

Europe in the Modern World

A NEW NARRATIVE HISTORY SINCE 1500

SECOND EDITION



OXFORD
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Edward Berenson

About the Cover



In this photograph, “The Sport Parade” (1932), the award-winning Soviet photographer Ivan Mikhaylovich Shagin (1904–1982) depicts a corps of female athletes marching through Moscow’s Red Square. On the cover of this book, you see a version of Shagin’s photo that has been colorized by the Russian artist Olga Shirnina (known as Klimbim), who specialized in imagining the full-color reality of historical black-and-white pictures.

Ivan Shagin, destined to become one of the Soviet Union’s most successful photographers, grew up in an impoverished peasant family. His father died when he was eleven, and shortly afterwards his mother sent him to Moscow, where he worked to support the family in a small merchant’s shop. He was too young to fight in the First

World War or to participate in the Russian Revolution of 1917; he became a sailor as a seventeen-year-old in 1919. After a three-year stint on a Volga River steamer, he returned to Moscow to take a job managing a cooperative store. He was successful and earned a respectable living but discovered photography during these years and became passionately devoted to it. Shagin's photographs were good enough to land him work as a professional photographer, and in 1928, he became a staff photojournalist for a local newspaper. Two years later he was named a special photo correspondent for the Soviet Union's most important youth newspaper, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, where he worked until 1950.

In the 1930s, Shagin made photographs of famous Soviet figures and ordinary people. He depicted the Red Army as well as the Soviet navy and air force. During the Second World War, he would become one of his country's most prominent photo-chroniclers of the fighting, taking pictures of all the major battles.

Like other leading quasi-official Soviet photographers, Shagin became enamored in the 1930s of the public festivals organized by Joseph Stalin to portray Soviet society as young, vigorous, healthy, and strong. One of the most important of these festivals was the Sport Parade, also known as the Parade of the Athletes, which became an annual event in 1931. In these parades large numbers of physically fit young men and women performed gymnastic exercises, marched in formation, displayed weapons, and waved hundreds of red flags and banners, vividly displaying the colors of the communist state. Marchers also carried huge portraits of Stalin, who stood atop a high viewing stand and waved as the athletes paraded by.

In "The Sport Parade," Shagin focuses on the powerful women's bodies that fill the entire frame even as they seem poised to burst through it, so vigorous is their forward movement. Shagin's camera captures their vigor by highlighting the athletes' swinging arms, determined youthful faces, and well-nourished female forms.

There are important differences between the photograph's colorized version and the original black-and-white. The original highlights the women's white dresses while their flags nearly melt into the gray of the sky. The colorized photo makes the red flags so vivid against the blue sky that they compete with the dresses and draw the viewer's eye away from them. No longer are the female athletes the sole subject of the picture, as they were in the original. Now, the red symbolism of Soviet communism commands our attention as well.

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To my mother, Claire Berenson, and the memory of my father, Norman
Berenson (1919–2018), with gratitude and love.

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