

ENCYCLOPEDIA THROUGH ITS OWN LENS: THE CASE OF THE *GREAT SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA*

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Abstract This study examines the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (GSE) as a vehicle of Marxist-Leninist doctrine, analysing its quantitative (entry length, references, authors) and qualitative aspects (ideological language, thematic framing). By studying entries like “Encyclopedists” and “Encyclopedia,” it finds that while the first two editions blend ideology with historical depth, the third edition adopts formal neutrality but with reduced informational richness. This challenges the prevailing scholarly view that the third edition is superior as a reference work due to its avoidance of ideological influence.

Keywords Soviet encyclopedia, history of knowledge, ideology, class struggle, history of scientific ideas.

Introduction

The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (GSE) is an extraordinary reference work, distinguished not only by its extensive scope but also by the singular circumstances of its production. Crafted under the auspices of a communist regime and strictly overseen by the State's publishing apparatus, this encyclopedia emerges as an impressive case study in the interplay between knowledge and power. In academic literature, it is frequently posited that, unlike its Western counterparts, the encyclopedia is heavily imbued with ideological content—an instrument of state propaganda meticulously designed to align with Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Nevertheless, since their modern inception, the production and publication of encyclopedias have been notably complex undertakings, involving the coordinated efforts of numerous individuals across various stages. Consequently, a monolithic and simplified narrative

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that reduces this history to a mere tool of state propaganda may inadequately capture the historical phenomenon. Considering this issue, this study examines a specific aspect of the GSE—entries related to encyclopedias themselves—to elucidate how this topic is concretely addressed within the text.

Three editions of the GSE were published, each reflecting the distinct social and political circumstances of its time. The first edition, comprising 65 volumes, was published between 1926 and 1947. Following this, the preparation of the second edition commenced two years later, with its publication extending until 1958 and resulting in 50 volumes. The third and final edition, consisting of 30 volumes, was published between 1969 and 1978. Given the extensive time span encompassing several decades, it is anticipated that variations may be observed across different editions.

This study is therefore dedicated to examining the entries explicitly related to the concept of the encyclopedia as a whole: *Энциклопедисты* and *Энциклопедия*. Through this approach, we aim to analyse the content of these two entries across all three editions to assess the literature-supported claim that the first two editions, shaped by the historical contexts in which they were published, are markedly more ideological, whereas the third edition represents a comparatively “neutral” and “objective” work, with less ideological influence.

Although seldom studied, the GSE occupies an important place in Soviet culture, standing as one of the USSR's major intellectual projects. Motivated by the suspicion that existing literature may misrepresent the GSE's complexity, this article proposes that a closer examination of the encyclopedia's content could challenge prevailing narratives on the subject. The findings of this research may encourage further studies, whether focused on specific topics within the GSE or examining its broader intellectual framework.

Literature Review

The scholarly perception of the three editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* varies, as each edition was produced during a distinct period of the Soviet era, leading scholars to interpret its significance in different ways. The first edition, being more experimental and pioneering in nature, received the most attention from researchers. For example, works discussing the presentation of psychological¹ and mathematical² topics in the first edition highlight the GSE's extensive amount of material, with a common observation of its positive feature being the significant load of information provided. On the other hand, Karl Schlögel³ emphasizes that the most fascinating aspect of this inaugural edition is the conditions under which it was produced, characterised by the marked repression of Stalinist regime. However, due to its publication lasting more than two decades, the whole process was not uniform and constant, especially as

¹ Eckart Scheerer, "The Great Soviet Encyclopedia as a Source for the Historiography of Soviet Psychology," *Revista de Historia de La Psicología* 5, no. 1–2 (1984): 313–35.

² Laurent Mazliak, 'The Beginnings of the Soviet Encyclopedia. The Utopia and Misery of Mathematics in the Political Turmoil of the 1920s,' *Centauros* 60, no. 1–2 (2018): 25–51.

³ Karl Schlögel, *The Soviet Century: Archaeology of a Lost World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023), 201.

the intensity of repression was more pronounced during specific periods, particularly during the dramatic episodes of the 1930s, when concerns arose over the perceived ideological weakness of texts presented in Soviet encyclopedias, leading to a strengthened ideological oversight and the recruitment of new contributors from Marxist-aligned institutions.⁴ In this regard, Loren R. Graham⁵ states that:

The volumes that were published before 1930 are the most interesting, since the later ones fell under the Stalinist controls that spread throughout Soviet life, extinguishing the spirit of innovation and experimentation that had been present in the Soviet cultural and intellectual worlds in the twenties.

Notwithstanding, the second edition is largely recognized as the most ideological among them.⁶ Irena Vladimirska⁷ refers to it as the “Stalinist edition,” symbolizing scientific backwardness and the ideological control over knowledge. Accordingly, Jeff Loveland⁸ concurs, noting that:

Published at the height of the Cold War, the second edition was the most doctrinaire of the encyclopedia’s editions, thick with propaganda and fanciful history – which occasionally necessitated altering photographs. The work’s ideology reflected a mindset, but it also reflected fear and the pressures of censorship. Tellingly, after his death, the cult of Joseph Stalin began to ebb in the encyclopedia’s pages. Furthermore, the proportion of biographies was just half what it had been in the previous edition, partly because so many people – now purged or blacklisted – could no longer be covered. After Stalin’s death, thousands of missing biographies were restored in a supplement. Censorship continued, though.

In contrast, the final edition is usually regarded as the least “ideological” among the three.⁹ However, despite such characterizations, the concept of “ideological” within the context of these encyclopedias remains largely undefined. Consequently, the perception of the third edition as “less ideological” appears to lack a clear basis and may be considered somewhat arbitrary.

Meanwhile, alternative perspectives can be found in the works of authors who do not necessarily support these claims. For instance, Yuriy Shmushkis states that “The ideological orientation of the publication is reflected both in the selection of entries (which concepts,

⁴ O. V. Vогomazova, ‘Советские Энциклопедии 1920–1960-Х Годов Как Источник Историографических Представлений,’ *Вестник Челябинского Государственного Университета* 22, no. 351 (2014): 163.

⁵ Loren R. Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 117.

⁶ Emma Widdis, *Socialist Senses: Film, Feeling, and the Soviet Subject, 1917-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 17.

⁷ Irena Vladimirska, “Knowledge Is Power: The Story of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia,” *Quaestio Rossica* 7, no. 3 (2019): 746, <https://doi.org/10.15826/qr.2019.3.404>.

⁸ Jeff Loveland, *The European Encyclopedia: From 1650 to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 270.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

phenomena, historical names, etc., are included or, conversely, left out) and in the proportional representation of individual disciplines as well as specific articles.”¹⁰ Based on this assertion, ideological influence is inherent throughout most of the process of creating an encyclopaedic work. Ideological orientation is thus intrinsic to any encyclopaedia, making the claim of being “less ideological” somewhat nonsensical.

Notwithstanding the ongoing debates concerning the “ideological” characterization of each edition of the GSE, ideology remains a central feature on its early development. Ideological conformity was not just an intellectual approach, but a fundamental requirement in the production of these reference works. In his historical analysis, Yuriy Shmushkis underscores this point, asserting that for Soviet encyclopedias:

Encyclopedic articles must meet the following key requirements: scientific accuracy, relevance, brevity, and accessibility. Scientific accuracy refers to the alignment with the achievements and trends of advanced science and culture, the correct interpretation of the topic from Marxist-Leninist ideological positions, and the precision and reliability of the information provided.¹¹

Although existing research addresses the topic of the GSE, it remains too limited to fully explore the broader epistemological issues involved. Current studies often focus on distinguishing the first and second editions as more ideologically driven, contrasting them with the third edition, which is viewed as comparatively neutral. This paper adds to this body of literature with new perspectives that aim to shift the interpretation of the topic, deepening the understanding of the GSE and challenging prevailing interpretations.

Methodology

In assessing the claim that the first and, most notably, the second edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* are the most ideologically driven, it is essential to engage in both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. This paper focuses separately on the entries for “Encyclopedists” (*Энциклопедисты*) and “Encyclopedia” (*Энциклопедия*), which are crucial, as they encapsulate the agents responsible to produce knowledge and the material product resulting from that intellectual endeavor—the encyclopedia itself. By examining this metadiscourse—where the

¹⁰ Yuriy Yevseevich Shmushkis, *Советские Энциклопедии. Очерки Истории. Вопросы Методики* (Moscow: Издательство «Советская Энциклопедия», 1975), 136. Free translation of: Идеологическая направленность издания находит выражение и в словарном составе (какие понятия, явления, исторические имена и т. п. в него включаются или, наоборот, остаются за его пределами), и в объемных пропорциях как отдельных дисциплин, так и отдельных статей.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 152. Free translation of: Энциклопедические статьи должны отвечать таким основным требованиям: научности, актуальности, краткости и доступности. Под научностью понимается соответствие достижениям и тенденциям передовой науки и культуры, правильность трактовки темы с марксистско ленинских идеологических позиций точность, достоверность приводимых сведений.

encyclopedia explains—we gain insights into the underlying ideological currents that may have influenced its creation and shaped its development throughout all the three editions. The initial approach employs a textual quantitative analysis. This includes examining the length of the respective entries across the different editions by counting characters (rounded to the nearest decimal), as well as assessing the number of cited authors or editors and the number of referenced encyclopedic works. Based on this data, we can apply three distinct methods of analysis: (i) examining authors to identify those who are commonly cited across multiple editions, those cited in all editions, and those unique to a specific edition; (ii) conducting a similar analysis for encyclopaedic works to assess continuity and variation across editions; and (iii) analysing the languages in which these encyclopaedic works are referenced. Although this approach has analytical limitations—such as not guaranteeing the relevance or adequacy of the information, as many aspects of ideological influence may elude quantitative measurement—it nonetheless provides a useful indicator. The presence of numerous references offers the reader greater potential for further consultation and exploration, which is a critical feature of any encyclopedia as a reference work. However, as mentioned by the specialised literature, the inclusion or exclusion of authors and encyclopaedias, as well as specific name references in an entry, can reflect the ideological inclinations of an encyclopaedia.

Subsequently, we delve into a qualitative analysis of the content and the way the entries are presented. This includes identifying any ideological expressions embedded in the text and understanding how these might reflect the broader socio-political context of the time. By comparing the treatment of the subject across the three editions, a method already applied on the same encyclopedia in one work by O. V. Bogomazova,¹² we aim to discern the extent to which ideological considerations influenced the presentation of knowledge within these entries.

This dual approach—balancing the quantitative with the qualitative—allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the ideological imprint on the GSE, thus contributing to the broader discourse on the intersection of knowledge production and state power in the Soviet Union.

Finally, this research employs the ALA-LC standard for transliteration from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet, primarily for personal names. However, original book titles are not transliterated, as this could hinder readers in identifying and locating the original sources.

Results and Discussion

The entry "Encyclopedists" in the analysed texts focuses on the French Enlightenment figures involved in the development of the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. Among the three editions of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia studied, in the volume 64 of the first edition (1933), the entry "Энциклопедисты" is the most extensive, containing around of 13,580 characters—almost four times the length of the same entry in the volume 49 of the second edition published in 1957 (3,530 characters) and significantly longer than the third

¹² Bogomazova, 'Советские Энциклопедии 1920–1960-Х Годов Как Источник Историографических Представлений,' 164.

edition, whose volume 30 was published in 1978 (1,190 characters). However, differences between these texts extend beyond mere word count.

The entry on “Encyclopedists” is notably limited in its scope, focusing almost exclusively on thinkers associated with the French Enlightenment while overlooking earlier traditions of encyclopedic scholarship. This narrow conception neglects even what some scholars refer to as “proto-encyclopedists” and earlier contributions to the field.¹³ Consequently, quantitative analysis of references to encyclopedic works and authors is inadequate to this entry, since it fails to account for these broader historical contexts. A more nuanced understanding can be achieved through qualitative analysis, which allows for deeper insights into these foundational contributions.

Firstly, it is essential to highlight several common points shared by all three texts. They emphasize the involvement of prominent thinkers in the creation and production of the *Encyclopédie*, including Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Furthermore, these texts consistently regard the *Encyclopédie* as a crucial influence on the French Revolution, advocating for a rationalist worldview while opposing the feudal order and clerical dominance in cultural and intellectual spheres. Additionally, all texts note both the diverse views within the group and the shared perspectives of the Encyclopedists. Nevertheless, notable discrepancies in the presentation of the subject emerge upon closer examination.

In this sense, the first edition provides a detailed account of the internal conflicts and contradictions during the production process of the *Encyclopédie*, as well as the clashes with reactionary forces of feudal society. It emphasizes the role of the Encyclopedists as intellectual representatives of the rising bourgeoisie at the dawn of the French Revolution, tasked with producing a comprehensive body of knowledge aimed at replacing the feudal heritage with the *Encyclopédie*. The second edition, although substantially shorter, preserves much of the core content and ideological perspectives of the first one. In contrast, the third edition, which has been widespread in western bibliography, offers a brief description of the topic, sacrificing essential content for a so-called “neutral” treatment.

These differences are evident in the way the authors and editors present the entries. The first edition describes the Encyclopedists as “a group of philosophers, scientists, publicists, ideologists of the French bourgeoisie on the eve of the Great French Revolution (18th century),

¹³ Daniel Anderson, “Philosophy and the Renaissance Encyclopaedia: Some Observations,” in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Jason König, Greg Woolf (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 400; John D. Bernal, *Science in History, Volume 1: The Emergence of Science* (Harmondsworth & Ringwood: Penguin, 1969), 169; Myrto Hatzimichali, “Encyclopaedism in the Alexandrian Library,” in *ibid.*, 70; König and Woolf, “Encyclopaedism in the Roman Empire,” in *ibid.*, 25; Chimiza Kuder-Oolovna Lamazhaa, “Из Истории Энциклопедизма,” *Научные Труды Московского Гуманитарного Университета*, no. 12 (2014): 42; Frédéric Le Blay, “Enjeux Philosophiques et Historiques de l’encyclopédisme Antique: Une Conception Positive de La Connaissance,” in *Questions Sur l’encyclopédisme: Le cercle des savoirs de l’Antiquité Jusqu’aux Lumières*, Nicolas Correard, Anne Teulade (eds.) (Paris: Epistemocritique, 2018), 13.

who participated in the publication of the *Great French Encyclopedia* [*L'Encyclopédie*]."¹⁴ The second edition accordingly refers to them as "ideologists of the pre-revolutionary French bourgeoisie of the 18th century who united around the publication of the '*Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*' [...]."¹⁵ Meanwhile, the third edition simply describes them as "The collective authors of the *French 'Encyclopedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts'* (*'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers'*), published from 1751 to 1780."¹⁶ Thus, despite the relatively consistent intervals between each edition, the treatment of the topic shifts significantly, with the third edition diverging most notably from the others. While characterizing the Encyclopedists as representatives of the French bourgeoisie might be viewed as an ideological interpretation, this characterization also serves to situate them within a specific historical and social framework, which can be used to explain historical processes. The omission of this context in the third edition, however, substantially diminishes the depth of the content. It is important to recognize that although some ideological frameworks categorise subjects according to certain standards, this does not inherently invalidate the categorization, as it may indeed reflect an objective analysis.

The entries in the first and second editions also delve into the philosophical intricacies of their intellectual undertake, situating it within the historical context and specific conditions of the period. This approach suggests that, although the encyclopedists of that time made strides in materialist philosophy, they fell short of fully grasping the dialectical development of nature, a concept that Marx would later establish on materialist foundations.¹⁷

Additionally, the 1933 and 1957 editions precisely describe the class role of this intellectual group, highlighting their contribution to establishing bourgeois society and combating the old order. In this context, the entry in the first edition asserts that:

Fulfilling a specific social mandate of their class, the Encyclopedists opposed feudal property, absolutism with its system of privileges, and the ideology of the feudal-Catholic church. At the same time, they attempted to formulate the principles of the new bourgeois state, bourgeois property, and bourgeois ideology. Nevertheless, reflecting the sentiments of the liberal

¹⁴ Otto Iŭl'evich Schmidt, "Энциклопедисты," in *Большая Советская Энциклопедия* (Moscow: Государственное Словарно-энциклопедическое Здательство «Советская Энциклопедия», 1933), 470. Free translation of: группа философов, ученых, публицистов, идеологов франц. буржуазии накануне Великой французской революции (18 в.), участвовавших в издании Великой французской энциклопедии.

¹⁵ Boris Alekseevich Vvedensky, "Энциклопедисты," in *Большая Советская Энциклопедия* (Moscow: Государственное Научное Издательство «Большая Советская Энциклопедия», 1957), 103. Free translation of: идеологи предреволюционной французской буржуазии 18 в., объединившиеся вокруг издания «Энциклопедии, или Толкового словаря наук, искусств и ремёсел» [...].

¹⁶ Bernard Emmanuilovich Vykhovsky, "Энциклопедисты," Alexander Mikhailovich Prokhorov (ed.), (Moscow: Издательство «Советская Энциклопедия», 1978), 206. Free translation of: коллектив авторов французской «Энциклопедии, или Толкового словаря наук, искусств и ремёсел» («*Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*»), изданной в 1751—80.

¹⁷ Schmidt, "Энциклопедисты," 473; Vvedensky, "Энциклопедисты," 103.

bourgeoisie, which, in the absence of a mass revolutionary movement, did not yet feel strong enough for a decisive struggle against the old order, the Encyclopedists exhibited considerable moderation and even timidity in matters related to political and social reforms.¹⁸

Under the same ideological view, the second edition states that:

The Encyclopedists opposed absolutism with its system of privileges and the ideology of the feudal-Catholic church. Due to the danger of repression, their attacks on the Christian religion were carried out indirectly: they ruthlessly criticized fanaticism and superstitions in other religions, the bloodshed during the Crusades, and advocated for the subordination of the church to the state. In formulating the principles of the new bourgeois order, the Encyclopedists recommended replacing the system of tax farming with a government system of taxes, advocated for the freedom of development of "talents and capital," the free development of trade, manufacturing, and agriculture, and energetically promoted the system of capitalist agriculture.¹⁹

Although "Encyclopedists" (*Энциклопедисты*) is a relatively brief entry in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, it reflects the distinctions between each edition, a phenomenon observable across various other entries. The first and second editions, often regarded as the most ideological, offer a broader perspective and more detailed descriptions of historical processes, whereas the third edition overlooks many of these intricacies. Consequently, the next step is to examine the entry on encyclopedias to determine whether a similar pattern of variation exists.

The entry "Encyclopedia" (*Энциклопедия*), in the absence of an entry dedicated to encyclopedism as an epistemological phenomenon, is intended to present the most relevant information about its own nature, philosophical foundations, and the historical development leading up to the current "state of the question" as presented by the GSE. Due to its broader scope compared to "Encyclopedists" (*Энциклопедисты*), the entry is considerably more extensive, encompassing numerous references to prior encyclopedic works and notable

¹⁸ Schmidt, "Энциклопедисты," 473. Free translation of: Выполняя определенный социальный заказ своего класса, Э. выступали против феодальной собственности, абсолютизма с его системой привилегий и против идеологии феодально-католической церкви; одновременно они пытались формулировать принципы нового буржуазного государства, буржуазной собственности, буржуазной идеологии. Тем не менее, отражая настроения либеральной буржуазии, к-рая при отсутствии массового революционного движения еще не чувствовала себя достаточно, сильной для решительной борьбы со старым порядком, Э. проявляли большую умеренность и даже робость в вопросах, касающихся политических и социальных реформ.

¹⁹ Vvedensky, "Энциклопедисты," 103. Free translation of: Э. выступали против абсолютизма с его системой привилегий и против идеологии феодально-католической церкви. В связи с опасностью репрессий атаки на христианскую религию Э. вели косвенно: беспощадно критиковали фанатизм и суеверия в других религиях, кровопролития во время крестовых походов, отстаивали подчинение церкви государству. Формулируя принципы нового буржуазного строя, Э. рекомендовали систему откупов заменить правительственной системой налогов, выступали за предоставление всем свободы развития «тантов и капиталов», за свободное развитие торговли, мануфактурного и с.-х. производства, энергично пропагандировали систему капиталистич. фермерства.

encyclopedists throughout history. The following table presents the quantitative aspect of this topic in each of the three editions:

Category	1 st edition	2 nd edition	3 rd edition
Extension in characters	69440	36180	13130
Authors/editors/encyclopedists	93	69	16
Encyclopedic works	84	78	78

Table 1: Quantitative Data on the Entry “Encyclopaedia”.

Based on the data presented, it is evident that the first edition, published during the turbulent 1930s, is the most extensive, containing numerous references to encyclopedists and encyclopedic works. The second and third editions are progressively shorter, with fewer references to encyclopedists. However, the number of encyclopedic works remains proportionally consistent even in the third edition, which is otherwise reduced in length. It is worth noting the role of chronology, as each successive publication has access to an increasingly broad range of material. This expansion results from the continuous production of encyclopedias over the decades, particularly in the USSR. Consequently, the third edition has access to more material than the second, and both later editions benefit from more sources than the first.

Despite the substantial reduction in references to encyclopedists, authors, and editors of encyclopedias, the first and second editions still provide readers with a notably diverse selection of encyclopedists from various traditions, contributing valuable quantitative data. The following diagram illustrates the relationships among these groups of encyclopedists and highlights the intersections between them.



Figure 1: Diagram showing groups of authors, editors, and encyclopaedists mentioned in the “Encyclopaedia” entry across different editions.

Interpretation of the diagram reveals that the third edition contains no unique names, as all encyclopedists featured in it are also included in the first or second editions. However, the first and second editions share 38 names, with an additional 50 names unique to the first edition and 31 names unique to the second.

The shared core of encyclopedists across all three editions likely represents a formal consensus among these versions, encompassing figures considered part of the historical foundation of encyclopedism, such as Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, V. Tatischev, S. A. Selivanovskii, V. I. Shteingel', V. Kiukhel'beker, A. Pliushar, F. G. Tol', F. A. Brockhaus, I. A. Efron and F. F. Pavlenkov. Among these 11 shared names, only Diderot and D'Alembert are outside the Russian tradition of encyclopedism. However, the first and second editions include references to encyclopedists from various cultural backgrounds, suggesting that the third edition is actually less culturally diverse. The 1933 edition mentions names such as Joachim Ringelbergh, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, and Vincenzo Coronelli, while the second edition presents, among others, Democritus, Aristotle, Al-Farabi, Avicena, and Domingo Gundisalvo. A complete, organized list of these references is provided in Appendix A.

Additionally, references to encyclopedic works follow a similar pattern. Although the quantity of works cited are not highly pronounced, certain nuances emerge when examining other aspects, such as the language in which each encyclopedic work is mentioned. The following graph provides visual distribution of these distinctions, based on the table presented above:

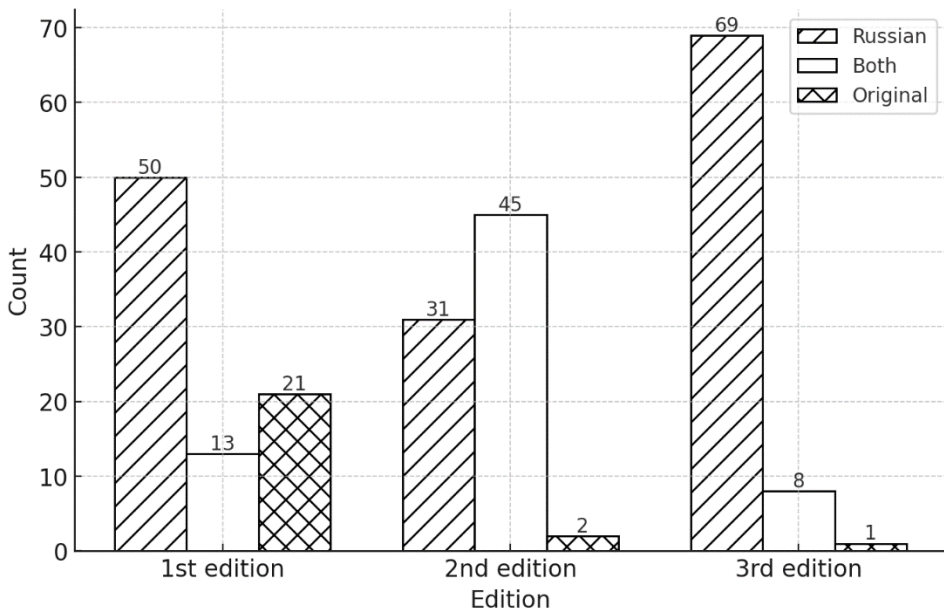


Figure 2: Graph showing the languages of encyclopaedic works listed in the “Encyclopaedia” entry across various editions.

The graph displays the distribution of works according to their language of presentation: (i) Russian, (ii) both Russian and the original language, and (iii) exclusively in the original language. The first edition is notable for preserving works in their original language, which is particularly striking given that many of these works are written in the Latin alphabet, potentially limiting accessibility for some readers. The second edition presents the largest number of works in both their original language and in Russian, even for works originally written in Slavic languages. The third edition, by contrast, overwhelmingly features works presented only in Russian, including those not originally part of the Russian cultural sphere. This data challenges the commonly held view in the academic literature that the first and especially the second edition are primarily nationalist in orientation. In fact, it is the third edition that appears to be more nationally focused, not only including fewer non-Russian encyclopedic sources but also presenting most of them exclusively in Russian. A full list of the encyclopedic works is presented on Appendix B.

In terms of the encyclopaedic works listed in the entry, the situation diverges notably from the list of encyclopaedists presented in Figure 1. Each edition features a distinct cluster of approximately 55 unique titles, with some overlap across editions, converging on 11 titles common to all. Similar to the core group of 11 encyclopaedists mentioned above, these shared titles likely represent the most significant works upon which all editions agree that should be considered as milestones for the development of encyclopedias. The encyclopaedic works referenced are as follows: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*; *Encyclopaedia Britannica or Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*; *Brockhaus Konversations-Lexikon*; *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeoamericana (Espasa)*; *Энциклопедический словарь (Selivanovskii)*; *Энциклопедический лексикон (Pliushar)*; *Энциклопедический словарь (Brockhaus & Efron)*; *Энциклопедический словарь (Granat)*; *Техническая Энциклопедия (СССР)*; *Большая Медицинская Энциклопедия*; *Малая Советская Энциклопедия*. The data is displayed in the diagram in Figure 3.

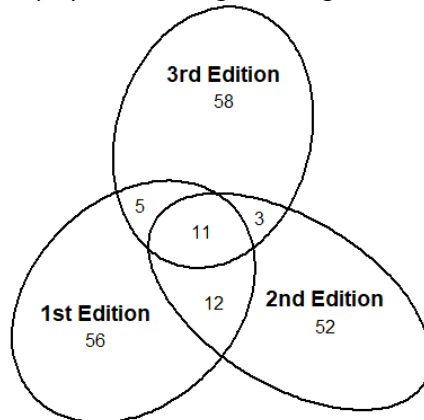


Figure 3: Diagram illustrating groups of encyclopaedic works referenced in the “Encyclopaedia” entry across various editions.

Figure 3 illustrates a pattern similar to that in Figure 2, where the 1st and 2nd editions include unique titles from diverse cultural traditions. In the first edition, distinct works such as *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, *Staatslexicon* (Görres) and *Dai Hyakka Jiten*. The second edition features *Disciplinae* (Marcus Varro), *Donish-noma* (Avicenna), and the *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*. In contrast, the third edition, despite featuring the largest amount of unique works cited, is less culturally varied and mainly references encyclopaedias from Soviet-aligned nations. The only unique work from a different cultural tradition in this edition is *Cursus Philosophiae Encyclopaedia*.

In qualitative terms, the encyclopedia is thus presented in the GSE as a comprehensive compendium of knowledge amassed through humankind's intellectual endeavors, whether as a universal reference or as a specialized work within a specific field. While this broad perspective is consistently maintained across all three editions, the first edition uniquely emphasizes that:

This formal aspect, however, masks the fact that the Encyclopedia—both in its choice of words and, even more clearly, in its content and thematic interpretation—is a concentrated reflection of the ideology of the class from which it emerged. This class, by instilling its ideology into the readers' consciousness, popularizes it and thereby expands the ideological base of its dominance (if it belongs to the “ruling” class) or re-creates it for itself in order to fight for dominance (if it is merely “ascending”).²⁰

Furthermore, traces of this understanding of encyclopedias as ideological products shaped by social relations can also be found in the second edition. Notably, this edition relies heavily on the historical development of encyclopedias to describe and categorize them, viewing their nature as intrinsically tied to specific social structures. For example, when discussing modern French developments in encyclopedias, the second edition of the GSE notes: “The historical significance of Diderot's Encyclopedia lay in its role as a powerful ideological weapon that undermined the foundations of the feudal order in France and ideologically prepared the way for the French bourgeois revolution at the end of the 18th century.”²¹

Similarly, the first edition was already inclined toward such insights, considering the development of encyclopedias within a broader historical framework, and thus intertwined with

²⁰ N. Meshcheriakov, “Энциклопедия,” in *Большая Советская Энциклопедия*, O Iu Shmidt (ed.) (Moscow: Государственное Словарно-Энциклопедическое Издательство «Советская Энциклопедия», 1933), 475. Free translation of: Этот формальный момент маскирует однако тот факт, что Э. и по подбору слов и еще более определенно по своему содержанию и своей трактовке тем является концентрированным отражением идеологии класса, из недр которого она вышла, и к-рый, внедряя эту идеологию в сознание читателей, популяризирует ее и тем расширяет идеологическую базу своего господства (если он принадлежит к «правлящим») или вновь создает ее для себя в целях борьбы за господство (если он лишь «восходящий»).

²¹ Vvedensky, “Энциклопедия,” 105-106. Free translation of: Историч. значение «Энциклопедии» Дидро состояло в том, что она явилась мощным идейным оружием, к-рое расшатывало устой феодального порядка во Франции и идеологически подготавливало французскую буржуазную революцию конца 18 в.

class struggle. The first edition, however, present it in more general perspective: "Thus, the history of Encyclopedia is, in a certain sense, the history of class struggle, reflected—through the prism of a given class—in the realm of knowledge and its dissemination, and its content at each stage more or less corresponds to the given stage of this struggle."²²

The first two editions of the GSE share much of the same tone regarding the social nature of encyclopedias, despite the first edition being more theoretically and ideologically inclined, while the second relies on broader historical information. However, the third edition lacks much of the ideological content, although it is still mentioned. The third edition thus briefly states that: "They [the encyclopedias] not only reflect the level of science and culture of that era but also carry a certain ideological charge, expressing the interests of the class on whose behalf they speak and within which they are created."²³

In this sense, all three editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* converge in asserting that encyclopedias are products of specific social formation, where class struggle is reflected in cultural outcomes. However, while the first and second editions explicitly adopt this perspective as a guiding framework throughout the entire entry, the third edition leaves it implicit, though it arguably remains embedded in its content.

Conclusion

In examining the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, this study highlights how the first and second editions, despite their ideological framing, deliver a richer, more comprehensive treatment of encyclopedic knowledge than the third edition. These initial editions, while often labelled ideologically driven, actually provide a broader array of references to encyclopedists and encyclopedic works, coupled with detailed historical analysis that enhances their informational depth and value to readers. In contrast, the third edition, though perceived as more neutral, presents a more streamlined and less detailed account, ultimately limiting its role as a robust reference work.

Thus, while each edition reflects its respective era's ideological and social climate, the depth of content and scope of analysis in the first two editions underscore the complex interplay between ideological perspective and scholarly rigor. Rather than reducing their informational value, the ideological framing in the first and second editions integrates a profound engagement with the history and cultural significance of encyclopedias, making them more extensive and enriching resources. Through this perspective, the GSE emerges as a layered work that, across its

²² Meshcheriakov, "Энциклопедия," 476. Free translation of: История Э. есть поэтому в некотором смысле история классовой борьбы, отраженная—через призму данного класса—в области знания и его распространения и ее содержание на каждом этапе более или менее соответствует данному этапу этой борьбы.

²³ I. V. Gudovshchikova and I. M. Terekhov, "Энциклопедия," in *Большая Советская Энциклопедия*, Alexander Mikhailovich Prokhorov (ed.) (Moscow: Издательство «Советская Энциклопедия», 1978) 206. Free translation of: Они не только отражают уровень науки и культуры данной эпохи, но и несут определённый идеология, заряд, выражающий интересы того класса, от имени к-рого они выступают и в среде к-рого создаются.

editions, provides a case study in how encyclopedias can simultaneously serve as ideological tools and as comprehensive repositories of knowledge.

Appendix A

Table of authors mentioned on the entry Энциклопедия in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*

Unique to 1st Edition	Unique to 2nd Edition	1st Edition ∩ 2nd Edition	1st Edition ∩ 3rd Edition	1st Edition ∩ 2nd Edition ∩ 3rd Edition
I. E. Andreevskii	Aristotle	M. M. Kheraskov	Johann Heinrich Alsted	V. Kiukhel'beker
Bartholomaeus Anglicus	Xu Guangqi	O. I. Senkovskii	A. Granat	Jean le Rond d'Alembert
K. A. Timiriāzev	Democritus	John Harris	Pamva Berynda	V. I. Shteingel'
V. Bonch-Bruевич	Al-Farabi	N. I. Ianovskii	I. Granat	Denis Diderot
V. Buniakovskii	Charles-Joseph Panckoucke	A. A. Kraevskii	M. M. Filippov	S. A. Selivanovskii
k. k. Arsen'ev	Charles-Louis de Montesquieu	I. Alekseev		F. G. Tol'
Carl Theodor Welcker	Voltaire	Pliny the Elder		A. Pliushar
S. M. Solov'ev	K. I. Meyer	A. V. Starchevskii		F. A. Brockhaus
Evgenii Bolkhovitinov	Martianus Minneus Capella	S. N. Iŭzhakov		V. Tatischev
M. Kovalevskii	J. G. Gruber	K. K. Krař		I. A. Efron
M. Tugan-Baranovskii	Domingo Gundisalvo	Isidore of Seville		F. F. Pavlenkov
P. P. Semenov	Taşköprüzade	Louis Moréri		
Paul Skalich	F. Polunin	Rabanus Maurus		
V. Friche	Marcus Terentius Varro	Pierre Bayle		
André Le Breton	Avicenna	N. P. Novikov		
S. Muromtsev	A. F. Gil'ferdipg	P. L. Lavrov		
Étienne Chauvin	Celsus	N. I. Grech		
Archbishop Kliment	H. Berthelot	Vincent de Beauvais		
F. F. Sidonskii	M. A. Antonovich	Pierre Larousse		
N. Kareev	Fakhr al-Din	Charles Dana		

M. N. Pokrovskii	K.N .Bestuzhev-Riumin	Brunetto Latini		
D. N. Bantysh-Kamenskii	Papias the Lombard	I. I. Berezin		
V. O. Klišchevskii	Jean-Jacques Rousseau	M. V. Butashevich-Petrashevskii		
F. Lagans	J. S. Ersch	Ephraim Chambers		
V. Ger'e	Cassidorus	L. Maksimovich		
D. I. Mendeleev	William Smellie	V. I. Lenin		
Lavrēntiĭ Zizaniĭ	V. R. Zotov	V. Maĭkov		
Thomas Spencer	G. F. Miller			
Raffaele Maffei	N. Kirilov			
M. Chulkov	An-Nedim			
A. Nikitin	P. P. Pekarskii			
I. N. Boltin				
A. Garbel'				
V. Solov'ev				
P. Struve				
Polidor Vergiliĭ				
N. Vodovozov				
S. I. Shevyrev				
Andreĭ Meĭer				
I. IĀ. Zātsepin				
Robertson Smith				
Joachim Ringelbergh				
P. Miliukov				
Karl von Rotteck				
V.IĀ. Zheleznov				
V. I. Lamanskii				
N. Ostolopov				
Vincenzo Coronelli				
V. P. Klišnikov				
George Ripley				

Appendix B

Table of encyclopedic works mentioned on the entry *Энциклопедия* in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*

Unique to 1st Edition	Unique to 2nd Edition	Unique to 3rd Edition	1st Edition n 2nd Edition	1st Edition n 3rd Edition	2nd Edition n 3rd Edition	1st Edition n 2nd Edition n 3rd Edition
Lucubrationes vel potius absolutissima kyklopaideia	Disciplinae	Cursus philosophiae encyclopaedia	Historia Naturalis	New American Encyclopedia	Enciklopedija Jugoslavije	Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers
Encyclopaedia, seu orbis disciplinarum, tam sacrarum quam prophanarum	Artes	Лексикон славеноросский... (Berynda)	Etymologiae or Origines sive etymologiarum libri XX	Larousse du XX siècle	Настольный словарь для справок по всем отраслям знания	Encyclopaedia Britannica or Dictionary of Arts and Sciences
De proprietatibus rerum	Satura	Лексикон Российской исторической, географической, политической и гражданской	De universo	Enciclopedia italiana di scienza, lettere ed arti	Энциклопедический словарь (СССР)	Brockhaus Konversations-Lexicon
Commentariorum rerum urbanarum libri XXXVIII	De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii	Энциклопедический словарь (Pavlenkov)	Speculum maius	Научно-энциклопедический словарь (Filippov)		Enciclopèdia Universal Il·lustrada Europeoamericana (Espasa)
Scientiarum Omnium Encyclopædia	Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum	Малый энциклопедический словарь	Les livres du trésor/Il tesoro	Литературная Энциклопедия (СССР)		Энциклопедический словарь

		(Brockhaus & Efron)				(Selivanovskii)
Le grand dictionnaire historique, ou Le mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane	Liber glossarum	Краткий народный словарь	Cyclopaedia or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences			Энциклопедический лексикон (Pliushar)
Lexicon Rationale, sive Thesaurus Philosophicus	Elementarium doctrinae rudimentum	Календарь для всех на 1908 год	KonversationsLexicon (Meyer)			Энциклопедический словарь (Brockhaus & Efron)
Dictionnaire Historique et Critique	Перечень наук	Спутник рабочего на 1914 год	Yongle Dadian			Энциклопедический словарь (Granat)
Bibliotheca universalis sacroprofana	De divisione philosophiae	Крестьянская сельскохозяйственная энциклопедия	Справочный энциклопедический словарь (Starchevskii)			Техническая Энциклопедия (СССР)
Lexicon Technicum or an Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences	Реестр (An-Nadim)	Торговая энциклопедия	Русский энциклопедический словарь (Berezin)			Большая Медицинская Энциклопедия
Reales Staats-Zeitungs und Conversation s-Lexicon	Ключи наук	Педагогическая энциклопедия	Большая Советская Энциклопедия			Малая Советская Энциклопедия
Curioses und reales Natur-	Donish-noma (Avicena)	Большая советская	Сельскохозяйственная			

Kunst-Berg-Gewerbe und Händelungs-Lexicon		энциклопедия	Энциклопедия (СССР)			
Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste welche bisher vom menschlichen Verstand und Witz erfunden und verbessert wurden/Zedlersches Lexikon	Книге исцеления (Avicenna)	Философская энциклопедия				
Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle	Ключ счастья (Taşköprüzade)	Советская историческая энциклопедия				
Staatslexikon (Rotteck&Welcker)	Сы-ку цюань шу	Промышленность и строительство				
Staatslexikon (Görres)	Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique	Физический энциклопедический словарь				
Nuova Enciclopedia Italiana	Dictionnaire historique et critique	Краткая химическая энциклопедия				
La Grande Encyclopédie	Lexicon Technicum,	Краткая географическая				

, inventaire raisonné des sciences, des lettres et des arts	or an Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences	кая энциклопедия				
Nouveau Larousse illustré, dictionnaire universel encyclopédique	Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste	Сельскохозяйственная энциклопедия				
Larousse mensuel illustré, revue encyclopédique universelle	Encyclopédie méthodique	Ветеринарная энциклопедия (СССР)				
Dai Hyakka Jiten	Encyclopaedia Metropolitana	Малая медицинская энциклопедия (СССР)				
Кормчей книги	Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste	Театральная энциклопедия (СССР)				
Толкование неудобьпознаваемом в писанных речех...	Herders Konversations-Lexikon	Великая Октябрьская социалистическая революция				
Лексис, сиречь речения в кратце собраны и из	Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX siècle	Краткая литературная энциклопедия				

славянского языка на простой Русский диалект истолкован ы						
Лексикон Славнооросс кий и имен толкование	Nouveau Larousse illustré	Искусство стран и народов мира (СССР)				
Осмы книг об изобретател ях вещей	Larousse du XXe siècle	Музыкально й энциклопед ии (СССР)				
Опыт историческо го словаря о русских писателях	La Grande Encyclopédie	Советская военная энциклопед ия				
Ботанически й подробный словарь	Enciclopedia Italiana de Scienze, Lettere ed Arti	Украинская советская энциклопед ия				
Словарь юридически й	Grande Dizionario Enciclopedic o	Украинский советский энциклопед ический словарь				
Географичес кий словарь Российского Государства	S. Orgelbranda Encyklopedja powszechna	Советская энциклопед ия истории Украины				
Сельский лечебник или словарь врачевания	Masarykův slovník naučný	История городов и сёл Украины				
Чудеса натуры, азбучным	Révai nagy lexikona	История украинского искусства				

порядком расположен ные						
Словарь исторически й или сокращенна я библиотека	New American Cyclopedia	Сельскохозяйственная украинская энциклопедия				
Лексикон российский исторически й, географический, политический и гражданский	The Encyclopedia Americana	Кибернетика				
Танцевальный слова	Der grosse Herder	Белорусская советская энциклопедия				
Любовного лексикона	Encyclopédie Française	Малая энциклопедия Латвийская ССР				
Пространное поле или Всеобщий исторический оригинальный словарь	Petit Larousse illustré	Малая Литовская советская энциклопедия				
Новый словотолкователь, расположенный по алфавиту,	Nouveau Larousse universel	Эстонская советская энциклопедия				

содержащи й разные в российском языке иностранны е речения и технические термины						
Словарь Ретрашевец в	Grand memento encyclopédique Larousse	Азербайджанская советская энциклопедия				
Карманного словаря иностранных слов	Lexikon A–Z	Армянская советская энциклопедия				
Словарь исторический о бывших в России писателях духовного чина...	Лексикон русской исторической, географической, политической и гражданской	Грузинская советская энциклопедия				
Словарь древней и новой поэзии	Географический лексикон Российского государства ...	Казахская советская энциклопедия				
Словарь достопамятных людей русской земли	Пространного поля... или всеобщего исторического оригинального словаря...	Киргизская советская энциклопедия				

Военный энциклопедический лексикон (Zedler)	Новый словотолкователь (lanovskii)	Молдавская советская энциклопедия				
Лексикон чистой и прикладной математики	Карманный словарь иностранных слов, вошедших в состав русского языка	Таджикская советская энциклопедия				
Энциклопедический словарь, составленный русскими учеными и писателями	Отечественных записок	Туркменская советская энциклопедия				
Настольный словарь для справок	Энциклопедического словаря, составленного русскими учёными и литераторами	Узбекская советская энциклопедия				
Энциклопедического словаря русских ученых и писателей	Новый энциклопедический словарь	Литовская советская энциклопедия				
Всенаучный энциклопедический словарь (Krugozor)	Большая энциклопедия(IUzhakov)	Детская энциклопедия				
Энциклопедический	Малая энциклопедия	Краткая болгарская				

словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона	ия практическо й медицины	энциклопед ия				
Малый Брокгауз	Физический словарь (СССР)	Новая венгерская энциклопед ия				
Большая энциклопед ия	Энциклопед ия элементарн ой математики	Новый словарь Мейера				
Большая энциклопед ия (1900— 1909 – Просвещени е)		Wielka encyklopedia powszechna				
Настольный энциклопед ический словарь (Garbel')		Dictiōnar enciclopedic român				
Русская энциклопед ия (Деятель)		Enciclopedia României				
Военная Советская Энциклопед ия		Большая румынская энциклопед ия				
		Настольный научный словарь				
		Enciklopedija Leksikografsk og zavoda				