

ALEKSANTERI INSTITUTE
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Thursday, 23 February 2012 at 14:15 Aleksanteri Institute, Unioninkatu 33, Meeting room 2nd floor
[Dr Alexandra Arkhipova](#)

How a Legend became a Woman: the Story of Rosa Kaganovich, Stalin's Secret Wife

ABSTRACT:

This presentation is dedicated to the problem of mythological versions of the biographies of political leaders. A famous example that actually never existed, yet mentioned in numerous memoirs and court cases, is Roza Lasarevna (also Moseevna, or Mikhailovna) Kaganovich, a sister (daughter or niece) of Stalin's powerful right hand Lasar Kaganovich. Her biography emerged from folklore, false memoirs and speculations of certain historians. First rumors of Stalin's "secret third wife" spread among Soviet diplomatic ranks during the late 30s. They basically transported an anti-Semitic idea: Lasar Kaganovich, a Jew, was the hidden, secret ruler of the Soviet Union, who controlled Stalin via his sister. Ironically, even the secret service of Nazi-Germany trusted this rumor and even offered a reward for information on the whereabouts of Roza Kaganovich. After WWII, this legend became even more popular and, in its last episode, Roza was killed during her attempt to assassinate Stalin for his last anti-Jewish campaign. In 1953-54, many Soviet citizens were imprisoned for spreading this rumor. Roza's story began its second life when emigrants brought this folklore to the West and, given understandable lack of verifiable and uncensored information from Russia, a number of historians mistook these rumors for true information.

Why is this story worthy of a researcher's interest? It is an example of mythology (mis)informing history. Primary elements (rumors about Roza and anti-Semitic stereotypes) unite to form complex legends, which evolve according to the rules of folklore and finally produce a political ideology. Evidently, a myth attracts people more than real history.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Dr Alexandra Arkhipova is an associate professor at the Centre for Typological and Semiotic Folklore Studies, Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow. She is the author (with Mikhail Melnichenko) of the book *Jokes about Stalin: Texts, Comments, Analysis* (in Russian) and more than 60 papers on folklore studies and anthropology; the origin of new Russian folklore in the Soviet era; anti-Stalin folklore; and the folklore and ethnography of Siberia, Northern and Central Asia.

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