

# Unity, Disintegration, and Monarchy

## Romanov Russia in Recent Scholarship

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Sergei Igorevich Grigor'ev, *Pridvornaia tsenzura i obraz Verkhovnoi vlasti (1831–1917)* (Court Censorship and the Image of Supreme Power). 476 pp. St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2007. ISBN-13 978-5914190306.

Lindsey Hughes, *The Romanovs: Ruling Russia, 1613–1917*. xv + 308 pp. London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008. ISBN-13 978-1847252135, \$42.95 (cloth); 978-0826430816, \$21.95 (paper).

Elise K. Wirtschafter, *Russia's Age of Serfdom, 1649–1861*. xx + 287 pp. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008. ISBN-13 978-1405134576, \$99.95 (cloth); 978-1405134583, \$47.95 (paper).

As is often noted, the wave of research following the collapse of the Soviet Union raised a variety of issues about the Russian past that require interpretation. Among the most popular of these nowadays are those concerned with Russia's unity—real and symbolic—and its disintegration, including consideration of what might have been done to prevent the events of 1917 or 1991. The search for answers in broad interpretive studies ultimately leads back to the history of the imperial period. Curiously enough, such fundamental causal factors as economics, foreign policy, and the activities of the Bolsheviks are often taken out of the equation. Scholars are rather reconsidering the deeper foundations of the country and its order, not least the supreme power that held together the enormous country and shaped its political, social, and cultural life. The three books under review exemplify this kind of research. They all address the issue of the monarchy as the supreme power and offer various explanations for both the stability and the instability of late Muscovite and imperial Russia.

For the British historian Lindsey Hughes, the monarchy was the dynasty. In effect, her book serves as an affirmation of the words once uttered by the French ambassador Maurice Paléologue and chosen by Hughes as an epigraph to one of the last chapters of her book: “The whole collective life of the Russian nation is so to speak summed up in tsarism. Outside tsarism there is nothing” (199). While this conclusion is not entirely new, Hughes’s method of demonstrating it brings to life a beautiful story. Tsarism, as seen here, is not just a state and an administrative system, but rather a ruling family, people of flesh and blood, and an assemblage of imperial symbols without which the country could not live.

The monograph was published after Lindsey Hughes’s death in the spring of 2007. As her husband, Jim Cutshall, remarks, “Most of the text ... was written when she already knew she was dying.” One cannot but see here Hughes’s conscious intention to assemble the whole store of her profound knowledge, acquired while investigating different issues of Russian social and cultural history, and to reconsider it in the context of the great volume of recent research produced by others.<sup>1</sup>

Hughes begins by arguing that “for much of its existence the Romanov dynasty was strong rather than weak”; its “style of rulership represented a variation on Byzantine and European models, rather than a deviant ‘Oriental’ form,” and for much of the period that the dynasty was in power, there was “little evidence of popular pressure to abolish or even limit autocracy” (3). Hughes believes that the history of the Russian Empire is the story of the Romanovs’ historical success in controlling the biggest country in Europe—a success that is continuously neglected by recent scholarship.

Hughes regards the flow of Russian literature on the history of the dynasty in the 1990s to early 2000s as “Romanovomania,” which is certainly true. Post-Soviet Romanov historiography started in the late 1980s with a boom in the biography of members of the ruling family. Readers were offered isolated chapters on each family member, in some cases put together

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<sup>1</sup> Works by Lindsey Hughes that have shifted the patterns of academic thinking include “The Moscow Armoury and Innovations in 17th-Century Muscovite Art,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 13 (1979): 204–23; “Images of the Elite: A Reconsideration of the Portrait in Seventeenth-Century Russia,” *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 56 (2000), 167–85; “A Beard Is an Unnecessary Burden: Peter I’s Laws on Shaving and Their Roots in Early Russia,” in *Russian Society and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century: Essays in Honour of Anthony G. Cross*, ed. Roger Bartlett and Hughes (Münster: LIT, 2004), 21–34; “Russian Culture in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Russia, 2: Imperial Russia, 1689–1917*, ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67–91; “The Funerals of the Russian Emperors and Empresses,” *Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia Newsletter* 31 (2003): 3–8; and *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

later under one cover.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the quality of the individual articles, when combined they did not offer a picture of the whole dynasty, even if this was the goal. Hughes opposed this kind of approach and instead posited a certain unity and integrity to the dynasty.

More recently, the situation has been changing, as Hughes herself implies in the last pages of her book. Russian historiography on the Romanovs has recently shifted toward the task of synthesis, whether at the level of source collections or interpretive research.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, even the popular genre of so called “bio-bibliography”<sup>4</sup> is now abandoning the format of general life stories, with genealogical tables and a very limited bibliography of scholarly publications, in favor of structured biographies with extensive bibliographic citations that include monographs, book chapters, articles, and doctoral dissertations, as well as memoirs, letters, visual material, and more.<sup>5</sup>

Hughes is quite critical of the Western view on the subject. She questions Western historiography’s preference for certain Romanovs over others. Both popular imagination and academic studies seem to care more about

<sup>2</sup> A good example here is the collection of articles by leading Russian historians written for the journal *Voprosy istorii* and translated into English (Iaroslav Vodarskii on Peter I, Evgenii Anisimov on Anna Ivanovna, Aleksandr Myl’nikov on Peter III, Aleksandr Kamenskii on Catherine II, Tat’iana Kapustina on Nicholas I, and Boris Anan’ich and Rafail Ganelin on Nicholas II), all in *The Emperors and Empresses of Russia: Rediscovering the Romanovs*, ed. Donald J. Raleigh (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> For example, annotated bibliographies of primary sources either produced or possessed by the Romanovs now appear regularly both in Russia and abroad: *Ekaterina II: Annotirovannaia bibliografiia publikatsii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004); Robert H. Davis, ed., *A Dark Mirror: Romanov and Imperial Palace Library Materials in the Holdings of the New York Public Library. A Checklist and Agenda for Research* (New York: A. Rabinovich, 2005); *Books and Artifacts (16th–20th centuries): From the Personal and Palace Libraries of the Romanov Dynasty and the Russian Elite. A Catalogue* (New York: A. Rabinovich, 2005); and Zhermena K. Pavlova, *Imperatorskaia biblioteka Ermitazha, 1762–1917* (Tenafly, NJ: Ermitazh, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> This type of historical writing, which combines biography and bibliography, is popular not only for dynastic history. In 2007, D. N. Shilov and Iu. A. Kuz’min published a reference book of this kind devoted to the members of the State Council: *Chleny Gosudarstvennogo soveta Rossiiskoi imperii, 1801–1906: Biobibliograficheskii spravochnik* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> An example of the first trend is Evgenii Pchelov, *Romanovy: Istoriia dinastii* (Moscow: Olma, 2001), which is republished nearly every year without even the slightest change, particularly in its bibliography. For examples of the second trend, see Iurii Kuz’min, *Rossiiskaia imperatorskaia familia, 1797–1917: Biobibliograficheskii spravochnik* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2005); T. A. Lobashkova, *Dinastiia Romanovykh: Biobibliograficheskii ukazatel’* (Moscow: Rossiiskii fond kul’tury, Studiia “TRITE” Nikity Mikhalkova, Rossiiskii arkhiv, 2007); Lobashkova, *Dom Romanovykh: Biobibliograficheskii illiustrirovannyi ukazatel’* (Moscow: Reka vremeni, 2008). Lobashkova does not include English-language books and articles on the Romanovs. Her first book covers 5,705 publications and the period up to 2006; the second contains another thousand titles that appeared in 2007 and early 2008.

the Romanovs' end than their beginning. As she notes, "There is to date no monograph in English on Michael Romanov and only a handful of works on his son Alexis. The eighteenth-century empresses Catherine I, Anna, and Elizabeth have also been neglected.... At the tail end, however, studies of Nicholas II and his reign would fill several shelves" (2–3).<sup>6</sup> She similarly highlights the tendency of Western historiography to posit the Romanovs' "otherness" and to concentrate on the tragic end of the dynasty. Hughes notes the striking frequency of words like "sunset," "twilight," "doom," and "curse," as well as a tremendous number of clichés like "tragic tyrants," "bizarre mixture of people," and "half-savage population" when speaking about Russian history in general (3). She offers a history of the Romanovs without such dubious formulations. Ironically, however, the design and the color of Hughes's own book cover (by Eleanor Rose) shows how deeply rooted this perception of Russia is. The blood-red background of the front cover combines two images: Vasiliï Surikov's painting *The Morning of the Execution of the Streltsy in 1698* (1881), and a photograph of Nicholas II with his family. This is precisely the kind of hackneyed image that Hughes tried to resist in her book.<sup>7</sup>

Hughes believes that telling the story of a successful Romanov dynasty requires one to focus on four different levels.<sup>8</sup> The first involves relationships within the ruling family and concerns a range of issues, such as the need to secure the succession and thus the survival of the dynasty itself, most notably under Aleksei, Elizabeth, Alexander I, and Nicholas II; cases of alienation inside the ruling house, such as the imperial family's disapproval of the marriage of Alexander II with Ekaterina Dolgorukaia (Romanovskaia-Iur'evskaia) and the fear that children from this second family might claim dynastic rights;

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<sup>6</sup> The only bibliography of English-language books and articles on the Romanovs was produced by David R. Egan, well known for his *V. I. Lenin: An Annotated Bibliography of English-Language Sources to 1980* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1982). A book of 2,082 annotated entries covers the period from the mid-15th century to 1985. See David R. Egan and Melinda A. Egan, *Russian Autocrats from Ivan the Great to the Fall of the Romanov Dynasty: An Annotated Bibliography of English-Language Sources to 1985* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987). A comprehensive list of English-language academic studies published about Russian monarchs during the period from 1985 to the 2000s has not yet been produced.

<sup>7</sup> Nor is the work of the book's editor to be praised. There are misprints, including dates (31, 230–31). Moreover, the sources for some assertions are not clear. For instance, in describing the marriage of Peter the Great's eldest son Aleksei to the German Protestant princess Charlotte (72), Hughes supports the well-known fact that the children from this marriage were to be raised in the Orthodox religion with a reference to *Pis'ma i bumagi Petra Velikogo* (11, pt. 2), but leaves the statement that Charlotte was viewed by Aleksei's friends as "cold, standoffish, and always surrounded by her German entourage" without any confirmation from the sources.

<sup>8</sup> All of them are, so to speak, domestic. Hughes writes little about foreign policy, though she never forgets to mention its importance for the notion of empire.

and opposition to Nicholas II because of Empress Alexandra and Rasputin. The second level concerns the dynasty's interactions with the Russian nobility. Throughout the book, Hughes consistently shows the tremendous impact that the ruling dynasty's tastes had on the cultural priorities of the Russian elite by setting new life patterns. The third level concerns the dynasty's attitude toward the people (*narod*), in terms of the tensions produced by the need both to preserve peasant traditions and to promote the country's modernization. She touches on popular belief in the tsar as the "little father" (*batiushka*) as well the Romanovs' continuing faith in their good loyal peasants (especially under Nicholas II). The last level has to do with the political and cultural role specifically of the Romanov women, an issue that was of life-long academic interest to Hughes.<sup>9</sup>

The integration of the Romanov women into the history of the dynasty in Hughes's monograph is indeed remarkable and reveals, once again, her refusal to submit to existing historiographical patterns. Despite the great number of books about the Russian empresses and grand duchesses, the women of the ruling house are traditionally viewed as a separate entity.<sup>10</sup> Hughes, on the contrary, renders them an essential part of the dynastic body and does not limit her consideration to the prominent empresses of the 18th century, as one might expect. This is not to say that she denies the existence of a male-centered political system in Russia, or finds "her story" as opposed to the *history* of the dynasty. She is far from exaggerating the role of women in the dynasty's history. Having an empress on the throne did not mean that an era was female-dominated, since "a woman ... even Catherine II, did little to reduce male dominance of power structures.... Women stayed in the 'private' sphere. A highly visible empress posed no threat" (84). Nevertheless, Hughes finds that the Romanov women's position was meaningful owing to their

<sup>9</sup> See Hughes's works: *Sophia, Regent of Russia, 1657–1704* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); "Catherine I of Russia: Consort to Peter the Great," in *Queenship in Europe, 1660–1815: The Role of the Consort*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131–54; "Peter the Great's Two Weddings: Changing Images of Women in a Transitional Age," in *Women in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Rosalind Marsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 31–44; and "From Caftans into Corsets: The Sartorial Transformation of Women during the Reign of Peter the Great," in *Gender and Sexuality in Russian Civilization*, ed. Peter I. Barta (London: Routledge, 2001), 17–32.

<sup>10</sup> A. Ikonnikova, *Tsaritsy i tsarevny iz doma Romanovykh: Istoricheskii ocherk* (Moscow: Vuzovskaia kniga, 1991); N. A. Vasetskii, *Zhenshchiny rossiiskoi korony* (Moscow: Znanie, 1994); A. V. Man'ko, *Avgušteishii dvor pod sen'iu gimeneia: Braki pravitelei Rossii s inostrannymi osobami* (Moscow: Agraf, 2003); O. V. Mikhnevich, *Russkaia zhenshchina XVIII stoletia: Istoricheskie etiudy* (Moscow: Panorama, 1990); Al'bina Danilova, ed., *Russkie imperatory, nemetskie printsessy: Dinasticheskie sviazi, chelovecheskie sud'by* (Moscow: Izografus, EKSMO, 2002).

place in the system of religious symbolism and the rhetoric of the time. She notes, for example, that the tsaritsa's role "complemented that of her spouse, as protector, intercessor, and champion of Orthodoxy" (32).

If Hughes's analysis of these four levels across three centuries imparts a certain unity and cohesiveness to the dynasty, her analysis of Peter I performs a similar function. The opening passages on Peter in *The Romanovs* are brilliant and deeply informative. They aspire to provide a synopsis of the author's significant publications on a complex of issues from early 18th-century history, including biographies of Tsarevna Sofiia and Peter.<sup>11</sup> Hughes highlights important matters that were to shape the young tsar's policy: the need to fight for independent rule by overcoming not only Sofiia's ambitions but also Patriarch Ioakim's xenophobic policies; the attempt to promote change through provocative and confusing play, such as the activities of the Most Comical All-Drunken Council; and his sense of the need for change for both the country and the ruler, illustrated by his simultaneous orders to shave off beards, cut off long sleeves, and force Tsarevna Sofiia and Tsaritsa Evdokiia to take the veil. Hughes's further description of Peter's reforms admittedly turns into a fairly typical, long list of his military, administrative, and cultural achievements. But Peter does not disappear with the end of the chapter devoted to his reign. Instead, he finds his place in every chapter that follows. Not long before her death, Hughes had started research on the image of Peter the Great and the commemoration practices that supported it.<sup>12</sup> Some results of this study are evident in *The Romanovs*. Hughes shows that "all the Romanovs honored 'the Petrine legacy'"; and she successfully demonstrates that every Russian ruler tried to articulate his or her own views on Peter as the founder of the empire, the key figure of the dynasty, and certainly its

<sup>11</sup> See by Lindsey Hughes: "A Note on the Children of Peter the Great," in *Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia Newsletter* 21(1993): 10–16; *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); "The Petrine Year: Anniversaries and Festivals in the Reign of Peter the Great (1682–1725)," in *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the 16th to the 20th Century*, ed. Karin Friedrich (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2000), 149–68; "Playing Games: The Alternative History of Peter the Great" (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies Occasional Papers, 2000); "From Tsar to Emperor: Portraits of Peter the Great," in *The Place of Russia in Eurasia*, ed. Gyula Szvák (Budapest: Magyar Ruzsisztikai Intézet, 2001), 221–32; "Peter the Great: A Passion for Ships," in *Scotland and the Slavs: Cultures in Contact, 1500–2000*, ed. Mark Cornwall and Murray Frame (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 2001), 3–20; and her edited volume *Peter the Great and the West: New Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> One of the articles Hughes published was devoted to imperial and Soviet-era popular discourses of Peter the Great and, more precisely, his dwellings (*domiki*): "Nothing Is Too Small for a Great Man: Peter the Great's Little Houses and the Creation of Some Petrine Myths," *Slavonic and East European Review* 81, 4 (2003): 634–58.

progenitor. She touches not only on Elizabeth, Catherine II, and Nicholas I but also much less obvious heirs to Peter I: for example, Peter III is portrayed as the grandson whose accession manifesto declared his intention “to follow the footsteps of our most wise sovereign, our grandfather, Emperor Peter I.”

Obviously, references to Peter I by 18th- or 19th-century Russian monarchs were not only verbal; symbols and events carried significance as well. In fact, in her preface, Hughes calls Richard Wortman’s classic study of the Russian monarchy’s scenarios of power “the major source of inspiration” for her own research.<sup>13</sup> Hughes herself analyzes the same kinds of sources (coronation descriptions and albums, letters, and diaries) and the same events and activities (coronations, weddings, parades, summer festivities, etc.). She agrees with Wortman’s main propositions—about the importance of the monarch’s display of supremacy, the personal approach of each ruler in creating his or her own image of absolute power, and the support from the nobility for each and every “scenario of power.”

Hughes also stresses the role of Orthodoxy in creating the monarchical ideal, something that she believes was not sufficiently emphasized in Wortman’s research.<sup>14</sup> She disagrees with the common view that Peter I secularized Russia (77–78)—or rather, that he secularized the image of the supreme power—and considers a life without religion to have been “inconceivable” for Russians and their rulers.<sup>15</sup> Orthodox devotion, she argues, dominated the everyday life of the dynasty and determined its views on social and political issues. Even when Orthodoxy remained a religious abstraction (as it did for Peter the Great), it provided the ideal for the Russian leadership. Hughes pays particular attention to the canonization campaigns launched by the Romanovs, the mysticism of Paul and Alexander I, the elevation of holy elders (*starsy*), and the notorious influence of Grigorii Rasputin on both the court and the political agenda in the early 20th century. Putting Orthodoxy at the forefront changes one’s perspective. Both Hughes and Wortman cite Mikhail Pogodin’s well-known dictum that “the European Emperor is again

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<sup>13</sup> Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995–2000).

<sup>14</sup> Lindsey Hughes, review of Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 1, in *Slavonic and East European Review* 75, 1 (1997): 167–69.

<sup>15</sup> Both in her previous publications—*Peter the Great: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) and “Playing Games”—and in the current book, she highlights the parodic aspects of Peter I’s power image that were introduced in the rituals of the so-called Most Comical All-Drunk Council. Hughes was apparently aware of the highly original research on the subject by Ernest A. Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom: Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), but does not seem to have used it for this book.

the Russian Tsar,” but whereas Wortman’s magisterial study presents Russian monarchs mostly as “European Emperors,” in Hughes’s book they appear more often as “Russian Tsars.”

Despite her intention to conceptualize the history of the Romanovs in terms of their successes, Hughes can scarcely avoid the last decades of the dynasty and the monarchy’s abolition in the early 20th century. Thus the last Russian emperor, Nicholas II, gets three chapters in Hughes’s book (“The Last Romanov, 1894–1913”; “From Celebration to Annihilation, 1913–1918,” and part of “Postscript—The Romanovs Return, 1918–2007”).<sup>16</sup> Following Wortman, Hughes sees in the era of Nicholas II an effort to create a new conception of power that was based on the pre-Petrine scenario and that ultimately proved ineffective. She shows Nicholas as reluctant to approve openly of the model of Peter the Great: for example, by being relatively passive in observing a series of bicentenaries—especially the St. Petersburg jubilee—and appearing in 17th-century dress at a costume ball in 1903. By telling Nicholas’s story, Hughes clearly aims to show that in Russia the monarchy was absolutely saddled with an emperor’s personality, which could either enhance or erode the structures of the supreme power. At the beginning of the 20th century, the latter was the case.

The book carries on Hughes’s unique style, evident in her earlier articles and books. This coherent synthesis is presented elegantly and with a good sense of humor. She once again proves herself a master of the skill of fact selection and word choice. In a study like this, where three centuries of eventful history are to be covered, she ensures that every fact and every word is well chosen and judiciously deployed.

Hughes makes excellent use of many details that have been neglected by previous studies. By making frequent reference to the issue of age, Hughes often shifts the reader’s perspective by demonstrating how a political agenda could be endowed with a specifically personal dimension. The fact that in the early 1660s there were nine unmarried tsarevny in the royal palace, and that the new wife of Tsar Aleksei, Tsaritsa Natal’ia Kirillovna Naryshkina, was younger than several of them, alters the interpretation of the clash between the members of the new tsarita’s clan (the Naryshkins) and the previous in-laws (the Miloslavskiis) that eventually led to Tsarevna Sofia’s regency (45). Certain patterns of behavior identified by Hughes reveal the complexity of the characters. The fact that Peter’s second wife Catherine, who accompanied

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<sup>16</sup> Although she considers Nicholas II to have been “the last Romanov,” Hughes acknowledges that the dynasty actually ended on 3 March 1917 “with Michael II” (Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich), who technically occupied the Russian throne for just one day after Nicholas’s manifesto of abdication (232).



the tsar during his second tour to Europe, was not taken to Paris due to Peter's fear that "her low origins would not command respect" (74), shows how sensitive the first Russian emperor was to his Western counterparts' judgment. Equally, Hughes's observation that the last Empress Alexandra received a British rather than a German upbringing (she was Queen Victoria's granddaughter), and that her husband exhibited quite an attachment to the British royal family (202–3, 229), helps explain the last Russian tsar's self-fashioning as an "officer and gentleman." Sometimes the details Hughes brings up turn out to be essential for the course of events. Hughes's observation that the extended 42-day trip of the newly elected Tsar Mikhail from Kostroma to Moscow to occupy the throne could have been completed in only a few days (13) leads her to conclude that the first Romanov was reluctant, fearful, and lost at that moment. The experience that the second member of the dynasty, Tsar Aleksei, gained during the campaign in Poland and the Baltic in the 1650s, "where he saw Renaissance and Baroque churches and palaces that inspired him to convert some of his own residences to a Western style" (40), suggests that he was a genuine forerunner of Peter I's reform.

*The Romanovs* is not a series of "potted biographies." Hughes, who was a master of historical biography, is here at her best.<sup>17</sup> The pages on the characters of "the Pious tsars" (Aleksei, Fedor, and Ivan V), as well as Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra (who, she believes, had very similar personalities), are among the best in contemporary academic literature. She even manages to portray court favorites (Catherine II's Grigorii Orlov, Grigorii Potemkin, and Petr Zavadovskii) and provide sketches of important family members (Grand Duke Sergei, Grand Duchess Elizabeth, and Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich in the chapter dedicated to Nicholas II). In short, Lindsey Hughes's last monograph shows a deep and sensitive understanding of three centuries of the Russian Empire's history and contributes substantially to our understanding of that country. The book also instills a sense of great loss, not so much for the dynasty as for a talented scholar who understood the country and its history so profoundly.

Unlike Hughes, Elise K. Wirtschafter does not present her new study in terms of either success or failure. Having already contributed a great deal to the study of tsarist Russia, with this new book Wirtschafter opens the Blackwell History of Russia series that aims eventually to cover the period

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<sup>17</sup> Hughes's biographical works include *Russia and the West: The Life of a Seventeenth-Century Westernizer, Prince Vasily Vasil'evich Golitsyn (1643–1714)* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1984); *Sophia, Regent of Russia*; "Catherine I of Russia: Consort to Peter the Great"; and *Peter the Great*.

from the mid-17th century to the present.<sup>18</sup> *Russia's Age of Serfdom* will be supplemented by two other volumes, to be written by Theodore R. Weeks and Stephen Lovell.

At first sight, one might think that a book with this title would raise the issue of autocracy and serfdom as the main basis for ruling Russia. The chronological parameters of the book are certainly defined by the history of serfdom, from its codification in 1649 to its abolition in 1861. The reader already senses social drama and poverty merely by looking at the brownish-gray book cover with its reproduction of Viktor Vasnetsov's painting *From Lodging to Lodging* (1876), which shows a poor elderly couple crossing the frozen Neva with just the small parcel that represents their belongings.

Yet unlike Hughes's monograph, where the entity in the title—the Romanovs—does indeed fill every page of the book, Wirtschafter's account does not put serfdom at the center of analysis. In fact, only the brilliantly written chapter 1.1 ("Face to Face in Russian Society") and a small paragraph in the chapter on post-Petrine Russia (92–100) touch on this issue. Here serfdom is invoked as a particular form of both economic and social organization that was based on a complex of perceptions and beliefs. For Wirtschafter, the key to understanding the history of these 200-odd years is the phenomenon of "community," something that she has already researched in other contexts.<sup>19</sup> By "community" she means certain self-governing and self-sufficient patriarchal structures that constituted Russian villages and towns and established the forms of order at the level of both the family and society as a whole.

If serfdom is not really at the center of Wirtschafter's analysis, autocracy and monarchy are, in contrast, a theme of great importance. She starts by demonstrating that as of the mid-17th century, the contacts linking the patriarchal communities of peasants and townspeople with the political center were very limited. Evidently, these communities "had little need for a larger 'society' or government." Things might have changed at the beginning of the 18th century, but this was not to be. Peter I could have embraced regular government, but he refused to allow this to limit his own supreme power. Consequently, "regular" governance was established under neither Peter nor any of his 18th-century successors. The need for a properly structured government was not fully met. Local civic institutions remained weak; instead,

<sup>18</sup> Elise Wirtschafter's principal monographs are *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); *Structures of Society: Imperial Russia's "People of Various Ranks"* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994); *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1997); and *The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia*, 7–42.

personal relationships remained central in dealing with all sorts of issues. Moreover, at no time in the 18th century—which was otherwise a time of social unrest—did an organized opposition by society to the established political institutions emerge.

Even so, the rulers of undergoverned, underinstitutionalized 18th-century Russia actively intervened in the social sphere by imposing sociability and greater consideration of the elite's needs and wishes. As the Enlightenment's moral vision of society and government spread among the Russian "educated classes," it heightened their self-consciousness. After having been artificially constructed, the elites gradually reached self-awareness through their sense of moral and patriotic duty to promote Westernized culture and to serve the monarchy and thereby, according to Wirtschafter, promoted their own unity. However, as long as political decision making remained authoritarian and top-down, "educated Russians" could not hope to see their aspirations realized in a Western-style institutionalized political sphere. Their wishes and desires to serve the country, therefore, found expression instead in art and literature. Unfortunately, although she says much about war and imperial expansion, Wirtschafter does not treat military service and diplomacy as additional spheres where Russian nobles could attain a certain self-realization.

The 18th-century Russian monarchs who created the elites are well presented in this broad study. Wirtschafter draws on all the outstanding scholars who have researched the 18th-century Russian Empire. Remarkably, the emperors of the 19th century seem to get much less attention. Wirtschafter mentions only one piece of research on each of the monarchs in the early to mid-19th century (Paul I, Alexander I, Nicholas I)<sup>20</sup> and none of Alexander II's biographies. Generally, in her study of the 19th century, she prefers to explore the qualities of the new elite rather than the personalities of the monarchs, who in any case could hardly have reversed the evolution of this group.

Wirtschafter regards the beginning of the 19th century as the period when the elites gradually came to oppose the absolute personal authority of the emperor. The participants in the Decembrist uprising of 1825 articulated views of governmental and social issues that were quite different from those accepted by the 18th-century Russian elite. Throughout the first half of the century, the alienation of society and the state increased dramatically; it reached its climax during the Crimean War, which revealed the gap between a dynamic and industrialized Europe and a Russia where autocracy and serfdom still prevailed.

<sup>20</sup> Roderick E. McGrew, *Paul I of Russia, 1754–1801* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); Janet M. Hartley, *Alexander I* (London: Longman, 1994); W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I: Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989).

At the center of Wirtschafter's narrative is the relationship between government and society. She concentrates on the discrepancy between the development of the state and the evolution of "the upper classes" in Russia. The 18th-century political system, which was based on the absolute power of the monarch and the precedence of individual morality over laws and rules, came into conflict with a social situation in the 19th century that featured Western-oriented elites with a deep sense of service to the nation. Wirtschafter's perspective in this regard demonstrates that the whole pattern of government–society relations that seemed appropriate to the 18th century became inefficient and destructive for the 19th century and (if we suppose that this contradiction was not eliminated by the Great Reforms) may have caused the collapse of the tsarist system in the early 20th century.

Wirtschafter's hypothesis lacks structured reasoning, however. The nature of her argument is reflected in the book's organization, which features three chronological periods: 1649–1725 ("The Absolute Monarchy"), 1725–96 ("The Building of Society") and 1796–1861 ("Government and People in Old Regime Russia"). In my view, such an unconventional chronology is not sufficiently justified by the author and in fact raises a number of questions. For example, was absolute monarchy in Russia limited to the period of Aleksei and Peter the Great? Was the reign of Paul I part of independent society's emergence, as the author suggests in chapter 3?

The confusion in terminology is also striking. Wirtschafter replaces "estate" (*soslovie*) with "elites" or "educated classes," both of which she leaves unexplained. This allows her to combine the Russian nobility with the "people of various ranks" (*raznochintsy*) in discussing 18th-century society (79). Such an approach requires more substantial evidence, since the nobility and *raznochintsy* of the 18th century had very little to do with each other, especially if we take into consideration that at mid-century the *raznochintsy*—the category of imperial subjects and taxpayers who did not officially belong to any estate—were transferred into either the peasantry or the merchantry. For Wirtschafter, the *raznochintsy* are an essential part of Russia's "educated classes," hence she follows the established tradition in treating them as the source for the Russian intelligentsia, a phenomenon that took place in the 19th, not the 18th century. This seems like an uncritical application of concepts from the 19th century to a much earlier period.

Sometimes the author's account itself is not directly connected to the conclusion given at the end of each chapter. Consider, for example, Wirtschafter's evaluation of Peter the Great's reforms. After reviewing the course of events during the Northern War and closely examining the accompanying cultural

change, she briefly mentions some widely known facts on the history of Peter's administrative reforms and declares that they "did nothing to improve local administration, which continued to rely on seigniorial power and community self-government" (57). Obviously, a detailed discussion would be required to support this point. Similarly, the lengthy paragraphs on the problem of imperial succession in 18th-century Russia and on the growth of the empire's territory do not seem to have much to do with the main point of the book.

The book by Sergei Igorevich Grigor'ev—the first on court censorship in the years 1831–1917 and its impact on the Russian image of power—starts at the point where Wirtschafter's book stops.<sup>21</sup> He shares her opinion about the potential danger in which the Russian monarchy found itself in the second half of the 19th century. Unlike Wirtschafter, however, Grigor'ev believes that the fall of the Russian Empire is best explained in terms of the personality of the last Russian emperor, Nicholas II (and, possibly, Empress Alexandra Fedorovna). He agrees with Wortman that Nicholas's view of the autocracy was based on the rejection of previously existing traditions and considers this to be among the main sources of the crisis and revolutions of the early 20th century and the collapse of the country (27). Though perhaps not explicitly, Grigor'ev in fact addresses the question of whether the Russian Empire could have been saved.

In many ways this is a typical example of Russian historical research. Its structure resembles the doctoral (*kandidatskaia*) thesis that the author defended in 2003,<sup>22</sup> as does the material selected. The doctoral defense in Russia is a peculiar institution that places a premium on highlighting the use of archival data and encourages the author to engage in conceptualizing cautiously, if at all. In the Russian academic community, research on a particular administrative structure is traditionally less likely to generate criticism than are attempts to conceptualize material in new ways. Consequently, Grigor'ev presents a detailed history of court censorship as an institution—its legal foundations and place in the structure of the Ministry of the Imperial Court, its forms of work, and the personalities of its most influential members—based primarily on data from the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA). According to the standard formula for such dissertations, this scrupulously documented archival research is to be accompanied by only limited consideration of issues like the creation of the image of imperial power.

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<sup>21</sup> Despite the dates in the book's title, it actually covers only the years 1855–96.

<sup>22</sup> Sergei Igorevich Grigor'ev, "Institut pridvornoi tsenzury Ministerstva imperatorskogo dvora" (Candidate of History diss., European University in St. Petersburg, 2003).

Grigor'ev's doctoral thesis may have been well received, but his book is rather disappointing as a result of these imperatives. The sources on the history of court censorship can be thought-provoking and deliver precious information concerning the image of power in 19th- and early 20th-century Russia. Moreover, Grigor'ev's admiration for Richard Wortman's concept of "scenarios of power," which is expressed in a passage of several pages, might lead the reader to expect a portrait of the supreme power as it was constructed and refined by court censors. Grigor'ev does not, however, use the sources in this way. Instead he presents a fairly conventional history of court censorship as a state institution.

Grigor'ev provides a decent survey of the existing historiography on the Ministry of the Imperial Court and its Office (Kantseliariia Ministerstva imperatorskogo dvora), which was responsible for court censorship, but he pays insufficient attention to the literature on the symbolic dimensions of power. Though Grigor'ev rightly values Wortman's groundbreaking research, on the whole he tends to neglect other studies of the representation of Russian imperial power. Writing about the Muscovite period he names only a few studies,<sup>23</sup> and he completely ignores the classic books by Boris Uspenskii.<sup>24</sup> Grigor'ev's evaluation of the scholarship on the symbolism of power in the imperial period, which he labels "meager" (*skudnyi*), is even less competent. He asserts that apart from Wortman's book, it is covered only by a couple of articles, when he should have been aware that the representation of power in Russian imperial rituals and ceremonies has become a field actively explored by both Russian and foreign scholars.<sup>25</sup> Nowadays scholars even identify a new category of

<sup>23</sup> O. B. Mel'nikova, "Obraz imperii: Tseremonial'nye protsessii v Rossii XVII–XVIII vv. (Sravnitel'nyi analiz)," in *Obrazy vlasti v politicheskoi kul'tury Rossii*, ed. E. B. Shestopal (Moscow: MONF, 2000), 95–115; A. V. Skorobogarov, "Obraz monarkhii v ofitsial'noi ideologii Rossii na rubezhe XVIII–XIX vekov," *Filosofskii vek: Al'manakh*, no. 17: *Istoriia idei kak metodologiya gumanitarnykh issledovaniy (Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii 27–30 sentyabrya 2001 goda, Sankt-Peterburg)* (2001): 481–502; L. A. Levykin, *Voinskie tseremonialy i regalii russkikh tsarei* (Moscow: Bioinformservis, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Boris Uspenskii, *Tsar' i patriarkh: Kharizma vlasti v Rossii* (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1998); Uspenskii, "Obriad khozhdeniia na osliati v Verboe voskresen'e i vospriiatie Moskovskogo Kremliia kak Novogo Ierusalima," in *Mezhdunarodnaia iubileinaia nauchnaia konferentsiia, posviashchennaia 200-letiiu muzeev Moskovskogo Kremliia: Tezisy dokladov* (Moscow: Muzei Moskovskogo Kremliia, 2006), 90–91.

<sup>25</sup> For Russian studies, see Grigorii Kaganov, *Images of Space: St. Petersburg in the Visual and Verbal Arts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); *Rossiia/Russia*, no. 3 (1999): *Kul'turnye praktiki v ideologicheskoi perspektive: Rossiia XVIII–nachalo XX veka*, ed. N. G. Okhotin; A. V. Skorobogarov, *Tsesarevich Pavel Petrovich: Politicheskii diskurs i sotsial'naia praktika* (Moscow: RGGU, 2005); Elena Pogolian, *Petr I—arkhitektor rossiiskoi istorii* (St. Petersburg: Iskustvo SPB, 2001); Pogolian, "I nevozmozhnoe vozmozhno': Svad'ba shutov v Ledianom dome kak fakt ofitsial'noi kul'tury," in *Trudy po russkoi i slavianskoi filologii:*

researchers who study Russian rituals and symbolism as “Wortmanists.” It is striking, moreover, that Grigor’ev, who believes the era of Nicholas II to have been crucial for understanding the country’s history, does not make reference to either Boris Kolonitskii’s research on the Romanovs’ popular image in prerevolutionary Russia or Stephen Norris’s study of popular imagery in wartime.<sup>26</sup> Engagement with these studies might have significantly improved Grigor’ev’s study. For instance, both Kolonitskii and Norris show a mastery of research with unconventional sources (documents on rumors about the royal family, visual materials, etc.) that Grigor’ev’s thesis obviously lacks.

The very structure of the book prevents the reader from understanding the interrelationships between court censorship and the image of the supreme power. While admitting that court censorship was driven primarily by the ideological views and positions of individual court ministers and emperors (chapter 3, part 2, 7), Grigor’ev chooses to present his data by topic rather than according to the chronology of the reigns. An alternative structure might have delivered his argument better.

Some of Grigor’ev’s material is quite interesting. He evaluates decisions by the Ministry of the Imperial Court and reflects on the reasons why it either allowed or prohibited the publication of certain materials and the manufacture of particular products. He comes to the very important conclusion that the court censors tended to disapprove of exploiting the supreme power for commercial purposes. Images of the ruling family were not permitted on everyday consumer goods (carpets, chocolate and perfume boxes, etc.), since “sacred images” were not supposed to be damaged or spoiled for any reason. Grigor’ev detects a more flexible attitude toward products with imperial symbols that came from abroad or were meant to be consumed outside the country. In these cases, even the request of a foreign factory owner to place a picture of the Russian monarch on cigarette labels received the censor’s approval, something nearly unthinkable for Russian entrepreneurs. This shows

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*Literaturovedenie* 4 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2001), 90–109; and E. A. Vil’k, “‘Gorod Petra’ i ‘sviatye Petry’ v literature Drevnei Rusi,” in *Fenomen Peterburga*, ed. Iurii Bespiatykh (St. Petersburg: Blits, 2001), 91–110. Foreign studies include Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, ed., *Russia Engages the World, 1453–1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25–48; Ernest Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom*; and Hughes, “‘Nothing Is Too Small for a Great Man,’” 634–65.

<sup>26</sup> Boris Kolonitskii, “*Tragicheskaia erotika*”: *Obrazy imperatorskoi sem’i v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010); Kolonitskii, “Voin ‘starogo vremeni’: Obrazy velikogo kniazia Nikolaia Nikolaevicha v gody Pervoi mirovoi voini,” *Studia Russica Helsingiensia et Tartuensia* 10: “*Vek nyneshnii i vek minuvshii*”: *Kul’turnaia refleksiiia proshedshei epokhi*, pt. 2 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2006): 297–326; Stephen Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity, 1812–1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

that the image of the Russian sovereign that was to be presented outside the country was different from the domestic version.

Grigor'ev's analysis of the decision-making process in court censorship is quite limited. An interpretation of the Russian rulers' personal reactions to various censorship cases never emerges. Grigor'ev often mentions that emperors agreed to the publication of certain texts (poems, plays, novels, articles, etc.), provided that certain words, lines, or pages were eliminated (136), but he does not provide textual analysis to establish the possible logic of the decisions that were taken.

Grigor'ev also often leaves suggestive archival documents without focused evaluation. Lengthy discussions of certain publications mentioned in the book are precisely the kind of material that could have provoked consideration of the practical construction of the monarchical image. For instance, in 1831 Nicholas I banned the publication of the tragedy *Peter I* by Mikhail Pogodin. Although the play was patriotic, Nicholas believed that the mere appearance of Peter I and Catherine I on a theatrical stage was inappropriate and even offensive to the "saintly" conception of the dynasty and the image of Peter the Great in particular (132–33). This case gives a unique opportunity to observe the monarchs' awareness of the sacred image of the Russian sovereign and reveals multiple layers of perception, since Nicholas's decision had been proposed by a regular censor. One can only regret that Grigor'ev undervalues such examples, which are consequently scarce in the book.

The space that might have allowed for investigation of cases like the one mentioned above is occupied by 70 pages of appendices (374–450), from which an average reader will get little additional information. The first is a table that tracks the requests for supreme approval that the Office of the Ministry of the Imperial Court received in the first half of 1855 from subjects of the Russian emperor. For example, archival materials show that the book dealer N. Korablev hoped to use the Emperor Nicholas I's portrait in some of his books and that the editors of *Severnaia pchela* wished to publish a poem dedicated to the late monarch (376–77). However valuable such cases are from a statistical point of view, Grigor'ev provides no information to explain why Korablev's petition was successful while the request from *Severnaia pchela* was rejected. Because further explanation is needed in each of the cases listed, the material in its present form is almost useless to the reader.

Grigor'ev's book has several other problems as well, such as terminological confusion. For example, the term "supreme power" (*verkhovnaia vlast'*) is used throughout the book but is explained only at the end. Grigor'ev at times falls into Soviet-style wording; for example, he writes of Aleksandr Adlerberg



that he was “not a statesman of the new type” (290). The author also engages in excessive comparison of historical issues to various aspects of life in present-day Russia (207, 365–66).

In the end, Grigor'ev argues that the Office of the Ministry of the Imperial Court was concerned above all with serving as a filter to stop the spread of “faulty” images of the sovereign and not with producing and disseminating a positive one. But this seems only logical. Censorship by definition aims to block material that is considered inappropriate, offensive, or inconvenient. Censors are inclined to view the creation of a positive image precisely as a matter of prohibiting harmful materials and activities, rather than an active process of creation. In my view, the launching of a campaign to create or restore a spotless image of the monarchy was not really the aim of 19th- and early 20th-century censors. We should not expect the censorship of that time to behave according to the rules of modern propaganda.

Grigor'ev does, however, mention some cases that could mark the beginning of an era of propaganda in Russia: the traditional organization of various royal festivities (Nicholas II's coronation, military parades, church ceremonies and processions) came to be accompanied with new ways of popularizing the monarchy, including the presence of the first official court projectionist (Boleslav Matushevskii) and photographers (Sergei Levitskii and Aleksandr Nasveteich) and the accreditation of journalists at the main royal ceremonies. Examples like these show an attempt to deal with the challenges of the new reality by creating a positive image for the imperial family instead of the more customary policy of banning inappropriate materials and images.

Despite his insufficient awareness of current academic debates about images of monarchical power,<sup>27</sup> Grigor'ev, like Hughes, is successful in revealing the personal level of politics and ideology in imperial Russia. He draws attention to the ministers of the Imperial Court who to a certain extent were also creators of the official vision of the image of power. It is noteworthy that chapter 4 contains wonderful portraits of Aleksandr Adlerberg and Vladimir Frederiks. The discussion of Adlerberg's personal and administrative views about Emperor Alexander II's second, morganatic marriage is definitely the best part of the book.



<sup>27</sup> “Kak sdelana istoriia: Obsuzhdenie knigi Richarda Uortmana ‘Stsenarii vlasti. Mify i tseremonii rossiiskoi monarkhii,’” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 56 (2002): 43–66.

Although these three books differ in their goals and chronological scope, all three authors take the Russian Empire's collapse as the starting point of their thinking. They agree that a crucial event of 20th-century world history, the collapse of imperial Russia, was caused by the nature of the Russian monarchy. Hughes sees all of Russian reality as based on the concept of autocracy and the tsar's power, which placed the whole empire at risk if the tsar turned to be "wrong" for the job. Wirtschafter argues that Westernization, which was launched under Peter the Great and continued to strengthen during the reign of his successors, became an integral part of the Russian monarchical tradition. It led to the creation of elites that moved from being the government's supporters (at the end of the 18th century) to being its staunch opponents (by the mid-19th) and that—though Wirtschafter ends her work in 1861—may have caused the collapse of the tsarist system in the early 20th century. Grigor'ev believes that the monarchy should have been more aware of the potential threats and challenges of the new era and should have paid closer attention to the image of the supreme power, perhaps by creating a system responsible for "monarchical public relations." In general, all the authors agree that the principal forces that demolished the structure in 1917 were, so to speak, "internal enemies."

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