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**Richard S. Wortman: Scenarios of Power**

**Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II**

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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

A glance at the records of past coronations in [Russia] leads to the conclusion that the pomp and circumstance attending them have not diminished with the advance of modern ideas, but rather increased. Not only do the rare coronation ceremonies of other countries pale before the religious inauguration of the Russian Czar, but there are other powerful monarchies at present in Europe, like Germany, for instance, where the reigning sovereign has never yet undergone a coronation and does not appear to require one.

In Russia, however, it appears to be indispensable to the Government and the nation. Their great love of display and purely Eastern traditions may also be reckoned among the causes; but the machinery of government is not supposed to get into proper working order until after a new Czar has been crowned, and it is only then, as a general rule, that the personal policy of the imperial autocrat becomes a known quantity both to his own people and to the world at large.

*New York Times, May 31, 1896*<sup>1</sup>

THE LEAD ARTICLE on page 1 of the May 31, 1896, *New York Times* opened with a statement that Nicholas II had been crowned “with the most gorgeous ceremonies the world has ever seen.” Further on, an article on past coronations (cited in the epigraph to this chapter) pointed out the continued and even increasing lavishness of these ceremonies. By way of explanation, the author quoted “a well-known Russian,” who referred to “ten thousand miles of Asiatic frontier.” But the magnificent coronation rites and celebrations had their origins in eighteenth-century Western models and sought first of all to impress Russian and European audiences.

Symbolic display served as an essential mechanism of rule in Imperial Russia. Ceremonies and celebrations—the coronation only the foremost among them—demonstrated the character and efficacy of the monarchy in different ways. They showed the emperor’s capacity to marshal vast wealth. They revealed the extent of his realm and the variety of nationalities that he and his forbears had conquered and ruled. Elaborately choreographed parades and dignified processions displayed the monarch’s powers of control and

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, May 31, 1896, 14. Wilhelm II held no coronation. Wilhelm I, however, was crowned in Königsberg in October 1861, though in a ceremony considerably less elaborate and with less publicity than Russian coronations.

direction—a simulacrum of a state directed by the ruler’s will. Crowds lining avenues and filling squares attested to his capacity to maintain “exemplary order” and to win popular support. Altogether these events illustrated what Clifford Geertz described as “the power of grandeur to organize the world.”<sup>2</sup>

The coronation and other ceremonies of the autocracy presented a cognitive map of the political order, one of the “particular models or political paradigms of society and how it functions” which, Steven Lukes has argued, distinguish political ritual.<sup>3</sup> Ceremonies and pageantry made clear that the Russian emperor was not bound by the limits of everyday life or subject to mundane judgment. They lifted him into various realms of the sublime free from disagreement and strife, a process I have described as “elevation.” The exercise of absolute power and the public presentation of the mythical image of the ruler were reciprocal processes: Absolute rule sustained an image of transcendent monarch, which in turn warranted the untrammelled exercise of his power. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the lifting of the monarch into a higher realm was a ceaseless endeavor, compensating for the fragile legitimacy of monarchical authority in Russia. Poetry, art, and architecture were mobilized to represent an otherworldly universe dominated by the monarch’s persona. By the same token, the failure of the ruler to make appearances at ceremonies and festivities or to prevent breakdowns in the organization of public events—as occurred during the reigns of Alexander II and Nicholas II—appeared as derelictions of his symbolic obligations. Such lapses cast doubt on the monarch’s superhuman capacities and portended a broader loss of authority and control over the political order.

This two-volume study is an exploration of the role of symbolic representation in elevating and perpetuating Russian monarchy from the reign of Peter the Great until the abdication of Nicholas II. It approaches Russian monarchy as a symbolic system that persisted over time but took different forms to adapt to new demands and exploit new possibilities. It examines the dominant myths and the various ceremonial expressions of the myths that defined the monarchy for its servitors. It argues the importance of image and symbol for the maintenance of absolute monarchy and suggests how they affected the responses of Russian monarchy to the challenges of institutional reform, economic change, and popular participation. It seeks to illuminate the symbolic aspects of rule in a culture where symbolic expressions were pervasive and, I argue, often the decisive ones in determining the destinies of the state. Most important, this work seeks 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

<sup>2</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 102.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory* (London, 1977), 68.

by myth, its own specific goals, as an agent creating the scene of struggle and breakdown in the early twentieth century, an agent of its own doom.

Volume 1 described how the presentations of Russian monarchy lifted the ruler and his servitors above the ruled, from Peter the Great through the reign of Nicholas I. Those who participated in the ceremonies and culture surrounding each ruler constituted what I refer to as the elite of Russian monarchy. The presence of the elite at court ceremonies demonstrated the solidarity between the upper ranks of the nobility, military, officialdom, and crown. The elite exemplified the forms of obedience the monarch expected and represented his ideas and tastes to the state administration, the armed forces, and, on occasion, to the population at large.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Russian emperor ruled what Ernest Gellner has described as a horizontally organized society. The elite comprised noblemen from other national areas, such as the Baltic and Tartar provinces and Georgia, as well as Russian nobility. They shared a common bond of service with the emperor and a common domination over a population bound to the land.<sup>4</sup> Under Nicholas I (1825–55), the imperial court, previously the preserve of the highest officials, officers, aristocrats, and favorites of the tsar, admitted increasing numbers of middle- and lesser-level officials.<sup>5</sup>

The elite joined the monarch in two types of ceremonies: First, social occasions, such as soirées, balls, and receptions, defined the inner circle of the monarchy; second, public presentations—coronations, public processions, trips—displayed the preeminence of the elite and its sharing in the transcendent qualities of the monarch. Whether behind the walls of the palace, or before crowds of people, as Max Weber argued, they performed ceremonies principally for themselves, for it was the performance and its representation in text and image that proved the truth of their preeminence.<sup>6</sup> The ceremonies confirmed the myths, justifying elite domination as the culmination of the heroic history of the monarchy. The common people remained outside these heroic narratives, in a realm of “historylessness,” unconsciously complying with the terms of the myth.<sup>7</sup> When they appeared at ceremonies, they made up a human backdrop, at times joining in choruses of acclaim for their ruler.

Myth endowed the monarch with an epic persona, placing him in what Michael<sup>8</sup> Bakhtin describes as an epic world of absolute truths, “a transferral

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), 11.

<sup>5</sup> See Volume 1: 303–4, 322–25.

<sup>6</sup> Max Weber pointed out that the various strata of the elite create myths, first and foremost, to justify their collective domination to themselves (Max Rheinstein, ed., *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society* [New York, 1967], 335–37).

<sup>7</sup> On the concepts of heroic history and historylessness, see Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985), 35–51.

<sup>8</sup> Note on transcription of Russian names: I have followed the practice of using Western equivalents of Russian names when those names are common equivalents of Western names

of a represented world onto the past.” The presentations were “monologic,” banishing doubt and compromise, permitting no responses but admiration and affirmation.<sup>9</sup> The emperor appeared as demiurge, who by a gesture or the printed words of a manifesto accomplished prodigies of conquest or transformation. The principle of “le secret du roi” preserved the sense both of the mystery and the authoritative certainty of rule.<sup>10</sup> Divergent understandings of the myth or of how the heroism of the past should be realized in current circumstances could be voiced only behind closed doors and did not mar the harmonious unity of imperial presentations.

Two overarching myths, a European and a National myth, framed the presentation of political power in Russia from Peter the Great until the abdication of Nicholas II. From the fifteenth to the late nineteenth century, the animating myth of Russian monarchy associated the rulers and their elites with foreign models of sovereignty. The source of sacrality was distant from Russia, located in the images of Byzantium, Rome, France, or Germany. By appearing like foreigners, the monarch and the elite affirmed the permanence and inevitability of their domination of subject populations, both Russian and other nationalities. Peter the Great made Europe the referent of foreignness and superiority, and taught his servitors to act like Europeans.

The European myth elaborated a heroic history of godlike figures, either coming from the West or ruling in the West, antecedents and exemplars of Russian rulers and their elites. While many rulers of early modern Europe had emulated foreign models to enhance their authority when consolidating monarchical power, the appropriation of borrowed signs of sovereignty remained a symbolic imperative for Russian rulers long after it had disappeared in Europe. Only with the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 did the emperor and his advisers introduce a myth to preserve absolute power that emphasized the monarch’s national character.

The European myth expressed the motifs of empire and conquest. Empire provided the model of sovereignty for Russia, as for other early-modern monarchies. Empire connoted supreme power, extensive territories, and diversity of subject peoples. Unity came from acts of conquest and was perpetuated by military rule.<sup>11</sup> The themes of conquest and usurpation, enacted spectacularly in the first years of Peter the Great’s reign, underlay authority in Russia, and were constantly reaffirmed in performances of ceremonies displaying the Western character of the elite. First literal reenactments of conquest in the Petrine triumphs, then ceremonial displays of European char-

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(e.g., Alexander, not Aleksandr; Nicholas, not Nikolai). On the other hand, I have kept the Russian original when this is the common practice (e.g., Stepan, not Steven; Iurii, not George).

<sup>9</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, Tex., 1981), 13–16.

<sup>10</sup> On “le secret du roi” and monarchical policy in France, see Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), 169–70.

<sup>11</sup> On the varied meanings of empire in early-modern Europe, see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven, 1995), 12–15. On the image of empire in early Russia, see Volume 1: 6, 26–30.

acter, dramatized the supremacy of an elite claiming foreign antecedents or associations.<sup>12</sup> The ceremonies sustained what Ronald Suny has described as the distinguishing principle of empire—“inequitable rule,” the dominion of one group over another.<sup>13</sup>

In the West, national monarchies developed their own symbols to replace the early-modern model of empire. In Russia, the European myth perpetuated and reinforced the principle of imperial domination, making it the vital center of the monarch’s self-image and the unity of the multinational elite. The expressions of European were displayed by a diverse group composed of noblemen from the various people of the empire but with the Russian nobility predominant. The difference between the Russian ethnic heartland, which gave rise to the unity of the Russian lands, and the Russian empire that succeeded it, was expressed in the words *Rus’* and *Rossiiia*. *Rossiiia* was greater Russia, which emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as an imperial state that engulfed *Rus’*. *Rossiiia* was the multinational empire ruled by a Westernized sovereign, through a Westernized bureaucracy, and dominated by cosmopolitan nobility united by a common European culture.

The European myth identified the emperor with the secular state, the administrative institutions and laws that Peter the Great began to introduce according to Western models. While the rulers’ power continued to be sanctified by God, they displayed their sacral qualities most visibly by the progress, expansion, and strengthening of the state. The Russian state never assumed an existence independent from the person of the monarch as it did in France or England. The notion of the state as an impersonal institution, operating according to laws of its own, remained an ideal of enlightened officials through the early twentieth century, but it could not take hold in the highly literal and personalized symbolic world of Russian monarchy.<sup>14</sup>

After Peter, Russian monarchs appeared not only as the rulers but as symbolic exemplifications of the secular state. The result was an image of secular transcendence expressed in terms of illustrious heroes or pagan gods. Neither religious sanction nor force of tradition was sufficient to justify the monarch’s secular pretensions. The emperor and his family faithfully performed the rituals of the church, but his plenitude of power required him to display godlike attributes that were demonstrated in an ongoing ceremonial drama of efficacy and omnipotence.

Although the European myth canonized and perpetuated the existing system of absolute monarchy based on a serf-holding elite, it also expressed a dynamic of change. The epic image of ruler that consecrated his unlimited

<sup>12</sup> See Volume 1: 42–51, 82–86, 91–100, 113–15, 171–75, 267–69, 298–99.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, National Identity, and Theories of Empire,” in Ronald Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, forthcoming.

<sup>14</sup> On Peter’s failure to develop an abstract conception of the Russian state, see Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths* (New York, 1969), 82–90.

domination, together with the principle of conquest, dramatized his power and intention to transform Russia. The goals of reform and transformation were symbolically inscribed in Peter the Great's succession law, which made utility along with heredity a justification of monarchical power. Thereafter, each ruler came to the throne posing as the heroic defender of the general welfare—the deliverer of Russia who would inaugurate an era of renovation.<sup>15</sup>

Myth could and did accommodate new policies when they were understood to enhance the resources and power of the monarchy. But it could not accommodate dissent or politics in the public sphere. The antithesis of the monologic world of myth was the modern politics of organized groups, a world of bitter contestation over important policies and compromises that were incompatible with an absolute, superordinate truth. It was the failure of the European myth in the reign of Alexander II to preserve the ideals and practice of absolute power in parts that led Alexander III to ground his authority on national symbols and imagery.

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The performance of the governing myth was a symbolic obligation of each Russian emperor when he ascended the throne. In the first decade of his reign, the new sovereign revealed his version of the myth, which displayed how he would embody the office of emperor and how he would exemplify the dominant political and cultural ideals of his era. I call these individual realizations of the myth “scenarios of power.” The scenarios cast the new emperor as a mythical hero in a historically sensitive narrative that claimed to preserve the timeless verities underlying the myth. It is in the scenarios of successive reigns that one observes both the transformations and the persistence of myth as it interacts with personality and history.

Ceremonies were episodes in the current scenario, and they received their meaning from the scenario. A ceremony as fundamental as the crowning of each emperor could emphasize a humble acceptance of divinely conferred authority, as in the seventeenth century; the affirmation of supreme moral and political authority, as in the eighteenth century; the identification of the emperor with nation and state as at Nicholas I's coronation in 1826. The coronations of Alexander II in 1856, Alexander III in 1883, and Nicholas II in 1896 presented a changing relationship between the monarch and the Russian people. A trip by the emperor or the heir through the empire could appear as a ceremonial conquest of the land by evoking love and approbation, as in the trips of Catherine the Great and Alexander II, or as an intimidating tour of inspection, as under Paul I and Nicholas I. Parades remained a dominant form of imperial presentation through the nineteenth and early

<sup>15</sup> On the centrality and persistence of the reform ethos in Russian monarchy, see Cynthia Whittaker, “The Reforming Tsar: The Redefinition of Autocratic Duty in Eighteenth-Century Russia,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (spring 1992): 77–98.

twentieth century. The discipline and symmetry of military reviews could be taken as proof of the personal power of the emperor, as with Paul I; of the loyalty and beauty of the elite, as with Alexander I; of the power and organization of the autocratic state, as in the displays of Nicholas I. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, parades would reflect the elegance and sympathy of Alexander II, the national aspirations of Alexander III, and Nicholas II's needs for camaraderie and political support. After 1881 religious ceremonies, particularly processions of the cross, assumed a new prominence in the representation of monarchy, demonstrating the national role of the Orthodox Church. Under Nicholas II, new ceremonies, informal meetings of the tsar with the common people and mass historical celebrations, showed the tsar's bonds with the people and his claim as leader of the nation to the heritage of Russia's heroic past.

The themes of each scenario were set forth in imperial manifestoes issued by the tsars in the first years of their reigns, with the exception of the reign of Nicholas II. The themes were elaborated in ceremonial texts, verbal and visual, that presented the emperor's appearances at public events that made known his persona as ruler. The elite took their cues from these initial statements and performances: their participation was a sign of solidarity with their sovereign, or minimally of outer adherence to the monarchy in its present embodiment. The inner feelings of members of the elite were occasionally expressed in diaries, memoirs, and letters.

The scenarios sought to approximate the epic unity of the myth. But the European models that the monarchy strove to appropriate were diverse, fluid, and open to varied interpretations that permitted complete accord. As a result, scenarios often revealed contradictory aspirations that were submerged in the drama of the performances. For example, the striving for legality and regularity conflicted with godlike images of omnipotence; displays of sentiments and humility contradicted claims to superhuman rationality. The alternative visions of Western monarchy provided antitheses that might revitalize the monarchy and the myth. Such visions informed the training of heirs to the throne. In some cases it was the grandmother or mother, in others the tutors who acquainted the heir with ideas and images of authority that diverged from his father's. The new scenario germinated even as the heir performed his role in his father's scenario. Only Nicholas II's education sheltered him from divergent conceptions of rule.<sup>16</sup>

The scenarios followed a symbolic dynamic that governed imperial presentations until the reign of Nicholas II. A scenario begins each reign with the prospect of energetic change. It takes form in the shadow of events discrediting the previous scenario, such as an uprising, a military defeat, an assassination, which make a new conception of monarchy urgent and unavoidable.

<sup>16</sup> I discuss the empresses and patterns of upbringing of the heirs in my article, "The Russian Empress as Mother," in David L. Ransel, ed., *The Family in Imperial Russia: New Lines of Historical Research* (Urbana, Ill., 1978), 60–74.

The emperor brings a new manner of rule, appoints new figures to key positions. But after a period of vigorous, innovative government, obstacles begin to appear, the initial inspiration is lost: The scenarios become frozen, “routinized.” The formal and ritualized repetitions increasingly lose touch with the changing views of the time and the needs of the state. Disappointment with the high hopes of transformation sets in. The performance of the world *in potentia*, always in a state of becoming, loses credibility once the potential is not met and opens the mind to new designs and more current settings of the myth.

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The political symbols and language introduced by the French Revolution challenged the very grounds of the early modern European models that had given Russian rulers moral and cultural preeminence. The revolution overthrew both the religious and utilitarian justifications of monarchical government, denying both its divine designation and its claim to work for the good of its subjects. Festivals of the revolution effected what Mona Ozouf called “a transfer of sacrality,” celebrating a new charismatic source of authority in the people.<sup>17</sup> Where the political symbolism of absolute monarchy had stressed the distance from subject, now closeness, the demonstration of affinity between government and governed, marked European political systems as legitimate.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the word *nation* took on the sense of a political order constituted by the people themselves—a community of equal individuals whose belonging to the nation was expressed in the notion of citizenship. This idea, what Eric Hobsbawm called “state-based patriotism,” gave rise in the second half of the nineteenth century to ethnic concepts of the nation, based on a people’s common history, language, and religious beliefs. The “ethnic nation” helped to unite newly emerging social groups with the political order and engendered new “invented” traditions that provided rituals and symbols of historical continuity.<sup>18</sup>

While European monarchs initially fought the manifestations of an awakening national spirit, they eventually drew upon such sentiments. These developments were part of a broader process whereby monarchies, conceived of in the image of empires, began to present themselves as nation-states. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France and Great Britain, which had consisted of separate *nations*, began to apply the term to a unified monarchical nation. The state merged with the nation, that is, with the people,

<sup>17</sup> See Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1986), 23; Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 262–82.

<sup>18</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990), 84–87; Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” and “Mass Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 1–14, 263–308.

who possessed a sense of civic or ethnic unity.<sup>19</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century Prussian kings and Hapsburg emperors were posing as leaders of their people. Later, they came to accept parliamentary institutions that could express the needs of conservative society. In the Hapsburg Empire, conservative representatives of various national groups received a modicum of power, and a moderate parliamentary system enabled the old aristocracy to maintain its authority. Franz Josef reigned as a symbol of stability of a multinational elite that could be used to diffuse national conflict.<sup>20</sup>

The symbolic development of Japan shows another evolutionary pattern. In the second half of the nineteenth century, a group of modernizing oligarchs adopted a parliamentary and legal system on European models to unite the regions of Japan, which previously had only loose ties to the center. After studying Western forms of political presentation, they unabashedly reshaped old myths and ceremonies and invented new ones that presented the Japanese emperor as symbol of a Japanese nation.<sup>21</sup>

Russian imperial myths emphasized conquest and domination, rather than the harmonious accommodation of monarchy to a civic nation. The imagery of conquest persisted in the representations of imperial power through the nineteenth century and was renewed, in more bellicose form, in the presentations of the national myth after 1881. The contrast to the mythical histories of Hapsburg and Hohenzollern emperors is striking. The Hapsburg myth was one of dynastic right glorifying the expansion of the realm through marriage. The dominant symbols of the Hapsburgs were variants of family trees and portraits: The figures of the members of the house and their distant roots were enshrined in magnificent art and given mythic grandeur by the tale of Trojan descent.<sup>22</sup> After the Prussian king assumed the mantle of German emperor in 1871, he took on new historical pretensions derived from a mythical medieval empire, to embody the pretensions of both monarchy and nation.<sup>23</sup> While both of these myths were anti-parliamentary, neither glorified

<sup>19</sup> See Alain Guéry, "L'état monarchique et la construction de la nation française," *Revue de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, no. 32 (summer 1989): 6–17; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> See Daniel Unowsky, "Creating Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations and the Cult of Franz Joseph," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 9, no. 2 (1998): 269–93.

<sup>21</sup> T. Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 1996); Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, N.J., 1985).

<sup>22</sup> See the interesting comparison by Orest Subtelny between Hapsburg and Romanov empires in "The Hapsburg and Russian Empires: Some Comparisons and Contrasts," in Teruyuki Hara and Kimitaka Matzuzato, eds., *Empire and Society: New Approaches to Russian History* (Sapporo, 1997), 86–90. The prominent symbolic role of dynasty in Hapsburg imagery is vividly described in Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Hapsburgs: Embodying Empire* (London, 1995). On Trojan myths of derivation, see Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of Emperor* (New Haven, 1993), 1–4, 67–118.

<sup>23</sup> On Germany, see Elizabeth Fehrenbach, "Images of Kaiserdom," in John C. G. Röhl, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: New Interpretations* (Cambridge, 1982), 270–85; Isabel V. Hull, "Prussian Dynastic Ritual and the End of Monarchy," in Carole Fink, Isabel V. Hull, and MacGregor

force as the key determinant of the relationship between monarch and subject. The theme of conquest in Russian imperial myth, on the contrary, maintained an image of irresistible domination and a disposition to conflict that precluded compromise with even moderate plans for participation. In the period covered in this volume, it encouraged instead direct confrontation with the most radical enemies of the regime. The violent outcome of the early twentieth century was inscribed in the myths of the ruling house.

Rather than accommodating the monarchy to the demands for a civic nation, Russian emperors, beginning with the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55), redefined the concept of nation to make it a mythical attribute of the monarch. Their scenarios dealt with the challenge of nationalism by conflating the nation with the monarchy and the empire. Official doctrine played on the ambiguous meaning of the Russian word *narod*, which connotes both the Russian people in its broadest, democratic sense and the nation as a collective political entity. The monarchy seized on the concept of *narodnost'*, the translation for the French *nationalité*, which was coming into usage in literary circles at the time, to designate the distinctive historical spirit that informed both Russian institutions and the Russian people.<sup>24</sup> “Official nationality” defined the Westernized empire as national and thus distinguished it from Europe, which had been corrupted by the influence of the French Revolution.<sup>25</sup>

After 1825 nationality was identified with absolutism, “autocracy” in the official lexicon. Russian nationality was presented as a nationality of consensual subordination, in contrast to egalitarian Western concepts. The monarchical narrative of nation described the Russian people as voluntarily surrendering power to their Westernized rulers. The tale of the invitation of Varangians by the town of Novgorod in 862 became the paradigm for the Russian political order, establishing the people’s propensity to obey rulers from afar. Immediately after Nicholas I’s accession in 1825, imperial manifestoes attributed the failure of the Decembrist uprising to the distinctive spirit of the Russian people, who remained devoted to their tsars. At Nicholas I’s coronation in 1826, the “people,” “*narod*” became for the first time an active participant in the Kremlin ceremonies. At the close of the coronation rites, Nicholas, returning in full regalia to the palace, stopped on the landing of the Red Staircase and bowed three times to the people gathered

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Knox, *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890–1945* (Norman, Okla., 1985), 13–41.

<sup>24</sup> On the meanings of *narodnost'*, see Maureen Perrie, “*Narodnost'*: Notions of National Identity,” in Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, eds., *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881–1940* (Oxford, 1998), 28–32; Nathaniel Knight, “Ethnicity, Nationality, and the Masses: *Narodnost'* and Modernity in Pre-Emancipation Russia,” in David Hoffman and Yanni Kotsonis, eds., *Russian Modernity* (London, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> See Volume 1: 379–81. On the western intellectual roots of the doctrine, see Andrei Zorin, “Ideologiia ‘Pravoslaviia-Samoderzhavii-Narodnosti’: Opyt rekonstruktsii,” *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 26 (1996): 71–104.

on Kremlin square. The bow was an initial sign of mutual recognition between tsar and people, expressing an unspoken bond of devotion. Later in the century, the triple bow came to be regarded as an “ancient tradition” distinctive to Russia, expressing the popular and personal character of the monarchy.

Writers and officials in subsequent years systematized these ideas. The empire, in these statements, was portrayed as the Russian people writ large, worshipping their tsar. One of the spokesmen of “official nationality,” the historian Michael Pogodin, wrote, “Occupying an expanse that no monarchy on earth has attained, not the Macedonian, the Roman, the Arab, the French, the Mongol, [Russia, *Rossiiia*] is settled predominantly by tribes that speak one language, have consequently one form of thought, practice one Faith, and, like an electric circuit, react suddenly to a single contact.”<sup>26</sup>

The refashioning of the presentation of the monarchical nation is a central theme of this volume. After 1855, the principal subject of Russian imperial representation shifts from the bonding of monarch and elite to showing the bonding of the monarch and the Russian people. Part 1 deals with Alexander II’s presentation of an affectionate bond, based on benevolence and gratitude, as a way to preserve the European myth and the structure of “official nationality.” Part 2 analyzes the propagation of a national myth during the reign of Alexander III when imperial presentations strove to display an ethnic and spiritual bond between a Russian tsar and the Russian people. Part 3 treats the reign of Nicholas II in terms of his quest for his own embodiment of the national myth in the face of broad political opposition and the development of modern forms of publicity and representation.

The elevation of the monarch as a figure enjoying a form of popular mandate required new forms of ceremony and imagery to appeal to an expanding public. Beginning with the reign of Alexander II, the enthusiasm of crowds hailing the tsar was taken by journalists, foreign and Russian, as well as by the tsar and his entourage, as a reliable indication that Russian monarchs rivaled or surpassed their European counterparts in popular devotion.<sup>27</sup> After the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the peasants more frequently appeared as participants in imperial ceremonies to show the democratic character of the monarchical nation and the progress toward civic equality. From 1909 to 1913 the jubilees of Poltava and Borodino, and the election of Michael Romanov, increased the magnitude and changed the nature of imperial celebrations. These were mass gatherings, rivaling or exceeding in numbers the coronation celebrations, that allowed the tsar to make direct contact with the people. Nicholas II viewed them as a symbolic mandate

<sup>26</sup> M. P. Pogodin, *Istoriko-kriticheskie otryvki* (Moscow, 1846), 2; P. Miliukov, *Glavnye tsecheniia russkoi istoricheskoi mysli* (Moscow, 1898), 1:365.

<sup>27</sup> A Japanese journalist seeking models for imperial appearances in Japan observed, in 1889, that European people greeted their monarchs or presidents when they approached. “All wave their hats, wave their handkerchiefs and shout a congratulatory ‘hooray’ [English in original] in unison” (Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*, 165).

more indicative of the people's feelings than the electoral mandate of the Duma.

The incorporation of large numbers of peasants into the presentations of the monarchy revealed the incongruities of using the imperial myth to govern a mass society. The problem of organizing such ceremonies while protecting the security of the members of the imperial family often led to extreme and conspicuous police measures that belied the claims of popularity. The peasants' responses were often orchestrated. Their perceptions of such events are difficult or impossible to measure. The great majority lived outside the ambit of imperial ceremonies. Historical works have suggested that the peasants thought of the tsar in terms of unchanging symbols, as the little father (*batiushka-tsar*), and that such "peasant monarchism" declined under the influence of the economic and political changes of the early twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> This study is concerned not with peasant mentalities but with peasants as representations in imperial scenarios that the tsars believed were characteristic of the Russian peasantry as a whole.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the growth of literacy and the development of a mass-circulation press, led the monarchy to make increasing use of the media of modern publicity. By 1914, urban literacy had reached 45 percent. Rural literacy had also risen, to about 25 percent. But literacy was higher in areas near industrial cities, such as Moscow Province where it was over 70 percent. By World War I, 68 percent of army recruits were literate. Circulation of newspapers and books rose rapidly, especially after the reform of the censorship laws in 1906. Newspapers and particularly books began to reach the villages, where peasants would sit in groups listening to a reader, frequently an adolescent boy.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> On the phenomenon of "peasant monarchism," see Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston, 1976); and Terence Emmons, "The Peasant and the Emancipation," in Wayne Vucinich, ed., *The Peasant in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Stanford, 1968), 41–71. On peasant utopias, see K. V. Chistov, *Russkie sotsial'no-utopicheskie legendy XVII–XIXvv.* (Moscow, 1967); and Maurine Perrie, *The Image of Ivan IV in Russian Folklore* (Cambridge, 1987). Jeffrey Brooks argues on the basis of popular literature that the peasants in the early twentieth century increasingly sought their national identity in the empire, in various forms of superiority to other nationalities, rather than in allegiance to tsar and orthodoxy (Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton, N.J., 1985), 241–45).

<sup>29</sup> On urban literacy, see Gregory Guroff and S. Frederick Starr, "A Note on Urban Literacy in Russia, 1890–1914," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 19 (1971): 520–31. On rural literacy, see Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 3–4, and passim. The figures show great increases in numbers of newspapers and in circulation, but the various statistics are inconsistent in terms of specific numbers for the most important newspapers (Caspar Ferenczi, "Freedom of the Press under the Old Regime, 1905–1914," in Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson, eds., *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia* [Oxford, 1989], 205–7; Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass Circulation Press* [Princeton, N.J., 1991], Appendix A; and Charles A. Ruud, *Russian Entrepreneur: Publisher Ivan Sytin of Moscow, 1851–1934* [Montreal, 1990], 41, 88, 106, 114, 127). On the censorship law of 1906, see

The press and popular books were used to spread the image of the tsar to the population and to demonstrate the people's support for Nicholas's rule. Newspapers, both official and commercial, brought knowledge of imperial ceremonies and the tsar's person into the everyday lives of the people. But modern publicity could also be detrimental to the monarchy. Not only was it harder for the government to control the content of proliferating newspapers, but the greater variety of newsworthy items and celebrities diminished the relative space devoted to the imperial family. After 1905 Nicholas used the press to compete with the Duma and the political parties for the people's allegiance. For the first time a Russian tsar descended into open political struggle and sacrificed the epic distance that had elevated imperial power. Seeking to defend his autocratic prerogatives, Nicholas alienated traditional supporters of the monarchy, as well as those promoting the new institutions, and jeopardized the sacrosanct image of tsar.

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Charles Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804–1906* (Toronto, 1982), 207–26; and Ferenczi, “Freedom of the Press,” 191–205.