

TO THE QUESTION ON UNDERSTANDING ABSOLUTE AND AUTOCRACY IN RUSSIA

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The authors analyzed the phenomenon of power in Russia, namely, its two forms – autocracy and absolutism. The first part of the article presents a historiographic analysis of this problem by Russian historians. The authors of the article note that the national historians have not worked out a complete unanimity regarding the beginning of the formation of absolutism in Russia. Also up to the present time there is no official unambiguous understanding of the terms “absolutism” and “autocracy” (in their similarity or difference). The second part of the article presents a historical analysis of the peculiarities of the emergence of autocratic power in Russia. The reasons for the formation of autocratic rule in Russia, according to the authors, were: at first, difficult natural and geographical conditions, secondly, the long existence of the Tatar-Mongol yoke, as well as the communal mentality of the Russian people.

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In the second half of the XVII – early XVI-II centuries the state system of Russia, in the opinion of the majority of domestic historians, was transformed into absolutism. The theme of Russian absolutism attracted and attract the attention of domestic historians, jurists, lawyers who, in accordance with their ideology and political views, tried to understand the background, the social essence, the historical significance of Russian absolutism. However, in historical science there is still no unified opinion on the content of this term, although all authors acknowledge that the problems of Russian absolutism are complex and ambiguous. Controversial questions regarding the concept of “absolutism” include the following: the prerequisites for the formation of absolutism, the correlation of the concepts “absolutism” and “autocracy”, the time of the existence of absolutism and the stages of its development, the historical role of absolutism in Russia and a number of others.

Note that the Russian sovereigns of the XVI century, the XVII century and the XVIII century. titled themselves autocrats. In 1716, in the interpretation of the 20 article of the Military Statute, it was noted: “His Majesty is an autocratic monarch, who should not give an answer to anyone in his affairs; but the strength and power has its own states and lands, for example, as a Christian sovereign, by its own will and splendor to rule” [4, P. 50]. A later in the “Spiritual Regulations”, compiled by Theophan Prokopovich, it is recorded: “Monarchs are the autocratic power, which God himself obeys for conscience” [9].

And how did the national researchers treat the notion of “autocracy”? Noble historians stood on the ground of the primacy of the autocracy in Russia. N.M. Karamzin saw him already in the Kiev state and, of course,

in the Moscow state from the moment of its formation. But historian S.M. Soloviev speaks of an absolute monarchy. In the second quarter of the XIX century S.M. Soloviev justified the historical conditionality of Peter’s transformations. Reforms of Peter appeared before him not as a violent break with Ancient Russia and the introduction of customs and practices alien to the country, but as a natural and necessary development of Russian history. For this very reason, S.M. Soloviev attributes the formation of absolutism in Russia to the time of the reign of Peter I.

Unlike S.M. Soloviev, his pupil V.O. Klyuchevsky with confidence found autocracy under Ivan IV, and possibly under Ivan III. It should be noted a fair observation of the modern researcher Y.A. Sorokin that probably these historians “were not interested in the difference in terms” [8, P. 11]. They did not divide such concepts as “autocracy”, “absolutism”, “unlimited monarchy”.

At the turn of the XIX-XX centuries Russian scholars – liberals (for example, M.A. Reisner, V.M. Gessen, P.G. Vinogradov, M.M. Kovalevsky, N.E. Kudrin, P.N. Miliukov) “bred the concept of “autocracy” and “absolutism”, “believing, firstly, that the autocracy was established in Russia much earlier than absolutism (the latter only with Peter I), and secondly, they found a fundamental difference between them in European theories that explain the monarch’s power not by the Divine Craft, but the theory of the common good and the theory of natural law” [8, P. 11-15]. Historians – monarchists in the early XX century distinguished the autocracy from Eastern despotism and Western absolutism. “Autocracy ... lived in the people and in the Church. Absolutism became superior to both of them. Absolute detached from the people, is overshadowed by

an absolute bureaucracy, which, having created an infinitely complex state mechanism, under the Tsar's name, under the sacred slogan of autocracy, is working according to its program, growing and expanding and entangling both the Tsar and the people ..." [3]. Thus, the authors of the turn of the XIX-XX centuries still agreed that in the XVIII century. Russian monarchs had absolute power.

In the 1920-1930-s problems of the history of absolutism were discussed through the prism of the views of the historian M.N. Pokrovsky. Mikhail Nikolaevich linked the establishment of absolutism with the name of Ivan the Terrible. An important reason for the emergence of absolutism in Russia, according to M.N. Pokrovsky, was the economic development of the country in the XVI – XVII centuries. "The modification of the feudal economy under the influence of commodity economy was absolutism, speaking more precisely bureaucratic monarchy" [6, P. 498]. After M.N. Pokrovsky's death, a lively criticism of his views unfolded. Great controversy continued to go on the question of the time of the emergence of absolutism in Russia. Soviet historians, describing the conditions for the emergence of absolutism in Russia, were guided by the well-known statement of K. Marx that absolute monarchy arose in transitional periods when feudal estates decay, and a modern bourgeois class is formed from the medieval estate of townspeople, and when none of the struggling The parties did not yet take the upper hand over the other and F. Engels: "The disintegration of feudalism, as well as the development of cities, both processes caused decentralization, hence the direct need for an absolute monarch and in force, the fastening nationality. It had to be absolute precisely because of the centrifugal character of all elements" [2, P. 417].

However, the modern domestic researcher O.A. Omelchenko believes that historians have not always correctly interpreted the statements of K. Marx and F. Engels, namely: "The analysis of the problems of the concept of absolutism ... built largely on the general concepts taken out of context and interpreted in violation of own problems of this concept of the texts of classical Marxism" [5].

Also, soviet historians referred to the work of Lenin, in which autocracy, absolutism and an unlimited monarchy were viewed as synonyms.

Most Soviet researchers also did not share the notion of "absolutism" and "autocracy". So, for example, Professor S.V. Yushkov argued that the terms we have identified are synonymous. Another researcher S.O. Schmidt

believed that absolutism in Russia was formed in the era of the Moscow kingdom, under Ivan the Terrible, but with the death of the tsar ceased, and then revived in the XVII century in the reign of Mikhail Fedorovich. Herepnin's view is also unique. He allowed the simultaneous coexistence of two forms of the state under Ivan the Terrible: the autocracy in oprichnina and the estate-representative monarchy in the zemshchina. D.N. Alshits unambiguously regards Ivan VI as an absolute monarch.

It should be noted that among the Soviet historians there was a rather heated discussion in the pages of the journal History of the USSR. The discussion as a whole was quite fruitful. A significant number of new sources were introduced into scientific circulation, basic approaches to revealing the social and political essence of the Russian autocracy, the stages of its formation and development were determined.

N.P. Pavlova-Silvanskaya, A.N. Chistvoznov, A.Y. Avrekh distinguished the following features of the Russian autocracy, bringing it closer, in their opinion, to Asian despotism: the prevalence of non-legal methods of governing society and, above all, the personal arbitrariness of monarchs; the predominance of state ownership of land and communal land use; underdevelopment in Russia XVII-XVIII centuries third estate, and hence, exclusively the noble character of Russian absolutism. In particular, according to A.Y. Avrekh, absolutism arose and was finally established under Peter I. The historian believes that the crux of the problem of absolutism is the ratio of feudal and bourgeois in nature and the policy of absolute monarchy. However, in his opinion, the effect of the bourgeois factor in Russia takes force historically too late. Russian absolutism arose and blossomed when the primitive nobility not only did not decompose, but, on the contrary, it consolidated and strengthened. Another factor in the formation and existence of absolutism in Russia A.Y. Avrekh considers the peasantry – the mass social support of Russian absolutism. Thus, in the absence of pronounced bourgeois tendencies in the country, absolutism in Russia arose and was affirmed thanks to the support, on the one hand, of the consolidated nobility and the patriarchal peasantry, on the other. Thus, A.Y. Avrekh defines absolutism as a feudal monarchy, capable of evolving into a bourgeois monarchy.

Another Soviet historian, S.M. Troitsky called the time of appearance of absolutism in Russia in the XVIII century. He argued that "the transition from the estate-representative monarchy to the absolute began in the XVII century and ended mainly in the first quarter

of the XVIII century” [10, P. 24]. A.L. Shapiro also believes that the autocracy, which developed in Russia XVI-XVII centuries – this is one thing, and absolutism of the XVIII century – something else.

However, most of the scientists who took part in the discussion did not support this position. N.I. Pavlenko, A.N. Sakharov, Y.Y. Titov and others argued that, theoretically, the division of concepts into absolutism and east (Asian) despotism is very conditional. After the Western reforms of Peter I, the Russian autocracy, in its external form, is finally drawing closer to Western European absolutism.

The modern historian E.V. Anisimov also does not share the concepts of “autocracy” and “absolutism”: “So in the course of the state reform, Peter I... “strengthened” autocracy in Russia for a long period” [1, P. 292].

Thus, the national historians have not developed complete unanimity regarding the beginning of the formation of absolutism in Russia. Also up to the present time there is no official unambiguous understanding of the terms “absolutism” and “autocracy” (in their similarity or difference).

We would like to note in this connection several features that distinguish Russian autocracy from any other similar phenomena of Western or Eastern history. The fact is that the ability of a Russian person to work, in particular a Russian peasant, is largely determined by natural-geographical conditions. Having a long winter, spring and autumn, often similar to winter and too short a summer, the Russian peasant has to work with great intensity to get the produce. The peasant, unable to produce marketable bread, often sells the product he needs, so he does not “live” but “survives”. That is why Russia has struggled for centuries with the threat of famine, which has been exacerbated by the slightest socioeconomic or political destabilization. That is why, in need of an aggregate surplus product, the state in Russia was to become very strong, like the eastern despotism. Here is the economic reason why autocracy is the specificity of Russia.

Certainly, the presence of the 300-year-old so-called Mongol-Tatar “yoke”, the functioning institution of “hostage”, the long stay of members of the princely family at the rate of the khan, as well as the penetration of eastern traditions into Russian culture, the destruction of the urban veche system, helped to turn away from democratic manifestations, which were in the state system of Ancient Russia, and had a strong influence on the process of forming a new form of power relations and the emergence

of the regime of unlimited power in Russia in the XVIth-XXth centuries. Here we agree with S.A. Kislitsyna, G.N. Serdyukova, I.O. Ionova, that the relationship between the Russian princes and Mongolian khans was built precisely by the type of citizenship and service, that is, “Ministers”, and not by the type of contractual relations, i.e. “Vassalage”, which later resulted in the “despotic autocracy”. The state organization of the Golden Horde, without encroaching on the foundations of the spiritual life of Russians and Orthodoxy, has become a model for the creation of a powerful state. V.V. Shulgin believes that “Russia borrowed from the Mongols their highest achievement and their strongest weapon, namely, the Khanat, that is, the autocracy. The eastern hordes assembled in one hand could not be opposed to each other by a feudal system that was struggling with one another” [7, P. 170].

And, of course, it would be impossible to fold the autocracy without that special type of mentality that existed in the Russian community. In Russia there was no West-specific accent on personality, personal beginning, there were no ambitions related to private property. In Russia, there was “peace”, and the Russian peasant thought the category “we”. Community consent was above the law, above the individual, as discussed by Aksakov and others. But, I would like to note the ambivalence inherent in the community. On the one hand, the community had protective functions: there was social responsibility, collectivism, a certain attitude towards the miserable, poor, arrested, orphans affected by natural disasters, etc. On the other hand, it was the community that monitored the payment of taxes and fees, the execution of punishments and the like. The feudal lords were afraid to encroach on some independence of the community, but it was beneficial and necessary for the system. The community, helping to improve the position of the peasants, simultaneously eased the pressure on them, between the peasants and the peasants. It was included in the state system: the community was a state mechanism of influence on the peasant, a mediator between power and man. This ensured the conservatism and vitality of the community. And in the future this communal mentality, this feeling of self not as “I”, but as “we” was easily transferred to the state and the attitude towards it.

Perhaps this idea is confirmed by the fact that the state could not survive in the conditions of the deepest crisis of the Troubles, if not for the support of the people. An important feature of the emerging ideology was patriarchy and the state’s awareness of the highest value,

compared to which the fate and freedom of a single person did not matter. On the other hand, the people constantly sought protection from the state, which personified in the figure of the sovereign. After all, despite a large number of uprisings, the peasants and the people did not oppose the sovereign or state, but against the boyars, landlords, officials, etc. The very appearance and spread of such an institution as “imposture” testifies, as many researchers note, not about a decrease, but just the opposite, about the growth of the authority of the tsarist power. In the tsar the people saw the true defender, directly referring to him with petitions: for example, in 1606, to False Dmitriy, in 1648, 1662 years to Alexei Mikhailovich. The very fact of such appeals to the tsar testifies to the existence of a definite idea of the inseparability of power and the people on the one hand, and the impossibility of limiting the power of the tsar, or on the other, by something or by somebody else. Thus, there is an evolution towards the tsar – “autocrat” and autocracy.

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