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An Emperor Travels around the Russian Empire Outskirts in the 1880s: As According to V.S. Obolenskii's Diary

Olesya Plekh  , Natalya V. Chernikova 

Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

 plekh@mail.ru

Abstract: Based on the materials from a previously unpublished source – the diary of Prince V.S. Obolenskii-Neledinskii-Meletskii, preserved in the Department of Written Sources of the State Historical Museum, the authors in their article consider the travels of Alexander III through the outlying territories of the Russian Empire in 1882–1888. The diary contains not only many details from the life of the imperial family and the court, but also information on the organization of official and unofficial trips of the emperor, which made it possible to trace the changes that took place in the ceremonial practice and the influence of modernization processes on the goals of the emperor's travels. There is presented through new information on the official visits of Alexander III to Poland (1884, 1886), Finland (1885), the Province of the Don Cossack Host (1887), Ukraine (1885) and the Caucasus (1888), as well as on private vacation trips to the Finnish skerries, the Principality of Łowicz and Livadia. The author shows that as inspection and study trips around Russia became a thing of the past, as ceremonial events came to the fore. The travels of Alexander III, continuing the line traced under Alexander II, were intended to establish a positive image of the monarch and emphasize the connection with his subjects. In the 1880s, visits to remote imperial residences for the purpose of recreation and entertainment became a regular occurrence, events which should be considered as an important part of the daily life of the imperial family.

Keywords: ego-documents, sources of personal origin, Ministries of the Imperial Court, center and regions, communicative practices

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Высочайшие путешествия по окраинам Российской империи в 1880-е гг.: на материалах дневника В.С. Оболенского

Олеся Плекс  , Наталья Черникова 

Институт российской истории Российской академии наук, Москва, Россия

 plekh@mail.ru

Аннотация: На материалах неизвестного ранее источника – дневника князя В.С. Оболенского-Нелединского-Мелецкого, сохранившегося в Отделе письменных источников Государственного исторического музея (ОПИ ГИМ), – рассматриваются путешествия Александра III по окраинным



территориям Российской империи в 1882–1888 гг. Дневник содержит не только множество подробностей из жизни императорской семьи и придворного мира, но и сведения об организации официальных и неофициальных поездок императора, что позволило проследить изменения, происходившие в церемониальной практике, и выявить влияние модернизационных процессов на цели и задачи высочайших путешествий. Представлены новые сведения об официальных визитах Александра III в Польшу (1884 г., 1886 г.), Финляндию (1885 г.), Область войска Донского (1887 г.), на Украину (1885 г.) и Кавказ (1888 г.), а также о частных поездках на отдых в финские шхеры, Ловичское княжество и Ливадию. С учетом предшествовавшего опыта показано, что инспекционные и ознакомительные поездки по России остались в прошлом, на первый план вышли церемониальные мероприятия. Путешествия Александра III, продолжая линию, намеченную при Александре II, были призваны утвердить положительный образ монарха и подчеркнуть его связь с подданными. В 1880-е гг. регулярным стало посещение отдаленных императорских резиденций с целью отдыха и развлечений, что следует рассматривать как важную часть повседневной жизни императорской семьи.

Ключевые слова: эго-документы, источники личного происхождения, Министерство императорского двора, центр и регионы, коммуникативные практики

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Introduction

In modern historiography, the ceremonial travels of monarchs are considered as both important government events, indicating the foreign and domestic political course of a country, and as an element of public administration which played a significant role in what was a relatively undeveloped system of control and oversight over local affairs. However, no less interesting is the view of these journeys as a form of interaction between the monarch and his subjects – an act designed to emphasize the spiritual connection between the sovereign and the people.¹ In this regard, the trips made across Russia by Emperor Alexander III, whose activities have received a contradictory assessment in the scientific literature, are worthy of special attention. Some scientists have portrayed him as a reactionary and obscurant who abandoned liberal reforms and hindered the development of the country, whereas others have described him as an emperor who managed to strengthen the state, to achieve economic progress, and avoid bloody wars. However, now historians seek to give a more balanced assessment of his reign.² When characteriz-

¹ See, for example: M.V. Leskinen, and O.V. Khavanova, eds. *Romanovy v doroge: Puteshestviia i poezdki chlenov tsarskoi sem'i po Rossii i za granitsu* [The Romanovs on the road: Travels and trips of members of the royal family in Russia and abroad] (Moscow; St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia Publ., 2016); R.S. Wortman, *Stsenarii vlasti: Mify i tseremonii russkoi monarkhii* [Scenarios of Power: Myths and Ceremonies of the Russian Monarchy] (Moscow: OGI Publ., 2002–2004).

² A.N. Bokhanov, *Imperator Aleksandr III* [Emperor Alexander III] (Moscow: Russkoe slovo Publ., 2019); I.E. Dronov, *Imperator Aleksandr III i ego epokha* [Emperor Alexander III and his Era] (Moscow: Akademicheskii proekt Publ., 2016); I.V. Zimin, *Vzroslyi mir imperatorskikh rezidentsii: vtoraiia chetvert' XIX – nachalo XX v.: povsednevnaia zhizn' rossiiskogo imperatorskogo Dvora* [The adult world of imperial residences: the second quarter of the XIX – the beginning of the early XX century: everyday life of the Russian imperial court] (Moscow: Centrpoligraf Publ.; St. Petersburg: Russkaia troika-SPb Publ., 2011); S.V. Il'in, *Imperator Aleksandr III* [Emperor Alexander III] (Moscow: Kvadriga Publ., 2019); A.V. Remnev, *Samoderzhavnoe pravitel'stvo: Komitet ministrov v sisteme vysshego upravleniia Rossiiskoi imperii (vtoraiia polovina XIX – nachalo XX veka)* [Autocratic Government: The Committee of Ministers in the system of Supreme Administration of the Russian Empire (the second half of the XIX – early XX century)] (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 2010); E.P. Tolmachev, *Aleksandr III i ego vremia* [Alexander III and his time] (Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi klub Publ., 2007), etc.

ing a person, present-day historians often turn to the testimonies of contemporaries who were also not unanimous in their views.³ All this does not diminish the achievements of historiography of the period, but obviously requires the search for and the scientific use of historical sources, including those of private origin, a process can that supplement our understanding of the processes which took place in this period.

It is important to emphasize that the travels of Alexander III have not yet become the subject of unique study, and the information available in that literature is often fragmentary. It has been recognized in historical literature that imperial tours played an important role both in the public and private life of the emperor, but the attention of historians to them is limited to individual trips and episodes, such as the crash of the royal train near Borki in 1888 and its impact on the politics of the period.⁴ Apparently, the reasons for the current historiographical situation lie in the narrowness of the existing source base, which does not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the problem.

In this regard, attention should be paid to the diaries of Prince Vladimir Sergeevich Obolenskii-Neledinskii-Meletskii (hereinafter – Obolenskii) stored in the Department of Written Sources of the State Historical Museum.⁵ It is no exaggeration to say that this material is unique; it contains valuable information about the court and state life of the 1880s, and allows taking a fresh look at the personality of the emperor. Against the background of the diaries of prominent political figures (A.A. Polovtsov, P.A. Valuev, etc.) already well-known to historians, Obolenskii stands out for the brevity of his notes and absence of value judgments: the author did not select facts, but daily recorded all significant events, meetings, impressions of situations he was present for. Prince Obolenskii enjoyed special trust of Alexander III and was one of his closest friends. From 1882, he held the position of Marshal of the Imperial Court and accompanied the monarch on almost all his trips. The information presented in the diary, previously unknown to historians, allows us to look at this side of the emperor's life from a new perspective.

In the course of this study, the chief goal is to identify the features of the official and unofficial travels of Alexander III around the outskirts of the Russian Empire in 1882–1888 as recorded in the diary of V.S. Obolenskii, which will allow us to see not only the changes that took place in the ceremonial practice, but also the manifestation of the modernization processes in arranging those trips.

Forming a Tradition of Emperor's Trips

The material accumulated in historiography shows that in different periods the goals and objectives of the emperor's travels, and the attitude towards them in general differed greatly. Back in the 18th century, they became important government events, but by that point had not become part of the sovereigns' daily life. The numerous trips of Peter I made around Russia are known, and were almost always were associated with the solu-

³ I.E. Barykina, and V.G. Chernuha, eds. *Aleksandr III: pro et contra, antologiiia* [Alexander III: pro et contra, anthology] (St Petersburg: Russkaia khristianskaia gumanitarnaia akademiia Publ., 2013); V.G. Chernuha, ed. *Aleksandr Tretii: Vospominaniia. Dnevnik. Pis'ma* [Alexander the Third: Memories. Diaries. Letters] (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii fond Publ., 2001), etc.

⁴ See, for axampe: A.N. Bokhanov, *Imperator Aleksandr III*, 374–76; R.S. Wortman, *Stsenarii vlasti*. Vol. 2, 384–87, 394–400.

⁵ The diaries of V.S. Obolenskii-Neledinskii-Meletskii for 1882–1891 make up 10 storage units of the family archival fund of the princes Obolensky, they are stored in the Department of Written Sources of the State Historical Museum (henceforth – OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 1–10). This source has not been introduced into scientific use to this day.

tion to the tasks of state importance, as are the trips of Catherine II, which were remarkable for their special solemnity and splendor of the ceremony. Paul I also preferred getting to know the people and the country directly, but unlike his predecessor, his trips were usually inspections. The emperor wanted:

to see the ordinary, everyday life of the people, and it was strictly forbidden to repair roads, bridges and make any preparations for the journey of the sovereign.⁶

While traveling, he considered the complaints and petitions of the population; he did not leave unnoticed the abuses of local officials, and immediately made specific decisions to address them.

In the first half of the 19th century, trips became an ordinary phenomenon in the life of the royalty. Contemporaries said that Alexander I ruled the country from a carriage. Whereas in the first period of his reign, his trips were mainly associated with foreign policy events, then in the post-war period, they became more and more distant, and their reasons were less and less unambiguous: some researchers tend to see this as an “escape” from responsibility,⁷ others as a connection with “gloomy mood” of the sovereign.⁸ In official publications, his goal was presented as a manifestation of care for the subjects and the desire to know the hardships of life in the provinces.⁹ It should be admitted that this aspect of the reign of Alexander I still needs a comprehensive analysis; however, the numerous travels of the next emperor have to be analyzed as well. Traditionally, it is believed that the main purpose of the trips of Nicholas I was to review troops, but recent studies show that the sovereign did not miss the opportunity to get acquainted with the state of civilian institutions; he was very attentive to observing the established order, never ignored violations, and was receptive to the most humble petitions.¹⁰

Significant attention in the literature is paid to the “marriage with Russia” of Alexander Nikolaevich in 1837.¹¹ The publication of his unique correspondence with Nicholas I, which made it possible to see not only the tasks and nature of this large-scale event (“to get to know Russia as much as possible, and let future subjects see you”), but also the principles that the emperor was guided by on the trips:

you should pay attention equally to everything <...> because everything useful should be important to you, but at the same time you need to know the ordinary things in order to get an idea of the real state of affairs.¹²

⁶ N.K. Shil'der, *Imperator Pavel Pervyi: istoriko-biograficheskii ocherk* [Emperor Paul the First: a historical and biographical sketch] (Moscow: A.S. Suvorin Publ., 1901), 352.

⁷ R.S. Wortman, *Stsenarii vlasti*, vol. 1, 317.

⁸ N.K. Shil'der, *Imperator Aleksandr Pervyi. Ego zhizn' i tsarstvovanie* [Emperor Alexander the First. His life and reign], vol. 4 (Moscow: A.S. Suvorin Publ., 1898), 47.

⁹ *Puteshestvie Ego Velichestva Gosudaria Imperatora chrez Orlovskuiu guberniyu v 1823 g.* [Journey of His Majesty the Sovereign Emperor through the Oryol province in 1823] (Orel: Tipografiia Orlovskogo Gubernskogo Pravleniia Publ., 1823), 7–8.

¹⁰ L.V. Vyskochkov, *Imperator Nikolai I: Chelovek i gosudar'* [Emperor Nicholas I: A Man and a Sovereign], vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburgskii gosudarstvennyi universitet Publ., 2001), 390–404, etc.

¹¹ T. Guzairov, “Stsenarii i nepredskazuemost'. Vpechatleniia i razmyshleniia uchastnikov puteshestviia po Rossii 1837 g. [Scenario and unpredictability. Impressions and reflections of the participants of the trip to Russia in 1837].” *Imagologiya i komparativistika*, no. 8 (2017): 62–75, <https://doi.org/10.17223/24099554/8/4>; G.N. Plotnikova, and S.N. Plotnikov, “Vsenarodnoe obruchenie naslednika s Rossiei (k 200-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia imperatora Aleksandra II) [The nationwide betrothal of the heir to Russia (to the 200th anniversary of the birth of Emperor Alexander II)].” *Manuskript*, no. 12–2 (2018): 243–248, <https://doi.org/10.30853/manuskript.2018-12-2.12>; R.S. Wortman, vol. 1 of *Stsenarii vlasti*, 473–482, etc.

¹² L.G. Zaharova, and L.I. Tyutyunnik, eds. *Venchanie s Rossiej: Perepiska velikogo kniazia Aleksandra Nikolaevicha s imperatorom Nikolaem I. 1837 god* [Wedding with Russia: Correspondence of Grand Duke Alexander Nikolaevich with Emperor Nicholas I. 1837] (Moscow: Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet Publ., 1999), 21, 25.

After the accession to the throne, Alexander II made trips aimed at uniting the country on the eve of the “Great Reforms,” delivered speeches in provincial towns. As contemporaries noted,

so far, it has not been customary of our sovereigns to speak with the estates about the common interests of the people...¹³

Thus far, the trips of the post-reform period have not yet been sufficiently studied; they certainly played a significant role in shaping the positive image of the monarch. In addition, at that time, the royal family's leisurely travels to Livadia (Crimea) became regular,¹⁴ as well as long-distance hunting trips. From the 1860s, the railway network developed rapidly, which made it possible to gradually abandon long-distance trips in carriages and travel by a comfortable royal train.¹⁵

Official Visits of Alexander III

As noted above, Prince Obolenskii appointed Marshal of the Imperial Court accompanied Alexander III on almost all trips and participated in their preparation. His diary reflected the official visits to the outskirts which should be regarded as significant for the period of the reign of Alexander III. Among these was a trip to Poland in 1884, during which a well-known meeting with the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors took place from 3 to 5 September in Skierniewice. It is believed that this event was aimed at strengthening the “Union of the Three Emperors,” as six months earlier, on 15 March 1884, representatives of the monarchs signed in Berlin the Protocol for an extension for three years of the Austro-Russian-German treaty which had concluded in 1881.

The preparations for the trip began a month before the departure – the first mention of this is found in the entry dated 28 July: Obolenskii discussed the upcoming travel with Minister of the Imperial Court, Count I.I. Vorontsov-Dashkov, manager of the Warsaw imperial palaces S.S. Mukhanov and manager of the Łowicz Principality S.A. Velio-polsk.¹⁶ The planned trip included stops in Vilna and Warsaw, military exercises near the Novogeorgievsk fortress, hunting in Skierniewice and Lubokhenek. Vorontsov-Dashkov informed Obolenskii about the arrival of Emperor Wilhelm on 15 August, and 4 days later it became known that the Austrian emperor would also arrive in Skierniewice.¹⁷ The departure of Alexander III with a large retinue was scheduled for 25 August; the lists of those departing were coordinated for a long time. “Unprecedented confusion,” Obolenskii wrote on 21 August.¹⁸

¹³ D.P. Khrushchov, *Materialy dlia istorii uprazhneniia krepostnogo sostoianiia pomeshchich'ikh krest'ian v Rossii v tsarstvovanie imperatora Aleksandra II* [Materials for the history of the abolition of serfdom of landowner peasants in Russia during the reign of Emperor Alexander II], vol. 1 (Berlin: F. Schneider Publ., 1860), 366.

¹⁴ The idea of arranging the royal estate on the southern coast of Crimea appeared during the trip to Yalta by Nicholas I with his family in 1837, however, long royal visits became annual after 1861. See: N.N. Kalinin, and M.A. Zemlianichenko, *Romanovy i Krym. 'U vsekh nas ostalas' toska po Krymu...'* [The Romanovs and the Crimea. “We all have a longing for the Crimea...”] (Simferopol: Biznes-Inform Publ., 2021), 14–28, 54–90.

¹⁵ The first royal train “with the greatest conveniences” appeared on the Nikolayevskaya railway in 1851. See: N.A. Magaziner, *Imperatorskie poezda: kak eto bylo: khronika stroitel'stva i ekspluatatsii* [Imperial Trains: how it was: chronicle of construction and operation] (Moscow: Renome Publ., 2017), 48, 57–60.

¹⁶ Otdel pis'mennykh istochnikov Gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzeia [Department of Written Sources of the State Historical Museum] (henceforth – OPI GIM), f. 224, op. 2, d. 3, l. 108 ob.

¹⁷ Ibid., l. 119 ob.

¹⁸ Ibid., l. 120 ob.

On the appointed day, the royal train departed, and the next morning it arrived in Vilna. The sovereign was in this city for the first time, attended a parade and later a solemn reception. On the same day, they moved on. On the morning of 27 August, the train was in Warsaw, where the emperor also watched a parade (“the parade failed, one dragoon was killed, another was seriously wounded”), then went to various institutions, including the Church of St. Alexander, which “made a sensation” (according to Obolenskii’s observations, it delighted Polish society).¹⁹ During the three-day stay of the sovereign in the Polish capital, there were solemn receptions which brought together much of the Polish aristocracy.

On 30 August, they went to the Novogeorgievsk fortress, where military exercises took place, and on the evening of 2 September they arrived in Skierniewice. The next day, at the station, Alexander III and Maria Fedorovna met emperors Franz Joseph and Wilhelm: “these were very nice meetings,” Obolenskii noted.²⁰ Together with the emperors, German Chancellor O. von Bismarck and his sons, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary G. Kalnoki, Prussian and Austrian generals had arrived at the summit. At the station, there was given a solemn dinner with music for the emperors, guests and the entire retinue (76 people in total). The event was recorded by photographers and correspondents. On 4 September, a review of two battalions by both emperors took place. V.S. Obolenskii wrote about this as follows:

The sovereign and one of the emperors stood on the flank, the scene was majestic.²¹

Then all of them went hunting. On 5 September, the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors left. As one can see, it was not a protocol meeting, but it still was covered in the press, and therefore it attracted everyone’s attention both in Russia and abroad.²²

On 7 September, Alexander III went to the Lubokhenek forestry, where they hunted for a week. On 15 September, the royal train returned to St. Petersburg. Obolenskii’s notes allow us to see that during their stay in Poland, representatives of the local aristocracy were “bewitched” by the sovereign and empress, and who tried to please them and expressed loyal feelings in every possible way. Only in relation to Countess Jadwiga Radziwiłł (née Krasinskaya), that Obolenskii noted: “She makes an impression that she hates Russians.”²³

Obolenskii’s Diary for 1885 reflects the travels of Alexander III to Helsingfors and Kiev. They had prepared for these trips no less than a month in advance. They were to arrive by the royal yacht to Vyborg on 23 July, then on the same day they were to depart by train to Villmanstrand, on 26 July to Helsingfors; from there on 29 July, and they were to return to Kronstadt. Other eminent persons and a rather numerous retinues traveled along with the imperial couple: it was assumed that up to 80 people would come to Villmanstrand, up to 150 people would gather in Helsingfors. From 2 to 3 July, Obolenskii was in Finland in order to prepare the “apartments,” then he “arranged the trip” in St. Petersburg. The journey went smoothly, they received a warm welcome; at each station

¹⁹ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 3, l. 123 ob.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 127.

²¹ N.V. Chernikova, “Tsarskie poezdki v opisaniĭ chinov Svity. V.S. Obolenskii i A.V. Golenishchev-Kutuzov o puteshestviiakh Aleksandra III v 1881, 1884 i 1890 gg. [Tsarist trips in the description of the ranks of the Retinue. V.S. Obolenskii and A.V. Golenishchev-Kutuzov about the travels of Alexander III in 1881, 1884 and 1890],” *Istoricheskii arhiv*, no. 4 (2020): 165.

²² “Politika vneshniaia [Foreign policy],” *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* [World illustration] 32 (1884): 211.

²³ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 3, l. 126.

the royal train was met by “huge crowds of people” with flowers; the towns were decorated and illuminated, the streets were crowded with cheering people. In Villmanstrand there took place a parade and maneuvers of Finnish troops; in Helsingfors there was a parade and review of recent court-martials. In addition to traditional solemn meetings and dinners with the highest civil and military ranks, there were visits to various establishments, the royal guests were entertained with a sailing race, concerts, sightseeing, as well as a ball.²⁴ There were magnificent ceremonies at all the events.

Prior to the decision to visit Kiev, it had become known about the forthcoming meeting of Alexander III with Emperor Franz Joseph. Obolenskii found it out on 5 July, and a week later they began to “talk about a trip to Kiev;” two days later they began preparing for the trip.²⁵ In early August, Obolenskii visited Kiev to resolve the issues of accommodating the guests and to coordinate with Governor-General A.R. Drenteln on the “schedule.” On 10 August, the imperial couple and the heir accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, went to the Moravian town of Kroměříž, where from 13 to 14 August, they met with the Austrian emperor. The meeting which was initiated by the Austrian side, and the emperor had made a favorable impression on his contemporaries; the emperors demonstrated “sincere friendly feelings,”²⁶ and Alexander III called the trip “successful,” but it did not lead to mitigation of contradictions as they failed to preserve the “Union of the Three Emperors.”

The imperial couple arrived in Kiev from Kroměříž on 16 August. The reception was no less magnificent than in Helsingfors: solemn meetings, cheering people everywhere, and shouts of “Hurrah” erupted from the beautifully decorated and illuminated streets. The program of the planned events was fairly usual: a visit to the Cathedral of St. Sophia and Orthodox holy places as well as charitable and educational institutions, a parade and maneuvers, dinners with military and civilian officials, a boat trip along the Dnieper, fireworks, and a concert.²⁷ However, the “universal joy” was somewhat overshadowed by the smoldering conflict between Drenteln and the Kiev nobility in the person of provincial leader N.V. Repnin.²⁸ To “eliminate the discontent of the nobles,” on 16 August, Obolenskii “brought together” Repnin and Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, and with his thanks, he managed to somewhat relieve tension and ensure the presence of the nobles at the parade.²⁹ On 19 August, the royal train left for St. Petersburg.

In 1886, another trip of Alexander III to Poland took place in connection with major troop maneuvers. The trip had been prepared for a month. On 26 August, the royal train arrived in Vysoko-Litovsk – Alexander III stayed there for 3 days (at the invitation of Countess M. Potocka, he stayed in her estate). “Due to a headache,” he missed the first day of the maneuvers (“they stayed at home all day”), and on 28 August he visited the Ianovskii State Stud Farm. On 29 August they arrived in Brest-Litovsk; there was a solemn reception for the imperial family. On the same day, Prince Wilhelm of Prussia arrived from Berlin; Alexander III met him with the heir. According to Obolenskii, the prince behaved “extremely kindly” and “modestly.” On the morning of 31 August, he left the town. The maneuvers continued until 2 September and were successful.³⁰

²⁴ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 4, l. 87 ob. – 109.

²⁵ Ibid., l. 96 ob., 100, 101, 104.

²⁶ “Politika vneshniaia,” 143.

²⁷ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 4, l. 117 ob. – 119.

²⁸ The dissatisfaction of the nobles was caused by the unresolved land issue in the province.

²⁹ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 4, l. 118.

³⁰ Ibid, d. 5, l. 107 ob. – 109 ob., 121 ob. – 126.

From 3 to 17 September, the imperial couple, the grand dukes and close associates hunted in various places of the Lubokhen forestry; they stayed in a hunting residence in Spala.³¹

The trips in 1887–1888 were somewhat different from the previous ones. After the averted assassination attempt on the emperor on 1 March 1887, even greater attention was paid to the preparation; all activities were carefully coordinated and were to strictly comply with the approved program. In May 1887 the imperial family went to Novochoerkassk. They began discussing this trip in early January, but the decision to travel was made at the end of March. The royal train set off on 3 May, went non-stop through Moscow, made brief stops in Kolomna, in Ryazan, where they “were met by ladies” at the station, and to Kozlov, where nobles gathered.³² In Voronezh, where the train arrived late on 4 May, Lieutenant General A.Ia. Fridre and commander of the Kharkov Military District, General F.F. Radetsky entered the carriage with a proposal to organize a review of the troops on the way back. The sovereign was dissatisfied with this act, since “no meetings were supposed to take place after eight p.m.,” but he agreed to visit the town, despite the fact that a stop in Voronezh had not been planned.³³ On the morning of 5 May, at Chertkovo station, the train was met by military appointed hetman N.I. Sviatopolk-Mirsky, then there was a meeting of chieftains in the Cossack village of Kamenskaya and in the evening they arrived in Novochoerkassk – the sovereign rode into the city on horseback. The next day, they congratulated the cesarevitch: in accordance with the approved ceremonial, a Cossack assembly took place, where the cesarevitch was presented with a flanged mace as a sign of dignity of the ataman of all Cossack troops, and the emperor read out the newly granted letter to the Don Cossack Host. On 7 May, a review of the Cossack troops was arranged. In the evening, the royal train departed for Voronezh, where on 8 May a parade was held before a vast assembly (“there was hustle and bustle”). The next stop was in Tula. It was planned to visit the arms factory and the parade of the 6th Tauride Grenadier Regiment, which “the sovereign found out of order.” According to police information, riots could have occurred in Tula, and although everything worked out, there were arrests at the cartridge factory. On 10 May, the imperial family arrived in Gatchina.³⁴

In the autumn of 1888, the most famous and long journey of Alexander III took place; its chronology is quite well covered in the literature.³⁵ The two-month travel began with a visit to Yelysavethrad and Nova Praha, where large-scale maneuvers took place from 26 August to 1 September. After the maneuvers, the emperor left for Poland: in Spala, the imperial couple rested and hunted for 12 days. On 17 September, the royal train passed from the Olen station, through Ivangorod, Kovel, Fastov, Znamenka, Liubotyn, and Merefa, and arrived in Rostov-on-Don. Afterward, the couple began the travel to the Caucasus. The eminent guests visited Mineralnye Vody, Vladikavkaz, Yekaterinodar, Novorossiysk, from where on 22 September they set off on the steamer “Moskva” to New Athos, Batum; then by rail they reached Borjom, Tiflis, Tsinandal, Baku, Kutais. On 14 October, they returned to Batum and went on the steamer to Sevastopol; there they expected Turkish

³¹ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 5, l. 126 ob. – 134 ob.

³² *Ibid.*, d. 6, l. 4 ob., 54 ob. – 58, 64–64 ob.

³³ *Ibid.*, l. 64 ob.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 65–67 ob.

³⁵ V.A. Potto, *Tsarskaia sem'ia na Kavkaze 18 sentiabria – 14 oktiabria 1888 goda* [The Royal family in the Caucasus September 18 – October 14, 1888] (Tiflis: Okruzhnoi shtab Kavkazskogo voennogo okruga Publ., 1889); D.N. Prasolov, “Zakavkazskii krai v tsarskikh puteshestviiakh: ot Aleksandra II do Nikolaia II [Transcaucasian Region in Tsarist travels: from Alexander II to Nicholas II],” *Kavkazologiya*, no. 2 (2022): 75–80, <https://doi.org/10.31143/2542-212X-2022-2-69-86>

ambassadors on 16 October.³⁶ This tour was remarkable for its numerous solemn events and especially magnificent ceremonies, but it was remembered for the tragedy that occurred on the way back. On 16 October, the train's departure was delayed: "We left at 5 o'clock, an hour later than scheduled."³⁷ In view of the fact that meetings at the stations and security measures had been planned in advance, it was necessary to make up for lost time. The royal train consisting of 15 cars and 2 locomotives exceeded the speed limit; on 17 October, around noon, not far from Kharkov, between the stations Taranovka and Borki, the train derailed. On the same day in the evening, the imperial family and the survivors boarded another train and headed for Kharkov making a detour through Lozovaya. In Kharkov, Kursk, Orel, Moscow, they met huge crowds of people who wanted to see the emperor: "People are enthusiastic, they are crying."³⁸ All seriously wounded lower ranks and servants were taken to Kharkov hospitals, while the victims from among the retinue, except for Baron K.G. Shernval, went to St. Petersburg by the royal train. The bodies of the dead were brought to the capital from the crash site. The mourning events ended with a funeral held on 22 October. The miraculous rescue of the royal family in the train wreck that claimed the lives of dozens of people,³⁹ made a lasting impression on both contemporaries and the emperor. On 20 October, Obolensky wrote in his diary: "The sovereign is crying. Luckily, it calms the nerves."⁴⁰

"When the Russian Tsar is Fishing...:" Vacation Trips

Every year, Alexander III spent time fishing and hunting; to that end, he made trips to Finnish skerries, Spala and Belovezhskaya Pushcha. In addition, from time to time the imperial family went to Livadia. Being the emperor's close friend, Prince Obolenskii often accompanied him on the trips.

It can be seen from the above text that during his official visits to Poland Alexander III missed no opportunity to make a stop in the Łowicz Principality, the favorite place for royal hunting. As a rule, the recreation period lasted 1–2 weeks. For accommodating the imperial family, hunting residences were arranged. The house in Spala built in 1885 was beautiful but at the same time simple, small and comfortable.⁴¹ More than 400 people served the royal hunting farm.⁴² In his diary for 1886, Obolenskii described a typical day in Spala as follows:

In the morning they have coffee at home; at 8.30 or 9 stalking begins; they have breakfast in the forest; there is lunch in the dining room for 18 or 19 people; there are trumpeters from Grodno. In the evening they gather in the billiard room, after that they have tea at the Empress's.⁴³

Alexander III was fond of fishing and almost every June he went to the Finnish skerries.⁴⁴ The emperor was accompanied by the family members and the closest persons

³⁶ OOI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 7, l. 122–148 ob.

³⁷ Ibid., l. 148 ob.

³⁸ Ibid., l. 10.

³⁹ 21 people died right there, one died in the hospital, 36 were injured.

⁴⁰ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 7, l. 150 ob.

⁴¹ From 1894, Belovezhskaia Pushcha became the main hunting ground, where the construction of a luxurious hunting palace was completed.

⁴² OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 5, l. 133.

⁴³ Ibid, l. 127.

⁴⁴ J. Tuomi-Nikula, and P. Tuomi-Nikula, *Imperatory na otdyke v Finliandii* [Emperors on vacation in Finland] (St. Petersburg: Kolo Publ., 2003), 75–139.

whom he invited personally. Travels that followed a similar pattern. Obolensky found out the sovereign's plans a week or two before departure. Apparently, the decisions were often made spontaneously. In the event of bad weather or other circumstances, the departure date could be changed. The emperor usually planned to travel for 8–10 days, but, as a rule, the vacation lasted up to two weeks.⁴⁵ Thus, on 28 June 1886, when the travel fell behind schedule, Obolenskii wrote in his diary: "The sovereign is very pleased to delay the return to St. Petersburg."⁴⁶ The records he made allow us to see that these travels did not have a rigid route and scenario; they could be changed depending on the situation. For example, the records of 21 June 1884 show the following:

They were supposed to sail around the island closer to Abo, but Adjutant General Count Aminov arrived and invited to his place.⁴⁷

In 1886, the plans were changed due to the weather conditions. The entry of 27 June stated:

A strong wind has been blowing since the morning, the sovereign decided to stay anchored until tomorrow <...> We plan to arrive in Peterhof on 29 June <...> Judging by the weather, we will go to Gangud tomorrow.

On 29 June he wrote:

Due to the rough seas, we went to Biorka, where we anchored. We sent the "Princess" to Kuivista to let Petersburg know about it. It was raining all day and it was foggy. It was not a pity to spend an extra day at sea.⁴⁸

From time to time the imperial family traveled to the southern coast of Crimea. Due to the fact that the journey was quite long, the emperor was accompanied by numerous relatives and close associates. Among these travels, there stands out the one in the spring of 1886 when they combined vacation with the celebration of the revival of the Black Sea Fleet. This event had been certainly planned in advance; it was originally scheduled for 24 April. However, as early as mid-February, the imperial family began to discuss a visit to Livadia⁴⁹ (the empress wanted to go there as early as possible), and on 23 March, the family and the retinue safely reached Sevastopol and went by ferry to Yalta.⁵⁰ While in Livadia, the emperor "approved" the further "program" of the travel and postponed the launch of the battleship "Chesma" to 6 May, the birthday of the cesarevitch. This decision was welcomed: "Everyone is very happy to stay in the Crimea."⁵¹ During the long vacation, there were a lot of urgent reports from the capital, and on 15–17 April Alexander III received the Turkish embassy headed by Edhem Pasha; it was followed by Romanian envoys.⁵² The solemn events in Sevastopol began on 3 May. The consecration of the Alekseevsky Western Dock and the launching of the battleship "Chesma," as planned,

⁴⁵ For example, in 1884 it was planned that the travel would take 10 days, but it lasted from 16 to 29 June; in 1885 it took 11 days instead of 8–10 (from 18 to 29 June), in 1886 – 13 days instead of 10 (from 17 to 30 June). See: OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 3, l. 87 ob. – 94; d. 4, l. 88–93 ob.; d. 5, l. 87 ob. – 94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, d. 5, l. 93.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, d. 3, l. 90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, d. 5, l. 92 ob., 93 ob.

⁴⁹ Prior to that, during the reign of Alexander III, the imperial family had gone on vacation to the southern coast of Crimea only once, in 1884.

⁵⁰ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 5, l. 26 ob., 32 ob., 34 ob. – 39 ob., 43–44 ob.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, l. 48 ob.

⁵² *Ibid.*, l. 56–58.

took place 3 days later. Then the imperial family went to Nikolaev, where on 10 May there took place the keel laying ceremony of three gunboats and the launching of the battleship “Catherine II”; the latter got stuck 15 feet above the water.⁵³

Conclusions

By the 1880s, the emperor’s travels around Russia had acquired a definite character. Firstly, by the time of his accession, Alexander III already had experience traveling around the country and was familiar with individual regions. The matter concerns not only the study trips that became a tradition, which helped the preparation of the heir to ascend the throne, but who had accompanied the emperor during his travels. Secondly, the inspection tours around Russia gradually became a thing of the past, and it was ceremonial events that came to the fore; they were designed to create a certain image of the monarch and emphasize his connection with the subjects. In this regard, Alexander III continued the course set by his father. From year to year, his travels were becoming increasingly solemn; there were encouraged magnificent receptions and ceremonies, as well as demonstrations of love and devotion to the monarch. Thirdly, in the second half of the 19th century, visits to remote imperial residences for the purpose of recreation and entertainment had become regular. These travels could be very long and in total took up to 2–3 months a year.

The information of the source analyzed in the article made it possible to see the travels of Alexander III from different angles. Being an employee of the Ministry of the Imperial Court, in his diary Obolenskii recorded many details of the organization of the travels. Preparation usually took at least a month. During this time, the route and all the stops were approved, the lists of people who traveled with the emperor were made, and the program of the entire travel and detailed scenarios for staying in individual towns were coordinated. The symbolic aspects and their expression in the ceremonies were supposed to emphasize not only the solidarity between the monarch and the upper strata of society, but also the unity of the authorities and the people as a whole. It should be noted that Obolenskii's notes are imbued with sincere faith in this idyllic relationship. Apparently, such sentiments dominated the court and were fueled by the situation observed during the travels – a devoted nation looking forward to the arrival of its adored monarch. All this obscured the real state of affairs. In particular, in an attempt to understand what happened at the Borki station in 1888, Obolenskii and other persons on the train immediately began to consider technical malfunctions as the main culprit, whereas the thought of a terrorist attack did not occur to anyone (although at first it was popular theory elsewhere in society). In the 1880s, traveling on a comfortable train made even long trips less tiring. Economic modernization required the rapid development of a network of railways covering ever larger territories, including the outskirts of the empire. This, in turn, made it possible to plan the emperor’s travels more carefully, to strictly follow the route without unplanned stops, and reduce the time spent on traveling, which became especially important after the assassination attempt prevented in 1887. At this juncture, strengthening security measures became a priority.

No less interesting is another view of the travels of Alexander III reflected in Obolenskii's diary – the view of a person close to the imperial family. From this point of view, there is a clear tendency to distinguish between private and public life, which was also a consequence of the modernization processes. As a rule, Alexander III was accom-

⁵³ OPI GIM, f. 224, op. 2, d. 5, l. 68 ob.

panied on his travels by his wife and children: it was supposed to help maintain the image of the emperor as a good family man. However, another aspect is no less significant – the emperor sincerely appreciated the time spent with his family. Regular travels for recreational purposes became for him an important part of everyday life, an opportunity to escape from the bustle of the capital.

In general, in Obolenskii's notes, Alexander III is presented as a truly popular emperor whose official travels, despite all their solemnity, symbolism, and appeal to traditional values, were subordinate to the state interests. They embodied the development of new communication practices, such as unofficial visits to remote imperial residences, where the emperor appeared as a man who loved modesty and simplicity and as a man who enjoyed pleasant pastimes and recreation with his family.

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Информация об авторах / Information about the authors

Олеся Анатольевна Плех, канд. истор. наук, научный сотрудник центра «История России XIX – начала XX вв.», Институт российской истории Российской академии наук; 117292, Россия, Москва, ул. Дм. Ульянова, 19; plekh@mail.ru; <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3750-6270>

Olesya A. Plekh, PhD in History, Researcher of the Center “History of Russia XIX – early XX century,” Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences; 19, Dm. Ulyanova St., Moscow, 117292, Russia; plekh@mail.ru; <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3750-6270>

Наталья Владимировна Черникова, канд. истор. наук, старший научный сотрудник центра «История России XIX – начала XX вв.», Институт российской истории Российской академии наук; 117292, Россия, Москва, ул. Дм. Ульянова, 19; ncher@inbox.ru; <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5163-9344>

Natalya V. Chernikova, PhD in History, Senior Researcher of the Center “History of Russia XIX – early XX century,” Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences; 19, Dm. Ulyanova St., Moscow, 117292, Russia; ncher@inbox.ru; <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5163-9344>