

Introduction

Texts of Representation



The first volume of my articles, *Russian Monarchy: Representation and Rule*, emphasized the central role of symbolic representation in the political culture of Russian monarchy. In Russia, the presentation of the emperor introduced by Peter the Great as superordinate hero wielding absolute power for the benefit of the state persisted as a precondition of monarchical rule for two subsequent centuries. With Peter, the act of borrowing and displaying forms of western imagery became an attribute of power.¹ The emulation of foreign models produced what Louis Marin called a “doubling effect” of representation—removing the monarch from his local confines and locating him in a realm of irresistible and efficacious enlightened rule.² The representation of the monarch became paramount, transcending considerations of law, prudence, or rational argument, and shaping the practices and attitudes of governmental officials to accommodate a culture of power.

Official texts exalted Russian rulers in mythical narratives of heroic conquest and transformation. Articles in this volume focus on such texts as artifacts of a monarchical culture: explicit and unequivocal statements of political truths that set the tone and established the goals of each reign in narratives I have termed “scenarios.” The laws of the realm carried symbolic weight, opening with preambles that set the provisions in the context of myth, justifying the decrees, statutes, and rules in terms of the designs of the current reign. Ceremonial texts—program books, later accounts in newspapers and

¹ See *Scenarios of Power*, 1: 14-15. (See Abbreviations).

² Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1981), 9-13.

illustrated journals—presented the events of the court in accounts that may or may not have corresponded to their actual performance and defined their meanings. Painting and architecture were called upon to evoke an imagined political landscape. For the historian, this complex of texts gives a sense of the verbal and visual universe of Russian monarchy and how its rulers envisioned the potentialities of the Russian state.

The articles in the first two parts of this volume, and to a certain extent in the third, are devoted to the interplay between the mythical narrative of the regime and the texts that gave it visual expression. Visual imagery and presentation over time has nearly vanished from historical accounts of Russian monarchy. My research soon made it clear that Russian monarchy inhabited a multifaceted visual culture. In the 1980s, when I was unable to visit the Soviet Union, I encountered numerous published visual sources in western repositories that gave vivid evidence of the public face of the monarchy. The Russian collection of the Helsinki Slavonic Library contained a wealth of illustrated journals and books that had not left an imprint on historical accounts. In 1984, after Edward Kasinec assumed the position of Director of the now lamented Slavonic and Baltic Division of the New York Public Library, he set about finding visual sources languishing ignored in the stacks. He brought the Division's collection of Russian imperial coronation albums to my attention, and we collaborated on the first scholarly analysis of their evolution and significance.

My encounter with these vivid and dramatic scenes opened new insights into the thinking and self-images of Russian monarchs and the figurative idioms they used to make their scenarios known. The texts disclosed what Steven Lukes has described as cognitive maps of the political order, showing the “particular models or political paradigms of society and how it functions” that distinguish political ritual.³ The illustrations revealed a supernal world of ceremony, demonstrating the emperor's mastery of the esthetic sphere, suggesting that he was not bound by the limits of the everyday or subject to mundane judgment. Elaborately choreographed parades and dignified processions displayed his powers of control and direction—a simulacrum of a state presumably directed by the ruler's will. Crowds lining avenues

³ Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory* (London: MacMillan, 1977), 68.

and filling squares attested to his capacity to maintain “exemplary order” and to win popular support. Altogether these texts illustrated what Clifford Geertz described as “the power of grandeur to organize the world.”⁴

Art and architecture were mobilized to evoke the transcendence of the monarchy and to make its presence felt throughout Russia. Paintings produced the “doubling” effect that intensified the presence of the subject of monarch. “The device of representation transforms force into might (*puissance*), force into power (*pouvoir*),” Louis Marin wrote. “The king is only truly king, that is the monarch, in images.”⁵ Imposing palaces and spacious parks likened his residences to the realm of the gods and classical heroes, whose figures were exalted in commanding statues; churches were constructed that brought a re-invented past into the landscape of contemporary Russia.

The meanings of the illustrations, however, were not self-evident: they had to be defined and explained. Ceremonial texts revealed the intent that the regime sought explicitly to convey—first to the court elite, and then to the broader layers of society subordinated to in the state and participating in its culture—what Christian Jouhaud, in his description of Louis XIII’s triumphal entry into Paris in December 1628, characterized as an “official version of a celebration of power.”⁶ We observe what has been called “the publicization” of ceremonies: ceremonial texts made intent explicit, to be honored publically and shared by the governing elite. Comparison with earlier such texts also reveals continuities and changes in the ceremonies and their modes of performance. Imperial ceremonies were not static: texts defined their meanings to suit the goals and imagery of the current ruler, making

⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 102.

⁵ Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*, 11-12.

⁶ Jouhaud writes of “the primacy of discourse, of the written word and of knowledge over the traditional ritual of the entry” (Christian Jouhaud, “Printing the Event: From La Rochelle to Paris,” in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989], 301-2). For other examples, see J. LeGoff, “A Coronation Program for the Age of St. Louis: The Ordo of 1250,” in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 46-57; J.-C. Bonne, “The Manuscript of the Ordo of 1250 and Its Illuminations,” in Bak, *Coronations*, 58-71.

known his scenario of power. The ceremonies then entered into a ceremonial tradition, clothing change as fidelity to the mythic history of the dynasty.

Commentaries in program books gave forceful statements of the significance of ceremonies. Coronation albums explained the meanings of the rites in the cathedral and the processions and celebrations before and after. Other texts, for example A. Ricard de Montferrand's explanation of the significance of the dedication of his Alexandrine column in 1834, or the historical introductions to Fedor Solntsev's illustrations in the *Antiquities of the Russian State*, followed the same practice. In the nineteenth century, journals, many of them illustrated, and newspapers assumed this role. In a culture ruled by a strict, even often arbitrary censorship, print expressions, not only in official organs, gave pointed indicators to the official meanings of events. On the other hand, the Khodynka field massacre in the midst of celebrations of Nicholas II's coronation provided the occasion for both statements of public sympathy from the tsar, and candid accounts of what seemed his insensitive attendance at a ball given by the French ambassador, all of this widely available in the Russian as well as the international press. In this setting, the tsar's scenario began to unfold against conflicting narratives that called into question the image of spiritual and moral supremacy intrinsic to the imperial myth.

My work does not deal with audience response, except to the extent that it was dictated by the scenario itself: in an authoritarian state the response is a necessary element of the performance. The central constitutive element of official representation from the reign of Peter the Great was a myth of conquest. The rule of the monarch found its principal grounds for sovereign power not in divine mandate, or dynastic inheritance, though these principles were also invoked, but performance and representation of his symbolic transcendence, which subsumed the onlookers in the drama. The conquest motif loomed large in tsarist ceremonies and imagery and the emotional force of the presentations was indeed potent, prompting an affect captured by the word *torzhestvennost'*. *Torzhestvennost'* may be translated as solemnity, or festivity, but it really means a combination of the two—the solemn and the festive, or perhaps solemn festivity, evoking the force of grandeur. *Torzhestvo* also means victory, and it carries the exaltation of triumph. The evocation of *torzhestvennost'* exalted the state and its elite by inspiring what has been

described as a “rapture of submission” a powerful emotional bond between the distant ruler and his lowly subjects.⁷ Official accounts describe this vicarious sharing of the rapture of conquest and submission, the onlookers struck dumb, shedding tears of admiration and sympathy (See Articles 7 and 10).

My articles in this volume analyze specific cultural texts that figured significantly in the scenarios of Russian rulers.⁸ Article One, “The Mythology of Empire: Imperial Russian Coronation Albums,” written with Edward Kasinec, brings Russian coronation albums into a historical narrative that I later elaborated at length in my *Scenarios of Power*. Article 2, “Ceremony and Empire in the Evolution of Russian Monarch,” draws on similar texts to understand the presentations that elevated the tsar as conqueror and embodiment of empire. Article 3, “Signs of Empire: Exotic Peoples at Imperial Coronations,” published originally in Russian, and slightly modified, focuses on the albums to trace the process of absorption of non-Russian nationalities into the rites and festivities of the coronation, which until the late nineteenth century were presented as events consecrating the Russian monarch in the presence of a westernized, principally Great Russian elite. Article 4, “Publicizing the Imperial Image,” discusses the new forms and media representing Nicholas II’s appeal for mass support, souvenirs, popular biography, postage stamps and commemorative coins and medals, and film—the devices of modern publicity utilized by European monarchies in order to assert his popularity in competition with the Duma—and to display his direct rapport with the people.

Articles in Part II address the role of art and architecture in the creation of a cultural ambience for each scenario that established the esthetic supremacy of the monarchy. The emperor drew on the talents of poets, artists, and architects to set the cultural tone for each reign—the cultural interlocutors of the monarchy. Among of the many artistic texts that Edward Kasinec rescued from the Slavonic Division’s stacks was the six-volume compilation of watercolors by Fedor Solntsev, *The Antiquities of the Russian State*, published in 1849. Kasinec and Wendy Salmond then organized

⁷ The term, “rapture of submission,” (*vostorg poddanstva*) has roots in religious literature, B. I. Berman, “Chitatel’ zhitia,” in *Khudozhestvennyi iazyk srednevekov’ia* (Moscow, 1982), 166-7, 179.

⁸ In those articles previously published in English, I have made only editorial changes.

an exhibition in the spring of 2007 and a symposium about Solntsev and his influence, which culminated in a conference volume edited by Cynthia Hyla Whittaker.⁹ I argue that *The Antiquities* represented a major component of Nicholas's scenario, which is described in Article 5, "Fedor Solntsev, Alexei Olenin, and the Development of a Russian National Esthetic." Article 6, part of which overlaps with Article 5, compares two examples of the role of poets, musicians, and artists in fashioning a foundation tale that would elevate the monarchy in the esthetic idiom of its time, first by Catherine the Great, the second by Nicholas I. Article 7, "Myth and Memory—Imperial Evocations of 1812," describes how official representation, invoking artistic, architectural, as well as ceremonial texts defined and redefined the memory of 1812 in terms of the changing settings of the myth.

Article 8, "*Glas naroda*: Visual Representations of Russian Monarchy in the Emancipation Era," shows examples of officially inspired lubki, popular prints that were issued after the reform to demonstrate the hoped for the popular devotion and gratitude to Alexander II presumed in his scenario of love. I was introduced to these prints by the work of Professor Larissa Zakharova of Moscow State University and with the help of Sergei Mironenko, the director of the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). The strange but striking evocations of meetings, actual and imagined, between tsar and grateful peasants cast in the idiom of the lubki gave expression to the lofty expectations of social concord entertained in official circles during the reforms.

During the nineteenth century, the construction and dedication of revival churches provided emphatic statements of the rulers' understanding of the meaning of Russia's religious past in the light of their scenarios. Article 9, "'The Russian Style' in Church Architecture as Imperial Symbol after 1881," describes the regime's mobilization of architects to appropriate the principle of *L'architecture parlante* to validate the regime's claims to Russia's past during the reign of Alexander III. Musical compositions provided the melodies and cadences that elevated the monarchy through the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Article 10, "St. Petersburg the Imperial City and Peter Tchaikovsky,"

⁹ Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, ed., *Visualizing Russia: Fedor Solntsev and Crafting a National Past* [Russian history and culture, v. 4] (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17-40.

my keynote Address for the Carnegie Hall Tchaikovsky Festival, in October, 2012, shows how forcefully Tchaikovsky's music resonated with spirit of *torzhestvennost'* and the ethos of the monarchy he revered.

Part III relates my later encounter with Russian texts of exploration, also occurring in the precincts of the Slavonic division, in conjunction with the splendid exhibition, "Russia Engages the World, 1453-1825," organized by Kasinec and Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, at the New York Public Library in 2003. Article 11, written for the accompanying exhibition volume, "Texts of Exploration and Russia's European Identity" explores the role of Catherine the Great and Alexander I in promoting both continental and maritime expeditions to the Urals, Siberia, the Far East, Alaska, and the Pacific, on the basis of diaries of naval officers who captained sea voyages to the Pacific and around the world.¹⁰ Article 12, "Russian Noble Officers and the Ethos of Exploration," continues the story, focusing on explorations by Peter Semenov (Tian-Shanskii) and Michael Veniukov sponsored by the Imperial Geographical Society, which was established and thrived under the patronage of the Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich.

Part IV goes back to my early encounters with texts of the intelligentsia. My first published work, Article 13, "Koshelev, Samarin, and Cherkassky and the Fate of Liberal Slavophilism," taken from a section of my Master's Thesis, "Koshelev, Samarin, and Cherkasskii: Three Views of Russia's Political Future" (University of Chicago, 1960), discusses the liberal ideas disclosed in writings of three Russian Slavophiles who were actively involved in the process of emancipation. It reveals my early focus on personal texts to reveal the dilemmas that underpinned their political outlooks. Their failure to find an institutional basis for political progress in Russia prefigured similar quandaries throughout the nineteenth century and indeed resurfacing today. Reflecting my early interest in psychology, Article 14, "Tolstoy and the Perception of Poverty: Tolstoy's "What Then Must We Do?" examines the text as an expression of the personal crisis prompted by the author's frustrated efforts to cope with the painful scenes of poverty that confronted him in Moscow and his inability to find sympathy or support in Russian society.

¹⁰ *Russia Engages the World, 1453-1825*, ed. Cynthia Hyla Whittaker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

In my reading of documents of Russian intellectual history, I could not fail to note the absence of references to a right of property, especially as I lived in a society where property right represented a transcendent value. Article 15, “Property Rights, Populism, and Russian Political Culture,” discusses the weakness of a principle of private property right in documents of Russian political culture and its implications for liberal programs of change in the early twentieth century.

Part V reveals my thinking as I began to approach the problems of state organization and monarchical rule with the sensibility and analytical tools of an intellectual historian. Article 16, “Thought, Culture, and Power: Reflections of a Russianist,” traces the changes in my intellectual orientation that led me turn to the study of Russian legal institutions, and then of Russian monarchy. Article 17, a review of a collection edited by Sergei Nekliudov, *Moskovsko-tartuskaia semioticheskaia shkola. Istoriiia, vospominaniia, razmyshleniia*, gives a sense of the contributions of the Moscow-Tartu school, which helped define my approach to monarchical political culture, its symbols, and representation.

The final pieces are miscellaneous remembrances of my past, Article 18, “Recollection of Vladimir Nabokov,” recalls my brief encounter with the writer as an auditor of his lectures. The last two contributions are recollections delivered at memorial services for scholars who inspired me with their ideas, knowledge, and devotion to the scholarly calling, Marc Raeff, and my mentor, Leopold Haimson.