

**KONECZNY, KUCHARZEWSKI AND
ZIENTARA:
THREE POLISH SURVEYS
OF RUSSIAN HISTORY²⁵²**

JIŘÍ VYKOUKAL

Polish-Russian relations have been burdened by numerous mutual insults as well as stereotyping, and it is instructive to examine how this fact has manifested itself in the several general treatments of Russian history that have appeared in Poland in the course of the 20th century. Some of them have been innovative in that they have rounded off and systematized past experiences in ways that subsequently influenced Polish views of Russia and had their impact on concrete political acts. Since these works were written and published in the inter-war period, when Poland's relations with Russia were, at best, cool but correct and also reflected this state of affairs, they could not be welcomed in postwar Poland. They were published mainly by émigré publishing houses and appeared in Poland only in the 1980's, the work of clandestine presses. New editions appeared legally only after 1989.²⁵³

²⁵² The first version of this paper appeared in the Czech journal *Slovanský přehled* (Slavonic Review), see VYKOUKAL, J., *Polské vidění Ruska: příklad negativního stereotypu (IV. Syntézy kanonické i nekanonické)*. *Slovanský přehled*, 86, 2000, č. 2, pp. 215–238.

²⁵³ Of the "official" surveys of Russian history that appeared in postwar Poland, three should be mentioned which are still cited today (I shall give the latest editions from

Two of the reissues of these works merit special attention. The author of the first is Feliks Koneczny (1862–1949), the “Polish Spengler”,²⁵⁴ known chiefly for his historicising treatment of civilizations, one of which appeared in Britain after the Second World War with a preface by Arnold Toynbee.²⁵⁵ Koneczny was a professor at Stephen Bathory University in Vilna until 1929, when as an adherent of the National Democrats he was forced into retirement by the authoritarian regime (*sanacja*). Thereafter he lived in Cracow, where he taught briefly at the Jagellon University in 1945. I shall examine one of his “secondary” works, on Russian history, which was published in two volumes in 1917 and 1929. In the interval he published an abridged version in 1921, which was reissued in 1997.²⁵⁶

The history of Russia, which covers the period from Kievan Rus to the First World War, was divided into five chronological sections: Ancient Rus to the Mongol invasions (1263), The Grand Principality

the 1980's, which reflected the fewest restrictions): Ludwik BAZYŁOW, *Historia Rosji*, 2 volumes, Warszawa 1985 (a one-volume version appeared the same year in the series World History, published by the Wrocław press Ossolineum); Jerzy OCHMAŃSKI, *Dzieje Rosji do r. 1861*, Warszawa-Poznań 1980; Zbigniew Wójcik, *Dzieje Rosji 1533–1801*, Warszawa 1981.

²⁵⁴ For biographical details see Andrzej SZWARC, “Koneczny Feliks”, in *Słownik historyków polskich*, Warszawa 1994, 240–241.

²⁵⁵ Of the best known works I should mention *Polskie Logos i Ethnos* (1921), *O wielości cywilizacji* (1935, English edition London 1963), Of the histories of “civilizations” there is *Cywilizacja bizantyńska, cywilizacja żydowska*. Koneczny is also said to have planned a history of Ottoman civilization which would have completed a set of studies of cultures which threatened the western Latin sphere. See Jędrzej Giertych's preface to Koneczny's *Cywilizacja żydowska*, Warszawa 1995, 5.

²⁵⁶ Feliks KONECZNY, *Dzieje Rosji od najdawniejszych do najnowszych czasów*, Warszawa 1997. Original two-volume version: Feliks KONECZNY, *Dzieje Rosji*, Warszawa 1917 (covers the period to 1449), Feliks KONECZNY, *Litwa a Moskwa w latach 1449-1492* (*Dziejów Rosji, t. II*) Wilno 1929. First edition of abridged version, Feliks KONECZNY, *Dzieje Rosji od najdawniejszych do najnowszych czasów*, Warszawa 1921. The first postwar abridged edition appeared in London as Feliks KONECZNY, *The Origins of Modern Russia*, London 1984, as did the third volume of the survey: Feliks KONECZNY, *Dzieje Rosji, T. III: Schyłek Iwana III 1492–1505*, London 1984. The current Polish edition appeared at the conservative *Antyk* publishing house, which subscribes to the Polish national democratic tradition.

of Moscow, 1263–1449, a transitional phase from 1449–1505, Muscovy through the reign of Peter I (1505–1725), and Imperial Russia, 1725–1914. Koneczny derives his view of Russian history by contrasting it with that of Poland, which reveals two areas of difference. In the first place, while the content of Polish history is given (i.e. by its western Latin and Roman Catholic kernel) and changes only as regards form, the changes in Russian history are more often a matter of content rather than form. As the text further shows, Koneczny has in mind the fact that Russia holds fast to form, which in times of bewildering change provides at least the semblance of continuity and order. Hence the disposition toward autocracy (the most elementary form of government) which endures through various orientations, or the vacillation between East and West and the tendency to regard itself as a special type of civilization, or the tendency to accept models which have no tradition within Russia, where there exist no mechanisms for assimilating external impulses or transforming them into agencies of further development. The second area of difference concerns the fact that Russia has not yet begun to work on its “being”, since the course of its history has never forced it to any intensive exercise of its own intellectual potential. Here Koneczny does not mean to suggest that Russian history consists merely of situations and periods in which the people are exposed to oppression; he simply declares that all impulses here are diffused, without giving rise to elements leading to substantive change: “Life there, especially on the banks of the Volga, flowed broadly, without depth.”²⁵⁷

Koneczny identifies as the chief element, axis or dimension of Russian history its amorphous quality, its ability to swallow whole the most varied external impulses. Russia is neither the counterpart nor the negation of Western Europe; it has no content of its own, it exists without constituent elements. In so far as it can be defined, it must be on the basis of some concrete semblance which is the result of

²⁵⁷ Feliks KONECZNY, *Dzieje Rosji od najdawniejszych do najnowszych czasów*, Warszawa 1997, 1.

penetration and influence from other civilizations which are strong in content and well rounded. Thus Koneczny adopts a neutral position in the old dispute over the relation between *Rus* and *Russia*, since there is not much difference between the two in any case in that both represent a "civilization without an identity". It is no accident that Koneczny did not include Russia among the types of civilization which he regarded as key (Latin, Byzantine, Jewish, Turkish). Rather it was a type which absorbed certain elements from other civilizations or acted as a parasite upon them.

Nor does Koneczny recognize the eastern liturgy as a positive or formative feature of Russian history, because like earlier or later impulses (the followers of Rurik, the Mongols) it is merely one of the foreign influences repeatedly brought to bear upon a cultural void. The Varangian element was unable to create a state because it had no interest in the Russian space, only using it as a transitional territory leading to the Mediterranean. As a loose confederation of clans, it never created a systematic political territory or anything resembling a state organization.²⁵⁸ Similarly, Byzantine Christianity failed to create an authentic Christianity but merely introduced a dual system in which paganism provided the content and Christianity the form. Since the first of Rurik's dynasty regarded their residence on Russian territory as temporary, they were not vitally interested in the question of religious organization, and the state-forming content of the Byzantine mission was soon allowed to atrophy. Nor does Koneczny see the Mongol invasion as a formative element, again for several reasons. The "Mongolization" of the eastern Slavic territories had occurred earlier, during the Cuman incursions, when a Mongol-Slavonic culture had been created which in turn served to suppress Byzantine influences and contributed to the disorganization of Russian territory. The conquest of the Russian space was not part of the Mongol's plans: they were only interested in subjugating the Cumans, who had earlier fled before the Mongols from central Asia.

²⁵⁸ F. KONECZNY, *Op. cit.*, 11.

But their arrival provoked the Russian princes, who defended the Cumans, to whom they were bound by ties of kinship (Mstislav the Brave and his Cuman father-in-law). With the catastrophic defeat at Kalka Rus became the focus of Mongol attention.²⁵⁹

The only formative elements which could have crystallized the Russian space culturally came from Poland (the first contact came in 981), though not always by optimal means. In 1448–49 peace was concluded bringing to an end the dispute over the Lithuanian-Russian regions and laying down a border between Russia and Poland, i.e. the West.²⁶⁰ The ecclesiastical union formed in 1596 in Brest, could have no authentic influence in Russia, since it depended on Polish eastward expansion – without powerful support its weak Catholic content would have been again swallowed up by Russia, resulting in the conviction that the Pope had been converted to Orthodoxy. The western pressure on Russia ended with the Cossack wars, and Muscovy began to expand westward. Poland was gradually “orientalized”, the Kievan cultural center disappeared, the chance was lost to create a Russian (in the sense pertaining to “Rus” rather than “Russia”) nation, and under Russian influence (in the sense pertaining to “Russia” rather than “Rus”) the “graft of European culture” in the East expired.²⁶¹

With Peter I (“the Great” was what he called himself) there began a period in which the feverish rush to acquire “European” values itself revealed perfectly the antagonism between form and content, as a state was created outside the society, which moreover was indifferent to that society. In the tracks of the reforms under Peter and Catherine, however, elements of Latin culture began to penetrate involuntarily into Russia, whose presence Koneczny perceives in the development of literature or the foundation of universities – but he does not claim that this resulted in a direct “Latinization” of Russia, rather that within Russia there arose fruitful disputes or paradoxes (university = autocracy

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

versus autonomy, literature = autocracy versus creative freedom), which possess a positive aspect for the future in that they contribute to Russia's europeanization, the cultivation of national feeling.²⁶² However, since the absorbent effect of the Russian space once again comes into play, reforms and disputes are not carried through to the end and call forth internal stress, which is relieved in the old and tested manner – by expansion, this time at the expense of Poland. The breakup of the Polish-Lithuanian state between 1772 and 1795 meant that Russia entered Europe as a geographical element, but acquired nothing therefrom since it lacked the necessary mechanisms for adopting certain values. Thus the contact instead produced a profound disorientation which is palpable through most of the 19th century.²⁶³

The Russian environment thus produced several new situations. Increasingly stretched between Europe and Asia (parallel engagements in the Balkans and in Central Asia), Russia collapses in upon itself, when (as the Crimean War demonstrates) it is unable to compete militarily with the West (which it considers decadent) and meanwhile the Congress of Berlin humiliates it by forcing it to give up the fruit of its advance in the Balkans. Russia forms apologetic and critical variants of its further existence and development. The apologetic variant is formulated by N. N. Danilevsky in his theses on the rottenness of the West and Russian patronage of the Slavic world, all the while preserving absolutism as the quintessence of the spirit of Russian history. The critical variant is represented by radical movements and groups (nihilism, terrorism, socialism) who, however, are just as indifferent as the absolutists to the real society and operate on programs that amount to social fiction.²⁶⁴

The second moment comes with developments after the Crimean War, when the industrial revolution begins in Russia. Unlike the reforms of Peter and Catherine, which merely reproduced “form without content”, industrialization represents a real innovation in the

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 192.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 212.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

history of western influence on Russia. For that reason, this revolution is “indigestible” for the Russian environment, because independently of conservative Panslavism or proto-socialist radicalism, it creates within this environment a truly European model of economic relations which, being unrestrainable, emphasizes the increasing Russian dependence on capitalism, its technological and financial strength. Proof of the fact that industrialization first introduced an element into Russia which it was unable to control or rework to fit in with its experience was the economic policy of S. J. Witte, which Koneczny assesses as an unsuccessful attempt to use European developments in support of Russian absolutism. By its advance westward (the annexation of Poland and the rest) Russia created an insoluble cultural dilemma for its own identity (Slavophiles and Westernizers). The industrial revolution exposed its structural dilemma, the incompatibility of archaic absolutism and modern industrialism.²⁶⁵ The two conflicts which after 1905 (the war with Japan and the revolution) merged into one practical problem – the renewal of external forces and the end of absolutism – brought the Polish question into prominence. Its “external” solution, or the settlement of the position of the Polish Kingdom within Russia, could, in relation to Germany and Austria-Hungary, strengthen the external position of Russia, its “internal” solution, or merging Polish and Russian constitutionalism, could bring with it an internal regeneration of the Russian state. But the Russian system was paralyzed, and the European crisis offered the last opportunity – to use the war to secure the prestige of Russian autocracy.²⁶⁶

The author of the second re-edition is Jan Kucharzewski (1876-1952), a historian and politician (premier of the Polish government set up under Austro-German patronage in November 1917), who spent the inter-war years in Poland and after 1940 emigrated to Switzerland and the United States, where he died.²⁶⁷ In 1924

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

²⁶⁷ Biographical data in Andrzej SZWARC, “Kucharzewski Jan”, in *Słownik historyków polskich*, Warszawa 1994, 274–275.

Kucharzewski published the first volume of his substantial series of studies collectively entitled *Od białego do czerwonego caratu*, which appeared in seven volumes until 1935 and covered Russian history from the period when Muscovy began to emancipate itself from Tatar domination to the reign of Nicholas II. A further three volumes dealing with the Soviet Union until the Second World War were destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising and the author never reconstructed them. Instead he prepared an abridged version of his work while in exile, which was published in New York in 1949 as *The Origin of Modern Russia* and appeared in Polish in London (both editions were supported by the Polish émigré community). The first legal edition in Poland appeared in 1990.²⁶⁸

The work is divided into twelve chapters which combine a chronological and thematic approach. The author has selected key periods, to each of which he assigns a theme which he considers to be of key importance and which give concrete shape to the central idea of his work. The first chapter (*Świeca Iwana Kality*) summarizes the essential background of modern Russian history, partly through the author's interpretation and partly through commentary on the "Russian Journey" of Adolph de Custine of 1843, which in Poland and elsewhere was often cited as revealing the true face of Russia.²⁶⁹ The

²⁶⁸ I shall cite the following edition: Jan KUCHARZEWSKI, *Od białego do czerwonego caratu*, Gdańsk 1990. In the original edition, the volumes appeared as follows: I. *Epoka mikołajewska*, II. *Dwa światy*, III. *Lata przelomu: Romanow, Pugaczow, czy Pestel*, IV. *Wyzwolenie ludów*, V. *Terrorysty*, VI. *Rządy Aleksandra III – Ku reakcji*, VII. *Triumf reakcji*. The work began to appear illegally in Poland in 1986, first as Jan KUCHARZEWSKI, *Od białego do czerwonego caratu, Tom I, II*, Warszawa, Głos, 1986, a second edition as Jan KUCHARZEWSKI, *Od białego do czerwonego caratu, Tom I, II*, Warszawa, Maraton, 1986, and a third edition as Jan KUCHARZEWSKI, *Od białego do czerwonego caratu, Tom I, II*, Warszawa, Krag, 1988.

²⁶⁹ De Custine published his work in Paris in 1843 under the title *La Russie en 1839*. George Kennan, among others, considers that de Custine intended an "eastern" version of de Tocqueville's analysis of American democracy which provided an accurate picture of Russian despotism. The first post-Communist Polish edition appeared in 1989: Astolphe Markiz DE CUSTINE, *Listy z Rosji. Rosja w 1839 roku*, Kraków 1989, 249 pp.

second chapter (*Lud*) deals with the position of the Russian *muzhik* and the countryside generally, the third (*Niepokój inteligencji*) the fate of the Russian intelligentsia after the Napoleonic Wars, the fourth (*Ku tamtemu brzegowi*) Herzen and the genesis of the Russian critique of Western civilization and conviction of Russian superiority, the fifth (*Nihilista*) the motivations of Russian political and cultural radicalism, the sixth (*Bakunin*) a leading representative of the foregoing, the seventh (*Fatalna sprawa*) Polish influence on Russian political culture, the eighth (*Przestrogi*) the relationship between Russian and Polish revolutionary movements, the ninth (*Rozstajne drogi*) the differences that emerged at the time of the January Uprising, the tenth (*Tatarski Grakchus*) Russian-Polish relations in the aftermath of the January Uprising, the eleventh (*Zwiastuni*) the intellectual and political background of the Russian Revolution, and the twelfth (*Demokracja socjalna*) the ideology and policies of Russian Marxism to 1917.

Like Koneczny, Kucharzewski begins by presenting his vision of Russian history, to which he adheres throughout the work. According to Kucharzewski the basis of Russian history is the connection between expansion and despotism. What Muscovy (not historically identical with present-day Russia) proclaimed as unification of the nation was in fact only an expedient fiction, a belated justification for expansion which destroyed the individuality of the conquered territories and adapted them to its own model. A certain equalization became: "...the instinct of the government and of the nation, too".²⁷⁰ Within such a "system" there exists a balance between domestic and foreign policy, which became mutually supplementary during the period when Russia came into closer contact with Europe as Russian help was sought in the wars against the Turks. During this contact two facts were underlined: Europe was fascinated by Russian massiveness, but it underestimated the Russian intellect, or cunning, so that Muscovy was always able to get the better of the Europeans.

²⁷⁰ Jan KUCHARZEWSKI, *Od białego do czerwonego caratu*, Gdańsk 1990, 9.

Russia always respected strength, and was capable of enduring military defeat, while it could not tolerate diplomatic defeat. A war could be won the second time around, but an “intellectual” defeat simply underlined what Russia feared the most: the recognition that it was a backward land: “It was a snobbery of civilization, based on dissimulation in order to win a good name in the world.”²⁷¹

After consideration of the “system” and its internal and external manifestations Kucharzewski presents two further protagonists of Russian history: the people and the intelligentsia. In the first case, the situation is clear: the peasantry represent the dark, primitive, uneducated mass, who, since the system did nothing to change their position, simply settled into their lot and freed themselves from it only occasionally (and temporarily) through numerous peasant uprisings which were sparked by a combination of intolerable oppression and a fanatical faith in the existence of mythical *ukaz* which was said to grant their freedom. The oppressed people represent a source of social catastrophe of unbelievable dimensions. The road from emphasis on the system to emphasis on the people is “the road from the white tsar to the red tsar, whose image lived in the masses ... The arms of the popular tsar will not be the double-headed Byzantine eagle but rather the red cock”.²⁷²

Kucharzewski arrives at a similar dead end when considering the intelligentsia. The first generation of Russian intellectuals who had a chance to introduce something of the European spirit into Russia, the generation of the Napoleonic Wars and the make-believe liberalism under Alexander, was brought to heel after the Decemberist uprising, while the ensuing generation, brought up under Nicholas I and his successors, had no such chance. Chaadayev’s fate (his critique of prevailing conditions was not punished but rather declared to be the fruit of a disturbed mind) was the exception confirming the rule.²⁷³ With the political break during the reign of Alexander I, access to

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 103.

civilized methods of resolving the situation was closed off, and the intelligentsia were faced with a fateful choice of options: should they support absolutism or seek its destruction by equally despotic methods? Thus tsarist absolutism limits the formulation of a conception of freedom within the framework of law and civil society. Its nemesis will be equally tyrannical, and despotism will have given birth to more despotism.²⁷⁴

During the 19th century several so far separate trends began to amalgamate into a recognizable form. The subjugation of the church to the state resulted in the secularization of the intelligentsia (i.e. the appearance of fashionable atheism in the 1850's), who, however, in the secular sphere communicate only with absolutist political and intellectual models and thus lose contact with the European conception of politics. In fact, a gathering opposition to Europe emerged, which subconsciously reflected Russian cultural inferiority, for which a solution was sought which included an apocalyptic vision. Within this backward Russia would wreak revenge on "arrogant" Europe. Hence the strong inclination toward socialism, which proclaims the equality of all nations or reduces the national element in favor of a new concept, and also toward anarchism, which proclaims the possibility of action. The sources of catastrophe are with a certain satisfaction defined in the "dark" countryside, upon which the intelligentsia, like the state, feeds parasitically. But the intellectuals cannot bring about its reform and only heighten its explosive quality which will engulf the entire world: Russia will avenge the injustice wrought by history by destroying history and installing a new world without history. According to Kucharzewski three basic elements became defined in the 1850's which composed the solution of the Russian predicament launched in 1917: the mirror effect of political tyranny, the rural revolution, and the effort to supersede the cultural deficit.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

Subsequent development only fills out this bare outline, revealing the face of the coming revolution. Kucharzewski traces the metamorphosis from the example of A. I. Herzen, who transferred the idea of liberation from the European context to that of Russian imperialism with its national and pan-Slavic potential. He believes that Herzen already embodied the fateful schism within the Russian mentality: Europe = Enlightenment; Russia = instinct. With Herzen instinct begins to suppress enlightenment. The shell of a superficial Europeanized culture begins to crack and the old dream returns: Moscow will again become the Third Rome, but “on the far bank” – it will no longer be Moscow leading the world according to European rules, but rather Moscow destroying the world in order to build a new one on its ruins. This prefigures not only the Russian Revolution, but also the fundamental attitude of all “underdeveloped nations” who aim to punish the haughty West by their revolt.²⁷⁶

Beginning with the fifth chapter Kucharzewski specifies the means by which the Herzen matrix will be filled out. The nihilist (the figure of Bazarov from Turgenev’s “Fathers and Children”) represents the generational split within the Russian family of the 1850’s and 1860’s against the background of the atheistic mode which followed the defeat in the Crimean War. Religion is replaced by a materialist dogma, a sort of “monodeism” against the background of erupting barbarism – all that transcends this dogma, any kind of civilization or culture, is *nihil* and must be destroyed.²⁷⁷ Nihilism from desperation unites the intelligentsia with the countryside to form a fateful wedge identical with blunt, non-transcendent and dogmatic materialism. Fateful because it appears to be the only solution to the consequences of the blow which Russia received from the reforms of Peter I. The reform “plowed up” the upper classes without touching the lower, for whom culture and civilization remained alien. Figuratively speaking, the “head” of the society attempted to move at

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

great speed, while the "feet" remained unmoved. The nihilist intelligentsia, then, is the body which the feet carry, but it will be a body without a head. Bazarov is the prototype of such an intellectual ("a university educated Pugachev"), whom Turgenev must kill off, since he would otherwise set off an annihilating conflagration.²⁷⁸

The basic outline of this conflagration is given by Bakunin, whose early vision of revolt recalls Robespierre, though he goes further when he combines the yearning to destroy and the yearning to create into a single instinct, which he called "fury".²⁷⁹ At first, until the revolutions of 1848-49, this ambivalent instinct is connected to emerging European Communism, but with the failure of revolution it is applied to Russia: the European revolution failed and Bakunin, like Herzen, looks to the "far bank", like a Chiliastic prophet looking to the East for the coming of the new Messiah. Meanwhile he begins to lay out in greater detail his conception of revolution, which must be world-wide and combine elements of anarchy and despotism, in which anarchy mirrors the dark explosiveness of the peasant masses and despotism the inability to become free of the absolutism of the Russian experience.²⁸⁰

Kucharzewski finds one obstacle which acts as a brake on Russian expansion (whether fuelled by absolutism or opposition to it) and the spread of despotism: this obstacle was and remains Poland. Kucharzewski illustrates the negativity of Russian thinking about Poland with Karamzin's memoranda to Alexander I. As a peaceful nation embodying freedom, Poland represents the antithesis of Russia, which is aggressive and despotic. If the attitude of the Russian regime to Poland is clear, what of the opposition's attitude? Kucharzewski points to the example of the Decemberists who, despite the legend of Russian-Polish friendship propagated by radical elements of the Polish emigration, were generally hostile toward Poland and willing to concede at most a limited Polish autonomy but

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

certainly not partnership. The motivation for such an attitude may be illustrated again by the example of Herzen: if the old world is to be destroyed in the name of the Slavonic element, then strong and Catholic (or Latin and “de-Slavicized”) Poland must be forcibly returned to the Slavic family – an impossibility if Poland were independent.²⁸¹ Russian Slavic or Panslavic ideology thus became a common dimension of Russian despotism and the Russian opposition to it; it was the expression of the denial of the West. In this situation Poland always preferred union with Western civilization before the chimera of an aggressive Eastern Slavism.²⁸²

The first Russian revolutionaries were informed of the “cultural deficit” of their country by, among others, the Polish “migr’s, but they refused to accept this information, instead reproaching the Poles on two counts: their respect for tradition (which excluded revolutionary radicalism) and their patriotism (which excluded participation in the universal Slavic revolution). For them Poland was thinkable only as part of the Slavic revolution, which would regenerate the land as a firm part of the Slavic world: thus the Russian revolution took over the methods of the regime and demonstrated (as Michelet wrote during the January Uprising in Poland) that Russia represents barbaric force and enmity toward the West. But barbarity is not merely endemic in Russian tradition, it is constantly renewed by the existence of the dark countryside, which sooner or later will throw off the yoke of state despotism and call forth a revolution which will be channeled only through revolutionary despotism.²⁸³

Russia and Poland began definitively to part ways at the beginning of the 1860’s – in the sense that the earlier illusion of the possibility of joint action disappeared as mutually antipathy set in. The agrarian reforms, which evoked praise from the West, and the brutal police

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 266. In contemporary Russia these arguments are often used by proponents of “sacral” geopolitics, represented for example by the controversial political scientist Alexander Dugin.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 194–195.

intervention against the Warsaw disturbances at the beginning of 1861, which evoked criticism from the West, placed Russia in a difficult position. Russia was vitally concerned to maintain its prestige in the West, but the prominence of the Polish question raised fears that Catholic Poland would serve as a wedge which could allow the West to penetrate into Orthodox Russia. Kucharzewski illustrates the genesis of this phobia using the example of the journalist and politician Michail Nikiforovich Katkov, who made aversion to Poland one of the foundation stones of Russian conservatism. Katkov did not invent this attitude, he merely gave precision to an existing mood. It was also turned against the opposition at home and in exile, which was accused of having been "de-Russified" through connivance with the Polish-Catholic-Jesuit conspiracy which was behind the January Uprising.²⁸⁴ The Russian liberals did not remain far behind, and if before the uprising they regarded the Polish question with a mixture of condescension and patronage, during its course they deplored the violence, while the other Russian political currents were seized with nationalist fury.²⁸⁵

Nor did the revolutionaries break ranks when they came to regard the Polish uprising as a manifestation of nationalism. But they added a twist. Not only did nationalism impede universal revolution, it also created political strength, as the example of Italian unification was beginning to show. As nationalism moved eastward, any concessions to Poland could provoke a chain reaction in the other provinces of the empire and, what was worse, Polish ambitions could become united to those of Byelorussia and the Ukraine.²⁸⁶ The final moment of the Polish-Russian divorce was the irresponsible diletantism of Russian radical circles which shortly before the uprising assured the Poles that their revolutions would unfold together, that the Russian revolutionaries would guarantee the neutrality of the army. What in fact happened was that from the shadow of an illusory struggle of

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 306, 309.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 322.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 331.

two conceptions of Russia (the revolutionary against the despotic) a new scheme emerged: Great Russian messianism, which had no intention of respecting the Polish viewpoint.²⁸⁷

If M. N. Katkov articulated the attitude of the Russian public toward the Polish question and the January Uprising, then General Michail Muravyev gave free reign to these views during its suppression. He was the embodiment of Russian expectations, a strong and merciless man who cannot be accused of any kind of sympathy with the Poles. Russia applauded his methods and his legend raised him to the status of Marshal Suvorov, remembered for his bloody settling of accounts with Warsaw at the end of Kosciuszko's uprising. Muravyev was a transitional figure who combined two trends: the definitive inauguration of an anti-Polish course (control of Poland to guarantee Russian security), and the refutation of the opposition movement of the 1860's (any opposition will hereafter compete with the regime strictly as an alternative despotism).²⁸⁸ The policy of state integration, which came with the defeat of the January Uprising and was ubiquitous by the end of the 1870's, was only a repetition of the measures instituted by Ivan III against Novgorod: – ... only the body remained; the Polish spirit flew off to become part of the Great Russian spirit.²⁸⁹ Thus Russia closed off the road to any sort of reform (i.e. through Europe) and the solution to its problems eventually passed into the hands of the Red successors to tsarist despotism.

These formed a vehicle for their activities in the emerging workers' movement, when the First International was set up amid the quarrels between Marx and Mazzini. Bakunin, who represented a third formative element in this combination, bided his time in the background and used the quarrels to his own advantage. Meanwhile he worked out his own program (the *Revolutionary Catechism* and *Organization*), making use of a number of European (organizational) principles for the enrichment of Russian messianism, while at the

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 358.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 404–406.

same time eliminating any European element from his conception (his attacks on education, culture and science). He intensified his attack on religion and pointed to the practical uses of the "furies" which lurk in the human (i.e. Russian) spirit as the chief source of the coming apocalyptic uprising against the existing order.²⁹⁰

In typical Russian style, he took over from Europe its technological and organizational models without the ability to appreciate their cultural origin and context. This style of thinking came to the fore in the disputes between Bakunin and Marx, when the program of European socialism, aimed at putting over its own ideas for the accomplishment of a certain measure of social progress, was eliminated from the Russian program, which was unwilling to allow capitalism to mature, preferring to take advantage of its weaknesses to carry through an immediate social revolution which, with the help of an anarchist-despotic government, would destroy the state and its social order. As the various potential centers of the European revolution faded and the socialist movement shifted to an evolutionary model of development, Bakunin formulated and defended the basic prototype of the Russian revolutionary. He located the fundamental impulse of revolution in the destruction of all moral and legal norms and the crushing of human individuality.²⁹¹

Bakunin thus formed a model which was incorporated into the theory and practice of Russian social democracy as a special type of socialist movement, which in the person of G. V. Plechanov began to represent the nationally exclusive and aggressive model of socialism which took over wholesale the despotic and intolerant legacy of Russian absolutism. The beginnings of Russian social democracy and Russian Marxism belong to the period of terrorist attacks on the regime and the highlighting of the Jacobin type of revolution, which again is merely a metamorphosis of Russian state terrorism against its own people.²⁹² Russian Marxism, however, already predicated terror

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 408.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 448.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 460.

not only as a method of achieving power but also as the means of retaining it, applicable also to the enemies, the creators and even the avant-garde of the revolution. Russian Marxism also arose under the influence of the anti-Jewish pogroms and was saturated with a Jewish element which saw in socialism the natural chance to avenge the wrongs it had suffered. In the relationship between its regime and its people, Russia had been pushed through the centuries toward extremity, and it could be aroused by an extreme reaction. Since the country lacked the type of conservative middle class which in France stopped the Jacobin fury, the way was open for political extremism. In its search for social support Russian socialism turned to the lowest masses and played on their instincts with the simple promise of legalized theft. But since it knew that the expropriators would become owners and acquire the mental habits of those whose property they destroyed, it had to incorporate a permanent despotism, which would allow the permanent deracination of humanity, turning people into automatons.²⁹³

This element was present at the split within Russian social democracy into Menshevik and Bolshevik factions. The latter at first defended the conception of revolution as "bourgeois-democratic" but soon abandoned this position. The bourgeoisie was weak, but it was the only element able to direct society. On the other hand, this weakness of the bourgeoisie, together with the antipathy of the peasantry, could be used to win a monopoly of power. This solution to their dilemma reveals the Bolsheviks as the true heirs of Russian political culture: faithful to their political nature, they grope almost instinctively toward despotic power. Equally instinctively, the society, accustomed to being ruled, subjugates itself to them: inconveniences from constitutionalism to the originally autonomous soviets could be easily dealt with through political force. To ward off the threat of counter-revolution, the Bolsheviks turned over the propertied classes

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 476.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 484.

to the tender mercies of the people, so that through “circuses” they were also able to provide them with “bread”.²⁹⁴

The third work takes us ahead by several decades, when in the first half of the 1980's the posthumous work of the medievalist Benedykt Zientara (1928-1983)²⁹⁵ appeared illegally, a study of the relation between despotism and democracy in Russian history.²⁹⁶ Zientara focuses on the period from Kievan-Novgorod Russia to the reign of Catherine II. But the work only appears to be handicapped thereby in relation to the other two: while it does not cover the 19th or 20th centuries (the completion of the absolutist system and the continuity between absolutism and Bolshevik totalitarianism), it does in fact concern precisely these segments of Russian history, in which most historians (not merely Polish) have sought the constituent elements of Russian autocracy and Soviet dictatorship. This chronological focus is divided into five parts combining chronological and thematic approaches: Rurik's legacy (until the Tatar invasions), the Tatar Yoke (1238-1240), The Gosudar of All Russia (the genesis of autocracy and the concept of the Third Rome), the road to absolutism (the Time of Troubles and the first Romanovs), and the great metamorphosis (Russia under Peter I and Catherine II).

In the first chapter Zientara introduces the basic features of the east Slavic space, to which he gives both geographic and climatic definition (a transit region for nomadic Asian groups, substantial distance from western Europe (advantage for the separation from German influence, avoiding the extinction that befell the Elbe and Baltic Slavs), and a considerable number of ethnic groups as potential nations and states, whose final number, however, was decided by the

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 500–505.

²⁹⁵ Biographical data are in Marek BARAŃSKI, “Zientara Benedykt”, in *Słownik historyków polskich*, 581-582. Among his best known works is *Świt narodów europejskich* published in 1985 (second edition, Warszawa 1996).

²⁹⁶ Benedykt ZIENTARA, *Dawna Rosja. Despotyzm i demokracja*, Warszawa 1995, 157 pp. The work appeared illegally as Benedykt Zientara, *Despotyzm i tradycje demokratyczne w dawnej historii Polski*, Kraków 1985. 31 pp.

structure of waterways,²⁹⁷ by means of which the Varangians penetrated into the region, founding on the banks of the Dnieper a state later called Rus after one of the Varangian groups. Here Zientara encounters the so-called Norman theory in Russian historiography, on which he adopts a moderate line. According to him some of the local ethnic groups would sooner or later form states, but the Norman arrival speeded up the process by offering their model which endured because the Norman presence was long-term. Thus he admits the importance of the external factor in the origin of Russian statehood. At the same time Zientara asserts that the east Slavic environment soon absorbed this incursion; cultural and linguistic assimilation took place as can be seen by the Slavic names given to members of Rurik's dynasty. With the stabilization of Rurik's state along the axis of the Dnieper, it encountered its first obstacles in eastern Europe (Poland, the Steppe invaders and the eastern Bulgarians) and elsewhere (Norman, Arabic and Byzantine influences), and it expanded chiefly into territory settled by Baltic and Finnish groups.²⁹⁸

The fact that Rurik's state was founded on ties of kinship was one obstacle to its integration; another was paganism. Thus the adoption of Christianity at some point became a political imperative. Unlike the west Slavic states which vegetated on the periphery of Latin Christianity and were the objects of the policies which led to the extinction of the Elbe and Baltic Slavs, the Russian space lay within the sphere of influence of eastern Christianity, of Constantinople ("the treasure-house of Mediterranean civilization"). The result was a "massive and rapid" cultural flowering in Russia, which can be "measured by comparison with its west Slavic neighbors."²⁹⁹ The fact that eastern Christianity penetrated into eastern Europe through the Slavonic liturgy led to an enormous growth in education (again immeasurably greater than among the western Slavs, where Christianization took place through the "foreign" medium of Latin), so that by the 11th and 12th centuries it

²⁹⁷ Benedykt ZIENTARA, *Dawna Rosja. Despotyzm i demokracja*, Warszawa 1995, 15.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24–25.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

is possible to speak of basic literacy among broad segments of the society, a rich literature, both in translation and autonomous, and also the fact that education and knowledge of languages were considered a necessary component of dynastic education.³⁰⁰

The adhesion of the Russian space to eastern Christianity did not mean the closure of roads to the West, as is shown by numerous dynastic ties, especially with the Polish Piasts but also with west European courts. For the western Slavs of Central Europe and the eastern Slavs of Eastern Europe the quarrel between the eastern and western churches played no role, because the language problem was not so formidable here as it was in the Mediterranean region, where Latin and Greek competed not only in the religious sphere but also politically and commercially. Zientara, however, dates the true schism to 1204, when the Crusaders plundered Constantinople and provoked that aversion of aggressive and intolerant Latin Christianity which later spread (thanks for example the advance of the Teutonic Knights along the Baltic coast and into northern Russia) also among the eastern Slavs.³⁰¹ In comparison with the western Slavs, who despite accepting Latin Christianity still had to confront the claims of the Empire, the acceptance of the eastern liturgy did not mean political subordination to Byzantium. On the other hand, not even the existence of a unified ecclesiastical organization of the western type could have ensured the effective integration of the state. Family quarrels broke out in Rurik's dynasty from the 11th century, resulting in the disintegration of Kievan Rus in the following century which, however, was not accompanied by cultural decline. On the contrary, Zientara maintains that the decay of political structures and the halt to territorial expansion were accompanied by an unusual cultural, economic and commercial development within the Russian space, evidence of which is found in the famous "Song of Igor's Campaign" (whose validity for the beginning of the 13th century Zientara does

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

not call into question). But the political decline weakened the Russian space in relation to neighboring states (the Poles, Hungarians, Lithuanians and Teutonic Knights), who attempted to tear it apart. But the greatest influence was the gathering incursion of the Polovtsi or Cumans, which pushed the population westward (Red Rus, bordering on Poland), but also northward (the region of Rostov-Suzdal), where "New Russia" originated. The decay of the Russian space at the end of the 12th century was not connected with the original inheritance arrangements of Rurik's dynasty, but it allowed the rise of territorial units with differing political and economic structures: Kievan Rus (the future Ukraine), the Rostov-Suzdal region (the future Russia or Muscovy), southwestern Red Rus (the territory of Galicia), the territory under the control of Great Novgorod and the western part of the Russo-Lithuanian borderland, later called Byelorussia or White Russia (Minsk) and Black Russia (Grodna). To these differentiations ethnic differences were added in time.³⁰²

The Mongol invasion in the 1230's and 1240's had two consequences, according to Zientara: the political disintegration of the Russian space was speeded up, and it was torn away from Europe: not only did it lose contact with western Europe, but the Byzantine empire never recovered from the shock of 1204 and lost its capacity for cultural expansion. "Russia" was thus isolated from the surrounding world and controlled by a special, terroristic regime which for two centuries made the populations of occupied territories the instruments of its domination. Both these factors, however, operated unevenly. The western regions escaped Tatar influence, so that "Red Rus" was able to maintain contact with Poland and Hungary, finally falling under their influence, while the White Russian and Ukrainian regions also avoided the Tatars but came to be dominated by the Lithuanian state; also exempt from Tatar control were the regions around Novgorod and Pskov. The Tatars directly ruled only the region of Rostov-Suzdal.³⁰³

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 36–37.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 52.

In northern Russia, which had been a refuge since the time of the Cuman invasions, there existed side by side two distinct political systems: the later Muscovite despotism, and the early Novgorod democracy. Zientara devotes more attention to the Novgorod model which, with all its advantages and drawbacks he evaluates as that thread of Russian tradition to which Russian liberalism pointed as evidence that the Russian psyche is not inevitably condemned to passivity in the face of violence and despotism.³⁰⁴ The Novgorod model, of course, was not democratic in the modern sense, but it represented a sovereign feudal-democratic republic governed by an oligarchic group of merchants, boyars and clergy, in which certain aspects of the rule of law are in evidence – the subordination of proprietary and personal rights and liberties to the court, free disposal of land, or the possibility to change one's status following upon increased wealth.

Zientara believes that Novgorod cannot be classified among the city-states of the ancient world or the renaissance, but unfortunately he gives no further guideline (such as possible comparison with the Hansa model, etc.); he merely asserts that Novgorod's political liberties and its contacts with the western world represented a thorn in the side of the political system that arose in the Rostov-Suzdal region, inspired by the despotic Tatar model. Since Novgorod was torn by domestic strife from the 14th century, its lower classes were willing to join with Moscow against the boyars (although the author does not deal with the objection that Novgorod can hardly be called "democratic" if its populace preferred Muscovy). Moreover, the city was dependent on grain supplies from the Rostov-Suzdal region and their interruption threatened famine, further increasing the radicalism of the lower classes. Aversion toward Novgorod was supported by Great Russian society, which helped to overcome the political division of the land – the struggle against Novgorod was a struggle for national (sic.) unity which, however, was to "come about

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

through despotic power, destroying the Novgorod democratic tradition.”³⁰⁵ Moscow’s pressure on the city intensified once Novgorod began contact with Jagellonian Poland, whose model it considered superior to Moscow’s. In an age of unification Novgorod’s separatism might be viewed as an anachronism; however, the price of unity was a state model foreign to Russian tradition which gave the ruler unlimited power.³⁰⁶

The Muscovite system arose from different circumstances from that of Novgorod. Once the Tatars finished with their destruction, they did not change the political system or the rulers. Their only interest was to exploit the conquered territory, what they did through selected Russian princes, who exploited their own people in the interests of a foreign power and punished them for disloyalty. The most effective in this regard were the Muscovite princes, of whom Ivan Kalita reached the highest position. He strengthened Muscovy economically, secured the transfer of the Metropolitan from Kiev, began the colonization of territory inhabited by Finno-Ugric speaking peoples, and secured Tatar recognition for the hereditary rights of his successors. Tatar power began to weaken during this period, and in 1380 Dmitri Donskoi attempted to overthrow it at the battle of Kulikovo and gain credit for Moscow as the unifier of the entire Russian space through the union of Orthodoxy and patriotism. Aside from declining Tatar power (conflict between the Volga Tatars and the Uzbek Khan) a certain role was played also by Lithuania, which, still in its pagan stage and well disposed to Orthodoxy, was able for a time to act as a serious rival of Moscow. Prince Jagello had his last chance to limit Muscovite power at the time of the battle of Kulikovo, when he promised support to Khan Mamai but withdrew it at the last moment. According to Zientara he could not afford to support the Tatars for fear of inciting his Orthodox subjects to revolt (though it should be added that the battle of Kulikovo did not pit

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

“holy Russia” against the Tatars: it was rather between the Russian-Tatar army – Volga Tatars – and troops of the Khan Mamai of the Golden Horde). With Jagello’s acceptance of Catholicism after the conclusion of personal union with Poland, Moscow had won the contest for Russia, and from this point Lithuanian influence in the region waned, and contact with Lithuania was regarded as treasonous.³⁰⁷

By the end of the 15th century Moscow had liquidated most of the independent political entities within the Russian space and began to take territory that had earlier been filled by Lithuania if the Tartars were not able to prevent it. In competition with Muscovite Russia, which was more effective, the Polish-Lithuanian state overlooked the loss of territory to Russia. Zientara declares that he does not intend to defend Lithuanian territorial annexation, and that from the Russian viewpoint the reconquest of these territories was not only justified but taken as compensation for wrongs committed by Russia’s neighbors as it labored under the Tatar yoke.³⁰⁸ The policy of unification had the general support of the Russian populace, which was concentrated especially on the person of the prince, Ivan III, who led Russia out of political and territorial disintegration to place it on the level of a significant power in the eyes of Europe, which began to compete for its favor, as did the Balkan Slavs who looked to it for liberation from the Turks.

The growth of Russia’s international significance was further confirm by its claim on the political and religious legacy of the extinct Byzantine empire. If the Muscovite goal until now had been the acquisition of Russian territory, the doctrine of the Third Rome introduced a mystical-messianic concept which could be used to support annexations outside this region. At the same time a quarrel began in Russia between the ruler and the boyars, stemming from the dissatisfaction of the courtiers with the boyars’ traditional method of

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

state administration (the principles of *kormleniye* and *mestnichestvo*). Hopes for reform were placed in the person of Ivan IV, later called “the Terrible”, who in 1550 instituted a series of changes (such as the codification of civil and canon law) to limit the power of the boyars. To prevent possible opposition from the boyar elite, the courtiers were removed to Moscow, and in 1550 and 1566 the *zemsky sobor* or national council was convened to confirm the reforms. This “diet” was to some extent a product of Polish-Lithuanian influence on the Russian political system, but it represented an outward imitation, since Russian society was not sufficiently mature to make use of parliamentarianism: the *sobor* was subject to the will of “God and the Tsar”. The fragility of this quasi-parliamentarianism was demonstrated when Ivan the Terrible began to pursue his enemies and no power was found capable of halting him. Zientara ascribes this passivity to habits that became ingrained during the Tatar period. With the domestic watershed, Russian expansion began in the south and the north, which is important in that it was directed at non-Russian regions. If the earlier expansion had been justified as unification of the Russian lands (Zientara admits that Lithuanian Rus, without regard to the changes that it had undergone, was by tradition and religion close to Muscovite Russia), expansion exceeded these bounds under Ivan IV, to end with the tsar’s death in resistance to Russian advance – the Livonian Wars – and the collapse of the internal structure of Muscovite Russia – the Time of Troubles.³⁰⁹

In the struggles that followed the death of Ivan the Terrible Zientara does not underestimate the fact that the accession of Boris Godunov was confirmed by the *sobor*, which demonstrated both the possibility of a ruler who does not regard the state as his property and the continued existence of that state after the extinction of the dynasty. Godunov, however, did not seize his chance, and the Time of Troubles ensued, one of the low points of Russian-Polish ambivalence. On the one hand there was the Russian hatred towards

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

the Poles caused partly by the Union of Brest, which forced the Orthodox population to apply for the Uniat church, and partly by the behavior of the Polish nobility who arrived with the pretender to plunder and rape Russia;³¹⁰ on the other there was the Russian regard for the Polish-Lithuanian state and its search there for a model which would enable Russia to turn toward the West and accept a Polish ruler, which would reduce the odds favoring the survival of absolutism. However, the chance was lost under the first pretender because of his support by the Polish army and also because of boyar fears of a peasant uprising in favor of Dmitri. After the overthrow of the first pretender Vasili Shuyski was elected tsar, who was important for the fact of being elected (though it was essentially an ad hoc election by a handful of supporters) and for having sworn to uphold the law (not to punish without trial or persecute relatives of the accused). Similar elements came into play in the treaty for the accession of the Polish prince Vladislav to the Russian throne (February and August 1610), when the notion arose of a division of power among the ruler, the diet and the boyar дума. Thus the Time of Troubles contained one positive feature: the state, until now considered to be the tsar's property, was shown to be able to exist without the tsar: the possibility emerged that the ruler's office might be subordinated to the state, which was no longer identified exclusively with the boyars and courtiers but included the idea of "the people of the Muscovite state", who had the right to elect, judge and punish the tsar.³¹¹

This "people", however, rose up against the Poles (in which the Orthodox church was involved) and gradually won over the Russian burghers, the Cossack units and other groups who succeeded in expelling the Poles from Muscovy. In 1613 a diet representing the courtiers and the towns elected Michael Romanov as the new tsar. He was thought to be a weak personality holding out little prospect of a

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

return to the days of Ivan the Terrible. Though the first election in 1613 duly considered the dynastic aspect (Michael's kinship with Rurik), this tsar was elected by the entire country, and this factor was strong enough to allow his successor Alexei to be re-elected in 1645. Zientara considers the 17th century to be especially important, since it was then that the society, after the tragic experience with Ivan the Terrible and the Time of Troubles, attempted to assure its influence on the administration of the state, which would have avoided extreme forms of both despotism and oligarchy. At this time also Russia began to be aware of its backwardness vis a vis the West, although in a somewhat schizophrenic manner: the state was incapable of undertaking a radical "westernization", and after its experience with Poland, the society, which wished to reform the state, reacted irritably to any hint of "Latinism" and also to attempts at progressive modernization, as evidenced by the schism provoked by elementary liturgical revision. Thus the society was torn between traditionalist xenophobia and yearning for new things, which in the case of the court were found in the Protestant regions of the Baltic, Scandinavia and Germany, or, in the case of the nobility and burghers, in Roman Catholic or Uniate Poland. In the latter case contact was facilitated by linguistic kinship fostered by new fashions and literature and also by the idea of political reform in the spirit of a division of power among the main political subjects, which at that time also included the towns – a circumstance which distinguished the Russian situation from Polish estates parliamentarianism in which the nobility held a monopoly of power.³¹²

The diets, however, did not create a balanced political model, which Zientara discusses in connection with the legal codification of 1648-49 (the *Ulozbeniya*), which may have represented a kind of political progress but was also a step backward in that it subjugated the formerly free peasantry to their lords – not only the old aristocracy but chiefly the new nobility with whom the ruler packed

³¹² *Ibid.*, 106.

the duma. In exchange for land and authority the new noblemen allowed themselves to be pressed into the tsar's service, while a peasantry tied to the land was a means of assuring agricultural production in troubled times. This new group, dependent upon the ruler, had no interest in an independent diet and was willing to leave its convocation up to the will of the tsar. In this way the society's control over the source of power was adroitly neutralized if not destroyed. When disturbances broke out in Moscow over the replacement of silver coinage with copper at the beginning of the 1660's, the tsar was able brutally to suppress them without fear of opposition. The brief "elective" era ended as Feodor III was confirmed as heir by a handful of people. Subsequent disturbances such as the Razin uprising showed that the instincts of the new elite were correct: the central power alone could deal with them effectively. With the help of the new nobility the ruler also began to eliminate the boyar oligarchy by tying them to honors and positions that represented a financial drain, while the new nobles acquired not only land but also local offices which they exploited on the old principle of *kormleniya*. Military careers represented a further possibility and laid the groundwork for further expansion. Still, tsarist autocracy was not yet complete, as the conflicts following the death of Alexei showed, when interest in European impulses increased (F. M. Rtishchev, A. Ordin-Nashchokin or V. V. Golitsyn), leaving the way open for the reforms of Peter I.³¹³

Zientara considers Peter I to be the key figure in modern Russian history. He does not doubt the rational motives for his political reforms, though he adds that these reforms evinced certain special features. Peter himself grew up in abnormal circumstances (the bloody conflicts prior to his accession) which could not prepare him to rule. Thus his reforms were conceived in an ad hoc manner, without background or preparation. Moreover, he did not discern the far-reaching consequences of some of his reforms, since his interest focussed on

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 113.

their immediate practical effects. These factors were further filtered through political experiences and the Russian cultural environment, which regarded autocracy as the only law. The reforms, which were to bring about a great metamorphosis on the Western model, often operated only on the surface, affecting only a narrow segment at the top of Russian society, leaving aside Peter's German, Dutch and English favorites. The rest of society welcomed the reforms with a good deal of scepticism and hostility which was eventually broken when it was recognized that here lay the road to advancement for those aspiring to join the elite. Zientara believes that the vicissitudes provoked by the reforms may be traced to Peter's definitive abandonment of the Polish model for one found much farther to the West, which was partly attributable to Polish weakness at the end of the 17th century which rendered it incapable of providing inspiration for reform.³¹⁴

Zientara devotes a good deal of attention to various aspects of the political reform, especially Peter's success in liquidating the remains of the boyar aristocracy through legal means and replacing them with a new nobility employed in the service of the state, in which they were classified according to the well-known system. Thus the nobles were bound to the state and the peasants to the landowning nobility. The Cossacks held out the longest in the defense of their freedom but were eventually dealt with according to the principle *divide et impera* as the leadership was set against the rank and file. The dangers of Cossack autonomy were illustrated by the Mazepa affair, so that Peter I and Catherine II dealt with the problem by various means including forced resettlement.³¹⁵

Peter I built the Russian political system on firm foundations which lasted into the 19th century. They consisted of institutions (the army, state bureaucracy, police, the church) and depended partly on cohesion between the institutional and extra-institutional components of the system, which affected the rural population (the

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

legend of the good tsar and his evil counsellors). This cohesion and mutual interdependence became the chief principle of policy as the superficiality of the reforms became clear – as for example when officials proved incapable of carrying out their duties and incompatible instructions had to be applied. The reforms under Peter and Catherine led to superficial Europeanization but also to strengthening the absolutism and expansionism of the Russian state. They eliminated possibilities for an authentic metamorphosis including for example establishing legal and institutional norms and securing continuity in times of succession crises, during which the aristocratic oligarchy proved unable to take advantage of a weakened central power to introduce norms not dependent upon the state. This leads to an important conclusion regarding the subsequent history of Russia: the absence of a non-personal political mechanism rendered political conditions dependent upon personal ties, in which autocracy always stood at the top. But a deep crisis affecting the system as a physical as well as an abstract entity (such as the First World War and the Revolution of 1917), given the absence of a developed institutional framework not dependent upon physical elites, could only result in utter chaos, opening the way to extremist forces.³¹⁶

Conclusions

The three authors offer different views of Russian history. As noted earlier, Feliks Koneczny was a supporter of the National Democratic Party, which saw in union with Russia a guarantee for the further existence of Poland. From 1905 to 1914 Koneczny was editor of the journal *Świat Słowiański*, which was accused of pan-Slavic and pro-Russian tendencies during the period when the party was divided over R. Dmowski's New Slavic program. His work also reflected to a certain extent the *endecja* attitude towards Russia, and it betrays an

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 130–134.

interesting emphasis on practicality which does not conflict with a strongly Catholic-messianic background. Koneczny insists on the special position of western Latin civilization in relation to Russia, and he views Russian culture and politics with contempt, although when he comes across elements comparable to the social background of *endecja* ideology (a middle class of entrepreneurs and industrialists) he emphasizes them – in his discussion not only of the industrial revolution but also for example the communications factor in the beginnings of Kievan Rus or the reign of Ivan Kalita, who fascinates him more for his commercial than his political talents. Thus trade, industry and the Latin cultural framework are the elements that Koneczny emphasizes in Russian history whether he is considering the period of the Tatar invasions, Ivan the Terrible or Catherine II.

On the other hand, Koneczny is hugely critical whenever he detects a failure of legal culture, leading him to conclude an inability to create statehood and a civilized social order. Ivan Kalita unified Russia economically, but that unity lacked a legal basis, and the absence of law leads to the impossibility of separating power from economics: when Ivan Kalita lends money on part of the “princely” rights to estates outside Moscow it is not for the economic development of the land but to further his political rule. Preserving the difference in legal standards between Lithuania and Russia after 1386 means different relations between power and the people. Russia takes over the Mongol principle of *karmłeniye*, while the absence of law clears the way for tsarist terror. The Polish-Russian discussions over occupation of the throne and alliance against the Turks. Moscow is simply unable to comprehend the principle of a voluntary alliance between nations. The list goes on.

A further element is Koneczny’s aversion towards the German element in Russian history. The long thread of German-Russian alliance runs through the centuries, always to the detriment of Poland – from the Crusaders, who instead of going to war against the Tatars turned against “Catholic Poland”³¹⁷ and for centuries denied Russia

³¹⁷ F. KONECZNY, *Op. cit.*, 29.

access to the sea, to the Russian-Habsburg-Crusader conspiracy against Poland during the Russo-Lithuanian war of 1512–1522, to the influence of “unprincipled” German Protestantism under Catherine II, to the Prussian attempt to use Poland against Russia (it was Prussia which provoked the January Uprising), to Russia’s confirmation of absolutism for its own benefit against Poland. Using the example of Russo-German *Hassliebe*, Koneczny reflects on the place of the Polish question between Germany and Russia. But he goes further, replacing the German offer with a Polish one. Thus, as Medieval Poland, during its struggles with the amorphous Russian space, had the chance to give Russia order, though Russia was unable to accept it, so later Poland had the chance to assist Russian acceptance of at least the outline of a system which would enable it to Europeanize.

But the cultural inferiority of Russia is only seemingly negative. Since the country is no more than an empty form without any content of its own, there is always a chance that it can be filled with something concrete, an eventuality impossible in more developed civilizations (the Byzantine, Jewish, Turkish or Latin). In other words, Russia continues to be the object of a latent struggle among the “established” civilizations, which have always competed to establish themselves there and decide the shape of its civilization. The problem, then, is not only the conflict between Poland and Russia but that between developed civilizations over the Russian space, which exists in a pre-civilized or extra-civilized stage. As each of the great types of civilization is defined by a developed religious sphere and Russia is not regarded as an independent civilization, Koneczny appears to consider it to be still a pagan land. Thus Poland’s relation to Russia includes some sort of delayed Christianizing mission which, together with a certain type of faith will also bring a certain system of rules, i.e. law. From this it appears that his secret wish is that Russia should be conclusively “impregnated” with the Latin type, by which he means the Roman Catholic type.

Koneczny finds justification for the Catholic accent in the fact that Russia had earlier used impulses from the sphere of Latin

civilization, although in a distorted, Protestant guise, which satisfied its admiration for European technology. Russia also admired Protestant hostility towards the Papacy, which was connected with contempt for Catholic rulers for "sharing power" with the Pope.³¹⁸ But the Protestant import eventually proved ineffective and only deepened the problem of Russian identity. In an analogous way other imports, from Byzantine Christianity to Mongol government or Jewish influence, also failed: "The Turkish-Slavonic cultures become interwoven with fragments of Jewish civilization, which was true of Muscovite culture as well as Russian. Within Christendom the Orthodox church is the closest to Judaism."³¹⁹

The connection with the doctrines of the National Democrats is again apparent: they prefer alliance with Russia against Germany partly because of practical experiences with germanization under Prussian annexation and partly out of a relatively accurate historical analysis and the social position of the Polish people between Russia and Germany. Political ideology and the accompanying historical conception of the *endecja* expressed and defended the interests of the emerging Polish middle classes, for whom Germany represented a greater threat to the national interest than backward Russia, for whom they felt respect as a great power but also despised as a barbarous land with a barbarous religion. At the same time German pressure, which fell on Poland from a higher stage of development, pushed the *endeks* towards Russia, where they were at a far greater advantage competing with the weak Russian middle class and could advance more easily than in Germany, where, moreover, Protestantism favors Orthodoxy and the threat of alliance with Russia looms. The accent on the Latin element in the Roman liturgy represented the minimum necessity for identity which would enable the Polish middle class to operate freely in the Russian cultural milieu without the threat of "de-nationalization". Thus Koneczny

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

³¹⁹ F. KONĘCZNY, *Cywilizacja żydowska*, 211.

offers a scheme of Russian history which demonstrates that the Poles must, within the bounds of possibility, leave open the channels of communication with Russia. They must not allow the quarrels between the two nationalities to go as far as to shut off the dialogue which holds out the possibility of mutual influence. On the other hand, exchanges must not be too free, because in view of the inequalities of power and sheer size it will be chiefly the Polish environment that is threatened by Russian "breadth" and faced with the prospect of losing its inner content and identity.³²⁰

Kucharzewski's view makes the opposite impression. If Koneczny's notion of the emptiness of Russian history gives the country a certain chance and does not see the Russo-Polish quarrel as the only dominant element in mutual relations, Kucharzewski is uncompromising. He defines Russia in exclusively negative terms, and the few elements indicating faint chances of amendment amount to the exceptions confirming the rule.

While Koneczny looks for the possibilities for mutual influence or signs of the utter contrariness of the Polish and Russian milieu in the occurrence of concrete elements drawn from from a broader historical or sociological plan (the economic mentality of Ivan Kalita versus the absence of a legal basis for economic development, etc.), Kucharzewski draws from another broad plan the thesis of the incompatibility of the two milieus. This plan is based on a general and merciless contempt for Russia, its barbaric civilization, its inert structure formed in the Mongol period and accompanying Russian history from its Muscovite beginnings to the Bolshevik system.

Kucharzewski is interesting in this sense primarily in that he belongs to a group of authors who shortly before the First World War formed and developed the concept of a single basic Russian historical formation embracing the period before and after 1917.

³²⁰ Roman Dmowski was a sharp critic of passivity, which he considered a greater evil than active germanization. Roman DMOWSKI, *Mysli nowoczesnego Polaka*, Wrocław 1996, 48.

Absolutism and Bolshevism are merely variations on a single theme. They represent different forms, but in content they are the same manifestation of that basic structure which defines modern Russia. It is also interesting that while the first generation of the creators of the one-dimensional model of Russian history make conclusions about Bolshevism from earlier Russian history, the passage of time also revealed the possibility of projecting back experience with Bolshevism onto earlier Russian history. That apparently immobile structure was alive after all, brought to life by people who attempt to arrange past events in the light of more recent experience of Russia.

This way of thinking about Russia, which especially after the Second World War influenced several historians (Tibor Szamuely, Richard Pipes, Alexandr Janov), brings with it a number of risks. One is the personal attitude of the scholars who seek either to rationalize Soviet domination of their own countries (notable where Russian power left traces in the pre-Bolshevik period), or to explain and justify their former admiration for the Soviet regime (notable in all countries of the former Soviet bloc) or prove the historical legitimacy of socialist or Communist ideas by presenting actual socialism as their distortion by Russian barbarism. The results of such considerations are parallels between Ivan the Terrible and Stalin, Orthodox ideology and Bolshevism, the idea of the Third Rome and the Comintern, and so forth.

Kucharzewski's work is characteristic of this type of thinking. He draws parallels between aggressive acts in earlier Russian history and the Bolshevik period, assigning all of them to the monolithic structure of barbarism which is the ubiquitous dimension of Russian history. It is the thread originating in the Mongol period which runs through all subsequent development. Kucharzewski locates the first manifestation of this barbarism in the liquidation of independent Novgorod which, unconquered by either the Mongols or Moscow, represents the original Rus as opposed to the later Russia and was finally defeated by a combination of cunning and cruelty: "This pearl of the Russian land was destroyed by a breed brought up in

the savage school of Mongol thralldom.”³²¹ The fall and enslavement of Novgorod prefigured the enslavement of Poland at the end of the 18th century which, though it occurred three centuries later, proceeded according to the same scenario, which according to Kucharzewski endured unchanged into the 20th century. Once it has decided to acquire a certain territory, Moscow first takes it under its “protection”, solicits the favor of the lower classes by discrediting their superiors (dangerous since they form a reservoir of traditions of freedom and independence), then searches for a pretext to intervene in domestic affairs and through its influence over the lower classes demands formal subjugation of the land. A “tragedy” is acted out with accusations of treason and collusion with the enemy, until “occupation of the country is accompanied by executions and mass deportations of the upper classes, who are replaced by new people from Moscow.”³²²

Conceived in such a structure, of course, Russian history has no chance, especially when after experience with the Bolsheviks the new Soviet regime begins to project back into the past and an inexorable chain of determinism emerges in which the Bolsheviks form the final and necessary link. It amounts to the permanent cultivation of barbarism. Russia became superficially European, but in fact it gave rise to forms by which barbarism could be channeled until the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

Understood thus, Russia can be dealt with only on the basis of force, the only means by which the Russian *milieu* can be penetrated by Europe (Kucharzewski points to the Napoleonic Wars as the single moment when Europe began to penetrate into Russia), by which Russia can be obliged to accept European norms and halt the expansion of Russian barbarism westward. In this conception, however, the historian is only filling out a mosaic whose outline already exists. He undertakes no analysis, only illustrates a historical “fact” with

³²¹ J. KUCHARZEWSKI, *Op. cit.*, 25.

³²² *Ibid.*, 26.

concrete examples. Such an approach does not exclude the possibility of suggestive observations, perceptions, comparisons or interpretations of detail, but it does not allow them full development by forcing them into a preconceived scheme. Kucharzewski uses this method of comparison on a number of cases aside from the example of the Muscovite subjugation of Novgorod and the Sovietization of Poland.

This conception is all the more interesting in that its author began as an adherent of the National Democrats, with whom, however he got into quarrels, always over policy toward Russia. This first occurred in 1911 in connection with Dmowski's decision to end his well-known boycott of Russian schools, which led to a schism within the National League which also carried Kucharzewski, who considered the decision premature and damaging to Poland's position, out of the organization.³²³ But the dispute ran deeper than the particular episode and concerned the future direction of Polish policy toward the annexing power. In the expectation of war between the occupying powers Dmowski defended orientation toward Russia and against the German-Austrian bloc. But since prospects for a positive response from Russia to a proffer of Polish loyalty were minimal, the National Democratic Party disintegrated as groups left to support either Germany or Austria, then Pilsudski's activists. The second and definitive parting of ways between Kucharzewski and the *endeks* occurred in 1916, when the "pro-Russian" program of Roman Dmowski, who represented the exiled Central Polish Agency, was opposed by a group around Kucharzewski (including the historian Szymon Askenazy), who after the proclamation of the Act of 5 November of that year definitively went over to the side of the activists.³²⁴ However, it cannot

³²³ Krzysztof KAWALEC, *Roman Dmowski*. Warszawa 1996, 145-147.

³²⁴ Władysław POBÓG-MALINOWSKI, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski. 1864-1945. Tom pierwszy 1864-1919*, Paris 1953, 296, 336-338. From the end of 1915 Kucharzewski published a series of brochures on the future of Poland and Polish-Russian relations which embrace the pro-activist viewpoint ("La Pologne et la guerre", "La nation polonaise", "Reflexions sur le probleme polonais", "L'Europe et le probleme polonais"). See K. Kawalec, 173-174.

be said that Kucharzewski underwent any fundamental change of views in the sense of exchanging a positive view of Russia for a negative one: the “pro-Russian” stance of the National Democrats was tactical, an expression of their anti-German stance and did not differ greatly from the views of the activist group around Pilsudski. At the same time it resulted from the different experiences of Poles under Russian or Prussian annexation.

The last work, written during the martial law in Poland, presents an atypical synthesis for several reasons. Benedykt Zientara was a historian of the early Medieval period focusing on the history of Central and Western Europe. However, as Bronisław Nowak has written, he was exceptional in that he “did not flee from those problems which plagued his nation.”³²⁵ A second noteworthy point is that, while it appeared illegally, the book evoked practically no comment not only because of an absence of public discussion but because it was not anti-Russian and thus did not fulfill expectations associated with underground historical literature. A third source of dissimilarity emerges from a comparison not only with the two foregoing works (leaving aside the “official” surveys which appeared after the war in the state publishing houses) but also with most of the “independent” Polish studies of Russian themes.

Zientara affirms this difference in the introduction to his book, in which he underlines those moments of Russian history in which “the democratic yearnings of society appeared, coming to the defense of the individual, as well as the variety of customs, opinions and attitudes adopted in the face of despotism before their enforced unification.”³²⁶ Zientara admits that the reader searching here for a mockery of Russian society or a catalogue of the eternal negative qualities of the Russian nation will be disappointed. He views the features of the Russian national character as the results of a tragic history. Nor are they necessarily irreversible. B. Nowak remarks in his

³²⁵ Bronisław Nowak, preface to Benedykt ZIENTARA's *Dawna Rosja*, 5.

³²⁶ B. ZIENTARA, *Op. cit.*, 9.

preface that glasnost and perestroika enabled changes in Poland of which the Poles themselves could scarcely dream – though these changes were for the removal distortions that Russia itself had introduced several decades earlier. The author's dedication, paraphrasing Mickiewicz (*przyjaciółom Moskalom*), is to those Russians who strove for the repudiation of notorious traditions and looked for new avenues of development for their society.³²⁷

Comparing Zientara's book with the two earlier studies, which even today retain an almost canonical status, we detect a certain fecklessness and inconsistency. This is traceable to the author's attempt to temper the prevailing negative Polish view of Russian history with something more positive. Along with the despotic paradigm there were other political currents presaging 19th century Russian liberalism (although this is assumed rather than documented). Zientara implicitly addresses future Russian democrats who, on the basis of a transformed picture of Russia, will withdraw themselves from the Russian structure and (as a subtext) adopt an attitude toward Poland that is different from that of the current Soviet regime.

The result of Zientara's efforts is a model of Russian history which, like the other works, works on the principle of Procrustes' bed, so that the facts are shaped to fit the form, although in this case the effect is meant to be rehabilitating. It should be added parenthetically, and not by way of making an excuse but rather of clarifying the situation, that Zientara's book was written quickly, in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, shortly before the author's death. Zientara asserts that modern Russian liberal and democratic politics may be traced back to the intellectual foundation of Novgorod democracy, the tradition of the *sobor* and the efforts of the nobility to limit the power of the ruler in the 17th century. But since he does not deal directly with these matters in his study, he merely posits a relationship, introducing "democratic" elements into an

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

earlier period and uses them to show the existence of a “proto-democracy” in Russian history. The result is a certain inconsistency which may be illustrated with the idea of the *sobor* tradition. Vasili Shuysky was not only the first elected tsar (elected by a crowd which was later recognized as representing the nation), but the first ruler who – ... *złożył uroczystą przysięgę przestrzegania praworządności.*”³²⁸ Several pages on we learn that the era of elected tsars ended with the *Uložbeniya* legal codification: “Alexei himself chose his son Feodor III (1676–1682) as his successor and the function of confirming the choice was assumed by a random crowd.”³²⁹ Both rulers, then, were elected by the momentary action of a handful of people, but in the first case the elements of election are interpolated (this was a democratic era), while in the second a similar handful of people is neither legitimate nor democratic (the democratic era was at an end), because it simply confirmed an autocrat.

By taking this approach Zientara does not in principle distinguish himself from the other two authors; the only difference is his content, which they would regard as naive. But something more substantial also emerges: that during the century that separates the “classical” Polish historians and Zientara, there is a constant structure to the understanding of Russian history. Its basic feature is that it includes not only an interpretation of a certain portion of world history, but rather represents the Polish view of Russian history, an analysis of the phenomenon or Russia for Poland. It presents a rationalization of various phases and guises of the mutual relationship of the two, viewed through various layers and phases of the nation building process and political co-existence. It is the viewpoint of a national historiography as part of the intellectual baggage of a national state.

Zientara’s synthesis, however, is different in one respect. One half of it consists of a certain structured understanding of Russian history

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

and uses approaches appropriate to that structure. The other half, however, withdraws from this structure and takes a different approach. Here Zientara does not consider Russia to be an entity without history as does Feliks Koneczny, nor does he ascribe to it any inherently negative property, as does Jan Kucharzewski. At one point he declares that from the Russian perspective the territorial reconquest at the expense of Poland-Lithuania was entirely justified and surrenders the option of bringing to bear a Polish perspective. Elsewhere he asserts that tradition and faith form an inalienable connection between that territory and Russia, or that Poland lost the respect of Russia because of its decline and weakness. Here Zientara expresses willingness to offset the negative balance (recalling the rampage of the Poles in the Kremlin) and assume responsibility for some of the "sins of the past".³³⁰

Here he also shows something more substantial: the opinion that Russian history is as legitimate as Polish history or that of any other nation, that it is part of a single historical family. Zientara's more or less forced positive attitude toward Russian history is not an aim in itself, but in combination with the idea of its equality with other national histories it expresses an effort to take up an open and accommodating position which will depend neither on a negative scheme or on a deliberate exploitation of the Russian historical process. Russia is no mysterious "Sphynx" nor the embodiment of evil. In its history it had and continues to have the possibility of making choices, a fact which negates the possibility of a monolithic interpretation and holds out the hope of overcoming difficulties. In short, a certain investment of trust in Russia is necessary – to which, however, a devil's advocate might reply that its history must also be thus understood and used by the Russians themselves.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72, 90-91, 94, 120.

Summary

Polish views of Russian history, often extremist and burdened by the dramatic course of relations between the two countries, have produced a number of interesting surveys, chiefly during the 20th century. These views have systematized the experience of mutual relations and in some cases have had their impact on Polish policy toward Russia. Some of them have also become popular outside of Poland, whether because they inspired a broader European or worldwide reflection on the Russian problem, or because they coincided with currently prevailing views. This article compares three significant conceptions, by Feliks Koneczny, Jan Kucharczyński and Benedykt Zientara. Each of these authors was the “child of his times”, and each devised a unique view of Russian history. The surveys by the first two historians originated in the inter-war period and present interpretations of the “black legend” of Russian history. The third author wrote during the war and attempted to correct the “black legend”. All three show, despite their differences, that Polish views of Russian history contain a strong element of expediency: they represent the standpoint of a national historiography as part of the intellectual equipment of the national state.

Translation: Frederick L. Snider