To the Memory of David Herlihy, 1930–1991

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Patricia Herlihy

Introduction

It was in the Florentine *Archivio di Stato* in 1961 that I first discovered Odessa (in Ukrainian, Odesa). As part of my doctoral dissertation, I was examining documents that tracked the export of grain in the nineteenth century from Russian ports on the Black Sea to Mediterranean ports. Naturally, Odessa figured as the principal port of export. The more I read the Tuscan consuls' reports on Odessa, the more I was reminded of my native city of San Francisco, California. Both were boomtowns in the nineteenth century—one attracted adventurers after the discovery of gold and the other attracted commercial entrepreneurs by industrializing Western Europe's voracious demand for grain. Hilly terrain situated on the fringe of their respective countries offered commanding views of the sea in both cities, which enjoyed a Mediterranean-style climate and bloomed into colorful cosmopolitan urban sites. I was determined to find out more about this attractive city, but I could find no general history of Odessa. I soon learned that urban history did not fall within the Marxist paradigm of meaningful historical research, although luckily local imperial Russian historians did write valuable articles about Odessa's history. For Marxists, class struggle within a city was worthy of examination, but a biography of a city itself was not a legitimate field of inquiry.

More than a dozen years and a half dozen children later, I made my first visit to Odessa by sea in the summer of 1974. The Soviet ship had sailed from Alexandria and stopped (inexplicably twenty-four hours late) at Varna, where I excitedly boarded. I remained on deck all night making sure I would miss not a moment of surveying the Black Sea, nor a first glimpse of the city I had by then studied for fourteen years. To my delight, the sea approach was the same romantic one taken by most of the hundred or so foreign travelers whose nineteenth-century accounts I had read. I was greeted at the pier by a member of Intourist, a young woman from Leningrad married to a local sailor. She took me on an obligatory tour of the city. Although her knowledge of its history was a bit shaky, I was careful not to correct her since I was allowed there only as a tourist. I had just given a paper on Black Sea trade at an international economic history conference in Bucharest. I took a train to Varna.

To my surprise a *refusenik* family was already waiting in my room at the Londonskaia Hotel when I arrived. The son, a professor of philosophy, who had managed to emigrate to Boston with his wife and child, had given me a suitcase to deliver to them. He had asked that I not write their names and address but memorize them and that I go surreptitiously to their home on Gogol Street. Their courage surprised me and their hospitality amazed me even more. One of the members, a university student, smuggled books out of the university library,

mostly about the grain trade, and brought them to the hotel where I furiously copied excerpts on my Olivetti portable typewriter.

En route by rail back to Bucharest, a train conductor sat with me—the car was nearly empty—to lecture me on the Soviet success in agriculture, even presenting me with a Marxist–Leninist textbook. When we arrived at the border city of Ungheni at midnight, we had to change trains as the gauge of the tracks differed. The Soviet border guards seized my innocuous notes. I put up an enormous fuss, rattling them to such an extent that they returned them to me and exchanged more dollars for my rubles than I was entitled to.

My next, but far from last, trip to Odessa was in 1981, when I was supported by an IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) grant as the first American exchange professor to do research in Odessa. I was not allowed to see students at the Odessa I. I. Mechnikov University, but that suited me since it gave me more time for research. As the oldest inhabitant (except for the director) in a university dormitory, I made friends among the Soviet and Cuban students, and even with a gorgeous graduate student named Liuda who was planted across the hall to spy on me. I spent my mornings at the Oblast Archives, afternoons at the University Library, and Sundays at the Gogol Public Library. Although food was scarce, I still regard that period as one of the most fulfilling of my life. In short, it was the moment when I became an Odessite at heart. In 1991, I returned to Odessa. It was then that I met Oleh Hubar, the leading historian of the city. I returned to the Oblast Archives. The staff presented me with a bouquet of flowers and showed me the catalog, which oddly had not existed a decade earlier. I realized that they were only obeying orders from on high in 1981. I returned to Odessa again to attend a conference on Ukrainian history and presented the Ukrainian translation (Krytyka Press) of my book *Odessa: A History, 1794–1914* (Harvard University Press) to the University library. In 2002, I was inducted into the World-Wide Club of Odessites as an honorary life member. In 2004, I was awarded the International Deribas Prize for Studies on the Black Sea. It seemed that the city I adopted had adopted me as well. This collection of articles is testimony to my abiding interest in Odessa's history.

Located on the northwest littoral of the Black Sea, Odessa remains of strategic significance in contemporary geopolitical affairs. As a part of Novorossiia and a gateway to Crimea, its location in Ukraine likewise has assumed increased importance. Changing regimes, shifting economic interests, periodic ethnic tensions, and threats of international crises have always marked Odessa's history. Pogroms, revolutionary violence, and the horrors of the Holocaust have left their ugly stains on the annals of the city. But fascinating, cosmopolitan, unique Odessa and its residents' cultural achievements, dry humor, joie de vivre, and fierce independent attitude offer historians still more riches to discover. Fortunately, many able younger scholars are now skillfully unearthing the city's alluring past.

May its future be stable and bright.

Part One

Culture

CHAPTER 1

The Persuasive Power of the Odessa Myth

The citizens of Odessa have cherished their ethnic diversity and vibrant economy since Catherine II officially founded the city in 1794.[1] She took a remote, sparsely populated Turkish fortress and then set out to attract settlers who could defend it.[2] She sent notices throughout Europe offering emigrants land, tax exemptions, and religious freedom. In addition to a nucleus of Russian officials, Polish landlords, and Ukrainians, many non-Slavs responded to her call. Among the early settlers of Odessa were Greek and Italian merchants, Bulgarians, Albanians, Tatars, Swiss, Germans, the French, and even a few English people. Many Jews, notably from Galicia and Poland, took legal residence there.[3] Serfs were not officially invited, of course, but the local authorities, eager to build a population base, often turned a blind eye to the arrival of fugitives. Some of these settlers were eager to acquire a homestead, while others were drawn by the economic opportunities afforded by the new and growing city.

ORIGINS OF THE MYTH

Early visitors from Europe, the United States, and Russia as well as early Odessites began to issue flattering reports, sparking the "myth of Odessa," a magical place where one could instantly become rich simply by setting one's foot in the city. As Menachem-Mendl puts it in a letter to his wife around the turn of the twentieth century, "I want you to know it is simply not in my power to describe the city of Odessa—how big and beautiful it is—the people here, so wonderful; and good-hearted, and the terrific business one can do here."[4] In the early 1820s, N. Chizhov, a naval cadet and friend of the poet Alexander Pushkin and a future Decembrist, writes lyrically of Odessa:

> Imagine that everyone gathers here [in the garden] to enjoy the cool evening and aromatic fragrance of flowers. The tall Turk offers you a tasty Asian drink, while a pretty Italian woman sitting under the dense shade of an elm brought over from the shores of the Volga, proffers ice cream in a cut-glass tumbler . . . A fellow citizen of the great Washington walks alongside the bearded inhabitants of Cairo and Alexandria; the ancient descendants

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Figure 1.1 The monument to Catherine II and to the other founders of Odessa. Sculptor: Boris Eduards. The monument was erected in 1900 and destroyed in 1920. It was reconstructed by Oleh Chernoivanov and unveiled in October 2007. Photograph by Ivan Cherevatenko.

> of the Normans from the steep cliffs of Norway, the splendid Spaniard from the shores of Guadalquivir, residents of Albion, Provence and Sicily gather, it seems, in order to represent here an abridgment of the universe. It can be said that nowhere in Russia is there another place where you might find such a spectacle.[5]

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, local historians, filmmakers, poets, novelists, journalists, and memoirists universally extolled Odessa as a multiethnic, energetic oasis of freedom and beauty and elaborated the Odessa myth.[6]

The legend of the "golden city" was not without some foundation. In its first half century, young Odessa was the largest exporter of grain in the world, even in the years of the Continental Blockade.[7] A typical Mediterranean port in appearance and function—cosmopolitan, energetic, with an independent character—emerged improbably on the *dikoe pole* (wild field) at the border of a subdued and servile Russia. Persuaded that they were indeed exceptional, Odessites embraced the image projected on them by outsiders. As a result, some might charge that they generated in themselves superciliousness, arrogance, and an augmented self-esteem completed by a certain narcissism and infantilism. The self-image of the Odessites guaranteed them a priori a special quality, one that lent them moral dividends. The Odessite derived as

Figure 1.2 Cafe Fankoni, showing the cosmopolitan liveliness of Odessa. Postcard from the early twentieth century.

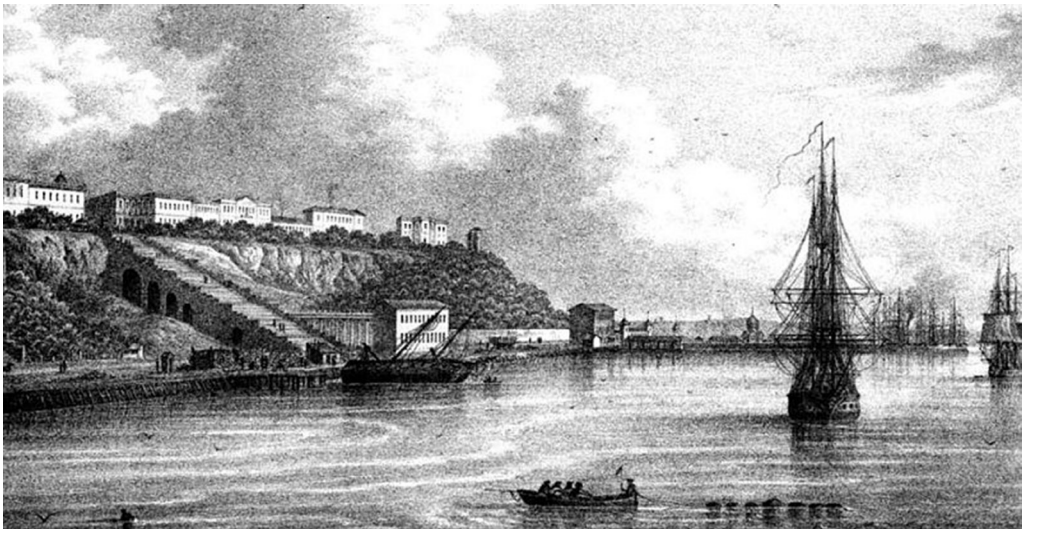

Figure 1.3 A view of Odessa Harbor. Lithograph from the middle nineteenth century.

much self-satisfaction from urban citizenship as from a certain perception of Odessa's historical past. The popular singer and bandleader Leonid Utesov expresses this pride in the first lines of his memoirs, "I was born in Odessa. You think I am bragging? But it is really true.

Many people would like to have been born in Odessa, but not everyone manages to."[8] Or more recently, Anatolii Kazik, a cinematographer, notes that whenever one informs others that he or she was born in Odessa, they smile and mention, "Odessa humor, Odessa songs, Odessa jokes and the characteristic Odessa speech, an Odessite is without fail merry, witty, sharp; he is never despondent, petty; he has a superior fascinating personality."[9]

THE SOVIET APPROPRIATION OF THE MYTH

During the Soviet era, the authorities celebrated whatever elements of the myth that suited their ideology. For example, the new Soviet regime, hungry for heroes and national treasures, rapturously accepted the axiom of the exceptionalism of Odessa. Long before the Great Patriotic War (World War II), before the heroic defense in the summer and fall of 1941, Odessa was considered not simply golden but Soviet golden. In Odessa, "by the bluest Black Sea in the world," diggers, pilots, reindeer breeders, builders of DniproHES and Magnitogorsk, and "swineherdesses and shepherds" took refuge from their heavy labors.[10] Here these vacationers met Odessites, reputedly the most hospitable, the merriest, the most fascinating, and the wittiest citizens in the world. Multinational Odessa was a miniature "new historical community—the Soviet people."

The Soviet view of Odessa and the image conveyed in the belles lettres of Pushkin, Batiushkov and Tumanskii, Babel', Paustovskii and Il'f and Petrov were of a carefree and harmonious Odessa.[11] Yet a few "renegades" or "dissidents" looked around and noted that not all was affable, hospitable, or funny. Citizens of various ages and professions strolled around, but they were not really jovial. Even though they all had pleasant expressions on their faces and they would look at you and listen, they did not truly want to hear or understand what you were saying, but only used your remarks as a pretext to joke, pun, or banter. And that is exactly the synthesis of Odessan and Soviet ideology—an excising of the very substance of meaning, leaving only the exotic aesthetic of humor. This stereotype is the source of the never-ending masks, images of the happy heroes of films such as *Happy-Go-Lucky Guys*, *Two Soldiers*, and other artistic personages composed of "100 percent Odessites."

Soviet Odessa served a special function as a supplier of satire and humor, as a home for funny shows and witty punning, as a haven for outspoken Jews. Limited criticism of Soviet reality spiced up Odessan irony and was not only tolerated but also even encouraged from time to time. In a sense, Odessa was conferred the privilege of being an urban "Holy Fool," a harmless character who could speak the truth under the cover of feigned madness. This veneer of affability to a certain extent protected Odessa from being as thoroughly "Sovietized" as other cities. Simple neglect prevented massive substitutions of Soviet buildings for the older European styles. The Soviet regime needed only to be assured that there were sufficient sanatoria and camps for workers from all over the Soviet Union, but it cared little for the housing needs of the city's residents.

Odessa was content to carry out its role of reveling in its own importance and uniqueness, being able to show its readiness to doubt and disagree without openly challenging the

authorities. After all, it has always shown "more color, spunk, and irreverence than other cities in the former Soviet Union."[12] The Club of the Merry and Witty (KVN) has been functioning from the mid-1960s and won the All-Soviet-Union humor championship four times. The important Odessa "Iumorina," the All-Union First of April holiday of humor with elements of carnival, has been celebrated since 1973. The Golden Duke Film Festival, the annual international jazz festival, the festival of contemporary art, the first Literary Museum in the Soviet Union, the International Club of Odessites, and other groups and activities also mark the celebratory inclinations of the natives.

Although now part of an independent Ukraine, Odessa has largely retained its historical-cultural baggage. To be sure, Communist Party ideologues at first tried to recolor the biography of the city to fit the new stereotypes. Soon this latter-day Bolshevik zeal abated, however, as authorities in the capital Kyiv realized that Odessa's traditional image was still attractive. The designations of the "southern Palmyra" or the "capital of humor" thus remained as before. Nevertheless, the city began to reflect on its dried-up moral and material resources.

During the time of the Soviet Union, the economy of the city fell into complete decline; its housing stock became dismally dilapidated, and a large part of the municipal and cultural monuments as well as the entire urban transportation system sank into a

Figure 1.4 The Vorontsov Palace on Prymors'kyi Boulevard. Architect: F. Boffo, 1826–28.

catastrophic situation. At the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of privatization in Odessa and the first accumulation of capital proceeded chaotically and barbarically, a far cry from democratic ideals.

When the matter arose concerning the monuments of history and culture, the responsible government department often acted the dog in the manger. Instead of leasing these buildings for a modest rent for an extended term requiring simple maintenance, officials burdened investors with the requirement of reconstruction as a condition of low rent. The policy has produced a sharp worsening of the structural condition of the buildings. Historical buildings such as the Odessa branch of the Russian Technical Society, the Palace of Sailors, and even the Vorontsov Palace were without owners for years because of such exactions. The "star of Odessa," the academic Theater of Opera and Ballet, was in the midst of restoration for many years.

Odessa's arrogance, encouraged by the high and the low, has in the end played a nasty joke on the citizenry. Odessa's delusions of its worth extended so far that it never once during the Soviet regime turned to UNESCO with a list of city monuments or statues to ask for assistance with preservation. Such apparent foolishness can be explained not only by patriotic blindness but also by the isolation of the Soviet people for many years from the outside world, from the living city-legends of Europe and from the planet. In comparison with other cities in Russia, Ukraine, and the USSR, Odessa actually is something outstanding both with regard to its society and to its architecture.[13] In this judgment, world opinion was in accord with that of the Odessites. When they were finally solicited, however, the experts of UNESCO concluded that Odessa's historical-cultural monuments did not possess conspicuous cultural value.[14] Perhaps the single truly attractive feature of Odessa's urban design rests on the fact that its historic center was shaped by a single general plan as brilliant as it was simple.

SHAPING THE CITY

One could say that Odessa sits on a high precipice, with its legs hung over to the basin of the Bay of Odessa. François de Wollant—a colleague of one of the main founders of Odessa, Joseph de Ribas, and a military engineer from Holland—planned the street design, having in mind above all the importance of the port for the future city.[15] Aiming to make his design conform to the natural contours of the terrain, de Wollant planned a system of straight perpendicular streets, the direction of which conformed to the orientation of the deep ravines cutting through the high Odessa plateau. The ravines served as natural steep descents to the shore and to the Quarantine and Practical harbors. To the west of the rectangular streets was planned another grid of blocks, lying at a forty-seven-degree angle in relation to the first. Every street led to the sea.

The transition from this general plan to the specific details was accomplished by the architects primarily of Mediterranean origin: Francesco and Giovanni Frapolli, Giordano Toricelli, Francesco Boffo, Gaetano Dall'Aqua, Giovanni Scudieri, Luigi Cambiaggio, and Francesco Morandi, whose best work coincided with the governance of Richelieu, Koble, Langeron, and Vorontsov. As a direct descendant of the ancient Greek colonies of the Northern Black

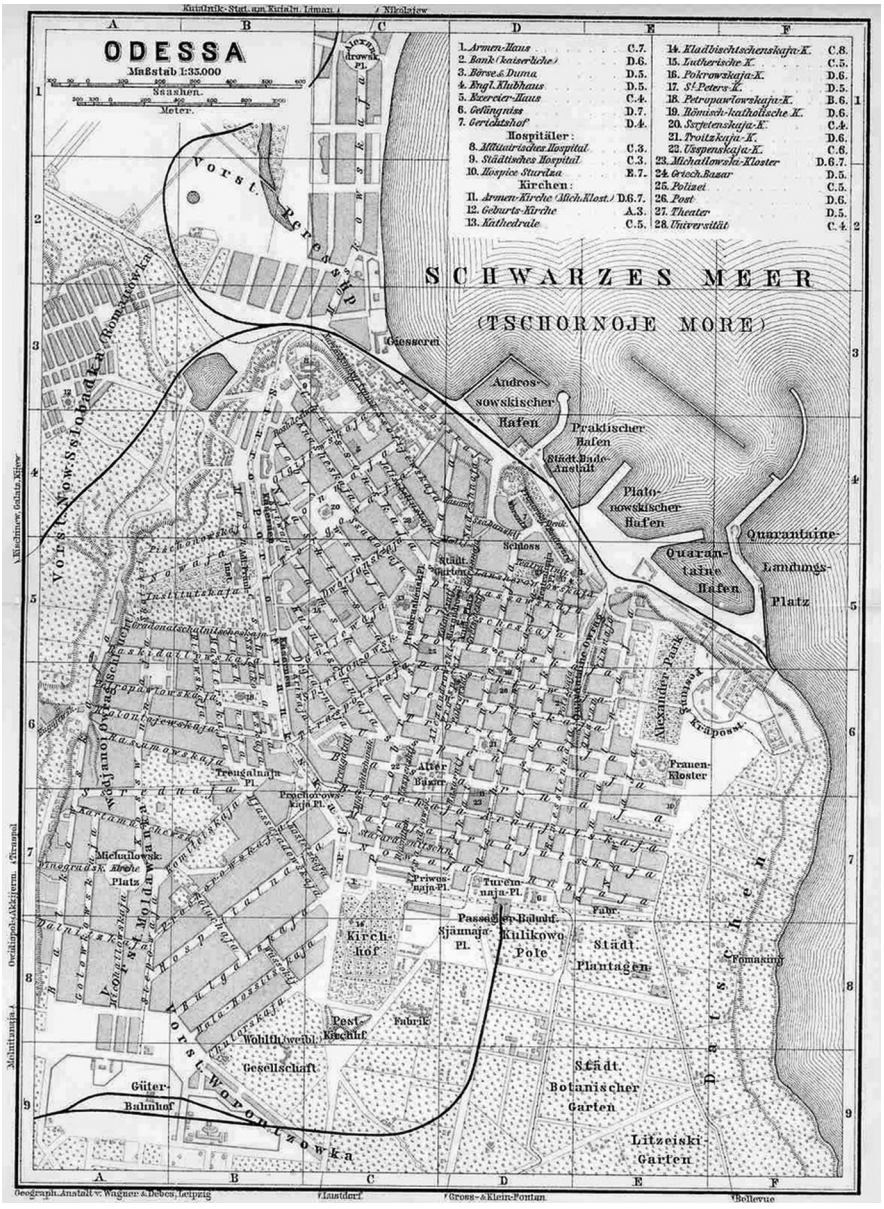

Figure 1.5 A plan of Odessa, 1892. Published in Leipzig.

Sea—mythology was embedded into the very birth of the city—Odessa replicated their design. The social centers were formed basically around three market squares: the Old Bazaar (Free Market), the Greek Bazaar (Northern or Oleksandrivs'ka Square), and the New Bazaar (Khersons'ka Square).[16] These squares lying alongside the transportation arteries imitated the ancient agora and were bordered exclusively by buildings earmarked for trade and decorated with stone arcades and porticos. In the rear of these imposing facades were built the modest houses of the Greek commercial elite.[17]

Figure 1.6 Katerynyns'ka Square. Lithograph from the end of the nineteenth century.

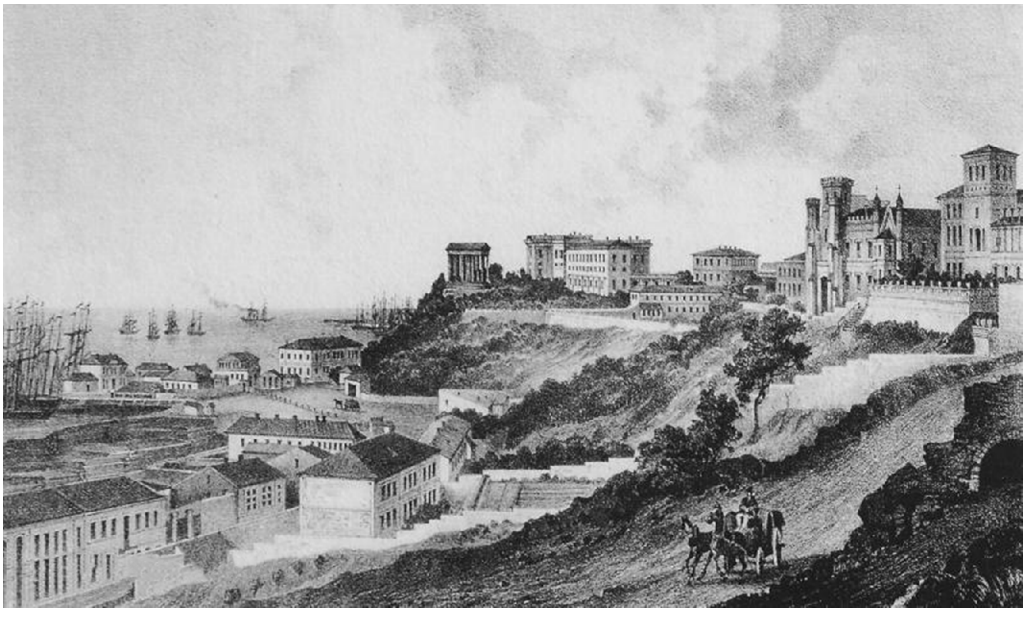

Figure 1.7 A view of the Practical Harbor of the Odessa Port and the Vorontsov Palace. Lithograph.

The style of their one- and two-story houses, with deeply vaulted cellars and isolated internal courtyards to ensure privacy, confirmed the tradition of "my house is my castle." The only demand made by homeowners of the Italian architects was functionality. The natives of Southern Italy and France, South Slavic countries, and Anatolia also incorporated the essentials of their native ways of life into their new residences in Odessa. Imposing houses

Figure 1.8 Fruktovyi Commercial Row at the Pryvoz market. Architect: Fedir Nesturkh, 1913

Figure 1.9 The monument to the Duc de Richelieu on Prymors'kyi Boulevard. Postcard from the beginning of the twentieth century.

were relatively rare at the turn of the nineteenth century, but there were a few: the house of M. Kramarev on Preobrazhens'ka Street, of F. de Ribas on Derybasivs'ka Street and of L. Lashkarev on Hrets'ka Street. Later a series of mansions appeared, among which were the palatial country house of Vorontsov, the State Stock Exchange, and various offices. Then came stone bridges, the Boulevard Staircase, and the monument to the Duc de Richelieu. Even in later years of deliberate beautification, functionality nonetheless always dominated Odessa's approach to urban planning. For example, the colossal storehouses of Sabanski and Papudov played an important role during the period of the Free Port from 1819 to 1857. After the Crimean War, which was disastrous for Russia and the Odessan grain trade, the storehouses were transformed into expensive rental properties while the gigantic grain storage place of Rafalovich was reconstructed into the Russian Theater.

For almost the entire second half of the nineteenth century, the real estate market in the city experienced an enormous boom in rental property. The precipitous growth of the population, the development of the stylish sea health-resorts, the building of railroads, the creation of the Russian Society of Shipping and Trade, the Voluntary Fleet, private shipping companies, the growth of export-import operations, the strengthening of the regional money market—each of these factors inflated prices for real estate and correspondingly for rents. A new army of landlords was more concerned about exacting profits than in erecting pompous outward appearances. Dozens of such monotonous buildings from that time survive to this day.

A fortunate exception is the few private residences and offices belonging to the generation of sons, that is, the descendants of the patriarchs of grain exporters and traders (Marazli, Abaza, Rodokanaki, Ralli, Mavrokordato, Papudov, and Sevastopulo), who received European educations with corresponding polish. These youths had a predilection for buildings not with patina and antiquity, imitating the picturesque ruins of Ol'via and Pantikapea, but for buildings like those of European capitals. Even the nouveaux riches rooted in Odessa, such as Anatra, Ashkenazi, Dement'ev, Efrusi, Liban, Mendelevich, Russov, and Fal'ts-Fein, rose to the new European standard with their buildings. These moguls competed to simulate Western Europe so that the patriarchal architecture of ancient Odessa and of the Southern Palmyra gradually dissolved and Odessa metamorphosed into "Little Paris." Unlike their frugal fathers, the sons learned how to put on airs and to master pretentiousness. By about 1830, Odessa presented a unified architectural ensemble, one that was a successful mirror of an ancient city; by the middle of the nineteenth century, however, eclecticism, but to be sure of a European style, had become a dominant characteristic of the city scene. Even the scattered oriental motifs echo European predilections for the exotic, such as the arch at the entrance to Otrada on Frantsuz'kyi Boulevard, the spa on the corner of Shchepkin'ska and Preobrazhens'ka Streets, and the arabesque decoration on the facade of the Vorontsov Palace.

Little by little, the porticos along the length of the thoroughfare Oleksandrivs'kyi Prospekt were closed. Instead of facades with Ionian and Doric columns, there remained mostly decorative pilasters. And the Prospekt itself lost importance. It was closed on one side by the Derybasivs'ka Street houses built by the city architect, G. I. Toricelli. And in the middle of the Greek market arose the round house of A. I. Maiorov, along with the no less extensive home of the beer king I. A. Ansel'm. From the 1870s, profitable houses replaced buildings of classical

design. The building boom at the turn of the twentieth century led to the formation of a kind of metaphorical modern museum under the sky, while sometimes destroying the best of the classical models—for example, the house of Kramerev (now the Passage), the guardhouse (the house of Libman), and the house of Marini (the Hotel Bol′shaia Moskovskaia).

The making of the architectural fabric of the city in the late nineteenth century became completely pragmatic, with no one casting a glance at the past. Today, no one would find controversial the then-modern designs of the prominent architects Alexander Bernardazzi, Lev Vlodek, Eduard Mesner, Valer′ian Shmidt, Felix Gąsiorowski, and Wilhelm Kabiolski, who worked between 1880 and 1910. Simply put, life's demands had to be met and people had to put up with it.

In later years, the Bolshevik state joyfully squeezed common workers and countless Communist Party and Soviet institutions into the spacious rental houses and into the luxurious single homes of the destroyed nobility. Sturdy as were those buildings, they could not last forever, and after seventy heroic years they were in a sorry condition. The highest achievement of the years from 1930 to 1950 was the Stalinist imperial style, a form of housing that proved its worth in building for the "radiant future." Nonetheless, later Odessites rejoiced in Khrushchev-style houses, where hundreds of people lived like worker bees in individual cells to await the soon-to-arrive fully communistic society.[18]

The inevitability of change is supremely evident, but not to the Odessite, an inveterate municipal patriot, who, famously gesticulating, tries to convince the visitor that the local theater is the third in the world according to its beauty or that this or that house has the longest balcony in Europe, that the Potemkin Steps are the eighth wonder of the world and so on. Odessa, it must be said, when it comes to formal art criticism, lives with its head turned backward. In resisting change, regional experts invoke memoirs, and anecdotes by regional historians or by their dilettante analogues, to support the notion of the purported harmonious architectural beauty of the past.[19]

Odessa is simultaneously seized by two mutually exclusive realities. One is an active, sometimes too frenetic attempt to inscribe the city into a new historical context. The second is a convulsive, rather hysterical, grasp for the past, one that is putatively heroic. Those who wish to justify bulldozed attacks on the old houses grope for some kind of ideological basis, although progress for itself need not be based on theory. New buildings and structures thrust through the turf suddenly as though they were mushrooms. Everything gives evidence that the city has a "primitive accumulation of capital" sufficient for massive construction projects, even making allowances for mammoth corruption. As Mikhail Gorbachev put it, "The process has started and it cannot be stopped."

THE ONCE AND FUTURE MYTH

The peculiarities of Odessa—that is, the aspects of the Odessa myth, particularly the city's multiethnic composition—dictate policy at all levels, including that of the local administration in shaping the construction process. Investors and their shadowy protectors and comrades in arms, the officials, demonstrate constant loyalty to the idea of a multiethnic city, with stress on