

## **The education of Alexander and Nicholas Pavlovich Romanov**

### **Abstract**

This article concerns two very different ways and methods of upbringing of two Russian tsars – Alexander the First and Nicholas the First. Although they were brothers, one was born nearly twenty years before the second and that influenced their future. Alexander, born in 1777 was the first son of the successor to the throne and was raised from the beginning as the future ruler. The person who shaped his education the most was his grandmother, empress Catherine the Second. She appointed the Swiss philosopher La Harpe as his teacher and wanted Alexander to become the enlightened monarch. Nicholas, on the other hand, was never meant to rule and was never prepared for it. He was born in 1796 as the ninth child and third son and by the will of his parents, Tsar Paul I and Tsarina Maria Fyodorovna he received education more suitable for a soldier than a tsar, but he eventually ascended to the throne after Alexander died. One may ask how these differences influenced them and how they shaped their personalities as people and as rulers.

**Keywords:** Romanov Children, Alexander I and Nicholas I, education, upbringing

## **The education of Alexander and Nicholas Pavlovich Romanov**

Among the ten children of Tsar Paul I and Tsarina Maria Feodorovna, two sons – the oldest Alexander and Nicholas, the second youngest son – took the Russian throne. These two brothers and two rulers differed in many respects, from their characters, through politics, views on Russia's place in Europe, to circumstances surrounding their reign. The first of them ascended to the throne, welcomed with hope and joy, which were almost imperceptibly overshadowed only by the dramatic circumstances of his father's death, the other

one was welcomed with an uprising against him in St. Petersburg, which broke out on the first day of his reign. The older son won the glory of a ruler who stopped Napoleon and died basking in it, the younger entangled Russia in the tragedy of the Crimean War near the end of his lifetime. The former gave the Kingdom of Poland a constitution and enjoyed the reputation of a liberal, particularly in the early years of his reign; the latter took it away and systematically fought against all forms of liberalism. The older son was born to rule and from the earliest years he was extensively prepared for this task under the watchful eye of his grandmother, Catherine II; the younger son became a tsar unexpectedly, while much less attention was paid to his upbringing and education.

The aim of these considerations is to compare and juxtapose the upbringing and character of education received in childhood and youth by Alexander I and Nicholas I, as well as to determine whether and to what extent these factors could influence the formation of their personalities and different approaches to ruling.

Alexander I was born in December 1777, as the first child of Paul I and his second wife, Duchess Sophie Dorothea of Württemberg, who after wedding and conversion assumed the name of Maria Feodorovna, and as the first grandson of Empress Catherine II.

A question can be asked about how much Russian blood was still flowing in the dynasty and the answer is – probably not that much. Definitely none on the distaff side. In the male line, one would have to go back three generations to the great grandmother of Alexander, grandmother of Paul and mother of his father, Pyotr Fyodorovich, namely Anna Romanova, daughter of Peter the Great, who married Prince Hollstein-Gottorp in 1725. The male line of the Romanov family ended in 1730 with the death of fifteen-year-old Peter II and since then, until 1796, the Russian Empire had been ruled by women. After the death of Peter the Great, his wife Catherine I, the daughter of a Latvian peasant, took power. After the death of the young Peter II, Anna, the daughter of Ivan V, took the throne and appointed a successor related to the Romanov dynasty on the distaff side. At the time of his coronation, Ivan VI was only a few months old and before a year had passed, he was deposed and imprisoned. He spent the rest of his life in prison and died at the age of twenty-four, killed by his guards. The country was taken over by Elizabeth Petrovna, the second daughter of Peter the Great. Her reign lasted for 21 years. Elisabeth did not take a husband, at least not officially. Among many rumours and gossips surrounding most aspects of the private lives of all rulers, a theory emerged that she secretly married her lover Alexei Razumovsky.<sup>1</sup> This, as well as the question of their possible offspring, which appeared in the colourful history of the so-called Princess Tarakanova, remains inconclusive.<sup>2</sup> With no official heir, Elisabeth appointed her nephew, son of her sister Anna,

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<sup>1</sup> Information regarding the wedding, cf. e.g. ANDRUSIEWICZ, A., *Romanowowie. Imperium i familia*, Kraków 2014, p. 257-258.

<sup>2</sup> In the mid-1770s, a young woman appeared in Livorno, Italy, claiming to be Elisabeth, granddaughter of Peter the Great, daughter of Empress Elisabeth I and Alexei Razumovsky, legitimate heir to the Russian throne. She found a following and support among certain people. Among those ready to support her claims was Polish nobleman, participant of the Bar Confederation Karol Radziwiłł. On the order of Catherine, Count Alexei Orlov approached her, seduced her and lured her to a Russian ship, where she was captured, transported to St. Petersburg

the Prince of Holstein as her successor to the throne. In 1762, he became Tsar Peter III. His reign lasted from winter to summer of the same year, as he was overthrown by *coup d'état* organised by his wife Sophie Anhalt-Zerbst, better known as Empress Catherine II or Catherine the Great. In Polish historiography, this ruler, for obvious and known reasons, is not particularly respected nor does she enjoy any sympathy, but her eligibility to her "Great" title cannot be disputed. She had measurable successes in foreign policy, waged wars against the Ottoman Empire, opened her empire a way to the west thanks to annexing Polish lands, she carried out numerous reforms, during her reign the Empire was internally stable, and she could manage all the problems, such as the Pugachev Rebellion. She was an enlightened monarch as much as the ruler of Russia could be enlightened, that is, in a very specific way. Apart from the practices of the Enlightenment, she was certainly interested in the Enlightenment theory.<sup>3</sup>

Paul was the only child of Peter and Catherine and, as a result, the obvious successor to the throne. However, the mother's relations with her son were very tense, as both did not have the best opinion about each other. Catherine openly proclaimed that her son was unfit to rule,<sup>4</sup> while he considered her to be a usurper. Paul could not be more different from his mother, he was interested mainly in soldiers, armies and Prussian-style military parades – a passion that he inherited from his father and later passed it on to all his sons. For Paul, everything that even slightly concerned the Enlightenment seemed suspicious. He was impulsive and unpredictable to such an extent that mental illness could not be ruled out. He had to wait for the throne for forty-two years. Before his mother finally died, he spent most of that time in a kind of an exile in Gatchina, 45 kilometres away from the capital, where he enjoyed his favourite drills and parades.<sup>5</sup>

His first wife, Natalia Alexeyevna, died in 1776 after delivering her stillborn son. Paul loved her and her loss was very difficult for him, but soon afterwards, urged by his mother, he married Sophie Dorothea of Württemberg. The relationship between him and his second wife was good at first and it can be assumed that there was a kind of a connection between them until the end. They had ten children and finally overcame the crisis that had been looming over the dynasty for half a century.

Neither Paul nor Maria contributed a lot to the upbringing of their first-born son. When Alexander was born, his grandmother took care of him, following the painful example of Empress Elisabeth, who once upon a time also took a child from the young mother. Just as that decision had a significant impact on the relationship between Catherine and Paul, in this case, Alexander had an abysmal relationship with his father and a poor one

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and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress, where she died a few years later. The story of the "Princess" and Alexei Orlov inspired many romantic stories, including Russian musical "Граф Орлов." Regarding Princess Tarakanova, cf. MONTEFIORE, S.S., *Katarzyna Wielka i Potiomkin*, Warsaw 2013, p. 175-178.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the reign and the figure of Catherine the Great, see e.g.: ANDRUSIEWICZ, A., *Romanowowie...*, p. 270-320 (chapter *Katarzyna II Aleksiejewna. Oświecony absolutyzm*).

<sup>4</sup> ANDRUSIEWICZ, A. *Romanowowie...*, p. 321.

<sup>5</sup> More about the life of Emperor Paul I: EJDELMAN, N., *Pawel I, czyli śmierć tyrauna*, translated by W. ŚLIWOWSKI and R. ŚLIWOWSKA, Warsaw 1990.



Fig. 1. Gerhard von Kuegelgen, Family of Paul I of Russia, 1800 ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Family\\_of\\_Paul\\_I\\_of\\_Russia.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Family_of_Paul_I_of_Russia.jpg))

with his mother. Both he and his younger brother Constantin were raised not by their parents, but by their grandmother. She was also the one to name them both – Alexander was named in honour of Alexander Nevsky or Alexander the Great, while Constantin’s name indicated that he was supposed to become the future ruler of Constantinople.<sup>6</sup>

Following her passion and love for the Enlightenment, Catherine decided to educate Alexander in this spirit. One day he was to become “the first Tsar-Emperor brought up according to modern models and a guarantor of his grandmother’s policy.”<sup>7</sup> It was therefore obvious that the Empress herself had to take care of bringing up the child, instead of her unsuccessful son or his young wife. It can be said that Catherine placed all the unfulfilled feelings and hopes onto her grandson.

She appointed Nikolai Saltykov,<sup>8</sup> later General and Field Marshal of Russia, to become her grandchildren’s governor – Alexander was six at that time, Constantin was two years younger. Along with the nomination, Catherine prepared detailed instructions for him, detailing her vision of raising her grandchildren<sup>9</sup> – a vision that was inspired in

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<sup>6</sup> BORTNOWSKI, W., *Wielki Książę Konstanty i Joanna Grudzińska*, Łódź 1961, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> ANDRUSIEWICZ, A., *Aleksander I*, Krakow 2015, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> АУКШТЫКАЛЬНИТЕ, А. Д., *Николай Иванович Салтыков и Фредерик Сезар де Лагарп*, „Известия Саратовского университета”. Серия История, Международные отношения. 2017, т. 17, №1, стр. 28-34 <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/nikolay-ivanovich-saltykov-i-frederik-sezar-de-lagarp> (accessed on 18.08.2017).

<sup>9</sup> “Instructions composees par Catherine II pour la gouverne de Nicolai Ivanovitsch Soltykov” [in:] G. BRIDEL, *Le gouverneur d’un prince: Frederic Cesar de Laharpe et Alexandre I. de Russie. D’apres les manuserits inedits de F. C. de Laharpe et les sources russes les plus recentes*, Lausanne 1902, p. 268-314. [<https://archive.org/stream/legouverneurdup001aha#page/n5/mode/2up>, accessed on 6.07.2017]

many respects by Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education*. The instructions dealt with matters pertaining to every area of a child's life, from clothing of small Grand Dukes (simple and lightweight materials),<sup>10</sup> through their food (also simple, without excessive spices and salt, wine only if clearly recommended by doctors, seasonal fruit in summer, the only food allowed between meals was a piece of bread),<sup>11</sup> the way of airing rooms (air regularly, do not overheat the room in winter),<sup>12</sup> sleep time (eight, nine hours is appropriate for boys of their age),<sup>13</sup> hygiene (care for hygiene, cold baths, teach boys to swim),<sup>14</sup> as well as recommended entertainment (they have to play a lot and spend time actively, they should choose their own games, as long as they are safe and moral – this was supposed to be a good measure of their characters).<sup>15</sup> In addition, the boys were supposed to develop Christian virtues, strong will, obedience towards the ruler, kindness and good manners. Children's tears could not be tolerated, the young princes were to learn to endure pain and sorrow patiently and with dignity.<sup>16</sup> In addition to taking care of their bodies and souls, it was also naturally important to take care of the young minds. The Empress recommended that their classes should last no more than half an hour and end before they could get bored.<sup>17</sup> The list of subjects they were supposed to study is hardly surprising, consisting of the standard repertoire of an educated ruler of those times. Languages were the first obvious choice – Catherine recommended not to neglect the native Russian language under any circumstances, probably not wanting her grandchildren to forget it completely. She advised that language learning should be



Fig. 2. Jean-Louis Voille, Alexander Pavlovich of Russia, 1792 ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander\\_Pavlovich\\_of\\_Russia\\_by\\_J.-L.Voille\\_\(1792,\\_Hermitage\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_Pavlovich_of_Russia_by_J.-L.Voille_(1792,_Hermitage).jpg))

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 268.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 268-270.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 269.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 271.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 270.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 271-272.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 276.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 290.

combined with teaching other subjects – the boys should learn mineralogy in Latin, botany in German and zoology in French.<sup>18</sup> In addition, subjects such as geography, astronomy and mathematics, law and history – general history, antiquity, mythology, genealogy, etc. – were to be included in their curriculum, which naturally started with reading, writing, drawing and arithmetic.<sup>19</sup> In addition, she recommended including physical exercise – horse riding, swimming or fencing.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Catherine advised that their teachers should give up poetry and music, as these subjects took too much time before reaching relative proficiency in them.<sup>21</sup>

As for the way of teaching and implanting knowledge in young heads, Catherine was clearly of the opinion that this should be done by making knowledge interesting for students, not by coercion. She made it clear that “fear is a bad teacher” (“la peur n’enseigne pas”<sup>22</sup>).

Apart for instructions for their tutor, Catherine II also wrote another work dedicated to Alexander, titled *Бабушкина азбука великому князю Александру Павловичу*.<sup>23</sup> It was a collection of more than 200 thoughts the grandmother had for her grandchild. The first one said that *Before God all people are equal* (*перед Богом все люди равны*<sup>24</sup>). Some of them were longer, such as stories about Persian prince Cyrus, philosophers such as Diogenes and Plato or the Greek legislator Solon, others were built on the basis of a short dialogue (“Question: how many elements are there? Answer: four – water, fire, air, earth” – there are also similar questions about the world, continents or human senses.) The collection of thoughts is concluded by the sentence attributed to Alexander’s namesake, Alexander the Great – “It is a royal privilege to do good and be spoken ill of” (“то дело царское добро творить и злоречие терпеть”). *Бабушкина азбука* is a collection of thoughts, wisdom and warnings that the ruler wanted to pass on to her beloved grandson, whom she was so keen to see as her immediate successor.

However, what had the greatest impact on the education and upbringing of young Alexander was probably his teacher, who was found and appointed to this function by Catherine when her beloved grandson was twelve years old. This man’s name was Frederic-Cesar de La Harpe, he came from Switzerland. He was born in April 1754 in Rolle

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 292-293.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 293-295.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 295.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 294.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 290.

<sup>23</sup> Another example of Catherine’s works for grandchildren are her fairy tales for grandchildren published in the 18th century. They were released in Polish in: *Bajki carycy Katarzyny II dla wnuków i inne utwory baśniowe pisarzy rosyjskich XVIII wieku*, Wrocław 2007. This collection contains two fairy tales by Catherine; one written in 1781 titled *Bajka o carewiczu Chlorze* and another one written in 1783, titled *Bajka o carewiczu Fewieju*.

<sup>24</sup> This and further quotes: *Бабушкина азбука великому князю Александру Павловичу* (<http://dlib.rsl.ru/viewer/01005436372#?page=6>), accessed on 6.07.2017.

as a son of a former soldier and he studied philosophy in Geneva. He was a republican, with Enlightenment views. He came to St. Petersburg in 1783.<sup>25</sup>

In his memoirs, Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, childhood friend of Alexander, mentioned the nature of the teachings of the Swiss republican for the future Russian tsar. He wrote: “Mister de la Harpe was the only noteworthy person among those entrusted with the education of the princes. I do not know who was told by Catherine to make this choice, I suppose that it had to be someone who was friends with Grimm or Holbach. However, Mister de la Harpe does not seem to have carried out any serious studies with the prince in any direction; since he would have been able to do anything with him if he took advantage of the powerful influence he used on his mind and heart. The prince received only superficial information from his teacher, who taught him the love of humanity, justice, freedom and equality for all; he did not allow superstitions, models and praise to stifle these noble tendencies in him. Inspiring and developing these traits in the Russian prince is a significant merit of Mister de la Harpe.”<sup>26</sup>

Czartoryski also mentions other people responsible for Grand Duke’s education and shares his far less favourable opinions. Regarding Saltykov, he wrote that “it needs to be said that he was not at all suitable to lead the upbringing of Russia’s future ruler, nor did he have any positive influence on him”,<sup>27</sup> he also mentioned Count Protazov, another one of Alexander’s educators – “I will not harm his reputation by claiming that he was a total fool that could not be respected by his student.”<sup>28</sup> He did not have any better opinion about one of the teachers of Alexander’s younger brother: “Prince Constantin was given to Count Saken and constantly ridiculed him.”<sup>29</sup>

It is difficult to doubt that La Harpe was the teacher who had the greatest influence on Alexander’s education, character and views.<sup>30</sup> As I already mentioned, he arrived in St. Petersburg in 1783, and soon afterwards he was appointed the principal teacher of Alexander. Catherine must have been convinced by a short dissertation which La Harpe addressed to Saltykov, detailing his own curriculum for the Grand Dukes.<sup>31</sup> He suggested there that he would teach his noble-born students not only French, but also geography, history and philosophy (although, as he says, without mathematics and physics), he also briefly discussed the form and nature of these classes. When learning languages, the empha-

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<sup>25</sup> BRIDEL, G., *Le gouverneur d'un prince: Frederic Cesar de Laharpe et Alexandre I. de Russie. D'apres les manuserits inedits de F. C. de Laharpe et les sources russes les plus recentes*, Lausanne 1902, p. 7-17.

<sup>26</sup> *Pamiętniki ks. Adama Czartoryskiego i korespondencya jego z cesarzem Aleksandrem I*, translated by K. SCIPPIO, Krakow 1904, p. 81-82.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 82-83.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> АНДРЕЕВ, А.Ю., *Император и его учитель: личные и политические аспекты взаимоотношений Александра I и Ф.С. Лагарпа*, „Филаретовский альманах”, 8, 2012. С.76–97.

<sup>31</sup> *Premier memoire remis le 10 juin 1784 au comte Soltykov, nomme gouverner en chef des jeunes Grands-Ducs, presente a S. M. I. Catherine II, avec ses ratures et apostille par elle*, in: BRIDEL, G., *Le gouverneur...*, p. 235-267. [<https://archive.org/stream/legouverneurdup00laha#page/n5/mode/2up>, accessed on 6.07.2017]

sis should be placed on their use. Geography should start with learning about Russia, then Europe and other regions. He pointed out the particular importance of history, especially for the future ruler – “every citizen who wants to become useful to their country in public affairs must study history” (“Tout citoyen qui se destine à être utile à son pays dans le maniement des affaires publiques, doit étudier l’histoire”<sup>32</sup>). La Harpe wrote and expands upon that point by pointing out the example of Alexander’s namesake (“On ne doit jamais oublier qu’Alexandre, né avec un beau génie et doué des qualités les plus brillantes, ne ravagea l’Asie et ne commit tant d’horreurs que pour avoir voulu imiter les héros d’Homère”<sup>33</sup>). He intended to teach antique history using figures such as Lycurgus, Solon, Cato, the Gracchus brothers, Cicero and both Brutuses. Apart from that, according to La Harpe, it was also important for Alexander to get to know the history of individual countries, including Russia in particular, as well as German, Danish, Swedish and Polish history, which he himself did not know extensively, but – as he mentioned – a certain “Mr. Naruszewicz [...], a wise man, known from his works among his countrymen” (“M. Naruszevicz [...], homme d’esprit connu par des ouvrages estimés parmi ses compatriotes”<sup>34</sup>) was working on it. Of course, he was talking about Adam Naruszewicz and his monumental work *The History of the Polish Nation*. La Harpe also mentions David Hume’s *History of England*,<sup>35</sup> several French authors, including Montesquieu and Robert Watson’s *History of Philip II of Spain*.<sup>36</sup>

The instruction had a note written by the Empress herself: “whomsoever wrote this piece is definitely fit to teach more than just the French language” (“celui qui a composé cet écrit paraît assurément capable d’enseigner plus que la seule langue française”<sup>37</sup>). Thanks to her approval, La Harpe became Alexander’s teacher one of his most trusted friends and trustees. Following the plan laid out by the Empress, he taught him according to his own convictions and his enlightened, republican and egalitarian views – which may seem paradoxical in the case of the future ruler of the Russian Empire. The ideas that the Swiss philosopher implanted into the absorbent mind of his student were there for a long time and undoubtedly became one of the building blocks of the colourful, complicated and paradoxical identity of the man who would later be called the Sphinx of the North.

We learn about the course of the Grand Dukes’ education from La Harpe’s own notes.<sup>38</sup> They start in 1786, with each year’s notes divided into two parts. In the first

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<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 244.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 252.

<sup>35</sup> David Hume was a Scottish philosopher, historian, author of a number of philosophical treatises. *The History of England*, released in 1754-1761, is a 6-volume work discussing history starting from Julius Caesar to the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Watson, Scottish scholar, released *History of Philip II of Spain* in 1777. He died working on a book about Philip III of Spain, which was completed at a later time by William Thomson.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 265.

<sup>38</sup> ЛАГАРП, Ф.Ц., *Записки Лагарпа о воспитании в. к. Александра и Константина Павловичей 1786-1789 гг.*, “Русская старина”. Ежемесячное историческое издание. 1870 г. Том I. Санкт-Петербург, 1870, стр. 152-204 <http://www.do1917.info/sites/default/files/user11/pdf/1870rysstarina1%286%29.pdf> (accessed on



part,<sup>39</sup> he discusses the scope of knowledge taught to young boys regarding all subjects – reading, French, arithmetic, geography and history. La Harpe gives examples of authors whose books he read with the boys and pointed out different talents and attitudes of his students. While both Grand Dukes still had problems with reading at that time, Alexander somehow managed to do well if he focused enough – “in a word, he had no practice”, as La Harpe pointed out, but Constantin, who was more active and less careful, had to think about every word. La Harpe believed that learning prose and poetry by heart would be the remedy, as the goal was to help them master the alphabet in speech and in writing. In the second part of his notes,<sup>40</sup> he described the boys’ efforts and progress, focusing mainly on Alexander. “Rarely does one meet boys who are as active and lively as the Grand Dukes”, he wrote, “they are unable to sit in one place for a minute.”<sup>41</sup> The notes also contain a number of comments on the boys’ nature, as well as suggestions regarding dealing with them depending on their behaviour.

Alexander’s education ended with his marriage to Princess Louise of Baden in 1793, who took the name of Elizabeth Alexeievna in Russia. The groom was only 16 at the time, his wife was two years younger. They were a beautiful couple, young, fair-haired and full of charm, while at the same time being completely mismatched. Of course, this marriage was arranged by Empress Catherine, who wanted her grandson to marry as soon as possible, thus strengthening his position as a potential successor to the throne while bypassing her son and Alexander’s father. The marriage made Alexander legally an adult. La Harpe left St. Petersburg two years later, leaving his pupil with instructions and advice for his future life in fourteen points. Some of them concerned every day matters – like the advice that Alexander should go to sleep and get up early,<sup>42</sup> not eat too much<sup>43</sup> and devote some time to study alone in the mornings.<sup>44</sup> Other advice, on the other hand, he directed not to the young man, but to the member of the ruling family and the future ruler. La Harpe advised that Alexander should not manifest negative emotions, be lenient towards less privileged people<sup>45</sup>, take interest in the lives of people from all of Russia, not only the closest surroundings<sup>46</sup>, and to develop his relationships with his wife and brother, because they

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18.08.2017). Cf. АНДРЕЕВ, А.Ю., «Заметки» Ф.С. Лагарпа как источник по истории России конца XVIII – начала XIX в., “Вестник ПСТГУ” II. История. История Русской Православной Церкви. 2013. Вып.4 (53). С.7–22, id. Воспитание великих князей Александра и Константина Павловичей глазами Ф.-С. Лагарпа, „Филаретовский альманах”, Вып.9, 2013. С. 90-122.

<sup>39</sup> ЛАГАРП, Ф.Ц., *Заметки...*, p. 155 and further.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 163 and further.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 168.

<sup>42</sup> *Instructions remises a S. S. I. Monseigneur le Grand-Duc Alexandre*, [in:] ibidem, p. 315-316.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 322.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 322-323.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 316-317.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 324.

were the only people on whom he could fully rely and trust without reservations.<sup>47</sup> La Harpe's instruction ended with a request – he told Alexander to remember him from time to time, when he looks on the map of Europe, he should think about a farmer who lives on Lake Geneva in Switzerland, whose eyes often turn towards Russia and who will always remember him:

“Relisez quelquefois ces derniers avis, Monseigneur, ce sont les adieux d'un homme qui eut onze ans l'honneur de vous être attaché par ses fonctions, et dont les vœux les plus ardents sont pour votre bonheur. Lorsqu'en parcourant la carte de l'Europe vous distinguerez la Suisse, arrêtez un moment vos regards sur le lac de Genève, et daignez vous rappeler que sur ses rives, à Genthod, habite un cultivateur dont les yeux se tournent fréquemment vers la Russie, et qui vous porte dans son cœur.

Accueillez, je vous prie, l'expression vraie des sentiments de mon dévouement éternel et du respect avec lequel j'ai l'honneur d'être Fr.- CÉSAR DE LA HARPE.”<sup>48</sup>

Aleksander never forgot about his teacher. He wrote letters to him, in which he called him his dear and true friend (“mon cheri et vrai ami”<sup>49</sup>), and when he ascended to the Russian throne a few years later, he brought La Harpe back and appointed him a member of his secret council, along with Czartoryski, Stroganov, Novosiltsev and Kochubey. According to Czartoryski, La Harpe came to St. Petersburg in the uniform of the directorate of the Helvetic Republic, of which he was one of the founders.<sup>50</sup>

The activities of this secret council were connected with the first years of the reign of Alexander I, which can be subdivided into three distinct parts. The first of them was a period of slogans regarding reforms, liberalism and changes; however, shortly afterwards, the young tsar had to deal with other matters, which effectively absorbed his attention for at least a decade, in particular the wars that Russia, together with other European countries, mainly England, Austria and Prussia, waged against Napoleon Bonaparte. Much has been written about the role played by Russia, as well as personal relationship between the Russian Tsar and the French Emperor, and this is a fascinating and complicated story, full of colourful episodes – starting with the battle of Austerlitz, from where Alexander fled with tears running down his face, through the peace on the Neman River, a meeting in Erfurt, Napoleon's unsuccessful matrimonial plans related to Alexander's beloved younger sister Catherine, up until the culminating point – the siege of Moscow in 1812, harsh Russian winter, Leipzig and Waterloo, followed by the dancing congress in 1815 in Vienna. Aleksander I emerged victorious from the Napoleonic wars, basking in the glory of his victory over Napoleon and became one of the builders of the new order in Europe. The Viennese system turned out to be extremely resilient for an imposed system, as it survived for a hundred years until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. It was built on a number of principles, all driven by the main goal – to bring back order destroyed by the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 319-320.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 327.

<sup>49</sup> *Lettres du Grand-Cud Alexandre a Laharpe et au prince Victor Kotchoubey*, [in] *ibidem*, p. 334.

<sup>50</sup> *Pamiętniki...*, p. 173.

French revolution and everything that it brought, and to prevent something similar from ever happening again. Its main author and originator was Klemens von Metternich, a brilliant and talented minister of the Austrian Emperor, but apart from him at least two figures were also worthy of a mention – Charles-Maurice Talleyrand, who successfully used diplomacy to bring France up from the role of an object to political subject in Vienna, as well as Alexander I, who defeated Napoleon.<sup>51</sup>

Alexander I was thirty-eight years old in 1815 and was no longer a young liberal ruler whose ascension to the throne was welcomed with hope and joy. The long years of a reign marked by wars and the fresh memories of his father's death – which will be discussed later in the article – destroyed his health, his condition and made the already unstable man even more volatile. The student of an Enlightenment philosopher, Alexander I began to gravitate towards religion in its most mystical manifestations, which can be symbolised by his acquaintance and contacts with Baroness Julianna von Krudener, a mystic who perceived him as a saviour from the powers of the Antichrist Napoleon. It is said that it was her influence that made him come up with a concept of the Holy Alliance,<sup>52</sup> a bizarre concept for at least several reasons. The Holy Alliance was intended to be an alliance of Christian rulers in defence against the revolutionary neo-paganism. It was both a religious and political institution – Alexander I focused on this former, while Metternich tended to focus on the latter, as well as the reactionary and ecumenical one – after all, it connected the Orthodox Tsar, the Catholic Austrian Emperor and the Protestant Prussian King. In the course of time, however, the Holy Alliance began to depart from Alexander I's assumptions, which was dictated by the opposition and dissent towards the Viennese order that kept growing for the rest of the century. These movements also reached Russia itself, but when they resulted in the uprising at the end of 1825, it was no longer Alexander's problem.

However, in this reactionary Europe ruled by the Viennese order, there was also a place for a constitutional state. Its creation was a solution to one of the most urgent and controversial problems of the congress. After Napoleon's downfall, the short history of the Duchy of Warsaw ended and the winners had to decide what to do with the Polish lands and the Poles. Based on their decision, the Kingdom of Poland was established, with Alexander as its king. The Kingdom of Poland, colloquially referred to as Congress Poland, was a kind of a constitutional experiment and a personal testing ground for the Tsar, where he could freely test the parliamentary system and constitution before he could make a decision to implement them in Russia. In hindsight, the experiment was not successful. First of all, it created a paradoxical and uncomfortable situation, making a single person both a tsar and a constitutional king.

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<sup>51</sup> More information on the Congress of Vienna: KING, D., *Wiedeń 1814. Jak pogromcy Napoleona, bawiąc się, ustaliły kształt Europy*, translated by N. RADOMSKI, Poznań 2009; more on Alexander's participation in Napoleon's story, e.g. ANDRUSIEWICZ, A., *Aleksander I...*

<sup>52</sup> On Baroness Krudener: ANDRUSIEWICZ, A., *Aleksander I...*, p. 416-430 (chapter XXVIII *Biały anioł*); ZAMOYSKI, A., *Święte szaleństwo. Romantycy, patrioci, rewolucjoniści 1776-1871*, translated by M. RO-NIKIER, Kraków 2015, p. 274-275.

The very idea of the Congress Poland itself shows that Alexander I still thought and dreamt about reforms, but they were never carried out. The last years of his reign, the last decade separating the Vienna Congress from his death, is usually associated with the figure of Count Aleksey Arakcheyev, who at that time became the second most important person in the country. At the end of his life, Alexander was hit with many problems and disappointments – starting with the death of Sophie, one of his few children who managed to survive childhood, the beloved daughter he had with his long-standing lover Maria Naryshkina, through dynastic and political trouble, unfulfilled hopes and ambitions, and – most probably – remorse. He died in December 1825 in Taganrog.

Aleksander I was a strange man, whose character was difficult to grasp. One of the paradoxes of his personality and – by extension – his reign was undoubtedly the clear divide between reaction and reform, between religious mysticism and education in the spirit of the Enlightenment. It seems that the education he received and the climate he had been living in since early childhood thanks to his grandmother have had a significant impact on these traits. Alexander was an autocratic ruler brought up in the spirit of the Enlightenment, and he never managed to get rid of either one of these identities, which have caused internal conflicts and hesitation.

The death of Alexander caused a succession problem. He never had a legitimate son and the two daughters he had with his wife died in childhood. The throne had to be taken by his brother and according to law, the person entitled to sit on the throne was the Grand Duke Constantin, second son of Paul and Maria. Constantin, however, for reasons that will not be discussed in depth in this paper, including Congress Poland and a morganatic marriage, he decided to give up his right to the throne.<sup>53</sup> This way, Alexander was succeeded by his third brother, Nicholas.

Nicholas Pavlovich Romanov was born in 1796. He was the third son and the ninth and penultimate child of Paul and Maria. He was also their last child to be born during the lifetime of his grandmother, Empress Catherine. Catherine died shortly after his birth, but before that she could feel happiness of having a third grandson. She was much less happy about her six granddaughters. Little Nicholas immediately became her favourite. In the letters to her correspondent, Melchior Grimm, she predicted an even better future for him compared to his older brothers, saying that “compared to him [...] they will be dwarves.”<sup>54</sup> If Catherine had lived longer, even a few years, she would probably have taken care of his education and upbringing at least as carefully as she once took care of Alexander’s back in the day. However, Nicholas was born in June and Catherine died in November of the same year.

If she had any plans to depose her son from power and to designate Alexander as her successor before her death, even if some documents were prepared, her intentions died

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<sup>53</sup> More on Constantin: BORTNOWSKI, W., *Wielki Książę Konstanty...*; KARNOWICZ, E., *Wielki Książę Konstanty. Zarys biograficzny*, Warsaw 1900.

<sup>54</sup> After: LINCOLN W.B., *Mikołaj I*, translated by H. KRZECZKOWSKI, Warsaw 1988, p. 44.

with her. After Catherine died, Paul took the throne, thus starting his short-lived five-year-long reign, which ended in winter of 1801 in quite dramatic circumstances.

The most striking characteristic of Paul's reign was probably the fact that he decided to firmly distance himself from his mother and predecessor, not so much politically, but mostly regarding the symbolic aspects. For show, he honoured the memory of his murdered father, whom he arranged a second burial, moving the remains of his both parents together in the Peter and Paul Fortress. For some time it seemed as well that his relations with Alexander would not become more aggravated, since his son pledged allegiance to his father and was his obvious successor. However, there was still some tension between them, a divide which started to deepen, first secretly, later visibly and openly. One day, for example, Paul ran into his son's chambers and found him reading forbidden "subversive" literature, and in anger he reminded him of the tragic story of Tsarevich Alexei Petrovich, who was sentenced to death by his father, Peter the Great.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the opposition against the tsar began to gather around Alexander. Ultimately, a conspiracy was also brought to life. Its main proponent was Count Nikita Petrovich Panin, who most probably wanted to take revenge for falling out of grace in 1799. Some senior officers were also involved, along with Peter Alekseyevich Pahlen, Military Governor of St. Petersburg. It was probably Pahlen who dragged Alexander into the conspiracy, telling him about the benefits it could bring to Russia and his personal security. The conspiracy succeeded. At the end of winter 1801, at the Mikhailovsky Palace, Tsar Paul I ate his last supper with his family, and then went to rest in his apartments, where the conspirators entered before midnight. They first demanded him to sign the act of abdication, which he refused, after which they attacked him. It is not entirely clear whether Paul died from his wounds, because the attackers strangled him with a sash to be sure.<sup>56</sup>

Alexander's role is not entirely clear, but it can be said that even if he did not actively participate in the conspiracy, he was aware of its existence and had to live with the shadow of patricide and tsaricide until the last days of his life.

As we can see, the first years of Nicholas' life abounded in many events and family problems. From his birth until his fifth birthday, there were three different rulers on the throne, each of whom had a different concept of what the upbringing of the young Grand Duke should look like. Catherine, as has already been mentioned, did not have enough time to leave her mark, so the first person who made initial decisions regarding the education of young Nicholas and Michael, his younger brother, born two years later in 1798 and the only *porfirorodny* among all the siblings, was their father. Paul's approach to the matter was totally different from what his mother would have done, and instead of searching for western philosophers and preparing his own instructions following the spirit of Enlightenment, he appointed Matvei Ivanovich Lamsdorf, a military man born in 1745. The nomination itself took place in quite peculiar circumstances. One day Paul, probably without any earlier notice, told Lamsdorf in German: "Ich habe Sie zum Erzieher mein-

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<sup>55</sup> ANDRUSIEWICZ, A. *Aleksander I...*, p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> On Paul's death: EJDELMAN, N., *Pawel I...*



Fig. 3. Alois Gustav Rochstuhl, Nicolas I as child, 1806 (kopia z 1869) ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nickolas\\_I\\_as\\_child\\_by\\_A.Rockstuhl.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nickolas_I_as_child_by_A.Rockstuhl.jpg))

er Soehne gewaehlt”,<sup>57</sup> and when he tried to excuse himself from the task, claiming a lack of any competencies, the tsar added: “wenn Sie es nicht fuer mich thun wollen, so mueszen Sie es fuer Rusland thun; aber das sage Ich ihnen, das Sie aus meinen Soehnen nicht solche schlingel machen, wie die deutschen Prinzen es sind.”<sup>58</sup> Lamsdorf assumed his new role in 1800. At that point, Nicholas was four years old and until that moment he was always cared for by women. He rarely saw his mother, as he was taken care of by two governesses, Ms. Lieven and Ms. Adlerberg, wives of German-Baltic officers, as well as a nanny, Jane Lyon from Scotland, to whom the boy was very attached. Military elements were present in Nicholas’ upbringing from the very beginning. He received his first officer rank from his father immediately after his grandmother’s death, and so he was appointed Colonel of the Imperial Horse Guard at the age of 6 months. Together

with his brother Michael, they played with toy rifles, wooden sabres and fake military drums. Also the way that Lamsdorf approached his new and unexpected duties was very military in nature, as he had little idea of how children should be brought up, or how Great Dukes should be brought up – he only knew how to promote military discipline among the recruits. Nicholas himself later described his educator and his influence: “Count Lamsdorf knew how to inspire in us just one feeling – fear, so much fear and so much certainty of his omnipotence, that our mother’s face came to have secondary importance. This state of affairs deprived us completely of the happiness of filial trust in our mother, whom we were allowed to see only rarely; even then it was like being sentenced.”<sup>59</sup>

The figure of their mother will be mentioned further in the paper. As has already been mentioned, his father managed to nominate a tutor for his youngest sons and he was murdered shortly afterwards. The new tsar and his elder brother Alexander entrusted his brothers’ upbringing to his mother and he was not particularly interested in their lives until later. Maria Feodorovna decided to respect the will of her deceased husband and thus Lamsdorf remained at his post. As it seems, she felt sympathy for him. In her biography,

<sup>57</sup> DUBROWICZ, N., *Сборник Императорского Русского исторического общества. Т. 98. Материалы и черты к биографии императора Николая I и к истории его царствования*, Petersburg 1896, p. 26.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>59</sup> After: BRUCE, L.W., *Mikolaj I*, p. 50.

W. Bruce Lincoln suggests that this sympathy may have stemmed from the fact that Maria, a German princess, enjoyed being around another German, especially one who did not speak perfect Russian just like her.<sup>60</sup>

Apart from his tutor, Nicolas was taught by teachers appointed by his mother – most of them were far more competent than Lamsdorf in that regard. The subjects that Nicholas has been taught since he was seven years old included political economics, Latin, Greek, German and French, as well as history. Starting in 1809, he also started learning logic, law and history of law, advanced mathematics, science and English. However, such a broad curriculum did not change a fundamental fact – Nicholas was not, in fact, a talented and obedient student. He also did not have any teacher, who would be able to get him interested in learning. Contrary to his oldest brother, who, first of all, was smart and clever by nature; secondly, he had La Harpe, who was a perfect mentor for him; and thirdly, he was better than Constantin, Nicholas considered learning and his classes to be a nuisance. In fact, he was mainly interested in military matters and not much else. He also seemed to have had at least a partial interest in modern history, especially the French Revolution, outlined pessimistically by his history teacher. His answer to a question about his assessment of the attitude of Louis XVI asked during one of these classes became an anecdote. Story has it that the ten-year-old duke answered that the French king demonstrated his weakness and betrayed his task, as “he would have spared his people much suffering if he had not spared the conspirators.”<sup>61</sup> It is very easy to draw a parallel to the events that occurred almost twenty years later – when, in the face of something that must have seemed similar to him, Nicholas, freshly crowned as a Tsar, did not allow himself to show weakness and did not spare the conspirators.

One can imagine that the attention of adolescent Nicholas was occupied by war far more than by his classes and education. In 1812, he dreamed about taking part in the defence of his motherland, but he was only allowed to join the army two years later and then he only managed to enter Paris after its surrender. The situation repeated in the following year. However, when Nicolas returned to St. Petersburg in 1815 after his second departure, his life began to change. At this point he was already nineteen years old, his education was about to end, and on his way back he became officially engaged to Princess Charlotte of Prussia. All of this, however, was nothing compared to another change, one that Nicholas himself probably had not any idea about. Most probably it was then that Alexander I started to perceive him as his potential successor. In 1816, Nicholas’ school education came to an end, starting what was probably the happiest period of his life, filled with military matters and family life – the marriage of Nicholas and Charlotte, who assumed the name of Alexandra Feodorovna, according to all the circumstantial evidence, was exceptionally successful and the couple was well-matched. This period came to an end in December 1825, when Nicholas ascended to the throne among the shouts of rebellious officers, cannon shots and the sound of ice on the Neva River cracking under the boots of insurgents.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 50-51.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 53.

His reign lasted for exactly thirty years and the end of his rule and life came in no less dramatic circumstances than his coronation – during the Crimean War, which Russia was then losing.

Both the character and reign of Tsar Nicholas I were not characterised by ambivalence, characteristic of his older brother. While Alexander I seemed to be a man of contradictions, Nicholas I was characterised by clear and strict straightforwardness, which left almost no room for hesitation or doubt. He is commonly associated with suppression of the Decembrist Revolt, the victory over the November insurgents, the post-revolutionary repressions in Congress Poland after 1831, the troops under the command of his friend, Prince of Warsaw Ivan Paskevich, who were sent to the Habsburg Family in order to help Austria fight the unruly Hungarians in 1849, as well as the Crimean War and his death following the fall of Sevastopol. Dark legends were told about both his interior and foreign policies – in the case of the former, the legends were associated with his activities on behalf of the Holy Alliance, which in the time of his rule was already military, not ideological in nature, and in the case of the latter, with the so-called Nicholas' system. All in all, the policy of Nicholas I seems to be exactly what it was in reality – policy of a ruler, who was not properly brought up and prepared to become a ruler, whose main and greatest passion, as well as the only aspect that he fully understood was the army with Prussic-style parades and drills, not wars and strategies. Nicholas I was not born to be an emperor, but when he became one, which he most probably did not want, he did his best to play this role and rule in a way that, according to his views and convictions, was the best for Russia. While his older brother, Alexander I, was nicknamed the Sphinx of the North or Talma of the North – in honour of a popular western actor, Nicholas I earned two nicknames, one of which was much more flattering than the other. Some people called him the Iron Tsar, while others used the nickname Palkin.

It is difficult to decide what had the greatest impact on the formation of Alexander's and Nicholas' characters, two brothers separated by almost two decades. To what extent it was an effect of genetic lottery, what can be attributed to the times in which they lived and ruled, what can be attributed to their upbringing? Naturally, this cannot be stated with any certainty, but in the case of the latter – their upbringing – one can point out very significant opposites, correlated in a clear way with the opposites which can be seen in already formed personalities. Thus, while the responsibility for Alexander's upbringing was borne by Empress Catherine, who was called an enlightened ruler not without a reason, in the case of Nicholas this responsibility was borne mainly by his mother, Maria Feodorovna, who, to a large extent, was guided by the will of her deceased husband. While La Harpe, a philosopher and republican, had the greatest influence on Alexander as a boy, Nicholas was brought up by Lamsdorf, a military man chosen for this task by chance, as it seems. Finally, Alexander was brought up as a future ruler from the very beginning, while Nicholas was trained to become a soldier. It is, therefore, no wonder that one of them grew to become a "strange tsar", who was unstable and had visions of reforms on the one hand and mystical visions on the other hand, and the other one became what amounted to a crowned corporal.



It is also significant that Nicholas I made sure that his son and successor was adequately and comprehensively prepared for his reign by Vasily Zhukovsky, an outstanding Russian poet, who took on the task of educating the young Alexandr Nikolayevich. The boy received thorough education in four foreign languages (French, German, English and Polish), history, geography, logic, philosophy and natural sciences, as well as military matters. Additionally, starting from his early youth he was made familiar with the secrets of state affairs, he also had an opportunity to tour Europe – he was in Austria, Italy, Sweden, German states and the Netherlands, as well as England, where the young Queen Victoria became infatuated with him. Although Alexander II's<sup>62</sup> life ended suddenly and tragically, he was undoubtedly one of the outstanding rulers and proponent of reforms who carried out a great work of enfranchisement in Russia. The question is to what extent this was a result of appropriate upbringing and education.

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<sup>62</sup> On Alexander II: ANDRUSIEWICZ, A., *Romanowowie...*, p. 427-463 (chapter *Aleksander II Nikolaiewicz. Danse macabre*).

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