

ENDRE SASHALMI

## **WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PUBLIC AND INCREASED RULER VISIBILITY**

### **The Tsar's Image and His Mortal Body as Means of Fostering National Cohesion during the Reign of Tsar Alexander III (1881–1894)**

This study discusses the different forms and media of ruler visibility in Russia in a period marked by the paradox between the withdrawal from the public by tsar Alexander III and his increased visibility when he came to the throne after the assassination of his father. I explore how old and new media (icons and posters e.g.) were used for the purpose of strengthening loyalty to the ruler. With this writing, I intend to complement what Richard Wortman has written in his magisterial book on the scenarios of power concerning the reign of Alexander III. At the same time, I try to place the topic within the framework of Russian nationalism of the late 19th century.

*Keywords: iconography, coronation, coronation jetons, lubki, funeral, crypto-portrait icons, concept of state, the "tsar's two bodies", coinage, beard as a sign of Russianness, autocracy, russkii, rossiiskii, nationalism.*

## I. METHODOLOGICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL PROLEGOMENA\*

Darin Stephanov defines “modern ruler visibility” as “a composite concept” which combines “projected traits of personal character, with short-term and long-term imperatives of policy, both domestically and abroad. It incorporates not only a physical aspect – a monarch’s more active participation in public events and ceremonies – but also the more frequent occurrence of references to and discussions of his person in the press.”<sup>1</sup> According to these criteria the reign of Tsar Alexander III will no doubt qualify as the years of *increased ruler visibility, despite his marked withdrawal from public events and ceremonies* compared to the previous reigns.

The discussion of *ruler visibility* with regard to the Russian Empire must definitely begin, and, one may say not without a firm foundation, also end with a reference to Richard Wortman’s magisterial two-volume book entitled *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*. In the second volume of his work which has the subtitle, *From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, part 2 is dedicated to the reign of Alexander III with the heading: ‘*Alexander III and the Inception of a National Myth*’.<sup>2</sup> Wortman’s concluding remarks concerning the reign of Alexander III, together with the statement in his introduction to this volume regarding the change of paradigm beginning with the accession of Alexander III in presenting the ruler to his subjects, can serve as a justification of the title chosen for this paper:

“The presentation of Alexander’s death in the Russian and foreign press created the legend of a *beloved and powerful national leader*. [...] *Despite the famine and the absence of public participation* [...] these evocations left the impression that Russia was better off and more powerful than in 1881,

---

\* The work was created in commission of the National University of Public Service under the priority project KÖFOP-2.1.2-VEKOP-15-2016-00001 titled “Public Service Development Establishing Good Governance”.

- 1 DARIN STEPHANOV, “Public Celebrations of Emperor Nicholas I (1825–1855) in the Grand Duchy of Finland, Typology, Dynamics, Impact”, in: *academia.edu* 2, fn. 4. (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)
- 2 RICHARD S. WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) vol. II. 159–270. Italics are mine!

a feeling widely held among the officials and, most importantly by Nicholas II when he ascended the throne.”<sup>3</sup>

“Two overarching myths, a European and a National myth framed the presentation of political power in Russia from Peter the Great to the abdication of Nicholas II [...]. Only with the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 did the emperor and his advisers *introduced a myth to preserve absolute power that emphasized the monarch’s national character.*”<sup>4</sup>

Although the *paradox between public withdrawal and increased ruler visibility as such* was not treated in Wortman’s classical work, still, my paper can be just a small contribution to this issue focusing on those aspects which were not at all, or not discussed at due length by Wortman, but were crucial, in my view, in fostering ‘national’ cohesion. These aspects concern, above all, *coinage*, the importance of *coronation jetons*, the old-new iconographic device in icon painting that I call *crypto-portrait icons*, a genre of popular graphic art called *lubok*,<sup>5</sup> and to a lesser extent *some rituals* to be specified later on. All these can be subsumed under Wortman’s term, *scenarios*, as it was defined by him very broadly: he used “the term *scenario* to describe the individual modes of performance of the imperial myth”.<sup>6</sup>

3 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*. 305. Italics are mine!

4 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, 6. Italics are mine! The term, *absolute power*, should be changed into *autocratic power* to understand the crucial difference between western absolute monarchies that had existed previously in Europe, and the Russian political system! There is no space to go into details here, but it must be noted that *absolute power* did not mean legally unlimited power, so it did not involve the idea that the ruler was completely above all laws whatsoever, while this was a *conditio sine qua non* of autocracy as it was clearly stated in the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire in 1832, as we shall see later. For the problem of *absolute monarchy - autocracy* see my article: ENDRE SASHALMI, “ ‘God is High up, the Tsar is Faw Away’: The Nature of Polity and Political Culture in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Russia. A Comparative View”, in: WIM BLOCKMANS, ANDERÉ HOLENSTEIN, JON MATHIEU (eds.) *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe 1300–1900* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009, (131–148.) 138–141.

5 The Russian word *lubok* (plural: *lubki*) means folk picture, cheap popular print (broadside or poster) which appeared in Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century but became more important from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and really flourished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it became widespread as a genre serving the needs of the common folk for pleasure. Its production began as simple woodcuts but with the improvement of technology the quality changed significantly in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when lithographic method was adopted, and ‘*lubok culture*’ became a kind of national characteristic by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

6 RICHARD S. WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Peter the Great to Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), vol. I., 6.

Scenarios visualizing the *ruler's portrait* and involving *his mortal body* remained important in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russia because of the ill-developed concept of the *state* (in Russian: *gosudarstvo*). The personal or *natural body of the ruler* was by far more important than the '*body politic*'.<sup>7</sup> This latter term deserves to be put in brackets in the Russian context because this metaphor, i.e. the *organic notion of the political community* which eventually acquired *legal-corporate character* and became an entity with rights of its own, a phenomenon common to Western political thought from the Late Middle Ages on, never fully emerged in Russia.<sup>8</sup> Since this organic-corporate phenomenon was the prerequisite for the emergence of the notion of the state, it is important to keep in mind Edward Muir's eloquent statement: "Long before the state became the abstract legal entity as it is today, it was a *body politic*."<sup>9</sup> Under these circumstances "the notion of the *state* as an impersonal institution operating according to laws of its own" was virtually unknown in Russia, and remained an ideal of Westernized bureaucrats, as it did not acquire "an existence independent from the person of the monarch as it did in France or England"<sup>10</sup> The reason for this was not so much the "highly literal and personalized symbolic world of Russian monarchy", as Wortman claims,<sup>11</sup> but rather *autocracy itself!* Autocracy, as we shall see, *eo ipso* precluded the full realization of the *concept of the state in the Western sense*, and an important further factor hindering its completion lay in the Russian language. The Russian word, *gosudarstvo*, which came to designate the *state*, unlike the Western terms employed to name this impersonal legal entity (*state, stato, état*, etc.), was *closely associated with the person of the ruler*, as it was derived from the word *gosudar'*, a title of the ruler in Muscovite times (when the ruler was *tsar* and *gosudar'*, and the latter term referred to the unlimited nature of ruling power). The word *gosudar'* was still in use in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in addressing the ruler, or as a general term,

7 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Peter the Great to Nicholas I*, 405.

8 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Peter the Great to Nicholas I*, 405–406. For this whole issue see in details: ENDRE SASHALMI, "Proprietary Dynasticism and the Development of the Concept of State in 17th-Century Russia. Richard Pipes's Interpretation of Muscovy and the European Perspective", *Specimina nova. Pars Prima. Sectio Mediaevalis III*. Pécs, 2005. (165–202.)

9 EDWARD MUIR, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 232. Italics are mine!

10 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, 7.

11 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, 7.

meaning ruler. Consequently, the term *gosudarstvo* had a very personal connotation, and, unlike the *state/état*, which were the derivatives of the Latin *status*, did not have a legal implication either. Simon Dixon superbly summarized how *gosudarstvo* was understood even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “it was not conceived as a political agent on its own right to which all subjects owed allegiance and which the tsar had the duty to maintain, but rather as an object, itself under the control of the tsar – it was his ‘state’ to use as he pleased, the state which he upheld to maintain his own position”.<sup>12</sup> This statement concords with Wortman’s view expressed in his introduction to the 2013 collection of his works, where he makes a clear distinction between *Russian monarchy* and the *Russian state*. In his perception, these two notions are often conflated in historical works, despite the fact that “the relationship between the two was never clearly defined”.<sup>13</sup> The monarchy “as an institution” was “set above the state, dominating and engulfing the organs of the state in the figure of the ruling emperor”.<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon had very important consequences for the understanding of the concept of *nation* in Russia, on the one hand. On the other hand, this phenomenon entailed that “institutional and symbolic change took place within the parameters set by a political culture for personal rule” with the result that “the representation of the monarch became paramount”.<sup>15</sup>

One of the many merits of Wortman’s works is, that Russian monarchy, which in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe was generally called *autocracy*, can no longer be seen and studied as a static regime, simply on the basis of its political institutions, but indeed as one which reacted to the challenges coming from both outside and inside, and developed different “scenarios” to foster cohesion.<sup>16</sup> This was all the more important because Russia, as many historians noted, was “notoriously undergoverned” by European standards, despite the fact that there was a considerable improvement in the per capita bureaucracy by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup>

---

12 SIMON DIXON, *The Modernisation of Russia 1676–1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 190–191. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818585>

13 RICHARD S. WORTMAN, *Russian Monarchy. Representation and Rule*. (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), XIV. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt21h4wbq>

14 WORTMAN, *Russian Monarchy. Representation and Rule*, XVI.

15 WORTMAN, *Russian Monarchy. Representation and Rule*, XVI, XX.

16 For the purely practical, institutional issues of governing see PETER WALDRON, *Governing Tsarist Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007)

17 STEPHEN VELYCHENKO, “The Size of the Imperial Russian Bureaucracy and Army in Comparative Perspective” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 49, H. 3 (2001) (346–362.) 351–357.

In addition to that, the empire contained more than 200 nationalities, and the scenarios employed until 1881 were “dynastic and imperial” designed to achieve *cohesion between the dynasty and the ruling elites*, while from the accession of Alexander III, rather the *cohesion between the tsar and the masses* became the goal.<sup>18</sup>

In discussing the visibility of the ruler in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian Empire, one should start with the recognition of the fact that its monarch, although officially called ‘*Emperor of All the Russias*’ from 1721 on when Peter the Great took the title *imperator*, was still the *Tsar* to the overwhelming majority of the population. According to the view of the Russian Orthodox Church and Orthodox believers, he was “*obraz Bozhij /Boga*”, that is the “*image/icon of God*” on earth, as the Russian word *obraz* meant (among others) not only ‘*image*’ in general, but was also synonym with the Russian word *ikona*, i.e. *icon*, meaning image in the narrower, religious sense of the word. Indeed, the importance attributed to the *natural body of the ruler* was due to this extreme elevation of his person which can be seen as a corollary to the underdeveloped notion of the state. This semi-divine position of the ruler is well attested by the collection of proverbs published in 1869, in which there are more than a hundred ones under the heading *Tsar*, and roughly in one-third of them *Tsar and God* are mentioned together. This phenomenon means that *Tsar and God* were conceived as two interdependent and almost co-equal powers.<sup>19</sup> The words uttered by Tsar Alexander II (1855-1881) eloquently express the importance of Russian proverb mentality in general: “*All the countries live in accordance with the Law, and Russia – in accordance with proverbs and sayings.*”

The *increased emphasis* placed on the *person of the tsar and his sacral image* became *especially pronounced* with Alexander III, expressed in imagery and the written word as well, due to the cultural turn which can be best called ‘*the return to Muscovite Orthodoxy*’. For Alexander III turned away from Western imagery which came to Russia with Peter the Great, the phenomenon that James Cracraft called the “*Petrine Revolution in Russian Imagery*”.<sup>20</sup> With Alexander III’s accession “representations of monarchical

---

18 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, 219.

19 TIBOR SZAMUELY, *The Russian Tradition*. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974), 67.

20 JAMES CRACRAFT, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Imagery*. (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1997)

power” changed: “Gone were the times when classical antiquity and Western European Imperial forms dominated the scene.”<sup>21</sup>

The following statement written on Late Imperial Russia, though not wholly correct and to be commented on later on, will give a sense of my forthcoming exposition of how the *visibility of the ruler increased* and was *used to foster Russianness* in the *national* sense under Alexander III:

“In terms of the development of popular attitudes Tsarism was incessantly reinforced in *words and images* emanating from both state and Church. Until 1917 the Tsar’s visage adorned all official places as well as the coinage and his name was invoked in most legal and public actions.”<sup>22</sup>

Before going further, it is necessary to explain briefly what is meant by *Russianness* in the ‘*national*’ sense of the term *Russian*. Even the term ‘*national*’ would be misleading without an immediate qualification. For a government decree of 1904 still *defined people of Russian nationality in religious terms*, as it stated that subjects counted as Russian nationals should only be those who professed the Orthodox faith: *therefore being Russian and being Orthodox went together*.<sup>23</sup> What did it mean to be *Russian* after all? As it was noted by Geoffrey Hosking (and many others before him), there are two words in the Russian language, namely *ruskii* and *rossiiskii* which are translated into English (and also Hungarian for example) with one word only, that is *Russian*. The two words, however, reflect that “there are *two kinds of Russianness*, one connected with the *people, the language*, [we may add: *the ‘Russian soul’*] the pre-imperial principalities” and derives from the word *Rus’*, whereas the other is connected “with the *territory, the multinational empire*”, the *state*, and comes from the word *Rossiia*.<sup>24</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century *Rossiia* became the official designation of the territories absorbed by Muscovy: besides *Rossiia* we also encounter the term *Rossiiskoe gosudarstvo*, which in the 17<sup>th</sup> century context can be translated as the ‘*Russian realm*’ – this term is in use even today but with the modern meaning, the ‘*Russian state*’. It was also from the adjective *rossiiskii* that the new title of Peter the Great, *Vserossiiskii Imperator* (All-Russian Emperor),

---

21 HUBERTIS F. JAHN, “‘Us’: Russians on Russianness”, in *National Identity in Russian Culture*, eds SIMON FRANKLIN, EMMA WIDDIS (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 63.

22 LEONID HERETZ, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity, Popular Religion and Traditional Culture under the Last Tsars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 124. Italics are mine! <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497179>

23 THEODOR R. WEEKS, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia. Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier 1863–1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 8.

24 GEOFFREY HOSKING, *Russia. People and Empire 1552–1917* (London: Fontana, 1998), xix. Italics are mine!

and hence the new official designation of the state, *Vserossiiskaia Imperiia* (All-Russian Empire) was derived in 1721. In these cases the *adjective did not refer to ethnicity* at all. ‘All-Russian’, indeed, meant one’s *belonging to the empire* either as a subject, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, or its ruler, as the adjective *Vserossiiskii* was on the coins of the tsars, Alexander III included: ‘All-Russian Emperor and Autocrator’ being the full official title of the ruler. Therefore, *Vserossiiskii* referred to the *multi-ethnic character* of the empire.

This intitulation was used in the official legal definition of the ruler’s power in 1832 in the Fundamental Laws of the Empire which remained in force until 1906:

*“The All-Russian (Vserossiiskii) Emperor is an unlimited and autocratic monarch. To obey his highest power, not only out of fear but out of conscience, God Himself commands.”*<sup>25</sup>

*What was, then, the ‘nation’ in Russia? Which word was used to designate it in Russian: a loanword or an indigenous term? What does it mean, what Wortman called, the emphasis on “the monarch’s national character” with regard to Alexander III? Let me postpone the clarification of these questions to the description of the change in the image of rulership under Alexander III.*

## II. ACCESSION TO THE THRONE AND CORONATION

Alexander III came to the throne in 1881 after the assassination of his father, Alexander II. Because of the many previous failed attempts at the life of tsar Alexander II, the new tsar saw his father’s reign as a period when the traditional values of Orthodox Russia, including the unquestionable

25 In Wortman’s view “the charisma of autocracy emanated in part from the emperor’s superiority to law” (WORTMAN, *Russian Monarchy. Representation and Rule*, XV.) which is explicitly expressed here. I claim, however, that the argument should go the other way around: it was due to the charismatic nature of the ruler (as the *image of God*) that he was conceived to be above the laws. This phenomenon is implied by the second part of the sentence quoted, as it is a *borrowing from St Paul’s letter to the Romans* on the issue of obedience to powers, as I have shown. Similarly, 19<sup>th</sup>-century official commentaries on autocracy emphasized the tsar’s close relationship with God: the adapted passage from the Book of Proverbs, “*The heart of the Tsar is in God’s hand*”, was the trump card, encountered not only in official sources beginning from the 16<sup>th</sup> century but also in collections of proverbs from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. SASHALMI, “*‘God is High up, the Tsar is Faw Away’: The Nature of Polity and Political Culture in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Russia. A Comparative View*”, 139. For a short but good treatment of the same issue (of the tsar’s divine right and his relationship to law) see also: WALDRON, *Governing Tsarist Russia*, 15–22.

respect for the tsar, were jeopardized or gone due to his father's liberal reforms. It is the irony of Russian history that the life of Alexander II, Russia's greatest reformer tsar, ended so tragically. Alexander III firmly believed that his father's fate was the result of his liberal policy: therefore, he saw preservation of autocracy unchanged as the pillar of social and political stability – a belief inculcated into him by Pobedonostev, his tutor and chief procurator of the Holy Synod.<sup>26</sup> Alexander III's manifesto in 1881 made it clear that the golden thread of his reign would be precisely to preserve "the power and justice of autocratic authority. [...] from any pretensions to it."<sup>27</sup>

The most immediate task was, however, to improve the tsar's personal security: serious measures were taken to protect the tsar's life, and the tsar practically disappeared from the public view of the capital, St Petersburg.<sup>28</sup> While Nicholas I and Alexander II often rode or even simply walked through the streets of the capital, Alexander III tended to withdraw from public appearance, restricting them mainly to the possible minimum. Moreover, his withdrawal was even furthered by the fact, that instead of living in the new capital established by Peter the Great, he preferred to stay in his strictly guarded *Gatchina Palace*, i.e. in one of St. Petersburg suburban palaces (46 kilometres from the city). He lived there for the most of his reign.<sup>29</sup> The security measures worked well, there was only one plot to kill him in 1887, on the day of the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his father's murder. (Lenin's elder brother was also involved in the plot and was executed for it.)

Alexander III's most important public appearances were in religious rituals, including his *coronation* which will be treated separately. Some of these rituals were age-old, such as his participation in the *Epiphany ritual*, while others were more recent ones, such as his presence at the *consecration or founding of churches*. To these rituals some purely public appearances can be added: his visits to theatre plays, but most notably, his *few trips in the country using the advantages provided by the railroad*.

Knowing these, one would think that the visibility of the ruler was shrinking during Alexander III's reign but, in fact, the opposite is true. *The ruler's visibility increased considerably through those means of media which had the most immediate reach to the public: coinage, icons, and the popular prints, the so-called 'lubki'. These means were the crucial ones, in*

---

26 FRANCIS WILLIAM WCISLO, *Reforming Rural Russia: State, Local Society, National Politics 1855–1914* Princeton: (Princeton University Press, 2014), 61.

27 WCISLO, *Reforming Rural Russia: State, Local Society, National Politics 1855–1914*, 61

28 EVGENII TOLMACHEV, *Aleksandr III i ego vremia* (Moscow: Terra, 2007), 202–203.

29 TOLMACHEV, *Aleksandr III i ego vremia*, 201.

my view, considering the highly image-based culture of Russia which was rooted in the role of icons in everyday life.<sup>30</sup> Long before Alexander III's accession a censorship law on the production of *lubok* was introduced. In 1851: this law "required all existing *lubok* plates be destroyed and all new ones registered with government censors".<sup>31</sup> As the law remained in force until 1917, it meant that, in principle, "all images had to be inspected by censorship committees".<sup>32</sup> *For us the crucial importance of this law lies in the fact, that the representation of the ruler's visual image was strictly controlled.* Therefore, *lubki* were an important means of conveying official political message, though it was just one aspect of the *lubki* as they were intended for pleasure. The political potential of this genre was used not only in 1883 to propagate the 'national' message of the coronation but generally for strengthening loyalty to the dynasty. Alexander III was usually shown in military uniform, but on everyday photos he looked like an ordinary Russian peasant as he liked wearing traditional peasant clothes.

This form of visual culture, that is '*lubok* culture', established its place besides the *traditional religious images*, i.e. the icons, and increasingly in a new format. "By the end of the nineteenth century cheap *lubok* books and illustrated periodicals appeared in every house: in the countryside and the cities, low-class rented apartments and peasant houses. Designed not only for reading, but also for viewing, they *satisfied the desire for images*. The illustrations would be cut out of magazines or *lubok* books, and would *replace lubki on the walls besides icons* or carefully collected in folders for personal enjoyment and entertainment."<sup>33</sup> According to one estimate the annual output of *lubok* literature in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was over 4 million copies!<sup>34</sup>

---

30 In every Orthodox Russian home there was a so-called *beautiful corner* where the icons were kept.

31 MARGARET BRIDGET BETZ, ANDREW M. NEDD, "Irony, Derision and Magical Wit: Censors as a Spur to Russian Abstract Art", in *Political Censorship of Visual Arts in 19th-century Europe*, eds. ROBERT JUSTIN GOLDSTEIN, ANDREW M. NEDD (Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2015), (9–60.) 12.

32 BETZ, NEDD, "Irony, Derision and Magical Wit: Censors as a Spur to Russian Abstract Art", 12.

33 HANNA CHUCHVAHA, *Art Periodical Culture in Late Imperial Russia (1898–1917). Print Modernism in Transition* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 25. Italics are mine! <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004301405>

34 CHUCHVAHA, *Art Periodical Culture in Late Imperial Russia (1898–1917). Print Modernism in Transition*, 24.

## CORONATION

Alexander III's coronation took place only in 1883, in Moscow, which remained the site of consecration of the Russian emperors. But after his accession to power in 1881, Alexander made *a visit to Moscow*, which had a symbolic meaning: *the return to the old Muscovite traditions*. Although coronation was the most important of the scenarios of Russian rulers, its impact, as for visibility, could be very different from ruler to ruler. I do not intend here to describe the lavish coronation ceremony of Alexander III and its public acclamation as it was amply discussed by Wortman in his works but the importance of the ritual has to be made plain: "A Russian coronation not only consecrated the Russian emperor, but also made known the image he intended to embody as a monarch, setting forth what might be described as the symbolic program for his reign."<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that not only the actual completion of Alexander III's coronation ritual but also *the heralding of this forthcoming event* was widely publicized. An eloquent proof of the latter is the manifesto containing an image of the ruling couple (image 1.),<sup>36</sup> while the accomplishment of the coronation was disseminated in 70 000 newspaper copies, by V. V. Komarov, which no doubt enjoyed government sponsorship.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, a lengthy book (of 469 pages with some pictures) was also issued by V.V. Komarov in 1883 in memory of the coronation of the imperial couple, describing the whole chain of events. The book began with a panegyric verse, which described the tsar's relationship with his people in a very patriarchal manner – similarly to Muscovite times, *the tsar was described as a father, while the people as his children, and the sanctity of the tsar's power* was also heavily stressed<sup>38</sup> – and it was followed by a historical overview of the inauguration ceremony of rulers from the era of Kivean Rus' before turning to the recent event.

The production of the (by then) traditional coronation album (coronation albums had their origin in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from 1730 on) was also important,

---

35 RICHARD S. WORTMAN, *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of Exploration. Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 277. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt21h4wkb>

36 Source of image: <http://v-murza.livejournal.com/105558.html> (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

37 WORTMAN, *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of Exploration. Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy*, 281.

38 VLADIMIR KOMAROV, *V pamiat' sviashchennogo koronovaniia gosudaria imperatora Alexandra III i gosudaryni imperatitsy Marii Fedorovny*. St Petersburg, 1883. <http://dlib.rsl.ru/viewer/01003547868#?page=7> (Accessed: Nov. 02, 2016.), 5–6.

but mainly for foreign audience. Its domestic impact could be very limited as it just targeted the highest strata of the ruling elite because of the small number of copies. The production of the highly decorative album altogether cost 92,376 roubles: there were 300 copies in Russian and 200 in French.<sup>39</sup> Despite its limited scope it was significant from the point of view that it set *the tone of the forthcoming rule*. “The Slavic revival script now serves less as an exotic flourish of decoration than as a sign of national character. For the first time in a coronation album, there are artistic references to the pre-Petrine coronations – small historical sketches of Muscovite scenes, of the bringing of regalia and the tsar at his coronation feast.”<sup>40</sup> In terms of *disseminating ruler visibility by word of mouth*, I find it very important that the common folk was also involved in the security measures of the coronation: there were about 20 000 loyal peasants recruited as volunteers to help the undercover agents, and, of course, the imperial guards during the coronation.

Let us see now the symbolic program of Alexander III’s reign as expressed in words, with the help of the text of the coronation album. The program of *unity between the Tsar and his people*, and with *his state* was clearly expressed as it described the coronation in the following manner:

*“It is this sacred, solemn, and all-national act that gives expression to the historical union of the Tsar with his State, his precept with his church, that is with the soul and conscience of his people, and finally, the union of the Tsar and the people with the Tsar of Tsars, in whose hands rests the fate of tsars and peoples.”*<sup>41</sup>

What is expressed here, is nothing else than the principles of educational policy expounded in 1833 by Uvarov, minister of education: this ideology had claimed that education should be conducted in the spirit of “*Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Peoplehood*” (*narodnost*).<sup>42</sup> The last element, *narodnost*, (which is generally but erroneously translated into English either as *Nationality* or *Nationhood*) was vaguely defined in the expositions of this ideology: it was simply referred to as the *devotion of the tsar’s subjects to*

39 WORTMAN, *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of Exploration. Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy*, 20.

40 WORTMAN, *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of Exploration. Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy*, 21.

41 WORTMAN, *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of Exploration. Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy*, 21. Italics are mine!

42 Besides *peoplehood*, the term *narodnost*’ can also be translated as “*a (sense of) belonging to the people.*” I am grateful to Darin Stephanov for offering these two terms for rendering this Russian word in English.

*Orthodoxy and Autocracy*. It was this last element of the triad that inspired a Russian historian in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to name this ideology *offitsial'naia narodnost'* which has been rendered in English, though incorrectly, as "Official Nationality". The problem is with the English term 'nationality' because it gives Western associations. The Russian term *narodnost'* derived from *narod*, meaning "people" in general, and at the same time, "the common folk", (and also "reflecting the ethnic aspect through the Russian soul")<sup>43</sup> should not be translated as *nationality*, because it would be misleading for the context of the time when the triad was formulated, i.e. during the reign of Nicholas I (1825–1855). The term *narodnost'* was deliberately chosen in 1833 instead of *natsiia* (*nation*), precisely to evade any hint of association with the word 'nation', because for the Russian government this latter term was overloaded with connotations of constitutionalism, radical social change: i.e. the very phenomena that were to be avoided in Russia!<sup>44</sup> *To be sure, the ideology expressed by Uvarov's triad was clearly Russia's conservative "response to the revolutionary slogan, 'liberty, equality, fraternity'".*<sup>45</sup> These terms were closely associated with the concept of the *nation* in the modern sense, but the Russian intention was clearly to differentiate between this French concept of the *nation* and the Russian values, as *narodnost'* was simply understood as, I have said, the strong commitment of the *people* (*narod*) of Russia to the Orthodoxy and Autocracy! That is why between the 1830s-1860s *narod*, *narodnost'* was the officially favored term.<sup>46</sup>

As nationalism was gaining strength in society and government policies in the second half of the nineteenth century, the term *nation* (*natsiia*) became an accepted one and *natsiia* replaced the term *narodnost'* by the 1880s. *Consequently a strong effort of Russification began, and the government policy was to make 'All-Russians' into Russian speaking (and preferably Orthodox) subjects.* This change in the concept of the 1833 doctrine towards a 'nationalistic' direction is clearly expressed by V. V. Komarov who, as we have seen, was the crucial person in popularizing Alexander III's coronation. Komarov who still used *narodnost'*, yet, emphasized 'Russianness', defined his political commitment as such: "*Predominance of the Russian folk*

43 TOOMAS KARJAHÄRM, "Terminology pertaining to ethnic relations as used in Late Imperial Russia" *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 2010, 15, (24–50.) 30. See the wording of the coronation album quoted! <https://doi.org/10.3176/hist.2010.1.02>

44 ALEKSEI MILLER, *Istoriia poniatiia "natsiia" v Rossii. Otechestvennye zapiski* (46) No. 1., 2012. <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2012/1/istoriya-ponyatiya-naciya-v-rossii> (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

45 WORTMAN, *Russian Monarchy. Representation and Rule*, 143.

46 MILLER, *Istoriia poniatiia "natsiia" v Rossii*

(*Preobladanie Russkoi narodnosti*), *the Supremacy of Orthodoxy, Autocracy united with People's local self-government*". (Under the latter term he meant the Slavophile ideal of village communities).<sup>47</sup>

Besides the text of the coronation cited, the *coronation jetons* and the *coronation coin* of Alexander III also underline the turn of the scenario, namely the emphasis on the national sentiment. The *lubki* below (images 2., 3.)<sup>48</sup>, printed on the occasion of the coronation, are again good examples of this turn. Though the prints here emphasize the multi-ethnic character of the empire, the *tsar's portrait with the beard* (also present on the coronation jetons and the coronation coin) was treated as a *sign of Russianness* by 1883! Furthermore, the *lubok* on the right side, and one of the coronation jetons, served the strengthening of the tsar's divine authority. Considering the fact that these media just mentioned were closely connected in their message, they will be treated together.

### III. THE 'BEARD ISSUE' AND RUSSIANNES ON LUBKI, CORONATION JETONS AND COINAGE

It happened during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 that Russian soldiers were allowed not to shave. At that time, the future Alexander III also stopped shaving his face "in order to show his patriotic loyalty to these men but also to eventually present himself in the mould of a medieval Russian knight (*bogatyř*)".<sup>49</sup> *This new image became much more than a personal habit.* Alexander III's beard "was soon seen as a symbol of national strength and old Muscovite strength and virility".<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, no other visible symbol of the new reign was more straightforward than the beard, which can be understood in the context of the well-known Petrine reform: compulsory shaving became an emblematic act of Peter the Great's reign, the sign of Westernization. Not only officials and officers, but also rank and file soldiers and town-dwellers did have the obligation to shave. While the overwhelming majority of the population remained peasants, and they had no obligation to shave, Alexander III's new bearded image was clearly a sign that the tsar associated himself with *Russian Orthodox tradition*, as shaving had been considered by male Orthodox believers as the distortion of Christ-like

47 [http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio\\_k/komarov\\_vv.html](http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_k/komarov_vv.html) (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

48 Source of images: <http://philologist.livejournal.com/5487745.html> (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

49 JAHN, " 'Us': Russians on Russianness", 63.

50 JAHN, " 'Us': Russians on Russianness", 63.

image of man! By the time coins with the bearded portrait of Alexander III appeared (1883), the imperial guards had already been allowed to have beards as a result of a decree passed soon after Alexander's accession.

A note on the role of Russian coronation jetons is necessary here to sense the importance of Alexander III's coronation jetons. As I have shown in my recent research on the iconography of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Russian coronation jetons, this medium became crucial in legitimating dubious/disputed claims to the throne: they became important in cases of legitimacy crises which, indeed, characterized 18<sup>th</sup>-century Russia until 1796. While this function of coronation jetons ceased from 1796 on, as succession was stabilized after the law of 1797 – the 1825 Decembrist uprising, emanating partly from an unpublicized succession issue, was just an intermezzo –, the jetons became simply informative conveying the fact of the coronation. *However, the legitimating function reappeared, though from a different perspective in 1881.* With the assassination of Alexander II *the legitimacy of the tsarist regime. i.e. autocracy itself was called into question*, a form of government rooted exclusively in divine appointment, the *divine right of the tsars*. The artistic composition of the *lubok* on the right side with its scattered scenes gives an *iconic impression* and it clearly represents the *divine right of the Russian emperor*. This ideology is expressed by the rays of Sun (divine grace) which come through the clouds (the iconographic representation of Heaven) and illuminate the Russian imperial crown, as well as the inscription in the rays '*God save the Tsar.*' The tsar is crowned from the Heavens, and he is even depicted as an intercessor or mediator between God and the people, which, in fact, he was according to the Orthodox Church.

The widespread popularization of Alexander III's coronation "*in images and texts*", as it has been described, i.e. in popular prints, newspapers, drawings and even in official edicts etc., taken as a whole, promoted *the Russian national sentiment*, and at the same time expressed the very image that the "monarch was God's living deputy on earth, a living icon, a source of protection and redemption".<sup>51</sup> Now, let us examine, in this spirit, the coronation jetons of Alexander III. In the middle of the obverse of this jeton below (image 4.)<sup>52</sup> we can see the inscription: [*They are*] '*Crowned in Moscow 15th of May 1883*' , while on the rim the inscriptions says: '*God save the*

51 OLEG TARASOV, *Framing Russian Art: From Early Icons to Malevich* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 252.

52 Source of image: [http://www.ebay.com/sch/sis.html?\\_nkw=RUSSIAN+EMPIRE+SILVER+RUBLE+1883+Coronation+of+Alexander+III](http://www.ebay.com/sch/sis.html?_nkw=RUSSIAN+EMPIRE+SILVER+RUBLE+1883+Coronation+of+Alexander+III) (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

*Tsar*. This inscription, and the one on the *lubok* (on the right side), is none other than the *first line of the Russian imperial anthem*, which was played during the coronation feast! Therefore, both the *lubok* and this coronation jeton underline the issue of *the intimate relationship between divinely sanctioned autocracy and identity*. The Russian Imperial anthem composed under Nicholas I in 1833, and “written under his supervision”, created “a national atmosphere around the monarch, a sense of uplift and inspiration identified later in the century as characteristically Russian”.<sup>53</sup> The first verse of the anthem reads as follows:

*God save the Tsar!*  
*Powerful, Mighty,*  
*Rule for our glory,*  
*Rule for the fear of the enemies!*  
*Orthodox Tsar!*  
*God save the Tsar!*

The obverse of another coronation jeton (image 5.)<sup>54</sup> contains the portraits of the tsar and tsaritsa and their identification with their given names, while the reverse says: ‘*God is with us.*’ What is, again, important here, is the tsar’s portrait, as *he is depicted with the beard*.

The bearded portrait also appears on the *coronation coin, i.e. the silver coronation rouble of Alexander III*. On this commemorative coronation coin (image 6.),<sup>55</sup> besides *autocratic power* (expressed by the regalia and the inscription ‘*By the Grace of God Alexander III All-Russian Emperor and Autocrator*’) the other *message was Russianness*, conveyed by the *bearded portrait of the tsar*.

This coronation coin takes us to a broader problem, the issue of *ruler visibility on coins*! In Hungarian, for instance, we say ‘*head or writing*’ (i.e. inscription) in case we want to decide something by fortune and the decision is made by a coin. The corresponding English phrase is: ‘*heads or tails*’. In Russian the same phrase is, ‘*orel ili reshka*’, i.e. ‘*eagle or rail*’, and it is not accidental in my view! The eagle, of course refers to the double-headed eagle, the coat of arms of Russia, while the designation of *reshka*

53 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Peter the Great to Nicholas I*, 388.

54 Source of image: [http://www.ebay.com/sch/sis.html?\\_nk=RUSSIAN+EMPIRE+SILVER+RUBLE+1883+Coronation+of+Alexander+III](http://www.ebay.com/sch/sis.html?_nk=RUSSIAN+EMPIRE+SILVER+RUBLE+1883+Coronation+of+Alexander+III) (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

55 Source of image: <http://www.imperialrussia.com/romanovcoronation/rouble1883coronation.html> (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

literally means 'rail'. (This designation is most probably explained by the fact that some images on the reverse of coins *consisted of lines*, and hence made the association in people's mind with a rail or fence.) Whatever the real origin of the term *reshka* is, the following facts remain. *The double-headed eagle was the most common iconographic theme on 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian coins, and not the given ruler's portrait who was in power at a given time.* "Inscribed on most coins, the crowned, double-headed eagle was a symbol virtually synonymous with Imperial Russia."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the vast majority of circulating coins "made no reference at all to a specific monarch": "Typical small value coins carried the double-headed eagle, the statement of value, and the year."<sup>57</sup> And tsars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "avoided the use of the imperial portrait on coins for much of the nineteenth century."<sup>58</sup> *No wonder that under these circumstances the Russian language did not refer to the (ruler's) portrait!*

Indeed, after the reign of Emperor Paul I (1796–1801) there was a clear tendency in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the rulers' portraits to disappear from coins. Therefore, it was not merely a gross exaggeration but an error to state that "until 1917 the Tsar's visage adorned all official places as well as the coinage". However, statements in specialized literature are not always reliable either. The claim that Nicholas I "never placed his effigy on circulating coins", and his son, Alexander II "continued the practice and never appeared on circulating coinage",<sup>59</sup> is also false. But the author rightly calls attention to Alexander III's reign: "In 1885, however, a rouble with Alexander's portrait was minted to mark his coronation. This precedent-breaking issue was followed by a *regular portrait coinage beginning in 1886.*"<sup>60</sup> *This change deserves a careful analysis: especially in the context of the image-centred Russian mentality.* On the basis of the catalogue of Russian coins, I can draw the following conclusion.

The 25 silver *kopek* denomination which was minted from the reign of Alexander I (1801–1825) contained no portrait of the ruler until 1885, but afterwards the portrait became a standard.<sup>61</sup> Similar is the case of

---

56 PAUL D. VAN WIE, *Image. History and Politics. The Coinage of Modern Europe* (New York-Oxford: University Press of America, 1999), 91.

57 VAN WIE, *Image. History and Politics. The Coinage of Modern Europe*, 91–92.

58 VAN WIE, *Image. History and Politics. The Coinage of Modern Europe*, 92.

59 VAN WIE, *Image. History and Politics. The Coinage of Modern Europe*, 91. Italics are mine!

60 VAN WIE, *Image. History and Politics. The Coinage of Modern Europe*, 91. Orlov, however, gives 1883 as the year of issue of the coronation coin (i.e. the year of the coronation). See later! Italics are mine!

61 ANTON PAVLOVICH ORLOV, *Monety Rossii 1700–1917* (Moscow, 1994), 132.

the 50 silver *kopek* denomination, though its minting was only between 1892-1894, and it was produced in very small quantities (1892: 2006, 1893: 4008, 1894: no data).<sup>62</sup> In case of the *one rouble silver coin* there is no portrait of the ruler in power after 1831, though during the reign of Nicholas I large quantities were minted with his brother's, Alexander I's portrait. Nevertheless, the number of *one rouble silver coins* without rulers' portraits is greater.<sup>63</sup> Beginning from 1883 there is a marked change when 279 143 *one rouble silver coronation coins* were minted.<sup>64</sup> *And altogether a bit over 7 millions of one rouble silver coins were minted during the rest of Alexander III's reign!*<sup>65</sup> *Probably no other medium could compete with this regarding ruler visibility and fostering Russian nationalism (because of the national significance of beard).* At the same time, the crucial information to evaluate this impact would be the data on the purchasing power of the *one rouble silver coin* because it would help us understand more precisely which strata of the society were the most familiar with it. To sum up: the *one rouble silver coin* with the bearded portrait of the tsar had the intention to blur the difference between the inscription "*Vserossiikii*" (present on the coin) and *russkii*, as the beard was the marker of Russianness, since the attribute of being *russkii* was, first of all, one's belonging to the Orthodox faith!

*But what about banknotes in Russia, especially under Alexander III?*<sup>66</sup> Well, they did not contain the portrait of the reigning tsar! If they had a portrait on their back, the portraits were of historical figures: the first two Romanov tsars, Catherine the Great and Dmitri Donskoi!<sup>67</sup> Similar was the situation with Alexander II's banknotes!<sup>68</sup>

---

62 ORLOV, *Monety Rossii 1700–1917*, 154.

63 ORLOV, *Monety Rossii 1700–1917*, 188–192.

64 ORLOV, *Monety Rossii 1700–1917*, 194.

65 But after 1883 the double-headed eagle was on the reverse.

66 GEORGE S. CUHAJ, *Standard Catalogue of World Paper Money, General Issues 1368–1960* (Iola: Krause Publications, 2010), 1021.

67 CUHAJ, *Standard Catalogue of World Paper Money, General Issues 1368–1960*, 1021.

68 CUHAJ, *Standard Catalogue of World Paper Money, General Issues 1368–1960*, 1020.

#### IV. CRYPTO-PORTRAIT ICONS, AND ICONS WITH NAMESAKE SAINTS OF THE IMPERIAL FAMILY

There is an eloquent example of how different forms of visibility could interact, which again underlines the turn towards old Muscovite imagery under Alexander III. In 1885 an icon was made in Kholui (image 7.), one of the greatest icon painting centres of Russia, and one of the figures of this icon (the second on the bottom left) was *intended to have the countenance of tsar Alexander III*.<sup>69</sup> The icon is called the ‘*Assembly of Archangel Michael with selected Saints*’ and its cartouche, on its lower border, has the inscription: ‘*In memory of the martyrdom of the Emperor Alexander II Nikolayevich and in honour of the most august family of the happily now-reigning Emperor Alexander III Aleksandrovich*’.<sup>70</sup> A detail, crucial for us, was given by Tarasov concerning this icon: “On the left end of the board an explanation has been added (doubtless by the painter’s hand): ‘*Depiction of the Emperor Alexander III. A. N. Artamonov*.’”<sup>71</sup> Tarasov’s comment on this point is also vital: “It is most likely that this indicated the wishes of the patron, and assumed that the countenance of Alexander Nevsky – the 13<sup>th</sup>-century name saint and protector of the ‘happily now reigning’ Alexander III – should be given the real features of the Emperor’s own face.”<sup>72</sup> This phenomenon described here was clearly the revival of a Muscovite practice originating precisely two hundred years earlier in the 1680s! “Depictions of name saints with facial features of the Tsar or members of his circle began to appear more and more from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>73</sup> This phenomenon I call *crypto-portrait icons*. (Also, from the 1660s “icons carrying representations of royal personages began to appear in official Orthodox places of worship”.<sup>74</sup>) The Kholui icon clearly shows a new phase of sacralisation of the Tsar/Emperor through *crypto-portrait icons*. Although we do not know, unfortunately, how many copies of this and other icons of similar programme were made, the following astonishing data given in Tarasov’s book can provide an insight into the *ruler visibility issue in icons*. He claims that by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the icon production

69 Source of image: OLEG TARASOV, *Ikona i blagochestie* (Moscow: Progress-Kultura, 1995), plate 47.

70 OLEG TARASOV, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Places in Imperial Russia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 224.

71 TARASOV, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Places in Imperial Russia*, 224.

72 TARASOV, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Places in Imperial Russia*, 224.

73 TARASOV, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Places in Imperial Russia*, 224–225.

74 TARASOV, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Places in Imperial Russia*, 145.

*in Kholui alone reached unimaginable figures: it was between 1.5–2 millions a year!*<sup>75</sup> When the imperial family miraculously survived the train crash of Borki in 17 October 1888, “the event was officially deemed a ‘miracle by the mercy of God’ in a manifesto 23 October”, and its impact was so great, that later the miracle “even inspired believers to dedicate new chapels to this event”.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, this miracle immediately resulted in a great upsurge in icon trade.

After the 1888 miracle, icons depicting group of saints who were namesake saints of the imperial family became common, one of which can be seen here (image 8.).<sup>77</sup> Even though there is no resemblance in this icon with the portrait of the tsar, we can suppose, on the basis of the former example of the crypto-portrait icon, that some of the icons depicting the group of namesake saints of the imperial family were more ‘real’ as for the countenance of the tsar. The connection of this icon with the imperial family is evident, as in the lower margin of the cartouche it is inscribed: “*Lord Save the Imperial Family, Bless the Righteous.*” Furthermore, the tsar is clearly identified in this icon (in the guise of his namesake, the Kievan prince, Alexander Nevskii) *by the mantle which could be known to contemporaries from images (lubki, for instance) depicting the tsar’s coronation. The abovementioned facts mean, that the reigning ruler was visible, even though his countenance did not have resemblance to that of the reigning tsar.*

The *bearded portrait of Alexander III on his coinage* and in the *crypto-portrait icons* confirm Wortman’s statement (who did not deal with these issues at all) that the primary image of the ruler moved from that of “Westernized emperor” to a tsar who was the “Most Russian of Russians”.<sup>78</sup> This is not a coincidence that Alexander III was given the epithet, the “Peasant Tsar” (*Muzhitskii Tsar*), which “he probably regarded as a compliment”.<sup>79</sup> The “by-product” of this change of image was Russification, in Finland for instance, and violent attacks (*pogroms*) against the Jews. Alexander III’s

75 TARASOV, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Places in Imperial Russia*, 55.

76 VERA SHEVZOV, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 115. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195154657.001.0001>

77 Source of image: <https://www.the-saleroom.com/en-us/auction-catalogues/jacksons-international-auctioneers-and-appraisers/catalogue-id-srjacks10004/lot-d5f38cdc-3aec-484d-ad02-a54000a0c9d9> (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

78 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, 525.

79 CHARLES LOWE, *Alexander III of Russia*. (New York, 1895) (<https://archive.org/details/alexanderiiiirus00lowegoog>) (Accessed: Nov. 02, 2016.)

association with Russian national identity was a top-down state controlled process, and it “actively discouraged or forbade the concept of a civic nation and by identifying the nation with the monarchy made it difficult or impossible for society to construct an independent concept of civic nationalism”.<sup>80</sup> As one of Wortman’s reviewers plausibly stated: “*the nation could not serve as a source of legitimacy*”, and *the legitimacy of the last two tsars “lay in pre-national concepts of divine right”*.<sup>81</sup> This statement takes us to those rituals which were crucial to the *old, pre-Petrine version of the tsars’ divine right, as Muscovite divine right ideology in the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries*<sup>82</sup> was most clearly visible in religious rituals including the Blessing of Water. This was the second most important ritual of Muscovy after the Palm Sunday ritual.

## V. RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND OLD MUSCOVITE CHURCH ARCHITECTURE UNDER ALEXANDER III *BLESSING OF WATER*

The most important cyclical religious rituals in the 17<sup>th</sup> century required the presence of the Tsar and the patriarch. After the Palm Sunday ritual ceased to exist from 1697, the Blessing of Water remained the most important one in the religious calendar. Since Peter abolished the patriarchate in 1721, the patriarch’s role in this ritual was taken over by the metropolitan of St Petersburg, as the location of the Blessing of Water was moved from Moscow to the new capital. The performance of this ritual was described as follows in *The New York Times* in 16 February, 1890:

*“At the conclusion of the service in the chapel the imperial ladies withdrew to the apartments on the first floor looking out on to the Neva [River], while the Emperor, accompanied by the Princes and gentlemen present, stepped forth out of the palace and crossed the broad quay to the pretty little pavilion erected on the left bank of the river... His Majesty strode a few paces behind the venerable and white bearded Metropolitan Isidore, a prelate ninety-two years of age, who was preceded by a large body of clergy decked out in all the gorgeous vestments and jewels of the orthodox*

80 LOWE, *Alexander III of Russia*, 525.

81 DAVID I. BURROW, in: <http://www.nationalismproject.org/books/bookrevs/wortman.htm> (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

82 SASHALMI, “‘God is High up, the Tsar is Faw Away’: The Nature of Polity and Political Culture in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Russia. A Comparative View”, 139–141.

church. The entire Nevski prospect [the main boulevard in St. Petersburg] as far as the eye could reach was occupied by the troops of the garrison, the magnificently mounted Chevalier Guards with their eagle-crested golden helmets presenting a particularly picturesque appearance. [...] As soon as [Emperor] Alexander had taken up his position under the pavilion the massed bands commenced to play the strains of the 'vozgläss' or 'Call to Worship,' and immediately every head was bared to the icy cold winds. [...] Standing to the edge of the hole cut in the ice of the Neva, the Metropolitan, whose long white locks fluttered in the breeze, thereupon intoned the words prescribed by the liturgy, and, after blessing the black girdling waters as they rushed rapidly by under the thick layer of ice by thrice dipping therein the crucifix which he bore in his hands, he turned to his sovereign and besprinkled him and the Princes with the water thus consecrated. [...] [Emperor] Alexander, having responded by kissing the prelate's hand and reverently crossing himself, slowly wended his way back to the palace amid the hoarse shouts of "Gospodi pomilui," (Lord be merciful to us), by the officers and soldiers present, and while the big cannon of the fortress of Saints Peter and Paul on the opposite side of the river boomed forth an imperial salute of 101 guns."<sup>83</sup>

An important phenomenon among the occasional (i.e. non-cyclical) religious rituals became the tsar's presence at the consecration of new churches, or at the laying of their foundation stones, though this was practiced by earlier tsars too. In building new churches the tsar's published goal was the promotion of the so-called Old Russian ('national') style, i.e. the style characteristic of the church known in general parlance as the *Church of Basil the Blessed* in the Red Square, in Moscow.

## VI. TRAVELS AND THE FUNERAL

Alexander III took advantage of the rapid development of the railroad system, and he initiated the Trans-Siberian railway. Whenever he travelled, extreme security measures were taken along the railroad, though he did not like them. He visited the Caucasian region (as Nicholas I had done in 1837), and his train crash has already been mentioned: it happened during his 1888 visit to the Ukraine. *His trips were publicized in newspapers, and official receptions of the ruler were organized at the stages of his visit.* Of his 1888 trip to the Caucasian it was written in a Russian newspaper

83 <http://www.royal-menus.com/royal-menu---alexander-iii---dinner-menu---6-january-1892> (Accessed: Nov. 29, 2016.)

called the 'Government Herald' that his visit "*will fuse into one all the nationalities living there* in general love and devotion to the Tsar and to stand for Him and for the whole land, the *Russian land*".<sup>84</sup> This statement is symptomatic, as after 1881 "the empire was replaced by the *Russian land (Russkaia zemlia)*" in the official rhetoric: it was to define "the new national character of the empire", and this change clearly reflected the return to the pre-Petrine rhetoric of sources,<sup>85</sup> as the '*Russian land*' was central to the narrative sources of the Muscovite period.

Alexander III's public visibility, paradoxically, reached its height after his death in Livadia – with the emperor being dead, the security measures were rendered meaningless. Livadia in the Crimea became the favourite place of the imperial family from 1884 on: they often returned there "to visits lasting from one to several months".<sup>86</sup> After Alexander III had died in the Livadia palace in 1894, his body underwent a grandiose scenario, "a funeral drama in five stages", as one foreign contemporary labelled the ritual transfer of his body from there to the place of the funeral.<sup>87</sup> In Catherine Merridale's opinion his funeral ritual provides an insight into the "political view of nineteenth-century Russia".<sup>88</sup> First Alexander III's body was shipped to Sevastopol, then, transferred by train from Sevastopol to Moscow and the train stopped "at the major railway stations": Simferopol, Kharkhov, Borki, Orel, Tula before it reached Moscow, and large crowds gathered with candles to mourn the deceased tsar.<sup>89</sup> American correspondents mentioning "the complete transformation of Moscow into mourning" noted a detail very precious for us with regard to *ruler visibility*: namely that "*black framed portraits of Alexander III*" could be seen "in hundreds of windows".<sup>90</sup> Finally the tsar's body was transferred to St Petersburg, to the new burial place of the Russian rulers after Peter the Great, but in the new capital foreign correspondents did not experience the same enthusiasm as in Moscow,

---

84 WORTMAN, *Russian Monarchy. Representation and Rule*, 226. Italics are mine!

85 WORTMAN, *Russian Monarchy. Representation and Rule*, 225., 226. Italics are mine!

86 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, 281.

87 LOWE, *Alexander III of Russia*, 17.

88 CATHERINE MERRIDALE, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia* (New York: Viking Adult, 2001), 26.

89 WORTMAN, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, 298.

90 KATHLEEN MARIE CONTI, *Decay on Display: The Funeral Train Journeys of Abraham Lincoln and Tsar Alexander III of Russia*. MA thesis. Chapel Hill, 2013., <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:c0b6f916-47a0-4bb3-b324-e8ef5b7268ed> (Accessed: Nov. 02, 2016.), 32.

which reflected the different spirit of the old and the new capital.<sup>91</sup> Although measures were taken to preserve the tsar's body, it was "visibly rotting" (due to late embalming) when it arrived in the capital but this fact was concealed as much as possible, and therefore even the funeral had to take place earlier than it had been planned since the purpose of the funeral "was not to portray the czar as an ordinary human being".<sup>92</sup> *The visibility of Alexander III in his death was realized not only through the public showings of his body at certain places but also in the press, foreign and Russian alike.* The growing importance of the press in Russia has been mentioned with regard to Alexander's coronation – the same was true in case of his death and funeral. Alexander III's appearance in Russian newspapers inevitably raises two questions: the level of literacy and the reading habits with the growth of the public. In the Russian Empire, according to the 1897 census 21% of the total population was literate (29% of the male and 13% of the female population), and while the literacy of the rural population in the 1860s was merely about 5-6%, it rose up to 24-25% by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, we have to calculate, that information through the newspapers reached not only the literate sections of the population but an even wider public as a result of the *habit of reading aloud in public*. Besides the recorded cases of this activity from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (especially during the First World War),<sup>94</sup> in urban areas (in the taverns of the industrial suburbs of St Petersburg, for instance) and the villages as well, the decree issued by the Ministry of Education in 1869 bears witness to this habit.<sup>95</sup> This decree stated that "henceforth only works that had been approved could be read aloud to popular audiences."<sup>96</sup>

The importance of funeral ceremony in Russia is underlined by the fact that, strangely enough, it was considered crucial to *Russianness*. No other person claimed it than Pobedonostsev who wrote: "*Nowhere else in the world, except in our country, the funerary custom and rite is developed*

91 LOWE, *Alexander III of Russia*, 296–298.

92 MERRIDALE, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*, 27.

93 JEFFREY BROOKS, "The Zemstvo and the Education of the People", in *The Zemstvo in Russia*, eds. TERENCE EMMONS, WAYNE S. VUCINIC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), (243–278.), 243.

94 MELISSA KIRSCHKE STOCKDALE, *Mobilising the Russian Nation. Patriotism and Citizenship in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 103. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316145449>

95 E. ANTHONY SWIFT, *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 139.

96 SWIFT, *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia*, 92.

to such depths, one might even say to (the point of) virtuosity.”<sup>97</sup> He even identified it as “the key to the Russian ‘national character’”.<sup>98</sup> Icons were crucial in Russian culture, and consequently in funeral rites too. “According to Orthodox custom, family members kissed an icon clasped in the deceased’s hands and were thus intimately acquainted with the condition of the remains.”<sup>99</sup> If the funeral was important in case of ordinary mortals, understandably, it was much more so with the tsar who was conceived as an “incarnation of mystical nationhood and divine rule”:<sup>100</sup> though the tsar died, his body still remained “to watch over his people”.<sup>101</sup> This spirit was to outlive the fall of tsarism: the ‘natural body’ of the person wielding political power, be it a *tsar* or *leader (vozhd’)*, received special honour in his death. Therefore, the funeral drama of 1894 was not only repeated but even enhanced in case of Lenin, whose body was embalmed after his death, and which still lays at public display in Moscow. Unlike the tsars’ bodies, Lenin’s body was not buried. The *embalmed natural body* was used to *embody an abstraction, the communist ideology*, and, at the same time, served as a visualized ‘*body politic*’, the visualization of the sovereignty of the communist party.<sup>102</sup>

Endre Sashalmi – D.Sc. in History, Professor, Institute of History, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pécs; Director of Institute, Institute of History; Member of Department, Department of Medieval and Early Modern History.

E-mail: endresashalmi@gmail.com

---

97 Quoted by THOMAS REED TRICE, “The ‘Body Politic’: Russian Funerals and the Politics of Representation, 1841–1921.” PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1998, 356.

98 TRICE, “The ‘Body Politic’: Russian Funerals and the Politics of Representation, 1841–1921.”, 356.

99 CONTI, *Decay on Display: The Funeral Train Journeys of Abraham Lincoln and Tsar Alexander III of Russia*, 35.

100 MERRIDALE, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*, 26.

101 MERRIDALE, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*, 26.

102 ALEXEI YURCHAK, “Bodies of Lenin: Hidden Science of Communist Sovereignty” *Representations* (129) Winter (116–157.) 135., 136. <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2015.129.1.116>



image 1.



images 2-3.



image 4.



image 5.



image 6.



image 7.



image 8.

