

ANASTASIA by Vladimir Megré

Book 1 of *The Ringing Cedars Series*

Ringing Cedars Press • www.ringingcedars.com

John Woodsworth, translator • Dr Leonid Sharashkin, editor

2nd edition June 2008 • ISBN 978-0-9801812-0-3 (paperback) • LCCN 2008923346

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DREAMS COMING TRUE

Editor's Afterword

In the summer of 1996 a tired-looking man was standing on a street corner in downtown Moscow, with a self-published 96-page volume in his hands, trying to sell it to passers-by. The book's title was *The Ringing Cedar: Anastasia*, and the man called himself Vladimir Megré.

A woman stopped by, looked at the inconspicuous cover, talked to the author and bought a copy. Next day she was back — smiling, her eyes shining — to pick up an entire pack, to give to everybody she knew.

As it was, the first print-run of 2,000 copies of *Anastasia* sold out in a matter of weeks. What happened next was as miraculous as the story Vladimir Megré had written down: new print-runs first of 2,000, then of 10,000, sold out within weeks. Not long afterward, *millions* more were printed and sold. By 1999 Vladimir Megré was one of Russia's most popular authors, and the seven books published to date have sold over 10 million copies in their original Russian alone, not counting their translated editions in more than a dozen languages.

The books in the *Ringing Cedars Series* started producing incredible changes in people's hearts and minds, the effect of which is now being felt throughout Russia and beyond. What happened here? How can it be that, with no advertisement other than word-of-mouth, this book by an unknown author became a national, then an international best seller, distributed initially by readers alone before it was accepted by even a single bookstore? How can it be that one copy from this first 2,000-copy print-run actually found its way to the stacks of the U.S. Library of Congress?¹

Why have people of all ages — from schoolchildren to pensioners — and in all walks of life — from teachers to public officials and from scientists to clergymen — felt such inspiration from the book to the point of writing poetry and creating works of art?

Why did a former member of the Russian parliament, an economist by the name of Dr Viktor Medikov, write an entire book, *Putin, Megré and Russia's future*,² stating that the Ringing Cedars was becoming Russia's new national idea?

Why did the Supreme Mufti³ of Russia, Talgat Tajuddin, publicly declare in a televised interview: “I love these books. I read them and get a lot out of them for myself”? Why have leaders of other confessions made equally laudatory remarks?

Why did my mother once bring home a copy of *Anastasia* from her yoga class on the recommendation of her instructor, and gingerly request that I read it?

Why, when, applying to enter the doctoral programme in Forestry at six top-rated American universities, I submitted a research proposal based on the ideas set forth by *Anastasia*, I was accepted by all of them? Four of the schools, in fact, offered me full financial support with a scholarship. And here I am now at the University of Missouri at Columbia, writing my Ph.D. dissertation on the significance of ideas from the Ringing Cedars for the future of forestry and agriculture in Russia and the world as a whole.

But here comes the most striking part: how can it be that all these developments — from the wild popularity of the Ringing Cedars Series to the outpouring of reader's poetry and art — had been described in the very first book *before* coming to pass?

As it is, true to what *Anastasia* said in the very first volume, millions of people have been moved by her words, many thousands have planted trees, written poetry and songs, or created works of art — all inspired by the book. Readers' clubs have proliferated throughout Russia and abroad. Numerous readers' conferences throughout Russia and Europe have brought together thousands of people, asking questions they had never even thought of before. In just the scant few years since the book's initial publication, Russia has witnessed the birth of a powerful eco-village movement, inspiring thousands of people to leave their jobs in large cities and, despite formidable obstacles, move to one of the many eco-settlements now sprouting all over the country. Russian emigrants to Germany, America and Canada have been flocking back to their homeland to establish new self-sufficient homesteads on their ancestors' lands. In the eco-village where my family now owns a plot of land, our neighbours include economists, singers, entrepreneurs, engineers, writers, mechanics, managers and executives, artists, peasants; young families, single mothers, pensioners and even schoolchildren — coming from all over Russia and other countries once part of the Soviet Union: from Moscow to Irkutsk and from Ivanovo to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Whence comes all this inspiration?

The answer is simple: *Anastasia* resonates so strongly in tune with people's hearts that one cannot fail to inwardly recognise the truth emanating from it. How many times have I heard personal examples of this instant recognition: people who have been searching for years or decades for meaningful answers to questions on the purpose of life, on Man's place in Nature, have finally found them in this book!

¹*Zvenishchii kedr: Anastasiia*, printed by Moscow Printshop Number Eleven in 1996, bears the Library of Congress Control Number 98171763. A copy from the first 1997 printing of Book 2, *Zvenishchie kedry Rossii* (The Ringing Cedars of Russia), has also been included in the Library of Congress collection (LCCN 98216313).

²*Putin, Megré i budushchaia Rossiia*, published in 2003, is also found at the Library of Congress, with Control Number 2003710013.

³*Mufti* — a Muslim scholar who interprets *Shari'a* law.

But should it be surprising that the image of a way of life founded on the ideals of love, beauty and non-violence, as presented by Anastasia, would resonate so strongly with our inner self? After all, does not every one of us want to live in a free society of kind and happy people, in a world without wars, crime or oppression? In a world where not a single tear need run down a child's cheek, and where families live in love and prosperity? Do we not want to live without monstrous industries destroying and polluting both Nature and Man? Do we not want to enjoy creative labour for the benefit of both our families and our communities, instead of suffering through boring jobs merely to enrich faceless corporations? Do we not want a society based on mutual help and co-operation, rather than competition?

But, you may say, this was just Anastasia's *dream*. Or just Vladimir Megré's dream. And "a dream is simply a dream".⁴ But cannot each of us dream of a desirable future and then act to bring this future about? Is it not what John Lennon was singing about in his *Imagine*:

*You may say I'm a dreamer,
But I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one.*

Is it not what one of the greatest economists of the twentieth century, E.F. Schumacher, was referring to in his seminal work *Small is beautiful*?⁵

Now, it might be said that this is a romantic, a utopian, vision. True enough. What we have today, in modern industrial society, is not romantic and certainly not utopian, as we have it right here. But it is in very deep trouble and holds no promise of survival. We jolly well have to have the courage to *dream* if we want to survive and give our children a chance of survival... [The crises of the industrial society] will become worse and end in disaster, until or unless we develop a new life-style which is compatible with the real needs of human nature, with the health of living nature around us, and with the resource endowment of the world.

Fortunately, the disaster may still be averted, as more and more people in Russia and throughout the world, drawing their inspiration from the Ringing Cedars, acquire "the courage to dream" and create an image of radiant reality for themselves and their children, and then get down to work in this direction.

The spiritual and practical revelations presented in this book are unparalleled in so many areas that their discussion could fill entire volumes. Let me but mention Anastasia's "beloved dachniks" — a discovery of exceptional significance.

As it happens, the most obvious and significant things often go the most easily unnoticed. This is particularly true about Russia's *dacha* movement. Judge for yourself — Anastasia and Vladimir Megré were the first to speak about the importance of *dachniks*. Now it turns out that according to widely available official statistics, published every year in Russia's primary statistical source *Rossiya v tsifrakh*, over 35 million families — and this amounts to 70% of the country's population — grow their own food on their plots and collectively provide far more vegetables, fruit, and even meat and milk than the whole

⁴See Chapter 7.

⁵E.F. Schumacher, *Small is beautiful: Economics as if people mattered* (New York, Harper & Row, 1973), p. 162 (in the 1989 edition).

country's commercial agriculture taken together.⁶ Why had nobody paid attention to these numbers earlier? Why didn't they ever surface in the discussion on the present and future of Russian — and, indeed, the world's — agriculture? Why did nobody take seriously President Boris Yeltsin's confession that he was spending his weekends tending a vegetable garden, growing potatoes and radishes?

Should you choose to research for yourself the questions discussed by Anastasia, you will soon discover the truth of her assertion that *her* knowledge is already shared — at least partially — by a number of people in our world, and that “collectively they know practically everything, only they do not fully understand how it works”.⁷

Take communication with plants, for example. It sounds incredible at first, but it only requires a reading of Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird's well-researched *The secret life of plants*⁸ to gain an entirely new perspective and conclude: She must be right!

But could it be possible that all diseases are curable through such interaction with plants, as Anastasia argues? It would take a complex and lengthy scientific study to test this hypothesis. Fortunately, this is not necessary, as — in addition to a growing number of personal testimonials from thousands of people — there is factual evidence at hand that can dispel any doubts. Over centuries and millennia the Hunzakut, a people living in a valley in northern Pakistan, have been practising an agriculture very similar to the one described by Anastasia. Eating food *exclusively* from their family garden plots and thus establishing a closed loop of matter- and information-exchange between people and their plants, they are recognised as the most healthy and long-living people on Earth. The Hunzakut commonly live to more than 100 years, and men becoming fathers at age 90 is not a rarity.⁹ Can it be that this information exchange between an individual person and a plant Anastasia talks about is the missing link to understanding human nutrition? Even in the absence of scientific studies, why not try it? The science will catch up.

Furthermore, why should we be sceptical about Anastasia's ability to live without concern for acquiring food or clothing — effortlessly relying on Nature for a complete life-support system? Is not the exact same ideal of life taught to humanity in the Bible: “He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap”¹⁰ or “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink”.¹¹ Also, in our own not-so-distant past, Nobel Laureate Albert Schweitzer testified on the basis of his experiences in Africa: “In return for very little work nature supplies the native with nearly everything that he requires for his support”.¹²

Looking around, should one doubt that truly happy children can *only* be raised in Nature? Jean Liedloff, who spent two and a half years in a society living in close relationship with Nature — and consequently knowing no such things as crying children, crime or depression — speaks about this in her book *The continuum concept*¹³ with very much the same conclusions as Anastasia.

⁶The spiritual, social and economic significance of dacha movement is discussed in great detail in Book 5 of the series, *Who are we?* Dr Medikov referred to this book as “expressing Russia's new national idea”.

⁷See Chapter 26.

⁸New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

⁹See, for example, *Secrets of the soil* by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird (Yonkers, N.Y.: Rare Bird Press, 1998), or numerous other books written about the Hunzakut people.

¹⁰Ecclesiastes 11: 4 (*New American Standard Bible*).

¹¹Matthew 6: 24 (*Authorised King James Version*).

¹²A. Schweitzer, *On the edge of the primeval forest: Experiences and observations of a doctor in Equatorial Africa* (London: A.C. Black, 1934), p. 112.

Again, this list could continue. In fact, researchers could — and probably will — write volumes of commentary on almost every statement contained in *Anastasia*.

Yes, doubts naturally do creep in. It still sounds all too improbable to our traditional way of thinking. And even if the heart feels a genuine light emanating from the book, the mind often refuses to accept it as real. This is an all too familiar dilemma, fully experienced even by Vladimir Megré himself. However, as the series progresses and you come to embrace the ever more significant revelations set forth in the subsequent volumes, and immerse yourself in their ever more poetic language, the idea that it could all be “simply thought up” should gradually melt away.

You hold in your hands a flower which will unfold its petals to reveal a most remarkable masterpiece, unique in all of Russia's literature and, possibly, the world's as well. Indeed, its significance goes far beyond *literature*. This book possesses a tremendous, unprecedented potential to change life on our whole planet for the better.

Do you know of any other book that in a matter of just a few years has succeeded in not only stirring the hearts and minds of millions of people, but also arousing these same people to extraordinary acts of creation in their everyday lives, developing new modes of expression in all the arts, taking or embracing non-violent initiatives to preserve and enhance life on this planet as we know it? Every day more and more people are joining in. Now that the Ringing Cedars is globally available in English, the realisation of Anastasia's dream is certain to take on planetary proportions. I have no doubt about it.

In the winter of 2003, at my office in downtown Moscow — just one block away from the street corner outside the Taganskaya metro station where Vladimir Megré had been selling the first copies of his book only six years earlier¹⁴ — Igor Vladimirov, head of the Anastasia Readers' Club in St. Petersburg, mused one day, looking at the snowflakes dancing outside the window:

“Wouldn't it be wonderful to have *Anastasia* published in English?”

“It would,” I agreed.

“You are a professional project manager, and you speak English fluently. Isn't that true?”

“Yes, more or less.”

“Then *why are you sitting here?!?*”

We laughed. A subsequent chain of circumstances and events led me to certain people — including Vladimir Megré himself — who became instrumental in carrying out the English translation project.

The story of the unusual co-incidences and struggles behind this edition could easily form the stuff of a suspense thriller (which I shall probably write one day). In the meantime I take comfort in the fact that you are now holding a masterfully translated volume in your hands. This alone is a good indication that dreams really do come true.

Columbia, Missouri, USA

January 2005

Leonid Sharashkin

¹³London: Duckworth, 1975; rev. ed. 1977. Currently published by Addison-Wesley (from 1985).

¹⁴At the time I was employed as Programme Manager at the Moscow headquarters of WWF Russia — a branch of the World Wide Fund for Nature (also known in America and Canada as the World Wildlife Fund) — just a five-minute walk from the Taganskaya station. Megré's initial attempts to sell and promote his book are painstakingly described in Book 2.

The Ringing Cedars Series by Vladimir Megré

Translated by **John Woodsworth** Edited by **Leonid Sharashkin**

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