Introduction

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The second volume of the *Cambridge History of Russia* covers the 'imperial era', in other words the years between Peter I's assumption of power and the revolution of 1917.

As is true of almost all attempts at periodisation in history, this division has its problems. For example, peasants were the overwhelming majority of the empire's population in 1917, as in 1689. The history of the Russian peasantry obviously neither began in 1689 nor ended in 1917. The enserfment of the peasantry was largely concluded in the century before Peter's accession. The destruction of the peasant world as it had existed in the imperial era came less in the revolution of 1917 than during Stalin's era of collectivisation and ruthless industrialisation.

Nevertheless, if one is to divide up Russian history into three volumes then defining the dates of volume two as 1689 to 1917 is much the best option. In formal terms, this volume's title (*Imperial Russia*) accurately defines the period between Russia's proclamation as an empire under Peter I and the fall of the Romanov dynasty and empire in March 1917. More importantly, this era is united by a number of crucial common characteristics. Of these, the most significant were probably the empire's emergence as a core member of the European concert of great powers and the full-scale Westernisation of the country's ruling elites. These two themes are the great clichés of modern Russian history-writing: like most such clichés they are broadly true in my opinion.

In editing this volume, I have made only a limited effort to impose my own conception of Russian history on the volume's shape, let alone on how individual contributors approach their topics. Readers who wish to gain a sense of my own overall understanding of the imperial era will find this in chapter 1, on Russia as empire and European periphery. They will be wise to remember that, like most academics, I see my own myopic obsessions – currently empire and peripherality – as the key to understanding the whole period to which this volume and my scholarly life has been devoted.

As editor, however, my key belief has been that a Cambridge History must be both comprehensive and diverse. The Russian Empire between 1689 and 1917 was a very diverse and complex society, which can and should be understood and studied from a great many different angles. To take but one example: it is in the nature of the Cambridge History as fundamentally a work of reference that most of its chapters have to be broad surveys of key themes in Russian history. But in some ways the micro-history of a single Great Russian village in a single year in the eighteenth century would provide more insights into crucial aspects of Russian history than a handful of general chapters, however well informed.

Even more important than diversity is comprehensiveness. I have tried to edit a volume from which the teacher of an MA programme in Russian history and her or his students can draw a rich and detailed understanding of Russian history in the imperial era. Very few people will read this volume as a whole and at one 'sitting'. But they will need to find within it detailed, scholarly coverage of a very broad range of themes. 'Coherence', though important, is therefore less of an issue than comprehensiveness. This volume covers politics and government: foreign policy and military history; economic and financial affairs; the history of all the key social groups in Russia, as well as of women and of the empire's non-Russian minorities; the legal and judicial system, the police and the revolutionary movement; Russian intellectual history and the history of Russian high culture.

To fit all this into a single volume has not been easy but in my view it has been essential. For example: in order to concentrate more space on other issues, I was urged at one point to drop the two chapters on Russian cultural history on the grounds that this subject is amply covered in histories of Russian literature, music and art. It seemed to me, however, that this volume would approach these subjects from a different angle to the ones most common in histories of Russian literature or the arts. Moreover, in some respects the vast and unexpected contribution made to European and world culture by Russian writers, musicians and artists is the most significant and exciting element in the history of Imperial Russia. To ignore it would therefore be a touch bizarre. In addition, Russians' understanding of themselves and their place in Europe, the world and the cosmos was so totally intertwined with literature, music and art that to leave out these themes would seriously distort the history of Imperial Russia.

In my opinion, the only way to address the requirements of the Cambridge History given the 228 years covered by this volume and the nature of the existing literature was thematic. Most chapters in this volume are therefore

broad thematic surveys. To cover the vast range of necessary topics and do justice to the existing literature, in most cases I was only able to allow contributors roughly 7,000 words each. It is immensely difficult for scholars who have devoted their lives to detailed study of topics to compress a lifetime's insights into so short a space. I was very grateful to contributors for their willingness to do this and vastly impressed by the outstanding skill with which they addressed this challenge.

Most themes chose themselves. To take the most obvious examples, you cannot have a history of Russia without a chapter on the Orthodox Church or the peasantry. A generation ago you not only could but would have had a volume without a chapter on Russian women. Barbara Engel's splendidly comprehensive and thought-provoking piece on a vast subject which is very difficult to define or confine shows just how much genuine progress has been made in this area over the last thirty years.

But if I have exercised some editorial influence in the selection of chapters it has been on the whole in what many will consider a conservative sense. This volume is based overwhelmingly on American and British scholarship. For all its excellence, this scholarship has tended at times to concentrate on a narrow range of fashionable topics. Traditional core topics such as foreign policy or the history of Russia's economy, financial, fiscal and military systems have been extremely unfashionable among Anglophone historians in recent decades. For example, there are no standard histories of Russian foreign policy or of the empire's fiscal and financial systems written in the last thirty years which one could confidently assign to Anglophone graduate students. This volume gives what I conceive to be appropriate weight to these crucial but unfashionable topics. This is of course a matter of my own judgement and responsibility. But my sense that this was necessary was strengthened by talking to Russian historians of Russia. In my view, to justify the work that goes into a volume of the Cambridge History that volume must be respected and legitimate in Russian eyes, as well as those of the Anglophone academic community.

Although the thematic structure of this book is in my view essential and inevitable, it does create some problems as regards chronology and the integration of the various themes. Ideally, two volumes on this period would have allowed one to concentrate on periods and another on thematic topics. Given the requirement of one volume, I have concentrated on themes but included a number of chapters either on overall contexts (for instance chapters 3 and 1 by Mark Bassin and myself respectively) or on specific periods (the chapters by Paul Bushkovitch, Larisa Zakharova and Eric Lohr).

As already noted, historical truths and insights come from many different angles. Had space permitted, I would have indulged my commitment to micro-history more fully. I have, however, sought to lace the volume's survey chapters with a small number of much narrower and more detailed vignettes. These are in a sense almost literally verbal illustrations attached to groups of thematic chapters. Thus Catherine Evtuhov's chapter on Nizhnii Novgorod is designed to complement and illustrate the chapters on Russia's 'middle classes', economy and Church: Michelle Marrese's chapter links but also illustrates the survey chapters on law and women by Jorg Baberowski and Barbara Engel, not least by showing graphically that for all its imperfections law made a hugely important impact on eighteenth-century Russian life; Alex Martin's chapter on 1812's impact on Russian identities encapsulates a key theme in the broader chapters on Russian culture and political thinking; Nikolai Afonin's chapter on the navy in 1900 plays the same role in linking the chapters on Russian empire and power to themes of economic development and revolution. If these vignettes have allowed the inclusion of younger scholars among the contributors to the *Cambridge History*, that is an additional bonus.

Although, as noted above, I expect only the occasional martyr to read this book from cover to cover, I have nevertheless conceived of it as a coherent whole. Perhaps more significantly, I see the book as comprising a number of groups of chapters which can profitably be read together at a single sitting. The table of contents shows how I see these groupings to work.

The first three chapters introduce the overarching theme of empire from different perspectives: in comparative and geopolitical perspective (Lieven), as it managed the minority peoples (Weeks) and as empire affected Russian conceptions of their own identity and that of their polity (Bassin). The next four chapters are all linked to Mark Bassin's theme of Russian perceptions of their nation and its ideals. They are followed by three chapters on the non-Russians (Poles and Ukrainians; Jews; Muslims), which ought to be read in conjunction with Theodore Weeks's Chapter 2. After this come nine chapters on Russian society, three on domestic government (Shakibi, Hartley, Waldron) and five on diplomatic and military affairs. Larisa Zakharova's excellent chapter illustrates the close link between failure in war and radical domestic political change in the mid-nineteenth century. This leads logically to the volume's last three chapters, which tell the story of the regime's struggle with revolution and the empire's ultimate collapse in the midst of global war.

A word is needed about the bibliography. This has been a major nightmare for me since in principle it could have been longer than the rest of the volume. The first section of the bibliography is a very limited guide to the most

important published 'official histories', primary sources, collections of documents and guides to archival holdings. The rest of the bibliography covers secondary sources. I have divided this into themes in order to make the book more friendly to teachers and students. I have also given strong priority to books over articles. I did this partly because I needed some principle which would allow me to confine the bibliography to manageable limits and partly because the majority of these books themselves contain bibliographies which will provide the reader with a guide to further reading. I have included no memoirs in the bibliography, because this would open the floodgates, but draw readers' attention to Petr Zaionchkovsii's exceptionally valuable multi-volume guide to memoirs which is listed in Section one. Given this volume's readership, it seemed sensible to give priority firstly to books in English and then to works in the Russian language.

Two final points are required in this introduction.

Shortly after writing his chapter for this volume Professor Reggie Zelnik was killed in an accident. The community of historians of Russia thereby lost not only a fine scholar but also a human being of great generosity and warm-heartedness. These qualities are recalled not only by his books but also in the memory of his friends and his former students.

For technical and financial reasons, this volume is based overwhelmingly on Anglophone scholarship. This is in no way an assertion that this scholarship is superior to that of our continental European or Russian comrades-in-arms and colleagues. One of the great joys of travelling to Russia at present is that one meets a wide range of excellent and enthusiastic young Russian historians. Given the frequent poverty and material challenges that these young people face, their commitment and enthusiasm is humbling. Even more humbling is recollection of the courage and integrity with which the best Russian scholars of the older generations sustained academic standards amidst the frustrations, dangers and temptations of the Soviet era. By dedicating this volume to Professor Petr Zaionchkovskii of Moscow University I wish to pay tribute not just to an outstanding scholar and human being but also to the many other Russian historians during the Soviet era to whom our profession owes a great debt.

PART I

*

EMPIRE

1

Russia as empire and periphery

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Empire is one of the most common types of polity in history.[1] It existed from ancient times into the twentieth century. Among its core characteristics were rule over many peoples and huge territories, the latter being a great challenge in the era of pre-modern communications. Military power was crucial to the creation and maintenance of empire but long-term survival also required effective political institutions.[2] Most empires were ruled by some combination of a theoretically autocratic monarch and a warrior-aristocratic class, though in some cases large and sophisticated bureaucracies greatly enhanced an empire's strength and durability.[3] In the long term the most interesting and important empires were those linked to the spread of some great high culture or universal religion.

Tsarist Russia was a worthy member of this imperial 'club'. If its long-term historical significance seems somewhat less than that of Rome, of the Han Chinese empire or of the Islamic tradition of empire, its achievements were nevertheless formidable. This is even more the case when one remembers Russia's relatively unfavourable location, far from the great trade routes and the traditional centres of global wealth and civilisation.[4] The tsarist regime directed one of the most successful examples of territorial expansion in history. Until the emergence of Japan in the twentieth century, it was the only example of a non-Western polity which had challenged effectively the might of the

1 For a historical survey of types of empire within a comparative study of polities see S. Finer, *A History of Government*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Also M. Duverger (ed.), *Le Concept d'Empire*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1980). D. Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (London: John Murray, 2000) discusses many of the themes of this chapter at length and contains a full bibliographical essay.

2 On 'bureaucratic thresholds' and the institutionalisation of empire, see e.g. M. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), especially chapter 5.

3 S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political System of Empires*, new edn (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1992).

4 J. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 156–7. Russia earns one paragraph in a book devoted to the world system of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

European great powers. Moreover, in the nineteenth century, this empire's ruling elites spawned a musical and literary high culture which made an immense contribution to global civilisation.

Tsarist history belongs not just to the overall history of empire but also, more specifically, to the modern story of the expansion of Europe. To a great extent Russian expansion depended on imported European institutions, technologies and even cadres, both military and civil. Its 'victims', often nomadic and Islamic, had many similarities with the peoples conquered by other European empires. Increasingly the ideology which justified expansion was that of European civilising mission. In this sense matters did not even change after 1917. Marxism was a Western, racially blind but culturally arrogant theory of historical development whose optimism and commitment to one unilinear path of development had much in common with Macaulay and nineteenth-century liberal champions of empire.

As is true of most empires, the tsarist empire was made up of radically differing lands and peoples which it acquired and used for a variety of purposes. Initially it was furs which drew the Russians into Siberia, the early period of Russian empire beyond the Urals thereby having something in common with the French fur-based empire in Canada. The cotton-based empire in late nineteenth-century Central Asia had parallels with the cotton economy of British Egypt, though central Asia (like Egypt) had also been acquired as part of the Anglo-Russian struggle for geopolitical advantage in Asia. Finland was annexed to enhance the security of St Petersburg, and military and geopolitical factors were also behind the initial Russian decision to jump the Caucasus range and incorporate Georgia into the empire.

The three most crucial acquisitions in the imperial era were the Baltic provinces, Ukraine and Poland. The first was vital because it opened up direct trade routes to Europe, which contributed greatly to the growth of the eighteenth-century economy. By the end of the nineteenth century 'New Russia' and the southern steppe territories were the core of Russian agriculture and of its coal and metallurgical industries: without them Russia would cease to be a great power. Expansion into Ukraine and the 'empty' steppe was Russia's equivalent to the 'New Worlds' conquered and colonised by the British and Spanish empires. Odessa, founded in 1794, had a population of 630,000 by 1914 and was one of the world's great grain-exporting ports. Mark Twain commented that it 'looked just like an American city'.[5] Of all Russia's

5 P. Herlihy, *Odessa: A History 1794–1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 13.

imperial acquisitions, Poland proved to be the biggest thorn in Petersburg's flesh in the nineteenth century, though it made a considerable contribution to the imperial economy and its territory was a useful glacis against invasion from the West. Poland's initial division between Russia, Austria and Prussia had something in common with the 'Scramble for Africa' a century later. It was a product of great-power rivalry and bargaining, a convenient compromise which aggrandised the great powers and lessened tensions between them at the expense of weaker polities.

Being recognised as the rulers of a European great power and empire (to a considerable extent the two concepts were seen as identical) was central to the Romanovs' self-esteem and identity, not to mention to the raison d'être and legitimacy of their regime. At the same time, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were excellent objective reasons for wishing to be a great power and an empire. In an era when a small group of predator states – Britain, France, Spain, the United States and (later) Germany – were subjecting most of the globe to their direct or indirect dominion, the alternative to being a great imperial power was unappetising.

Russia was a more successful European great power in the first half of the imperial period than in the second. The obvious dividing line was the Crimean War of 1854–6, though the reasons for failure in that war could be traced back two generations at least.

From 1700 until 1815, the key to being a European great power, apart from having the basic human and economic resources, was the creation of an effective military and fiscal state apparatus. This Peter I and his successors achieved. Without belittling the achievement of two outstanding monarchs and their lieutenants in 'catching up with Louis XIV', they did enjoy certain advantages. A key impediment to maximising the effectiveness of the European absolutist military-fiscal state was the various territorial and corporate institutions and privileges inherited from the feudal era. These had never been so deeply rooted in the Muscovite frontier lands of Europe, and where they had existed they were uprooted by tsars in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Moreover, Russia like Prussia, belonging to the second wave of European absolutist state-building, was not lumbered by outdated and venal fiscal and administrative institutions, and the vested interests which grew around them.[6] The tsarist

6 See e.g. chapter 1 of T. Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and chapter 11 by Richard Bonney, 'The Eighteenth Century II: The Struggle for Great Power Status and the End of the Old Fiscal Regime', in R. Bonney (ed.), *Economic Systems and State Finance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

autocracy and its alliance with a serf-owning nobility was an exceptionally effective (and ruthless) mechanism for mobilising resources from a vast and pre-modern realm which lacked European assets such as a university-trained bureaucracy until well into the nineteenth century.

By the mid-nineteenth century a professional bureaucratic elite was being created, but by then the factors of power in Europe were changing to Russia's disadvantage. Above all this stemmed from the onset of the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe, and its extension to Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century. Though Nicholas I's government in his thirty-year reign before 1855 might have done a little more to speed Russian economic development, the basic geographical pattern of industrialisation in Europe was way beyond the means of any Russian government to change. Russia's economic backwardness was cruelly evident during the Crimean conflict. The British and French fought and moved with the technology of the industrial era, for instance travelling to the theatre of operations more quickly by steamship and railway from Western Europe than Russian troops could reach Crimea on foot. Meanwhile Russian finances collapsed under the strains of war, and a military system rooted in serfdom could not provide the armed forces with sufficient reserves of trained manpower.

The Crimean War made it clear that modernisation, social and governmental as well as economic, was essential if Russia was to survive as a great power. In 1863 the threat of Anglo-French intervention in support of the Polish rebellion rammed this point home. So too did Prussia's subsequent defeat of Austria and France by skilful use of railways, trained and educated reservists, and a sophisticated modern system of general staff planning, management and co-ordination. In response the tsarist regime did embark on radical policies of economic, administrative and social modernisation. By 1914 Russia was much more modern than she had been in 1856, but in relative terms she was still well behind Germany or Britain. Moreover, the price of very rapid forced modernisation was acute class and ethnic conflict.

The regime's relative failure in war and diplomacy between 1856 and 1914 itself greatly contributed to its declining legitimacy. At the same time internal conflict and tsarism's reduced domestic legitimacy were major factors undermining its position as a great power. It was the threat of revolution at home as much as military reverses which determined the regime to accept unequivocal defeat and sue for peace in 1905 with Japan. By January 1917 Russia's military and economic performance in the Great War had in most ways been deeply impressive, and much better than anyone had a right to