

Boris Ferapontoff. *Constantinople Notes on the Transition to Man Number 4*. Edited by Joseph Azize. Mount Desert, ME: Beech Hill Publishing, 2017. xiii + 200 pp. ISBN: 978-1-49681-947-5. \$30.00.

The publication of Boris Ferapontoff's *Constantinople Notes on the Transition to Man Number 4* is an important milestone for the study of G. I. Gurdjieff (c. 1866–1949) and the Fourth Way teaching lineage he established. The first published version of Gurdjieff's teachings was that of P. D. Ouspensky (1878–1947). His *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949) was released with Gurdjieff's approval and provided a highly systematic and cognitively-inclined version of the teaching. Gurdjieff's "Three Series" was published posthumously and trenchantly resisted systematization and explanation, in favour of more indirect and challenging modes of expression. Ferapontoff (1890–1930) is little known, but his notes were written when Ouspensky and Gurdjieff were in Constantinople in 1920–1921. They exist in two copies, one which editor Joseph Azize received from the late George Adie (1901–1989), and the other in the P. D. Ouspensky Memorial Collection at Yale University. Ferapontoff's notes are important as he was a pupil of both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, and no other records exist of the teachings in Constantinople, though they are mentioned in Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch's memoir (first published in French in 2003 and translated into English in 2006).

Azize is a distinguished scholar of the Fourth Way; his monograph *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation and Exercises* (Oxford University Press, 2020) is a major contribution to the academic study of Gurdjieff as a mystic and teacher of spiritual exercises. His exposition of Ferapontoff's text is a model of clarity and economy; commentary follows the numbered sections and is chiefly concerned to establish where he is dependent on either Gurdjieff or Ouspensky, or combining both, or proposing a novel interpretation or introducing new material that is not traceable to either teacher. Azize has reproduced the Yale

text; Adie's copy lacked the "Introduction" with biographical details about Ferapontoff, but where Adie made comments or corrections, these are indicated in footnotes. Ferapontoff, an expert Movements instructor, was nicknamed Starosta ("the Old One") on account of his grave mien. He served as Gurdjieff's secretary and was fluent in English, but left Gurdjieff and in the company of Ivanoff, another Movements demonstrator, emigrated to Australia in 1925. It seems that Gurdjieff pushed them away, as he did with so many pupils; however, the two had returned to Europe by 1928.

The Ferapontoff notes are very concise when compared to Ouspensky's detailed exposition of the teachings, and it does not seem they were intended for teaching purposes, though whether they were written as an *aide-memoir* or for another reason is not known. Azize concludes that they are in a preliminary rather than a final form, and notes omissions such as the lack of reference to the enneagram, a symbol "which was very important to Ouspensky" (8). Some sections in the Ferapontoff text are more extensive and can be linked not only to *In Search of the Miraculous*, but also to talks and teachings by Gurdjieff that have only recently been published, and to sundry pupil memoirs. In his discussion of Ferapontoff's notes on "2. Centres" Azize brings in Anna Butkovsky-Hewitt's memoir to explain that Gurdjieff's use of imagery from weaving (cotton reels and coloured threads) and from gramophone recordings (wax rolls or cylinders) illustrates his "idea of the relations (actual and potential) between unity and diversity in a striking way" (24) in the former case, and in the latter "the registering of impressions" (24). The discussion of centres continues in various sections, such as "5. Matter of Centres" which has quite a sizeable commentary attached, as it covers complex concepts such as the Food Diagram, chief feature, and the higher bodies.

Azize regards Ferapontoff as an important recorder of ideas that are not known from other sources, and lists some as: karma; "Studying the state of sleep and sleep pathology" (3); the draining of energy by imagination; our inability to see our "I"s; the links between various bodies and various knowledges; issues of nutrition; and ideas about laws. For example, in "15. Physiological Sleep" it is

posited that the sleeping state can be used to “better understand our situation” (79) and in “24. Karma” he writes that karma is “absolute conditioning of the smallest action” (107), to the extent that it dominates even the desire or interest to do or not do any specific thing, and also that humans are tied chiefly by “cares and imagination” (107) that consume their time and energy. In “30. Language. Logic. Knowledge. Part 2,” Azize identifies the idea that there are three kinds of knowledge (mechanics of facts, direct perception of facts, and knowledge of useful facts) as original to Ferapontoff. The mentions of mysticism, magic, clairvoyance and the cosmic in relation to higher bodies are particularly interesting.

Section “34. Nutrition” discusses the transformation of organic life into food and energy and heat (similar to entropy, and the Second Law of Thermodynamics?), and also observes that splitting atoms lets “the energy released to be consumed as food . . . a unique idea on the Gurdjieff literature” (135). In addition to noting original or novel ideas in Ferapontoff’s text, Azize also draws attention to his knowledge of academic philosophy, noting influences from figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Gurdjieff’s near-contemporary Henri-Louis Bergson (1859–1941). The notes are also contextualised in terms of Theosophical ideas current at the time, and Gurdjieff’s well-known interest in machines and mechanisation (despite his profoundly anti-modern stance on certain matters). This book is highly recommended to scholars and students of G. I. Gurdjieff and his Fourth Way teaching in all its multifarious lineages. One task of scholars of esotericism and esoteric teachers and schools is the historicising of ideas, and this unique text from 1920–1921 that contains both Gurdjieffian and Ouspenskyan ideas (which are seen as harmonious and essentially the same) and that offers thoughtful and novel interpretations and insights is a welcome additional text, in that it enables certain historical links and speculations. I recommend it highly.

Carole M. Cusack
carole.cusack@sydney.edu.au