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THOUGHT, CULTURE, AND POWER: REFLECTIONS OF A RUSSIANIST

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Looking back on the evolution of my scholarship over five decades, I am struck both by my constant fascination with how systems of thought enthralled and inspired historical figures and by my approach to the changing subjects that became the object of this fascination. The ideas and sentiments propounded by great philosophers and writers established a necessary background for my work, but what engaged my interest and stirred my imagination was the varied ways these ideas were understood and acted upon. It was my reflection on the transformation of ideas into conscious views of the world that prompted my three research projects: the populists of the 1870s and 1880s, the legal reformers of the nineteenth century, and the emperors of Russia.

Such transformation of ideas is particularly evident in the history of Russian thought. The idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel; Marxism; the positivism of Mill; and Nietzsche's notions of art, morality, and the superman assumed new meanings when received in Russia. Russian intellectuals drew upon Western ideas to understand Russia's political future and to guide their own life and goals. The most radical emerged as a revolutionary intelligentsia, who sought support from the people, the peasants, the workers, or both, to unleash a revolution that would bring socialism to Russia. But the conviction that foreign ideas and models could provide the content and direction for Russian historical development was shared by a broad segment of educated opinion—Slavophiles, westernizers, even conservatives and governmental officials.[1] All of them, to a greater or lesser extent, conceived of the world as the realization of certain ideas they thought immanent in reality. The ideas provided the meaning for their lives and they described their

[1] My master's essay was on the subject of the liberal slavophiles and was the basis for my first publication, "Koshelev, Samarin and Cherkasskii and the Fate of Liberal Slavophilism," *Slavic Review* (June, 1962), 261–79.

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existential quests in what Lydia Ginzburg has called "the human document,"[2] diaries and memoirs as well as poetry and fiction of a confessional character.

The application of individual psychology to history promised a means to approach the interaction of ideas and personality. Leopold Haimson's *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* exemplified this approach for me. Haimson explored the different understandings of Marxism among the leading Russian Marxists—George Plekhanov, Paul Axelrod, Julius Martov, and Vladimir Lenin—by tracing the divergent paths of psychological development that led each to his own conclusions about the importance of reason and feeling in history.[3] On this basis he explained the assessments they made of the role of the conscious vanguard elite and the spontaneous revolutionary impulses of the masses in the organization of a revolutionary movement. Other biographical works with acute insights into the intelligentsia's psychology were essays by the pre-Revolutionary historian Michael Gershenzon on the Decembrist revolutionaries and the young intellectuals of the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as Isaiah Berlin's moving account of the idealist circles of the 1830s and 1840s, "A Remarkable Generation."[4]

In 1958 I began my graduate work, under Haimson's direction, at the University of Chicago. My first book, *The Crisis of Russian Populism*,[5] described the responses of three populist writers, Alexander Engelgardt, Gleb Uspenskii, and Nicholas Zlatovratskii, to their experiences in Russian peasant villages during the 1870s and 1880s. I was struck by these writers' unswerving determination to cling to their ideas in the face of the evident contradictions they encountered in the countryside. Their idealization of the peasants appeared to be based on far more than a strategic political calculation. It seemed a powerful emotional bond rooted in their psyches.

I turned as I would in my later research to the social sciences, particularly psychology and anthropology, to understand the thinking of the subjects of my research. My use of social science insights, however, has been pragmatic, as a means to find openings to the mental world of individuals governed by ideas and imagery remote from our own. I was first attracted to works on individual

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2 Lydia Ginzburg, *On Psychological Prose* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 27–106.

3 Leopold H. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955).

4 Particularly M. O. Gershenzon, *Istoriia molodoi Rossii* (Petrograd, 1923); and *idem*, *Istoricheskie zapiski* (Moscow, 1910); Isaiah Berlin, "A Remarkable Generation," in *idem*, *Russian Thinkers* (Hammondsworth, 1978). The essays were originally printed in the journal *Encounter* in 1955 and 1956.

5 Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967.

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psychology, particularly those of Erik H. Erikson, whose influence was widespread in the 1960s. Erikson's work, particularly *Childhood and Society*, focused on the concept of identity and provided an analysis of the interaction between personal development in the context of the values, goals, and self-images of different societies. His use of developmental psychology sensitized me to the importance of childhood memories and experience in the intellectual evolution of the writers I studied. Memories of their early years surfaced in their works when their ideas were thrown into doubt. These ideas had taken form as they entered maturity during the era of "Great Reforms" of the 1860s, which stirred intellectuals' hopes of liberation from the legacy of the despotic past—serfdom and autocracy. The subsequent disappointment in the results of the reforms—the peasants' loss of part of the land they farmed, the refusal of the government to consider constitutional reforms—had led to disillusionment and increasing reliance on the peasantry for the hopes of the future. Yet little was known about the peasants besides their poverty and ignorance, and, as in other cases, literature filled the void by depicting the nature of reality for them.

In the midst of their ideological predicament, the populist writers revealed the depth of their psychological investment in the ideology that had promised their redemption from the inequality and egoism they believed pervaded Russian society. They resorted to various defense mechanisms to dispel their doubts—rationalization, denial, self-blame, and schemes to transform the peasants in the image of the idealized figures of their imagination. Engelgardt, a chemist, conceived of creating better peasants by training populist intellectuals to till the land and adopt collectivistic practices. Uspenskii and Zlatovratskii escaped despair by evoking fantasy images of an idealized peasantry, Uspenskii to escape painful memories of his childhood, Zlatovratskii to restore the warm relations with his relatives and the peasants he remembered in his family home. Populist economists V. P. Vorontsov and N. F. Danielson answered the disturbing information about the countryside with elaborate proofs that denied the possibility of the development of capitalism in Russia.

My second book, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness*, also focused on individual psychology as a frame and impetus for intellectual development.[6] I studied the emergence and development of a mentality of reform among the group of legal reformers who appeared in the administration in the

[6] Richard S. Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976); Russian translation *Vlastiteli i sudii: razvitie pravovogo soznaniia v imperatorskoi Rossii* (Moscow: NLO, 2004). An English version of the introduction to the Russian edition, reiterating and developing my views in reference to later works, appears in the journal *Kritika*: "Russian Monarchy and the Rule of Law: New Considerations of the Court Reform of 1864," *Kritika* 6/1 (Winter, 2005), 145–70.

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1840s and 1850s and who pressed for, drafted, and implemented the Court Reform of 1864, which introduced a modern judiciary in Russia. However, both my high valuation of the role of ideas and individual personality and my interest in institutional mentality were at odds with dominant historical approaches of the time in the Soviet Union. Marxist-Leninist ideology discouraged or prohibited such research since the state was considered an epiphenomenon, of secondary importance to economic development and class conflict.

The Soviet scholar who opened this area for serious study was Peter Zaionchkovskii of Moscow State University. I had met Zaionchkovskii during my stay in Moscow in 1961 and 1962, and I returned to work under his guidance in 1966 and 1967. Official ideology held that events were determined by "objective" factors, the development of capitalism and the revolutionary threat of the peasantry. Without denying the importance of these objective factors, Zaionchkovskii insisted on including what he called "the subjective factor" in historical writing. This meant taking the views and the initiatives of officials into account in explaining events like the Great Reforms, particularly the emancipation of the Russian serfs—the subject of his classic monograph.[7] I recall the startled reaction of students to his defense of the "subjective factor" during a lecture he delivered in 1967 before the History Faculty of Leningrad State University.

While Zaionchkovskii observed the orthodoxy in print, in his teaching, scholarly advice, and public lectures he emphasized the importance of attitudes and ideas. Most important, as an experienced archivist he ensured that personal documents of tsarist officials were opened to young scholars, foreigners as well as Russians, and he himself published or saw to the publication of the personal papers of a number of the most significant figures, such as the diaries of Minister of the Interior Peter Valuev and of War Minister Dmitrii Miliutin.[8] As a research advisor (*rukovoditel'*), he was unequaled, a scholar who maintained the pre-Revolutionary devotion to "science" (*nauka*) and drew our attention to crucial archival and published documents.

In my research I sought explanations for the appearance of officials dedicated to the cause of the law in an administration that historically had subordinated the judiciary to executive authorities and allowed for the exercise of arbitrary personal will. This led me to a study of the emergence of a striving for "legality"

7 P. A. Zaionchkovskii, *Otmena krepostnogo prava*, 2nd edn (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1968); *idem*, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia* (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1978).

8 *Dnevnik D. A. Miliutina 1873–1875* (Moscow, 1947); *Dnevnik D. A. Miliutina* (Moscow 1950); *Dnevnik P. A. Valueva, ministra vnutrennix del*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Soviet Academy of Sciences Press, 1961).

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(*zakonnost'*) in the Russian state in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and particularly the efforts for legal reform and codification beginning with Peter the Great. The "reforming tsar" was a component of what I later called "the European myth," the effort of Russian rulers to cast themselves as progressive Western monarchs that prevailed from Peter's reign on.[9]

When Nicholas I came to the throne he determined to place absolute monarchy as it existed in Russia on a legal basis. His first step was the codification of the laws, which had been attempted eleven times since the beginning of the eighteenth century. He assigned the task to the Second Section of his own chancellery, but he remained in charge, dictating its guiding principles and reviewing reports carefully at every stage. His efforts resulted in the publication in 1830 of *The Complete Collection of Laws*, a compilation purportedly of all the laws issued in the empire since the Law Code of 1649, and in 1833 a *Digest of Laws* enumerating all laws presumably still in effect. He also took steps to provide legal education for future officials. In the 1830s a "Professor's Institute" was established at Dorpat University in Estland (present-day Tartu) to train young scholars in jurisprudence. They then were sent to complete their studies in Berlin under the personal direction of renowned jurist Friedrich-Karl von Savigny. In 1835, at the instance of Prince Peter Oldenburg and Michael Speranskii, Nicholas established an elite School of Jurisprudence to train future legal officials.

I found key insights into the psychology of the legal reformers in Marc Raeff's *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia*. Raeff described how eighteenth-century noblemen, separated from their estates and family as young men, had little contact with their parents and looked to other authorities and intellectual doctrines as guides to their behavior.[10] The noble officials I studied proved to be either orphans or individuals who grew up apart from their parents. They had been initiated into the adult world by their reading, university lectures, and intellectual circles, and by the comradeship of similarly disposed young men in the educated society of Moscow and Petersburg. As with the populists, intellectual influences played a decisive role in shaping mature identities and political goals.

Nicholas expected that this training would prepare students to be able and knowledgeable executors of the laws. But contrary to his expectations, many of them embraced Western legal concepts on the role of the judiciary. They developed a powerful consciousness of the dignity and the role of law, a legal ethos that impelled them to conceive basic reforms of the Russian court systems. The diaries and writings of these officials revealed the intensity of

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9 See Cynthia H. Whittaker, "The Reforming Tsar: The Redefinition of Autocratic Duty in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *Slavic Review* 51/1 (Spring, 1992), 77–98.

10 Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1966), 129, 140–47.

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their emotional commitment to these ideas. The diaries of Sergei Zarudnyi and Constantine Ushinskii, the memoirs of Boris Chicherin, the articles of Constantine Pobedonostsev, the correspondence of Ivan Aksakov, all attest to the depth and power of their commitment.

The School of Jurisprudence inculcated an ethos of devotion to the law, turning what had been a sphere of expertise considered inferior to the military into an exalted cause. The young noblemen were also inspired by examples of honor and triumph that they discovered in the novels of Scott, Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, Hugo, and Dumas. An image of a romantic hero replaced for them the passive model evoked by the sentimentalist poets of the early part of the century such as Nicholas Karamzin and Vasilii Zhukovskii. They saw themselves as active agents of change engaged in a valiant struggle to realize principles of justice in the Russian legal administration.

At the newly founded law faculties of Russian universities, noble students became devotees of German idealism, particularly the philosophy of Hegel, which was propounded at Moscow University in the lectures of the jurist Peter Redkin and the historians Timothy Granovskii and Constantine Kavelin. Redkin in particular made philosophy seem the key to understanding the law. The young students began to see law as part of the advancement of knowledge and the product of ineluctable universal progress. Juridical science then meant not an enumeration of laws, as the Ministry of Education prescribed, but, as the historian and jurist Boris Chicherin wrote, "a live organism, penetrated by high principles."[11]

The faith in the progress of the idea turned their work in the judicial system into a mission. The diaries and letters of the young legal scholars and later officials express an unbounded optimism. One of them, Sergei Zarudnyi, wrote in 1834, when he was eighteen years old, "I see only the idea, I chase it." When he took charge of the Consultation of the Ministry of Justice in 1849, Zarudnyi brought to his work both passion and intellectual rigor and began to formulate a systematic approach to legal cases. He served as mentor to the generation of younger legal officials who began to staff the ministry. A new group appeared in the Russian state administration dedicated to an autonomous and exalted concept of the law. The Court Reform of 1864 would enable them to realize their ideals in institutions that ill accorded with the mentality of administrative officials who served the Russian emperor and the Russian state.

The mentality of the monarch and his administrative officials, however, remained a mystery to me. The monarchs and the officials were not intellectuals. Few of them expressed a commitment to philosophy or ideas. Yet the sources

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[11] Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness*, 231, 226.

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I encountered in my work on legal institutions suggested that they continued to understand and justify their actions through systems of concepts, values, and aesthetic and personal principles expressed in art and literature.

My first attempt to gain insight into the mental universe of Russian monarchy was a study of the upbringing and education of the heirs to the throne. In the course of my research on judicial reform, I had examined letters and diaries of members of the imperial family that revealed an intellectual and emotional world that was absent from historical accounts, yet seemed crucial to understanding the workings of Russian monarchy. I also learned of archival documents on the heirs' preparation for the throne. In 1975 I received a Social Science Research Grant to study psychology at the Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis, where I took classes and participated in workshops at its Center for Psychosocial Studies. I also worked with a psychoanalyst, Dr George Moraitis, on the analysis of some important texts of intellectual history.[12]

My work focused on the heirs' relationships with their parents and tutors, and the lessons that introduced them to history, literature, and political and legal concepts. I was struck by the efforts of both parents and tutors to present an image of the monarch who was strong and infallible in wielding the vast powers of the autocrat, but who also showed a sense of responsibility that could justify his extensive prerogatives. These insistent demands often came from the heir's father, the emperor, who exemplified a confident authority that daunted the heir with lofty and often unattainable expectations.[13]

Both my participation in the Center's workshops and changes in the external circumstances of my research led me to recast my study of monarchy more broadly. The workshops alerted me to the limitations of applying psychoanalytical categories to the interpretation of historical figures. One session made an especially strong impression. A distinguished analyst described an assignment he had given to his students for a clinical course. He distributed detailed materials on a case and asked them to present and explain a specific diagnosis for the patient. The diagnoses differed radically. The analyst then went through each diagnosis, finally concluding that they all could be argued convincingly. The point was that the categories could never exactly describe the condition, which could be

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[12] See my articles "Biography and the Russian Intelligentsia," in Samuel H. Baron and Carl Pletsch, eds., *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self* (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press), 157–74; and "Tolstoi and the Perception of Poverty," *Rossija* 4 (1979), 119–32.

[13] See Richard Wortman, "Power and Responsibility in the Upbringing of the Nineteenth Century Tsars," *Newsletter of the Group for the Use of Psychology in History* (Spring, 1976), 2; and *idem*, "The Russian Empress as Mother," in D. Ransel, ed., *The Family in Imperial Russia* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 60–74.

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understood only through interaction of the patient with the analyst in which he could test his hypotheses.

I understood that this meant that any psychological analysis I undertook, considering the nature of my sources, would have to remain on a highly superficial, phenomenological level, and that the characterization of historical figures in terms of psychoanalytic categories would be arbitrary and not particularly meaningful. At another workshop, I presented my paper on the relationships of the emperors to their fathers, which relied on an Oedipal model. The Chicago School was very much under the influence of its leading theorist, Heinz Kohut, whose teachings emphasized the importance of narcissistic disorders, which had their roots at an earlier developmental stage than Oedipal relationships. The analysts listened skeptically and suggested that my material might indicate rather a pattern of narcissistic involvement with the mother.

At the same time, I became increasingly aware of the reductionist tendencies of psychohistory, which often enclosed individual figures in a web of family antagonisms and ambivalences, diminishing if not eliminating the effect of ideas and the evolution of their intellectual consciousness. Such problems were particularly evident and troubling in psychological treatments of revolutionaries that construe revolutionary doctrines and activity as re-enactments of Oedipal forms of rebellion and destruction.[14] Objective analysis seemed to metamorphose into thinly veiled polemic. The revolutionary's ideas were characterized as expressions of neurosis and the depreciation of ideas—what Stefan Possony described as the "over-valued ideas" characteristic of disturbed minds.[15] Such treatments are extreme examples, but the problem seemed intrinsic to the approach. Freud himself, in a biography of Woodrow Wilson, written in collaboration with the diplomat William C. Bullitt, characterized Wilson's idealist vision as little more than a neurotic expression of unresolved Oedipal conflicts. Freud concluded that these conflicts gave rise to Wilson's grandiose conception of self and his inability to confront facts.[16]

Similar shortcomings beset other more scrupulous and objective historical studies. An example, close to my own interests, was Elizabeth Wirth Marvick's

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[14] For example, "As has been argued, the revolutionist generally is a person with severe conflicts over masculinity. He is a person on the one hand whose Oedipal hatred of his father has not been dissipated and on the other who feels unusually guilty about asserting his masculinity." E. Victor Wolfenstein, *The Revolutionary Personality: Lenin, Trotsky, Gandhi* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 228. See also Stefan T. Possony's treatment of Lenin's "psychology of destruction" in *Lenin: The Compulsive Revolutionary* (Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1964), 376–400.

[15] Possony, *Lenin*, 390.

[16] Sigmund Freud and William C. Bullitt, *Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Twenty-Eighth President of the United States: A Psychological Study* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1967), x–xiii, 102.

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biography, *Louis XIII: The Making of a King*. Marvick drew on the diary of the physician Jean Héroard, who cared for Louis until he was aged twenty-six. On the basis of the diary, she constructs a detailed, virtually clinical, account of the strained relations between the child Louis and his father, King Henri IV. Marvick denies that her work is presented as "psychohistory." But it is focused on "sources of the distinctive character traits" of the king, and she finds these in the Oedipal nexus that she discovered. She argues that "attached to Louis's desire for his father's love was the fear of becoming his passive object," and that the anger the king inspired in him "had to be directed elsewhere." It was expressed, she concludes, by Louis's impulsive and unpredictable violence as heir and, later, king.[17]

Marvick connects Louis's childhood with a thorough narrative of his life as heir and his first years as king. But I found that the emphasis on unconscious motivation had obscured how Louis conceived of the world, and most important had omitted the cultural context of French monarchy, which imposed its own determinants on the monarch's rule. A review of Marvick's book by Lawrence M. Bryant made this point most effectively:

> Louis's personality cannot be separated from the cultural world and institutional traditions in which it developed and particularly cannot be seen apart from the seventeenth-century royal obsession that everything that went into or came out of the king's body be witnessed by the public. Louis's milieu identified decorum and personal conduct with the substance of political institutions and society values.[18]

My intention became to use psychological insight; not to diagnose and thus introduce closure to the historical narrative, but rather to discern the emergence of the heir's personality as he began to assume the beliefs, attitudes, and tastes represented by his parents and family as exemplifications of Russian monarchy. Images, ideas, and beliefs are thus invested with affect, but they represent more than the sublimation of base instincts. They make the heir's world comprehensible. They define his identity and the principles that would guide his conduct as monarch.

The materials I encountered about the heirs' early lives yielded increasing evidence of the importance of the milieu, particularly court and military ritual, in their personal development. The father, to be sure, as a towering image of authority, proved to be a crucial factor in his son's own self-image. But the heir seemed to perceive and understand it within a context of ceremony, symbols, and myth which would shape his concept of the role of emperor.

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17 Elizabeth Firth Marvick, *Louis XIII: The Making of a King* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), xiv, 2–3, 39.

18 Lawrence M. Bryant, *Journal of Modern History* 1/3 (1989), 610.

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The literature on Russian monarchy described individual rulers with their idiosyncratic personalities as well as concepts and manners of rule but ignored a continuity of monarchical traditions, values, and patterns of behavior.

My research, on the other hand, indicated the importance of culture in the shaping of the ideas and practices of Russian monarchy. This culture did not coincide with the category of "political culture," which connoted character traits attributable to an entire nation, such as Nicholas Berdyaev's concept of a "Russian Idea" or dispositions to authoritarianism or messianism. Nor is it related to the later, more sophisticated, political-science efforts to characterize a political culture on the basis of quantitative studies and models. I understand "culture" in the more restricted sense, articulated by Mary McAuley, as a description of a pattern of thought and activity that dominated a particular group or institution.[19] A pattern indicating the presence of a culture of Russian monarchy, comprising the emperor, members of the imperial family, the entourage, and the imperial suite, emerged unmistakably from my materials. The inhabitants of this milieu entertained shared ideas, symbols, and imagery that shaped their understanding of reality. It was this common manner of seeing and thinking that I now sought to understand and figure into the narrative of Russian history.

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Although I did not immediately realize it, I had undertaken a project vastly more ambitious and daunting than my previous work. To pursue this project, I had to fulfill three tasks. First, I had to engage in a broad and detailed study of the ceremonial texts and other forms of representation that had remained untouched by the historical literature. Second, I had to determine how they reflected the ideas and attitudes of the monarchs and their circles—their significance as expressions of monarchical culture. Third, if I was to show that the ceremonies and representations of the monarchy were more than embellishments to monarchical power, I had to integrate what I had learned about them into the historical narrative of the Russian state. Initially, I had conceived a one-volume work on three emperors, Nicholas I, Alexander II, and Alexander III. But it soon became clear to me that to tell the story I had to include the beginnings and bring it

[19] For similar efforts to use the notion of political culture to understand particular Russian institutions, in this case the contemporary legal system, see Mary McAuley, "Bringing Culture back into Political Analysis: The Reform of the Russian Judiciary," in Stephen Whitefield, ed., *Political Culture and Post-Communism* (Houndmills, 2005); Peter H. Solomon, Jr., "Informal Practices in Russian Justice: Probing the Limits of Post-Soviet Reform," in Ferdinand Feldbrugge, ed., *Russia, Europe, and the Rule of Law* (Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006).

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to its tragic end. The project lasted twenty years, and in some respects is still with me.

This reorientation of my interest, beginning in the late 1970s, accompanied two major changes in my professional and personal life. In 1975, for the first time, I was denied a visa to work in the Soviet Union. I remained *persona non grata* until perestroika in the late 1980s. This deprived me of access to the archives of the imperial family and many materials on the upbringing of the heirs, which I consulted only after the ban had been lifted. Ceremonial texts, on the other hand, though rare, were available in Western libraries. Further, in 1977 I moved from the University of Chicago to Princeton, where the ideas and methods of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz were pervasive in their influence.

Geertz's semiotic approach provided a way to comprehend the "webs of significance" that prevailed in alien and distant cultures. In particular, he showed how ritual could be read to understand the mental world of a monarchy. His analyses of "cultural performances," such as the Balinese "theater state" and royal processions in Elizabethan England, Morocco, and Java, revealed the importance of ceremony as a central function of monarchy.[20] He made clear that ceremonies invested authority with an aura of sacrality that set the rulers above and apart from the subject population. Although he used few illustrations in his texts, his descriptions of "charismatic centers" of power gave examples of how public displays conveyed meaning in pageantry, dress, art, and architecture.

Imagery and presentation had been banished from historical accounts of Russian monarchy, thus eliminating the world of visual representation it inhabited. In the early 1980s I began to discover ceremonial texts, first in the Russian collection of the Helsinki University Library, then in the rich collection of coronation albums and plate books in the Slavonic Division of the New York Public Library. I collaborated with the director of the division, Edward Kasinec, on an article about the coronation albums in the division's holdings and also worked with him as cocurator for an exhibition of books from the collections of the imperial family belonging to the division.[21] The pictures in these texts revealed

[20] In Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); *idem*, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1980; *idem*, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 13–40.

[21] Edward Kasinec and Richard Wortman, "The Mythology of Empire: Imperial Russian Coronation Albums," *Biblion: The Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 1/1 (Fall, 1992), 77–100. The Romanov books are described in Robert H. Davis, *A Dark Mirror: Romanov and Imperial Palace Library Materials in the Holdings of the New York Public Library. A Checklist and Agenda for Research* (New York: Norman Ross, 1999).

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the rich visual imagery of the monarchy, while the written texts suggested the meanings those images were supposed to convey.

Geertz offered synchronic glimpses into different cultures and the social structures that underlay them. But these glimpses, like a series of still photographs, lacked a sense of human agency and intention. Meaning was locked in semiotic webs with little sense of the thoughts or purposes of the individual men moved by them. Geertz referred to the mythical grounding of these performances, but the myths themselves remained in the background, explaining the source of the beliefs but not figuring in the adaptation of these symbols to the historical situation and the dynamic processes of change in which they figured.[22]

During my research I had been struck by the prominent themes and imagery of conquest that suggested an overarching myth that provided the continuity of imperial representation. This led me to turn to the writings of Marshall Sahlins, whose work emphasized the importance of myth in early monarchies. Sahlins's analyses of Polynesian myths showed how persistent mythical narratives provided structures of understanding that evolved to meet new historical challenges and make them comprehensible.

In the heroic, mythical history of Polynesian kings, Sahlins perceived a structure that "generalizes the action of the king as the form and destiny of the society." The myths demonstrated that these rulers did not "spring from the same clay" as their subjects. Rather they came from the heavens or different ethnic groups. Sahlins concluded, "Royalty is the foreigner." "Heroic history" also dictated "an unusual capacity for sudden change or rupture: a mutation of the cultural courses as the rapid popular generalization of a heroic action."[23] Myth provided a conceptual framework to guide responses to historical conjunctures, such as the appearance of foreigners like Captain Cook, who was seen as the fertility god Lono, and the introduction of commerce from abroad by the king.[24]

The same type of "heroic history" figured largely in the narratives of the Russian monarchy. The motif of the foreigner, "the stranger king," was present in the tales of origin and the assertions of the foreign character of the Russian

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22 For a critique of this tenor see Aletta Biersack, "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 72–96.

23 Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xi, 41, 78.

24 This emerges from Sahlins's revision of Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, language and speech, in which speech represents changing expressions of the underlying structure of language. Sahlins casts this distinction on a historical grid, the myth containing the structure—*langue*, historical actions or events representing the *parole*, guided by but representing transformations of the myth. Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 3–8, 17–22, 43–6.

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emperor from the beginnings of the Russian state. The central motifs of conquest bringing with it sudden rupture and the adoption of new foreign antecedents and models run through Russian history. They were expressed in the legendary accounts of the Vikings, "the Varangians," coming from abroad to bring order and justice to Novgorod. The tsars of Rus' during the sixteenth century laid claim in word and ceremony to descent from the Byzantine emperors and in the seventeenth century adopted Byzantine vestments and ceremonies. Peter the Great staged his rule as a show of the cultural and political westernization of the Russian ruler, noble elite, and state. Under Nicholas I and Alexander II the summoning of the Varangians was presented as the central, determining event of Russian history.

The persistence of what might be described as archaic imagery, the depiction of the ruler as superhuman representative of a distant realm, reflected the highly personalized character of Russian political authority, which resisted the type of institutionalization that moderated the monarch's power in the West.[25] I traced the evolution of this imagery by close examination of the evolution of ideas, literature, art, and architecture in successive reigns. From this process it became clear that Russian rulers, until the last decades of the nineteenth century, asserted their foreign character in order to elevate their rule—to sustain absolute domination by creating the distance, what Nietzsche called "the pathos of distance," between themselves, with their elites, and the subject population, whether Russians or the other diverse nationalities of the empire. Russian monarchy was dominated by what I call a "performative imperative." While other monarchies had also emulated foreign examples, a distinguishing characteristic of Russian monarchy, I concluded, was the perpetuation of images of foreignness.

These observations drew heavily from the works of what is now known as the Moscow–Tartu school, with which I became acquainted in the 1980s, particularly

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[25] When Peter the Great reformed the Russian state on a European model, he endeavored to create state institutions that operated according to law, a state that had a perpetual existence regardless of the monarch on the throne. But the Western states Peter sought to emulate observed to a lesser or greater degree a sophisticated legal distinction between on the one hand the king as ruler of the state, an abstract and perpetual embodiment of state authority, and on the other the mortal person—between the body politic and the human body of the king, described in Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). In Russia, Michael Cherniavsky, Kantorowicz's student, showed that Peter's attempt to impose such a distinction never took hold. The state never assumed the integrity of an institution with its own rules and traditions that could not be breached by the imperial will. In this situation, I observed, the monarch himself took on the role of literal incarnation of the immortal state. See Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 82–90.

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the many articles of Iurii Lotman, Boris Uspenskii, and Victor Zhivov. The Moscow–Tartu school now refers to the study of cultural semiotics developed in the relatively free precincts of Tartu University in Soviet Estonia under Lotman's leadership and inspiration during the 1960s and 1970s, and to his followers.[26] Soviet historians had not investigated or taught the history of Russian culture, since culture did not fit the Marxist-Leninist conception of history as the study of the interaction of economy, class, and state. The culture and life of the nobility and merchantry was regarded as the result of their exploitation of the ruling classes, and not worthy of scholarly attention. Literary scholars and linguists, however, were given more leeway than historians in their study of the great works of Russian literature. Moreover, they approached culture as grounded in the science of semiotics and as a search for a universal system of signs, and their journal and conferences provided what Henrik Baran described as "a defined politically neutral space."[27] When I visited these scholars in the 1990s, my historian friends were always bemused by my interest in "the formalists."

Examining the processes of the reception of foreign culture, precluded by Marxist-Leninist historiography, they showed how Russian tastes and behavior emulated first Byzantine, then European, cultural models. They described a dynamic of the processes, cultural ruptures, that led to the adoption of one set of models and the repudiation of previous ones. Uspenskii and Zhivov explicated the changes in religious rhetoric and symbols during Peter's reform that transformed Russian Orthodoxy into a religion resembling the Erastian, natural-law teachings of the German states, which elevated the ruler as a god on earth. Lotman described the cultural semiotics of noble behavior in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, revealing educated noblemen showing their Western character by acting out scripts drawn from prominent works of European literature. I consulted with these scholars and attended several of their "Lotman conferences" (*Lotmanovskie chteniia*) during the 1990s.

The members of the Moscow–Tartu school made it clear too that by acting as Europeans, Russian noblemen were displaying their adherence to the code of Western behavior imposed by Russian emperors, and in this way established their distance from the lesser estates of the realm. Most important, I recognized a similar code of acting according to Western literary and philosophical scripts in the presentation of the rulers themselves. When it became possible at the end of the 1980s for me to make annual trips to Russia and to gain archival access, I began to study the scenarios of each reign with a broader range of

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[26] For a discussion of the rise and decline of the Moscow–Tartu school and its contribution see my review of Sergei Nekliudov, ed., "Moskovsko-tartuskaia semioticheskaia shkola. Istoria, vospominania, razmyshleniia," *Kritika* 1/4 (Fall, 2000), 821–9.

[27] Cited in ibid., 824–5.

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sources—program books, and journal and newspaper descriptions, as well as discussions of the works of art and architecture that provided the stage effects of imperial power. The new materials and my interaction with the scholars of the Moscow–Tartu school enabled me to develop my interpretation and formulate the conceptualization of Russian monarchy that I set forth in my two-volume study of Russian imperial myths and representation, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*.[28]

In *Scenarios* I trace how each successive Russian monarch, beginning with Peter the Great, presented him- or herself as heroic protagonist of a myth of conquest that had its origin in early Russian legends and chronicles. Each performed the myth according to the intellectual ideals and cultural modes of the era, bringing the narrative of Russian monarchy as living representation into the present. I call these individual realizations of the myth "scenarios," the *mise-en-scène* for each reign. The scenario communicated the emperor's tastes, goals, and style of rule to the noble elite. These were set forth at the beginning of each reign, in manifestos, panegyrics, and ceremonies, culminating with the imperial coronation.

The myth created a continuity of imperial representation. The scenarios introduced notes of change, promises of renovation, while reaffirming the bond with the dynasty. I found that it was the upbringing of the heirs that played the crucial role in the successive transformations of the myth. On the one hand, the heir performed in his father's scenario and regarded his father as the embodiment of imperial authority. On the other, within the context of the previous scenario he began to develop a concept of his own role. This came from his teachers, who introduced him to different conceptions of monarchy, nationality, and religion. He also drew his own notions of personal feeling and deportment from his mother, grandmother, and other relatives, as well as from his reading.

By the time of his accession, the heir had developed his own understanding of the office of emperor. The new scenario was announced in the opening months of his reign. It established a dramatic unity that shaped the particular ceremonies of each reign. Thus, rather than fixed rituals, the descriptions of imperial ceremonies make clear that they underwent significant changes. Both the manner of performance and the conduct of the ceremony were adapted to convey the feelings and meanings significant to the scenario. Like plays or ballets,

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[28] Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1, *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I*; vol. 2, *From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995–2000). Russian translation, Tsenarii vlasti, 2 vols. (Moscow: OGI, 2004). Princeton University Press published a revised and abridged one-volume paperback version in 2006: *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy: From Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II.* A translation is in progress to be published by Novoe Izdate'lstvo in Moscow.

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imperial ceremonies provided scripts that could be reinterpreted in productions that filled them with contemporary meaning. The upbringing and accession of each monarch thus lent the representation of the Russian monarchy dynamism within the reaffirmation of the continuity of the dynastic myth.

For example, we witness such changes in the imperial coronation, the principal public ceremony of Russian monarchy until the end of the empire.[29] The crowning and anointing of the emperor both consecrated his power and promulgated his scenario. The coronation ceremonies and celebrations lasted several weeks and included, in addition to the rites of crowning and anointment in the cathedral, the gala entry into Moscow, the announcement of the coronation, parades, balls, banquets, and fireworks. All of these were described in accounts, many of them richly illustrated.

One of the most important innovations occurred at the conclusion of Nicholas I's coronation rites in 1826. After the crowning and anointment, he proceeded, according to tradition, in full regalia to the Archangel and Annunciation Cathedrals and climbed the steps of the Red Staircase. Then he turned and to the traditional thunderous shouts of "Hoorah!" He bowed three times to the throng of people in Kremlin Square. The triple bow indicated for the first time a mutuality of sentiment: the people were recognizing and acclaiming their monarchy; the monarch was showing recognition and gratitude to the people. The gesture prefigured the national elements in Nicholas I's scenario. It was a true example of the invention of tradition, one repeated at all future coronations and many imperial visits to Moscow. By the end of the century it was considered "an ancient Russian tradition."

Another significant innovation in the coronation celebrations was introduced by Alexander II in 1856. For the first time, a delegation of peasants marched in the procession to the Assumption Cathedral, where the rites were administered. This gave symbolic statement to the growing sentiment that peasants had to be considered members of the nation, an augur of an emancipation still in secret deliberations. It also suggested that imperial ceremonies, previously functions of the elite attended by the people for ceremonial acclamations, now would be broadened to include them as participants.

Coronation albums provided a valuable source for tracing the relationship between myth, scenarios, and ceremony. They were elaborate and luxurious volumes, published in limited editions in several foreign languages as well as Russian, in order to make known the emperor's image and scenario to both Russian and foreign elites. For example, Alexander II's coronation album gloried

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[29] Other ceremonies such as parades, and court fêtes, and religious ceremonies also changed to fit the scenario of each reign.

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in the color, variety, and dashing appearance of the horsemen from the Caucasus and Central Asia, making clear the love that prevailed for the Russian monarch among the multiethnic imperial elite after the disastrous defeat of the Crimean War. Alexander's III's coronation album, on the other hand, called attention to their subjection to and acceptance of Russian domination, announcing the theme of Russian national supremacy proclaimed during his reign and that of his son, Nicholas II.

* * *

The shift to an ethnic, national symbolic, suggested in the last example, indicates not only a new scenario, but the beginning of the transformation of the myth, from the European to what I call "the national myth." The European myth had preserved the heroic history that ensured the monarch's transcendence by identifying the ruler with Western images of sovereignty and transmitting this narrative from generation to generation in the upbringing of members of the imperial family. Russian emperors from the reign of Peter the Great identified with state institutions and even presented themselves as their embodiment. But at the same time they displayed their distance from the state administration by asserting their supreme character and, when they chose, exerting authority freely, as befit superhuman absolute monarchs.

The exercise of power and the representation of the monarch thus were reciprocal processes: absolute rule sustained the image of a transcendent monarch, which in turn warranted the untrammeled exercise of power. It was this nexus that defined absolute monarchy in Russia and came to be understood under the term "autocracy" in the nineteenth century. The capacity of Russian monarchs to live in the context of myth explains their refusal to compromise, to accept intermediaries such as a chancellor, or parliamentary institutions in order to ensure the monarchy's survival, as in the case of the German and the Austrian emperors. Their intellectual aversion to constitutionalism reflected merely one aspect of a mentality that knew only absolute domination or utter defeat.

Until the assassination of Alexander II on 1 March 1881, the representations of the ruler as foreigner sustained the distance that enabled him to exercise absolute power in the interests of both social stability and progress.

The Great Reforms of Alexander II's reign—the emancipation of the serfs, reform of the courts and local institutions—culminate a tradition that identified the monarchy with European-style progress. When Alexander III ascended the throne, officials dedicated to the goals of reform dominated many high governmental organs, such as the State Council and the Senate. As heir, he had been imbued by his teachers with nationalist sentiments and became increasingly critical of his father's policies under the influence of his mentor, Constantine

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Pobedonostsev. When he became emperor, Alexander III denounced the liberal policies that he and his advisers regarded as incitements to revolution.

With his mentor Pobedonostsev, now Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, Alexander III recast the myth so that it presented the emperor not only as the expression of a monarchical nation, but as the most Russian of Russians, struggling against the contagion of subversive doctrines coming from the West. Distance between ruler and ruled was now sustained by reaching back to the pre-Petrine past and evoking the images of a Muscovite tsar, who presumably exercised untrammeled patriarchal power, and of the *bogatyrs*, the heroes of folk epic. The national myth showed the tsar's authority emanating from his spiritual union with the Orthodox Church and the Russian people and was expressed in his image of most pious practitioner of Russian Orthodoxy.

The mythical union with people and church conjured a separation, a distrust between the emperor and the institutions of state, which he regarded with increasing suspicion and even hostility as potential threats to his power. The evocation of an ethnic nationalism, itself of European provenance, introduced an element of contradiction into the Westernized culture of Russian monarchy, whose representatives continued to share the culture of European royalty. The increasingly national tenor of official statements and policy threw doubt on the multinational grounding of the emperor's authority intrinsic to the European myth and inflamed the opposition of national minorities in the empire.

For Alexander III, the ideal national monarchy was evoked as an extension of the monarch's personal power, deriving from the sanction of the Orthodox Church and centered in the Ministry of the Interior, which was obedient to his will and unencumbered by law. Nicholas II distrusted both the Orthodox Church and governmental officials. His sense of self emanated from the faith that he enjoyed a direct personal relationship with God and the absolute sympathy and devotion of the Russian people. As it emerged in the first years of the twentieth century, his scenario presented him in different national personas. He appeared as a man spiritually close to simple Russian people, especially holy men, as a pilgrim, as well as Muscovite tsar. These identities emphasized his distance from and spiritual superiority to educated society and the imperial administration, and after the 1905 revolution from the parliamentary institutions he had reluctantly established and strove to undermine.[30] He sustained these beliefs regardless of

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[30] See Andrew M. Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy: Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 109–10, 239–41; Geoffrey Hosking, *The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma, 1907–1914* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 201–5.

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the bloody peasant uprisings that swept the countryside during the revolution of 1905 and maintained them even after his abdication in 1917.[31]

Russian monarchy has been characterized as a largely reactive institution, striking out defensively to preserve the institutions of autocracy. But its mythical narratives conjured the image of an active force, building and maintaining an empire, educating and uplifting the populace, and establishing legality and order. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, on the contrary, the monarchy proved a subversive force, turning first against the institutions produced by the Great Reforms and later against the parliamentary bodies established in 1905. The violent catastrophic events of the early twentieth century in Russia resulted not from a decrepit monarchy collapsing before insurgent oppositional movements, but from the clash of an insurgent monarchy, bent on restoring a mythical pre-Petrine past, with the forces of liberalism and revolution determined to transform Russia according to Western models of progress.

My books have explored the mentality of members of three groups and their responses to political reality. Their modes of thinking can be described under different categories—ideology, ethos, and myth. Each involved the embrace of a picture of reality that inspired a heroic dedication and often a disregard for expedience. In each case, their solutions evolved as conscious acts that left traces in personal sources and public statements that are open to the historian's gaze. Looking back, I realize that I engaged in an ongoing process of discovery of aspects of history that had eluded historians who focused on the great ideas, major political events, or dominant social and economic trends of the period.

The process of discovery presumes a strategy of openness in approaching sources—openness to the expressions of ideas and feelings, and to the visual manifestations of political attitudes. The strategy of openness entails a wariness of the preconceptions or theoretical constructs that have possessed the academic world and can lead to premature closure of the process of discovery. It reveals the ways that ideas become objects of affect while at the same time maintaining a rational basis in consciousness. The social sciences, psychology and anthropology have opened me to other aspects of human experience, like emotional development and symbolic expression, as objects of scholarly study and suggested avenues of approach. But abstract universal models, when applied

31 Recent scholarship has made clear Nicholas II's role in insisting on the most aggressive and brutal responses and imposing his views on his ministers, whom he often hid behind. For example, he was clearly behind Peter Stolypin's introduction of the notorious field courts-martial in 1906 and the "Stolypin coup d'état", the change in the election law in June 1907. See Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, vol. 2, *Authority Restored* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 244–59.

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to a particular situation, can obscure the specificity and variety of human experience and impoverish the historical narrative.

By emphasizing specificity, as my books show, I do not deny the possibility of viewing these individuals in a general comparative context. The revolutionary movement, the reform of the Russian judiciary, and Russian monarchy must be understood in terms of their Western counterparts. But if comparisons are to be cogent and informative they must be based on an understanding of the phenomena to be compared. They must take into account what might be described as a view from inside—the thinking and representations of the individuals involved—which may disclose a quite different picture from that governed by general categories and lead to quite different understandings of the motivations and ideas of the figures involved.

My goal has been to write my subjects into the narrative of Russian history. The narrative form provides a cultural and political context that makes it possible to understand the dilemmas and preoccupations that found expression in their thought. It places them in a sequence that relates them to contemporary events they knew. Most important, it evokes the drama of their quests to see themselves as agents of history itself, who, gifted with special knowledge and insight, could influence its direction and outcome.

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