Director, Sun Shuyun Producer, Paladin Invision, 2004.
- ²³ *1421: The Year China Discovered the World*, DVD.
- ²⁴ Four Corners Program Transcript, 'Junk History', 31/07/2006 <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2006/s1702333.htm>>.
- ²⁵ <<http://www.gavinmenzies.net/about.asp>> accessed 29 March 2009.
- ²⁶ Menzies, *1434*, xvi.
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- ²⁹ 'British Author Gavin Menzies' TalkAsia Interview Transcript', <<http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/asiapcf/09/13/talkasia.menzies.script/index.html>> accessed 10 March 2009.
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- ³² 'British Author Gavin Menzies' TalkAsia Interview Transcript' <<http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/asiapcf/09/13/talkasia.menzies.script/index.html>>.
- ³³ See, for example, the website edited by Benny Peiser, CCNet <<http://www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/spsbpeis/AD536-CCNetDebate.htm>> accessed 29 March 2009.

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