

**Making “The Russian Lion”:
Vladislav von Krajewski’s Bodybuilding of George Hachenschmidt**

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In their focus upon the rupture and transformation of Soviet physical culture in the 1930s, histories of Russian bodybuilding of the new man have tended to become disconnected from trajectories stretching back to the •Crimean War and the need to enhance military preparedness through modern sports and gymnastics inspired by the •German Turnen gymnastic societies. Valued for producing a disciplined subject in peacetime and a fearless fighter in war, these so-called “disciplinary exercises” were promoted in the •first gymnastics club of St. Petersburg from 1863, followed by the *Pal’ma* Gymnastics Society which quickly spread with branches in five cities. After the Moscow Gymnastics Society opened with meetings on Tsvetnoi Boulevard, in 1874, •Pyotr Lesgaft, the founder of Russian physical education introduced gymnastics into the army with gymnastic courses for army officers and civilians by 1896. Yet, as this paper will reveal, it was only through •Dr. V. F. Krajewski, founder of the •St. Petersburg Athletic and Cycling Club and physician to the •Tsar, that *the St. Petersburg Amateur Weightlifting Society* was opened in 1885. •It was only due to Dr Krajewski that a •gym for weightlifting opened with the first all-Russian weightlifting championship being held in April 1897 in St. Petersburg Mikhailovsky Manege. It was only this event that attracted the Estonian strongman, George Hackenschmidt. It was then only through Dr Krajewski’s mentoring that Hackenschmidt achieved renown as “The Russian Lion”. •Once his victories and his image circulated far and wide across Russia, Krajewski’s bodybuilding of “The Russian Lion” was commemorated, as this paper will argue, as ‘the newly made man’. Instrumental to his making were Kettlebells.

To unravel the network of interrelationships in which Krajewski's gym and the performativity of "The Russian Lion" as 'the newly made man', this paper will begin by examining how physical culture became inscribed as the perfect antidote to devolution and the degeneration of male bodies in modernizing and industrializing St Petersburg. It will then investigate the analogies between Krajewski's gym, his 'rational physical exercise' and Edmond Desbonnet's *La Culture Physique* and 'rational physical culture, before focusing upon Krajewski's introduction of wrestling and his training of Hach. After comparing Hach with Eugen Sandow, it will then compare their different concepts of fitness and visual cultures before focussing upon the significant role played by kettlebells in making the Russian Lion and considering the significance they were granted in the 1948 competition for Soviet strongmen in Moscow without any reference to this history. By unravelling this trajectory of gymnastics, physical culture and kettlebell throwing in relation to Krajewski's bodybuilding of Hachenschmidt, it will then explore how the model for making the new man became "The Russian Lion" and how these trajectories were unwittingly sustained and elaborated during the Soviet era.

With •industrialisation, railways, banking houses and offices cluttering its centre and •factories congesting its outskirts, St Petersburg's rapid transformation was deemed both devolutionary and degenerative.¹ Conceived as an enhancer of productivity and an antidote to sedentary occupations and the debilitating conditions of moral life engendering weakness, degenerative bodies, constant fatigue and neurasthenia, physical culture was promoted by three "professors of athletics": Count G. I. Ribop'er, I. V. Lebedev – editor of the journal, *Hercules*, and Krajewski.² So transformed had Krajewski been by the Berlin weightlifter, •Charles Ernst, that he had toured Austria and Germany for ideas about gymnasiums. •When Krajewski then opened his own gym in his St Petersburg apartment in 1885, aged 41, it marked what Lebedev calls "the birth of Russian athletics". Opening its doors to the factory worker and the average business man "to meet the demands made upon him daily by their long hours of work", Krajewski filled it with bodybuilding equipment. •Modelling it upon *La Culture Physique* gym of

Edmond Desbonnet, •its walls were papered with aspirational images of bodybuilders trained by Desbonnet with instructions in Rational Physical Exercise. There professional strongmen and wrestlers could give private 'exhibitions of their art' whilst being 'photographed, examined, measured, and weighed'.³ While •Desbonnet's photographs for his gym and his journal, *La Culture Physique*, invariably featured the remade male body naked, epitomized by Desbonnet himself, •the 'new men' flexing their weight-lifting muscles in photographs of Krajewski's gym reveal them clothed, as was Krajewski himself. •The other salient difference between these photographs, as well as the images of Desbonnet's and Krajewski's gym, is the inclusion of Kettlebells positioned prominently by the weight-lifting apparatus. For Krajewski, they were seminal to what he called after Desbonnet's 'rational physical culture', "Rational Physical Exercise". "The only satisfactory weapon ... to combat the consequent unhealthy conditions of modern life" and what Krajewski called the "self-poisoning" of the "muscular and nervous system" is, he maintained, "Rational Physical Exercise".

•The "rational" dimension of Krajewski's "physical exercise" entailed carefully calibrated use of •free-weights, as well as •Kettlebells, with a steady progression of exercises in the open-air. Unlike Desbonnet, Krajewski stressed that his "Rational Physical Exercise" was designed to achieve the development of useful rather than useless muscles, which he correlated with productive, not unproductive, labour. Crunches, situps and legs raises complemented by •dumbbell exercises, •weightlifting and •Kettlebell throwing were designed to strengthen the midriff, back and leg muscles, in his words, "to be the better able to withstand the wear and tear resulting from the hurry, worry and hustle of the modern business life." •Given the significance of the "human hands and arms in transacting the work of the world", Krajewski designed exercises to strengthen the arm and hand muscles with Kettlebells. The strengthening of these muscles was designed to make the new Russian man sufficiently resilient to adapt to industrialization, commercialization, modern warfare and the rapidly expanding metropolises – •as was Krajewski's introduction of wrestling.

Once the Tsarist wrestling ban on professional wrestling was lifted, •Kraveskii incepted the Saint Petersburg Circle of Amateur Athletes in 1895. Becoming the Petersburg Athletic Society, it took “athletics out of the privacy of Kraveskii's gym and into the public sphere.”⁴ Soon it was followed by the St. Petersburg Amateur Weightlifting Society, *Sanitas* and •*The Hercules Club*. Once Kraveskii's sponsored the first national bodybuilding competition, it attracted such internationally competitive wrestlers as Ivan Shemiakin and •Ivan Poddudny, as well as the apprentice blacksmith who had achieved renown for his extraordinary weightlifting and wrestling defeats since the age of 14: •Hachenschmidt.⁵

So impressed was Kravetski with the 17-year old Estonian's strength and physical development that he invited Hack to stay in his home to oversee his training. Acclaiming him as •“one of the most-truly balanced and beautifully-knit athletes the world has even seen”, Kravetski promised to help turn Hack into the strongest man in the world. Readily accepting, Hack reminisced that Kravetski's offer “was better than anything [he] had ever dared to dream.” Despite Krajewski's enormous medical practice with up to 250 patients flocking to his surgery from early morning until late at night, Hach recalls how the Dr. devoted himself to his rigorous physical culture training.⁶ •“I owe practically all that I have and am to him”, recalled Hachenschmidt. “He it was who taught me how to live and how to train, and he it was who launched on my career. ... Nor would I indeed claim to be his chief and only debtor ... athletes the world over are ... directly or indirectly in his debt. Well was he styled the “Father” of athletics; for it was through the system which he first organized, that every athlete of any prominence during the last twenty-five or thirty years, developed his powers.” •Pursuing Krajewski's daily routine of 8 hours sleep, icy cold baths followed by vigorous drying exercises and weight training with dumbbells and kettlebells in his sunlight gym, Hach's considered his body and his manhood remade, as seemingly testified by his bodybuilding photography.

•At 18 his chest had been ‘41 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. normal and 44 in. expanded’ (103); after rigorous training with Krajewski, it became 47 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. normal and 51 in.

expanded'. It was commemorated by cabinet images made of him circulating far and wide across Russia as 'the new man'. Devoting his entire working day to working out, Hach not only achieved renown for his massive chest but also for his physical dominance, unlimited strength, swift movement, infinite staying power and huge muscles, as testified by the number of cabinet cards produced by photographers in which he was carefully posed to reveal his neck, chest, back, buttocks, arms and hand muscles. While setting records in weight-lifting, Hach took every opportunity to get into the ring with the wrestlers visiting Krajewski's gym. Winning local wrestling championships in St. Petersburg, his critics complained "He outmuscled rather than outwrestled his opponents". For the *World Amateur Championship in Gaeco-Roman Wrestling* in Vienna in 1898 where Krajewski was its Russian consultant, Krajewski considered Hackenschmidt ready to compete. Beating all his opponents, Hach became the amateur world wrestling champion at the age of twenty.⁷ From this feat onwards, images of this newly made man oozing every ounce of rippling muscle were circulated not just across Russia's metropolitan cities but across Europe, particularly Berlin. Yet to develop strength and muscles that did not merely look and feel hard but which were identified by Krajewski as functional and 'useful', Hach stressed that they arose from "the hardest kind of work".

"It is a well-known fact that the majority of men to-day are relatively weak", declared Hackenschmidt.⁸ "Deprived ... of open-air life and hard physical exertion", they become "sickly, weedy and stunted".⁹ Drawing upon Darwinist evolutionary theory, Hach argued that "the struggle for existence" against what he called "the disadvantages of evil consequences", "demands now more than at any previous epoch that they should be strong!"¹⁰ "The most effectual means of preventing all the disadvantages of evil consequences of a neglected exercise of body and muscles is methodical physical training." Yet the new demands upon masculinity generated by industrialization, modernization and urbanization required, according to Hach, the physical and psychological development of male strength and endurance in new ways. While aware of the new ways in which hard muscles were acquired by

•Sandow through his •dumbbells and •rubber chest expanders attachable to doors, Hachenschmidt considered they “defrauded” the public. The muscles they produced would be of little use for modern work, industry, sport or warfare. •“Only by exercising with heavy weights can a man hope to develop really great strength”, Hach maintained.¹¹ •Rather than Sandow’s light-weights, Hach trained with a pair of 150-pound dumbbells. •Conterminously he developed the Hach squat, “one of the best leg exercises in the world” with a 120-pound barbell or kettlebell held between his thighs: “How can a man get strong unless he does a strong man’s work?” asked Hachenschmidt. He applied this question to •Sandow’s workouts and his posing.

While acknowledging Sandow’s knack for •posing and •showmanship, Hach criticized Sandow’s postures as •“effeminate”, no doubt aware of the •homosexual following they attracted. Although purportedly refusing to engage in superfluous posing and professional strongman spectacles, nevertheless •the cabinet photographs circulating of Hach across Russia, America, Britain and Germany indicate •otherwise although his poses were rarely quite as languorous nor as •tantalizingly homoerotic. Denouncing the exercises Sandow promoted as not just useless but potentially harmful, Hach concluded “Where acrobatics, weightlifting, or wrestling is discussed seriously ... Sandow is not prominently considered.” In fact, so critical was he of Sandow’s methods that the showman asked Hach to stop publicly attacking his training as it “interfered with his business”. Following his lead, the media invariably pitted Hachenschmidt against Sandow. Highlighting the disconnection between showmanship and actual athletic ability, journalists credited Hach with muscular development not only eclipsing that of Sandow but with muscles that were actually “useful” for athletic feats, wrestling and hard work.¹² Unlike Sandow, the Russian Lion Can Put His Great Muscles to Practical Use”, *The Morning Telegraph* crowed.¹³ •Hailed as “the man who out-Sandowed Sandow at his own game”, one journalist concluded: “in one word, Hachenschmidt’s strength and speed are so great that he can defy all the skill and strategy of the most eminent man in the wrestling game.”¹⁴ Even Theodore Roosevelt declared, “If I wasn’t president of the United States, I would

like to be George Hackenschmidt'. Yet muscular strength for Sandow needed to be not only useful but functional.

•Equating 'the hard work' of muscular strength with control of the nervous system, Hach regarded strength training as equivalent to the psycho-physical training of the 'will' to offset neurasthenia and what he called a 'weakening' of the nerves leading to "fatigue, headache, anxiety and depression". Repetitive strength exercises were not only intended to prepare the new man for industry, modernization, citizenship and war but were also key to the new man's attainment of vitality, will-power, self-mastery and fulfilment.¹⁵ In generating a symbiosis of body and mind, Hach regarded this strength as "functional": "Just as the man of sedentary habits and weak body possesses a correspondingly sluggish mind and lack of energy, so he who assiduously pursues a physical development gains not only that desired government of his organs, but ... a thorough mastery of his will and, consequently, an easy and contented mind." •Yet while "The Russian Lion" attributed much of his weight-lifting and wrestling success to his rigorous 'useful' and 'functional' strength routines and workouts with 150-pound dumbbells, he never failed to stress to interviewers •the importance of lifting and throwing kettlebells, as did Krajewski.

•Imperative to Krajewski's concept of bodybuilding as "heavy athletics" was Kettlebells. The subject of Krajewski's treatise, *The Development of Physical Strength with Kettlebells and without Kettlebells*, they were identified as the best means of maximizing the human body as a tool for strength. •"*Kettlebells develop power-endurance*", Krajewski explained, "*the ability to sustain quick bursts of muscular energy over an extended period of time*". Tracing the word back to the 1704 *Russian Dictionary* and identifying Kettlebells with •strong farmers and •buff seamen, Krajewski popularized kettlebell training in his gym and with Nicholas II. In fact so impressed was the •Tsar with their effectiveness that he ordered his own guards to train with kettlebells. Following Krayewski's recommendation, the Russian military also trained their new recruits with them, while the Russian army eventually elevated kettlebells to a national sport. At the same time, •Ludvig Chaplinskiy

pointed out that kettlebells was the working-class sport: "Every person can and ought to be fit and strong", he wrote in *Hercules Magazine* in 1913: "Not one single sport develops our muscular strength and bodies as well as kettlebell athletics".

During the last part of the Stalinist era when any trace of Russia's industrial capitalist Tsarist history continued to be deracinated, this included this active history of bodybuilding generated by Krajewski and his relationship with Hach and so many who actively fertilized this field, including the Hercules Club. This meant that in 1948 when the Soviet Union refused to attend the Summer Olympics in London, instead hosting the All-Soviet Union Competition of Strongmen in Moscow, no connection with this history was acknowledged. Paradoxically many of its competitions seemed to have their roots in this history, including the kettlebell competitions which featured in two of the events, the long jerk and the biathlon. Just as Krajewski's bodybuilders performed the two-kettlebell jerk and single-arm snatch, so did contestants in 1948 without any knowledge of its foundation. In 1981, when the Soviet government acknowledged the various advantages that kettlebells could give its working citizens, an official commission required mandatory kettlebell training for the masses, relying on the kettlebell to increase productivity and to decrease the healthcare costs of the country. Yet what may still need to be brought to light, as this paper has endeavoured to expose, is the ways in which bodybuilding with weights and Kettlebells became instrumental to training the Russian military and worker and to making the new Russian man like 'The Russian Lion', well before the October Revolution, as much as after it. Viewed from this perspective making the new man may never be a finished product but one constantly in the process of being remade with distinctly Russian masculinities fortified by the practice of kettlebells.

EDITS

Krajewski viewed physical exercise as a means to preserve health, enhance overall fitness and prevent illnesses. Health and strength as a defence against illness: "A man can only fortify himself against disease by strengthening his body in such manner as will enable it to defy the attacks of any malady".¹⁶

was also closely trained by him from this time onwards while staying in his home. After winning local contests and European matches, Krajewski prepared Hackenschmidt to compete in the world championships held in Vienna in 1898. Winning at the age of twenty, from this time onward Hackenschmidt was touted as "The Russian Lion". After army duty with the Preobrashensky regiment, when "The Russian Lion" defeated von Schmelling for the 1899 Russian championship, it was commemorated by his image circulating far and wide across Russia as 'the new man'.

. Hailed for outmuscling his opponents and for "out-Sandowing Sandow at his own game" with muscles that were actually "useful", "The Russian Lion" attributed much of his weight-lifting and wrestling success to his rigorous strength-training regiment, never failing to stress to interviewers the importance of lifting and throwing kettlebells. The subject of a treatise by Krajewski, "The Development of Physical Strength with Kettlebells and without Kettlebells", they became instrumental to training the Russian military and making the new Russian man like 'The Russian Lion' before the October Revolution.

¹ As Karl Schlogel has argued, St Petersburg was becoming a new industrial bourgeois metropolis, where peasant migrants constituted the majority of the city dwellers, gradually overlapped the old imperial capital. The new urban leisure culture played an important role in this process.

² Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era*, 87: "The connection between physical and mental health resulted in the 'physical culture' movement of the late nineteenth century which moved east into Russia specifically from Germany. Because the ideas that underlay this movement were reputedly scientific, its champions were tenured as "professors of athletics" ... Their backgrounds could have scarcely been more dissimilar, but their paths crossed at the formative point of organized athletics. ...collectively they represented athletics as an individual effort, something worth doing for the self rather than the glory of the competition. Their efforts resulted in the

emergence of a widespread cult of the body, which by 1914 had reached into the public school system."

³ 109.

⁴ Organizing in 1895, and officially chartered two years later, the St Petersburg Athletic Circle was one of the first clubs. Offering seasonal competitions and individual and group sports from shot put to bicycling, its aim was "The promotion of physical exercises beneficial for the development of the body and for the improvement of health among youth". Women were not allowed to join. As an organizational model, Louise McReynolds maintains. That it "took athletics out of the privacy of Kraveskii's gym and into the public sphere."

⁵ I. V. Lebedev, biography, *Kraveskii: Illustrirovannyi zhurnal atletika i sport*, no. 3, 1905, 48-50. Until 1894, the Tsarist Government had prohibited professional wrestling because of the explosive effects the matches might have on its presumed lower-class audience. Through Lebedev, wrestling fused athletic respectability with mass popularity as a spectator sport with a cultural impact. More than any other physical and sporting activity, it influenced changing notions of masculinity. The other wrestler attracted to St Petersburg was ...

⁶ ... enormous practice with 250 patients "frequently calling on him in one day ... attending numberless patients of the poorer classes without any fee or recompense. These were freely invited to call on him, and used to flock in in large numbers are 8 pm, as they left their work; his waiting-rooms being usually crowded at that hour. ... He had, of course, a large practice among the wealthy classes, which occupied the earlier part of the day ... treated "the poorer classes without any fee or recompense. These were feely invited to call on him, and used to flock in large numbers after 8 pm, as they left their work; his waiting-rooms being usually crowded at that hour. He had, of course, a large practice among the wealthy classes, which occupied the earlier part of the day. Very waring ... 120 would have been thought to tax the strength of even the hardest constitution. Yet the doctor was always well, active and vigorous in mind and body, and ascribed his perpetual fitness solely to his daily physical exercise.

⁷ After this victory, Hackenschmidt served for five months in the army before taking up the life of a travelling professional wrestler. In 1901 he returned to Vienna and captured the professional world championship crown in a bout against Halil Adali.²² As Hack traveled he came into contact with dozens of trainers, athletes, doctors, and other kinds of physical culture experts. These encounters and his own close attention to how his body responded to exercise and diet allowed Hackenschmidt to develop and promulgate a system of beliefs on the right way to eat, train, and live.

⁸ *The Way to Live*, 14.

⁹ George Hackenschmidt, *The Way to Live*, 9.

¹⁰ *The Way to Live*, 14.

¹¹ *The Way to Live*, 12.

¹² George Hackenschmidt, *The Russian Lion* (unpublished), 2, Hackenschmidt Collection, 64.

¹³ 11 April 1905.

¹⁴ 67.

¹⁵ Hach refers to this as "true enjoyment of living"; 18.

¹⁶ *The Way to Live*