

**EUROPEAN TRAVELLERS IN NINETEENTH**  
**CENTURY RUSSIA:**

AN ANALYSIS OF TRAVEL ACCOUNTS ON RUSSIA  
UNDER TSAR NICHOLAS I

By

Olimpia P. Jones

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In partial fulfillment for the requirements  
For the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History  
Joint MA Programme  
University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
© June 2003

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Abstract	iii
List of Tables and Maps	iv
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
•Europe and Russia: An Historical Perspective of Western Travel Accounts on Russia	12
•Personal Motives for Travel: The Intentions Behind the Six Travel Accounts on Russia	21
•An Historical Assessment of Imperial Russia	29
<b>Chapter Two: Russian Political and International Affairs</b>	<b>42</b>
•The Image of Nicholas I	43
•Autocratic Government	53
•The Travellers' Views on Russia's Place in the World	63
•The Russian Threat to Europe	71
<b>Chapter Three: Russian Culture</b>	<b>89</b>
•Artistic Achievements	89
•Religion and the Orthodox Church in Russia	95
•Education	109
•Criminals, Punishment and the Threat of Siberia	114
<b>Chapter Four: The People of the Russian Empire</b>	<b>125</b>
•The Peasantry	125
•The Middle Class	136
•The Nobility	138
•The Life and People of Russia's German Provinces and Extended Territories of the Russian Empire	145
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>157</b>
Appendix	172
Maps	177
Bibliography	183

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the manner in which six Europeans who travelled to Russia during the reign of Nicholas I (1825-55) viewed the Russian Empire. Travel writings provided a detailed and intimate glimpse of a foreign country and have become vital sources to understand how that country was perceived by others. The travel accounts by the Marquis de Custine, J. G. Kohl, George Poulett Cameron, Richard Southwell Bourke, August von Haxthausen and Germain de Lagny are important because of the rich information they contain on nineteenth century Russia and the reception they received when published. The travellers were primarily interested in three topics: politics, culture and social developments. Within this framework, the six men provided their significant findings on Nicholas I, the autocratic government, Russia's threat to Europe, Russia's place in the world, the Orthodox religion and the lives of the Russian people. As a basis for understanding the accounts on Nicholaevan Russia, this paper examines Europe's changing views of Russia and its growing importance in world affairs from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

## LIST OF TABLES AND MAPS

Table	1.	Table of Ranks	177
Map	1.	Russian Expansion From the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century	178
Map	2.	Russian Expansion 1801-81	179
Map	3.	The Russian Empire	180
Map	4.	The Russian Provinces	181
Map	5.	The Regions of European Russia	182

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In the nineteenth century travel accounts provided Europeans with a detailed view of Russia under Tsar Nicholas I. This thesis argues that six men, the Marquis de Custine, Johann Georg Kohl, George Poulett Cameron, Richard Southwell Bourke, August von Haxthausen and Germain de Lagny, produced insightful travel writings that shaped Europeans' knowledge and attitudes towards Russia. This is because these six accounts were among the most popular and authoritative and overcame Europe's lack of information on Russian conditions at the beginning of Nicholas' reign (1825-55). Their books increased the body of literature available on Russian political, cultural and social developments. Out of the hundreds of travel accounts published on Russia during Nicholas' reign, these six are the most comprehensive, owing to the considerable access the travellers enjoyed throughout the Russian Empire. Custine's *The Empire of the Czar; or, Observations on the Social, Political, and Religious State and Prospects of Russia*, Kohl's *Russia, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kharkoff, Riga, Odessa, the German Provinces on the Baltic, the Steppes, the Crimea and the Interior of the Empire*, Cameron's *Personal Adventures and Excursions in Georgia, Circassia, and Russia*, Bourke's *St. Petersburg and Moscow A Visit to the Court of the Czar*, Haxthausen's *The Russian Empire: Its People, Institutions and Resources* and Lagny's *The Knout of the Russians, or the Muscovite Empire, the Czar and His People* evoked a tremendous response amongst the European public and literary critics. For the thirty-year reign of Nicholas I, these

works were tools which helped to shape the West's image of Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Since the publication of the sixteenth-century work on Russia by Sigmund von Herberstein, *Rerum Moscoviticarum Comentarum*, the West had expressed curiosity towards Russia which resulted in an increased number of travel accounts being written on Russia from the sixteenth to nineteenth century. In the 1800s, Europeans' desire to understand Russian conditions still prevailed and, by the reign of Nicholas I, Russia had become recognized as a strong political and military power. This factor would create a need in the West for detailed and informative accounts on recent developments in Russia. The travel accounts published by the six authors were particularly valuable sources for information because the Europeans were able to observe the lives of the people and political developments as they travelled in the tsarist realm. The foreigners recognized that the autocratic government's repressive policies affected many aspects of life in the country. However, their ability to observe Russian conditions was not restricted by censorship policies practiced by the police force of the Third Section during Nicholas' reign. The fact that the accounts were written and published in the West ensured that the travellers were free to comment on everything they encountered in Russia.

A circumstance which elevated the importance of the six travel accounts was the fact that excursions to Russia were not possible for most Europeans in the nineteenth century. The travellers were afforded a unique opportunity to leisurely journey through Russia during the 1830s and 1840s that could not be experienced by many contemporary

Europeans considering the time and expense such a journey would entail.<sup>1</sup> Travellers can be distinguished between the two groups that also become acquainted with foreign cultures and environments, tourists and explorers, because of their expressed desire to conduct a study. The distinction between the three types of individuals is not unconditional. Paul Fussell, the author of *Abroad*, notes that “all three make journeys, but the explorer seeks the undiscovered, the traveller that which has been discovered . . . the tourist that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity.” Ultimately, the traveller is a cross-section of both explorer and tourist. He experiences the thrill of investigating an unfamiliar land at the same time that his destination is a controlled environment which has been discovered by past travelers and explorers.<sup>2</sup>

The six Europeans, from Great Britain, France and Prussia, were in a position to present European audiences with a wide array of details on the Russian Empire. Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny journeyed through Russia in carriages and came in contact with towns and villages throughout the Russian Empire. The

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<sup>1</sup> Modern tourism grew in popularity in the beginning of the nineteenth century when Cook's travel agency began to organize sight-seeing expeditions. The early tourists wanted to, as Paul Fussell explains, “experience a change” and, unlike travellers who were akin to temporary students of foreign cultures, sought to elevate their social standing at home and experience a sense of superiority over the native people in foreign lands. Custine, Bourke and Haxthausen were able to travel throughout Russia because of their personal means and Kohl and Cameron were, respectively, in the Russian Empire because of their positions as a tutor and British military officer. The fact that Russia did not expect an influx of foreign visitors during the mid-nineteenth century can be gauged from the limited number of hotels in Russia, a circumstance that the travellers openly lamented in their writings. For a look at tourism during the nineteenth century, see: James Buzard, *The Beaten Track European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Paul Fussell, *Abroad British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. (New York: Scribner Books, 1976) and Valene L. Smith, ed., *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977.)

<sup>2</sup> Fussell, *Abroad*, 38-9.



ordinary European who wanted to learn about conditions in Russia turned to works like the six travellers' accounts. Newspaper reports and journal articles on Russia at the time primarily dealt with Russian news events and did not, unlike travel authors, have the available space to devote hundreds of pages on a study of issues ranging from the autocracy to the Russian Baltic provinces. The information Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny shared with their readers concerning nineteenth century Russia was derived from first-hand observation and supplemented by conversations with Russians regarding their country's political and social developments.

The author of the first of the six published accounts, the Marquis de Custine, was born into an aristocratic family in France in 1790. Astolphe de Custine initially became preoccupied with foreign travel when his homosexuality incited a scandal that barred him from attaining a prominent position in the French government. Instead, from 1827 Custine became an unsuccessful poet and author of travel accounts. During his early literary endeavours, the marquis travelled extensively throughout England, Spain and Italy to escape the public condemnation he faced in France and became acquainted with foreign cultures.

Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* was published in Paris in 1843, as *La Russie en 1839*, and recounted the events of Custine's three month sojourn in Russia which commenced on July 10, 1839.<sup>3</sup> Custine's travels in the Russian Empire were primarily concentrated in St. Petersburg and Moscow although he, like Bourke after him, was able to comment upon the situation in the small towns and villages between these points that he

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<sup>3</sup> Marquis de Custine, *The Empire of the Czar; or, Observations on the Social, Political, and Religious State and Prospects of Russia, Made During a Journey Through That Empire*. 3 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1843.)

passed through in his carriage. The most extensive study Custine made beyond Russia's two major cities was in the ancient city of Yaroslav and he spent several days observing the activities at the annually held fair at Nizhni Novgorod. Custine also became familiar with the city of Vladimir before he left Russia to return to European soil, arriving in Prussia on October 1, 1839. In *The Empire of the Czar* Custine not only commented on what he observed during the course of his daily travels but also included a great deal of analysis on Russian social and political conditions. During his journey, Custine became associated with the prominent Russian intellectual Peter Chaadaev, founder of the Westernizer movement, the poet Peter Viazemsky and Alexander Turgenev, the uncle of the famous Russian writer Ivan Turgenev, all of whom contributed to Custine's awareness of important Russian developments.<sup>4</sup> Following the success of *The Empire of the Czar* throughout Europe, Custine wrote the unpopular novel *Romuald* which exceeded one thousand pages and debated the merits of the Catholic and Protestant religions. In his last years, Custine divided his time between his estates in France and Italy before his death on September 25, 1857.<sup>5</sup>

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the author of the next published account on Russia, the German Johann Georg Kohl, was recognized throughout Europe as a prolific travel author who studied foreign lands ranging from Russia to North America. Kohl was born in 1808 and became fascinated with excursions to distant countries after surveying his uncle's collection of maps and atlases. Kohl was inspired to emulate the example of his uncle, also named Johann, who had travelled extensively throughout Asia

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<sup>4</sup> The Marquis de Custine, *Letters from Russia*. (London: Penguin Books, 1991) xv.

<sup>5</sup> Anka Muhlstein, *A Taste for Freedom The Life of Astolphe de Custine*. Translated by Teresa Waugh. (New York: Helen Marx Books, 1999) 359, 378-9.

and beyond. Prior to pursuing his interest in foreign lands, Kohl made an attempt to attain a law degree in 1827. He haphazardly studied law in an unfocused manner, enrolling at the University of Göttingen in 1827; the University of Heidelberg in 1828 and the University of Munich in 1829, before economic difficulties arising from the death of his father in 1829 forced Kohl to forgo an education. In 1830, Kohl accepted a position as a tutor in Russian controlled Latvia which lasted until 1835. During the next four years, Kohl travelled throughout the Russian Empire and, when he returned home to Dresden in 1839, decided to record his impressions on all that he had witnessed.<sup>6</sup> While Kohl followed the customary route of travel conducted by Custine, Cameron and Bourke when he chronicled life in St. Petersburg and Moscow in the first section of *Russia*, Kohl also extended the span of his study to the farthest reaches of the Russian Empire. Kohl's *Russia St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kharkoff, Riga, Odessa, The German Provinces on the Baltic, The Steppes, The Crimea, and The Interior of the Empire*, was originally published as nine distinct works that studied each of the locations referred to in the title, which were combined for an 1844 publication.<sup>7</sup> The book provided detailed descriptions on the daily life and social aspects of Russia proper in addition to examining the government and customs of the Baltic Provinces, Southern Russia and Ukraine.

After the critical acclaim Kohl received for his account of his journey through Russia, Kohl wrote a series of books that detailed the native life and customs he observed

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<sup>6</sup> Of the six travellers, only Kohl spoke fluent Russian. Although Cameron travelled through Russia many times, he was still endeavouring to learn the Russian language. Custine, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny depended on their knowledge of the French language, which was popular among the ranks of Russia's nobility, to converse with Russian aristocrats and their guides.

<sup>7</sup> J. G. Kohl, *Russia, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kharkoff, Riga, Odessa, the German Provinces on the Baltic, the Steppes, the Crimea and the Interior of the Empire*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1844.)

during his travels through Great Britain, Austria, the German states and North America. All of his publications exhibited Kohl's propensity for relaying intensely detailed descriptions on all that he surveyed. As the reviewer for Kohl's *Travels Through England and Wales* recorded in *The Athenæum* in 1844, "Mr. Kohl's rapidity in writing is only equalled by his rapidity in travelling."<sup>8</sup> Kohl's journeys through Great Britain were recorded in the books *Travels in Ireland* (1843), *Travels in Scotland* (1844) and *The Land and People of the British Isles* (1845). Kohl focused on German lands in *The Marshes and Islands of the Dukedom of Sleswick and Holstein* (1846), *Travels in Denmark and the Duchies of Sleswick and Holstein* (1847) and *The Rhine* (1851). In the 1860s and 1870s his adventuresome and journalistic spirit took Kohl to North America where he wrote extensively on its culture and geography. One of these works, *Kitchi-Gami Life Among the Lake Superior Ojibway* (1860) recounted the tribal customs of the Ojibway natives. Further studies on the region included *Travels in the Northwestern United States* (1857) and *Travels in Canada, and Through the States of New York and Pennsylvania* (1861).

*Personal Adventures and Excursions* was George Poulett Cameron's two-volume account of his travels through the Russian Empire which was published in 1845.<sup>9</sup> Cameron frequently travelled through the Russian Empire as a Lieutenant Colonel in the British army overseeing the furthest reaches of the British Empire in Asia. His interest and frequent contact with Russia motivated Cameron to record the events of his 1839-40

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<sup>8</sup> "Review of Kohl's *Travels Through England and Wales*," *The Athenæum*. 847 (January 20, 1844): 58-60.

<sup>9</sup> George Poulett Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions in Georgia, Circassia, and Russia*. 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1845.)

journey. During this visit, the British officer passed through Georgia and Circassia before Cameron extended his visit to St. Petersburg and Moscow and stopped in Novgorod before his trip was cut short by official duties for the British government which required Cameron to travel to Berlin. In *Personal Adventures and Excursions* Cameron reminisced about the people he encountered as he performed official military duties in Persia, the Black Sea region, Constantinople and Asia Minor. In the sections on the outermost regions of the Russian Empire, Cameron regaled his readers with stories of native folklore and geographical descriptions instead of examining nineteenth century conditions. The second volume of *Personal Adventures and Excursions* was far more informative as it considered political and social customs in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Cameron also wrote *The Romance of Military Life Being Souvenirs Connected With Thirty Years' Service* (1853) a collection of stories from his service with the British army in India and Egypt from the 1820s to the 1850s.<sup>10</sup>

Richard Southwell Bourke's travels through Russia at age twenty-three preceded his illustrious political career in the British Empire. A graduate of Trinity College in Dublin, he enjoyed the life of an aristocrat in Great Britain. It was believed that his distinguished family descended from William Fitzadelm de Borgo, the successor of Ireland's legendary ruler in 1066 and another one of his ancestors, Hubert de Burgh, was mentioned in Shakespeare's play *King John*. When his father died in 1867, Bourke assumed the title of the sixth Earl of Mayo. Bourke's *St. Petersburg and Moscow* was published in 1846 and based on his eleven-week journey through the Russian Empire.

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<sup>10</sup> George Poulett Cameron, *Romance of Military Life; Being Souvenirs Connected With Thirty Years' Service*. (London: G. Cox, 1853.)

Bourke's two volume study was a simple narrative of his travel experiences which recounted all that he saw and did in Russia after his departure from London on June 11, 1845.<sup>11</sup> Despite the admittedly limited duration of his exposure to the foreign land, Bourke made numerous comments about Russian history, politics, social conditions and Tsar Nicholas.<sup>12</sup> In between St. Petersburg and Moscow, Bourke passed through a multitude of villages and presented a broad picture of the life and customs of the Russian peasantry. *St. Petersburg and Moscow's* survey of the provinces and the different races in the empire arose through Bourke's observations from the start and close of his journey when he passed through the German Baltic region.<sup>13</sup>

Upon his return from Russia, Bourke became active in Irish politics. In 1848 he was elected to parliament and, from 1852 until 1868, was Ireland's Chief Secretary and became a member of the House of Commons. In his political career, Bourke was a moderate conservative who was deeply concerned about the welfare of the common people and with the government's ability to respond to the needs of the destitute. In 1869, Bourke became the viceroy and governor-general of India. In this position, Bourke endeavoured to be a worthy servant of the British Empire. His primary preoccupation was to guarantee the rights of Indians and reduce incidents of corruption amongst British politicians in India through means of economic and political reform. Bourke's

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<sup>11</sup> *The Dictionary of National Biography: From Earliest Times to 1900*. 21 vol. Edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. (London: Oxford University Press) vol. 3, 929-33.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Southwell Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow: A Visit to the Court of the Czar*. (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1970; First published in 1846: London: Henry Colburn.) vol. 1, 1-14. George Pottinger, *Mayo Disraeli's Viceroy*. (Great Britain: Michael Russell Publishing, Ltd., 1990) 19-21.

<sup>13</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 13, 19, 35, 173; vol. 2, 26, 36.

ambitious career was cut short when a native rebel assassinated him in 1872 in India.<sup>14</sup>

August von Haxthausen examined Russian conditions from March of 1843 until he returned to his home in Prussia in the spring of 1844. Haxthausen's *The Russian Empire* was originally published in the years 1847 and 1852 in Prussia in three volumes, under the German title *Studien ber die inner Zustände, das Volksleben, und insbesondere die ländlichen Einrichtungen Russlands*.<sup>15</sup> Already a proficient traveller preoccupied with observing the lives of the lower classes within Prussia, Haxthausen developed an interest in Slavic peoples and traditions during his research in that German state and went to Russia to examine the life and culture of Russia's peasantry.<sup>16</sup> Haxthausen decided to bypass a study on Russia's modern and ancient capitals of St. Petersburg and Moscow to focus on the Russian towns and countryside, including the principalities of Tver, Yaroslav and Pereiaslav, which were virtually unknown in the West. Haxthausen's journey to Kazan enabled him to reflect upon the lives of the many different tribes included in the population of the Russian Empire. Although *The Russian Empire* studied the social and cultural conditions of the peasantry, this did not preclude Haxthausen from analyzing Tsar Nicholas' reign or Russia's relationship with Europe. In 1854 Haxthausen wrote *Transcaucasia. Sketches of the Nations and Races Between the Black Sea and the Caspian*, which was a 'sequel' to his work *The Russian Empire*. The later book looked

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<sup>14</sup> *D. N. B.* III, 929-33.

<sup>15</sup> The two volume edition which was translated for English audiences in 1856 by Robert Farie received Haxthausen's approval. A number of portions and passages which were deemed both by the author and translator to be repetitive and of little value to the flow of the work were removed from *The Russian Empire*. In the introduction to the third volume of *Studien*, Haxthausen admitted "It only appeared during the printing of the work that [a] . . . characteristic anecdote had already been related . . . In truth, repetitions frequently occur in this book." August von Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire, Its People, Institutions and Resources*. 2 vols. Translated by Robert Farie. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856) vol. I, vi-vii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-x.

at the culture and lives of the people who formed a part of Russia's southern frontiers. In a manner reminiscent of his approach in *The Russian Empire, for Transcaucasia* Haxthausen emphasized the agricultural developments in the region while endeavouring to impart a sense of the culture and customs of the conquered nationalities in Russia's foreign territories.<sup>17</sup>

In *The Knout of the Russians* (1854) Germain de Lagny wanted to provide the world with what he deemed a 'true' portrait of Russian conditions.<sup>18</sup> It was evident from many of his comments on social conditions in the United States interspersed throughout his account of Russia that this was not the first time the Frenchman studied a foreign land. Prior to Lagny's arrival in Russia, he had become familiar with the United States and was aware of the practice of slavery in the southern states. In his study of Russia, Lagny provided Europeans with detailed information on different aspects of Russian life and politics. Lagny featured lengthy chapters on the Russian nobility, the army, climate, the peasantry, judicial proceedings, Nicholas I, the clergy, finances and St. Petersburg in his account on Russia. Within these expansive topics, *The Knout of the Russians* demonstrated the extent of Lagny's knowledge of Russia and the considerable breadth of his travels. While there were few references to life in the German provinces, Lagny made a concerted effort to explore Russian government and society under Nicholas I.

The importance of the accounts produced by Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny lies in the rich variety of material the travellers revealed about

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<sup>17</sup> August von Haxthausen, *Transcaucasia. Sketches of the Nations and Races Between the Black Sea and the Caspian*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1854.)

<sup>18</sup> Germain de Lagny, *The Knout and the Russians; or the Muscovite Empire, the Czar and His People*. Translated from the French by John Bridgeman. (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1970; First published in 1854: New York: Harper & Brothers) 9-11, 45.



Russia during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I. While newspaper reports and journal articles kept ordinary Europeans apprised of political developments, and historical works taught the West about Russia's past, travel accounts were a primary source for Europeans who wanted to learn about conditions in the Russia of Nicholas I. At a time when Russia had become established as an important political and military power and the West was in search of information on Nicholaevan Russia, the six travellers produced works on Russia which provided Europeans with a source for information. A close examination of their writings reveals that the accounts included some inaccurate information or excluded facts which have since become recognized as significant. Such shortcomings do not negate the overall importance and outstanding benefits which can be derived from the travel accounts. Alone and collectively, these writings contributed to Europe's growing understanding of Russia in the nineteenth century. Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny provided a meticulous contemporary portrait of a wide-range of Russian issues, ranging from Nicholas I and the autocratic government to the threat Russia posed against the West to Russian social conditions. The six travellers were notable contributors to the West's knowledge of Russia because their surveys, in comparison with other travel accounts produced on Russia during Nicholas' reign, were expansive and detailed.

***EUROPE AND RUSSIA: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE  
OF WESTERN TRAVEL ACCOUNTS ON RUSSIA***

The West's interest in Russia was not isolated to the nineteenth century and, for many centuries, Europeans had sought to understand conditions in faraway Russia. From

the sixteenth century, many Western travellers' accounts of their journeys to Russia were valuable sources for detailed information on the strange and faraway land. The importance of travel literature as a genre rests with its ability to portray the political and cultural developments in a country from a contemporary perspective.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny published accounts on Russia during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I which updated and improved Europeans' understanding of Russian internal conditions.

A published travel writing has a significance which varies according to the region or country the author has described. When Europeans described lands subject to colonization, such as India or the African continent, the works served to inspire further expansion and informed the West about new territorial holdings.<sup>20</sup> Travellers to North America intended "to instruct, to warn, to encourage, to criticize, and to judge" the region they travelled to, ultimately seeking to promote emigration to America.<sup>21</sup> Despite the insight that can be derived from travel literature, it is necessary to recognize that some of the works are poorly written and some of the authors willing "to believe that the particular

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<sup>19</sup> When travel accounts such as these six are examined for their content, it is imperative to be aware that the observations on Russia made by each of the foreign travellers were preconditioned by literary styles and language use that was prevalent at the time of their writing in their own countries. As Chloe Chard has pointed out in her study of travel writing, a trope "lays the traveller open to the accusations of affectation, pretentiousness, . . . reliance on the conventional formulations of others, a naïve proclivity to be much too easily impressed, or simply a general lack of discrimination." In travel accounts, the importance of a trope becomes particularly apparent when travellers describe all that they see as 'dramatically different' from the norm. Chloe Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel writing and imaginative geography 1600-1830*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 5. James Duncan and Derek Gregory, ed., *Writes of Passage reading travel writing*. (London: Routledge, 1999.) Focussing on the Orient, Edward Said has examined the significance of tropes in historical literature during different time periods. Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978.)

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Early Travellers in the Canadas 1791-1867*. Selected and Edited With an Introduction by Gerald M. Craig. (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1955) xxvii.

was the general.”<sup>22</sup> Regardless, it remains indisputable that many travellers produced remarkable works that educated the West about the customs, politics and social conditions of an unknown country. The value of travel accounts as an historical source has been described in a recent study by Barbara Kelcey as “offering a valuable resource for salient detail and for understanding social relations and change over time” in the society under observation.<sup>23</sup>

For a country such as Russia, nineteenth century accounts on the foreign land brought Europeans knowledge on an otherwise distant and unfamiliar land. The first informative travel account on Russia was Freiherr Sigmund von Herberstein’s *Rerum Moscoviticarum Comentarum*. Published in Vienna in 1549, it became immensely popular throughout Europe and available in eighteen editions and translations by 1589.<sup>24</sup> Herberstein travelled to Moscow as an ambassador from the Holy Roman Empire to encourage better relations between Muscovy and Poland for a united crusade of Christian powers against the Turks. Herberstein’s knowledge of the Russian language, although flawed, provided him with tremendous advantages as it enabled Herberstein to consult

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>23</sup> Barbara E. Kelcey, *Alone in Silence European Women in the Canadian North before 1940*. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001) 57. Many studies have been published which examine the accounts of nineteenth century travellers throughout Europe. Some examples of this recent scholarship include: Eva-Marie Kröller, *Canadian Travellers in Europe, 1851-1900*. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); Ian Ousby, *The Englishman’s England Taste, travel and the rise of tourism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Christopher Mulvey, *Anglo-American Landscapes: A Study of Nineteenth Century Anglo-American Travel Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.) A brief article on the manner in which travellers have portrayed Russia is by William Henry Chamberlain, “Russia Under Western Eyes,” *The Russian Review*. 16 (1957): 3-12.

<sup>24</sup> Herberstein’s success would have been impossible one hundred years earlier due to the absence of a printing press. From the time of its invention in 1450 by the German Johann Gutenberg, the number of printed books increased tremendously and facilitated the distribution of Herberstein’s book throughout Europe.

Russian law codes and the earliest historical records located in the principalities.<sup>25</sup> With so little known about Russia in the West during the 1500s, Herberstein's task was Herculean in scope and provided the first significant crack in Russia's impenetrable wall of mystery by informing Europeans about the eastern land and people. *Rerum Moscoviticarum Comentariorum* contained an abundance of descriptive passages on the geography and physical appearance of Muscovy, social and economic developments and the despotic government system.

Herberstein's impressive start to the Western travel accounts on Russia was continued by later generations of Europeans visiting Russia on diplomatic missions who supplied fresh information on developments in Russia. In 1553 British naval Captain Richard Chancellor was credited by the British with having 'discovered' Russia when he became waylaid in the country while in search of a northern trade route to China. Tsar Ivan IV warmly received Chancellor and established a trade relationship between Britain and Muscovy.<sup>26</sup> Chancellor's assessment of Russian conditions, published in Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation, by Sea or Overland, to the Most Remote and Distant Quarters of the Earth, at Any Time Within the Compass of These 1,500 Years* (1589), was very descriptive and surveyed Muscovy's economic and social life, as well as the religious practices of the Orthodox

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<sup>25</sup> Sigmund von Herberstein, *Description of Moscow and Muscovy 1557*. Edited by Bertold Picard. Translated by J. B. C. Grundy. (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1969) 5-6, 8. Herberstein was born in Carniola where he was able to learn the Russian, Polish and Bohemian tongues as a result of his close relations with the Slovenes in the region. Acquainted with the Wendish language of these Slavs, Herberstein then proceeded to study other Slavonic tongues.

<sup>26</sup> Muscovy's desire to enter into a trade relationship with Britain which provided the English merchants with favourable terms was based on Tsar Ivan's wish to develop close relations with the Western power to attain a military partnership with Queen Elizabeth. Francesca Wilson, ed., *Muscovy: Russia Through Foreign Eyes 1553-1900*. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1970) 27-30.

population. Englishmen inspired by Chancellor's voyage would publish additional reports on Russia until the end of the sixteenth century.

Trade between England and Russia declined after the death of Ivan IV in 1584 and, in 1588, Englishman Giles Fletcher was commissioned with the task of repairing relations which had faltered with the appearance of trade opportunities for the Muscovites with the Dutch. The inhospitable welcome Fletcher received from the Russian government was the likely cause of his condemnation of the malicious nature of the tsarist system and the debauchery of the Russian people in *Rus Commonwealth* (1589).<sup>27</sup>

Adam Olearius' *Voyages and Travels of the Ambassadors from the Duke of Holstein to the Great Duke of Muscovy and the King of Persia* (1647) was another source for information on Russia which helped shape European sentiment towards Russia. The early years of the seventeenth century had not been an easy time for travellers to gain entry into Russia. Until Michael Romanov was chosen as Russia's new monarch in 1613, the country had been embroiled in the succession crisis, known as the 'Time of Troubles,' which did not encourage Western diplomatic missions to Muscovy.<sup>28</sup> Olearius, commissioned with the task of studying the Russian government and people as a member of the Duke of Holstein's embassy in 1634, 1636 and 1639, described the geography, social customs and history of Russia. *Voyages and Travels* was an immensely popular

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<sup>27</sup> Giles Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*. With an Introduction by Richard Pipes and a Glossary-Index by John V. A. Fine Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) 15-6.

<sup>28</sup> Upon Ivan IV's death in 1584, his sickly and incapable son Feodor became Russia's tsar. Throughout Feodor's reign, Russia was controlled by boyars and princes and after the suspicious death of Ivan's eight year old son in 1591, and Feodor's death on 1598, the boyar Boris Godunov assumed control of the Russian throne. Godunov's death in 1604 initiated a succession crisis in which Godunov's son Feodor, two 'False Dmitri's' pretending to be Ivan's murdered son and boyar Vasilii Shiuskii claimed the throne. The 'Time of Troubles' was ended after a meeting of a *Zemskii Sobor* chose Michael Romanov as Russia's next tsar. A historical assessment the turbulent 'Time of Troubles' can be located in S. F. Platonov, *The Time of Troubles*. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1970.)

travel account and rapidly appeared in several German editions and was translated into French, English, Dutch and Italian versions.<sup>29</sup>

The West's interest in the information relayed by the sixteenth and seventeenth century travelers paved the way for publications on changing conditions in Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Despite the fact that the early travel writings provided a glimpse into Russian life, the authors of these works could not explore Russia's changing status in the world or depict Russian conditions in the eighteenth century. Russia took a prominent place on the world stage during the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725). After Peter was victorious in the long-standing war against Sweden (1700-21) the European community recognized the Russian Empire as part of Europe, not Asia. While Europeans could no longer doubt Russia's political importance and military strength, the West was left unaware of changing conditions in Russia. The results of Peter's program to modernize Russia's political and social structure indicated that new travel accounts on Russia were warranted and current information on the remote country was needed if Europe was to understand eighteenth century Russia. Captain John Perry's *The State of Russia Under the Present Tsar* (1716) was based on his fourteen years in Russia as a foreign advisor assisting in the development of Russia's navy. *The State of Russia* captured the attention of British and French audiences because it provided a glimpse of changing times in Russia. The Englishman showed the Russian people to be resistant to the modernization which Peter was anxious to introduce with his program of Westernization. Perry's overall impression of Russia in *The State of Russia* considered the

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<sup>29</sup> Adam Olearius, *The Travels of Olearius in Seventeenth-Century Russia*. Translated and edited by Samuel H. Baron. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967) 11.

Russian people to be backward and suspicious and reliant upon Peter the Great to bring them into the modern world.<sup>30</sup>

In 1800, William Tooke published his thoroughly researched and richly detailed account of Russia, *View of the Russian Empire, During the Reign of Catherine the Second and to the Close of the Eighteenth Century*. The recurring theme in Tooke's work concerned the ever-growing strength of the Russian Empire which he depicted by contrasting developments in Russia during the reigns of Peter I and Catherine II. While Tooke was particularly impressed with Russia's political, military and social advancements in the 1700s, *View of the Russian Empire* included information on the cultural life and geography of the Russian Empire. Tooke's work had intrinsic value for Westerners because it used Russian sources from the libraries and collections of the Russian Academy and amalgamated such information with that from previous European travel accounts as well as Tooke's own observations on Russia under Catherine II.<sup>31</sup>

Even though Europeans possessed a general understanding of Russian conditions prior to the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, the information they learned could not account for developments in the era of Nicholaevan Russia. Russia's authority in world affairs had been steadily increasing since the reign of Peter the Great and under Tsar Alexander I (1801-25) Russia had been decisively involved in the Napoleonic wars and had become respected and feared throughout Europe. The Russian Empire exercised its newfound political strength at the Congress of Vienna (1814-5) when Alexander helped reshape the

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<sup>30</sup> Wilson, *Muscovy*, 106-13.

<sup>31</sup> William Tooke, *View of the Russian Empire During the Reign of Catherine the Second and to the Close of the Eighteenth Century*. 3 vols. (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1970; First published in 1800: London: Longman.)

map of Europe. When Alexander died in 1825, the West was left to wonder about the policies and personality of Russia's next ruler, Nicholas I. This was the first time in Europe's history that the intentions of the Russian government took on a level of urgency. Russia's military was numerically superior to the armies of European nations and the West viewed Russia's foreign policy interests towards the Ottoman Empire with suspicion.<sup>32</sup> In 1842, *The Times* was apprehensive of "the headstrong and fanatical character of Nicholas, confident to excess in his resources and elated by the consciousness of brute force."<sup>33</sup> Europeans who perceived the existence of a possible threat from Russia wanted to be informed about the nature of Russia's internal conditions and military strength as well as its intentions against the West.

While the ascendancy of a new tsar to Russia's throne did not instantly transform Russia's social and political structures, during the reign of Nicholas I Europeans interested in Russia sought new data. Despite the publication of a number of studies on Russia during Nicholas' reign, not all of the foreign travel accounts presented a detailed and informative portrait of Russia. In 1838 London's *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine* derided the lack of instructive material which had been published on Russia in the 1830s. The article mentioned that the travellers:

have accordingly amused us exceedingly, and left us with considerably less real and available knowledge of the power, prospects, and designs of Russia, and of the extraordinary man who rules over her destinies, than if they had never been written.<sup>34</sup>

The quality of the books on Russia was regarded to be so poor that the article determined

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>33</sup> *The Times* (London), 18 May 1842, 4.

<sup>34</sup> "Bremner's Excursions in Russia," *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine*. 55 (1839): 285.



that the works could be labelled fiction. Although this opinion may have been exceedingly harsh, it did indicate that many travel accounts published between 1825 and 1855 contained a limited amount of information on the Russian Empire. *Recollections of a Tour in the North of Europe* (1839) by the Marquis of Londonderry provided an amusing read as it portrayed Russian court life and society. The reviewer of Richard Lister Venables' *Domestic Scenes in Russia: In a Series of Letters Describing a Year's Residence in that Country, Chiefly in the Interior* (1839) in *The Quarterly Review* considered the book's description of "the modes of life amongst the nobility with spirit in a very pleasing style" to be the most significant aspect of Venables' publication.<sup>35</sup> Anatole de Demidoff's *Travels in Southern Russia, and the Crimea; Through Hungary, Wallachia, & Moldavia, During the Year 1837*, published in 1853, was a survey of Russian economic developments from earliest times to the reign of Nicholas I.<sup>36</sup> While writings such as these were informative, they were not well-rounded accounts of Russia.

Six of the most detailed and thorough works on Russia during the period of Nicholas' rule were by Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen, and Lagny. This was because the authors studied Russian political, cultural and social developments and thoroughly investigated issues such as Nicholas' character and the threat Russia posed to the West. The outstanding breadth of *The Empire of the Czar, Russia, Personal Adventures and Excursions, St. Petersburg and Moscow, The Russian Empire* and *The Knout of the Russians* made them important sources on the Russia of Nicholas I in Europe's long-standing quest to understand Russia. In the introduction to *The Knout of*

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<sup>35</sup> "Tours in the Russian Provinces," *The Quarterly Review*. 67 (1840-1): 350.

<sup>36</sup> Anatole de Demidoff, *Travels in Southern Russia, and the Crimea; Through Hungary, Wallachia, & Moldavia, During the Year 1837*. 2 vol. (London: John Mitchell, 1853.)

*the Russians*, Lagny reflected upon the travellers' mission thus, "Russia, which has always engrossed, in a high degree, the attention of Europe . . . is exciting a feeling of curiosity, which we believe it is in our power to satisfy."<sup>37</sup>

***PERSONAL MOTIVES FOR TRAVEL: THE INTENTIONS  
BEHIND THE SIX TRAVEL ACCOUNTS ON RUSSIA***

In addition to the West's interest in Nicholaevan Russia which stemmed from the important position Russia had attained in international relations, the six Europeans had personal reasons for visiting Russia and publishing their travel impressions. Several factors propelled Custine to visit Russia in the spring of 1839 and write *The Empire of the Czar*. The favourable reviews he received for his book on Spain, *L'Espagne sous Ferdinand VII* (1838) prompted Custine to conduct another study of a foreign land. Custine, who had dreams of becoming a respected author on par with such literary luminaries as Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac, had only attained moderate success with his poetry and short stories. Custine received strong encouragement to continue his writing career when Balzac praised *L'Espagne sous Ferdinand VII* and recommended that Custine continue writing travel studies:

if you do the same thing for each country, you will have produced a unique collection . . . [of] great value. I shall do everything in my power to get you to commit to the descriptions of Germany . . . Italy, Russia . . .<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in George F. Kennan, *The Marquis de Custine and His Russia In 1839*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 136.

Custine chose Russia because it, like Spain, was in close proximity to Europe but seemingly prone to foreign, Asiatic, tendencies.<sup>39</sup>

Custine also became interested in analyzing Russia's political system after Alexis de Tocqueville published *De la démocratie en Amérique* in 1835. Although Custine did not accept many of Tocqueville's ideas on democracy, his interest in Russia was heightened by *De la démocratie* as Custine perceived it would be suitable to study the Russian government.<sup>40</sup> Custine's initial interest in politics stemmed from his desire to discover a political solution for the chaos in France's government which he reasoned to be the result of the recent freedoms introduced in French politics. Custine supported the principles of democracy but, as an aristocrat, he could not accept the reality of a democratic government in France that gave an overwhelming amount of power to the common people. The marquis viewed Russia as France's possible saviour because of his respect for Russia's previous ruler, Alexander I, who had played a pivotal role in the destruction of Napoleon's power throughout Europe. Instead of finding salvation for France in Russia's political system, Custine witnessed government control and restrictions in Russia which overpowered all personal freedom.<sup>41</sup>

Custine's negative assessment of Russian conditions was furthered by his friendship with the Polish Count Ignace de Gurowski. Gurowski was in exile from the Russian Empire and Custine's travels to Russia were partly inspired by his desire to assist

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 15-6. Spain had been exposed to Asiatic culture after the invasion by Muslim forces in 711 which, although weakened by the Christian rulers in the eleventh century, remained present in Spain until the Muslims were completely overrun by 1492. The 'Oriental influences' in Russia were derived from the Mongol yoke over the Rus' land which lasted from 1240 until 1480.

<sup>40</sup> Muhlstein, *A Taste for Freedom*, 272-3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 316-7.

Gurowski's quest to receive permission to re-enter the Russian Empire.<sup>42</sup> Custine attained insight into the difficulties of Poles under the tsar from Adam Mickiewicz's poetry which was available in a French translation titled *Road to Russia* just prior to the time that Custine composed his reflections on Russia. The combination of Russia's political system and Custine's awareness of the plight of the Poles served to sharpen his opinions against Russia in *The Empire of the Czar*.

Cameron wrote *Personal Adventures and Excursions* to publicly assert his opinions on Russia. Cameron was aghast over Custine's negative assessment of Russia and, as he stated, was motivated to write "in opposition to the information obtained by the Marquis de Custine, Heaven knows where, I beg to offer what I have gleaned during the course of my journey, from one extremity of Russia to the other."<sup>43</sup> Cameron and Custine had argued over their different views of the Russian Empire and Cameron published *Personal Adventures and Excursions* to publicly assert his opinions on Russia.<sup>44</sup> Cameron's sympathetic opinion of the Russian Empire led him to be critical of Custine's rather unfavourable depiction of the tsarist realm. More than simply attacking *The Empire of the Czar*, Cameron believed that his account, based on long familiarity with the region, could act as a counter-balance against all negative travel writings on Russia. Cameron wanted to create new, and more complimentary, perceptions of Russia amongst Europeans as he felt it was wrong to continually find fault with all aspects of the Russian Empire. Cameron believed that no nation deserved the scathing criticism levelled against

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<sup>42</sup> Kennan, *The Marquis de Custine*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 1, x.

<sup>44</sup> Harry W. Nerhood, *To Russia and Return: An Annotated Bibliography of Travellers' English-Language Accounts of Russia From the Ninth Century to the Present*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969) 56.

Russia and stated that Britain, Austria and France had committed many unlawful and barbaric acts in their conquests over foreign lands and peoples.<sup>45</sup>

Bourke was interested in foreign travel and chose Russia as the site for his excursion because he felt the true nature of the Russian Empire had been obscured by the contradictory and negative information relayed about Russia in recent travel writings.<sup>46</sup> Bourke recognized that he lacked literary talent and knowledge of Russian conditions to make assertions on what he observed during his eleven weeks in Russia. Instead he chose to “merely tell of the country and the people, as he himself saw them.”<sup>47</sup> Bourke was especially critical towards Custine’s negative assessment of Russia in *The Empire of the Czar* because he felt it had ruined what could have been one of the most informative and well-written studies of the Russian realm. Instead of accurately depicting Russia, Bourke alleged that Custine’s “hatred of his subject appears in every line of his book.”<sup>48</sup> The marquis’ cynical approach to his topic was so prevalent that Bourke suggested that Custine’s three-volume study would have been markedly improved if reduced to one volume of facts which eliminated speculation.<sup>49</sup> Hence, Bourke was compelled to travel to Russia to determine the validity of Custine’s publication and persuaded to write *St. Petersburg and Moscow* to present a more objective picture of Russia to the West.

Unlike *Personal Adventures and Excursions* and *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, which were efforts to dispute and undermine negative writings on Russia, *The Knout of the Russians* asserted that recent travel accounts on Russia did not depict the true level of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., xix.

<sup>46</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 11-2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 74.

barbarity in Russia. Lagny believed it was incumbent on him to produce an accurate portrait of Russia for the European reading public. Lagny noted his special qualities for describing Russia when he declared that past travel accounts had falsely attributed the poor state of Russia's military to the familial obligations of the army man which eroded his militaristic ardour. Conversely, Lagny viewed the situation to be the result of the machine-like indifference to life and all surroundings which was embodied in the character of the peasant soldier.<sup>50</sup> Without referring to a particular foreign chronicler, Lagny stated that his predecessors were under police surveillance in Russia and unable to observe the real Russia.<sup>51</sup> Lagny also credited the scant amount of correct information published on Russia to the tsar's predilection for strict censorship which obscured the level of barbarity that existed in Russia. Deeming himself to be the ideal foreign observer, as he was aware of the evil machinations of the Russian government, Lagny intended *The Knout of the Russians* to be an accurate portrait of Russia that was sorely lacking in the world. Unlike the accounts by earlier travelers, he would not attempt to find favour with the tsarist government.<sup>52</sup>

Haxthausen travelled to Russia in the spring of 1843 because he wanted to study the Russian peasantry and rural conditions. As Haxthausen recorded in the preface to *The Russian Empire*, he was desirous of conducting a

study of rural institutions, or, in other words, the different relations of the peasant class to the cultivation of the land, their families, the landowners, their Communes, and the State. He has

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<sup>50</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> The validity of this statement is doubtful as Custine, Cameron, Bourke, Kohl and Haxthausen were free to condemn any supervision experienced in Russia once they were safely in their own countries if they had truly felt oppressive scrutiny had impeded their travels through Russia.

<sup>52</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 9-11.

endeavoured to study the life of the lower classes of the people by direct personal observation.<sup>53</sup>

Haxthausen became aware of the economic difficulties experienced by peasants when Napoleon imposed harsh taxes on Prussia's lower classes after French troops overtook the German territory. In 1812 he joined the Prussian military to fight the French and spent his spare time studying the legends and stories from German peasant culture. When the end of France's dominance over Europe was signalled by the start of the Congress of Vienna in 1814, Haxthausen investigated the traditional literature and music of Germany's lower classes at the University of Göttingen (1814-8). In addition to cultural studies, Haxthausen enrolled in a number of law courses that traced the history of legal developments in different German regions. In 1829 Haxthausen combined his interest in peasant conditions and law when he published a study on agricultural conditions in Paderborn and Corvey that surveyed legal statutes concerning principles of land tenure from ancient times.<sup>54</sup>

Haxthausen's study on Paderborn and Corvey caught the attention of Prussia's future ruler, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Haxthausen was commissioned with the task of conducting surveys on agricultural conditions throughout Prussia in 1830.<sup>55</sup> For the next ten years Haxthausen studied the relationship between the peasantry and the land and found that the remnants of traditional ties between the land and peasantry throughout Prussia had disappeared in the face of modern agricultural reforms. With the exception of

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<sup>53</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, ix.

<sup>54</sup> August von Haxthausen, *Studies into the Interior of Russia*. Translated by Eleanor L. M. Schmidt. Edited and with an introduction by S. Frederick Starr. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972) ix-x.

<sup>55</sup> Bettina Knust Beer, "August von Haxthausen, A Conservative Reformer: Proposals for Administrative and Social Reform in Russia and Prussia 1829-1866." (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of Tennessee, 1976) 105-6. Haxthausen, *Studies into the Interior*, xiv

Paderborn and Corvey, Haxthausen did not detect any traces of ancient native German customs of land tenure that were practiced in the modern era.<sup>56</sup> Although Haxthausen's search for traditional German agricultural practices did not yield substantial results, he did perceive signs of Slavic farming procedures in eastern Prussia, in Pomerania, where Slavs had once resided in large numbers and *Gemeinden*, ancient Slavic communes, could be discerned in the 1830s.

In 1843 Haxthausen visited Russia to conduct studies similar to those he had undertaken throughout Prussia. Haxthausen had initially formed an interest in Russia in the 1830s when he engaged in a brief examination of the peasant situation in Russian-controlled Estonia. In 1842 Haxthausen demonstrated his continued awareness of developments in Russia when he published an article in support of a Russian decree of 1842 which promoted greater cooperation between the lord and peasant and sought the slow dispersal of the land into the hands of the peasantry towards eventual emancipation.<sup>57</sup> Haxthausen went to Russia in order to explore rural conditions and expanded his survey into Slav practices which was inaugurated during his travels through Pomerania. After being unable to detect traces of traditional German agricultural practices which had not been influenced by Slavic methods, Haxthausen was able to study the remnants of ancient Slavic traditions amongst nineteenth century Slavs, most notably the Russians.<sup>58</sup>

Kohl's financial hardships in addition to his love of travel were the driving forces behind the publication of *Russia*. From 1830-5, Kohl was a tutor in Russian-controlled Latvia and his interest in studying foreign lands inspired him to conduct a survey on the

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-xiv.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>58</sup> Beer, "August von Haxthausen," 145-57. Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, x.



geographic points of interest in the Russian Empire from 1835-9. It first became evident that Kohl hoped to benefit financially from his favourite pastime - travel - when he attempted to have his observations on Russia published by St. Petersburg's Academy of Sciences. When Kohl returned to his home in Dresden he published an account of his impressions on Russia that described the geography and architecture of Russia and the customs of the people.<sup>59</sup> The typical section in *Russia*, whether it was on industry, the Neva River or the churches was very descriptive and contained historical background information while stressing daily life and routines in Russia. London's *The Quarterly Review* made reference to this aspect of Kohl's style when it commented, "[Kohl] has given us St. Petersburg by winter and summer - by day and night - with its Neva, canals, quays, markets, shops and houses - each swarming with its respective population . . . caught in full life and movement."<sup>60</sup> Thus, his travel account, influenced by financial need, allowed Kohl to realize his interest in studying a foreign country.

Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny were prompted to conduct a survey of Russia during the 1830s and 1840s for a variety of reasons. Each traveller examined aspects of Russia concerned with Nicholas I, the autocratic government, Russia's place in the world, the threat Russia's military posed to Europe, artistic achievements, educational practices, the Orthodox religion, the Russian social classes and a discussion on the Russian Empire's provinces and extended territories.

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<sup>59</sup> J. G. Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami: Life Among the Lake Superior Ojibway*. Translated by Lascelles Wraxall. With a New Introduction by Robert E. Bieder. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985) xviii.

<sup>60</sup> "Jesse - Kohl - and - Sterling on Russia," *Quarterly Review*. 69 (1842): 408.

## ***AN HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT OF IMPERIAL RUSSIA***

When Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny ventured into 1830s and 1840s Russia they were confronted with Russian social and political conditions under Tsar Nicholas I. The reign of Nicholas I had begun amidst the Decembrist Revolt in 1825 and ended during the final stages of the faltering Crimean War in 1855. Nicholas was younger than his two brothers, Tsar Alexander I and Constantine, and did not anticipate that he would become Russia's next ruler. Following Alexander's death in 1825, a succession crisis ensued whereby both Constantine and Nicholas recognized each other as the new Russian tsar.<sup>61</sup> The confused period in Russia's leadership prompted young aristocrats who already harboured ideas of rebelling against the autocracy to stage the Decembrist Revolt. In the midst of the crisis, Nicholas ascended to the Russian throne and proceeded to exert control over all aspects of the Russian Empire to ensure that the position of the Russian autocrat was never again threatened.

Throughout his reign Nicholas ruled according to the precept, "even if I shall be Emperor for only one hour I shall show myself worthy of the honour."<sup>62</sup> In his youth, Nicholas had wanted to pursue a military career and, although this ambition could not be

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<sup>61</sup> While it was commonly believed that Constantine would assume the throne in the event of Alexander's death, Constantine's marriage to a non-royal ended his candidacy to be tsar. While Nicholas was aware that Constantine had renounced his claim to the throne in private official documents, the succession crisis ensued because Nicholas did not want to assume power until Constantine had publicly, and unequivocally, renounced all rights to the throne. Nicholas assumed power when he became aware of the activities of noblemen in the Northern and Southern societies and recognized that a revolutionary uprising was imminent. Adam B. Ulam, *Russia's Failed Revolutionaries: From the Decembrists to the Dissidents*. (New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1981) 48-9. Two thorough works on the Decembrist Revolt are Anatole Mazour's *The First Russian Revolution 1825: The Decembrist Movement*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1937; reprint 1961) and Mikhail Zeltin's *The Decembrists*. Trans. George Panin, preface by Michael M. Karpovich. (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1958.)

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I: Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978) 77-8.

fulfilled, Nicholas' love of order and discipline was reflected in his performance as Russia's autocrat. The majority of Nicholas' bureaucratic officials were military men who acted in accordance with the tsar's rigid and repressive policies.<sup>63</sup> Within the first six months of Nicholas' reign, the Third Department became an established police system that ensured that Nicholas' authority could be thoroughly and effectively imposed throughout Russia. As the noted historian Nicholas V. Riasankovsky, who published a definitive study on Nicholas' government policies explained:

The Third Department of his Majesty's Own Chancery, the political police - which came to symbolize to many Russians the reign of Nicholas I - acted as the autocrat's main weapon against subversion and revolution and as his principal agency for distributing punishments and rewards among them . . . The Third Department also prepared detailed, interesting, and remarkably candid reports for the emperor, supervised literature . . . and fought every trace of revolutionary infection.<sup>64</sup>

In 1832 the program of 'Official Nationality' was developed and it embraced the fundamental principles of Nicholas' rule: 'Autocracy', 'Orthodoxy' and 'Nationality.' It was a controlling ideological system based on Russian tradition and devised to strengthen the tsar's authority over the empire and people. The concept of 'Orthodoxy' was established to influence the proper and correct religious and moral behaviour of Russians. 'Autocracy' was promoted to preserve and uphold the will of the autocrat who led the Russian people. 'Nationality' was meant to defend and maintain the national identity and

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<sup>63</sup> A. E. Presniakov, *Emperor Nicholas I of Russia, the Apogee of Autocracy 1825-1855*. Edited and Translated by Judith C. Zacek With *Nicholas I And the Course of Russian History* by Nicholas V. Riasankovsky. (Gulf Breeze, Florida: Academic International Press, 1974) xxv.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

culture and was exemplified when Nicholas insisted that the nobility use the Russian language at court.<sup>65</sup>

The essential principle which Nicholas strove so vigorously to protect throughout his reign was centred upon the continuance of the autocratic system which was rooted in Russian history. Although the power of the tsar was brought to its pinnacle under Nicholas I, it had been present in Russia for centuries.<sup>66</sup> In the fourteenth century Moscow's Grand Prince, Ivan III, overpowered lesser princedoms in Russia and laid the foundations for autocratic power which was strengthened and expanded over the years by such despots as Ivan IV and Peter the Great. The autocrat's will was law and only God remained above the tsar.<sup>67</sup> It was the ruler's duty to protect and punish the people and to govern the country. The belief in the authority of the tsar was so strong, almost like a sacred cult, that it was widely believed throughout Russia that any alteration of these principals would lead to chaos.<sup>68</sup> During Nicholas' rule, control over all aspects of people's life was the greatest and the least was done to undermine the autocrat's authority. Nicholas commented, "take away the limitless, all powerful will of the monarch and at the least shock [Russia] will crumble."<sup>69</sup> Unlike Alexander I who courted ideas on

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholas has been regarded as Russia's last absolute monarch because the level of control he exerted over the Russian people would not be repeated under his successor, Alexander II, who introduced reforms that allowed a greater role to bureaucrats in the government and emancipated the peasants.

<sup>67</sup> In some respects, the authority of the autocrat preceded the importance of God. The rural priest Ioann S. Belliustin noted that many peasants regarded the tsar to be of such importance that "when God dies, Nicholas would take his place." Quoted in Gregory L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) xxiv.

<sup>68</sup> M. N. Pokrovskii, *Russia in World History*. Edited, With an Introduction, by Roman Szporluk. Translated by Roman and Mary Ann Szporluk. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970) 45-51.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Quoted in Edward Crankshaw, *In the Shadow of the Winter Palace: Russia's Drift Towards Revolution, 1825-1917*. (New York: Viking Press, 1976) 79.

liberal forms of government, Nicholas displayed no confusion regarding his complete devotion to the autocratic system.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the oppression stemming from the extraordinary levels of control that the tsar exercised over the land and people, one of the most problematic aspects of the autocratic system was that it was unable to manage all government matters. Although the bureaucrats in Russia had limited control over administrative duties, officials such as the local governors in the provinces could be bloodthirsty and vicious dictators. One of the most notable aspects of the Russian bureaucracy was the corrupt behaviour of some officials. Their income was not substantial and government workers were adept at deceitful dealings which included stealing money from the Russian people. However, under Nicholas I, there was an increase of young officials who wanted to perform honest and efficient work. A bureaucrat during the reign of Alexander II, Dmitri Obolensky, noted that officials during the era of Nicholas I:

worked, studied, and read, and they looked upon the pointless, empty life of high society with contempt. [They were sustained

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<sup>70</sup> Two organizations that Nicholas devised best illustrated his desire to oversee all aspects of Russian life. Special committees were responsible for studying urgent matters and supplanted Alexander's Senate and Ministries in importance. More controlling and all-encompassing, was Nicholas' refinement of the private institution 'His Majesty's Own Chancellery.' By the end of its development in 1842, it was comprised of six sections which supervised the work of provincial governors, charities, the peasantry, law reform and, most importantly, police matters which the Third Section headed. Each organization worked independently of the other to ensure that the tsar was the sole authority to which it was responsible and provided Nicholas with unlimited control. The Second Section organized the law codes of Russia and prepared the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire which emphatically declared the all-encompassing power of the autocrat. Nicholas also assumed the role of grand censor when he used the Third Section to condemn writings which were unfavourable towards official policies or encouraged radical elements. Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, "The Patterns of Autocracy" in *The Transformation of Russian Society Aspects of Social Change Since 1861*. Edited by Cyril E. Black. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 93-110. Sidney Monas, "The Political Police: The Dream of a Beautiful Autocracy" in *The Transformation of Russian Society Aspects of Social Change Since 1861*. Edited by Cyril E. Black. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 164-91.

by] some incomprehensible hope that the present order could not continue very long and that better days soon must come.<sup>71</sup>

One man who was particularly notable as an indicator of the increased standards in the bureaucracy was Nikolai Miliutin who was active in government affairs under Nicholas I and instrumental during the period of reforms enacted under Alexander II in the 1860s and 1870s which saw such monumental changes in Russia as the emancipation of the serfs.

The Russian military in the nineteenth was dominated by the peasantry, as 90% of conscripts. Soldiers were subjected to constant hardship during their twenty-five years of service. From age twenty, serfs, peasants and labourers in village communes could be conscripted into the army by landowners. The lowest class of men filled the army as more affluent peasant families used bribes to have their sons exempted from military service. It was also not uncommon for volunteers to take the place of recruits for a fee and, if the hired men did not flee their responsibilities, added to the poor standards in the army.<sup>72</sup> The majority of officers in the army came from the lower and uneducated ranks of the nobility and were poorly trained.

For poor conduct or misbehaviour, Russia's soldiers faced extreme punishments and attempts to flee the army could result in flogging or being sent to Siberia. Low pay exacerbated the harsh conditions and the poor living standard experienced by army men. Commanders provided soldiers with insufficient food in order that government funds could be siphoned off for their private use.<sup>73</sup> Russia's forces were distributed equally

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrat's 1825-1861*. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982) 77.

<sup>72</sup> John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Army Under Nicholas I, 1825-1855*. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965) 233.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

throughout the empire, in Poland, Kiev, St. Petersburg, the Caucasus, Siberia, Finland and on the Chinese border. The official figure for the numbers of soldiers in the Russian army in the 1850s was listed at 859,000; in comparison to Austria's 350,000 troops and Prussia at 200,000. This circumstance can be attributed to the size of the Russian population as, statistically, Russia contributed fewer soldiers, at one man for every 75.6 Russians, while the French trained one soldier for every 62.1 members of France's population.<sup>74</sup>

Since the reign of Peter the Great, Russian tsars exercised great control over religious affairs. Peter I created the Holy Synod in 1721 as an official religious office to bring the Church firmly under tsarist control. While the Church was never an institution directly opposed to the ruler, Peter's initiative made it powerless and even the choice of bishops was left to the discretion of the tsar. Under Nicholas I the Holy Synod was transformed into a government office and, following his long military career, Count N. A. Protasov became overprocurator of the Holy Synod in 1835. Bishops' abilities to oversee church matters, ranging from the collection of alms to exempting members of the clergy from their duties, came under Nicholas' supervision and any religious leader who questioned Nicholas' authority could be demoted or forced into premature retirement. In 1841 measures were taken to ensure that Nicholas' will was clearly enforced and differences of opinion regarding religious matters were entrusted to the overprocurator.<sup>75</sup>

In the countryside, rural clergymen received a sparse and incomplete education and were not encouraged to develop independent religious ideas and it was desired by the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 107-8.

<sup>75</sup> David W. Edwards, "The System of Nicholas I in Church-State Relations" in Robert L. Nichols and Theofanis George Stavrou, ed. *Russian Orthodoxy Under the Old Regime*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978) 154-70.

government that religious texts be memorized, not understood or questioned. In a state of poverty, the members of a parish clergy were forced to demand fees for their religious work to earn a living. An outcome of the clergy's penury and poor education was that the Russian people did not respect them. The Church officials were divided into 'black' and 'white' clergy. The later, village priests, descended from the lower classes and were required to marry; the black clergy could not marry and often became bishops or high-ranking Church officials. A career as a clergyman was not prestigious, or highly sought, and most of its members were the sons of priests.<sup>76</sup>

Russia's economy improved steadily during Nicholas' reign; only in comparison with Europe did the progress achieved by Russia seem less substantial. The development of a flourishing capitalist society and strong industrial base in Russia's cities on par with Europe was undermined by the small size of the populations in Russia's major cities; only St. Petersburg and Moscow's population exceeded 65,000.<sup>77</sup> A further impediment to the creation of a thriving economy was the small Russian merchant class, totalling 180,000, which had a moderate economic base that hindered trade activities.<sup>78</sup> The essential problem of the Russian economy stemmed from the use of peasant labour. During Nicholas' reign, serf labour, either in agricultural work or in small cottage crafts, remained the basis of the Russian economy. The destitute status of the peasants further left them

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<sup>76</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801-1917*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 34-5. Sergei Pushkarov, *The Emergence of Modern Russia, 1801-1917*. Translated by Robert H. McNeal and Tova Yedlin. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963) 90-5.

<sup>77</sup> In 1800, the approximate population of Moscow was 250,000 and St. Petersburg 300,000. Whereas in London the population was estimated to be 960,000 and Paris at 600,000. Tim Chapman, *Imperial Russia 1801-1905*. (London: Routledge, 2001) 6.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas C. Owen, *Capitalism and Politics in Russia: A Social History of the Moscow Merchants, 1855-1905*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 1-9. W. O. Henderson, *The Industrial Revolution in Europe Germany, France, Russia, 1815-1914*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1961.)



unable to purchase manufactured products and the majority of Russian nobles preferred to buy peasant handicrafts rather than manufactured and luxury items.

In 1802 Alexander I had formed a Ministry of Public Education to manage the establishment of parochial and country schools, gymnasiums, or secondary schools, and universities, led by foreign educators. In the nineteenth century, the curriculum in the lower levels of the educational facilities for the peasants, with the exception of the serfs who were forbidden from receiving an education, consisted of languages, history, mathematics, religion, grammar, geography, science and drawing in the fifty gymnasiums and four hundred rural schools. A number of lyceums and cadet corps educated young nobles in Western culture and primarily functioned to prepare nobles for a position in the government or military leadership.<sup>79</sup> From 1833 to 1849, minister of Education, S. S. Uvarov, wanted to promote the educational standards of the youth in the country and took firm control over the practices in Russia's universities in order to develop an educated class of Russians. Russia's universities went through a series of reforms and faculties for law, medicine and philosophy were introduced. Even though Uvarov exerted rigid control, the quality of the education and curriculum was not severely stifled. The empire's universities, at St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan, Kiev, Odessa, Kharakov, Warsaw and Dorpat helped promote steady levels of academic scholarship.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> James C. McClelland, *Autocrats and Academics: Education, Culture, and Society in Tsarist Russia*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979) 6.

<sup>80</sup> Pushkarov, *The Emergence of Modern Russia*, 55-7. Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, 224.

Cultural and artistic developments flourished in mid-nineteenth century Russia.<sup>81</sup> The first great Russian writer during this period was Alexander Pushkin who refined the Russian literary language. In his study of Russian literature, Ivan Spector argued that Pushkin “found [the Russian language] a rough uncut diamond with great potentialities and he left it a polished medium of expression.”<sup>82</sup> During Nicholas’ reign, the last of Pushkin’s masterpieces, the poem *Evgeny Onegin* and the prose works *The Queen of Spades* and *The Captain’s Daughter* were published. Another proficient author to emerge during Nicholas’ reign, the poet Michael Lermontov, followed on Pushkin’s successes when he published several impressive works, including the celebrated poem *On the Death of the Poet*, that lamented Pushkin’s premature death after a duel and the novel *A Hero of Our Time*. Russia’s literary prowess in the 1830s was also enriched by the works of Ukrainian Nikolai Gogol who explored topics ranging from native folklore to ridiculing Russia’s inefficient and corrupt bureaucratic officials in short stories such as *The Nose* and the play *Inspector General* to the novel *Dead Souls*. By the end of Nicholas’ reign, the careers of the legendary figures of Russian literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Lev Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev were in their early stages and their major works, respectively *Crime and Punishment*, *War and Peace* and *Fathers and Sons*, still lay in the future.

Musical prowess was likewise in its infancy during Nicholas’ reign and Michael Glinka inaugurated the future achievements of Russia’s classical music with the opera *A*

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<sup>81</sup> Russia’s literary accomplishments received a tremendous boost by the discovery of the original copy of the medieval epic *The Tale of the Host of Igor* and a Russian national spirit which appeared in the aftermath of the struggle against France in the Napoleonic Wars. These two developments helped shape a strong sense of Russian identity and led Russian authors to abandon imitations of foreign literature in favour of producing works inspired by Russian tradition and culture.

<sup>82</sup> Ivan Spector, *An Introduction to Russian History and Culture*. 3rd ed. (Princeton: D. Von Nostrand Company, Inc., 1961) 192.

*Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Ludmilla*. Glinka, similarly to Pushkin's contributions to Russian literature, developed a national music based on Russian traditions and European classical style which paved the way for the music produced by the 'Mighty Handful,' a collection of Russia's most accomplished musicians in the 1860s and 1870s. Included in this group were Alexander Borodin, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Peter Tchaikovsky who wrote unforgettable symphonies and operas.<sup>83</sup> Paintings and sculpture at this period were under the supervision of the Academy of Arts and showed itself most impressively in Brulov's "The Last Day of Pompeii" and O. A. Kirpenski's "The Musician."<sup>84</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Russian intelligentsia was becoming a politically active force. An important ideology that developed amongst intellectuals in the 1830s centred upon questions concerning Russia's true position in the world which was developed by the Slavophiles and Westernizers. Although the groups were similar in that they both recognized Russia's need for political and social reforms and Russia's important place in the world, the Westernizers and Slavophiles were divided by opposing views on the Orthodox Church and Russian history. The Westernizers, headed by Peter Chaadaev, Alexander Herzen and Vissarion Belinsky supported the infusion of Western ideas and customs in Russian life introduced by Peter I. They felt that Russia should adopt Western cultural and intellectual initiatives to ensure Russia's advancement. The Slavophiles, impressively led by Ivan and Peter Kireevsky, A. S. Khomyakov and Ivan and Konstantin

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<sup>83</sup> Paul Miliukov, *Outlines of Russian Culture*. 3 vols. Edited by Michael Karpovich. Translated by Valentine Ughet and Eleanor Davis. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943) vol. 3, 101-10. James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1970.)

<sup>84</sup> Anatole G. Mazour, *Russia Tsarist and Communist*. (New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1962) 456-7.

Aksakov, believed in the traditions of Muscovy and opposed the intrusion of Western principles in Russia and resented Peter the Great's process of Westernization which, they purported, defiled the true, Slavic Russia.<sup>85</sup>

The Russian social structure of the nineteenth century was comprised of the nobility, the ill-defined middle class and the peasantry. Although numerically inferior to the peasantry, the nobility constituted a vital force in Russia.<sup>86</sup> All nobles were able to pursue government employment, own land, the right to own serfs and were often supported by the tsar or tsarina in times of financial distress if they were loyal and obedient servants. In 1722 Peter the Great introduced the Table of Ranks which allowed free individuals to enter the ranks of the nobility through the skilful performance of military and administrative duties. The new nobles, descended from the lowest classes in Russia, formed the *tchin* sector of the nobility and became exempt from the soul tax, military duties and corporal punishment. The ancient nobles, who traced their lineage to a Riurikide prince, were displeased with the inclusion of less worthy individuals, free peasants and traders, into their prestigious class.<sup>87</sup>

In Russia, there was no sharp division between the Russian nobility and the peasantry which could be termed a true 'middle class.' In Europe, a middle class indicated the existence of industrialists, financiers, bankers and capitalists as well as professionals

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<sup>85</sup> Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism*. Translated from the Polish by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979) 81-115.

<sup>86</sup> The Russian nobility was comprised of rich magnates, the ordinary gentry and the impoverished nobility. Wealth was estimated by the amount of serfs an aristocrat owned, the largest magnates in Russia acquired up to 185,000 peasants and one million acres of land. After the magnates, other sectors of the nobility owned approximately 1,000 serfs and 10,000 acres of land while the lesser nobles possessed up to one hundred serfs and 1,000 acres of land. Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) 367-85. Dmytryshyn, *A History of Russia*, 309

<sup>87</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*. (London: Widenfeld & Nicolson, 1974) 171-90.

such as lawyers and small shopkeepers and workers. Russia's eclectic assortment of 'middle class' workers, exemplified by the *raznochintsy* who toiled in Russia's small commercial sector, was not sufficient to create the basis of a true middle class.<sup>88</sup>

The peasantry, the most populous class in Russia at 95% of the population, was comprised of state and private (serfs) peasants. The serfs, owned by the nobility, worked on their masters' land and constituted the majority of the peasants. Peasants were under the control of their masters and could be punished, exiled or sent into the army. The lives of all peasants under the power of the state or a landowner were remarkably similar. All were required to pay the soul tax and *obrok* for the land, where actual labour, through the application of the *barshchina*, was not required.<sup>89</sup> Under the *barshchina* the peasants worked for at least three days of the week on their master's land. Peasants were expected to maintain public roads and provide for postal and transport services and fill the ranks of the military. Peasants who amassed enough personal wealth, through occupations performed under the *obrok* system, could purchase their freedom if the peasant and master could agree upon a price. Serfs were under the authority of their master and needed permission to marry and could be subjected to strict punishments for real, or perceived, acts of disobedience.<sup>90</sup> With the exception of the few peasants who lived in the cities, in their masters' homes or as factory workers, the majority of peasants in the Russian heartland lived in wooden *izbas*. Their food was mundane and consistent - onions, gruel,

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<sup>88</sup> Elsie Kimerling Wirtschafter *Social Identity in Imperial Russia*. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997) 96-7.

<sup>89</sup> The level of the *obrok* payment varied throughout the Russian Empire.

<sup>90</sup> Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 141-70. D. S. Mirsky, *Russia: A Social History*. (London: The Cresset Press, Ltd., 1942) 218-23. Blum, *Lord and Peasant*, 442-503.

black bread, cabbage and *kvas* - and merriment only came with holidays and family celebrations. Education was denied to the serfs and literacy was low for this class.<sup>91</sup>

The Russian Empire comprised a vast amount of territory which had been the result of annexations and conquests over land and people bordering Russia from the reign of Peter I. Provinces in the Baltic region fell to Russian control after Peter's wars against Sweden (1700-21). Polish territory and Ukrainian land came under Russian sovereignty through a series of partitions of Poland undertaken with the cooperation of Austria and Prussia under Catherine II. Throughout the Russian Empire's conquered territories, Germans, Estonians, Finns, Latvians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians and Swedes retained a measure of their national identity and native customs, government institutions and religious practices. Under Nicholas I, inroads were made to assert Russian authority over the land and peoples of Russia's provinces and extended territories. The need for such a course of action could be seen when the Poles staged a revolution against Nicholas' authority in 1830. The determination to Russify the conquered foreign inhabitants of the empire under Nicholas was noticeable in the attempts to enforce the Orthodox religion through the introduction of a bishopric in the Baltic region and the enforcement of the Russian legal code over the Lithuanians during the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 433-5. Wayne Vunich, ed., *The Peasant in Nineteenth-Century Russia*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970.)

<sup>92</sup> Mirsky, *Russia: A Social History*, 237-48. Edward C. Thaden, *Russia's Western Borderlands, 1710-1870*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.)

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**RUSSIAN POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL**  
**AFFAIRS**

A close examination of Custine's *The Empire of the Czar*, Kohl's *Russia*, Cameron's *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, Bourke's *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, Haxthausen's *The Russian Empire* and Lagny's *The Knout of the Russians* can determine that the travellers' recorded their personal observations on a number of issues concerning Russia during the reign of Nicholas I, including the image of Nicholas, the autocratic government, Russia's place in the world, religious practices, education and the people of Russia. It was the immense amount of detail in the six travel accounts, adding to the body of literature available on Russia, that made them especially important sources on contemporary Russia that explored social and political developments. To understand the manner in which the six travellers viewed Nicholaevan Russia, as well as the value of the information in their reports, it is imperative to examine the contents of the travel accounts. The following three chapters will examine political, cultural and social life in the Russian Empire. This chapter looks at Russia's relationship with the West and internal political developments.

Several dimensions of the Russian political structure have been examined in the travel accounts. In their reports on developments within the Russian government, the travellers have supplied Europeans with an in-depth examination of the character of Tsar Nicholas I and the autocratic system. In the wider sphere of Russia's relationship with the

outside world, Custine, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthauxen and Lagny provided sources for information on the possible military threat Russia posed to Europe as well as offered insight into Russia's place in the world. Collectively, the descriptions by the five travellers supplied the West with newfound insight into Russia's internal government structure as well as Russia's relations and intentions towards the West.

### ***THE IMAGE OF TSAR NICHOLAS I***

Tsar Nicholas' important position as Russia's absolute monarch inspired the European travellers to comment on the personal attributes and failings of the autocratic ruler. Only Kohl, who limited himself to describing what he saw in everyday Russian life, never came in contact with Nicholas I during his travels and did not venture to make assumptions about the tsar's personality. The information Custine, Bourke, Cameron, Haxthausen and Lagny provided on Nicholas I was derived from their actual contact with the Russian ruler as well as anecdotes they heard from their guides or acquaintances in Russia. From such sources, the travellers relayed a composite portrait of Nicholas I to nineteenth century European audiences. While the information the foreign observers related varied according to the extent and nature of their association with the tsar, the substance of their depictions of Tsar Nicholas was quite similar.

Custine was amazed by the unchecked power and authority wielded by Nicholas I over the Russian Empire. From the moment of his first glimpse of Nicholas' figure and countenance on July 14, 1839, Custine made many assumptions about the ruler's character and personality. The marquis attributed Nicholas' severe appearance to the enormous amount of responsibility borne by an absolute monarch who directed all aspects of Russian



life and governance. Everything about the tsar suggested a rigid military order and Custine noted that Nicholas' "carriage and his attitude are naturally imposing. He expects always to be gazed at, and never for a moment forgets that he is so."<sup>1</sup> Custine believed that the immense pressure that resulted from ruling such a vast land and being subject to unremitting public observation had resulted in a strain on Nicholas' face which limited the monarch to three levels of expression - severe, solemn and courteous.<sup>2</sup>

Custine's increased contact with Nicholas I led the French aristocrat to be temporarily overwhelmed by the ruler's magnetism.<sup>3</sup> The remarkably powerful aura which emanated from the autocrat was noted to affect the atmosphere of the city in which Nicholas temporarily resided. Custine credited the situation to the tsar's personality in combination with the political machinations of Russian aristocrats who sought to acquire official favour at court. Custine was able to personally observe that after Nicholas' departure from St. Petersburg the capital became dull and staid. In Moscow, weeks later, Custine witnessed that city's rebirth as Muscovites shook themselves out of their doldrums and the city awakened its spirit and character as the tsar approached Moscow.<sup>4</sup> Custine credited Nicholas with the capabilities of a genius for his skilful command of an enormous empire which was inhabited by people with social, racial and linguistic differences. In order to guarantee Russia's national identity, Nicholas demanded that the nobility speak Russian instead of the more popular and fashionable French language.

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<sup>1</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 193.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 273, 277-81.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 139-40; vol. 3, 262.

Custine commended Nicholas for disregarding the inevitable resistance which resulted from such an endeavour and taking action to safeguard and assert the national language.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to his observations on the personal attributes of the powerful Russian sovereign, Custine presented his interpretation of Nicholas' political views based on a conversation he shared with the tsar during a fête in St. Petersburg. The Russian ruler believed that only through the individual and powerful will of an absolutist force could a government be an uncomplicated extension of the leader's will and successfully enforce law and order over an amalgamation of ethnic groups. Although Custine was a liberal, he was sympathetic to Nicholas' obligations and responsibilities which were the result of his position as an absolute monarch. Despite their different political ideologies, Custine pardoned the fact that Nicholas was an autocrat because the Russian tsar understood the needs of the Russian government and people. Custine believed Nicholas was both aware and tolerant of the ideas behind different political solutions to govern nations and acknowledged that there were positive aspects of a liberal form of government. Instead of being applicable to Russia, Custine recorded that Nicholas was concerned that a representative monarchy would lead to confusion in Russia as there would be no single individual in authority over the political structure.<sup>6</sup> Custine also mentioned that Nicholas' faith in the merits of the autocratic system was based on the tsar's personal experience with a different form of government. The tsar had played the role of a constitutional monarch over the Congress Kingdom of Poland and the experiment had ended disastrously

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 73-5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 272-3.

in the Polish revolt of 1830.<sup>7</sup> To further lessen the severity of Nicholas' unrivalled power as an autocrat and to cast Nicholas in a sympathetic light to Europeans, Custine recounted Nicholas' tribulations during the 1825 Decembrist Revolt and the tsar's personal suffering as a result of the empress' failing health.

Custine's favourable impression of Nicholas during the early stages of his journey was radically altered in the first days of August 1839. Custine's newfound and somewhat surprising dislike of the tsar was the result of the supposed plight of Princess Trubetskoi, the wife of a Decembrist rebel exiled to Siberia. Putting complete faith in a story which relayed the family's wretched condition, Custine was outraged that Nicholas did not allow the Trubetskoi's young children to be properly cared for because of Sergei Trubetskoi's rebellious activities in 1825. Custine immediately resolved not to have any further contact with Nicholas. Instead of determining the living conditions of the Trubetskoi family in Siberia, Custine dramatically changed his opinion of Nicholas I from benevolent tsar to harsh and barbaric tyrant.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Polish revolt, staged amidst the year of revolutions throughout Europe in 1830, sought independence from the Russian tsar and was led by Polish patriots who hoped that their movement against the Russian government would be militarily supported by Europe. Although many in the West were sympathetic to the Poles' plight, most of Europe was too preoccupied crushing their own rebellious forces to assist the Poles. A detailed and in-depth study of the Polish uprising is by R. F. Leslie, *Polish Politics and the Revolution of November 1830*. (Westport: Greenwood, 1969.)

<sup>8</sup> In the *Quarterly Review's* examination of Custine's *The Empire of the Czar*, there was a focussed refutation of the Trubetskoi family's hardships in Siberia. The journal revealed that the Princess chose not to accept the tsar's kind offer allowing her children to leave Siberia because she did not want her family to be separated. The article also stressed the rather favourable conditions experienced by the family - considering the crime committed by Sergei Trubetskoi - which was not settled on an isolated stretch of land without any modern conveniences, but within the proximity of a northern city. "Tour in Russia by the Marquis de Custine," *The Quarterly Review*. 73 (1844): 324-74. After he recounted the supposed horrors in which the Trubetskoi family lived and Nicholas' cruelty, Custine, who had previously been sympathetic towards Nicholas, stated that the Poles under the Russian government were under the strict and oppressive supervision of Nicholas I. Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 215-28.

Bourke's assessment of Nicholas was primarily a refutation of Custine's harsh allegations against the tsar. Bourke, who was aware that *The Empire of the Czar* included inaccurate statements on Nicholas I, determined to present the humanitarian side of the tsar's character. Appraised of the fact that the *Quarterly Review* had conducted a lengthy examination of the supposed plight of the Trubetskoi family, Bourke rejected the marquis' declaration that Nicholas was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of labourers during the reconstruction of the Winter Palace. In contrast to Custine's assertion that Nicholas demanded the repair work on the imperial palace be completed in one year and gave little thought to the dangerous conditions the labourers were exposed to, Bourke described the swift action Nicholas took to save lives when the structure caught fire. *St. Petersburg and Moscow* reprinted the well-known story in Russia which recounted that Nicholas insisted that the Winter Palace's valuable contents should burn in the fire rather than one of his servants be killed in a rescue attempt.<sup>9</sup> After refuting Custine's negative depiction of Tsar Nicholas, Bourke commented on Nicholas' autocratic authority in Russia. Bourke was able to make a superficial assessment of Nicholas I after being presented to the tsar at the court at Sniaminsky. Bourke was enchanted by the kindness and appearance of the entire royal family and determined that the statuesque monarch appeared to be quite capable and 'admirably fitted' to rule over the vast Russian Empire; "never for a moment, could I detect a movement or a gesture unworthy of the dignity of the Emperor. Truly Nicholas is the first gentleman of the age."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 159-60. Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 136-7.

<sup>10</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 237.

Cameron, who was able to observe Tsar Nicholas on three occasions during his journey through Russia, believed that “if any human being was ever qualified for a monarch by the exterior advantages of majestic figure and high kingly bearing, it was the Emperor Nicholas.”<sup>11</sup> Physically, Nicholas was portrayed as an impressive specimen who personified strength and vitality and possessed a strict, yet friendly, personality.<sup>12</sup> When the tsar inspected Russian soldiers in a military parade, Nicholas’ every movement belied his unparalleled power and authority. Cameron saw Nicholas as a powerful force that acted as a counterweight against the inept and corrupt bureaucratic forces at work in Russia. Nicholas had successfully promoted the development of manufacturing plants in towns and cities as well as on the estates of large landowners to encourage the economic welfare of the Russian Empire. Cameron believed that Nicholas had vision for Russia’s future because the tsar continued the educational reforms sponsored by Alexander I and redeveloped the Russian navy. Cameron recorded that Tsar Nicholas’ tremendous energy was much lauded throughout the empire and the immense speeds that his carriage could reach permitted him to travel quickly across Russia’s vast expanses.<sup>13</sup>

Haxthausen primarily chronicled Nicholas’ military achievements and noted that the tsar’s far-reaching reforms to both the army and navy were all the more striking when contrasted to the contributions of previous Romanov rulers to Russia’s defence.<sup>14</sup> Being,

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<sup>11</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 253.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 222, 230.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 170, 259, 273. During Cameron’s first ‘meeting’ with the tsar, enroute to St. Petersburg, the Englishman had the dubious honour of having his carriage nearly overturned by Nicholas’ speeding *drohsky*.

<sup>14</sup> Although Haxthausen did not mention it in his study, he became personally acquainted with Nicholas at the end of his journey. However, *The Russian Empire* did not offer an analysis of the tsar’s character but focused on his political and military achievements.

as Haxthausen termed him, a 'military monarch,' Nicholas took the Russian navy to new heights that were worthy of the fleet's founder - Peter the Great - by restructuring and re-strengthening Russia's navy. Nicholas advanced the army by ensuring that in an emergency over eighteen-hundred of Russia's field guns would be ready for swift mobilization because of the tsar's wise deployment of soldiers on Russia's borders and in the interior, ranging from the Baltic Provinces to Kazakhstan. It only remained to be seen whether the recently introduced improvements would be sufficient in the event of a crisis.<sup>15</sup>

As with Cameron before him, Haxthausen recognized Nicholas' ability to thwart the dishonest practices of Russia's bureaucratic officials. To a far greater degree than the Englishman's brief comment referring to Nicholas as a force against corruption, Haxthausen saw Nicholas as a servant of justice who was able to overcome the Russian Empire's vast distances as he pursued a difficult course against bureaucratic dishonesty in order to combat corruption and vice in Russia. Haxthausen determined Nicholas to have effectively fought dishonesty and greed within the ranks of the military. In the early years of Nicholas' reign, many stories were publicized throughout Europe about Russian officers who cheated soldiers out of their requisitions and sold weapons and supplies for personal profit. Unlike his predecessors who were either unable or unwilling to overcome the deceitful practices, Nicholas had the skill and foresight to end these illegal transactions.<sup>16</sup>

A detailed and multi-dimensional characterization of Nicholas I was present in Lagny's *The Knout of the Russians*. An entire chapter of the book was devoted to

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<sup>15</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 286-341.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 296-303.

examining the character and policies of Nicholas I and essentially expanded on the main points in Custine, Bourke, Cameron and Haxthausen's depictions of the ruler. While Lagny was cognisant of the deficiencies resulting from the power wielded by an autocrat, the only negative act Lagny attributed to Nicholas was in reference to the tsar's contributing role to a famine which devastated the Russian countryside in the late 1840s when he exported maize to France and England for profit.<sup>17</sup> The remainder of Lagny's study on Nicholas was consumed with praise for the man who - through the immense force of his will - kept the barbaric nation of unruly Russians strong and united.<sup>18</sup> Nicholas' authority over the Russian people was so complete that Nicholas calmed the afflicted during a cholera outbreak in 1830 when he urged Russians to pray for relief from the nation's suffering. Lagny believed that Nicholas' position as an all-controlling and unrivalled despot made some of the tsar's deeds appear cruel and repressive. However, Lagny contended that Nicholas always acted in the best interests of Russians and was sometimes forced to commit brutal and aggressive acts in order to ensure that the Russian people were afforded as many rights and comforts as their savage and barbaric natures permitted. Lagny felt that Nicholas' boundless energy, enthusiasm and personal magnetism, enhanced by his 'spiritual,' 'temporal,' and 'autocratic' authority, sought honest and progressive contributions from government offices. However, Nicholas was unable to overcome the incompetence and corruption that had plagued the work of government officials in Russia for generations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 161.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-7, 242-3.

On a more personal level, Lagny felt Nicholas had a commanding appearance which was well suited to his usual military attire. *The Knout of the Russians* viewed Nicholas as the perfect Russian and a thoroughly national tsar. Lagny reported that stories circulated in Russia about Nicholas demanding that Russians wearing European style-clothing and exhibiting Western mannerisms alter their appearance and habits in order to be more recognizable as Russian subjects. Lagny viewed Nicholas as the ideal human being because the ruler was kind, handsome, knowledgeable, a wonderful family man, the possessor of a keen sense of humour and had earned the respect of all who knew him.<sup>20</sup> Destitute European visitors to Russia had benefited from Nicholas' many generous acts during the revolutions which plagued Europe in 1848. In the midst of that chaotic year, Nicholas provided protection to foreigners who had been stranded in Russia during the disturbances. Lagny also noted that Nicholas financially assisted once illustrious Russian nobles who became debt-ridden through misfortune or extravagance.

Lagny felt that only Nicholas was capable of overcoming the immense threats which sought to engulf Russia. Russia had not suffered from the catastrophic effects of the revolutions which shocked Europe in 1848 because Nicholas was able to enforce tight restrictions over the intellectual forces in Russia who would have otherwise promoted radical tendencies and encouraged revolution. Nicholas' kindness and imposing physical attributes, along with his comprehensive understanding of the Russian Empire's many problems, ensured the tsar's ability to respond to Russia's needs. When confronted with corruption in any form, Nicholas could be relied upon to act in the best interests of the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 237-8, 246-7.



empire and work against forces of evil in Russia such as bribery in the courts. Lagny labelled the tsar as a champion of the peasantry and Nicholas' protection of their rights against the unscrupulous actions of wealthy landlords was hampered only by the immense size of the Russian Empire which precluded perfect supervision.

Lagny sensed that Nicholas' constant opposition to the aristocracy's abuse of power and privilege produced a number of plots, hatched by Russian intellectuals throughout Europe, to usurp the throne. Especially active from 1839-48, Lagny recorded that Russian aristocrats were angered by Nicholas' reforms which disrespected the status of the ancient nobility. A *ukaz* of 1839, which made slight allusions to the possibility of future peasant emancipation, was perceived by Lagny to have created an uproar amongst the nobles who resented all threats to their power over the peasantry.<sup>21</sup> Russia's aristocrats were further agitated by Nicholas' approval of the Grand Duchess Marie's choice of husband, the undistinguished Prince de Beauharnais. Illustrious nobles were angered by the apparent slight to their origins and resented Nicholas' disregard for the bureaucrat's authority in Russia. The nobility's hostility towards the tsar led to a period of danger for Nicholas I and *The Knout of the Russians* recorded that "all persons expected, nearly every day, to hear that [Nicholas] had perished by a violent death."<sup>22</sup> Lagny determined that the nobility only recognized the importance of the Romanov monarch after the revolutions which swept through Europe in 1848. These foreign

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<sup>21</sup> Although Nicholas realized the evils of serfdom which kept the Russian economy behind Europe, and acknowledged that "the present situation [of serfdom] cannot continue forever," he believed that emancipation for the peasants must be enacted slowly and gradually because he knew that the nobility's opposition to emancipation for the peasantry could prove dangerous to his autocratic authority. (This problem was countered by Nicholas' belief that peasant discontent and rebellion could also threaten his power.) Lincoln, *Nicholas I*, 187.

<sup>22</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 234.

disturbances caused the aristocrats in Russia to fear socialist ideas and the possibility of a reorganization of the social structure which would be devastating to their personal fortunes. As a result, Lagny reported that Nicholas' authority was able to remain intact and Russia triumphed over the perilous conditions while retaining a stabilizing influence though the presence of Tsar Nicholas I.<sup>23</sup>

### ***AUTOCRATIC GOVERNMENT***

Custine, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny assessed the personal attributes and authority wielded by Tsar Nicholas I in their travel accounts on Russia. With the exception of Haxthausen who detailed Nicholas' military reforms, the foreigners did not conduct a study on Nicholas' duties as an autocrat. Instead, the Europeans chose to portray Nicholas as Russia's benevolent and powerful master. Regarding the workings of the Russian government, Haxthausen, Bourke, Custine, Cameron and Lagny critically assessed the relationship between the autocratic ruler and the bureaucrats in Russia. When the travellers undertook to discuss the role and power of the tsar, the Europeans did not refer to Nicholas I, but the government system which had been dominant in Russia for centuries.

Of the Europeans who studied the Russian government, Haxthausen was the only traveller to include positive comments on both Russia's autocratic system and its administrative controls in his travel account. Haxthausen felt that the autocrat was held to

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-40.

be the father of the people by Russia's lower class.<sup>24</sup> The uncultured peasants had the utmost respect for their beloved tsar, and their credo was, "whatever the Emperor commands must be done."<sup>25</sup> Haxthausen proposed that in Russia the ruler was regarded to be essential for the nation's well-being and defended this point when he stated that there had never been any attempt to overthrow a legitimate tsar or alter the autocratic form of government in Russia. Haxthausen determined that the seventeenth century uprisings, known as the 'Time of Troubles,' were targeted at the 'False Dmitrii' who, Haxthausen reminded his readers, was regarded by Russians to have usurped the throne. The more recent disturbance concerning the autocratic ruler, the 1825 Decembrist Revolt, stemmed from the confusion regarding the legitimate tsar, Nicholas or Constantine, following the death of Alexander I.<sup>26</sup>

Haxthausen determined that Russian government institutions were modeled after practices in Europe, although the Russian forms, unlike governments in the West, did not advance to meet changing times. The state institutions that provided the nobility with a role in rural affairs were revised in Europe but remained unaltered throughout Russia.

Whereas the West accepted the concept of representative chambers, restrictions against

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<sup>24</sup> This statement, referring to the tsar as the father of the Russian people, is reflected in Glinka's description of the Russian people welcoming Alexander I in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars with, "Father; Our Father! Let us look at you! . . . Our Father; Our Angel . . . lead us where thou will." It was common for the Russian people to refer to the tsar as *Batiushka Tsar* (little father tsar) which denoted both the ruler's authority and the people's affection for the tsar. Quoted in Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People Studies in Russian Myths*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) 83-4, 122-3.

<sup>25</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 230.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 230-1. Despite Haxthausen's simplistic assessment of the 'Time of Troubles' it was accurate that the period of chaos at the start of the seventeenth century stemmed, not from the presence of an autocratic ruler, but the lack of a strong and legitimate leader in the Russian government. However, uprisings against the autocracy were not unknown in Russia. Two prominent examples of rebellion occurred during the reigns of Tsar Alexis (1645-76) and Catherine II (1762-96) when, respectively, the Cossack leaders Stenka Razin and Emelian Pugachev led desperate armies of peasants, Old Believers and repressed minorities against the rulers.

the combined strength of the nobility in Russia was indicative of the fact that the tsarist government system did not encourage freer, more representative forms of administration.<sup>27</sup> While Haxthausen was aware of the transgressions committed by some army officers who sold Russian military equipment in foreign nations for personal profit, Haxthausen was generally impressed by the high moral character and quality of Russia's bureaucrats. Furthermore, he acknowledged that officials in Europe were themselves not ideal and they did much to establish and promote despotic forms of government throughout Europe by the control they exerted over the state.<sup>28</sup> The cases of corruption in Russia, because of their sensational manner, were publicized in Europe, but they did not reflect normal conditions in Russia. While the number of dishonest officials existed to a far greater degree in Russia than in nineteenth century Europe, Haxthausen felt it was incumbent upon him to publicize the fact that in Russia's army and the civil service there were men of good character that would be welcome additions to any foreign government.

Bourke was of the opinion that a Russian autocrat was overwhelmed by an immense assortment of tasks which were the result of his position as chief censor, head of the church, defence and administration which transformed one individual into the source from which all was accomplished in Russia.<sup>29</sup> Bourke regarded the tsar to be the very soul of the empire and every official decision reached in Russia bore the mark of his authority. Bourke believed Europeans should be awestruck by the Russian despot's unrestricted authority that was tempered only by the tsar's personal whims and dictates. Bourke believed that when an absolutist form of government was practiced in England, France or

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<sup>27</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 215-7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 295, 189.

<sup>29</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 225, 247-50.

Prussia, the authority of the ruler was kept in check by the will of the nobility. By contrast, in Bourke's estimation, the 'constitution' of Russia could be simply described through the immortal words attributed to France's King Louis XIV, "*L'Etat c'est moi.*"<sup>30</sup> Bourke noted that the power of the Russian tsar was unrestrained by any force and a ruler such as Nicholas I had to answer only to God.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the differences between the political practices of modern Europe and Russia, Bourke advised Westerners not to dismiss the tsarist system as purely harsh or evil. Although all authority over the Russian populace and decisions of war and peace rested with one individual, foreign observers should not condemn Russia's autocratic system on the basis of that characteristic. Bourke determined that Russian autocrats had a tradition of ensuring the propagation of justice and rash acts or mismanagement of government affairs were rare amongst recent sovereigns. Bourke contended that the flaws that existed in the Russian autocratic system were the result, not of the failings of the individual autocrat, but of the use of petty bureaucratic officials.

However immense a man's talents may be; however unwearied his efforts; however ardent his desire to do good, he cannot solely and unaided, administer rightly the affairs of a wide-spreading realm, or sufficiently superintend the proper working of each department of government.<sup>32</sup>

Regardless of the tireless and unremitting intentions of a ruler to promote the skilful

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 248. Imperial Russia did not have a constitution.

<sup>31</sup> The relationship between God and tsar was especially pronounced during the reign of Nicholas I as the tsar felt it was his responsibility to direct all matters in Russia. The idea that the Russian tsar was equated with God was expressed when the Russian poet Tiutchev commented on the death of Nicholas in 1855, "it is as if one has been told that God died." Quoted in Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, 178; Lincoln, *Nicholas I*, 243-4.

<sup>32</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 250-1.

administration of Russia, it was simply impossible for the tsar to accomplish all the tasks necessary for the nation to function.<sup>33</sup>

Bourke believed that the shortcomings of Russia's government stemmed from the existence of bureaucrats who submitted themselves to the will of the tsar. The efficiency and reliability of the petty officials was flawed by their status as mere 'underlings,' which led to their subservient status. Bourke considered there was no substantive interest by Russian bureaucrats to contribute credible government work. He stated, "a kingdom cannot be properly governed by men who are, at best, but servants of an Emperor and not directors of the great machine."<sup>34</sup> As a result, the civil servants displayed little talent or propensity for original thought in the performance of their official duties. The ruler had complete authority over the system of law courts and all verdicts reached in Russia. However, Bourke did not determine this to be detrimental as the officials were not qualified to enforce the high standards which must necessarily accompany judicial proceedings. The combined purpose of the imperial institutions of the Council of the Empire, General Assembly of the Senate, Senate departments and government tribunals was to produce and enforce laws, provide a court of appeal and ensure an outlet to oversee the duties of government officials.<sup>35</sup> Bourke sensed that time was wasted through the existence of a large body of regulations within the various levels of administrative

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<sup>33</sup> While Bourke was describing the attributes and talents of the autocrat he personally witnessed, Nicholas I, he failed to consider that the system whereby one individual had supreme control could prove disastrous under a less capable or inept ruler. However, his comments on the failings of the bureaucrats under Nicholas I reflected the commonly held belief that Russian officials were extremely corrupt. The Slavophile Ivan Aksakov stated, "out of every hundred elected officials, two-thirds are swindlers, and out of every hundred minor bureaucrats, one cannot find even two honest ones." Quoted in W. Bruce Lincoln, "N. A. Miliutin and the St. Petersburg Municipal Act of 1846: A Study of Reform Under Nicholas I," *Slavic Review*. 1 (1974): 56.

<sup>34</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 250-1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-50.

assemblies. Cases often proceeded through different departments and were attended by a vast array of officials who contributed masses of paperwork but did not offer legal resolutions.<sup>36</sup> As this manner of justice was inept, Bourke felt that a process of reform was necessary and it would be of such consequence that it would be akin to a revolutionary movement.<sup>37</sup>

Bourke regarded the Russian system of government to be devised to exert control and influence over the Russian people and thereby insulate them from controversial ideas which could tarnish the image and authority of the Orthodox faith and the unlimited power of the tsar.<sup>38</sup> Bourke did not condemn the restrictive measures exerted by the autocratic government because he divined that behind the authoritarian appearance, the controlling practices were not all-encompassing. Although censorship thrived in Russia, Bourke revealed that it was not powerful enough to impede Russians' ability to obtain restricted information on news from abroad; a simple visit to high society could procure an unlimited array of facts on world affairs. Likewise, while censors banned a large selection of foreign works, ranging from the popular British magazine *Punch* to Western novels, the ability to obtain restricted publications in Russia was not severely hindered.<sup>39</sup>

The state control that the Russian administrative system exerted over the entire Russian Empire was first experienced by foreigners, and even Russian citizens, who

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<sup>36</sup> An example of the extreme level of paperwork that government affairs in Russia could generate can be found in the example of St. Petersburg's City Council. In the year 1842, the department received 31,223 documents while it released 46,369 documents and memos. Lincoln, "N. A. Miliutin and the St. Petersburg Municipal Act of 1846," 56-7.

<sup>37</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 260-3.

<sup>38</sup> An apparent reference to the program of 'Official Nationality' which promoted the authority of the tsar and the importance of the Orthodox faith.

<sup>39</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 109-13.

passed through the customs office. Bourke found the official procedure of being thoroughly questioned by passport officials upon entering Russia from Europe was performed with great formality, swiftly and politely.<sup>40</sup> Bourke was particularly favourable in his assessment of his experiences at customs because it was found to be in sharp contrast to the horrific tales of the customs officials which were recounted by Custine in *The Empire of the Czar*.

Custine declared that all foreign travellers arriving in Russia were approached with suspicion and forced to respond to a series of tedious questions which primarily sought to ascertain a foreigner's motives for visiting Russia. The marquis felt that Russia's customs officials demonstrated the level of their subservience to the state when they approached their task with exactness and rigidity. All bureaucrats in Russia were labelled petty underlings who followed the dictates of the true power in Russia - the autocrat.<sup>41</sup> The only time Custine perceived that Russia's lowly government officials showed an independent spirit was during the course of deceitful actions which ultimately weakened Russia. This problem was observed to greatest effect during the reign of Catherine II when the idealized 'Potemkin' villages were constructed to ensure that Catherine was pleased with conditions in Russia. Despite the defects in the autocratic system which Custine recognized in the extreme level of subservience of the Russian people, Custine ultimately supported the unrestricted power of the tsar in Russia.<sup>42</sup> He believed the existence of a despotic form of government was suited to the temperament and personality of the Russian people who were awed by the tsar's unbridled power and willingly humbled

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 39-41, 66-7.

<sup>41</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 122-3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 9.



themselves before their ruler. The most offensive aspect of Russian autocracy which the French nobleman identified concerned its ability to helm aristocrats under the authority of such a government structure which left them unable to contribute to the development of the nation.<sup>43</sup>

Cameron went further than Custine in his condemnation of Russia's autocratic structure and determined that the form of tsarist controls prevalent in Russia were the most oppressive and overbearing that had existed throughout history. He suggested that a powerful aristocratic class or religious authority had tempered the despotic reigns of the rulers of the ancient empires of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and Greeks. In Russia the situation was quite different as all power, without exception, resided with the tsar. Cameron believed that no legal statutes or rule of law could hinder the unlimited power wielded by the Russian despot.<sup>44</sup>

Cameron concluded that bureaucrats in Russia were under the will of the tsar and not able to elevate the standards of the Russian government because they were inept and not concerned with fulfilling their duties. Even the repressive censorship policies in Russia were led by inefficient officials and thereby limited in their effectiveness. Cameron found it easy for banned Western materials to be procured in reading rooms frequented by foreign visitors in Russia.<sup>45</sup> The government officials under the tsar exhibited a strong penchant for bribery and corruption which was their only true talent. While such immoral habits were admitted by Cameron to exist in European nations, the problem in Russia was of such a massive proportion that it touched upon all aspects of the bureaucracy. Legal

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 139-40; vol. 1, 282.

<sup>44</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 202-4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 232.

and official matters could be successful only if bribes were made to the head judge. To end the dishonesty, Cameron suggested that the low salaries of government officials should be raised to increase a bureaucrat's loyalty and sense of obligation to his work.<sup>46</sup>

Lagny also perceived that the corruption in the Russian government stemmed from the bureaucrats' paltry income which contributed to a propensity for bribery amongst all levels of government. Lagny did not excuse this situation but, like Cameron, felt that it could only be overcome by an improvement in the wage conditions which were unsuitably low. Symptomatic of the enormity of the greed and dishonesty present in the Russian government, only wealthy Russian nobles, willing and able to pay officials, could receive justice. Lagny described everything that came from the Russian government as difficult and corrupt - minor legal cases could take two decades for resolution because the officials did not possess any talent for legal matters beyond the art of bribery. The law was nothing but a façade and truth could be manipulated to any purpose.<sup>47</sup> Lagny considered the dreadful situation to be compounded by the masses of law codes in Russia, oftentimes referring to the same crime, which enabled a level of punishment to be chosen from amongst the voluminous body of legal statutes which had been written throughout the centuries.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 215-7.

<sup>47</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 116-119.

<sup>48</sup> When Lagny mentioned the abundance of law codes in Russia that confounded the Russian judicial system, he failed to note that, in 1828 and 1832 the Second Section in Nicholas' government, headed by Michael Speransky and dealing with law reform, produced the *Complete Collection and Digest*, together totalling sixty volumes, which asserted the importance of recent laws over the past legal statutes in order to simplify criminal procedures. However, as the historian W. Bruce Lincoln noted, "individual precedents and customs had assumed the force of law over the years," a factor which contributed to the confusion in the system of law and order. Lincoln, "N. A. Miliutin and the St. Petersburg Municipal Act of 1846," 56.

For all the laws in Russia, Lagny believed there were too few bureaucrats who were skilled in their occupations. Lagny regarded financial compensation as the primary factor behind the rare instances of prompt and competent action by Russian bureaucrats. Justice was only swift in cases when the accused were to receive physical punishment or cases against foreigners who were negligent in their financial responsibilities. Some police officials - or *nadziratells* - emerged as some of Russia's wealthiest citizens through dishonest negotiations and financial arrangements with criminals.<sup>49</sup> The deceptive personality of the otherwise inefficient officials within the autocratic system was more problematic to Lagny than the absolute power exercised by the tsar as the personification of the nation, Church and God. Such an authority, which could either act with mercy or vengeance, was ultimately deemed necessary to bind the various ethnic groups throughout Russia into a strong unit.<sup>50</sup> Lagny felt that the bureaucrats frequently committed dishonest acts which made the tsar unaware of the problems which were present in the empire and unable to properly initiate reforms in Russia.<sup>51</sup> However, Lagny did not see the continuance of the autocrat and the Russian Empire as a certainty. The possible ramifications of dangerous rebellious forces in the country had been witnessed when revolutionary ideals grew in scale, most impressively during the Decembrist Revolt of 1825.<sup>52</sup> Lagny believed it was incumbent upon the ruler to be powerful enough to keep the nation intact as well as to resist and triumph over threats posed by radical members of the nobility that tried to usurp his power.

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<sup>49</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 120, 123-32.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 29, 82, 145.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 42,

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-9.

***THE TRAVELLERS' VIEWS ON RUSSIA'S  
PLACE IN THE WORLD***

If nineteenth century Russia had been an isolated and withdrawn nation that abstained from contact with the West, there would have been little need for Europeans to investigate Russia's internal conditions. As it was, Russia's military and political prominence in the world inspired the travellers to study Russia and led Custine, Lagny, Bourke and Haxthausen to determine Russia's status, as part of Europe or Asia. Russia's European or Asian characteristics have been debated for many years. Wedged between Europe and the Orient, Russia's affinity with either culture, or its distinct Russian identity is still unresolved.

In *The Empire of the Czar*, Custine was outspoken and direct when he determined Russia's place in the world. From a superficial assessment of Russian conditions, Custine initially believed that Russian nobles' possessed a level of cultural development and intellect similar to that of Europe's aristocracy. After closer scrutiny, the marquis concluded that Russia's enlightened aristocratic class was too insignificant to make Russia a cultured, Western nation. Custine determined that Russian nobles were an uncivilized barbaric people who absurdly attempted to imitate their superiors, the Europeans. Custine regarded the Russians' inability to acknowledge their shortcomings as the true cause of Russia's failure to be categorized as a European nation. By not admitting their weaknesses, Custine felt that Russians became 'monkeys,' when they attempted to emulate Europe's higher culture. Custine labelled St. Petersburg's atmosphere of European civilization an empty façade. When Russian noble women were regaled in their

finest attire, it was nothing but an imitation of their superiors in the West. Russians were quickly drawn to a popular fad but had little interest in what was real. All that concerned Russians was the manner in which foreigners perceived their country. Custine regarded the Russian people's preoccupation with the way they were viewed by foreigners as an indication of Russia's inferiority as Europeans were not concerned by such trivialities. Such a derogatory statement was an opportunity for the marquis to assert his belief in Europe's superiority over Russia.<sup>53</sup>

Instead of fitting into the prestigious mould of a Western nation, Custine regarded Russia to be a dissolute Slavonic entity.<sup>54</sup> Custine saw Russia's failure to resemble a European nation through cultural or intellectual developments to be mirrored in the abundance of buildings and monuments constructed in a Western style which were pale imitations of the original, classical constructions in Europe. Custine believed Russians displayed their inability to reconcile themselves to their lowly position in the world when they attempted to copy their cultural and intellectual superiors. Instead of producing monstrous imitations of Western monuments, Custine felt that Russians should have recognized their limited intellectual and cultural capabilities and retained the style of buildings erected in Russia prior to the reign of Peter the Great before the process of Westernization introduced a flood of European-style edifices.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 140, 182, 187. It should be recalled that Custine was motivated to visit Russia in part because he was interested in studying a nation on the periphery of Europe that had been subjected to Asian, or barbaric, influences.

<sup>54</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 168-9.

<sup>55</sup> Although Custine was aware that many of Russia's greatest monuments had been constructed by Western architects, he did not credit the failings of Russian architecture to the European craftsmen. Instead he noted, "masterpieces have only been produced by men [Europeans] who have listened to, and felt, the power of nature." He had forgotten that the Russian architecture and monuments that he derided

Custine regarded Russia to be two entities in *The Empire of the Czar*, the cultured image Russia wished to present to Europe and the backward and barbaric reality. All of the European qualities exuded by a Russian were simply imitative and not valid indicators of the Russian personality. While Custine determined that Russia was not a European nation, he perceived many Oriental aspects of Russia. Through his observations on buildings and monuments, Custine came to the conclusion that in all matters of Russian life, "Muscovy is more nearly allied to Asia than to Europe."<sup>56</sup> He felt that Oriental, not classically designed buildings and monuments would be better suited to the Russian mentality. As a result, the marquis stated that an edifice which was appropriate to Russia's secretive and cruel nature, 'the tower of Peking,' ought to replace the 'caricatures' of the Parthenon.<sup>57</sup> Custine argued that Russia's Asiatic nature was further evidenced by the alleged inability of Russians to become skilled sailors - they could not reach beyond their Tartar heritage which was at the very root of the Russian character. In a manner similar to their Oriental neighbours, Russians were deluded in the belief that foreigners envied them. Custine even went so far as to label Russians 'Chinese' in disguise because, like the Chinese in Peking, he believed the Russians in St. Petersburg wanted to be shrouded in mystery.<sup>58</sup> Overall, Custine felt the Russian government was a combination of the barbaric Eastern culture and the teachings of the great European philosophers; an amalgamation of Western precepts overpowered by Oriental savagery.<sup>59</sup>

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as 'monstrous,' such as the Bronze Horseman constructed by Frenchman Etienne Falconet, were built by Europeans. Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 216.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 216-7.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 216-7, 262.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 61, 72, 150-3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 157.

In his survey of Russia's affinity with either Europe or Asia, Custine did not recognize that Russian intellectuals had a great appreciation for Western concepts. Two of the most prominent rulers of the eighteenth century, Peter I and Catherine II, had actively encouraged the introduction of European culture and ideas to Russia and there were no intellectual or political forces in Russia that endeavoured to model Russia after Oriental culture and civilization.

Lagny, like Custine, was convinced that Russia could not be designated a European nation. Through an exploration of the factors which distinguished Russia from the West, *The Knout of the Russians* concluded that the benefits of Western civilization had not enhanced Russia to the degree that it could be considered part of Europe. When traces of European culture were visible in Russia, Lagny concluded that they referred to the inferior and barbaric customs in the Italian states. He felt Russians and Italians were similarly uncultured and prone to drunkenness and debauchery and the popular dance of the Russians was very similar to the violent exuberance of the Italian *saltarella*.<sup>60</sup> Lagny identified a difference between Russia and the West in the restrictions enforced by Russia's tsarist system that did not allow social groups to intermingle and the possibility of advancement from the lowest rung of the social ladder was not permissible. By contrast, Lagny suggested that in Europe there was a preponderance of skilled soldiers because talent, not class, was used as the basis for advancement.<sup>61</sup> Instead of fitting into Europe, Lagny felt that Russia had a greater affinity with Asia. While the evidence that Lagny presented for Russia's membership or exclusion from either culture was limited, he

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<sup>60</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 170.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 46, 100, 112, 144. Lagny's comments obviously did not account for the class differences and stratification which pervaded British society.

believed that Russian practices resembled Chinese, rather than Western customs. As an example, Lagny noted that Russians adopted the Asian custom of promoting marriage for soldiers. From the traditions originating 'beyond the Oural,' the habit of swaddling newborns was practiced in Russia, and women were thought of as little more than possessions.<sup>62</sup>

Bourke confined his comments on Russia's place in the world to superficial remarks concerning Russia's affinity with either Europe or Asia. Bourke believed that Russia's nobility exuded European mannerisms and talents which were visible to the degree that the Russian tongue had been submerged in importance to the French language. The appearance of well-dressed women and the frequency of balls in Russia enhanced the European atmosphere in Russia. Another European quality that Bourke recognized to exist concerned Russian soldiers who he felt embodied the friendly and charming nature of their European counterparts.<sup>63</sup> The primary factor which Bourke determined to be responsible for dividing Russia from Europe concerned the domineering and controlling presence of Russian tsar. Bourke recorded that "Englishmen cannot think an autocratic government to be according to the will of God, or calculated to promote the best interests of mankind."<sup>64</sup> Hence, despite Bourke's recognition of Russia's European attributes, he could not regard Russia to be a Western nation. Even though the aristocracy in Russia could be considered to resemble their European counterparts, Bourke noted that the Russian peasantry exhibited strong native traditions and appeared uncivilized, failing to note that, even in Europe, peasants and labourers were not refined or cultured. The

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 39, 154.

<sup>63</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 53, 97, 123-4, 133.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 249.



agricultural labourers who remained the majority of the population in the West were primarily concerned with warding off hunger and disease, not acquiring the attributes of civilized society. Bourke also stated that, while Russian churches were worthy of admiration, they were inferior to the churches throughout Europe. Bourke limited his exploration into Russia's affinity with Asia to remarks on the Oriental splendour prevalent throughout Moscow. Instead of concluding that Russia fit into the Western or Eastern mould, Bourke extolled the need for the Russian people to attain a stronger sense of Russian culture.<sup>65</sup> He was enthusiastic that the new education programs promoted by Nicholas would produce a greater recognition of the Russian identity amongst the people, an apparent reference to the government's policy of 'Official Nationality' which promoted Russian national unity and strength.

In *The Russian Empire*, Haxthausen emphasized the differences between Russia and the West which prohibited him from considering Russia to be a European nation. Haxthausen felt that the city of St. Petersburg could be labelled a true European city because of its cultural achievements, but credited this circumstance to the fact that the land was not on true Russian soil but on Finnish territory. Furthermore, Haxthausen contended that the population of the city was comprised of so many Europeans that the Russians in St. Petersburg became mere colonists.<sup>66</sup> He felt that the differences between Russia and Europe were rooted in developments stemming from medieval times. Haxthausen used the example of the ancient Europeans to explore how the use of the Latin language had forged a close religious and cultural bond amongst Europeans.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 39, 58, 82.

<sup>66</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 25.

Haxthausen contended that when the Romanic languages emerged and new nationalities could be discerned, the people's original linguistic and religious affinity ensured that Europeans "found a natural centre in Rome, based upon the Church, whence had come to them the elements of Christianity together with civilization."<sup>67</sup> Haxthausen also recognized that the Crusades of the Middle Ages brought elements of chivalry and valour to the civilization and culture of Europe. The combined effect of such linguistic, religious, cultural and historical experiences for Europeans produced a distinct sense of unity that affected all Westerners but did not develop amongst the Slavonic population of Russia. Haxthausen recorded that ancient Russians were not in close contact with a higher civilization and only had the defunct Tchudish race of nomads to offer instruction on Russia's development. The Christianity Kievan Rus' attained in 989 came from the floundering Eastern Church which separated Russia from the rest of Europe. Russia was isolated from the teachings of Greek culture because the Slavonic language was used in Russia and did not facilitate knowledge of ancient Greek culture.

Haxthausen saw the Russians to be a united collection of people sharing the same language without deviation which was in sharp contrast to Europeans who exhibited a number of variations due to linguistic developments.

Germany has . . . such a number of different dialects that the various peoples who live far apart do not understand each other. In Russia there is only one language, the same for the educated classes and the common people; but likewise only one dialect, with very slight differences in single word, accents, and intonations.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 225. In Haxthausen's statement he failed to note the obvious fact that, irrespective of regional language variations in Russia (which he would not be aware of as he did not speak Russian) the Russian nobility primarily spoke French while the peasantry spoke Russian.

*The Russian Empire* also noted that Russia could not be likened to a European country on the basis of the insurmountable intellectual gap which existed between the classes.

Although in Europe the upper and lower classes had the same values and culture, in Russia Haxthausen determined that the aristocrats were aware and interested in modern European civilization and philosophies but the peasant class did not ascend beyond primitive native traditions. The distinctness of Russia from Europe was further evidenced by the absence of a middle class in Russia. Haxthausen felt that the history of the Slavs was not amenable to the development of a middle class, despite the attempts of Catherine II to foster such a group of men according to the precepts of the German model, because Russians had no passion or particular skills for work.<sup>69</sup>

In view of all the differences Haxthausen identified between Russia and Europe, he regarded Russia as a distinctly Russian nation. Despite any similarities between Russia and Europe because of Russia's adherence to the Christian faith, Haxthausen felt that Russia was a truly national entity. Moscow became a symbol of Russia's strength after the expulsion of the Mongols in the fifteenth century and all Russians regarded the city with great reverence. Haxthausen felt this was a significant reason for Napoleon's failure in his invasion of Russia in 1812; the Russians would not have resisted an attack on a different city with such ferocity. European architecture may have recently pervaded

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 51-62. In addition to the dominance of serf labour in Russia, a factor behind the lack of a middle class in Russia can be attributed to the lack of money in circulation; prior to the reign of Alexander II, Russia did not have any banks to provide credit for small industries. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 191, 206-7.

Moscow but Haxthausen believed the true Russian spirit was determined to prevail triumphantly over foreign elements.<sup>70</sup>

### ***THE RUSSIAN THREAT TO EUROPE***

In their travel accounts, the Europeans endeavoured to determine if Russia was a threat to the West because of its military capabilities or political designs. Custine, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny related their personal impressions of the danger Russia posed to Europe as well as recorded details concerning Russia's actual military capabilities during Nicholas' reign. Custine was the only traveller who expressed the belief that Russia was a serious threat to world peace. Custine did not present a comprehensive study on the Russian military's ability to destabilize Europe. Instead, throughout *The Empire of the Czar* the marquis interspersed remarks on what he concluded were signs of Russia's intentions to threaten the West. He viewed the penchant for Byzantine-style architecture which he witnessed in St. Petersburg and Moscow as evidence of the Russian people's long-standing ambition to conquer Constantinople, the former capital of ancient Byzantium and present capital of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>71</sup> Custine credited the inequalities in the Russian class system, which led the aristocrats to be obedient courtiers to the tsar, with creating "a fever of envy so violent, a stretch of mind towards ambition so constant, that the Russian people will . . . become incapable of anything except the conquest of the world."<sup>72</sup> Custine was certain that, after overrunning

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<sup>70</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 30-3.

<sup>71</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 217.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 146.

the Turkish Empire, the Russian military would turn its attention towards the conquest of Europe.<sup>73</sup>

Custine dismissed the arguments of Russians who stated that the acquisition of foreign territory would weaken the Russian Empire as false and empty assurances. The marquis believed that a need for conquest and domination was ingrained in the Russian character, a 'conquering community,' and it was supported by the will of the tsar.<sup>74</sup> Custine was of the opinion that the barbaric Russians would soon attack the West to extend the Russian Empire's influence and Europeans had to find the moral and physical strength to resist Russia. The only thing that Custine felt could prevent Russia from destroying the higher civilization of the West would be the combined power of Europe's armed forces. *The Empire of the Czar* recorded that "if passions calm in the West, if union be established between the governments and their subjects, the greedy hope of the conquering Slavonians will be a chimera."<sup>75</sup> Although Custine would have liked to put aside his fears about the threat Russia posed to Europe, and noted that individuals he described as experts on Russia postulated many arguments against the likelihood of Eastern aggression towards Europe, Custine was unable to view Russia without trepidation. Aside from Europe's united resistance, Custine felt that if anything could

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<sup>73</sup> When Custine discussed Russia's ambition to conquer Constantinople which would be a precursor to a Russian assault on Europe, Custine failed to recognize that it was the Third Rome theory which prompted Russian interest in Constantinople. When the Byzantine Empire fell to the Turks in 1453, a theory developed, first sponsored by the monk Philotheos, that Russia was the 'Third Rome,' following the decline of Rome by heretics and the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. The 'Third Rome Theory' instilled Russians with a mission and duty, not only to protect and uphold the Orthodox faith, but also a sacred Christian responsibility to overthrow the Muslim forces in Constantinople. However potent this belief may have been amongst the Russian people, it did not influence the government with a plan to attack and conquer Constantinople. Mazour, *Russia Tsarist and Communist*, 42-3.

<sup>74</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 147; vol. 3, 342-5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

preserve Europe from domination it would be Russia's weaknesses which the 'experienced' men attributed to the idea that the Russian people were not scientific or innovative thinkers.<sup>76</sup>

While not conceding that Russia presented an actual military threat to Europe, in *Personal Adventures and Excursions* Cameron distinguished one aspect of Russian government policy which presented a problem for the maintenance of peace between Russia and Europe. Cameron determined that Russia's methods of diplomacy far exceeded Russia's actual ability to threaten Europe.

During the late Turkish campaigns, the whole of Europe appeared to be either on the eve of a general war, or once more threatened with an inundation from the tribes of the north, . . . it was of the highest importance, both for the Austrian and British governments, to be correctly informed as to the real strength and power of the Russian forces, and the probability of their commander proving successful, in the event of his executing his anticipated onward movement.<sup>77</sup>

Cameron concluded that Austria and Britain encouraged the Ottoman Empire to agree to the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829 with Russia instead of risking war because they were misinformed about Russia's available military resources. Deceit and dishonesty were key skills of Russian officials, as a result, Russia was able to strengthen its position in Turkey by veiled threats of war which caused trepidation throughout Europe.<sup>78</sup> Cameron did not label Russia's suppression of the Polish rebellion of 1830 as a threat against the West. Although Russia's reaction to the Polish insurgence was described as terrible, Cameron

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 83; vol. 2, 147; vol. 3, 342.

<sup>77</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 226.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 225. Through the Treaty of Adrianople Russia attained the position of protector over Turkish principalities, access through the Straits and especial trade rights with the Ottoman Empire.

believed that Nicholas endeavoured to ensure the stability of the Russian Empire in the face of a revolt against his authority.<sup>79</sup>

Despite Russia's military capabilities, Cameron did not perceive a targeted threat from Russia's forces to be directed against Europe. Russia's army and navy existed to provide Russia with a measure of strength and defence, not wreak havoc on the world. The only truly inspiring aspect of the Russian military that Cameron acknowledged concerned the troops' numerical superiority to that of the Prussians, Austrians and French. From a cursory review of the troops, Cameron estimated that there were nearly 400,000 men at Nicholas' disposal.<sup>80</sup> Cameron felt the Russian officers looked splendid adorned in their uniforms and skilfully performed military exercises mounted on their horses. During military manoeuvres the troops were in a tight, precise order and made an artful exhibition of their prowess.<sup>81</sup> Cameron regarded Russia's naval abilities to be a recent development. Despite its original foundation under Peter the Great, the navy fell into a state of disrepair until Nicholas' reign. Numerically, the Russian navy was a force to be reckoned with, realistically Cameron did not feel the Russians were suited to sea faring activities. The boats, either because of the quality of the wood or the sea water in the region, were unable to outfit a growing navy.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 154.

<sup>80</sup> From statistical information on the Russian forces in the 1850s, it can be determined that there were 859,000 Russian soldiers; at the same time Austria had 350,000 and Prussia 200,000. Bourke's calculation that there were 800,000 soldiers, compared to Cameron's estimate of 400,000 and Haxthausen's belief that there were 500,000 soldiers in Russia, was the most accurate assessment produced by the travellers on Russia's military. Curtiss, *The Russian Army Under Nicholas I*, 107-8.

<sup>81</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 173-5, 249-50, 266.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

Bourke, like Cameron, did not view Russia as a threat to Europe. During a survey of military manoeuvres on the outskirts of St. Petersburg Bourke, a member of the Kildare Militia in Great Britain, took delight in recording technical details concerning the Russian army. Bourke emphasized the skill of the 56,000 soldiers who displayed their military expertise and preparations for combat while fitted with impressive weaponry. A British officer who also observed the manoeuvres of the Russian troops concurred with Bourke's favourable assessment and voiced the opinion that Russians were focused and strict warriors. Despite these soldiers' enthusiasm for military duties which Bourke attributed to the presence of the tsar and army leadership, Bourke did not believe that Russia was a danger to Europe's stability. While the portion of the military that he described appeared strong and capable, Bourke was mindful of the fact that the troops he witnessed were but a small percentage of Russia's military which he believed totalled up to 800,000 men and was, therefore, not an accurate representative of the entire army's prowess. Bourke further deprecated the danger that Russia posed by noting that the Russians, with all their capabilities, could not be a threat to the superior British forces since the ideal Russian soldier was an inch and a half shorter than the average British combatant and, therefore, should not be looked at with fear.<sup>83</sup>

Haxthausen's *The Russian Empire* presented several strong arguments against the supposition that Russia's daunting military numbers and capabilities were a potential threat to Europe. Under Nicholas I, the country's prowess had been refined through the careful deployment of troops in strategic locations on the empire's borders and in the interior to

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<sup>83</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 198-202.



safeguard Russia from invasion while allowing the troops to swiftly organize in the event of war.<sup>84</sup> The number of men active in Russian service increased substantially in the 1800s and, at 500,000 men, exceeded the number of military men which could be realized in European nations, a reflection of the greater size of Russia's population. With the addition of recruits in time of war, Haxthausen viewed Russia's military as an immense fighting machine that exhibited boundless potential. Such strength left the Russian army quite capable of contending with the best armies of Europe. The West was aware of the surge in Russia's military abilities in the nineteenth century which enabled it to overpower Napoleon in 1812 and successfully challenge the Turks and quash the Polish rebellion in the 1820s and 1830s. Some Europeans, Haxthausen contended, liked to portray Russia as corrupt and incapable of carrying out triumphant military victories across Europe to ease their fears. Instead of deriding Russia's military capabilities, Haxthausen determined that Russians did not pose a threat to Europe because the Russian soldiers were not driven to battle and did not have a penchant for attacking or conquering new lands.<sup>85</sup> Haxthausen believed that Russians had no inward passion for military service and achievement in battle. Military duties were required of the Russian peasants, but there were no eager and willing volunteers to serve as soldiers.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> In the 1830s, eighteen of Russia's twenty-three infantry divisions were in the Baltic Provinces, the Caucasus, Kazakhstan and Finland (the remaining five were stationed in the interior.) In addition to protecting the empire, the troops were necessary in the region to control regional rebellions and were also used to perform the duties of law courts to punish and condemn criminals to Siberia. David Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform*. (London: Longmans, 1992) 186.

<sup>85</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 287-315.

<sup>86</sup> To provide for Russia's military needs, each village had to supply a number of recruits, depending on the size of the village. Both masters and serfs were against the practice and oftentimes hired men to serve in the army as a substitute. It was also common for peasants to cripple themselves in order to avoid the possibility of being recruited into the army for twenty-five years. Blum, *Lord and Peasant*, 466-7.

Haxthausen could not identify any period in Russian history when Russians entertained covert or evil designs against Europe. In response to the charge that Russia posed a menace to peace, *The Russian Empire* documented the motives behind Russian military conquests from ancient times. When Haxthausen examined Russia's physical boundaries to reveal that Russia's previous aggressive movements were not targeted at organized and civilized states, he failed to consider the Russian partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. Haxthausen believed that all the wars of conquest undertaken by grand princes and tsars were aimed at establishing the sovereignty of the Russian state. Peter the Great's quest for possession of an outlet on the Baltic and Black sea coasts was necessary for Russia's economic development and military security. Haxthausen recognized that Russia's conquests over territories to serve the state's defensive needs were regarded with suspicion by Europeans. Despite the fact that Russia had overtaken vast amounts of territory, including the German Baltic Provinces, Haxthausen could not credit the Russian people with a predilection for becoming conquerors of the Western world. Haxthausen regarded Russia's military designs on Poland, Finland and Turkish regions to have been developed to satisfy Russia's need for security as these territories, if controlled by a foreign aggressor, would be an easy launching pad to attack and invade Russia. Haxthausen reminded his readers that:

Russia's love of conquest is decried throughout Europe; nevertheless in the last twenty years she has not conquered a single village. England's conquests rarely meet the censure of the world, but in one century she has reduced countries and subjugated nations four times her own extent, and hardly a year passes in which she does not make new conquests.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 277.

Hence, Haxthausen was unable to chastise Russia for violent practices against foreign lands considering that such policies prevailed in European nations.

Haxthausen also defended Russia's conquests of Georgia and the Caucasus during the reign of Nicholas I. He felt that the tsar inherited the preparations for the invasion of Georgia which had been initiated prior to his reign on religious grounds and was against Nicholas' dislike of a foreign policy based on expansion. Haxthausen believed Russia "would gladly abandon the conquest of the Caucasian countries, if peaceful relations could be established with their inhabitants."<sup>88</sup> Haxthausen determined trade and friendship were the primary ambitions of Russian policy - there was no decided need for hard fought victories that cost more than they added to the empire. Haxthausen suggested that the possibility that Russia could endanger Europe's stability was rendered absurd by Russia's inability to extend a line of influence and domination throughout Europe. A war waged between Russia and Europe would make the financial expense too extreme for Russians to bear and a possible triumph would be attained at a heavy price that would never be secure considering Europe's military response to such a situation would undermine a Russian victory.<sup>89</sup>

After his thorough survey of Russia under Nicholas I, Haxthausen was confident in his assessment that Russia was not violently intent on threatening Europe. He felt that it was unfair and baseless to condemn Russia for expansionist policies which sought the preservation of the empire and not territorial gain for the thrill of glory. Although some Russians displayed an ambition to conquer the ancient city of Constantinople because of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 259-74.

its historic links to Russia, this sentiment was not reflected in the tsar's policy and therefore not a threat to world stability. *The Russian Empire* reported that opinions expressed by the student group 'Young Russia' should not be feared simply because it desired vast conquests for Russia. Like its counterparts for national unity in Europe such as 'Young Germany' and 'Young Italy,' Haxthausen felt that 'Young Russia,' an intellectual group seeking democracy and social upheaval in Russia, did not reflect a national policy by the Russian government. Haxthausen determined the probability of Russian military action against the Turks to be unwarranted, considering Russia already possessed an immense amount of non-utilized natural resources. If Russia were to actually proceed towards the Ottoman Empire, the tsar would encounter great difficulty in maintaining the conquest. Haxthausen felt that Russia would be incapable of defending a further extension of its borders as the government was already taxed by the empire's extreme size and Russia would not gain actual economic or strategic rewards from such a territorial victory.<sup>90</sup>

Lagny, like Haxthausen, voiced the opinion that Russia was not a threat to world stability even though he recognized the enormous military potential Russia possessed. Russia was described as a nation to be feared and respected because it had a daunting population of sixty-six million Russians which, towards the end of Nicholas' reign, grew by 800,000 people each year.<sup>91</sup> Lagny felt that recent Russian rulers developed a modern and powerful government structure which ensured Russia's military capabilities. Lagny considered that Russia's naval prowess was tremendous considering that Nicholas just

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., vol. 2; 77-8; vol. 1, xxi-xxii.

<sup>91</sup> Lagny did not discuss whether the population increase reflected a natural birth rate or an influx of foreigners into Russia.

recently undertook to improve Russia's sea-faring capabilities. Russia's navy showed the potential to dominate all others - the only requirement lacking was experience. Lagny believed that Russia possessed an amazing brute force, supplemented by the strength of Cossacks, which was more destructive than that unleashed by Attila the Hun's forces that had demolished the Roman Empire. Lagny also noted that the recruitment of serfs, or as he termed them slaves, provided Russia with an endless source of men for military service.<sup>92</sup>

Despite the impressive military potential to incite fear, Lagny was unshakable in his opinion that Russia should not be regarded as a threat to the West. Russia's military might, which left the Russian army capable of contending with the best armies of Europe, had developed to guarantee that Russia would be immune from assault by foreign powers. Lagny did not feel Russia's army was capable, or intent, on world domination. Lagny believed the extreme size of the Russian Empire inspired outsiders to overstate the threat which Russia presented. *The Knout of the Russians* recorded that:

Russia is positively obliged to maintain [its military], in order to protect its immense surface, and guarantee from attack its coasts and frontiers which extend for some thousands of miles along kingdoms, Empires, and provinces.<sup>93</sup>

Lagny also noted that the vastness of the Russian Empire made it necessary for Russia to assert itself when it had acted as an aggressive power in the past. It was a matter of survival for Russia to attain an outlet on the sea when Russia expanded towards the Black Sea region. The creation of the city of St. Petersburg and the seaport at Odessa were necessary for Russia to be able to export its goods. Only from Russia's flagrant attempts

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<sup>92</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 26-30.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

to possess the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits, and its recent victory over the Turks at Navarino in the Russo-Turkish War (1828-9) did Lagny perceive Russia's concerted efforts to increase its strength and dominance in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>94</sup> Nonetheless, Lagny concluded that if Russia were to magically position itself over the Turks, there were weaknesses in the Russian military which would prohibit Russians from overrunning Europe. In fact, although Lagny had previously been impressed by Russia's military strength, he did not feel that Russia could sustain a prolonged attack on the West. Lagny derided Russia's army by emphasizing the dominance of peasant soldiers who lacked the vigour and skill necessary to become successful warriors. Lagny felt Russians were ill suited to naval endeavours because they were rooted to the soil and had no inborn desire to conquer the seas. He further stated that Russia's defence system lacked military leaders who possessed a military passion which could transform soldiers into a truly capable and unstoppable army.<sup>95</sup> In light of Russia's inability to overwhelm the British, French and Turkish forces in the Crimean War, Lagny's opinion of the Russian military was ultimately proven correct.

All of the travelers who studied Nicholas I recorded favourable impressions of the tsar.<sup>96</sup> The ruler was perceived to be a humane and majestic force in Russia who sought to improve the conditions for the people and ensure Russia's future potential by introducing reforms to meet the empire's changing needs. The travellers were awestruck

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 52-4, 104-7.

<sup>96</sup> This point, of course, excludes the negative comments Custine expounded in the second volume of *The Empire of the Czar* when he upbraided Nicholas' treatment of the Trubetskoi family.

by Nicholas' physical appearance and mannerisms and felt the tsar's strength and military air made him a capable and impressive ruler, ideally suited to be in control over such an immense territory. A notable European who recorded similar views on Nicholas' appearance and manner was Queen Victoria. In the spring of 1844 Nicholas visited England to strengthen relations between Russia and England and upon meeting Nicholas I the British monarch commented:

He is certainly a very striking man; still very handsome; his profile is beautiful, and his manners most dignified and graceful, extremely civil - quite alarmingly so, as he is so full of attentions and politeness . . . the expression of the eyes is formidable, and unlike anything I ever saw before.<sup>97</sup>

Although the six Europeans did not make any inaccurate statements in their studies on Nicholas, a number of prominent Russian intellectuals at the same time provided deeper insight into the authoritarian rule of Nicholas I.

Based on extensive contact and their personal difficulties under Tsar Nicholas I, it was natural that contemporary Russians' views of the tsar would be different than those of foreign visitors. An important Russian intellectual who expressed a decidedly negative opinion of Nicholas I was Alexander Herzen who was disturbed by the tsar's oppressive political activities. Herzen saw Nicholas' political policies as promoting a stronger Russian identity but whose repressive tactics could only plunge Russia into a backward state, "introducing everywhere the element of paralysis, of death."<sup>98</sup> Nicholas' government policies provided the ruler with a tight grasp over Russia's affairs through police surveillance and the suppression of political dissenters which was ably handled by

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in W. Bruce Lincoln, "The Emperor Nicholas I in England," *History Today*, 25 (1975): 27.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, 152.

the Third Section. Conditions in Russia under Nicholas I led Herzen to remark that the tsar was “Genghis Khan with telegraphs.”<sup>99</sup> Ivan Golovine, the Russian author of an analysis of Russian conditions titled *Russia Under the Autocrat Nicholas the First*, declared that Nicholas was the foremost enemy of liberty. Golovine regarded Nicholas’ powers in Russia to be boundless and no one in the country had the right to contradict the will of the tsar.<sup>100</sup> A notable Russian sympathetic to Nicholas I was the poet Alexander Pushkin. In his poem *Stanzas*, Pushkin compared Nicholas favourably to a leader he highly respected, Peter the Great. Pushkin’s appreciation for Nicholas stemmed from the fact that his period of exile under Alexander I was ended by Nicholas and Pushkin was provided with a small salary and access to the imperial archives by Nicholas.

In the surveys of the Russian autocratic government, the travellers assessed the importance of the tsar and his bureaucratic officials. The only aspect of Russian politics that the travellers’ condemned concerned the corrupt character of the tsar’s bureaucratic underlings. Haxthausen was the only foreign observer who considered Russia’s bureaucratic system to be capable and strong. As long as a tsar remained in control of affairs it was not unnatural that the contributions of his servants were overlooked by most of the travellers. The European adventurers were unaware that a new, younger generation of Russian government officials were not the lecherous parasites that had filled the ranks of government office for centuries and, under Nicholas I, a class of educated individuals had new visions for Russia’s future.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction*, 116.

<sup>100</sup> Ivan Golovine, *Russia Under the Autocrat, Nicholas the First*. 2 vols. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970. First published in 1846: London: Colburn) vol. 1, 162-3, 174-8.

<sup>101</sup> The evidence supporting the fact that Russia’s bureaucrats were imbued with progressive ideas can be



The travellers' assessment of the Russian government should not be derided for its limited vision. In the 1840s, Ivan Golovine condemned the bureaucrats for "steal[ing] openly and with impunity, from the ammunition to the rations of the soldiers and the medicines of the hospitals."<sup>102</sup> The majority of Russians found that the image of past subservient and inept officials was difficult to forget. The writer Nikolai Gogol was especially proficient at poking fun at petty bureaucrats in his fictional accounts of the Russian government. Gogol included bumbling government officials in his short stories *The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled With Ivan Nikiforovich* and *The Nose*. In his famous novel *Dead Souls*, Gogol told the story of the ease in which government regulations in Russia could be overpowered for malicious gain by describing the fictional actions of the destitute noble Chichikov who purchased the deeds to dead serfs to increase his wealth.<sup>103</sup>

In the view that autocracy was appropriate in Russia, despite the control it exerted over the entire population, the Europeans' sentiments were in accordance with Russia's conservatives. Conservatives such as the early nineteenth century historian Nikolai

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ascertained through the fact that they would be responsible for the swift pace of reform activity carried out under Nicholas' successor, Alexander II. The appearance of skilled bureaucrats just a few years after Nicholas' death, such as Nikolai Miliutin and Dmitri Kisleev who worked towards the emancipation of the peasantry in 1861, indicated that these same men, active in the government during Nicholas' rule, were far from incompetent. Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform*, 39-42.

<sup>102</sup> Golovine, *Russia Under the Autocrat*, vol. 1, 164.

<sup>103</sup> Nikolai Gogol, *The Complete Tales of Nikolai Gogol*. 2 vols. Edited With an introduction and notes by Leonard J. Kent. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992.) Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*. A New Translation by Andrew R. MacAndrew. With a Forward by Frank O'Connor. (New York: Signet, 1961.)

Karamzin connected the importance of the tsar's unrivalled authority with the condition of the nobility, favoured the tsarist system. Karamzin stated:

For lo, these many centuries, we have seen our monarch as our superior judge and have recognized his benevolent will as the highest authority . . . In Russia, the sovereign is the living law: he shows favour to the good and punishes the wicked . . . In the Russian monarch all powers are joined; our government is patriarchal. Autocracy is the bulwark of Russia.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly to Karamzin who considered the divine position of the ruler and his authority to be a necessity, Gogol believed it was imperative that the tsar remain above the law. In *Selected Passages from Correspondence With Friends* (1847) Gogol demonstrated that he had changed from a critic of the Russian government, exhibited in his fiction, to a staunch defender of the autocratic system. Gogol wrote that the Russian people, not Nicholas I, were responsible for the social problems in Russia.<sup>105</sup> Liberal opposition to the unrivalled authority of the tsar had diminished in influence after the failed Decembrist Revolt of 1825. Vocal opposition to autocratic rule was less active in the face of Nicholas' strict and oppressive rule over Russia.<sup>106</sup>

Beyond the travellers' reports on the character of the tsar and the autocratic structure of the Russian government, the accounts made an effort to determine Russia's place in the world. The travellers were emphatic in their assertion that Russia was not a

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Lincoln, *Nicholas I*, 15.

<sup>105</sup> Thornton Anderson, *Russian Political Thought An Introduction*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967) 174.

<sup>106</sup> A notable view against the autocracy was expressed by a leading Westernizer and active literary critic, Vissarion Belinsky. In a letter to Gogol in 1847, Belinsky vehemently denounced the degraded state of the Russian Empire's level of development which he blamed on the unlimited power of the tsar. Marc Raeff, ed., *Russian Intellectual History*. With an Introduction by Issiah Berlin. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1966) 353-62. Belinsky died in 1848 and the letter was quickly distributed in intellectual circles before a partial version of Belinsky's response to Gogol was published by Herzen in 1855.

European nation. While it was acknowledged by all the travellers that Russia's aristocracy enjoyed the same lifestyle as its counterpart in Europe, the travellers, Custine in particular, vehemently stated that Western mannerisms in Russia were simply a façade and not substantive enough to make Russia a European nation. Only Haxthausen considered the possibility that Russia was neither European nor Asian but had a distinct Russian character.<sup>107</sup>

In Russia during the 1830s and 1840s, two philosophies debated whether Russia should accept European culture and ideas or rigidly exclude all outside influences in favour of native Russian culture. The Slavophiles upheld the virtues of Russia prior to Peter the Great and the Western influences which infiltrated into Russia. They believed that without interference from foreign nations and concepts the Russian identity would have been able to develop and bring Russia closer to her Slavic brothers without suffering the evil effects of Western culture. In the opposing philosophy, that of the Westernizers, the true, native character of Russia was not held to high esteem. The group's leader, Peter Chaadaev, deplored Russia's lack of parity with the West and despaired over Russia's distant ties with Europe. Chaadaev's derisive attitude towards Russian culture was visible when he wrote:

We Russians, entering the world like illegitimate children, without a heritage, without a link with those who have lived on earth before us, we have in our hearts none of those lessons learned before we came into being . . . what is a matter of habit and instinct among other nations we must drive into our heads . . .

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<sup>107</sup> Haxthausen was also the only traveller who acknowledged the existence of the Westernizer/Slavophile debate in Russia during which Russian intellectuals questioned Russia's position in the world. Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 186-8.

Our memories do not go back beyond yesterday . . . we have only the wildest barbarianism.<sup>108</sup>

While Custine, Lagny, Bourke and Haxthausen tried to determine the status of Russia as a European, Asiatic or distinctly Russian entity, they did not proclaim that Russians did not unequivocally claim membership to either culture and that two competing philosophies were endeavouring to determine Russia's place in the world.<sup>109</sup>

With the exception of Haxthausen, the travellers chose to castigate Russia as inferior, or less advanced, for not being 'European' rather than recognize Russia's unique cultural heritage. This point became significant in the travellers' discussions on the possible threat Russia posed to the West. With the exception of Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* which labelled Russia a dangerous foe, the travel accounts did not believe that Russia had intentions to invade or attack Europe. Even though Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny acknowledged Russia's military strength, they did not think it was either capable or intent on attacking Europe's superior forces. Contemporary Russians were primarily of the belief that Nicholaevan Russia did not pose a threat to the West. Ivan Golovine acknowledged that Russia was constantly seeking influence and power during the 1830s and 1840s. Golovine predicted that the Russian military would attempt to capture Constantinople or India when Russia's foreign policy turned its attention to Asian conquests. However, although Golovine acknowledged Russia's expansionist policy towards the east, Golovine did not regard Russia as a threat to Europe and believed that Nicholas I recognized that any actions against a European power would provoke an

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted in W. J. Leatherbarrow and D. C. Offord, ed. *Documentary History of Russian Thought*. (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1987) 69-70.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Baro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan Slavism 1856-1870*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) 3-60.

overpowering resistance by Europe.<sup>110</sup> Based on the elapse of time which ultimately witnessed the end of the imperial Russian Empire in 1917, it can be conclusively determined that the tsarist leaders never sought or attempted to dominate Europe by force. At the end of Nicholas' reign Russia was involved in the Crimean War, but the conflict did not imply Russia's covetous designs against the West. The Crimean War was based on issues arising from the contradictory Russian and European interests in the Ottoman Empire. Russia's policy of Pan Slavism, which was often perceived by Westerners as a threatening policy, reached its high point of activity in the 1860s and 1870s and was not directed against the West through military force, but sought a closer relationship with the Slavs under the Austrian and Ottoman Empires.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Golovine, *Russia Under the Autocrat*, vol. 1, 194-200.

<sup>111</sup> Hans Kohl, *Pan-Slavism Its History and Ideology*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1960.)

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RUSSIAN CULTURE**

This chapter deals with the different aspects of elite Russian culture that the six Western travellers examined in their writings. The travellers' study of Russian culture encompassed a wide range of topics concerned with providing their prospective readers in the West with an overall sense of life in imperial Russia. In its widest application, the term 'culture' encompasses the artistic and intellectual progress of a nation in conjunction with the customs and lives of the people within a given society. In *The Empire of the Czar, Russia, Personal Adventures and Excursions, St. Petersburg and Moscow, The Russian Empire* and *The Knout of the Russians* the six authors focussed on artistic accomplishments, Orthodox religious practices, education and criminal justice in Russia. In the surveys, the accounts extended their reach beyond Russian political affairs to portray the cultural accomplishments and practices of the Russian people.

#### ***ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS***

During their visits to mid-nineteenth century Russia, Bourke, Custine, Cameron and Kohl formed an impression of Russia's artistic accomplishments. The nature of the Western travellers' critiques was necessarily coloured by their long familiarity with European culture. It was also a fact that the travellers were not art critics and, therefore, compared Russian art and architecture to the monuments they had favourable opinions of in England, France or a German state. Bourke acknowledge that he was not technically qualified to judge Russian architecture, stating "I am unlearned, and ignorant of the

technicalities of art.”<sup>1</sup> This circumstance, however, did not stop Bourke, or any of the other travellers, from recording their personal impressions on Russian art.

Bourke was primarily unenthusiastic in his assessment of Russia’s artistic accomplishments, despite recognizing the existence of a few eye-catching achievements. Bourke acknowledged the presence of beautiful monuments in St. Petersburg such as the statue of Peter the Great, known as the Bronze Horseman, which was an impressive representation of Peter’s strength and importance in Russian history. Bourke regarded himself to be unqualified to judge any technical problems in the design of the human form, noting that “critics and dilettanti may find fault with the details of the work, and lose, in the examination of legs and arms, all ideas beyond a mere anatomical study” and confined himself to describing the statue as a startling and powerful work.<sup>2</sup> The government-supported theatre in Russia was noted by Bourke to be remarkable in both its external design as well as the performances that took place within its walls. The buildings favoured by Russia’s royal family, namely the Winter Palace and the Hermitage, had a striking appearance and Bourke believed they were further enhanced by being geographically well-situated near a river.<sup>3</sup> The column constructed to the memory of Alexander I was stated to be “one of the most graceful monuments in the city.”<sup>4</sup> Even though Bourke recognized the presence of such outstanding architectural achievements in Russia, he also identified a similar number of less attractive buildings. The monument to Potemkin - the Russian general active in the Crimea during the reign of Catherine II - the Tauride Palace - was

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<sup>1</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-51, 97, 147-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

represented as unsightly and of no architectural merit. The churches in Russia were initially singled out because of their good, if somewhat inferior, appearance in comparison to the religious architecture seen throughout the West. Bourke later amended this opinion when he viewed more examples of the Russo-Byzantine style in Russia. The Church of St. Vasilli was regarded as a hideous sight due to its mixture of colours and decorative design. The Kremlin was seen as the worst example of Russian craftsmanship and described as a gaudy monstrosity, more like a Manchester cotton factory than an imperial residence.<sup>5</sup>

Bourke discerned favourable aspects of individual buildings and monuments during a close inspection of St. Petersburg and Moscow, but felt that a complete survey which encompassed all of the edifices immediately magnified the contradictory and flawed designs prevalent throughout Russia. Bourke characterized the Russian people as lacking an inborn creativity and much of what they produced was labelled an imitation of European works - the Russians were viewed to be adept at copying, not creating. *St. Petersburg and Moscow* recorded that foreign architects and engineers were responsible for the major achievements in Russian architecture as there was not a great preponderance of talented craftsmen in Russia. Bourke felt that the Russian painter Brulov, who had received international acclaim, should not have been credited with possessing talent. Brulov's "The Last Day of Pompeii" made the artist the most celebrated student of Russia's Academy of Arts, due to one painting, and was cited by Bourke as further evidence of the inferiority of Russian artistic achievements in the nineteenth century. Regarding literary endeavours in Russia, Bourke noted that the quantity of native

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 88-9, 116.



literature was stagnant at 784 publications while the more popular and intellectual European books were estimated to number 300,000. Bourke credited the dearth of Russian literature to the over-abundant use of the German and French languages amongst the nobility which left the Russian tongue underdeveloped.<sup>6</sup>

Custine unabashedly criticized Russian art and felt that the Russian people's barbarianism existed to such an extreme that Russians would rather appear cultured than actually become refined. Custine believed that Russians had only begun to transcend beyond the backward and depraved level of the Tartars after Peter I introduced Western-based reforms.<sup>7</sup> In *The Empire of the Czar*, Custine criticized the Russians' propensity for copying the intellectual and social standards of the aristocracy throughout Europe. In Custine's words:

I do not reproach the Russians for being what they are, what I blame in them is, their pretending to be what we are. They are still uncultivated: this state would at least allow room for hope; but I see them incessantly occupied with the desire of mimicking other nations and this they do after the true manner of monkeys, caricaturing what they copy. They thus appear to me spoilt for the savage state, and yet wanting in the requisites of civilization; and the terrible words of Voltaire or of Diderot . . . recur to my mind - 'The Russians have rotted before they have ripened.'<sup>8</sup>

Custine believed that Russians were incapable of finding beauty in artistic achievements and endeavoured to procure such skills primarily to impress foreign visitors. Custine credited the Russian ballet with being technically competent, but it was not

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 211-3, 222-5. While Bourke acknowledged that official government censorship of Russian literature restricted the content of printed materials, in particular if they questioned the Orthodox faith or the tsar's authority, he did not feel that censorship led to the low volume of Russian literature.

<sup>7</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 182, 210.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 182.

regarded to be artistically or stylistically stimulating. A variety of Russian painters produced some enchanting landscape pictures, but the most celebrated artist in Russia, Brulov, possessed only the rudiments of talent and executed his famous painting, "The Last Day of Pompeii," without feeling and a poor use of colour.<sup>9</sup> Custine did not have optimism for Russian literary endeavours because he felt that the authors lacked the intellectual and cultural refinement necessary to write inspirational and popular novels.<sup>10</sup> The architectural monuments in Russia, perhaps the most visible form of artistic expression, were described as poor replicas of the classical patterns of ancient Greece that had been transplanted into a region whose harsh winter climate inhibited Russia from being a suitable location for such structures. Custine only deemed it permissible that Russians implement Byzantine styles which, while not flattering, were better suited to the land because of Russia's Orthodox religious heritage than the replicas of classical monuments. He labelled the bronze statue erected to the memory of Peter the Great a monstrosity produced by an incompetent artist.<sup>11</sup> One of the few edifices viewed by Custine in Russia which he, unlike Bourke, found impressive was the Kremlin and the artwork contained within. Custine described the Kremlin thus, "its prodigious walls and towers, carried over hills and ravines, and rising above each other in every variety of style, shape and design, forming altogether the most original and poetical architecture in the world."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 289-92.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 76-7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 129,135.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 11.

Cameron viewed Russian architecture favourably in *Personal Adventures and Excursions*. All buildings of note in St. Petersburg and Moscow were described by Cameron who commented on the decorative qualities of every building he came in contact with, including the Cathedral of the Assumption. Cameron did not condemn the appearance of the Church of Vasilli, which was maligned by Bourke, and instead described it as colourful and unique.<sup>13</sup> Cameron was astounded by the superb production values of the Grand Opera in St. Petersburg that exceeded the best cities of Europe.<sup>14</sup>

In *Russia*, Kohl sought to describe, in minute detail, the artistic and architectural achievements he viewed in Russia. The very appearance of St. Petersburg was noted as 'magnificent' and Moscow was deemed to be breathtaking in a manner unparalleled in Europe, thanks to the rich assortment of beautiful buildings that could be viewed. The domineering presence of churches in the country produced a mesh of brilliant colours and the Hermitage and the Winter Palace created a striking vision in Russia.<sup>15</sup> Kohl felt that Russian architecture was worthy of endless admiration. In St. Petersburg, the Lady of Kazan Cathedral was singled out for its fine workmanship and attractive design. The column dedicated to Alexander I was labelled incomparable because of its unaffected beauty. The bronze statue of Peter the Great was also cited as a superb example of skilled craftsmanship. The Tauride Palace built for Prince Potemkin during the reign of Catherine II was a marvellous work.<sup>16</sup> Kohl regarded the architectural achievements which prevailed in Moscow to be similarly impressive and the Great Bell of Moscow was referred to as an

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<sup>13</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 147-8, 163-4, 178-9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 251, 289-90.

<sup>15</sup> Kohl, *Russia*, 36.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 245-57; 295.

interesting object owing to its immense size. An aerial view of the city from the Tower of Ivan the Great was an awe-inspiring display of different artistic styles brought together.

Kohl expressed high hopes for Russia's literary output and found that in the 1830s a greater number of Russian authors had become widely-read, something he attributed to the declining popularity of foreign publications. Literature was a recently developed form of artistic expression in Russia which suffered from the limited use of the Russian language amongst the nobility. Pushkin and Karamzin were the only Russian authors that Kohl reckoned to possess literary talent.<sup>17</sup> Kohl's impression of Russian painters was less favourable and he felt that St. Petersburg's Academy of Arts had not produced an abundance of talented artists. He only noted the slight achievements of the painter Orlovsky, the sculptor Tolstoy and Brulov's picture "The Last Day of Pompeii" as being particularly significant. Regardless of the shortcomings of the artistic works, Kohl did not feel that such items should be dismissed as they had merit and should be seen by all foreign travellers visiting Russia.<sup>18</sup>

### ***RELIGION AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN RUSSIA***

The six European travellers became acquainted with the outward practices of the Russian Church and the influence of Orthodox Christianity during their journeys through Russia. The observations of Custine, Lagny, Bourke, Cameron, Haxthausen and Kohl on religious ceremonies and devotional acts of worship facilitated their personal

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 132-3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 202-4.

understanding of the power of religion in Russia. In this topic, the travellers' religious convictions were a likely influence on their opinions of Russian Orthodoxy. Custine, who was quite critical of the backward and immoral state of the Orthodox Church, is known to have deemed Catholicism to be superior to Protestantism. In his novel *Romuald*, Custine asserted that only the religious forces in Rome were strong enough to preserve Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Bourke had a religious upbringing as a Protestant, but the information available on the extent of his religious beliefs is limited.<sup>20</sup> A greater amount of information is available on Haxthausen's religious sentiments, specifically his opinions on Orthodoxy. After his travels to Russia, Haxthausen became an advocate for a reconciliation between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. From 1857-60 he exchanged several letters with the Russian author of *Will Russia Become Catholic?*, Ivan S. Gagarin, which revealed Haxthausen's respect for the Russian liturgy and religious customs.<sup>21</sup>

Custine conducted a superficial investigation into Russia's religious practices that was relegated to random comments dispersed throughout his three volume *The Empire of the Czar*. The Russian Orthodox Church, unlike Protestantism, was deemed to have no spiritual authority and unable to inspire deep religious feeling in the Russian populace, a very derisive statement considering Custine's belief in the inferiority of Protestantism to Catholicism. Custine felt that the Orthodox religion did not contribute to the intellectual or moral development of Russians. Custine labelled the Russian Church and its leaders as

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<sup>19</sup> Muhlstein, *A Taste for Freedom*, 358-60.

<sup>20</sup> Pottinger, *Mayo*, 14-5.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond T. McNally, "Two Catholic Slavophiles?: Ivan S. Gagarin and August von Haxthausen in Search of Church Reconciliation 1857-60," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*. 34 (2000): 251-309.

nothing more than a tsarist tool to control and discipline the people and stated that “the temples of the Greek church no longer serve as roots for the pulpit of truth.”<sup>22</sup>

Custine described Russian priests as lifeless corpses devoted, not to God, but to the tsar.<sup>23</sup> The Church’s relationship with the tsarist government had weakened its authority, as Custine noted, “a priest who allows himself to be dethroned by the king, for the want of courage to follow that road, equally fails in his high calling.”<sup>24</sup> Custine condemned Russia’s priests for fostering a superstitious Russian population after he witnessed that people of all classes - nobles, workers and peasants - displayed signs of extreme religious devotion.

Signs of the cross, salutations in the street, bowing of the knees before the chapels, prostrations of old devotees upon the pavements of the churches, kissings of the hands, a wife, children, and universal contempt - such are the fruits of the priests abdication - such is all that he has been able to obtain from the most superstitious people in the world.<sup>25</sup>

Upon observing the impassioned acts of submission performed by the Russian people in front of an image of the Virgin of Vivilski, an important religious shrine in Russia, Custine restated his belief that Russians were not spiritual. Custine deemed the acts of

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<sup>22</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 76. Custine’s statements which criticized the Church as unlearned was reflected in the fact that the intellectual elite in Russia were known to convert to Western faiths because of the highly conservative nature of the Orthodox Church which spent little time educating the Russian people. This often meant that intellectuals responded to the Church’s opinion that “all evil comes from opinions” by turning to Western religions for spiritual enlightenment. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 243.

<sup>23</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 76-8.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 77. Under Peter the Great the members of the Holy Synod were required to take an oath that declared “I swear by almighty God that I resolve and am in duty bound, to be a faithful, good, and obedient slave [*rab*] and subject to my natural and true Tsar and Sovereign” and the priests promised to “defend . . . all the powers, rights and prerogatives belonging to the High Autocracy of His Majesty.” After Church lands were appropriated by the government under Catherine II, the priests became dependent on the ruler for a small income (which was supplemented by fees obtained from parishioners.) Quoted in Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 241, 243.

<sup>25</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 77.

prostration, because of their unnaturalness and frequency, to be the result of custom and practice rather than true religious sentiment.<sup>26</sup>

The marquis labelled the separation of the Russian priest from his mission to serve God 'a schism' because the priest had failed to follow his true path. Custine degraded the saints worshiped by the Russians as inadequate and unworthy. Only heroes known for bloody and horrific deeds, not true martyrs, were respected and admired by Russian believers; a reference to saints such as Michael of Chernigov and Alexander Nevsky who were revered for their military victories over the Tartars and Swedes rather than their religious convictions. Custine felt that the leaders of the Orthodox faith in Russia had never been involved in Crusades to civilize the world or taken part in any great religious movements in history. As a witness to the marriage of the Grand Duchess Marie in St. Petersburg, Custine was impressed with the beautiful surroundings in the richly ornamented church which presented a marked contrast to the archaic customs which were evident during the ceremony.<sup>27</sup> The only favourable aspect which Custine reported to exist in an Orthodox liturgy concerned the church choir. Without the aid of instruments, the harmony of the unaccompanied singers was reported to be simple and moving.<sup>28</sup>

Lagny, like Custine before him, did not view the Orthodox faith in Russia as an instrument which exerted a strong moral influence over the Russian people. *The Knout of the Russians* was preoccupied with revealing the backward and debauched state of Russia's priests while noting the clergy's recent dissent to the position of the subservient follower of the tsar. Lagny believed that the priests did not resent their declining religious

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 204-5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 272-3; vol. 1, 155.

authority because “acts of devotion, charity, and humility are virtues not convenient in the Russian church.”<sup>29</sup> Lagny credited all of the failings of Russian Orthodoxy to the fact that the Church was separated from the superior influences of Rome and became subject to the will of a Russian despot.

The Greek religion is what we should have expected her to be when she separated from Rome. She wished to become independent, and has fallen under the brutalising (sic) yoke of the sabre at Constantinople and Moscow. For six centuries she has suffered the penalty of her treason.<sup>30</sup>

Lagny contended that religion became little more than a tool with which the tsar taught the Russian people to fear both the earthly and heavenly ruler. A Russian translation of the New Testament expressed the idea that the tsar was more important than God. Debates on religious doctrine were prohibited in Russia and disobedience could result in immediate exile because the Russian government was fearful of new ideas and thoughts which might ultimately challenge the tsar’s authority.

Lagny surmised that the priests serving the Church were ill-educated fools who did not exhibit religious convictions. Compared to the missionary work of the clergy throughout Europe, Lagny concluded that there was a dismal sense of religious duty in Russia and priests did not convey religious passion during a liturgy. The Russian clergy did not extol the faith as missionaries or church servants. Lagny could not cite examples of priests acting on behalf of a misfortunate criminal or caring for the spiritual needs of the sick in Russia. Members of the clergy lived in squalor and pursued a life of drunkenness

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<sup>29</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 70. An example of the priests official, or political, rather than spiritual role, can be cited in the requirement that priest’s report information they learned in confession which suggested a possible threat against the tsar to the authorities. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 241.

<sup>30</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 86.



and debauchery. The priests had little knowledge of religious precepts and were therefore not bothered that their immoral behaviour conflicted with the Bible's teachings. From his observations, Lagny determined that to become a priest, a good voice and full beard were the only obligatory requirements.<sup>31</sup> In Russia the clergy did not act out of devotion, but for financial benefit. The priests were not well paid by the government and increased their income by selling their services for Easter mass and the duties such as confession, baptism, weddings and funerals to the highest bidder; a rather harsh interpretation of the Russian people's practice of giving priests a small payment to provide for their livelihood. Lagny asserted that the situation left priests more interested in attending to the needs of the rich than the poor and often situated themselves in close proximity to noble households.<sup>32</sup>

Lagny, like Custine, believed that there were no martyrs who died in defence of their beliefs because strong convictions were not present in the Russian faith. The saints that the Orthodox Church honoured were not deemed worthy of such a lofty distinction because Russian saints had not performed any devotional or charitable acts during their lifetime. Lagny felt that the poor quality of Russia's priests was mirrored in the superstitious practices of the Russian populace. Religion had not been able to civilize the Russian people; the attributes of the "barbarous savages of Polynesia" could be upheld as virtuous when compared to the moral qualities of Russians. Easter ceremonies and other

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<sup>31</sup> Lagny's negative comments on the character of the Russian clergy did reflect some of the more scandalous incidents involving members of the Russian clergy. A private government report in Nizhni Novgorod questioned "can the people respect the clergy when they hear how one priest stole money from below the pillow of a dying man at the moment of confession, how another was publicly dragged out of a house of ill-fame, how a third christened a dog." Beyond these extreme examples of a priest's misconduct, the majority of Russian priests, while not interested in debating issues of the faith, were religious and endeavoured to be faithful representatives of the Church in their parish. Quoted in Donald W. Treadgold, "The Peasant and Religion" in *The Peasant in Nineteenth Century Russia*. ed. Wayne S. Vucinich. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968) 101-2.

<sup>32</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 83-4.

forms of religious celebration were described as occasions for wanton behaviour throughout the empire. The process of revering saints was carried out crudely by the Russians who rented pictures of saints to cure a particular ailment or lend strength in a time of crisis.<sup>33</sup> Lagny stated that the barns employed in many towns to serve the functions of a church - an outrageous statement considering the prevalence of churches throughout the countryside - as well as the properly constructed churches in the cities, which mixed Byzantine, Greek, Gothic, Roman and Mongol architectural styles, were not conducive to religious worship.<sup>34</sup>

*The Knout of the Russians* noted that other faiths within the Russian Empire were viewed with suspicion by the tsarist government and conversions to another religion from the Orthodox faith resulted in strict censure. Religious sects were only tolerated in Russia because the government recognized that it was impossible to completely eradicate them. Provided that the believers did not attempt to increase their numbers through conversions of Orthodox Russians, the practices of the sects were not forbidden by the government. Lagny noted that the lives of the non-Orthodox believers were difficult and it was not uncommon for non-Orthodox Russian serfs and Polish Catholics to convert to Russian Orthodoxy in order to improve their lives; serfs attained freedom and the Poles were no longer subjected to strict government scrutiny.<sup>35</sup>

Haxthausen's interest in Russian religious practices stemmed from his belief that "the social and political institutions of a country can never be rightly apprehended without

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 67-72.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 82-3, 86-7.

its religious condition being understood.”<sup>36</sup> In sharp contrast to Custine’s *The Empire of the Czar* and Lagny’s *The Knout of the Russians*, Haxthausen credited the Orthodox Church with playing an important role in inspiring religious sentiment in the Russian people. The power of the Church prevailed everywhere in Russia, uniting believers and non-believers, the rich and the poor. This led Haxthausen to consider the Russian people to be imbued with a religious passion that did not exist in Europe even though he regarded ideological differences between the Russian Orthodox, or Eastern Church, and the Western Churches as barely perceptible - an assertion that supported his desire for a reconciliation between the Orthodox and Western churches.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to recording his impressions on religious teachings in Russia compared to those of the West, Haxthausen noted that the Russian Church, when viewed against the practices of the Protestant faith, did not distinguish between the classes. The Orthodox faith recognized all individuals, irrespective of their status as peasant or aristocrat, to be equal before God. Haxthausen recorded that in a Russian church, no individual was considered more important than another.

There is . . . no difference visible between a Russian of the highest rank and a common man; everywhere prevails the unity of the national Church and national worship: there is moreover in the Church, what is very beautiful, never the slightest difference perceptible between high and low . . . In Russia there is complete equality . . . the serf, places himself without hesitation above or before the rich man, his lord and master; the latter on the other hand claims no precedence.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 247.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 219. One significant difference between the Western churches and the Russian Church concerned their view towards a country’s leader. In the West, a ruler whose actions were against Christian precepts could be subjected to criticism and censure. In Russia, belief in autocracy meant that the power of the tsar should be supported at all times. Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, 13-4.

<sup>38</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 95.

Throughout Russia, from large city to small town, the people displayed their religious passion in front of religious pictures or relics with fervour and devotion. The elevated status of the Russian faith inspired a generous spirit which contributed to the construction of many small churches throughout Russian villages.<sup>39</sup> The exteriors of a number of the churches were regarded by Haxthausen as inspirational achievements; the Church of Saint Vasilii was an exceptional monument with an imposing appearance, equalled only by the treasures, primarily pictures of saints, contained within the church.<sup>40</sup>

Haxthausen felt that the people's religious faith and patriotic ardour often combined to create the idea of a 'Russian God' and the unparalleled strength of the Russian nation.<sup>41</sup> Despite their unsophisticated understanding of spiritual doctrine, religion was able to unify the Russian people. Although the Biblical passages that dealt with Purgatory and other concepts were not rigidly defined in the Russian faith, Orthodoxy was responsible for producing a devout populace. It was all the more remarkable that Haxthausen deemed the Orthodox belief to be a powerful force in Russia considering that he, like Custine and Lagny, had little regard for the educational standards of the priests. Haxthausen recognized the truth behind the reports of foreign observers who had stated that the Russian people did not like or respect the clergy. Haxthausen noted that the older generation of uneducated priests cared little about performing their

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 41, 79.

<sup>41</sup> The concept of 'Holy Russia' referred to the belief that Russia was the only Christian land in which spiritual salvation was possible. The idea of Holy Russia contributed to the references to a 'Russian God' who had a special connection to the Russian land. As the historian Michael Cherniavsky explained, "if the uniqueness of Russia required the transcendental adjective of 'Holy,' then the uniqueness of God, at least as far as Russia was concerned, required the materialistic adjective 'Russian.'" Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, 133.

religious duties and pursued a religious career only for financial benefits. Haxthausen stated that an influx of young and educated men devoted to serving the Church in the 1830s and 1840s ended the dishonourable practices of earlier priests and thereby received the admiration of parishioners. The newer generation of the clergy were described as exemplary leaders of the Orthodox faith.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike Haxthausen who erroneously noted that there were no substantial ideological differences between Eastern and Western Christianity, Bourke determined that there were fundamental distinctions between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, noting in particular, that the Church “enjoins marriage on her clergy as a duty, and a man must have entered into the happy state of matrimony before his admittance to the order of priest; but should he have the misfortune to lose his wife; he cannot marry again.”<sup>43</sup> The traveller looked favourably upon Russian religious customs when he stated, without citing examples, that Protestants recognized that many of the doctrines of the Orthodox Church attained a level of truth that eluded Roman Catholicism. Bourke regarded the ordinary priest in Russia to be uneducated and unlikely to rise in his calling through the ranks of the Church. Neither were the monks noted to be educated in Russia, but in this circumstance Bourke did not feel that they differed from their counterparts throughout Europe.<sup>44</sup> Bourke believed that the changes instituted by Peter the Great took the Russian Church out of the backward state of earlier centuries when it had been governed by a patriarch and placed religious matters under the authority of the Holy Synod. Whereas Church

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<sup>42</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 220, 226. The changes which Haxthausen noted in the Russian clergy were the result of reforms from 1808-14 which revised the educational standards for the clergy which meant that the number of graduates from a seminary degree doubled from 1800 to 1825.

<sup>43</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 93.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 93, 107-22.

leaders in earlier centuries had been preoccupied with condemning and punishing Russians who promoted “religious controversy,” the Church hierarchy that Bourke witnessed in 1845 was devoted to religious matters and instilled a high moral standard for the people to emulate.<sup>45</sup>

Bourke portrayed the parish priests in Russia as an invaluable force in the preservation of the Orthodox religious faith as a consequence of the close association between the Russian people and church officials. A priest’s year-round attention to the needs of his flock was regarded as more important than the performance of church services.<sup>46</sup> Noting that there were a large number of devoted worshippers throughout Russia, Bourke contended that Moscow’s population appeared to be more religious than the rest of Russia. Bourke perceived the existence of a strong faith in Moscow because the city’s inhabitants continually kissed the cross and prostrated themselves on the ground. While Bourke noted that such acts indicated the prevalence of superstitious practices amongst the clergy and worshippers, Bourke accepted that native customs helped serve the spiritual needs of the faithful - only in its excessive repetition did the practice become peculiar and somewhat amusing.<sup>47</sup>

Bourke placed particular emphasis on describing the appearance of churches and religious symbols in *St. Petersburg and Moscow*. He was fascinated by the assortment icons of saints, richly adorned with eye-catching jewels, that were typically present in a church. These religious paintings were deemed more appropriate in a place of worship than the assortment of military emblems acquired from Russia’s military victories which,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 94-6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 93-4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 103, 109-16.

although meant to acknowledge God's role in Russia's ultimate success over its enemies, should not glorify battle or the plight of the vanquished in a church. Bourke found the singing of the church choir, without instrumental accompaniment, to be particularly appealing and should be considered the "finest in the world."<sup>48</sup> While the number of churches in Russia astonished Bourke, he recorded contradictory impressions about their appearance. Bourke described Moscow's Church of St. Vasilii as "a gaudy ornament done in sugar by an insane confectioner, rather than a real place of Christian worship."<sup>49</sup> Overall, the churches in Russia were felt to be pleasing to the eye and Bourke only discerned flaws in the Russian buildings when he compared them to churches in Europe. For instance, he noted that St. Issac's Cathedral "although a magnificent but as yet unfurnished structure, is not what we should suppose the metropolitan cathedral of the Greek religion ought to be."<sup>50</sup>

Whereas in Bourke's study of Russia, the architectural style of the Russian churches was noted in passing, Kohl's *Russia* was predominantly focussed on describing the architecture of Russian churches which displayed a blend of Greek, Byzantine, ancient Russian and modern European designs. The newer churches were constructed of brick and replaced the older wooden structures which were decreasing in numbers due to decay or fire. Inside the churches, brightly coloured icons and shrines confronted the eye while bells, cupolas, towers and columns served a decorative purpose for the church's exterior. In St. Petersburg, Kohl felt there were many examples of exceptional workmanship, in particular, St. Isaac's Cathedral and the church in the Peter and Paul fortress. Upon

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 91.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 115.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 97.

viewing the religious edifices in Russia, Kohl was impressed by the fact that the dominant Orthodox population in Russia was deferential towards other religious faiths. Armenian, Greek, Protestant and Roman Catholic churches and mosques were treated with respect by Russians who acknowledged the existence of one God over all people.<sup>51</sup>

Despite Kohl's concentration on the architectural and artistic attributes of the churches and monasteries he visited, Kohl did not neglect the study of Russian Orthodox religious practices. Kohl recognized that a form of peculiar Russian devotional practices affected the Christian faith, in keeping with Haxthausen's recognition of a 'Russian God,' when he observed that the faithful preferred to venerate Russian saints over such universal Christian figures as John the Baptist. It was not uncommon to see churches and monuments in Russia dedicated to revering past tsars and tsarinas. Many religious occasions, such as Easter and fasting, were noted by Kohl to be different in their Russian forms than that of Protestantism and Catholicism, in particular through the severity of the rigorous fast. A joyous festival occurred with the Palm Sunday fair when religious items became bountiful and an immense quantity of richly decorated Easter eggs were visible in Russian homes.<sup>52</sup> In Easter celebrations the feasts were enormous and Russians became highly emotional. After Easter mass there was a procession to cemeteries to mourn and remember the dearly departed. Kohl found it impressive that the parishioners retained their interest in a traditional holiday four-hour liturgy. By contrast, individuals in attendance at a Protestant mass in Europe could often be witnessed sleeping. Even an ordinary Sunday liturgy in Russia was a highly ceremonial affair as sections from the

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<sup>51</sup> Kohl, *Russia*, 72, 227-9.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-31.



scriptures were read while the choir sung at intervals. Kohl viewed the entire ritual to have elements of modern and ancient Christianity in Russia when Orthodoxy was not free of all pagan influences. What Kohl perceived to be truly astounding about the ceremony was the fact that the people did not grow weary of the spectacle and it continued to evoke powerful emotions in the Russian people.<sup>53</sup>

Despite their history of inspiring strong religious emotions in the Russian people, Kohl acknowledged that the Russian clergy was not particularly learned. Nonetheless, he perceived that the priests were exemplarily men who accepted people of other faiths and provided assistance to all Russians in need.<sup>54</sup> The Russian clergy came from the typically large families of priests who were required to marry in the Orthodox faith. With the exception of the Sunday liturgy, Kohl believed the priest had little influence over the peasants. In times of crisis or extreme need, the lower classes preferred to pray to icons of saints rather than seek assistance from the clergy. All servants of the Church received an inadequate income from the state which was supplanted by payments received from the nobility for performing religious ceremonies.

The information in Cameron's *Personal Adventures and Excursions* was very similar to the reports on Russian Orthodoxy provided by Custine, Lagny, Haxthausen, Bourke and Kohl. Cameron felt that the clergy did not exert much influence over Russians and the spiritual authority of Russia's religious leaders varied according to the status and station of the priest's parishioners. The economic plight of some members of the clergy was astonishing in its severity and, accordingly, the moral tone of these

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 169, 251-67.

religious leaders tended to be low. Cameron found it peculiar that priests were required to marry; but regarded the custom as acceptable for the lower, not higher ranking, members of the clergy; an acknowledgement that members of the black clergy were required to marry and the white clergy did not. While sacred images were prohibited by the religious orders, paintings portraying national saints were popular in Russia. Overall, Cameron acquired a favourable impression of the Orthodox faith and saw that feast times in Russia were observed with zealously.<sup>55</sup>

### ***EDUCATION***

Custine, Cameron, Haxthausen and Bourke surveyed Russia's educational facilities in their efforts to produce a thorough picture of contemporary Russian conditions for Europeans. Custine did not study the educational opportunities available to the Russian people he observed. However, it became evident that he did not think highly of the Russian school system from Custine's blunt assertion that the people were 'ill-educated.'<sup>56</sup> Cameron viewed the quality of education available to the Russian peasantry to be very poor. He noted that the Nicholaevan government was primarily concerned with educating the sons of the nobility and a number of schools were founded to teach the children of the upper classes. Although Cameron mentioned Moscow University, he was primarily occupied with noting its large collection of literature, not the quality of education it offered.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 204-8.

<sup>56</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 270.

<sup>57</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 188-9.

In accordance with *The Russian Empire's* focus on rural Russia, Haxthausen studied the lack of opportunities for an education which were available to the peasants throughout Russia. Although Haxthausen believed that the number of schools in Russia increased in the nineteenth century, he determined that the amount of peasant children requiring an education far exceeded the capabilities of the existing facilities. Educational standards varied widely throughout Russia and Haxthausen credited an exceptional school in the village of Diakonshi with facilitating the peasants' high literacy rates as well as their understanding of mathematics and religion.<sup>58</sup> Many peasant families of modest means relied upon a local priest for their son's schooling and were willing to pay the equivalent of four English pounds for their child's education.<sup>59</sup> Haxthausen regarded the Theological Academy which was erected in 1749 in the Troitza countryside as an example of the dominant position of monks and clergymen over the education of peasants.<sup>60</sup> During his travels throughout Totma, Haxthausen believed that the peasantry's desire for an education was particularly strong and prompted official government involvement which led to a school being constructed in each of Totma's six districts. The peasant children of the region, already literate because of their parents' especially high interest in education, had their curriculum enhanced by the inclusion of religious and mathematical courses. In

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<sup>58</sup> While it is possible that the peasants Haxthausen encountered were literate, this would have been an exceptional segment of the peasant population as the majority of peasants were illiterate in the nineteenth century.

<sup>59</sup> Instead of using the term 'priest,' Haxthausen and the rest of the travellers referred to Russia's priests by the Russian term for priest, *pop*, or as they translated it, *pope*.

<sup>60</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 83.

other Russian towns, such as Kostrama, it was the peasants' duty to supply their children with the rudiments of an education.<sup>61</sup>

The School of Industry was an educational facility which was supplied by the Russian government to turn out skilled craftsmen from amongst the peasantry. Haxthausen surmised that such initiatives were developed to produce proficient carpenters, hat makers and smiths to enable the peasants to provide Russians with essential goods and services. During the initial years of study, the government provided young apprentices with accommodations and living necessities. After the peasant became competent in his new trade, a modest income was supplied by the government in exchange for the peasant's services in his newfound labour skills.<sup>62</sup>

Haxthausen believed that the Russian government provided the best educational facilities for the children of the nobility. The students of the Forest Academy in St. Petersburg resided in a strict atmosphere and received an excellent education that was on par with similar German schools of the era. The most remarkable aspect of the Russian academy concerned the luxurious surroundings and comfortable lives afforded to the students.<sup>63</sup> Another avenue for the education of the children of Russia's pre-eminent families that Haxthausen encountered were the military establishments. The inspiration for these exemplary facilities came from Peter the Great's school for military men in Moscow which was devised to supply the country with skilled and educated officers. Under Alexander I, Peter's initiative was carried even further as military schools were established throughout the country. During Nicholas' reign, a number of wealthy noblemen set up

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 10.

twenty-eight academies for children of the nobility that could educate up to 10,000 young men in a variety of courses which included military strategy and language instruction. Students were admitted to these establishments according to their father's standing in Russia's Table of Ranks.<sup>64</sup>

Bourke also saw military schools to be an important part of the Russian education system. Improved by Grand Duke Michael just a few years before Bourke's visit to Russia, twenty-six institutions instructed nearly 10,000 sons of the nobility in a wide range of subjects to prepare them for national service as officers.<sup>65</sup> As a military post was ultimately sought by all of the students, the institutions possessed a strict military atmosphere and recognized graduates for acts of gallantry in the performance of military duties. Bourke noted that the facilities for these illustrious students included libraries, a museum and many laboratories which were of the highest quality. Bourke stated that the daily schedule in these institutions included instruction in religion, history, geography, math, languages and art as well as ensured that there was a period for play time, meals and exercise. Gymnasiums were another level of education in Russia and intended to provide

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 345. The Table of Ranks was introduced by Peter the Great in 1722 to establish the status of a noble, in both the government and the military, through fourteen grades, the highest of which was a chancellor or field-marshal. The ancient nobility in Russia abhorred the system as it allowed freemen to attain the status of a nobleman through efficient service to the state, a fact seen by members of the ancient nobility as offensive to their noble lineage. If a member of the new *tchin* class achieved the equivalent to the eighth grade in the Table of Ranks, a collegial assessor in the government or captain in the army, he was awarded the rights of hereditary nobility which included financial rewards, and he could not receive corporal punishment. The ancient nobility's dislike of the system would lead Nicholas I to make it more difficult for members of the *tchin* to be conferred with hereditary status in 1845 when he required civil servants to acquire the fifth rank to attain the hereditary rights of the nobility. See Table 1.

<sup>65</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 2, 7-14. As Bourke visited Russia at a different period than Haxthausen, it is reasonable to assume that both men gave an accurate indication of the facts as they knew them. The difference between Haxthausen's belief that there were twenty-eight institutions compared to Bourke's figure of twenty-six can also be attributed to the extent of the Russian Empire that they included in their calculations.

young nobles, not in attendance at the military academies, with a higher education which led to university studies. The courses offered were based on Western standards and available in nearly every Russian town. The Russian Empire's universities, at Kazan, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, Dorpat and Kharakov taught philosophy, law and medicine and provided graduates with a position equivalent to twelfth class, or provisional secretary, in the Table of Ranks and a place in government service upon the conclusion of studies.

Bourke perceived an important government role in the education of the young of all social levels, while recognizing that the Russian serfs, the majority of the population, were forbidden from attending school.<sup>66</sup> Bourke stated that there were parish facilities for the peasants and district schools whose typical student was the son of a shopkeeper or tradesman. These two forms of schooling taught religion, math, literature, geography and history and were administered at the government's expense. While the idea behind the educational system in Russia was sound, Bourke noted that it did not provide for the different needs of the diverse population throughout the Russian Empire. Autonomy was not afforded to these institutions and even the foreign led private schools were unable to overcome the limited course of study as they were subjected to harsh supervision and restrictions by the tsarist government.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 2, 49-50.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 214-18.

***CRIMINALS, PUNISHMENT AND  
THE THREAT OF SIBERIA***

The treatment of criminals in nineteenth century Russia, notably torture, imprisonment or exile to Siberia, was a topic which received attention in the West.<sup>68</sup> To gauge from Custine's immediate reaction to the idea of Siberia, "that Russian hell" as well as Bourke's comment on "the terrible feeling that the name of Siberia bears to the mind of everyone in Europe," many Europeans had an exaggerated impression of the brutal punishments inflicted upon criminals in Russia.<sup>69</sup> The information Russia's foreign travellers' recorded on the fate of Russian criminals was either favourable or unfavourable. Bourke and Haxthausen presented the situation they observed in Russia with few editorial comments and their reports attempted to be factual, not sensationalistic. Cameron, Lagny and Custine were less interested in providing information on criminals and Siberia and instead chose to regale their readers with fantastic stories concerning the cruelty and abuse in the Russian justice system.

At Schlüsselburg, Bourke inquired into the possibility that a prominent fortress was used to house prisoners. The supposition that the edifice was employed as a state prison was based on the rumours that Bourke heard during his visit to the island.<sup>70</sup> Despite the secretive atmosphere which surrounded judicial procedures in Russia, Bourke

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<sup>68</sup> From the provisions included in the Russian the Law Code of 1649, criminals as well as beggars and religious outcasts, could be punished through exile to Siberia. The individuals sent to Siberia typically descended from the peasant class, although, seen most notably through the example of the Decembrist rebels of 1825, aristocrats were not immune to such punishment.

<sup>69</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 3, 171; Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 2, 160.

<sup>70</sup> One prominent prisoner known to have spent his final days at Schlüsselburg was Shakyk Mansur who incited the people of the Caucasus to rebel against Catherine II's expansion of the Russian Empire over the Caucasus. Taras Hunczak, ed., *Russian Imperialism from Ivan the Great to the Revolution*. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1974) 246-8.

concluded that criminals were treated fairly and prisons in Russia were not more terrifying than the jails throughout England. Bourke felt that the majority of condemned convicts in Russia must have been guilty of heinous crimes and, therefore, whatever term of imprisonment they received was warranted. Bourke also dismissed all allegations which have been levelled by foreigners, without citing examples, against the much-heralded brutality inflicted on criminals exiled to Siberia. Although the idea of Siberia overwhelmed many Europeans with feelings of fear and disgust, Bourke cited the experiences of British prisoners sent to Australia as a stronger example of a government's gross inhumanity towards criminals. The most horrific aspect of the Siberian exile system that Bourke perceived concerned the excessively long trek to the far north; the actual situation in the region was not described by the Irishman as unjust.<sup>71</sup>

Bourke noted that the majority of Russian convicts in Siberia were able to begin new lives with relatively few restrictions imposed on them. Only the most serious offenders in Russia were subjected to strict employment and confinement during exile. The punishment of the knout, although officially banned by the Russian government, was applied in cases involving sensational or brutal crimes. Bourke condemned the barbarity of this torturous ordeal, believing that a more humane form of punishment should replace the knout, but did not feel that the use of the knout was indicative of a cruel nature in the Russians' treatment of criminals as occurrences of this extreme punishment were rare. Bourke recognized that less humane government officials throughout the Russian Empire

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<sup>71</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 2, 161.



might take advantage of the knout in the course of punishing criminals, but he did not deem such individuals to represent the entire Russian populace or government system.<sup>72</sup>

Haxthausen's *The Russian Empire* also presented a favourable view of the overall position and treatment of criminals in imperial Russia. Haxthausen examined the living conditions in a prison in Nizhni Novgorod and was impressed by the humane treatment and comfortable surroundings the prisoners experienced. That the offenders could be considered well fed by the officials was a fact personally tested by Haxthausen during a visit to the prison. Throughout the jail order and discipline were ensured through the maintenance of a respectful relationship, not fear and cruelty, between prisoners and officials. During their imprisonment criminals were at liberty to converse with other inmates regardless of their offence.<sup>73</sup>

Haxthausen felt that prisoners did not dread their approaching exile to Siberia but were resigned to their fate. *The Russian Empire* attributed this circumstance to government precautions which had substantially reduced the number of casualties which arose during the long and exhausting march to Siberia. From a one-third survival rate in the past, in the nineteenth century, less than fifteen percent of the men perished enroute to Siberia. The inhabitants of a local community that a convoy of convicts passed through were responsible for providing the men with provisions for their long trek to Siberia. Haxthausen recorded that the lives of the exiled convicts could be quite pleasant in Siberia. The harsh climate of the northern region was the only real discomfort faced by

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 162-4.

<sup>73</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 240.

the majority of prisoners.<sup>74</sup> The new citizens of Siberia settled into the occupations that the government imposed on them, based on the level of their offence, ranging from work in the mines for the most serious offenders to employment in government initiatives, such as salt-works. The lesser category of criminals, typically vagabonds, immediately found themselves at home in a Siberian village.

Haxthausen was unique among the travellers for commenting upon the life and value of Siberia to the Russian Empire. In his survey of Siberia, Haxthausen primarily relied on statistical data and was able to provide an assortment of details on the region that were not available to the other travellers, such as noting that the population of Siberia, in 1838, was 2,656,300. He characterized Siberia as a land ripe with potential which afforded its population, primarily state peasants, with a vast amount of wealth and opportunities.<sup>75</sup> Besides its use as a place of exile and punishment for criminals, Bourke, Cameron, Custine and Lagny did not regard Siberia as important. Haxthausen recognized the beauty of the land and the freedom which prevailed due to the absence of serfdom in the region and the presence of good governance.<sup>76</sup> The convicts and the natives of the region lived harmoniously in an honest and hardworking atmosphere.<sup>77</sup> The fertility of the land and the abundance of gold, minerals and precious metals in Siberia provided good

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 312; vol. 2, 23.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. The practice of serfdom had never been legally enforced in Siberia and in 1839 Nicholas issued a law forbidding nobles from having serfs in Siberia. Blum, *Lord and Peasant*, 419

<sup>76</sup> The government in Siberia underwent reforms after Haxthausen's visit to Russia when Nikolai Muraviev became Siberia's governor-general in 1847 and began to initiate reforms in the region. That Haxthausen may have been aware of Muraviev's initiatives for Siberia was demonstrated by the German's frequent references to developments in Russia which occurred after his travels; for instance he noted that the gold from the Siberian mines in 1846 was estimated at 1,722 *poods*, the equivalent of 61,992 pounds. Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 17; W. Bruce Lincoln, *Conquest of a Continent: Siberia and the Russians*. (New York: Random House, 1994) 189-92.

<sup>77</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 312, 386.

wages for the people and Haxthausen regarded the natural resources to be a source of great wealth for Russia in the future.<sup>78</sup>

Cameron saw few benefits resulting from Russia's conquest over Siberia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when he analyzed the plight of convicts. While the long trek towards Siberia was treacherous for all exiled criminals, Cameron noted that living conditions in Siberia varied according to a prisoner's offence. Convicts guilty of political or petty crimes did not experience hardships in their northern exile. By contrast, murders, thieves and violent offenders viewed death as the only possible form of relief for their woes. Cameron stated that "the light of heaven was forever excluded from their view" when such criminals arrived in Siberia and the names of these criminals were no longer known to the outside world when they worked and laboured in mines and prisons.<sup>79</sup> Cameron felt that exile to Siberia was an ideal substitute for the death penalty as the practice of capital punishment did not legally exist in Russia, recognition of the fact that the government could sentence an indeterminate number of lashes of the knout to inflict a merciless death on the worst offenders. Only when compared to other forms of punishment applied for a number of crimes, notably the use of the knout or, for offenders in military service, the process of running the gauntlet, did *Personal Adventures and Excursions* see Siberia as a lesser degree of punishment for criminals.

Lagny's commentary on the treatment of criminals in Russia depicted torture and physical abuse as the primary method of punishment employed by Russian officials. In Russia physical punishment was always utilized to subdue criminals; Lagny regarded mere

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 213.

imprisonment as little more than respite for the average Russian whose daily life and surroundings improved when he was behind prison walls. Lagny felt that the terrifying Peter and Paul fortress, a place of imprisonment for political radicals, was the most impressive monument to the bloodthirsty habits of Russia's rulers. Lagny believed it was quite probable that the Neva River which encircled the fortress had received the bodies of many criminals killed by tsarist officials during the course of imprisonment and torture. In an entire chapter of *The Knout of the Russians* titled 'The Knout,' Lagny derided the use of the knout which, as the most painful aspect of Russian punishment, was meant to mercilessly inflict pain and a slow death on its victims. Lagny regarded the knout to be a lawful form of punishment, widely used and accepted throughout the empire.<sup>80</sup>

Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* considered criminal punishment procedures in Russia to be an example of the barbarity of the Russian system of justice. Noting the absence of the death penalty for all but the most severe criminal cases, such as the Decembrist rebels, Custine assured his reading public that this situation was remedied through the careful application of the knout in large doses to produce fatal results in its victims. At the fortress of Schlüsselburg, Custine recounted the horrible conditions in which the imprisoned men were reputed to live. At no point were they referred to, or believed to be, criminals. Instead all inmates were viewed by Custine as guiltless men forced to exist in an oppressive state of isolation and misery - innocent victims of the

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<sup>80</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 130-1, 174-89. Although Lagny was writing after the 'official' abolition of the knout as a form of punishment in 1845, it nonetheless remained common for criminals, with the exception of members of the nobility who were not subject to the knout, a result of Catherine's 'Charter of the Nobility,' to be publicly whipped until the middle of the reign of Alexander II in 1863. Mirsky, *Russia A Social History*, 203.

state's policy of repression.<sup>81</sup> When mentioning Siberia, Custine was similarly merciless in his views. Whereas the exile of French criminals to remote lands was a romantic proposition, Custine regarded all Russian exiles to have been unjustly condemned to their fate. The very idea of Siberia was fearful, a point which Custine remarked upon after seeing convicts on their way to Siberia - impressions he recorded without endeavouring to determine the substantive nature of his beliefs.<sup>82</sup>

The travel accounts on Russia presented the foreign observers' opinions on Russian culture in the 1830s and 1840s. Referring to Russia's artistic progress, Kohl was the only traveller who noted an increased number of literary works in Russia and felt that Russian art, although flawed, should be viewed and appreciated. While Cameron also recognized the beauty of Russian architectural achievements, Custine and Bourke were severe critics of Russian art and literature which could only crudely imitate European examples.<sup>83</sup> Considering the subjective nature of an individual's opinions on art, the diversity in the Europeans' assessments of Russian accomplishments is understandable. It

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<sup>81</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 16, 191-5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 171-3.

<sup>83</sup> It is worthwhile to note that the travellers failed to consider the reasons behind the shortcomings they perceived to exist in Russian artistic achievements. As an example, the effects of censorship were not noted to hinder the progress of Russian literature. After the introduction of publishing enterprises in Russia under Catherine II, the written word immediately came under the supervision of a censor. During the reign of Nicholas I, bureaucratic official N. S. Shishkov released a statute in 1826 which limited the different types of literature that could be published and religious and political debates were expressly forbidden. Every new piece of writing, either in books or journals, was required to pass through several government censorship committees before it was deemed to be free of radical ideas and could be published. The ability for some reactionary and critical works to be printed in Russia was primarily achieved by skilled writers such as Nikolai Gogol who were able to discreetly present their ideas on Russian politics. It is also important to recognize that Custine and Bourke, unlike Kohl who noted recent developments in literature - notably Pushkin's prose and poetry - commented on the state of Russian literature without being able to accurately gauge the merits of native literature as they did not read Russian. Charles A. Rudd, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906*. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982) 83; Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction*, 154-5.

is also notable that Russians presented contradictory opinions on Russia's level of artistic talent. In his rebuttal to *The Empire of the Czar* in *A Russian's Reply*, K. K. Labanskii was indignant that Custine presumed that Russia should remain rooted in the past without being allowed to follow the natural course of development and progression followed by all nations. Labanskii deemed the merciless criticism targeted at St. Petersburg's appearance to be unjust. Labanskii argued against Custine's assertion that "we [Russians] should confine ourselves to the erection of wooden ones [buildings] as the only kind of habitation peculiar to our national style."<sup>84</sup>

In the 1840s Ivan Golovine studied the quality of Russian literature and defended the existence of a Russian, or in his view, Slavic literature, which was evident in Ivan Krylov's fables. Even though Golovine believed that Russian literature possessed great merits, he nonetheless felt that unlike foreign literary forms which constantly developed and expanded through the contributions of skilled writers, the Russian tongue was a backward language that could not possibly produce a memorable body of literature. Any recent writings of quality, such as Karamzin's historical work or Pushkin's poetry were labelled oddities and nothing more.<sup>85</sup> Although in the 1850s and 1860s some of Russia's greatest literary, musical and artistic talents would emerge, the travellers should not be criticized for failing to recognize the cultural environment in Russia that was able to produce Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Tchaikovsky as Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny chronicled what they personally witnessed and, like the Russian commentators on Russian conditions, could not predict future achievements.

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<sup>84</sup> Ksaverii Ksaverievich Labanskii, *A Russians Reply to the Marquis de Custine's "Russia in 1839."* Edited by Henry J. Bradfield. (London: T. C. Newby, 1844) 103.

<sup>85</sup> Golovine, *Russia Under the Autocrat*, vol. 2, 232-5.

Several different aspects of Orthodox religious practices in Russia were explored in the selected six travel accounts on Russia. Lagny and Custine produced a rather negative description of the superstitious practices of Russian Orthodox believers. Kohl found the appearance of churches, religious art and practices to be worthy of a lengthy discussion.<sup>86</sup> All of the travellers recognized the fact that the activities of the Church were under the restrictive control of the autocratic government and understood that, to a greater degree than in the past, church matters in Russia began to take on the appearance of a government office. The travellers also explored the degraded financial and moral conditions that were prevalent amongst the clergy and the Orthodox faithful.<sup>87</sup> This point was mirrored in the life and work of the young Russian priest Ioann S. Belliustin. From 1840-2, Belliustin worked in a rural, but thriving parish at Vasilino. In exchange for the performance of his religious duties, he earned his livelihood through “the beggarly wandering about the parish under a seemingly pretext to glorify Christ” although in truth, “the purpose of my wandering is a three-kopeck piece, a half-bushel of oats.”<sup>88</sup> The priest also noted the backwardness of the Russian peasants’ religious practices, whereby they would be steadfast in the observance of Lent without feeling the slightest compunction when they committed crimes and engaged in debauched behaviour.

The European travellers did not place much emphasis on Russian educational developments in their studies on the culture of Nicholaevan Russia. Bourke and

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<sup>86</sup> To some extent detailed information was not available to five of the travellers because they did not speak Russian; Custine, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny could not listen to a liturgy and determine its merits or shortcomings. Another hindrance to the travellers’ examination of religious practices in Russia came from their own religious convictions which were not Orthodox.

<sup>87</sup> Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, 216.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Freeze, *The Parish Clergy*, xxiii.

Haxthausen confined their comments to the different levels of schooling and curriculum in Russia and Custine and Cameron derided the quality of education most Russians received. While the travellers presented a valid portrait of Russia's educational facilities, with Bourke and Haxthausen noting the existence of parochial, county, secondary facilities and universities, they did not acknowledge that it had been able to produce Russia's emerging intellectual leaders. The contributions of Russia's educated class at this period was evident in the literature of the age, noted by a Soviet era literary critic as "the flowering of the realistic talents of the founders of Russian literature, Pushkin and Gogol."<sup>89</sup> The nineteenth century Russian intellectual Alexander Herzen, who was himself a representative of an educated Russian, often condemned varying aspects of Russian government and society but supported the progress he saw in Moscow University. "The University became more and more the center of Russian culture [and] . . . grew in influence; the youthful strength of Russia streamed to it from all sides, from all classes of society . . . in its halls they were purified from . . . superstitions."<sup>90</sup> In 1850, the increasing number of educated nobles in Russia led Herzen to remark that "the thirst for instruction is taking hold of the entire new generation."<sup>91</sup>

A Russian's contemporary report of official criminal procedures can be located in Fyodor Dostoevsky's book *The House of the Dead* which vividly recounted the author's tribulations from the years he spent in a Siberian prison from 1849-54 because of his involvement in the revolutionary Petrashevsky Circle. Dostoevsky noted that, regardless

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Nicholas V. Riasankovsky, *A Parting of the Ways, Government and the Educated Public In Russia, 1801-1855*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 160.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Pushkarov, *The Emergence of Modern Russia*, 59.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction*, 152.



of the offence, many Russian criminals faced a term of hard labour in Siberia. His narrative also recounted the life of hardships and depravity and filth in Siberian prisons.<sup>92</sup> The travellers who included information on the punishment of criminals in Russia interpreted the situation they observed in two vastly different veins. Cameron, Custine and Lagny discerned nothing that was humane in the Russian system of law and order whereas Bourke and Haxthausen viewed the Russian justice system to be fair and just. In *Russia Under the Autocrat Nicholas the First* Golovine determined that the life and punishment of convicts in Siberia varied according to their crimes. Prisoners could experience the knout or face strict employment conditions in Siberia. Golovine, reminiscent of the views of Cameron and Lagny, also noted that the knout was liberally applied to criminals for a variety of offences in Russia and could sometimes be viewed as a death sentence.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead*. Translated With an Introduction by David McDuff. (London: Penguin Books, 1985.)

<sup>93</sup> Golovine, *Russia Under the Autocrat*, vol. 2, 203-18.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE PEOPLE OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE**

During the course of their travels, the six Europeans' contact with the people of the Russian Empire enabled them to extensively record observations and thoughts on Russian society. The travellers' assessment of the lives of the peasantry, the 'middle class' and the nobility was chronicled in their travel accounts. In addition, the different customs and traditions in Russia's German Baltic provinces and extended territories have been covered in *The Empire of the Czar, Russia, Personal Adventures and Excursions, St. Petersburg and Moscow, The Russian Empire* and *The Knout of the Russians*. The following sections will examine the travellers' treatments on the different classes and ethnic groups living under the Russian tsar.

#### ***THE RUSSIAN PEASANTRY***

The Russian peasantry was comprised of serfs, owned by the landowning nobility, and the state owned peasants. The travellers primarily recorded information on the lives of the peasants under the control of the nobles. Haxthausen and Lagny were engaged in studying the living conditions and the daily routine of the peasants residing in rural Russia. During the course of their travels between Moscow and St. Petersburg, Custine and Bourke spent a limited amount of time observing the peasants in the countryside and some of their conclusions on the peasants' conditions were based on information supplied by their guides. Kohl directed his comments on the Russian peasantry to those he encountered in the cities as workers.

Lagny examined the living conditions of Russia's peasantry who suffered under the domineering rule of the nobility in rural towns and villages. *The Knout of the Russians* noted that for centuries the position of the peasant had remained unchanged, continually oppressed by the landowning nobility who, although numerically inferior, were the peasants' masters. Assaults on peasant women by the nobles, a violence which frequently occurred, were barely acknowledged by the victimized peasants as a result of an inborn tradition of fear. The Russian serf had no status before the law and, without the right to own land, was regarded as little more than property by the upper classes. The problem of the peasant's subservience prevailed to such an extreme degree in Russia that Lagny depicted the peasant as:

indifferent to all around him. The agent of his lord may rob him, or the lord himself may carry off his daughter to satisfy his brutal lust, and he will thank him for the honour he has done his family.<sup>1</sup>

Although they existed in a degraded state as human property, Lagny believed the peasants' situation was improved when they were within close proximity to St. Petersburg or Moscow as peasants could call upon the tsar to protect them from injustices. Lagny found the most atrocious instances of the Russian peasants' inferior position to their master in the towns between Moscow and Kazan where nobles committed "such crimes and tortures . . . [that] make one's blood curdle to think of them."<sup>2</sup> The peasants' position became more inhumane in remote regions of the empire and the punishments the

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<sup>1</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 144.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

denigrated agricultural labourers experienced were often unmatched in their brutality and frequency because nobles knew that the tsar was unlikely to intercede.<sup>3</sup>

Lagny stated that the peasant relentlessly toiled on the Russian soil and amounted to little more than a mass of flesh bent under the yoke of oppression. During the months of fieldwork, the peasant was obliged, from age sixteen, to provide manual labour on both his and his master's land, a system known as the *barschina*. Lagny recognized that the conditions on estates where the *obrok* was applied, whereby the peasant paid a fee to the landowner, were generally less restrictive than manual labour and enabled the peasants to become factory workers or traders. The peasant was prohibited from abandoning agricultural work for other trades without the landlord's knowledge and consent. A drawback to the *obrok* was that the required fee could be exorbitant, as high as the equivalent of two English pounds.<sup>4</sup> A few peasants who were especially proficient in a trade could purchase their freedom if the master was willing to accept the amount offered.<sup>5</sup>

In the winter when the agricultural work could not be tended to, farm implements had to be repaired or constructed out of pieces of wood or metal. During this time,

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<sup>3</sup> Nicholas' concern for the peasants' welfare was reflected in the many times he became involved in the relationship between the peasants and the nobles. Through official warnings to the nobility and government ordinances, Nicholas attempted to safeguard the peasants from harsh treatment from their masters - both because he believed that serfdom needed to be reformed and his fear of the possibility of revolutionary disturbances caused by peasant discontent. Blum, *Lord and Peasant*, 545-6.

<sup>4</sup> The problem of the *obrok* was increased during times of famine or hardship if the *obrok* payment was not adjusted. For the peasants who left their master's land, the size of the *obrok* was based on the peasant's income.

<sup>5</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 158-9. The peasant who attained enough wealth to purchase his freedom had typically been occupied in trade and cottage industries rather than agricultural work. Negotiations over the peasant's economic worth could be quite intense and varied according to the labour value of the serf; in 1861, the value of a serf in Ivanovo (and his family) could reach 200,000 roubles. Other peasants paid between 130 to 5,000 roubles for their freedom. Blum, *Lord and Peasant*, 473.

Russian peasant women looked after the food and clothing needs of their families. Lagny determined that alcohol was the only method to escape from the difficult and monotonous life experienced by the peasants in order to attain some moments of ribaldry.<sup>6</sup> Lagny believed that the average peasant was not worthy of respect and had no notion of the finer things in life. Hence, Lagny felt that the peasant would be unable to tell the difference between an omelette prepared with butter or tallow. The peasant dance was noted to be little more than a noisy display of barbaric movements by an unrefined people. Lagny felt the music the peasant's produced was depressing and the instruments, a wooden flute and a balalaika, were crude and purposeless tools which were unable to stir the listener's soul. The appearance of the peasant was likened to a savage attired in a disfiguring mass of material which may have been practical for work but was not appealing to the eye.<sup>7</sup>

Lagny felt that every dimension of a peasant's life was primitive and underdeveloped. The peasant dwellings were haphazardly constructed from various and disjointed pieces of wood and appeared to be in danger of collapsing. Within the homes, the furniture consisted of nothing more than rudely constructed, filthy tables, chairs, a linen chest and old and cracked pottery. For decoration, there were religious pictures in the eastern part of the structure and a few cheap vases. Lagny believed the vermin and filth that infiltrated every corner of the living quarters was indicative of the savage character of the peasants. Ovens became the cornerstone of the home to heat the food and warm the dwelling.

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<sup>6</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 143, 156, 163-8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-72.

Bourke concurred with Lagny's opinion that peasant dwellings throughout the Russian villages were ramshackle and disarrayed in appearance. He also observed that the peasants seemed to live in a disorganized fashion, working or sleeping at any time they chose without regard to an established time scheme for rest and work. In the summer, with the extended daylight hours, Bourke acknowledged that this was not an entirely insensible system. In winter it was common for a family to sleep on the Russian stove, *pech*, and in the summer a Russian in slumber could be observed in a variety of peculiar locations. Bourke noted that the peasants' lives were dominated by agricultural work performed in rustic conditions year round. From what he saw, Bourke regarded the peasants' disorganized and unenthusiastic approach to their work to be reminiscent of ancient agricultural labourers, not modern men. While Bourke regarded the male peasants to be fine and handsome, he considered the appearance of the women as far inferior to the men and any especial qualities possessed by the fairer sex was nullified by the dirt which covered their face and body.

Bourke was cognisant of the fact that there could be no single assessment of the lives of the serfs as the situation for this class of men and women was wholly dependent upon the whims of a master. The peasant could not consider marriage without the consent of the landowner - in some cases, a master's consent had to be encouraged by a payment. Freedom, which was possible to purchase, was not assured to the peasant as a noble landowner could arbitrarily refuse the most inflated sums offered by the peasant. Bourke recognized that the serfs' duties to the landowner could be fulfilled by two methods. In the system of *barschina* a labourer was required to work on the masters' land for three days a week in the busy spring and summer months of harvest and cultivation. In return,

the master provided the peasant with food, land and other necessities. The system by which an *obrok* was applied, whereby the peasants were required to pay a fee to the nobles, was seen by Bourke to offer the peasant a greater degree of freedom and independence. Although still under the authority of the landowner, the peasants under this system were able to venture into trades and start new lives, providing they continued to fulfill their *obrok* payments.<sup>8</sup>

From his study of the Russian countryside, Bourke concluded that, in most cases, the peasants withstood their subservient positions without complaint. Bourke noted that the nobles viewed peasant workers as a 'horde of slaves' and the serfs themselves recognized that they were not their master's equals, "no feeling in his breast tells him that he is born of the same race."<sup>9</sup> However, this did not mean that the peasants did not rebel against the nobles. Bourke stated that:

there have been instances of revolt where the slaves rising in a body, have committed all sorts of atrocities, burning the cattle and property of their proprietors, and in some cases boiling their landlords alive in oil. The progress of this Tipperary-like vengeance was only stopped by a strong detachment of the army being sent to oppose them.<sup>10</sup>

Bourke felt that it was imperative for the serfs to attain liberty to enable Russia to become a great nation that would be universally respected. Bourke perceived a hopeful indication that the harmful affects of the existence of a powerless peasant class in Russia were subsiding because Nicholas I did not own serfs, however, Bourke did recognize that

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<sup>8</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 2, 46-8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 155.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 48-50.

the tsar owned state peasants.<sup>11</sup> There were efforts to liberate the peasants, which slowly developed amongst some enlightened aristocrats, but this was not yet widespread or acceptable to the majority of Russia's landowners.<sup>12</sup> Bourke saw the ultimate emancipation of the peasantry as something that would be of enormous benefit to Russia's future. Only with complete freedom for the entire population could Russia be universally respected and Russia's image throughout Europe would rise immeasurably. To ensure Russia's stability, Bourke recommended that the serfs be granted freedom from above as such an action would make the tsar appear to be a 'benevolent' father to his subjects. Bourke believed that the best method to achieve such results would be through the slow and steady process of emancipation to prevent the possibility of revolts similar to those which erupted in the British domains in the West Indies.<sup>13</sup>

Custine sensed that because of the peasant's strong attachment to the land, progress towards emancipation must be slow and deliberate to prevent unrest.

The moment that the serfs, separated from the land to which they are attached, were to see it sold, let, or cultivated without them, they would rise in a mass, crying that they were despoiled of their goods.<sup>14</sup>

Custine found Russian peasants to be proficient masters of avoiding the difficulties of work. The peasants were noted to be intelligent and, despite their high morals, could be

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<sup>11</sup> While Bourke seemed impressed by the distinction between state and private peasants, he did not recognize that the lives of the peasants owned by the state was not markedly better than the serfs. Apart from the legal right to own land and less restrictions being placed on their movement, the state peasant was required to pay the *obrok*, the soul tax and also had to provide a number of services to the state, such as repairing roads or postal services.

<sup>12</sup> Although some of the nobles who advocated emancipation did so on humanitarian grounds, the majority of aristocrats felt that emancipation would provide them with workers who had a vested interest in providing skilled and efficient work.

<sup>13</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 55-62.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 179.



cunning in their relations with their masters. Such a precaution was necessary to guard against deceitful landlords. Custine reported that when the peasants of a large estate financially assisted a destitute owner in order to ensure that they were not sold to a new, and possibly harsher overlord, this was an act of self-preservation, not devotion to the landlord. Overall, Custine regarded peasant resistance to the landowner as uncommon. Custine, who felt that the peasants had to be subjected to extreme brutality before any attempts at disobedience would arise, was not aware that there were hundreds of peasant uprisings or forms of rebellion against their masters during Nicholas' reign.<sup>15</sup> Custine believed that on the rare occasions that rebellious activity developed against the masters, the 'slaves' received swift punishments and all of the peasants on an estate were sent to Siberia.<sup>16</sup>

Custine noted that the peasant treated the master like a god and the peasants readily prostrated themselves in a manner which fully distinguished their inferiority. The marquis stated, "the Russian peasant believes that he owes both body and soul to his lord."<sup>17</sup> In rare instances, peasants became an important part of market life although their own financial rights were limited to dealings under five roubles.<sup>18</sup> The more prodigious peasants acquired enough money to purchase land for themselves in their master's name, necessary because of the peasant's lack of legal rights. The marquis believed that only

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<sup>15</sup> Although the majority of the 674 uprisings and disturbances were not well-organized, the ferocity of the peasants was displayed by the fact that the army was used to suppress 228 of the rebellions. While the precise cause of each incident of unrest varied, such occasions betrayed the peasantry's unwillingness to accept their continued enserfment without resistance. Mazour, *Russia Tsarist and Communist*, 218-9.

<sup>16</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 175-81. While it was true that the peasants who rebelled against their masters were punished, only the leaders of peasant unrest, numbering 416 between 1835 and 1843, were exiled to Siberia; their followers remained on the master's estate after they were punished for their disobedience. Mazour, *Russia Tsarist and Communist*, 218-9.

<sup>17</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 3, 167.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 195, 211.

Tsar Nicholas' benevolent affection for these lowly labourers ensured the honesty of a master towards his peasants in these arrangements. Custine feared that the wealth of skilled peasants who became entrepreneurs and were responsible for important trade endeavours and owned tracts of land would not be secure under a future tsar.<sup>19</sup> Custine perceived the only avenue for the peasants to openly lament their lives of hardship and woe to be through their beautiful and harmonious singing.<sup>20</sup>

Custine regarded the men, both young and old, as the most attractive members of the peasant population. The women were less striking, although the young girls did exhibit beauty, but the appearance of all members of the female sex was hindered by the poor style of their clothing. While the typical peasant was very neat and clean in his appearance, Custine felt that the peasants' living quarters were squalid.<sup>21</sup> Custine felt the typical peasant dwelling resembled a wooden cabin - poorly constructed and lacking charm.

Haxthausen presented the most extensive and far-reaching survey of Russia's peasants in the countryside. Haxthausen recorded that the peasants' freedom of movement was first restricted by Tsar Boris Godunov who, in a proclamation of 1601, recognized that agricultural workers' roaming habits caused land to be left unoccupied as they favoured the fertile districts.<sup>22</sup> When Haxthausen visited Russia in the nineteenth century, he saw peasants attached to the soil under the power of their masters. While he noted that the construction of the peasant's homes, or *izbas*, was appropriate to the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 196, 211.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 167-9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 261.

<sup>22</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 107.

severity of the climate, Haxthausen felt that the dwellings were somewhat plain in appearance with the sole exception of the wealthier peasants' colourfully painted homes.<sup>23</sup> Within the *izbas*, families gathered by the stove in winter to keep warm and a lower level was constructed in the house to keep animals and there was a cellar for preserved food, farm tools and an outside garden. Haxthausen believed that the peasants' homes were typically clean; the result of a continual fire and open windows. Haxthausen perceived the peasants to be busy individuals who lived in large family groups of immediate as well as distant relations. The typical peasant meal consisted of a fare of rye bread, groats and cabbage soup.<sup>24</sup> Even though the clothing of the peasants varied according to the season, the one thing that never altered was the bright colour and poor material of their garments.

Throughout *The Russian Empire*, Haxthausen stressed the variety of agricultural systems which were present throughout Russia. Many of the variations were the result of the different qualities of soil and the climate conditions. In Yaroslav, a farm operated by a rich peasant employed labourers to plough the land three times to prepare the rich soil for harvesting. In Velikoye Selo, the poor quality of the soil as well as the weak horses prevalent in the region only permitted the land to be ploughed one time before a harvest could be planted.<sup>25</sup>

Haxthausen described the personality of a peasant as generally agreeable and affable. Peasants under the power of the nobles were in a better situation than those under the official protection of the tsar on crown lands who were subjected to a bureaucrat's authority. These peasants did, however, enjoy a measure of freedom and were subjected

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 19-20

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 48-9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 107; 136, 208.

to an *obrok* equally. They were free to pursue various economic pursuits, ranging from factory work to appearing in an opera, in order to pay their dues.<sup>26</sup>

Haxthausen's commentary on the peasantry was particularly valuable because he studied the importance of peasant labour to the Russian economy. Haxthausen believed that the Russian economy was founded on the contributions of the agricultural workers who extended their labours beyond the soil. As an example, he noted that peasants from Yaroslav and Vologda abandoned their agricultural work as they flocked to Moscow in hopes of earning money. In the past, peasants had left their lives in the countryside to pursue manufacturing positions while the crops were under cultivation. At harvest time, the peasants would return to the land to fulfil their agricultural duties under the *barshchina*. Haxthausen reported that it was because of such developments that Moscow's growing industrial sector endeavoured to end the peasants' piecemeal contribution to the city's economy through seasonal work and enforced wage schemes which favoured the continued employment of peasants in the city.<sup>27</sup> For peasants who did not chose to emigrate to the city, their idleness during the winter months led them to find work in small-scale cottage industries. Many peasants enjoyed these economic activities and, in a region such as Yaroslav where the *obrok* was applied, the labourers discovered that agricultural work was less financially rewarding than manufacturing endeavours. In a short time Russian peasants became proficient cloth spinners, weavers, rope makers and carpenters.<sup>28</sup> In some instances, entire villages engaged in the same occupation; whether it was as shoemakers or blacksmiths. Haxthausen regarded such work to be immensely

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 107, 212-4, 227, 243.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 165-7.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 152-3.

important for Russia and provided opportunities to peasants who would otherwise have been confined to agricultural work. Haxthausen commended the rise of peasant labour off the soil and noted that labour could be shared amongst members of large families and goods easily sent to a common market for sale and distribution.

Kohl did not present an image of the peasant in a rural atmosphere as his travel writing on Russia was strictly confined to a survey of St. Petersburg and Moscow. *Russia*, therefore, presented a somewhat unique view of the peasants who lived and toiled in the city. Kohl saw the peasants to be a reminder of poverty and barbarity in the richly adorned palaces of the aristocracy in St. Petersburg. Typically, the nobles, desirous of enriching their dwellings with a sense of luxury and high refinement, preferred to employ foreigners as servants because they presented a better appearance than the peasant workers. The peasants who had been brought by their masters to the cities were provided with a permit which allowed them to find other forms of employment in St. Petersburg or Moscow. Kohl noted that the peasants adapted themselves to their new style of work in coffee houses or industry with amazing skill.<sup>29</sup>

### ***THE MIDDLE CLASS***

Reflecting its unimportance in the Russian social structure, the 'middle class' was not afforded a great deal of attention by the foreign observers. The attempts of Catherine II to introduce legislation which "related status definitions to economic development, believing that if the government fashioned an effective administrative-social structure, economic development would ensue" did not develop a middle class, most significantly

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<sup>29</sup> Kohl, *Russia*, 81-3.

because of the dominance of serfdom and the insufficient amount of circulating currency.<sup>30</sup> Custine's comments in *The Empire of the Czar* recognized that "the trades people who ought to form a middle class are too few in number to possess any influence in the state; besides they are almost all foreigners."<sup>31</sup> Bourke similarly regarded the middle class as a negligible social group which had no impact on the governance of Russia and the typical member of the middle class was a foreigner. This was credited with creating an unbridgeable gulf in the social strata which placed a drastic division between the peasant and the noble.<sup>32</sup>

Haxthausen, who perceived that a middle class was essential for Russia to achieve industrial success, attempted to explain why Russia lacked a middle class. He recorded that Russian rulers had sought to develop a middle class since the time of Catherine II who was interested in developing an educated working class. Haxthausen supposed that the Slavic people lacked the ability to develop a citizen class. Under this circumstance, Haxthausen believed that no government initiatives could inspire a passion for work in the Russian people since it was a foreign concept. The opportunity for a strong and populous class to emerge was dealt a greater blow by the fact that the process of attaining skills in middle class occupations such as a cook, clerk, or shoemaker in Russia was highly structured and did not consider the individual talents of the worker. Haxthausen felt the development of a Russian middle class was further hindered by the fact that middle class merchants who attained wealth ascended to the upper levels of the nobility through the

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<sup>30</sup> Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Structures of Society Imperial Russia's "People of Various Ranks."* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994) 133.

<sup>31</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 2, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 154-5, 181; vol. 2, 25, 143.

provisions of the Table of Ranks, thus depopulating the burgeoning middle class and adding to the ranks of the lower nobility. The most impressive stirrings of a working class that Haxthausen observed concerned the development of manufacturing endeavours and, in time, he hoped that the permanence of such edifices would result in a true Russian middle class.<sup>33</sup>

### ***THE NOBILITY***

The descriptions of Russia's nobility by Lagny, Bourke, Custine and Haxthausen stressed the class stratification which resulted from the rivalry between the ancient and the *tchin* nobles. Divisions amongst members of the nobility were caused by Peter the Great's Table of Ranks which enabled all free Russians to acquire the status of a nobleman through government work. The travellers scrutinized the Russian nobility's position as government bureaucrats while making slight references to their living conditions. In Lagny's *The Knout of the Russians*, Russia's aristocracy was studied through a comparison of the feudal landowners and the recent *tchin* class who comprised the nobility. Lagny stated that the traditional element of Russia had been the ancient class of nobles who enjoyed a virtual monopoly over the peasants and the land. Lagny felt that the *tchin* emerged because the feudal lords, the obvious candidates for government service, had no interest in replacing their lives of leisure with official state duties. The established landowners staunchly resisted the idea of serving the government and forced Peter the Great to develop a class of Russian bureaucratic state servitors. By working in civil or military departments privileges and status, equal to that enjoyed by the ancient nobility,

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<sup>33</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 51-5.

with the exception of owning serfs and hereditary status, could be attained by lowly freemen. The system allowed some of the most powerful men in the empire, from the field-marshal, grand chancellor, generals and governors, to have risen from the position of free peasants or tradesmen to become more influential than hereditary nobles through loyal service to the tsar.<sup>34</sup>

Lagny believed that the traditional leaders of the nobility were initially unaware that their political role was rapidly being overtaken by the *tchinn*. The aristocrats looked upon Peter's action as a momentary fad, not a strict policy to deprive feudal lords of their authority in Russian politics. In the rivalry which developed between the two groups of nobles, Lagny noted that the feudal nobility could not reclaim their former political strength from the *tchinn* who became dominant in political affairs.<sup>35</sup> In cases of established and exceptional ability, and an increased rank in the Table of Ranks, members of the *tchinn* were granted hereditary status by the tsar. *The Knout of the Russians* recorded that the *tchinn* were Russia's leading bureaucrats. Despite their political role, Lagny believed that the character of the new ruling class betrayed its lowly origin.

Recruited from among the ranks of the people, it possesses nothing; it does not enjoy, so to speak, an independence, and subsists solely on the slender income which it received from the crown.<sup>36</sup>

In large measure because of the *tchinn*'s inadequate salary, Lagny reported that vice and

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<sup>34</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 57-9.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.



corruption was rampant amongst the bureaucracy, and affected both the *tchin* and feudal nobility.<sup>37</sup>

Lagny did not perceive the nobles' refinement to have exceeded beyond that of the Tartars. Culturally, the nobles, of feudal and *tchin* origin, were occupied with imitating their superiors in Europe. In St. Petersburg, the aristocrats presented a stunning picture of wealth and luxury while, in truth, the nobility was usually burdened by gambling debts and made countless sacrifices in matters concerning their diet and cleanliness to present a polished façade to the public. The furniture in the nobles' extravagant homes was clumsily constructed and existed to fill an empty space - beds were simply decorative tools while sofas were typically preferred for sleeping. Lagny found that it was not uncommon for filth and vermin to pervade the living quarters of the upper classes and as it did the cabins of the peasantry. *The Knout of the Russians* recorded that only the wealthiest members of the nobility lived in better conditions.<sup>38</sup>

Bourke was less analytical and more descriptive in his survey of Russia's nobility. Bourke was charmed by the generous hospitality he received from an unnamed Russian aristocrat. The Irishman sensed that the nobility fostered a strong sense of community and friendship because all Russians could freely move about the exceptional gardens on an aristocrat's estate.<sup>39</sup> Bourke felt the nobles had a strong sense of patriotism which often coloured the information they offered on Russia or current events. The use of the French language dominated amongst the Russian nobility, a seeming affront to the national Russian language and the nobility's conversation topics were seen to be in accordance

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 57-9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 217-20.

<sup>39</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 57-9, 62-3, 67.

with that prevalent amongst Europeans.<sup>40</sup> During the summer months, some nobles preferred to leave St. Petersburg for retreats on the outskirts of town. In these lavish dwellings, balls and dinner parties continued to entertain the nobility as they had in the city.

Custine's study of the nobility stressed the character and status of the upper classes of imperial Russia. Custine felt that the aristocratic women were quite beautiful and, reflecting the manner of their European counterparts, they were intellectually active and displayed a keen understanding of the political affairs of the realm.<sup>41</sup> An exemplarily quality which Custine credited to the Russian nobles was their manners and conversational skills which were special through the 'easy politeness' which distinguished them favourably from the higher classes in Europe.<sup>42</sup> Custine briefly noted the living quarters of the nobles to be richly ornamented to hide the vermin and filth.<sup>43</sup> On their estates, the landowning aristocrats were described as mini-dictators. The wealth of the nobles was valued through the number of serfs they possessed, as Custine recorded, "the fortune of a wealthy man is here computed by the heads of peasants."<sup>44</sup> The only responsibility he credited to the nobles was their ability to oppress their serfs and exalt the power of the tsar as their overlord. The marquis felt that the feudal nobility never earned its high status in Russia and only the tsar had shown strength and resolve throughout Russia's history.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 121-5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. vol. 2, 37, 141.

<sup>42</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 73, 110, 124.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 180.

Custine believed the noble's authority could be more lethal than that of the tsar because their influence was not tempered by the public sentiment or censure the tsar faced.<sup>45</sup>

The most conspicuous quality Custine detected in the nobility was their devotion to the tsar. Many nobles worked hard to gain favour with Nicholas and all were desirous of attaining prestigious positions in the government. In Russia, the tsar was the supreme master, and everyone, even the tsarina, became his underling. Custine believed that proximity to the tsar only promoted fear and flattery; pride was forced to remain hidden in the hearts of men. The nobles were courtiers, not true individuals and they always sought to display their submissive status to the ruler. The aristocrats were able to attend festivities and enjoy themselves with official sanction but were never at ease; a measure of reserve always accompanied their actions. The courtiers' unceasing eagerness to respond to the tsar's every command was without parallel in Europe and Custine erroneously attributed it to the possibility that the nobles faced torture, or exile to Siberia, if they did not remain in a state of strict obedience and devotion to the ruler, an apparent reference to the fact that Sergei Trubestkoi and his family had been exiled to Siberia after his participation in the Decembrist revolt.<sup>46</sup> Custine believed that in every act of subservience performed before the tsar, there was not true love but recognition of an official role which needed to be enacted on command. The slave/courtiers became so resigned to their degraded position that they turned into lifeless, empty beings when parted from their

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 92-3.

<sup>46</sup> In actual fact, the nobility could not be subjected to corporal punishment or exile (with the exception of an extreme act such as the revolt against Tsar Nicholas in 1825) and in court proceedings they were guaranteed a trial of their peers from the Charter of the Nobility that was issued during the reign of Catherine II in 1785. Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia*, 22-4.

master. Constantly scheming for some form of promotion or official recognition, Custine believed the nobles were unable to exist without their tsar.<sup>47</sup>

Custine surmised that the relentless aspirations of the nobles were the result of the *tchin* class. He recorded that Peter the Great devised the Table of Ranks to remedy the existence of the independent feudal nobles who were desirous of limiting the tsar's power in order to develop a strong aristocratic force in Russia. The emergence of a free will amongst a sector of the Russian population led Peter to denigrate the rights of the legitimate nobles in order that lesser Russians could ascend from their lowly class and become rich and powerful, all under the guidance and control of the tsar. The ancient feudal authority possessed by the nobles was lost and a new group of courtiers under autocratic command replaced the established nobility as the *tchin* achieved power in the Russian government. Custine believed the *tchin* class was an evil which multiplied the problems in Russia through the creation of a militarized society in which all free individuals sought status in the government.<sup>48</sup>

Haxthausen perceived the Russian nobility to be very similar to their European counterparts prior to the French Revolution. Haxthausen believed that the essential difference between Russian and European nobles stemmed from the absence of a native aristocratic class in ancient Russia and he could not discover a writer that acknowledged a leading, noble force amongst Rus' native inhabitants in all the medieval texts which dealt with the land that became present day Russia. Haxthausen did not feel that the lives of Russia's feudal nobility was dramatically altered after the introduction of the *tchin* system

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<sup>47</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 253, 265; vol. 2, 36, 61, 140-1, 269, 308-9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 142-6.

by Peter the Great. Although the status of nobles who did not serve the state was denigrated, Haxthausen did not see this as a problem because the Russian nobility had a long tradition of serving the state because it was a method for them to retain a high standing in society. The legal position of the higher classes was strong and they were only subject to other nobles in court matters and could not receive the death penalty. Reminiscent of Lagny's comments, the most disturbing fact that Haxthausen recorded about the *tchinn* regarded the fact that they introduced corrupt methods which influenced and undermined the work of Russia's ancient nobility. Haxthausen stated that the *tchinn* had "a certain kind of superficial modern cultivation or polish, too contemptible to be associated with the term civilization."<sup>49</sup>

During the reign of Nicholas I, Haxthausen believed that Russia's nobility differed from the aristocrats in Europe because it was not wealthy or civilized. Life in the countryside was necessary to give a "freshness of spirit, that practical view of life and tact."<sup>50</sup> Instead, *The Russian Empire* noted that the most influential nobles in Russia preferred a life in court rather than overseeing their rural responsibilities over their land and serfs. The most important nobles in Russia resided in the cities and it was amongst this group that there was the least attachment to the land despite the fact that they owned the majority of Russia's land.<sup>51</sup>

Haxthausen paid particular attention to the changing economic situation of the nobles in Moscow. Prior to the fire that consumed much of Moscow in 1812 and caused Napoleon's withdrawal from Russia, the nobility of that city enjoyed comfortable lives. In

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<sup>49</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, 111-2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 208.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-212.

large palaces, the upper classes lived in a state of luxury and extravagance which was suddenly ended when their homes were lost in the great inferno. From that point, the status of Moscow's aristocracy was radically changed and the former leaders of Moscow moved to the countryside. Haxthausen described the household of a noble residing in the country to be constructed of wood and typically one story in height. With a rustic, earthy appearance, the abode had a simple dignity. In the changing times of the 1830s and 1840s, Moscow became involved in a burgeoning industrial revolution and some members of the nobility decided to join the ranks or 'workers.' While the lifestyles of the nobility remained comfortable, the great opulence visible in olden days had vanished. Less servants and horses were retained and the great feasts once enjoyed by the city's aristocrats diminished in numbers.<sup>52</sup> During this time of increased contact with Europe, many nobles became enthralled with European manners and customs, causing them to spend money to Europeanize their Russian-style dwellings and personal habits. The new expenses that this change in lifestyle entailed caused high levels of debt and forced many members of the feudal nobility to sell their estates to the new aristocrats, members of the *tchinn*.<sup>53</sup>

***THE LIFE AND PEOPLE IN RUSSIA'S GERMAN BALTIC  
PROVINCES AND EXTENDED TERRITORIES***

The tremendous size of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century was attributable to expansionist wars in preceding centuries which provided Russian rulers

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 45-50.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 110.

with a vast territory and a collection of diverse races. Of the six European observers, only Cameron, Kohl and Haxthausen traveled extensively throughout the Russian Empire and were able to record detailed impressions of the people and customs in Russia's Baltic provinces and extended territories. Bourke, Custine and Lagny became acquainted with life in Russia's outermost regions as they initiated and concluded their travels from their homes in Europe. All of the travellers' comments on the conditions in the conquered foreign territories of the Russian Empire added to the detailed information on social and political conditions in Russia proper which dominated the writings of Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny.

Custine's travels through Russia's German Baltic provinces provided the foundation for his descriptions of the people and customs in the region. The port of Travermunde in Lubeck was characterized as an interesting modern contrast to the rural occupations and appearance of the people of Lubeck. Custine was impressed by the serene beauty of the Baltic region and perceived the people to be hard workers who faced many hardships, in particular, during the winter occupation of ice fishing. The spring harvests were plentiful despite the short duration of the warm temperatures in the region. Custine concluded that the backward and underdeveloped conditions in Mecklenburg represented what life must have been like throughout Europe in the Middle Ages.<sup>54</sup> Custine observed that the polar nights in the Baltic region were beautiful events but described the land to be similar to a monotonous plain and had been too often admired by previous European travellers to Russia. Custine determined that the Finns he observed in

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<sup>54</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 1, 52-3, 57.

Kronstadt were not physically attractive and the people of the North, despite Custine's limited contact with the masses, were represented as fickle.<sup>55</sup> Within Russia, *The Empire of the Czar* noted that the Tartars were traders and lived apart from the Russian people.<sup>56</sup>

Within Russia proper, Bourke considered the amalgamation of different ethnic groups to have been a simple process which met with great success. As an example, Bourke stated that Armenians, Kalmyks, Tartars, Russians and Circassians lived in harmony despite their different cultures. The Circassian soldiers within the Russian army were able to retain their own identity and customs. Bourke also noted the variety of nationalities that could be encountered in Moscow who presented a colourful and diverse sight in their traditional costumes.<sup>57</sup>

Although Bourke did not attempt to conduct a thorough study of life in the Russian Empire's German Baltic provinces, he did remark upon Russia's difficult quest to annex the entire Caucasus region. Bourke did not feel Russia's mission to dominate the Caucasus was a worthwhile endeavour as the Russians faced many obstacles during their military adventures and the land would not benefit the Russian economy. The native population of the Caucasus heartily resisted the Russian intrusion and inflicted many defeats on the empire's invading forces. The prolonged process of annexing the Caucasus was also unpopular amongst Russian soldiers because of the vast distance and hardships in the region which convinced the Russian government to make service in the Caucasus a form of punishment. However, as a British subject, Bourke primarily objected to Russia's position in the Caucasus because he did not want an expanded Russian presence in the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 65-6, 119, 126-7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 57-9.

<sup>57</sup> Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 191; vol. 2, 18.



region. Bourke asserted that Russia's proximity to Persia would not guarantee success over the region because Great Britain's position in India meant that the English were preoccupied with the political and territorial stability of the area.<sup>58</sup>

Lagny did not view the Russian Empire as a strong and stable unit, but instead saw it to be a conglomeration of conquered and overpowered races and territories held together under the authority of the Russian tsar. Throughout the farthest reaches of the empire, Lagny noted that native traditions and culture made cooperation impossible between the Poles, Cossacks, Germans, Swedes and Finns who were separated by national loyalties and customs. Lagny's sentiments were exemplified by his statement in *The Knout of the Russians* that:

All these remarkable races, strangers to each other, arbitrarily agglomerated by the chances of politics and war, and sewn together like so many pieces of various colours, are only maintained in their present condition by skilful Machiavellism, and a system of inexorable discipline, the workings of which absolutely stupefy the mind.<sup>59</sup>

The inhabitants of the Baltic provinces were divided by national customs and languages, groups of desperate peoples united precariously with no common bond, other than the will of the tsar, to keep them together. Lagny felt that the participation of Russia's tribal peoples in the tsar's wars was of negligible importance and these soldiers were used for decorative, not practical, purposes. Within his survey of Russia's provinces, Lagny surmised that the land was not economically valuable to the Russian Empire as the native

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 193-5.

<sup>59</sup> Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 29.

populations were too small to provide substantial levies to pay for Russia's growing navy.<sup>60</sup>

Cameron, Kohl and Haxthausen became familiar with Russia's conquered foreign territories owing to their extensive travels throughout the Russian Empire. While Cameron was intimately acquainted with life and customs in the Russian Empire, many of his observations were of little use to the contemporary reader who sought to understand the situation in the conquered territories during Nicholas' reign. The entire first volume and part of the second instalment of Cameron's *Personal Adventures and Excursions in Georgia, Circassia, and Russia* included many mundane remarks on Georgia and Circassia that did little more than recount the names of the towns and cities he ventured through.<sup>61</sup> Instead of studying nineteenth century political and social conditions, Cameron regaled his readers with stories of native folklore and local history. The attributes of Cameron's exploration into Georgia and Circassia stemmed from his general comments and observations on the people he met and regional culture and traditions.

Kohl concluded his travel account on Russia with a lengthy narrative on the life and people in the German Baltic provinces and the southern regions of Russia - namely the steppes, Odessa and the Crimea. In the section in *Russia* titled 'The German Provinces on the Baltic,' the lands under the authority of the Romanovs were described by Kohl to be an autonomous region which had little contact with the government at St. Petersburg. The landowners in the Baltic towns had authority over the life and welfare of the region's inhabitants. Kohl believed that the Germans in the Baltic land were overwhelming in their

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 28-9, 106.

<sup>61</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 1, 1-349.

generous hospitality that was unmatched anywhere in Europe. The German observer did not credit this quality to the people's German origin, but felt that the small size of the populations within the cities he visited made the inhabitants anxious to welcome foreign visitors. Kohl noted that the festive mood in the German provinces was quite agreeable and made everyday in the region akin to a holiday. Kohl depicted the region as a harmonious community whose wealthy residents looked after the needs of the poor. Unlike the German towns under German control where industrial or intellectual activities were prevalent, in the regions under the authority of the Russian tsar, the German inhabitants were not involved in politics or modern culture and found sea bathing a far more enjoyable and satisfying pursuit, although Kohl identified Riga as important for its trading position.

Kohl deemed the eighteenth century conquest of the Baltic territory by the Russian Empire to be the most important and powerful event in the region's history due to the fact that it would have repercussions for the future. Kohl asserted the superiority of German civilization over Russian when he determined that the provinces' relationship with the Russian government and culture influenced the rise of class inequality in the German territory which had been obliterated in Prussia. Of especial interest in Kohl's survey of the outer reaches of the Russian Empire was the review of the nationalities in the region. The population of the Baltic primarily consisted of Germans, Lettes, Estonians, Swedes, Poles, Jews and Russians, all of whom maintained their own culture.<sup>62</sup> A particularly significant point Kohl noted regarding the lives of the Lettes and Estonians, the dominant ethnic

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<sup>62</sup> Kohl, *Russia*, 298-328.

group in the region, was that after their long history of servitude, the Russian government introduced legislation to end the practice of serfdom for these people which was officially enforced by 1831.<sup>63</sup>

While the Germans initially dominated and distinguished themselves in the Baltic region, Kohl felt that years of intermingling between the people caused the population of such provinces as Riga, Revel and Dorpat to become racially diverse. The weakened German presence in the region was also credited to the Russian government's policies towards the Baltic provinces. After they were conquered, the German inhabitants were granted numerous privileges by the tsars which extended to language and religious rights. While Kohl described the Russian authorities as respectful of all faiths, he felt that in education the Russian government was trying to enforce the Russian language too strongly upon the Germans. Kohl believed that Russians should consider themselves honoured to have the civilizing influences of the German people and culture within the Russian Empire.<sup>64</sup> A great deal of the information Kohl included on the German provinces were trivial details which, nonetheless, contributed to a European's general knowledge of life in the region. Social life and festivities were noted to be especially joyous occasions

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 390-6.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 390-9. Under Nicholas I, a process of Russification was active which sought to Russify government, religious, linguistic and educational standards to assert a system of Russian uniformity throughout the tsarist realm. After the Polish rebellion of 1830, the former Congress Kingdom of Poland was brought under tighter Russian control. In the Baltic region, the Russian government introduced an Orthodox bishopric to compete with the strength of Protestantism and enforced a Russian legal code over the Lithuanians. In response to a Ukrainian national movement led by the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the publication of Ukrainian-language literature was forbidden. During the reign of Alexander III (1881-94) a strengthened policy of Russification targeted all non-Russians to enforce the Russian language, in education and government affairs, and Orthodox religion on the people in an effort to create 'Russians.'

and there were a number of celebrations, such as the Riga Flower festival, which had its roots in the ancient traditions of the city.

In the sections 'South Russia and the Crimea,' 'The Steppes of Southern Russia' and 'The Interior of Russia' the majority of the information Kohl relayed concerned geographical descriptions of towns and cities and mentioned personal anecdotes from his travel experiences. Kohl was quite impressed with the natural beauty of the landscape of the southern region. Odessa was noted to provide a port on the Black Sea which was useful for trade. Despite this fact, economic initiatives were not overwhelmingly successful because the port was closed during the cold winter months. The bazaars in Odessa, which were the primary source of trade and commerce for the city, paled in comparison to their counterparts in Moscow.<sup>65</sup> The major towns of the Crimea - Simpherpol and Sevastopol - were regarded by Kohl as modern and bustling while traces of ancient Tartar history lingered in Baktshiserai. Kohl included an eclectic assortment of information on the steppes of southern Russia, describing in vivid detail the climate, animal population and native occupations such as tallow-candle making.<sup>66</sup>

Haxthausen's travels also took him to the farthest reaches of the Russian Empire. Haxthausen believed that colonization was the force behind Russia's acquisition of land which had been at work since Russia's earliest history. Unlike other nations whose territorial growth was largely government regulated, Russia's expansion was conducted by enthusiastic Russians who established colonies to produce the present day Russian Empire. While this is an accurate assessment of the conquest of Siberia, it does not

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<sup>65</sup> Kohl, *Russia*, 417-9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 458-61.

acknowledge the wars conducted by Peter the Great and his successors which added Baltic provinces and Asian territories to Russia. Haxthausen saw Russia's conquests of Odessa and Taganrog as beneficial because of their seaports, although the towns themselves were only notable for trade and their supply of raw material for Russian manufacturers. Haxthausen felt that the racial composition of the extended territories encompassed a mixture of ethnic groups who did not contribute to the wealth or strength of the Russian Empire. Relying upon Kohl's findings in *Russia*, Haxthausen commented on the different professions practiced by the people in the Baltic provinces.<sup>67</sup>

In the steppes, Haxthausen perceived agriculture to be increasing in strength as a tool to modernize the land and people. Although Haxthausen's remarks on the people and towns were interesting, *The Russian Empire* offered little by way of analysis and primarily recounted all that Haxthausen observed in a manner reminiscent of Cameron's *Personal Adventures and Excursions*. As the German traveller passed through Feodosia, Kertch and Simpherpol he made slight comments on the physical attributes and inhabitants of the towns. When Haxthausen came across the Tartars residing in the Crimea, he recounted their history and provided an historical account of the Tartar invasions of the thirteenth century and the eventual end of the Mongol's power over Russia in the fifteenth century. Haxthausen felt that the ancient Tartar's customs and lifestyle in Russia had altered through the effects of modern European culture.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 1-57.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-30, 155-5; vol. 2, 66-8, 322.

The travellers presented a wide survey of the Russian social spectrum when each recorded similar observations on the lives of the peasants, the 'middle class' and the nobles. Custine and Haxthausen raised interesting and important points in their discussions on the Russian people which became the primary focus of their writings. In *The Empire of the Czar* the central theme of the discussion concerned the slavish behaviour of the Russian people, from peasant to nobleman. Custine commented that "there is no people of Russia; there is an emperor, who has serfs, and there are courtiers who have serfs also."<sup>69</sup> Custine viewed the domineering presence of Nicholas I to have such an effect over the people that Russians had no soul, no free will; there was a tsar at the head of Russia and the people were his willing servants, "the Russians . . . are drunk with slavery."<sup>70</sup> Haxthausen's recognition that the Russian economy was based on serf labour led him to reveal that most of Russia's small-scale industrial endeavours were led by serfs under the *obrok* system. During Nicholas' reign, the untrained and unskilled peasants primarily toiled in small scale cottage industries in towns and villages. This was a significant point as Haxthausen correctly assessed the importance of serf labour for the Russian economy; both in agriculture and small craft industries.<sup>71</sup>

A Russian's view of the social system was a reflection of his own status in the Russian Empire. A prominent example comes from Russian nobleman and acclaimed

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<sup>69</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 3, 328.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 141.

<sup>71</sup> Haxthausen's interest in financial matters was not limited to the peasantry as he noted Russia's need to develop a middle class for industry and the economic pursuits of Moscow's nobility. When Bourke, Custine, Lagny, Kohl and Cameron referred to the Russian economy, their comments were relegated to a few random remarks on the limited scope of Russia's trade which was controlled by foreign merchants. Kohl's comments on economic matters did not extend beyond an acknowledgement that bazaars were an important method of distributing goods. Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, vol. 3, 37; Lagny, *The Knout of the Russians*, 136-9; Bourke, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, vol. 1, 184-7; Kohl, *Russia*, 48; Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 2, 221-6.

writer Alexander Pushkin who was enraged that the Table of Ranks of 1722 had cheapened and undermined the status of the nobility and allowed amongst its ranks men of a questionable background, the *tchinn* nobles. For someone like Pushkin, who could trace his family lineage to ancient times, the political strength of the new class of bureaucrats was abhorrent. The hereditary, ancient noble families attempted to assert their superiority through educational facilities such as Tsarskoye Selo, which Pushkin attended in his youth.

Pushkin showed his awareness of the plight of the peasantry in his poem *The Village* which contained an impassioned plea on behalf of serfs:

Head down, docile under the pursuing lash,  
The gaunt old serf struggles down the furrows  
Of some implacable master.  
Not daring to deem any more, or hope for them!  
His little girls growing up  
To feed the lust of some vice-sodden old monster . . . .<sup>72</sup>

Amazingly, when he published *A Journey From Moscow to St. Petersburg* in the 1830s, inspired by Radishchev's famous work, Pushkin asserted that the peasants' lives were not unduly harsh and the application of their fines and obligations was not burdensome.<sup>73</sup>

The foreign observers' comments on Nicholas' vast domains reflected the extent of their travels through the Russian Empire. Kohl provided a detailed and expansive treatment on life in the Baltic Provinces and the extended territories of southern Russia which made up for the shortcomings in the other travellers' descriptions of Russia's vast empire. None of the travellers ventured to the Polish land or studied the current situation

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Henri Troyat, *Pushkin*. Translated by Nancy Amphoux. (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970) 129.

<sup>73</sup> Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 150.



of the Poles after their revolt in 1830.<sup>74</sup> This is a remarkable fact considering Custine's interest in the plight of the Poles prior to his journey to Russia. Although developments in Russia proper were the focus of the six travellers accounts, they presented their impressions on the life and customs throughout the empire in their well-rounded studies on the Russian Empire. While Golovine did not raise any controversial points which contradicted the travellers' survey of Russia's conquered foreign territories, he did stress his belief that the German Baltic provinces were becoming Russified.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> In *The Russian Empire*, Haxthausen commented on the history of Poland and its relationship with Russia from ancient times to the present day, but did not offer a contemporary portrait of the land. Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 2, 249-54.

<sup>75</sup> Golovine, *Russia Under the Autocrat*, vol. 2, 155-87.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of *The Empire of the Czar, Russia, Personal Adventures and Excursions, St. Petersburg and Moscow, The Russian Empire* and *The Knout of the Russians* was based on the fact that they produced a portrait of conditions in Russia under Nicholas I. From their travels throughout the Russian Empire, the six Europeans were able to record observations on life in St. Petersburg and Moscow as well as in rural villages and towns and the Baltic provinces and extended territories. The value of the writings was derived not only from their contents, but also from Europeans' response to the travel accounts. The first study to appear was Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* and its immense popularity throughout the West served as a catalyst which inspired the other travellers to record their knowledge of Russia. Although Custine's book undeniably received the most attention from Europeans and Russians, each of the six travel works were recognized at the time of their publication for their ability to enrich the West's understanding of Nicholaevan Russia.

The Marquis de Custine's account of Russia is notable because of the response his publication generated in Europe. From the moment of his arrival in Russia in 1839, Custine intended that his excursion to this foreign land would result in a written account of his adventures. The reaction to Custine's publication was immediate and the initial three thousand copies of the four-volume set published in France were quickly sold. Legitimate as well as illegally printed versions of Custine's travel account appeared in France over the years. The interest in *The Empire of the Czar* throughout Europe was also substantial. Translated versions of the book were immediately published in England,

Germany and Sweden and successive editions were later printed to satisfy the voracious appetite of the reading public.<sup>1</sup> In response to the popularity *The Empire of the Czar* enjoyed amongst Europeans, literary critics discussed the work at length in various journals and commented on modern Russian conditions.

Though panned by literary critics, *The Empire of the Czar* received extensive coverage from reviewers who still recognized that Europeans had much to learn from Custine's work. French critics who praised *The Empire of the Czar* did so in recognition of the popularity of Custine's publication amongst the people and they chose to study a particular aspect of Custine's observations on Russia, such as religion. One reviewer, Saint-Marc Girardin, used the book as the basis for a discussion of his own ideas on Russia.<sup>2</sup> Whereas many of the British journals based their criticism of Custine on a reading of *The Empire of the Czar*, French reviewers' personal acquaintance and dislike of Custine prejudiced their critique of the publication. Their animosity towards Custine, which the marquis acknowledged by noting that his personality was appreciated "better from afar than from nearby," as well as the French reviewers' wish to ensure that the public did not perceive they were bribed by Custine for favourable reviews, contributed to their sharp criticism of *The Empire of the Czar*.<sup>3</sup> Critical reaction to Custine's work was also influenced by a French journal's support or disapproval of the French government's relationship with Russia. There is also evidence for the Russian government's influence over French reviewers. Emile de Girardin of France's *La Presse* was in contact with Russian officials and it was reported by the Russian police that his journal would be

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<sup>1</sup> Muhlstein, *A Taste for Freedom*, 345. Kennan, *The Marquis de Custine*, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Muhlstein, *A Taste for Freedom*, 346.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Kennan, *The Marquis de Custine*, 97-8.

supportive of Russia's plan to discredit Custine's publication. Another French journalist, J. Claude-Agues, was contacted by Russian officials regarding his journal's position towards *The Empire of the Czar*. Evidence for Claude-Agues' support of the Russian government's tactics is derived from the fact that the French reviewer relentlessly upbraided Custine's personal life and literary skill, the primary target of the Russian government's response to *The Empire of the Czar*.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the French journals, the English press' condemnation of Custine's writing dealt with the substance of *The Empire of the Czar*. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine's* extensive two-part article, "The Marquis de Custine's *Empire of the Czar*," conducted a study of modern conditions in Russia in response to Custine's publication.<sup>5</sup> Other journals criticized Custine's portrayal of Russia after they detected factual errors in *The Empire of the Czar*. An 1844 article in the *Edinburgh Review* asserted that Custine's intention was to 'misinterpret' all that he observed during his travels in Russia because of the unceasing criticism of Russia which permeated his book.<sup>6</sup> The weekly British journal *The Athenæum* also expressed a dismal view of *The Empire of the Czar* and questioned its authors unwavering condemnation of Russia. The reviewer believed that Custine chose to distort the realities of nineteenth century Russia to fit his preconceived hatred of Russia.<sup>7</sup>

London's *Quarterly Review* was shocked by Custine's willingness to believe and report all the negative stories he uncovered about Russia. Custine was labelled a 'genius' for his ability to criticize and distort everything he observed during his travels. The

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-5.

<sup>5</sup> "The Marquis de Custine's *Empire of the Czar*," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*. 62 (1843): 637-48, 693-701.

<sup>6</sup> "The Marquis de Custine's *Russia*," *The Edinburgh Review*. 79 (1844): 336-41, 352.

<sup>7</sup> "Review of Custine's *The Empire of the Czar*," *The Athenæum*. 835 (October 28, 1843): 957-9.

reviewer condemned Custine for not being able to find any signs of culture or beauty in St. Petersburg and scrutinized the falsehoods which existed in *The Empire of the Czar*.<sup>8</sup> *The Quarterly Review* berated Custine's depiction of the reconstruction of the Hermitage which had been ravaged by fire. Whereas Custine stated that the greed of the Russian government, and its senseless demand for swift repairs on the Hermitage, led to the unnecessary deaths of workmen, the journal suggested that accidents were often a by-product of manual labour and not an indication of evil designs by the Russian government. The article's critique of *The Empire of the Czar* extended to a comparison of Custine's assertion that an 1840 railway accident caused over 500 deaths, to that of a witness to the event, N. I. Grech, who recorded that there were only five casualties. The reviewer believed that Custine had a hatred for Russia prior to his travels which was expressed through petty comments against Russia. Citing an example, the *Quarterly Review* responded to Custine's suggestion that a Russian returning from abroad without enthusiasm was a sign of Russia's depravity, by noting that a traveller's countenance could be an indication of exhaustion after long and tiresome travel, not dread and disdain of the country they returned to.

The publicity surrounding *The Empire of the Czar* in Europe reached a new level when Russia's response to the book became known. Nicholas I was outraged by Custine's depiction of Russia. Although Custine's travel account was banned in Russia, Russians living in Europe could read the book's charges against their country and added

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<sup>8</sup> "Tour in Russia by the Marquis de Custine," *The Quarterly Review*. 73 (1844): 324-74.

to the publicity surrounding the publication of *The Empire of the Czar* through their vehement denouncements of Custine's observations of Russia.<sup>9</sup>

The Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky made his opinion of *The Empire of the Czar* apparent when he alluded to an 'anonymous' marquis who visited Russia and suggested that publications on Russia which were the result of brief visits should cease.

The French traveller decided to study Russia in depth and in detail and sets out at once for Moscow. There he glances at the Kremlin, thinks about Napoleon, sings the praises of tea, of the healthy beauty of the people, anguishes over the corruption . . . [and] protests against Peter the Great.<sup>10</sup>

A detailed protest against Custine's book by a Russian appeared in K. K. Labanskii's *Russian's Reply to the Marquis de Custine's "Russia in 1839"* (1844). Published anonymously, Labanskii launched an unremitting assault on Custine's travel account. After criticizing Custine's frivolous character, writing style, method of analysis and refuting Custine's derogatory observations on Russia, Labanskii presented his own more favourable views on Russian conditions. The Russian author responded to Custine's assertion that Russia was a monstrous entity that sought to destroy Europe by reminding the marquis, and all Europeans, that it was France that dragged all of Europe into war and chaos under Napoleon Bonaparte. Similarly, in colonial matters, France, unlike Russia, greedily joined her European neighbours to demand territorial acquisitions in Africa, India, and China. Another Russian attack on *The Empire of the Czar* was launched in the pamphlet N. I. Grech published in 1844 which denounced the inaccuracies in Custine's writing. I. N. Tolstoy chose to engage in a personal attack on Custine, also in 1844,

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<sup>9</sup> The tsar first allowed the marquis' travel account to be printed in Russia but this order was later revoked without official explanation and all copies of *The Empire of the Czar* were seized.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Muhlstein, *A Taste for Freedom*, 348-9.

when he examined *The Empire of the Czar* and referred to a painful and humiliating moment in Custine's life when the marquis was publicly revealed to be a homosexual.<sup>11</sup> Labanskii, Grech and Tolstoy had nominal connections with the Russian government and the passionate nature of their reaction to Custine's publication suggested a patriotic response. The fact that Nicholas I did not play an active role in these rebuttals to Custine's publication was attested by the surprising difficulties Labanskii encountered when he tried to get copies of *A Russian's Reply* past Russian customs officials.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Grech's condemnation of *The Empire of the Czar*, it was he and not the Russian government who suggested that there be a denouncement of Custine's travel account. After he completed his pamphlet, Grech wanted to, as he termed it, become Russia's "agent and mover of public opinion in France and Germany" and even offered to approach the French playwright Hippolyte Auger about writing a degrading play about Custine.<sup>13</sup>

Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* elicited a powerful response from the European public and also became notable as a representative of Soviet Russia. Some modern historians have discerned a resemblance between Custine's depiction of imperial Russia and conditions in the Soviet Union. The relationship between Russia and Poland in the 1830s has been likened to that between the USSR and Czechoslovakia in the 1960s because, in both cases, the Russian government dominated and oppressed a group of people.<sup>14</sup> The belief that there were similarities between Tsarist and Stalinist Russia was especially potent amongst Americans in the 1940s and 1950s who had found a source to

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<sup>11</sup> Kennan, *The Marquis de Custine*, 101-2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Rudd, *Fighting Words*, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Fay Kohler, "Custine's Eternal Russia," *Atlantic Community Quarterly*. 14 (1976): 143.

understand the threat they perceived from Soviet Russia from an account of Nicholaevan Russia.<sup>15</sup>

Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* attained a level of notoriety throughout Europe because of Custine's unremitting negative impression of Russia. The public's response to Custine's work at the time of its publication directly inspired future accounts on the Russian Empire. The popularity of *The Empire of the Czar* motivated Cameron and Bourke to present their own views of Russia in, respectively, *Personal Adventures and Excursions* and *St. Petersburg and Moscow*. In the case of Haxthausen's *The Russian Empire*, Nicholas I encouraged Haxthausen to study Russia in the hopes that the German would publish a favourable account on Russian conditions that would undermine the significance of Custine's musings in *The Empire of the Czar*.

J. G. Kohl's *Russia* was published in 1844 one year after Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* and was immediately recognized by Western reviewers as a notable achievement. As the only traveller amongst the six fluent in the Russian language, Kohl was provided with insight into Russian life and customs that was not available to the other travelers. *Russia* was initially published in nine parts which discussed a different region of Russia. The popularity of 'St. Petersburg,' 'Moscow,' 'Kharakov,' 'Riga,' 'Odessa,' 'the German Provinces on the Baltic,' 'the Steppes,' 'the Crimea' and 'the Interior of the Empire' amongst Europeans led to the publication of the separate sections in a volume titled *Russia* in 1844. The popularity of Kohl's travel account was evident when it quickly became available in English, Italian and Russian editions. In financial distress prior to

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<sup>15</sup> Marquis de Custine, *The Journals of the Marquis de Custine: Journey for Our Time*. Edited and translated by Phyllis Penn Kohler; Introduction by Lieut. General Walter Bedell Smith. (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1951) 5-7.



arriving in Russia in the 1830s, the popularity of Kohl's writing had considerable personal importance as he was able to pursue his interest in studying foreign lands and be financially recompensed for extensive travels.<sup>16</sup> Kohl was established as a prominent contributor to Europe's knowledge of other nations through the collection of travel memoirs he published in the 1840s and 1850s.

The majority of Kohl's reflections on Russia detailed social developments. At the time of *Russia's* publication in England, a critic from the journal *Eclectic Review* commented:

This is just such a work as we are always glad to receive from the hands of an intelligent and voracious traveller. It contains the precise information we want, and conveys it in a style both attractive and appropriate.<sup>17</sup>

Written, as Kohl noted, neither to 'flatter' nor 'slander' the country he visited, *Russia* was seen by the reviewer as a meticulous account - akin to a tourist guide. The most valuable aspect of Kohl's work was the astounding level of in-depth information which distinguished Kohl's account from that of the other travel writers. Kohl informed Europeans about Russian conditions in minute detail at the same time that he produced a work that *Eclectic Review* described as "a book which it is so difficult to lay down. It has all the attraction of a novel."<sup>18</sup> *The Quarterly Review* believed that in Kohl's *Russia* obscure and commonplace information about Russia, which typically escaped the notice of

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<sup>16</sup> Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, xviii.

<sup>17</sup> "Kohl's *Russia and the Russians*," *Eclectic Review*, 76 (1842): 687.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 698.

foreigners, received top-notch treatment and contributed to the book's wide dissemination.<sup>19</sup>

George Poulett Cameron published *Personal Adventures and Excursions* to present a contrast to the negative opinions Custine expressed on Russia in *The Empire of the Czar*. Cameron's travel account is distinguished by its presentation of information on a wide-variety of aspects of Nicholaevan Russia. Cameron acquired his knowledge of Russia through his service in the British army. While the British Empire expanded its reach into India and exhibited a determination for other conquests in Asia, it was not uncommon for British officers stationed in the region to protect British interests to become acquainted with Russian social and political developments.

Cameron was prompted to write *Personal Adventures and Excursions* on the advice of army veteran and editor of the *United Service Magazine*, Major Shadwell Clerke who recognized that a favourable travel account on Russia was necessary to present a balanced portrait of Russia to Europeans. Cameron's earliest writings on Russia were in the form of articles which had been warmly welcomed by Europeans seeking a positive view of contemporary Russia. Britain's *Herald* and *The Post* as well as journals in France and Germany immediately released enthusiastic reviews of Cameron's writings on Russia.<sup>20</sup> A particularly useful aspect of Cameron's achievement which the reviewers acknowledged was the precise and informative nature of *Personal Adventures and Excursions*. *The Athenæum* appreciated that Cameron had provided glimpses into

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<sup>19</sup> "Jesse - Kohl - and - Sterling on Russia," 408.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 1, vii.

previously unexplored aspects of Russia.<sup>21</sup> Cameron himself contended that he bridged the gap left by many of the previous narratives on Russia which had been weakened by an unremitting hatred of their subject. Cameron hoped that he produced more than a favourable work on Russia but, more substantially, an unbiased study which was founded on simple observations unfettered by personal animosity towards the tsarist realm.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of Richard Southwell Bourke's *St. Petersburg and Moscow* depended on the subject he chose to study and not his particular adeptness for literary endeavours or ability to provide startling insights into Russian conditions. In 1847, *Dublin University Magazine* described the publication as "pleasing" and Bourke was seen to have "powers both of observation and of judgement, which only require to be matured and exercised, to secure for him high distinction."<sup>23</sup> The reviewer considered Bourke to have produced an informative book because of his detailed and descriptive passages on Russia. Bourke's biographer, William Hunter, applauded Bourke for being able to write a 'truthful' portrayal of Russia. *St. Petersburg and Moscow* was "a fair specimen of a young man's travels - modestly written, full of eyesight and not overlaid with reflections. His descriptions of Russian life are quiet and realistic."<sup>24</sup> *St. Petersburg and Moscow* was a singular accomplishment because of the honest impressions and sincere interest Bourke displayed towards Russia. The fact that Bourke's style was regarded as accessible and enjoyable to read helped his book find a place in English literary circles. In Britain, *St. Petersburg and Moscow* created a minor stir because a fellow countryman was the author.

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<sup>21</sup> "Review of Cameron's *Personal Adventures and Excursions in Georgia, Circassia, and Russia*," *The Athenæum*. 920 (June 14, 1845): 585-6.

<sup>22</sup> Cameron, *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, vol. 1, vii.

<sup>23</sup> "Bourke's Travels in Russia," *Dublin University Magazine*. 29 (1847): 262-3.

<sup>24</sup> William Wilson Hunter, *Rulers of India: The Earl of Mayo*. (London: Clarendon Press, 1892) 28.

Although the work was not given the same degree of attention throughout Europe as Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* or Haxthausen's later *The Russian Empire, St. Petersburg and Moscow* was a relevant contribution to the body of literature on Russia as an acknowledged refutation of the harsh negativity present towards Russia in recent travel writings.<sup>25</sup>

August von Haxthausen was a private individual who lived and died in anonymity. With the exception of his travel writings, Haxthausen did not stray from his quiet existence and has only risen out of the ranks of obscurity because of the immense task he undertook when he wrote *The Russian Empire*. His study was enriched by detailed and thorough descriptions of Russia and the associations he formed with leading members of Russia's intellectual elite. Haxthausen met and conversed with Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, a prominent advocate of peasant emancipation, as well as notables in the intelligentsia ranging from Alexander Herzen to Ivan Aksakov. Such contact served to enlarge the scope and basis of Haxthausen's knowledge and understanding of Russia and he had a far clearer view of Russian life and the government structure than he could have attained by travel.<sup>26</sup>

Haxthausen's access to Russian statistical data provided him with more insight into Russian conditions than European readers could normally expect to learn from a travel writing.<sup>27</sup> Haxthausen's analysis of Russian society and the communal institutions of the

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<sup>25</sup> Pottinger, *Mayo*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Haxthausen, *Studies into the Interior*, xiv-xv.

<sup>27</sup> In Russia, Haxthausen enjoyed extensive, if somewhat monitored, access to the country's archives which provided him with an abundance of information on Russian political and social conditions. The unprecedented access developed because Tsar Nicholas hoped a report on Russia by a European conservative thinker who viewed Russia favourably might offset some of the negative publicity on Russia

peasantry particularly impressed French historian Jules Michelet who proclaimed Haxthausen to be Russia's Columbus who discovered Russia for Europeans.<sup>28</sup> In a review of Haxthausen's book, the *Quarterly Review* noted, "no other Empire but that of Russia ever succeeded in keeping so vast a portion of the globe secret and a mystery from the rest of mankind."<sup>29</sup> It was because of the West's limited understanding of Nicholaevan Russia that Haxthausen played a vital role in contributing to Europe's knowledge of Russia. *The Spectator* acknowledged Haxthausen's valuable contribution through the rich amount of detail he provided on agricultural developments in Russia's rural districts. *The Russian Empire* was believed to be "occupied with deeper and more important subjects, extending over a wider field than almost any other modern work on Russia."<sup>30</sup> Haxthausen's book was warmly received in Russia and had the honour of being approved by Nicholas I who viewed *The Russian Empire* as an instrument to rectify the damage caused to Russia's image by Custine's *The Empire of the Czar*.

Germain de Lagny's *The Knout of the Russians* was a detailed study of Russia by a traveller who felt himself to be the ideal observer to present an accurate picture of Russia to Europeans. Lagny's work on Russia encompassed information on Nicholas' character as well as Russian government institutions, the army, the clergy and the people. While *The Knout of the Russians* explained Russian conditions to the world, the book's strengths were undermined by Lagny's disrespectful attitude towards Orthodox rituals in Russia and

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that Custine's *The Empire of the Czar* had incited in the West. Haxthausen, *Studies into the Interior*, xxiii.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx.

<sup>29</sup> "The Russian Empire," *The Quarterly Review*. 94 (1854): 423.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

extravagant recitals of the depravity of the Russian population. For example, upon witnessing a baptismal ceremony the Frenchman noted, "I had the greatest difficulty in restraining myself from indulging in a Homeric fit of laughter" because of the ritual's "strange whimsicality."<sup>31</sup> The true value of *The Knout of the Russians* can be determined from the fact that it transcended the pettiness of some of Lagny's negative comments on Russia. Overall, *The Knout of the Russians* created an image of Russia which was valuable because of the depth of the information provided on Nicholaevan Russia. Proof of this ability was apparent when, on the eve of the Crimean War, Lagny was characterized by an English literary critic as too sensationalistic. However, *The Knout of the Russians*' section of Russia's military was nonetheless found to be quite helpful to understand Russia's capabilities against the West.<sup>32</sup>

The six European travellers who ventured into Russia during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I produced accounts which demonstrated remarkable insight into that empire's political, cultural and social conditions. Custine's *The Empire of the Czar*, Kohl's *Russia*, Cameron's *Personal Adventures and Excursions*, Bourke's *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, Haxthausen's *The Russian Empire* and Lagny's *The Knout of the Russians* were vital sources for Europeans who wanted to obtain a detailed view of life and politics in the Russian Empire at a time when it was recognized as a potentially strong and increasingly threatening military power. The travellers' observations on the era of Nicholaevan Russia were not only valued by Europeans who wanted to learn about Russian conditions, but

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<sup>31</sup> Lagny, *The Knout and the Russians*, 96.

<sup>32</sup> "Review of Lagny's *Knout of the Russians*," *The Athenæum*. 1383 (April 29, 1854): 515-6.

they also served to stimulate Western interest and curiosity towards that country. Since their earliest visits to Russia, it had been important for Europeans to chronicle their impressions of that strange and faraway land in order to provide information on Russia. From the first notable publication on the Russian land - Herberstein's *Rerum Moscoviticarum Comentarum* - generations of travellers endeavoured to describe all that they had witnessed in Russia. While the obscurity of the land dissipated with the culmination of reports, changing political and cultural conditions in Russia served to make the country an enigma to the West. Russia's importance and the position it played in world affairs increased substantially over the years, credited to reforms and military actions initiated under Peter the Great. This contributed to the constant need for current information on Russia's increasing power and influence in the world.

The Marquis de Custine, Johann Georg Kohl, George Poulett Cameron, Richard Southwell Bourke, August von Haxthausen and Germain de Lagny provided credible accounts that were important sources of information on nineteenth-century Russia. When contrasted with the opinions of Russian intellectuals on social and political developments, the true strength and scope of these six travel accounts becomes apparent. When it is recalled that, with the exception of Kohl, the travellers spent a short time in Russia and relied on guides to act as interpreters during their travels, the quality of information that the travel accounts contain is remarkable. They examined an array of topics ranging from the image of Nicholas I to religion and the people of Russia. The contents of the six books were similar and the information supplied by each traveller served to enhance and strengthen the picture of Russia that Europeans obtained. The travellers presented a vivid view of the harsh lives of servitude experienced by the serfs, including information on their

obligations to their masters and living conditions. In the depictions of Nicholas I and the autocratic government, the absolute authority of the Russian tsar became apparent. When the travellers' interpretations differed on a particular topic, it served to enhance and broaden the portrait of Russia that Europeans received. For example, in the discussions on the possible threat Russia posed to Europe, Haxthausen showed that a desire for conquest was not ingrained in the Russian character and Bourke, Lagny and Cameron provided information on the shortcomings of Russia's military. Custine, Kohl, Cameron, Bourke, Haxthausen and Lagny produced informative studies on Russia which were available to all interested Europeans. As Russia's strength and potential began to be recognized in the West, the people had detailed sources to find answers to their questions on the Russian Empire.



## APPENDIX

Europe's heightened awareness of Russia's political and military authority during the nineteenth century led Russia's foreign policy interests to be a source of consternation for Western powers. Russia was militarily superior to the rest of Europe through the sheer numbers of its soldiers and, from its acquisition of Polish territory at the Congress of Vienna, Russia's proximity to Europe was increased. Peter I and Catherine II had inaugurated Russia's territorial growth into Asia and Europe through wars waged with Sweden, Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Under Alexander I (1801-25) Russian expansion became active in the Caucasus due to the fact that Georgia had sought Russia's protection from the Turks during the reign of Paul I (1796-1801). Paul chose to annex Georgia rather than safeguard the territory against aggression from Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Russia's increased presence in the Caucasus through the acquisition of Georgia culminated in a war between Russia and Persia which resulted in a Russian victory and, from the Treaty of Gulistan (1813) Alexander added Daghestan, Kuba, the Ossetian region, Azerbaijan, Imertia, Abkhaz and Mingrelia to the Russian Empire. In 1826, Persia's desire to reverse Alexander's military conquests resulted in a renewed Russo-Persian War which enabled Nicholas I to gain possession of Ervian and Nakhichevan in the Treaty of Turkmanchai (1828).

The most troubling aspect of Russian foreign policy which worried Europeans in the nineteenth century concerned Russia's relationship with the Ottoman Empire. Russia's ancient connection to Byzantium was derived from Russia's acceptance of Orthodox Christianity which established religious and cultural connections that lasted until the Turks

captured Constantinople in 1453. After the collapse of the Byzantine Empire, Russia had to rely upon itself for cultural achievements and many Russians harboured a fantastic dream of conquering Constantinople. Although never an accepted government policy, or even attempted, thoughts of controlling the ancient capital of the Byzantine Empire led many Russians to entertain fantasies about re-establishing the connection between Russia and Constantinople.

Russia's interest in the Ottoman Empire was threatening to Europeans because the Turks were not rulers of an empire to be feared and their weakened position had resulted in the apt appellation 'The Sick Man of Europe.' While Russia's past connection to Byzantium may not have motivated Russian rulers, Russia was interested in the economic and strategic importance of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits which were outside of the Black Sea in the realm of Turkish influence. Russia's rulers were preoccupied with the question of the Straits, as Navy Minister I. K. Grigorovich commented during the reign of Nicholas II in 1913, "the Straits in the hands of another state would mean the complete control of the economic development of southern Russia by a foreign power and . . . the key for an aggressive advance into Asia Minor."<sup>1</sup> In 1696 Peter the Great had won privileges for Russia on the Black Sea, but the rights were surrendered after a military defeat against the Turks in a Russo-Turkish War of 1711, and Russia was required to relinquish Azov and nearby fortresses.

Russia again became influential in the Black Sea region at the end of the eighteenth century from Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji from the 1768-74 Russo-Turkish War and the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Ivo J. Leder, ed. *Russian Foreign Policy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) 420.

Treaty of Jassy (1792) which formalized the Russian conquest of the Crimea and land between the Bug and Dneister River. Realizing that it would be impossible to control the area by physical force due to the ambitions of other countries in the region, in the nineteenth century the Russian government hoped it could ensure that the area would be closed to all warships. As Russia was a minor naval power it was in its interest to ensure that a capable sea power such as Britain did not become a dominant presence in the Black Sea region. Russia always proclaimed a desire to keep the Turks in power while obtaining as much personal gain as possible. It was with such intentions that Russia assisted the Ottoman Empire against the Egyptians in the 1830s. Russia was rewarded for supporting the Turks with the Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi in 1833 which greatly distressed the British. Depending on the interpretation of the treaty's provisions, the agreement could bar all foreign warships from the Straits while allowing the Russians to trek freely through the area. Russia's increased influence in the Ottoman Empire troubled English politicians as it was a detriment to the British Empire's expansionist aims in the region.<sup>2</sup>

Russia's foreign policy was a constant source of consternation for Great Britain and other European powers who wanted to safeguard their own interests in the Ottoman Empire and nearby regions. The clash of imperialist ambitions in the nineteenth century resulted in many areas where Russia's actions could ignite an angry response from the West. The British government viewed a persistent menace to India, the jewel of the British Empire, from Russia's expansionist efforts which touched on Persia and Afghanistan's borders. Austria did not support Russian ambitions towards the Ottoman

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy*. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964) 81-6.  
Phillip C. Graves, *The Question of the Straits*. (London: E. Benn Ltd., 1931.)

Empire because the Habsburg rulers were fearful that a liberation movement involving the Slavs in the Turkish Empire could incite the large population of Slavs under the Austrian ruler to seek independence. However, as the Habsburgs often sought Russian support for their position in the Italian and German states, the Austrian stance towards Russia was never as severe as Britain's policy. France's opposition to Russia's preoccupation with the Straits tended to be supportive of the official British policy. As France's interest in the region declined, despite a continued presence in Egypt and the conquest of Algeria in 1830, French policy did not directly oppose Russia's ambitions.

In conjunction with Russia's involvement in the 'Eastern Question,' Europe's uneasiness towards Russia during the 1830s and 1840s was derived from periods in Nicholas' reign when Russia displayed its strength and stability. In 1830 Nicholas' forces ruthlessly suppressed the Polish uprising for independence from the Russian Empire. After their failed rebellion, the Poles lost the limited independence they had experienced prior to 1830 and faced harsh repression under the authority of Nicholas' trusted General I. F. Paskevich. When, in 1830 and 1848, all of Europe, with the exception of Britain and Russia, was plagued by revolutionary activity, Russia proved to be a stabilizing and powerful reactionary force against rebellious factions. In 1848, Nicholas assisted the Austrians against the Hungarian revolt for independence from the Habsburg monarchy. Awed by Russia's immense size and political stability, Europeans viewed Russia as a strong nation whose military powers seemed limitless.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until the end of Nicholas' reign that Russia and Europe came into

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<sup>3</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, *The Eastern Question An Historical Study*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions 1848-1851*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954.)

conflict and Russia's military might was actually tested. Russia's true capabilities in a war against Europe remained unknown until the Crimean War (1853-6), waged in the last years of Nicholas' reign and concluded under his successor, Alexander II (1855-81). The conflict was instigated by the quarrel over the right of Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox control of the key to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. When the Ottoman Empire favoured the Roman Catholics - after being pressured by France - Nicholas I determined that it was necessary to take a firm stance in support of Russia's rights in the region against Western interference. The Ottoman Empire's action was seen as a flagrant dismissal of the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainjardi from the Russo-Turkish War which formalized the rights of the Orthodox population in the Holy City. During the Crimean War, Russia was unable to resist the combined military strength of France, Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire and was forced to accept the Treaty of Paris (1856). The provisions of the settlement did not allow Russia to keep warships on the Black Sea. Russia was also forced to abandon its influential position over Besarabia, Serbia, the Danubian Principalities, and lost its role as the protector of the Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire as the Europeans systematically diminished Russia's presence and authority in the Black Sea region. Although Russia's strength was ultimately proven insufficient against the combined forces of Western nations, until the Crimean War, Russia's strength and foreign policy interests were regarded as a potential threat to the West.

TABLE 1

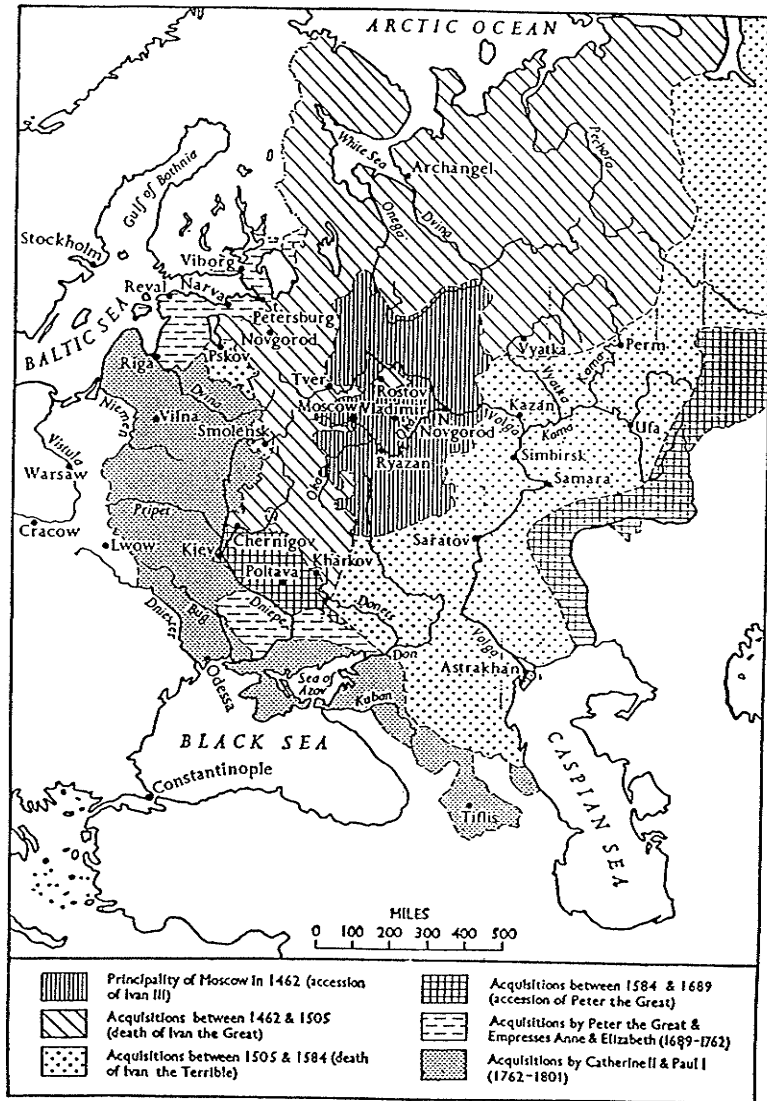
## THE TABLE OF RANKS

1st	class	chancellor (civil); field-marshal (military); general-admiral (naval)
2nd		Active privy councillor; general of cavalry, or infantry, or artillery; admiral
3rd		privy councillor; lieutenant-general; vice-admiral
4th		active civil councillor, or senior procurator, or master of heralds (civil); major-general; rear-admiral
5th		civil councillor
6th		collegial councillor or military councillor; colonel; captain of 1st rank (naval)
7th		aulic councillor; lieutenant-colonel; captain of 2nd rank (naval)
8th		collegial assessor; captain or rotmistr
9th		titular councillor; staff captain or staff rotmistr
10th		collegial secretary; lieutenant; midshipman
11th		ship's secretary
12th		provincial secretary
13th		senatorial registrar, synodal registrar or cabinet registrar, ensign
14th		collegial registrar

Source: Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801-1917*.  
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 15.

MAP 1

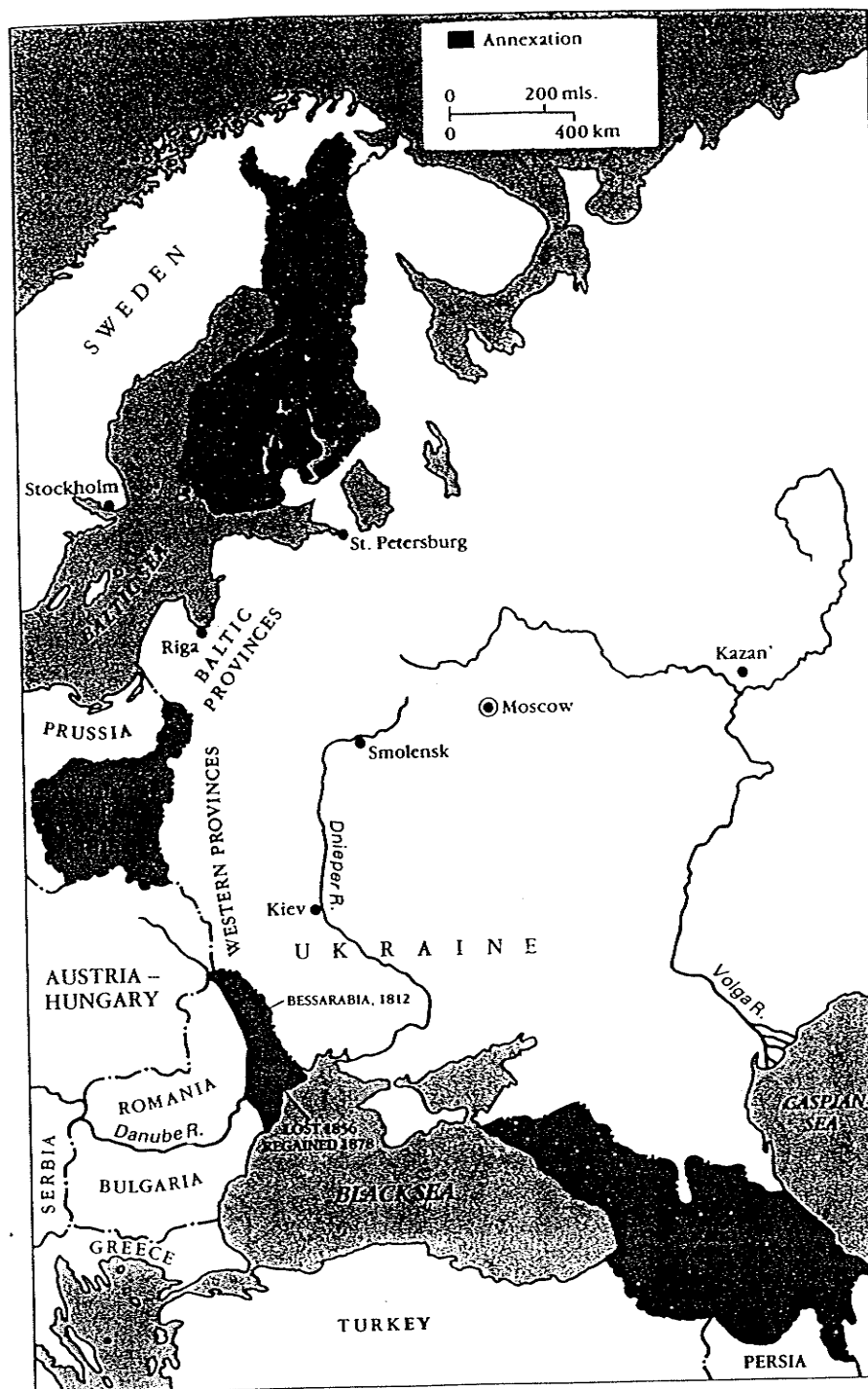
RUSSIAN EXPANSION FROM THE FIFTEENTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



Source: Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801-1917*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 771.

MAP 2

## RUSSIAN EXPANSION 1801-81



Source: David Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform 1801-1881*. (London: Longman, 1992) 368.



MAP 3

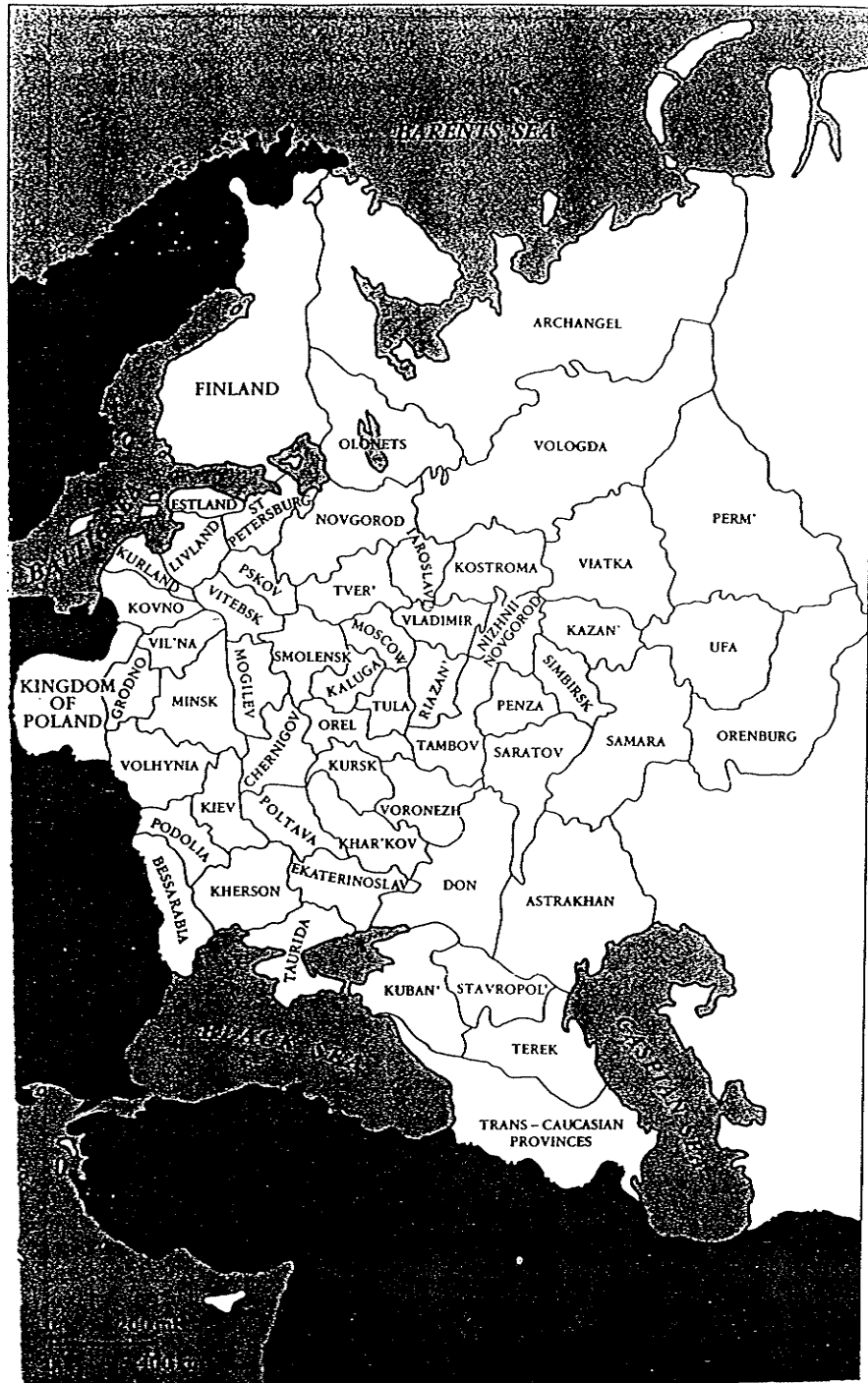
THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE



Source: David Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform 1801-1881*.  
(London: Longman, 1992) 367.

MAP 4

## THE RUSSIAN PROVINCES



Source: David Saunde *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform 1801-1881*.  
 (London: Longman, 1992) 369.

MAP 5

## THE REGIONS OF EUROPEAN RUSSIA



Source: Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801-1917*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 770.

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