Aleksandr Nikolaevich Pypin was born on 25 March (6 April), 1833, in Saratov, the same city where five years earlier his cousin (their mothers were sisters), the future revolutionary Nikolai Chernyshevskii (1828-1889), had been born. The son of a petty nobleman and a priest’s daughter, Aleksandr lived under the same roof as the Chernyshevskii family, and the ties between the cousins would remain strong throughout their lives. Already attracted to books as a boy, Pypin at an early age started to learn French, German and Latin, and acquainted himself with the then classics of Russian literature. After finishing gymnasium in Saratov (1842-1849), he studied at the historical-philological faculty of Kazan University and from 1850 onwards at Saint Petersburg University. Here he successfully defended, in 1857, his dissertation on the history of medieval Russian stories and fairy tales, which he examined not only from a literary-historical perspective, but from a broader cultural viewpoint as well, drawing attention to the folkloristic connections between East and South Slavs.

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In 1858-1860, as part of the preparation for a professorship, he visited Germany, France, England – where he met Aleksandr Herzen and Nikolai Ogarev –, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and the Austrian Empire, which allowed him to immerse himself into the cultures of the West and South Slavs living under Austrian rule. In Prague he met the Czech writer Božena Němcová (1820-1862). Back in Russia, Pypin was appointed professor at Saint Petersburg University in the field of general literary history, but already one year later, in 1861, he became involved in a conflict between the Russian government and academia, which made him leave university because of his too liberal ideas (needless to say that these ideas would upset censors more than once throughout his life). This had an impact on his living conditions and yet allowed him to spend even more time writing, publishing and editing articles for the renowned journals of the time, some of which, such as The Contemporary (Современник), were temporarily suspended. This was also the decade in which his first book-length studies began to appear about the Slavic literatures in general. In the meantime, in 1863, he had married Iuliia Gurskalin, with whom he would have three daughters and two sons.

His most remarkable achievement from this period is his acclaimed Overview of the History of the Slavic Literatures (Обзор истории славянских литератур, 1865), conceived as a supplement to the 1863 Russian translation (under Pypin’s redaction) of Johannes Scherr’s German world literary history Allgemeine Geschichte der Literatur von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart: Ein Handbuch für alle Gebildeten (General History of the Literature from the Oldest Times to the Present: A Manual for All Educated People, 1851), in which only 22 pages were devoted to the literatures of the Slavs. In his 530-page Overview Pypin respectively treated Bulgarian, Serbian (incl. Croatian and Slovene), Russian (incl. Ukrainian and Ruthenian), Czech (incl. Slovak) and Sorbian literature (the chapter on Polish literature was written by the Polish-Russian lawyer and literary historian Włodzimierz Spasowicz). The second edition of Pypin’s Obzor (now in two volumes, 1879-1881) was soon translated into Czech, German and (partially into) French, and the chapter on Bulgarian literature into Bulgarian under the title History of Bulgarian Literature (История на българската литература, 1884), thus becoming the very first monograph on this subject.
Other important works (though less with regard to the intercultural connections between East and South Slavs) are his *History of Russian Ethnography* (История русской этнографии, 1890-1892) and *History of Russian Literature* (История русской литературы, 1898-1899), both in four volumes. Worth mentioning, too, are the very first scholarly biography (1876) of Russia’s most famous nineteenth-century literary critic, Vissarion Belinskii (1811-1847) and the 1899 monograph on the Russian writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-1889), with whom Pypin had corresponded at the time.

After several unsuccessful attempts to rejoin academia, in 1891 Pypin was finally made corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He became a full member in 1898, six years before his death. By the end of his life he was a member of more than a dozen learned societies, boards and organizations, a.o. in Sofia, Belgrade and Prague.

Although Pypin sympathized with the views of the authoritative critic to whom he devoted an already-mentioned biography, his name, unlike Belinskii’s, usually remains absent on lists of so-called Westernizers (zapadniki). Unsurprisingly, since a large part of his voluminous oeuvre is devoted to Slavic issues, Pypin is rather mentioned when Slavophile movements are at stake. His lively interest in the Slavic peoples and their cultures enabled him to form well-considered opinions about the much-debated political questions which had risen for the Slavs under Austrian, Ottoman Turkish or Russian rule in the turbulent second half of the nineteenth century. However, though certainly a ‘Slavophile’ in the most literal sense of the word (because ‘sympathizing with the Slavs’ throughout his life), Pypin never endorsed any ideological movement that then or later (can be said to have mis)used the term ‘Slav’, such as Slavophilism or Pan-Slavism. On the contrary, Pypin did not spare his criticism of these movements in his publications, in particular of Pan-Slavism as it was advocated in his own country, where Russians just wanted the other Slavs to learn Russian.

The least thing to say about this very productive author (some speak of more than 1500 publications) is that the range of his scholarly interests was very broad, even for nineteenth-century standards, according to which scholars usually published in more and/or broader domains than nowadays. Present-day literary scholars, cultural scientists, philosophers and historians alike can still find valuable observations and comparisons in Pypin’s works. Moreover, the fact that he was familiar with not only one or two (as most Slavists today), but actually all Slavic languages and cultures, makes his works with the term ‘Slavic’
(slavianskii) in the title virtually unique for those and later times. Admittedly, in Pypin’s time there were other scholars knowing (and writing about) all Slavic languages, but these were usually philologists who were often not interested in disseminating their knowledge and observations in a popularizing way.
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About Pypin