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Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*. Volume 1: *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I*. Studies of the Harriman Institute. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. xvii + 469 pp. ISBN 0-691-03484-2. $60.00; Volume 2: *From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*. Studies of the Harriman Institute. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. xvii + 586 pp. ISBN 0-691-02947-4. $59.50.

Peter Mustonen, *Sobstvennaia ego imperatorskogo velichestva kantseliariia v mekhanizme vlastvovaniia instituta samoderzhtsa 1812–1858: K tipologii osnov imperskogo upravleniia* [Helsinki:] Aleksanteri Instituutin julkaisusarja: Kikimoro Publications, 1998. 358 pp. ISBN 951-45-8074-5.

The history of the Russian autocracy is one of those areas of current Russian historiography strongly influenced by non-scholarly factors, among them commercial demand, popular sentiment, and sometimes the political and ideological situation. It is not hard to understand why this tendency is especially evident in the literature on the 19th and early 20th centuries. The cult of the imperial dynasty and family, typified by the "masculine" autocracy of that period, above all else meets the explicit or latent striving of the reading public to "recognize" its own characteristics in depictions of the family and private life of the Romanovs, and in this way to confirm its participation and, in some cases, identity with an appealing historical tradition.

One may distinguish two major categories among the works published in recent years by scholars on the late autocracy – political biographies of the monarchs and the publication of the personal correspondence and diaries of members of the imperial family. The authors of the biographies have summarized a significant amount of empirical data. But they have not demonstrated a noticeable interest in methodological innovations regarding the study of the exercise of power. While they disagree among themselves (at times fundamentally so) in their assessment of the Russian monarchy's historical significance, these historians are

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united in their view of the late autocracy as a static structure of authority frozen in specific forms.[1]

Undoubtedly, the publication of the personal papers of the emperors and their relatives represents a very promising trend in research. The archival collections of members of the dynasty contain an incalculable volume of documents (granted, many of them in foreign languages, which makes work with them rather complicated) allowing us to penetrate the psychology of the rulers and assess the sophistication of their thinking about government. However, it is difficult to do so successfully without the application of current interpretive methods for reading epistolary and memoir materials. Moreover, the majority of dynastic documents recently published in Russia lack any sort of interpretive commentary or critical interpretation.[2] The publishers appear to operate on the belief that the historical value of "the tsar's word" as extracted from the archives derives precisely from the fact that it emanates from the tsar, was once a family secret, and has now become the possession of the reading public as a whole.

The history of the autocratic regime as a *process* of rule has been markedly less well developed. The bases of the autocracy's legitimacy, the bureaucratic regimentation of the "supreme authority's" operations, and the means of inculcating subordination and loyalty into subjects remain peripheral for scholars. I would suggest that the study of the late monarchy from this perspective has thus far been hindered by the historiographic idol of "absolutism." Many historians today are beginning to recognize that our historiographical understanding of absolutism, of the absolute personal power of the monarch, is nothing other than the result of the uncritical absorption of ideologies and beliefs that the rulers and their coteries strenuously sought to implant in the minds of their contemporaries.[3] In depicting the tsar's power as unlimited, we fall into a trap set long ago by

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[1] Examples of biographies written in a spirit of partisan apology, but that brought new factual material (albeit without scholarly annotation) into circulation are the works of Aleksandr Nikolaevich Bokhanov, *Imperator Aleksandr III* (Moscow: Russkoe slovo, 1998) and *Imperator Nikolai II* (Moscow: Russkoe slovo, 1998). An example of a biographical study that depicts the person of the monarch as subject to destructive influence by the autocracy as a self-contained "system" is Andrei Nikolaevich Sakharov, *Aleksandr I* (Moscow: Nauka, 1998). For a compilation that aspires to the status of a biography, written according to the principle of "everything that happened in the reign of a given ruler is his biography," see Evgenii Petrovich Tolmachev, *Aleksandr II i ego vremia*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Terra, 1998).

[2] See Larissa Georgievna Zakharova and Liubov′ Ivanovna Tiutiunnik, eds., *Venchanie s Rossiei: Perepiska velikogo kniazia Aleksandra Nikolaevicha s imperatorom Nikolaem I. 1837 god* (Moscow: Izdatel′stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1999); [Alexander III], "Pis′ma imperatora Aleksandra III k nasledniku tsesarevichu velikomu kniaziu Nikolaiu Aleksandrovichu," *Rossiiskii Arkhiv (Istoriia Otechestva v svidetel′stvakh i dokumentakh XVIII–XX v.)*, no. 9 (1999), 213–50.

[3] For a valuable recognition of this, see Aleksandr Borisovich Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I do Pavla I: Reformy v Rossii XVIII v. Opyt tselostnogo analiza* (Moscow: RGGU, 1999), 22–25.

the ideologists of the monarchy. This situation had a particularly ironic effect on the works of Soviet historians, whose emotionally negative treatment of the autocracy simply inverted (but failed to reconceptualize) the pre-revolutionary official understanding of the monarchical order.

However, the late autocracy has little prospect of being "liberated" from this methodological prison any time soon. The stubborn tradition of historical narrative in Russia, which reached its apex in the liberal pre-1917 historiography, gives hypertrophied significance to the struggle of the monarchs of the late empire against the constitutional movement.[4] With scholars' attention focused on that issue, the very term "absolutism" provides a comprehensive explanation of the nature of the autocracy.

It is all the more helpful and timely, then, to turn to non-Russian studies of the mechanics of Russian rule. The publication of the second volume of Richard Wortman's magnum opus is an apt occasion to consider the likelihood of Russian historians' assimilation of the approaches and conclusions of their Western colleagues.

Wortman has been a pioneer in conceptualizing the autocracy as a system of power incapable of existing and acting without the simultaneous creation of a mythical reality, without symbolic self-representation in elevated oral, behavioral, artistic, and other forms. He interprets the symbolism of power, understood in the broadest sense of the term, as an effective means for distancing the monarchs from the mass of their subjects, ascribing an indisputable cultural otherness to the rulers, and regulating their relations with the elite. Studying the autocracy's myth-creating mission allows one clearly to see it as part of a broader European monarchical discourse. The imperial narrative (whether verbal or, for example, expressed in monuments and architecture) depended on the dominant political and cultural ideals in the West. It was then modified, arranged, and associated with the theme of rule along a whole spectrum of cultural idioms: faith in God and religiosity, death, war, love, friendship, marriage and the family, maternalism, beauty, fear, pity and empathy, subordination and submissiveness, service and self-abnegation, and so forth.

The principal novelty of Wortman's conclusions is that this is perhaps the first study to present the history of the Russian autocracy as so dynamic and complex a process, and the autocratic order as so adaptable to all sorts of changes both within and outside of the state.[5] The term "scenarios" in the book's title

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[4] Recently, this view has found expression in the idea of "false constitutionalism": Andrei Nikolaevich Medushevskii, *Demokratiia i avtoritarizm: Rossiiskii konstitutsionalizm v sravnitel'noi perspektive* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997), 198–201, 308–49.

[5] Just before the publication of volume 2 of *Scenarios of Power*, Boris Nikolaevich Mironov proposed a unique conception of the dynamic evolution of Russian imperial *gosudarstvennost'*, the

underlines the individuality and creativity of each ruler in realizing the fundamental myths of power. The author writes in the introduction to the second volume that one of his goals is "to restore the monarchy as an active, conscious factor to the history of Russia's political evolution before 1917. Examined with the same care as other institutions, Russian monarchy emerges as an institution with its own political culture, dominated by myth, its own specific goals … an agent of its own doom" (2: 4–5).

Wortman's analysis irrefutably demonstrates the inadequacy of studying the late autocracy from a political-juridical, institutional, or philosophical-ideological perspective. Combining semiotic and anthropological methods, Wortman reveals the internal cultural code of the autocracy, which formed the source of the varied and inventive means of symbolic legitimation of the emperor's power. As a whole, his book is a gripping story about the long road that the mythology of autocracy traveled during the imperial period, from the elevation of the autocrat to the status of an all-powerful divinity to the dramatization of the ruler's image as an "everyman," a simple family man like all his subjects. The picture that Wortman draws, with literary as well as scholarly mastery, is a very convincing answer to the question – still vital to Russian studies – of the reasons for the stability and viability of the Russian monarchy. It is another matter that the author, one might say, unwittingly contributes to the image of the autocracy's stability. In attempting to make his narrative a complete historical tapestry, he retrospectively attributes additional charisma to the autocracy and makes the regime's symbolic appeal more intelligible and effective than it could have been in actual political life.

Wortman's elucidation of the autocracy's internal rhythm brings us closer to understanding the hidden motives behind particular actions of "the supreme authority." In many cases, he first shows the lengthy process, intrinsically cultural by its nature, of "maturation" of those political actions which most historians see as evidence of the autocrats' passivity in the face of external constraints or crisis conditions. Perhaps Wortman's reconstruction of the dynamic of the mythologization of power is most successful with respect to the reigns of Nicholas I (the concluding part of volume 1) and Alexander II (the first part of volume 2).

Wortman presents Nicholas I's "dynastic scenario" and Alexander II's "scenario of love" as the two final versions of the autocracy's "European myth."

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main criterion of which is the extent to which the monarchy approached a *Rechtsstaat*. This conception requires analysis in the context of all of Mironov's work; I will only note here that he links the very dissimilar reigns of Alexander II and Alexander III as a single type of "all-estate monarchy." See Mironov, *Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii perioda imperii (XVIII–nachalo XX v.): Genezis lichnosti, demokraticheskoi sem'i, grazhdanskogo obshchestva i pravovogo gosudarstva,* vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999), 109–95, 150–54 ff, reviewed in *Kritika* 2: 1 (Winter 2001), 183–89.

Nicholas's main goal, according to Wortman, was to harmonize the universalistic principles of the multiethnic Petrine empire with newer ideas of national uniqueness. This project required the retention of the European image of the emperor's power, which was presented as an immanent national peculiarity of Russia (1: 275, 297–99, 379–81).

This example shows that the historian possesses methods for identifying a monarch's direct contribution to the doctrine of his reign, even in a case where the ruler had a clearly empirical way of thinking and was not inclined to ideological reflection. By concentrating on Nicholas's behavioral strategies, Wortman has found the key to systematizing the individual, transitory observations previously made by many historians about this tsar's very complex style of "self-definition." Nicholas's discourse of rituals, gestures, and manners proves rather consistent and evident. Nicholas succeeded in making the monarchy the embodiment of Russia and its people not by means of abstract metaphors and allegories, as in the baroque culture of the 18th century, but by means of a metonymic identification of the microcosm of the dynasty, court, military parade, and popular crowd in the Kremlin with the macrocosm of Russia itself.

Simplifying a bit, it might be said that each ceremonial interaction between Nicholas and one or another group of his subjects could be presented as the reflection in the person of the emperor of a concrete characteristic of Russia as a whole. With military men, his interaction evoked the ideals of valor and discipline; with the bureaucracy – diligence and knowledge; with members of the court – taste and civility; with the simple folk – religiosity and submissiveness; with his own family – love and tenderness. The most distinctive element of metonymic representation was the unprecedented theatricality of the emperor's private life, which transformed even a summer tea with the family at the Peterhof "cottage" into a refined and edifying public event.

To avoid any misunderstanding, I would like to point out that Wortman of course does not claim that Nicholas was acquainted with metonymy and synecdoche as literary tropes and artistic techniques (see, for instance, 1: 303, 384). Wortman suggests instead that Nicholas acted in accordance with a cultural and social "sensibility," by means of spontaneous self-identification, not on the basis of some sort of theoretical scheme. But, in my view, it should be emphasized that the practice of reflecting the whole in its constituent parts (which Nicholas grasped intuitively) compels us to consider the underlying psychological basis for this particular strategy. I think that Nicholas, unlike other crowned Romanovs, had a firm sense of the "spatial" position of the emperor's figure as the nucleus or "heart" of the state body, as opposed to conceiving of him as a "pinnacle," a "peak," and so forth.

This impression of the Nikolaevan scenario's semiotic sophistication is strengthened by Wortman's explanation of the mechanism for maintaining the "Europeanism" of Nicholas's image. In general, Wortman's characterization of Nicholas's image as decidedly European contradicts the depiction of him, widespread in Russian historiography, as virtually the progenitor of Great Russian chauvinism.[6] Wortman demonstrates that the symbolic union of the emperor with the military and bureaucratic elite, on the one hand, and his growing contact with the people, on the other, were two fundamentally different types of ceremonies. In the first instance, Nicholas demonstrated his inseparability from the institutions of the monarchy, the melding of the latter with the persons of the emperor and members of his family, and their mutual inclusion in "the culture of international royalty" (1: 298, 322, and *passim*). In the second instance, such interaction allegorically represented the distance between the ruler and the people. In rhetorical signification, the closer the emperor was united with the surrounding elite, the greater this distance from the people. This occurred particularly in ceremonial processions in the Kremlin in the last years of Nicholas's reign, after the European revolutions of 1848–49: "The pathos of the scene came from the mutual attraction of opposites, the grateful acceptance of the conquerors by the conquered" (1: 404). In other words, the devotion and submissiveness of the people to rulers who had not hidden their mysterious visage from them attenuated the rulers' connection with the universal tradition of European absolutism. At the same time, it counterposed the Russian emperor to contemporary European rulers. For them the idea of national sovereignty compelled a surrendering of some monarchical prerogatives, whereas in Russia, on the contrary, the principle of nationality (*narodnost'*) actually raised the prestige of the autocracy.

Obviously anticipating a criticism that the complex reconstruction he proposes might be considered over-interpretation, Wortman repeatedly emphasizes the eclecticism of Nicholas's scenario, which "combined the universal and the native, the neoclassical and the romantic" (1: 408). Yet the reader may rightfully ask whether this apparent eclecticism might not be the result of Wortman's own attempt to discover a single language of supreme authority in a number of differing systems of imagery and types of discourse – ideological, ritual-behavioral, monumental (architectural), and even musical. Undoubtedly, Wortman is far removed from the tendency that has recently appeared among Russian semioticians to absolutize retrospective "decipherings" of monarchical ritual, where an entire mythology of a given monarch can be derived from the supposed meaning

[6] See, for example, Nikolai Ivanovich Tsimbaev, "Rossiia i russkie (natsional'nyi vopros v Rossiiskoi imperii)," *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Seriia VIII: Istoriia*, no. 5 (1993), 32.

of the ritual.[7] Still, at times Wortman's verbalized discourse of artistic and behavioral symbols is not clearly confirmed in the *verbal narrative* of the myth as fixed in the synchronic written sources.

Most debatable is the proposed interpretation and understanding for the most important ceremonies and rituals of Nicholas's reign in terms of "conquest." (Wortman's reading of the basic archetype of Russian autocracy as a myth of conquest requires separate discussion.) The author certainly is right that the legend of the calling of the Varangians was critical for the doctrine of official nationality. I am also prepared to agree with Wortman that Nicholas's meetings with the people in the Kremlin "did recall … not so much the religious processions of Muscovy as the legendary summons to the princes beyond the sea to rule and bring order to the warring Slavic tribes…" (1: 404). Additionally, I would suggest that the implicit association with Riurik (along with the explicit comparison to Peter I) was purposefully cultivated as part of his own image by Nicholas himself as well as by the individuals participating in the creation of the myth of power. At the start of his reign, in both official and private rhetoric, a trope of wonder and delight was played up in every possible way: a decisive ruler, strong in spirit, rises almost from nowhere, miraculously appears at the most dramatic moment of trouble, and boldly undertakes to root out disorder. Immortalized in Nikolai Aleksandrovich Ramazanov's 1858 bas-relief, Nicholas's expressive gesture – his appearance, with his heir Alexander in his arms, before the Sapper Battalion on the evening of 14 December 1825 – may have been an allusion to the chronicle legend of 882, in which the Varangian Oleg lifts the boy Igor′ in his arms as a gesture of the durability of his sovereignty over Kiev.

However, in the verbal expression of these images, the ideology of Nicholas's reign not only did not employ the idea of conquest, but actually demonstrated that idea's incompatibility with the political basis of the autocracy. One may, of course, interpret this as a verbal tactical maneuver, as Wortman in fact does. For example, he discusses a passage from a lecture by Mikhail Petrovich Pogodin, in which the historian rejected on principle any characterization of the Varangians as "victors and conquerors" and instead developed the notion of their voluntary invitation. Wortman comments: "The Russian people had invited their *conquerors*, and had obeyed and loved them…" (1: 299, emphasis added). But thus "correcting" Pogodin's thought does not accord with Wortman's general semiotic-linguistic approach. In several other instances, he argues convincingly that the

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[7] Thus, in his recent work, Boris Andreevich Uspenskii, having analyzed the particular role of religious rituals and gestures in the coronation ceremony of Paul I, concludes: "It seems that Paul's idea of the prerogatives of tsarist authority was in some measure conditioned by the ritual of ascension to the throne." See Uspenskii, *Tsar′ i patriarkh: Kharizma vlasti v Rossii (Vizantiiskaia model′ i ee russkoe pereosmyslenie)* (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul′tury, 1998), 177–78. But why not vice versa?

public articulation of a key term or concept by the ideologists of the autocracy – even if it appeared hypocritical from the point of view of positivistic common sense – adequately reflected and in some sense even predetermined the symbolic strategy of the monarchy. An example is the importance of the words "clear" (*iasnyi*) and "unity" (*splochenie*) for the scenario of Alexander III (2: 167, 219).

Actually, we find in these very writings by Pogodin the verbalization of the topos of "summoning" that is essential to understanding the image of Nicholas I. The historian wrote that, at all times and for all subjects, "our ruler was an invited peaceable guest, the wished-for *defender*…."[8] It is precisely this phrase, "guest-defender," which created in the scenario of Nicholas I two images that at first glance appear conflicting and mutually exclusive – the bewitching, striking otherness of the autocracy and the touching accessibility and closeness of the ruler to the people.[9] This verbal formulation of the scenario corresponds more closely than does "conquest" to the image of the heir to the throne that Nicholas consciously created for the tsesarevich Alexander – the image of Russia's "hope," of its future, long-awaited benefactor.

Wortman uses the succession from Nicholas I to Alexander II as the chronological divide between the two volumes of his study, because after 1855, in his thinking, "the principal subject of Russian imperial representation shifts from the bonding of monarch and elite to showing the bonding of monarch and the Russian people" (2: 13). The first part of volume 2 treats the dynamic of Alexander II's search for appropriate ritual forms. At the same time, Wortman examines Alexander's scenarios as a revived version of Nicholas' "official nationality." In this he diverges from the majority of Russian and Western scholars, who attribute this doctrine's "second edition" to the reign of Alexander III (while recognizing its essential difference from the original version).[10]

Wortman considers the archetypal basis of Alexander II's scenario to be the myth of the ruler's parental love for his subjects and the subjects' filial adoration of the ruler. The genetic connection between the scenario of love and "official nationality" was expressed in the fact that the fundamental criterion – the autocracy's national identity – was unchanged in principle. The autocracy is "national" because it corresponds to *universal imperial* ideas of domination and

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[8] Mikhail Petrovich Pogodin, *Istoriko-kriticheskie otryvki*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1846), 64.

[9] On the relationship between conceptions of "conquest" and "summoning" in imperial discourse, see also Ol′ga Evgenievna Maiorova, "Bessmertnyi Riurik: Prazdnovanie Tysiacheletiia Rossii v 1862 godu," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 43 (2000), 137–45.

[10] Valentina Aleksandrovna Tvardovskaia, "Tsarstvovanie Aleksandra III," in *Russkii konservatizm XIX stoletiia: Ideologiia i praktika*, ed. Vladislav Iakimovich Grosul (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiia, 2000), 292–93; Nathaniel Knight, "Ethnicity, Nationality and the Masses: *Narodnost′* and Modernity in Pre-Emancipation Russia," in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, ed. David Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), chap. 3.

subordination and is therefore far ahead of contemporary European monarchies even in efforts at modernization. That the representation of these ideas was expanded relative to Nicholas I's reign is quite another matter: "The Russian people's devotion to their sovereigns expressed not only their immemorial subservience to authority, but their love and gratitude for the benefactions bestowed by their rulers" (2: 27). Wortman sees Alexander II's receptiveness to the model of Napoleon III's "people's monarchy" as a stimulus to the theme of love in imperial discourse and to the emperor's image as leader of the nation.

How the "scenario of love" operated in practice is shown with respect to the problem of the abolition of serfdom: "Alexander's commitment to emancipation arose not only from the specific shortcomings of a serf system and the backwardness revealed by the Crimean War; it resulted as well from the symbolic imperative instilled in him as tsarevich, which ordained that the Russian sovereign … should be an incarnation of absolute values of the educated elite serving the emperor and the state" (2: 59). The monograph portrays Alexander II as the creator of a political mythology of peasant liberation. According to this mythology, the reform arose from feelings of love and trust between the emperor and the gentry, and the First Estate's willingness to follow the monarch in his altruistic concern for the peasants' well-being.

In sum, it seems to me that Wortman provides a persuasive and perhaps comprehensive explanation of how Alexander II's scenario influenced the *initiation* of the 1861 reform by cultivating a sociopolitical atmosphere that favored a course of reform. However, as I have already had occasion to argue in discussing Wortman's 1990 article about Alexander II's travels around Russia (the major conclusions of which are reiterated in the corresponding chapter of the monograph), he does not fully clarify the mechanism of the interaction between the image of the "Tsar-Liberator" and the legislative process of reform.[11] The symbolic message of those ceremonies, which Wortman sees simply as a demonstration of the tsar's commitment to reform, was understood quite differently in gentry and bureaucratic circles, where it provoked a sharp competition for the monopoly of the true interpretation of the "supreme will."

Wortman's conceptualization of Alexander's scenario of love also sheds significant light on the profound paradox of the Great Reforms, which many historians have tried to formulate before him. As Wortman writes, "[t]he abolition of serfdom, the court, and *zemstvo* reforms introduced elements of a European civil society, with the presupposition that the generous acts of a kind monarch would be rewarded with renewed gratitude and devotion of the people to monarchy" (2:

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[11] Richard Wortman, "Rule by Sentiment: Alexander II's Journeys through the Russian Empire," *American Historical Review* 95: 3 (June 1990), 745–71; Mikhail Dmitrievich Dolbilov, "Aleksandr II i otmena krepostnogo prava," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 10 (1998), 32–51.

525). The issue was therefore not so much that Alexander II did not wish to "crown" the edifice of the reforms with a constitution (widely regarded as a historiographic truism), but rather that he may have introduced social reforms early in his reign precisely in order to render the constitutional issue moot in the future. The idea of representation – even in Mikhail Tarielovich Loris-Melikov's modest interpretation – was *organically incompatible* with Alexander's scenario, and the reasons for this incompatibility were deeper than a merely intellectual rejection of the doctrine: "For him, constitutionalism, or any form of representative participation, meant the institutionalization and formalization of his relationship with the people. The challenge was not abstract or intellectual but an immediate threat to the personal bonds that, in his mind, empowered and connected him to his ancestors, the court, and the estates" (2: 151).

From Wortman's analysis of the process of the collapse of Alexander's scenario, it is clear that the very grandiosity of the tsarist image contained within itself a destructive force. The effect of demonstrating the people's love and adoration was that the emperor's symbolic image again took on the characteristics of a transcendental being, which had been reduced in the image of Nicholas I (see, for example, the depiction of Alexander on *lubki* issued after the emancipation of 1861 [2: 75]). A certain *alienation* of the image from the person of the emperor had taken place.

Reflections on this paradox prompt me to pose the issue of the scenarios' authorship. The fact of the emperor's personal convictions about his image does not preclude the possibility of a scenario's parallel creation "from without." I submit that such was the case with Alexander: the creators of the reforms themselves played a significant role in the "extreme" level of mythologization of his authority. For example, the image of the peasantry's prayerful reverence and religious worship of the Tsar-Liberator was constructed as part of Alexander's image and popularized (partly in French high society) by one of the authors of the statutes of 19 February 1861, Nikolai Alekseevich Miliutin.[12] Alexander himself, as is clear from several accounts, took no pleasure in the near-idolization of his person, but the greatness and brilliance of the image compelled the tsar to sanction those elements of the mythology of power that he personified but which did not accord with his own subjective views.

Wortman considers the reigns of Alexander III and Nicholas II, to which the second and third parts of volume 2 are devoted, a distinct epoch in the history of the autocracy: the European myth of imperial authority had exhausted itself and was pushed aside by the national myth. The immediate motive for Alexander III's rejection of the European myth was that the new tsar found the earlier model of the autocracy's identification with nationality too abstract and believed

[12] Dolbilov, "Aleksandr II," 48.

that his father's efforts at symbolically including various segments of educated society into the elite had pushed the empire to the brink of destruction. Interestingly, Wortman's book attributes the *conceptualization* of Alexander III's national myth more to the advisors and confidants of the heir to the throne than to Alexander himself. Accordingly, "the Russian party," which "referred not to a single organized group but to diverse writers, journalists, and officials who opposed Alexander II's policies from a conservative national standpoint," was an autonomous actor in the formation of his scenario (2: 162; also 178, 203, 341).

The tsesarevich's inarticulate opposition to Alexander II's policies was transformed into the myth of national monarchy by means of effective symbolic inversion. Particularly interesting is the indication of how, thanks to the efforts of Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev, Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii, and others, the very aspects of the tsesarevich's personality and character that prevented him from occupying a worthy place in his father's scenario took on significance as elevated virtues and attributes of authentic "Russianness." "The Russian party" successfully constructed a cultural idiom of extreme importance for the reign of Alexander III: that of awakening or vision regained, of an ideological scheme for the "discernment" of primordial Russian foundations beneath the layer of imported Europeanization.

Despite the significant role of the "Russian party" in the creation of new symbols, "… it was Alexander who identified them with the imperial persona and made them aspects of an image of a ruler who was transcendent because he embodied national traits now defined as intrinsic to Russian monarchy" (2: 203–4). The affirmation of the monarch's national image was premised upon a reconsideration of rituals of the unity of tsar and people. This was already evident in Alexander III's visit to Moscow in 1881 and his coronation in 1883. During the reigns of Nicholas I and Alexander II, the main effect of such ceremonies had come from the display of emotional closeness between two fundamentally different elements. Alexander III's (and subsequently Nicholas II's) coronation, by contrast, was "less the fusion of the Western and Russian polarities of imperial culture than a coming home: a denial of these polarities and an affirmation of the national identity of the Russian emperor" (2: 219).

Wortman's reconstruction is especially valuable in that it illuminates the principal difference between Alexander III's scenario and the "official nationality" of Nicholas I, a difference of which most historians tend to lose sight owing to the external similarity between the two reigns' "anti-Western" ideology. Under Nicholas I, imperial mythology remained linear, progressively ascending to the European image of Peter I and beyond to the legend of the summoning of the Varangians. By contrast, under Alexander III the fundamental cultural mechanism for the elevation of authority became, in line with the ethnocentric

paradigm of nationalism then current in Europe, a cyclical "synchronization" of the present with some sort of ideal epoch in the past, an ideal source.

According to Wortman, the Muscovite state under the first Romanovs was adopted as a starting point, the essence of which was defined as an indissoluble union between tsar and estates (the land) that was later broken. According to this model, the elevation of the ruler was achieved by depicting him as the last intact relic of that epoch, "as an artifact of a true unchanging past." Only the ruler, who continued to live as though in an earlier time, was recognized as capable of revitalizing the organism of the state. Earlier likenesses, whether metaphoric (as under Peter I or Catherine II) or metonymic (under Nicholas I), had "lifted the emperor into a realm of art and imagination." Now these were rejected, for "the predominant forms of presentation became historical rather than literary" (2: 235).

The typologization of the "national myth" as a particular manifestation of the "duo-temporal" paradigm of representation explains its cultural dependence on the European ideology of late-19th-century nationalism. The obvious paradox is that the origins of the "anti-European" national myth were no less European than the imperial mythology of Peter I had been: "in order to appropriate the dominant Western doctrine of nationalism, Russian monarchy had to be shown to be non-Western and to derive from beliefs and traditions rooted in the people" (2: 161). In my view, this also explains the important role of advisors-intellectuals in creating the image of the "Russian tsar" – despite its creators' and adherents' claim that it was rooted in organic tradition and identified with the popular masses, the myth was more the product of intellectual engineering and theorizing than of social practice. (This, once again, underscores the degree to which Alexander III's scenario differed from that of Nicholas I.)

Wortman's proposed scheme, its heuristic quality notwithstanding, is by no means free of strains and simplifications. In my view, the thesis that Alexander III consistently cultivated the myth of "the resurrection of Muscovy" is not fully demonstrated (2: chap. 7). One could fully agree with the author only if the study of the mythology of power involved nothing but visual-artistic and ceremonial symbolism. He wonderfully reveals the meaning of the entire campaign to build churches in accordance with a fantastic architectural canon that combined the "Old Moscow" style with the aesthetic lushness of art nouveau (2: 246–48 ff). The semiotics of state-church ceremonies, the emperor's visits to Moscow, the Caucasus, and Kholmshchina, and the ritual of the burial of the emperor are also strikingly deciphered.

In other instances, however, Wortman overgeneralizes the contrast between the national myth and Alexander II's "scenario of love," which, as is quite apparent, is connected with his underestimation of the complexity of the course of

domestic politics under Alexander III and the emperor's own sociopolitical views. Wortman describes the institutional "counterreforms," the ethno-religious Russification policy, and the industrial policy of the 1880s–90s as the most important models of the symbolic "resurrection" of 17th-century Russia. Not wishing to turn this review into a lengthy specialized discussion, I will address only the first of these topics.

Above all, I would take issue with Wortman's remark that the Ministry of the Interior's elaboration of measures to strengthen the state administration and buttress the estate principle (especially with the 1889 law on the land captains) were based directly on the traditional organization of gentry service in the 17th century (2: 258–60). One need only read the ideological manifesto of the "counterreformist" course cited by Wortman as evidence for his conception to see that the apologists of the estate principle by no means praised the 17th century administrative system as a model to be emulated and did not erase the Petrine reforms from the system of images of imperial rule.[13]

Another consequence of this same effort to "straighten out" the symbolic line is Wortman's predictable, categorical conclusion that Alexander III "rejected the Petrine state apparatus, with its Western rationalist orientation," that by 1886 the emperor and "his advisers had dissociated themselves completely from the reform tradition and set themselves against the officials who remained loyal to the principles of legality and the development of civic order in Russia," and that the general thrust of the "counterreforms" consisted of "the monarch's abiding determination to reverse the civic development begun in the 1860s" (2: 262, 526). This thesis rests in part on the relationship between the emperor and the State Council. Wortman sees this body's active participation in the legislative process as inconsistent with the "epic" imperial monologue. However, it is precisely from the standpoint of political mythology that the State Council's role under Alexander III can be viewed differently. To take just one example, the published diary of State Secretary Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Polovtsov contains several significant illustrations of how the State Council obtained imperial approval for legislative advisory proposals. This was accomplished by presenting the act of approval as an essential part of the image of the national monarch, the hard-working ruler who was daily brooding over papers in the quiet of his study and making responsible decisions with the help of advisers.[14] In a word, the "restraining" functions of the State Council could have been effectively achieved not only in spite of, but because of, the myth of "national monarchy."

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[13] Aleksei Dmitrievich Pazukhin, "Sovremennoe sostoianie Rossii i soslovnyi vopros," *Russkii vestnik*, no. 1 (1885), 47–51.

[14] See, for example, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Polovtsov, *Dnevnik gosudarstvennogo sekretaria A. A. Polovtsova,* ed. Petr Andreevich Zaionchkovskii, vol. 1 (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), 195–97.

The preceding remarks are intended not to cast doubt on the conception of the scenario of power as such, but to reconsider and further refine the choice of the area and methods for its application. One of the principal positions taken in the monograph is that imperial political mythology was "monologic," "banishing doubt and compromise, permitting no responses but admiration and affirmation." In this realm, "divergent understandings of the myth … could be voiced only behind closed doors and did not mar the harmonious unity of imperial presentations" (2: 6). In other words, the sphere of political mythology is understood as a "heavenly domain" of monarchical rule, the sublimated projection of the monarchy counterposed to the sphere of "unheroic," "earthly" worries and concerns.

It is no accident that Wortman's own narrative is often reminiscent of a marvelously structured monologue or a very symmetrical realm of discourse. Similarly symptomatic is his evident selectivity in citing sources on subjects' reactions to the ceremonies most important to the scenario. For instance, among the diary and memoir responses to coronations and other celebrations cited by the author, especially those under Nicholas I and Alexander II, the eulogistic ones are clearly overrepresented, when in reality many critical remarks also exist.

However, might one not think in terms of a strong interconnectedness and interdependency between "heaven" and "earth" in the regime's administrative practice and its everyday operations? Wortman, it seems to me, underrates the significance of the *hidden forms* of reaction by representatives of the elite to one or another dramatization of power. The imperial narrative was "monologic" in its formal structure, but in its origins (which every ruler, naturally, wanted to conceal) this "monologue" could have been collective. That is, the very image of the monarch developed not only out of the ruler's subjective notions of how he should appear, but also out of the very persistent "promptings" and suggestions of his entourage, whether immediate or more removed. The epic imperial image, the symbolic dimension of rule, was objectified not only in spectacular manifestations of unified approval, exaltation, and devotion, or massive visual displays, but also, for example, in not at all "heroic" or "epic" corridor conversations between the ruler and advisers during routine legislative work and so forth.

The myth penetrated all layers of the imperial government – even those with no direct connection to ceremonial representation – but with varying degrees of intensity, so the symbolism of power could not be "symmetrically" concentrated at various isolated levels. Wortman systematically interprets divergences in contemporaries' understanding as evidence of a scenario's dissolution or the emergence of a new scenario as a counterweight to the old one (e.g., 2: 9, 298, 427, 439–50). In the end, the reconstruction of political mythology in the form of an ordered series of completed and, as we see in most of Wortman's book, consis-

tent symbols is a very important, but as yet only the first, step toward resolving this historiographical problem.

The need for further studies of the political mythology of autocracy is evident from the concluding section of volume 2, devoted to Nicholas II. Rich in factual material and presenting fresh assessments of the main subjects of the last tsar's reign, this section simultaneously poses new questions about the internal nature of the autocracy. The limited scope of this review compels me to formulate these without a detailed recounting of the author's interpretations.

First, Wortman's analysis of Nicholas II's rule strengthens the impression of the Russian regime's imitative quality in the cultural-ideological realm. Proceeding from a belief in "a direct though unspoken and invisible spiritual bond [of the tsar] with the people," Nicholas II – whose actions were in this respect the polar opposite of Nicholas I's strategy – sacralized not "the monarchy as the incarnation of the nation," but the divinely chosen person of the tsar himself (2: 366, 344). Yet this distinctly Russian manifestation of the phenomenon of power, with pretensions to absolutism, was intended to legitimize the European understanding of the nation as a political entity in monarchical discourse. Nicholas strove to become nothing less than the all-encompassing representative of the nation, the personal and self-sufficient repository of the national essence. Translated into the language of contemporary political life, this meant disavowing traditional elevated representations of the ruler and letting himself be drawn into a struggle with the State Duma and the opposition for popular support. All the truly radical innovations that he introduced into the ceremonial of the Russian autocracy – the issuing of jubilee coins and postage stamps with pictures of past and the current rulers, the showing of documentary films featuring the emperor, the massive publication of his popular biography – were borrowed from European monarchies, where they served a completely different, modern type of monarchy compatible with kitsch. The regular "importation" by the autocracy of European cultural-symbolic structures of power probably deserves historiosophical interpretation.

Secondly, Wortman's conclusion regarding the profound "anti-institutionalism" of Nicholas II's scenario deserves mention. The claim to a direct and personal connection with the nation not only encouraged his aversion to representative government, but actually drove a wedge between him and state, church, and estate institutions (2: 365–66, 448, and *passim*). Wortman considers this break with the reliable bases of rule to be as significant as the activity of revolutionaries in contributing to the collapse of the imperial political regime. But was this challenge by the tsar to institutions not prepared by the entire preceding tradition of cultivating (in these or other forms) the otherness and "otherworldliness" of the autocracy?

Third, if I am not mistaken, Wortman regards the evolution of Nicholas II's scenario as the best confirmation of a central premise of the study: that the scenarios' main function was not their direct influence on the ruled, but the symbolic reproduction of the faith of the ruler and the elite in his right to command (e.g., 2: 5). From the start, the restricted range of the scenarios' impact was reduced under Nicholas to the person of the emperor, in contrast to the ever-increasing number of passive participants in ceremonies. According to Wortman, the costly and carefully cultivated measures for popularizing the tsar's image were needed not so much to secure massive popular support for the monarchy as to construct, in the consciousness of the emperor, a convincing impression of such support. This "narrowed the mythical reality of the Russian sovereign to the personal world of the all-competent monarch, isolated from the institutional and social realities of Russia." As a result, "by 1914 Nicholas's sense of reality was little more than a reflection of his own self-image and sense of political destiny" (2: 502–03).

The heuristic potential of Wortman's book is so great that the insights and hypotheses it prompts might easily diverge from the author's own conception. While clearly recognizing this temptation to arbitrary interpretation, I will nonetheless hazard the following assessment of Wortman's final conclusions. For at least several years prior to the abdication of Nicholas II, the autocracy ceased to exist *as an institution*, having given way to a sort of highly personalized essence of authority. Historians often operate with a notion of "the institution of the autocracy" without empirically revealing the substance of this institution itself, and they usually conceive of it as a political order, a general system of rule. But what of the projection of this understanding onto the concrete institutional realities of Russia? Was the autocracy only the emperor and members of the dynasty? Or perhaps the emperor along with his advisers and ministers? And why not the autocrat at the head of an entire bureaucratic apparatus? Did this institution expand or contract in the 19th century? These and similar questions cannot be answered in haste.

The notion that the narrowing of "the mythical reality of the Russian sovereign," as described by Wortman, had serious institutional precedents came to me while reading Peter Mustonen's book, published just slightly earlier. Mustonen's monograph is a successful case of the construction of a promising theoretical model based on the study of a relatively narrow subject. The immediate subject of the study is an agency whose place in the central administrative apparatus of the 19th-century Russian empire has long elicited discussion by historians: the emperor's personal secretariat. The functions of a secretariat were fulfilled by His Majesty's Own Chancellery as a whole during the period 1812–26, and thereaf-

ter were concentrated in the First Department of His Majesty's Own Chancellery. During 1846–58 there was a special Inspectorate Department of the Civil Service within the First Department, which, as Mustonen demonstrates, had significant influence on the personnel policies of "the supreme authority" with respect to the "middle strata of the bureaucracy" (230).

In his analysis of the activities of the emperor's secretariat, Mustonen builds, in an original manner, on Marc Raeff's thesis of autocratic rule as administration by means of the tsar's personal agents, whose activity unfolded at all levels of the administrative hierarchy. Mustonen distinguishes between two levels of the autocrat's "delegation of power" to his agents: one immediate (agents personally known to the emperor and enjoying his special trust), and the other more distant (agents not personally known to the tsar, e.g., trusted subordinates of his ministers). Mustonen sees the emperor's secretariat and, more broadly, His Majesty's Own Chancellery, as a particular type of collective agent of the autocrat, acting in a sphere of "immediate delegation" (49–50, 275).

Examined in this context, the history of the emperor's secretariat in the first half of the 19th century reveals a steady encroachment on the jurisdictions of those governmental institutions that Mustonen characterizes as "regular" or "institutionalized": the State Council, Senate, Committee of Ministers, ministries, and others. The Chancellery, under the control of Aleksei Andreevich Arakcheev, sharply expanded its authority in 1816. Based on his analysis of new archival sources, the author demonstrates that this was directly tied to the emperor's rejection of proposals from various dignitaries to reorganize the higher administration and grant new legislative and executive powers to the First Department of the Senate or the Committee of Ministers. Mustonen suggests that implementing such a reform would "in essence have meant the institutionalization of a coordinating organ with the potential to present a legal opposition to the power of the emperor" (79–87, quotation 81). Alexander I preferred another line of reorganization. He distanced organs with legally established lawmaking rights from the active discussion of major problems of state and redistributed administrative functions in favor of the Chancellery, an agency with which the emperor could construct relations on a decidedly informal, personal, and private basis.

The evolution of His Majesty's Own Chancellery during the reign of Nicholas I exhibited contradictory tendencies. Without a doubt, the Chancellery's activity was noticeably affected by regulations and formalities – principles which Nicholas strove to infuse into the operation of the regular bureaucratic apparatus. This was reflected in official imperial decrees establishing new departments of His Majesty's Own Chancellery with relatively clearly defined spheres of competence. At the same time, the emperor's secretariat as such, the First Department of His Majesty's Own Chancellery, continued to function in

its earlier patriarchal, "irregular" way. Indeed, this irregularity may have become even stronger as competition between His Majesty's Own Chancellery and juridically constituted administrative agencies increased. Mustonen recognizes that one of the secretariat's most important functions was advisory (especially in matters of promotions and the presentation of rewards to civil bureaucrats in all offices), since the means of its fulfillment were different from those available to regular lawmaking organs. The secretariat, as opposed (for example) to the State Council, could not, and was not obliged to, carry out its own decisions on a given question. This was the case even though it possessed the "power of the reporter," that is the ability surreptitiously to influence the ultimate "supreme will" by means of a proposal's wording, the elaboration of an argument, the form of an oral presentation to the autocrat, and so forth.

A no less significant factor in the growth of the secretariat's influence was the reduction in the number of heads of legislative and executive agencies who had the right to report in person to the emperor, and the introduction of a strict system for the submission of written reports and memoranda by government officials (and even members of the dynasty) through the First Department of His Majesty's Own Chancellery. In this case, the secretariat played the role of a "*buffer* between the autocrat and regular organs of power." As Mustonen writes: "[w]ith the increasing complexity of governmental life, the autocracy limited the access of the higher bureaucracy to the source of power and compensated for personal contact with written reports" (237, 168–69).

The clarification of the specific status and powers of His Majesty's Own Chancellery permits Mustonen to base his closing chapter on a new conception of "the institution of the autocrat," or "the political space of the autocrat." "The autocrat and his personal agents and agencies formed a homogeneous political space – the institution of the autocrat, within which the emperor manifested the greatest political activity" (276). The institution of the autocrat was able to incorporate very different branches of administration as needed and to resolve complicated problems operationally, concentrating the autocrat's will on key points and forcing and reanimating the work of the bureaucratic machine. This explains the mutability and mobility of its composition.

Aside from His Majesty's Own Chancellery, Mustonen includes a number of institutions, rather diverse in mandate and character, as elements of the institution of the autocrat. The author argues that a singular, private, and personalized system of relationships linked the emperor with these institutions – the Ministry of the Imperial Court; "to a certain extent the secret committees" (above all in the reign of Nicholas I); the special chancelleries for the affairs of Finland, the Kingdom of Poland, and Bessarabia; secret commissions for the resolution of ongoing matters during the emperor's absence in 1828 and 1849; the Cabinet of

His Imperial Majesty; and others (282). The author presents a striking and heuristic image of the "diffusion of the autocrat and personal agencies," meaning that one should reject the image of the self-sufficient personal will of the individual on the imperial throne in studying the functioning of "the supreme power."

Mustonen suggests that the opposition between the "institution of the autocrat" and "regular institutions" might serve as the primary basis for a typology of the imperial administration. This system of administration was dichotomous: the autocrat's "autonomy" brought with it the "isolation of the regular administration from the source of governmental power" and, in the final account, led to the isolation of the very "institution of the autocrat from the rest of the administration" (238–40, 286, 289, 307–08).

I would suggest that Mustonen's major contribution lies in his conceptualization of the very significant idea of a more or less *closed*, *isolated* space (one far less expansive than many historians believe) where the autocrat's power effectively functioned in a patriarchal and particularistic way. However, the dichotomy of the "institution of the autocrat" and "regular institutions" proves schematic and artificial when applied to a whole series of particular organizations as well as traditional procedures in the system of imperial administration. Thus, Mustonen unfortunately does not attempt to test the explanatory powers of his conception in so important an area as the interaction between the emperor and his ministers. Clearly, the inclusion of the heads of ministries and their office staffs within the "institution of the autocrat" renders this conception too fluid and approximate. Yet it goes without saying that one cannot situate the ministers' functions in the sphere of "regular institutions," either, since they undoubtedly form a specific category of "personal agents of the autocrat," complementary to the type represented by officials in the secretariat.

To recast the ministers' functions as a constituent part of the *informal political space* of the autocrat, one must, in my opinion, expand the understanding of the term itself. The autonomous sphere of the autocrat was occupied not only by administrative agents and bodies, but also by symbolic images, cultural stereotypes, ritualized gestures, and so forth. The variability and multifunctionality of the latter were conditioned precisely by the absence in this sphere of formalized administrative-political practices: regulation was subordinated to the cultural norm. As a matter of fact, these very institutions could have been inscribed quite differently into monarchical discourse, and the functioning of the "supreme power" in the 19th century depended to a considerable degree on the means of the bureaucracy's symbolic perception of the connection between the tsar and the executive organs, above all the ministries.

It is well known that the ministerial reform of 1802–11 transformed the higher administration into a conglomerate of huge and mutually independent specialized offices, the heads of which were in direct contact with the emperor. Historians diverge sharply in their understanding of the significance of this reform for the autocratic system of rule. Some see it as centralization, a reorganization of the bureaucratic apparatus modeled on the personal power of the tsar, a strengthening of the tsar's control over the executors of his will.[15] John LeDonne has advanced a different point of view: "[After the ministerial reform] the power of the ruler, in spite of the assertion of his autocratic prerogative, was increasingly dependent on the ministerial core of the ruling elite… The glorification of the ruler's autocracy only served to strengthen each minister's despotism toward his subordinates and his independence of other ministers … The 'autocrat' was no longer the master of his own ministers."[16]

These conflicting evaluations are due to the fact that they refer back to the mythological metaphors used by contemporaries to make sense of the new system. The ministers could be represented as the emperor's "eyes" or "hands" or, on the contrary, as "chains" and "fetters" on the monarch's will. The fact of the matter is that the ministerial reform of 1802–11 defined many aspects of the image of the autocracy in the consciousness of both contemporaries and succeeding generations. Recall that the reform was carried out at a fateful time for Russia, during the Napoleonic wars, when the society acutely acknowledged and dramatized the threat to the country's integrity and security, and the fear that the body of the state was threatened with dismemberment became a widespread sentiment.[17] This image was projected all the more easily onto the state of affairs in the higher administration as the system was undergoing a complicated reorganization, and Mikhail Mikhailovich Speranskii was identified as the party responsible for the sickness of the entire state organism.

In the 1810s, the particular tradition of interpreting the reformed central agencies by means of binary cultural opposites was already emerging: "near/distant," "wholeness/separateness," "openness/seclusion," "truth/false-

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[15] See, for example, Mikhail Mikhailovich Safonov, *Problema reform v pravitel'stvennoi politike Rossii na rubezhe XVIII i XIX v.* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1988), 203–29, and *passim*.

[16] J. P. LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700–1825* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 108. In the most recent Russian literature, Leonid Efimovich Shepelev has subjected the relations between the emperor and his ministers to the deepest analysis: Shepelev, *Chinovnyi mir Rossii: XVIII–nachalo XX v.* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPb, 1999), 35–55, 59–67, and *passim*. Unfortunately, the popular tone of this book and the extreme heterogeneity of its subject matter do not permit me to undertake a separate review of it.

[17] Andrei Zorin, *Kormia dvuglavogo orla: Literatura i gosudarstvennaia ideologiia v Rossii v poslednei treti XVIII–pervoi treti XIX veka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), 187–237.

hood," "honesty/deceit," "order/chaos," and others. This tradition remained stable over the course of the entire century. In other words, the separate and confidential contact between each of the ministers and the emperor had its own symbolic representations. The symbolic figure of the emperor as head of the administrative system lost its earlier integrity and broke down into several modes.[18] If earlier the supreme ruler's autonomy and distancing from the apparatus was persistently identified with his/her "otherness," greatness, sagacity, and elevation above the routine of current affairs, now this very same model of autonomy proved capable, depending upon the cultural context, of generating competing representations: the emperor was cut off and isolated from his subjects, his words could not reach them, he existed in a fog of officialdom, imprisoned by his advisers, he did not know "the whole truth," did not see the deception and abuses of his closest servitors, and so forth. However, the next step in the cultural game could add further perceptual accents to these images: an inability to make firm decisions was transformed into a touching "gentleness," insufficient competency into a sign of trust in his closest advisers, and inability to escape the confines of bureaucratic routine into evidence of devoted, constant labor for the good of his subjects, and so on.

To give just one example, an anecdote that circulated in Alexander II's inner circle about an apocryphal action by the emperor: "If, upon entering his study, the emperor discovered that one of his ministers had stolen something there, then he would be displeased only by the insufficient respect shown His Majesty."[19] On the one hand, through the metaphor (important in monarchical discourse) of *stealing* the supreme will, the anecdote allegorically expressed a critical attitude toward Alexander II's practice of entrusting many decisions to his most trusted subordinates. Yet, at the same time, it could also suggest aspects of Alexander's image such as tolerance, delicacy, and sensitivity to others' opinions.

The emperors clearly felt the pressure of negative cultural stereotypes. It would hardly be an exaggeration to suggest that their efforts to lend positive symbolic meaning to the image of their own distancing from governmental (and other) institutions were reflected in the functioning of the system of higher administration. As Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter recently pointed out, the political and cultural legitimation of the emperor's power corresponded less to the maxim "I am the state" (which would have implied that the idea of the state existed separately from the person of the ruler, since "I" here signifies not the sovereign's

[18] Not accidentally, one of the characteristic traits of the thinking of the higher bureaucracy in the 19th century was the paradoxical combination of faith in the solidity of the emperor's will and the representation of the emperors as extremely impressionable individuals, incessantly vacillating in regards to this or that piece of advice.

[19] Polovtsov, *Dnevnik*, 2: 201–02.

"physical" but his "political body") than principally to another formula: "I am, my state-society is, and my subjects in their particular statuses, communities, and institutions are as well."[20] The emperors' adherence to this paradigm of self-representation is explained, apart from anything else, by the fact that the traditional image of the autocrat's autonomy in the new institutional setting of the 19th century was a powerful source for generating cultural meanings and significations.

Further elaboration of the conceptions of the "scenario of power" and the "political space of the autocrat" will no doubt clarify the peculiar complexity of how the emperor's will was expressed in late imperial Russia. Future research should not only be governed by the idea, repeatedly noted by Russianists in America, that the myth of unlimited individual power in Russia may have been a façade that hid from the "profane" population's view some form of disguised collective rule by the political elite. It is no less important to consider another issue – that this myth found a different application within that narrow governmental circle where, hidden from the gaze of outsiders, the influence of advisers on the monarch's will was very direct and relationships were unconstrained by bureaucratic regulation.

The uniqueness of the system for expressing the Russian emperors' will was what I would call the "pathos of confidentiality" or "epic routine." The most confidential means for joint decision-making with the emperor (for example, a secret conversation with a trusted adviser) could not be realized without an appeal to one or another attribute of the elevated image of the autocrat. It is even possible that a reverse dependency is evident here: the more informal the mechanism for making a responsible decision, the stronger the symbolic "catalyst" required for the expression of the tsar's agreement with the opinion of a confidant. A very characteristic example is the friendly relationship between Alexander II and General Iakov Ivanovich Rostovtsev, a leader in the elaboration of the 1861 emancipation, which gave powerful impetus to the emergence of the majestic image of the "Tsar-Liberator."

Permit me to use a metaphor: a given decision by the ruler could be attributed not to a particular person (the monarch himself or an adviser) but to a distinct "virtual" mediator acting in the cultural space between the ruler and his circle. The decision, one might say, was made not so much by the monarch together with a concrete group of people, as by an image floating around him, an image "brought to life" by the collective efforts of a larger or smaller group of people. This made it possible for advisers and experts to play with the various

[20] Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 165.

cultural meanings of the autocrat's image and exert hidden symbolic pressure on the tsar's subjective will. The autocrats, of course, were not "defenseless" against such pressure. But it would be very naive to suggest that disgrace, dismissal, the open demonstration of the tsar's disfavor, mercilessness, and so forth, were sufficient means of resistance. I do not think that the pretensions of advisers could be completely neutralized and countered by the ceremonial elevation of sublime feelings of love, affection, friendship, etc. between the ruler and the elite, as described by Wortman. The emperors were also compelled to allow "narrower" representational strategies, so that the process of decision-making was accompanied by the manipulation of contradictory interpretations of the images of ruler and adviser.

In this light, the problem of understanding the limits of autocracy seems closely connected to the study of the modality of interaction between images of power and administrative practice. Even obvious factors, such as the vastness of the territory to be administered, the poor state of communications, or objective laws of monetary exchange, cannot be correctly assessed as limitations on the tsar's personal power until we discover the form of the symbolic structures in which they were reflected in the discourse of the ruler and others involved in decision-making. Such an approach also requires the inclusion of a vast amount of archival material, and the application of new interpretive methods to the surviving primary accounts of the *situation of contact* between tsar and adviser.

It is possible that the efforts of traditionalists, who prefer to study the autocracy, for example, as political history, and the efforts of adherents of new methodologies, especially semiotic-linguistic and anthropological ones, could be combined within the parameters of this scholarly agenda. The discovery of new "secrets" about the functioning of the autocracy does not, of course, generate mass media sensations, but it is precisely this subject – and not the publication of scandalous documents or the indulgence in sentimental tenderness about the intimate details of the monarch's life – that will provide a true step forward in comprehending the phenomenon of the Russian monarchy.

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