

Title: Some Implications of “Culture” in the Writings of Osip Mandel'shtam and Viacheslav Ivanov

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Osip Mandel'shtam's growing interest in culture in the 1920s may be linked to a larger debate in Europe initiated by Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*, the first volume of which was published in 1918 (later appearing in Russian translation in 1923 as *Zakat evropy*). But besides the greater context there is cause to further investigate Mandel'shtam's strong reliance on the term in his essays from the early 20s. To that end this paper argues that Mandel'shtam's understanding of 'culture' was partially motivated by Viacheslav Ivanov's negative use of the term in several famous essays dating mostly to the period known as the crisis in Symbolism. I will attempt to show how Mandel'shtam's positive view of culture and the associations it has to Classicism in his essay “Slovo i kul'tura” may indicate a direct response to *mifotvorchestvo*, one of the cornerstones of Ivanov's Symbolist project. Ivanov's discussion of mythmaking in his essay “Zavety simvolizma” is a mystical yet systematic outline of how symbols become myths. In other essays between the years of 1907 and 1916, Ivanov consistently describes culture as the polar opposite of the positively marked *mifotvorchestvo*: the former is merely the trace of once living and now fossilized myths, the latter is an organic process that requires the artist-priest as its generator. Ivanov often associates culture with the school of Classicism, a dismissal interesting to consider in light of the return to Classicism foregrounded in Mandel'shtam's essay “Slovo i kul'tura.” Mandel'shtam associates culture with living material and stresses the resilience of myth and culture with equal emphasis. Culture in his view is thus not part of the problem toward the regeneration of myth, but the root of its being.

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