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**Familial Relations of Russian Naval Officer N.V. Kopytov:
based on Epistolary Sources of 1866–1897**

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Abstract: The author in their work analyzes familial relations, gender roles and gender equality issues based on Vice Admiral N.V. Kopytov's letters to his wife, letters currently being stored in his personal fund stored at the Russian State Archive of Navy. The novelty of the scientific usefulness of the letters is determined by their use as a source base for further historical analysis. The introduction of N.V. Kopytov's personal letters into scientific use for the first time has allowed the authors and further researchers to obtain information to analyze a wide range of issues: including interpersonal communications, gender relations, everyday life, and professional activities. In addition, this research has allowed the analysis of the influence of peculiarities of mentality, class affiliation, financial situation on the character and main priorities of relationships in N.V. Kopytov's family. Recent research interest in personal letters as historical sources of private origin and the epistolary genre is currently associated with the ability to identify common and specific features of intra-family communications of people of a certain social stratum and social status, in this particular case, the noble family of the Vice-Admiral of Navy. The study of the letters allows us to conclude that the Kopytov family was not typical of Russian society and was more of an equal partnership, despite the prevailing gender inequality enshrined in the legislation and in the mentality of the population of time. The authors have examined the causes of family relations which were considered progressive for the period under consideration, based on the equal division of gender roles and the position of spouses in joint decision-making.

Keywords: gender roles, gender equality, family relations, everyday life, documents of personal origin, Maritime Ministry

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**Семейные взаимоотношения
российского военно-морского офицера Н.В. Копытова:
по материалам эпистолярных источников 1866–1897 гг.**

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Аннотация: На основе писем жене вице-адмирала Н.В. Копытова, извлеченных из личного фонда, хранящегося в Российском государственном архиве Военно-Морского флота, проведен анализ семейных отношений, гендерных ролей и вопросов гендерного равенства. Научная новизна статьи определяется прежде всего источниковой базой исследования, то есть введением впервые в научный



оборот личных писем Н.В. Копыткова, которые позволяют получить информацию и подвернуть анализу широкий круг вопросов, включающих межличностные коммуникации, гендерные отношения, повседневную жизнь, профессиональную деятельность. В статье проанализированы влияние особенностей ментальности, сословной принадлежности, материального положения на характер и основные приоритеты взаимоотношений в семье. Исследовательский интерес к письмам как к историческим источникам личного происхождения и эпистолярному жанру связан с возможностью выявить общие и особенные черты внутрисемейных коммуникаций людей определенного социального слоя и социального статуса, в данном конкретном случае дворянской семьи вице-адмирала флота. Изучение писем позволяет сделать вывод о том, что семья Копытковых не была типичной для российского общества и относилась к партнерскому типу, несмотря на закрепленное в законодательстве и в ментальности населения господствовавшее гендерное неравенство. В заключении предпринята попытка определить причины прогрессивных для рассматриваемого периода времени семейных отношений, основанных на равноправном разделении гендерных ролей, положении супругов и совместной выработке решений. Цитаты в тексте статьи приводятся в стилистике, орфографии и пунктуации автора.

Ключевые слова: гендерные роли, гендерное равенство, семейные отношения, повседневная жизнь, документы личного происхождения, Морское министерство

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Introduction

Personal documents – memoirs, diaries, letters can be a representative source for the study of family relations. Taking into account the peculiarities of social development and the mentality of citizens with regard to the period under consideration, they allow identifying and analyzing the typology of interpersonal communications. In the second half of the XIX century, class affiliation, financial situation and professional activity were factors that influenced family relations and upbringing of children. Present-day social scientists are interested in various historical and cultural aspects of class, demographic differences, analysis of gender roles, issues of family life in the second half of the XIX century. With regard to noble families, experts have comprehensively studied the legal situation, everyday practices, issues of education, communication culture, and the transformation of relationships¹. Of great scientific interest are families of representatives of different classes, including merchants and townspeople². Unfortunately, there are few works regarding peasant families³. When studying family relations, an im-

¹ V.A. Veremenko, *Dvoryanskaia sem'ia i gosudarstvennaia politika Rossii (vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX v.)* [Noble family and state policy of Russia (second half of the XIX – early XX centuries)] (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom Publ., 2007); N.A. Mileshina, “Rossiiskoe dvorianstvo XVII – nachala XX stoletii v kontekste transformatsii vnutrisemeinykh otnoshenii [Russian nobility of the XVII – early XX centuries in the context of the transformation of intra-family relations],” *Vestnik Chelyabinskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Istoriya*, 42, no. 30 (2010): 5–11; A. Shokareva, *Dvorianskaia sem'ia: kul'tura obshcheniia. Russkoe stolichnoe dvorianstvo pervoi poloviny XIX veka* [Noble family: culture of communication. Russian metropolitan nobility in the first half of the XIX century] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie Publ., 2017) etc.

² E.V. Bannikova, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' provintsial'nogo kupechestva (na materialakh gubernii Urala doreformennogo perioda)* [Everyday life of the provincial merchants (based on the materials of the provinces of the Urals in the pre-reform period)] (St. Petersburg: Poltorak Publ., 2014); Yu.M. Goncharov, *Kupechskaia sem'ia vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX v. (po materialam komp'iuternoi bazy dannykh kupecheskikh semei Zapadnoi Sibiri)* [Merchant family of the second half of the XIX – early XX centuries. (Based on the computer database of merchant families in Western Siberia)] (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii RAN Publ., 1999); Goncharov, Yu.M. *Gorodskaiia sem'ia Sibiri vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX v.* [Urban family of Siberia in the second half of the XIX – early XX centuries] (Barnaul: Izd-vo Altaiskogo gos. un-ta Publ., 2002), etc.

³ V.B. Bezgin, *'Na miru' I v sem'e: russkaia krest'ianka kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka* [On the world' and in the family: Russian peasant woman of the late XIX – early XX century] (Tambov: RGNF, FGBOU

portant place is given to the analysis of gender roles⁴. A family of XVIII – early XX century as a small social group, an agent of socialization, one of the means of social mobility was studied by B.M. Mironov⁵. In foreign historiography, issues of family and family relations in different periods of time occupy a significant place⁶.

There are no serious works dedicated to the life of N.V. Kopytov and his role in the development of the Russian navy, except for an attempt to recreate the biography of the Vice Admiral⁷.

Among the documents stored in the Russian State Archive of the Navy, of considerable interest are the personal papers of gentleman by birth, Vice Admiral Nikolai Vasilyevich Kopytov (1833–1901) (F. 12.); in particular, the letters to his wife comprising six cases with a total volume of more than a thousand sheets previously not introduced into scientific use⁸.

At the age of ten, due to the difficult financial situation of the family after the death of his mother, on the basis of a petition to the emperor, N.V. Kopytov was admitted at government expense as a pupil of the naval company of the Alexander Cadet Corps for juveniles. Subsequently, he commanded the corvette “Griden” in the Pacific Ocean, the frigate “Peresvet” during the American expedition, the armored battery “Pervenets” in the Baltic Sea. In addition, he served: as the commander of a detachment of vessels in the Pacific Ocean, the chief commander of the fleet and ports of the Black and Caspian Seas and the military governor of Nikolaev, performed tasks for the Naval Ministry in London and in the Mediterranean Sea, and at the end of his career he was appointed a member of the Board of Admiralty⁹. Being away from home, he corresponded with his wife, who testified that to the fact the harsh and responsible service in the Navy did not make him a callous and cruel person in everyday and family life; she confirmed his

VPO «TGTU» Publ., 2015); O.A. Boeva, “Krest’ianskaia sem’ia Voronezhskoi gubernii v kontse XIX – pervoi treti XX vv. [Peasant family of the Voronezh province at the end of the XIX – the first third of the XX centuries],” PhD dis., Voronezh State Pedagogical University, 2014; Z.Z. Mukhina, *Semeinyi byt i povsednevnost’ krest’ian Kurskoi gubernii: traditsii i dinamika peremen v poreformennoi Rossii* [Family life and everyday life of the peasants of the Kursk province: traditions and dynamics of change in post-reform Russia] (Moscow: In-t etnologii i antropologii RAN Publ., 2012) etc.

⁴ A.V. Belova, “Zhenskaya dvoryanskaya povsednevnost’ v kontekste genderno-chuvstvitel’noj social’noj istorii [Women’s noble everyday life in the context of gender-sensitive social history].” *RUDN Journal of Russian History*, no. 8 (2007): 51–63; N.L. Pushkareva, *Gendernaia teoriia I istoricheskoe znanie* [Gender theory and historical knowledge] (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia Publ., 2007); N.L. Pushkareva, “Zhenshchina v russkoi sem’e X – nachala XIX v.: dinamika sotsio-kul’turnykh izmenenii [A woman in a Russian family in the X – early XIX centuries: the dynamics of socio-cultural changes],” Doctor Habil. Dis., Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk. Institut etnologii i antropologii im. N.N. Mikluho-Maklaya, 1997 etc.

⁵ Mironov, B.M. *Sotsial’naia istoriia Rossii perioda imperii (XVIII – nachalo XX v.): Genesis lichnosti, demokraticeskoi sem’i, grazhdanskogo obshchestva I pravovogo gosudarstva* [The social history of Russia in the period of the empire (XVIII – early XX century): The genesis of the individual, the democratic family, civil society and the rule of law], in 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin Publ., 2003).

⁶ R. Zider, *Sotsial’naia istoriia sem’i v Tsentral’noi i Zapadnoi Evrope, konets XVII–XX vv.* [Social history of the family in Western and Central Europe, late XVII – XX centuries] (Moscow: Vlado Publ., 1997); A.-Sh. Trepp, “Balans mezhdru partnerstvom, razlichiem i neravenstvom polov: supruzheskie otnosheniya v burzhuaiznoy sem’e (1770–1830) [Balancing Partnership, Gender Difference and Inequality: Marital Relations in the Bourgeois Family (1770–1830)],” in *Sem’ia, dom, uzy rodstva v istorii* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia Publ., 2004), 138–175 etc.

⁷ N.M. Ivanov, and Yu.S. Rozadorskii, *Vitse-admiral Kopytov N.V.: (Zhizn’ i sluzhba Otechestvu general-ad’iutanta Svity Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva Nikolaia II, chlena Admiralteistv-Soveta, vitse-admirala Kopytova Nikolaia Vasil’evicha)* [Vice Admiral N.V. Kopytov: (Life and service to the Fatherland, Adjutant General of the Retinue of His Imperial Majesty Nicholas II, member of the Admiralty Council, Vice Admiral Kopytov Nikolai Vasilyevich)] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’skii dom Branko Publ., 2012).

⁸ The author of the article read all the letters of the admiral to his wife in six cases of the found 12.

⁹ N.M. Ivanov, and Yu.S. Rozadorskii, *Vitse-admiral Kopytov N.V.*

kindness, sincerity, humanism, and commitment to the broader principle of gender equality in interpersonal relationships.

The epistolary genre was the main means of communication in the XIX century; its peculiarity was both the presence of the recipient of the letter and the possibility of indirect observation of the subject. This is what is of particular interest to researchers of this type of sources, when it is possible to form a hypothesis, to evaluate it, and even to draw conclusions simultaneously about the author of the letter and its recipient.

In accordance with the established rules, N.V. Kopytov indicated the date, month and even the day of the week when the letter was written, and on some of the letters the geographical name of the place of his stay is indicated; in some cases during long marches, he even numbered them and asked his wife to do the same. Moreover, almost no letters indicate the year of their writing, therefore the verification of their chronology is possible only as a result of a comparison of the officer's service record and the events stated by him in letters.

Acquaintance with the letters of Vice Admiral Kopytov is not just a penetration into his private life and observation of the relationship of two loving people; it is to a certain extent the history of the Russian Navy in the development of which the author was directly involved; it is the history of the family and close family relations in which one can see a typology for naval officers; it is an opportunity to analyze the distribution of gender roles and issues of gender equality in the period under consideration of people of a given social stratum and social status.

Due to the homogeneity of historical sources, the main research method for the paper was content analysis, which made it possible to identify the relationship between the content and communicative functions of the text.

Wedding anniversaries of the Kopytovs and attitude towards his wife

Nikolai Vasilyevich and Alexandra Alexandrovna (1838–1919; née Melnikova) got married on June 30, 1865¹⁰. The Vice Admiral's letters cover more than thirty years of their life together; a reverent attitude towards each other, as well as: trust, respect, concern for the health of his wife, her nutrition, and pastimes remained unchanged throughout that period. Despite gender inequality, both in terms of law and the mentality of the population prevailing in Russian society in the second half of the XIX century, the style and content of the letters testify to the equal position of spouses, the joint decision-making of the couple, and a lack of the husband's overt dominance in the family.

In the Russian State Archive of the Navy there is no information about A.A. Kopytova. It is known that before marriage, in the early 1860s she studied at a medical school, which testifies to the progressive views of her parents, as well as her own desire to take an independent place in society. Alexandra Alexandrovna's grandparents were buried in Hamburg; Kopytov mentions plans to visit their graves¹¹. The analysis of the content of the documents and its comparison allows us to conclude that she was an educated woman, proficient in two foreign languages – English and French, had good manners, communication skills, and was of kind character. It was these qualities that her husband appreciated in her and respected her as a person. Unfortunately, there are no letters from Alexandra Alexandrovna in the archive, and Kopytov believed that “your nice letters

¹⁰ N.M. Ivanov, and Yu.S. Rozadorskii, *Vitse-admiral Kopytov N.V.*, 72.

¹¹ Russian State Archive of the Navy (henceforth – RGA VMF), f. 12, op. 2, d. 25, l. 28 ob.

and interesting congratulations are a great pleasure for everyone, and since they are received regularly at dinner, they are read aloud.”¹²

But Nikolai Vasilyevich's letters alone allow not only allow us to learn more about the features of his service, but also allow us to recreate: a story of love about their relationship, how they got acquainted with the feelings and doubts of their spouses, their weak and strong qualities, forms of communication with relatives and friends, and their search for joint solutions to everyday and domestic issues. After the death of her husband, it was the wife who gave his documents to the archive. It is hard to believe that taking into account his self-discipline, accuracy and punctuality, Kopytov did not keep the letters of Alexandra Alexandrovna. Most likely, she did not consider it necessary to hand them to the archive, so as not to put herself on a par with her husband.

In one of the first letters, which is not dated by the author, but it might be the spring or early summer of 1865, Nikolai Vasilyevich writes with delight:

I'm in a hurry *ma bien airuci*¹³ Alexandra Alexandrovna to comply with your request and write to you about Alexandra Petrovna's consent and blessing to our union, which by surprise, and most importantly by its especially dear participation in the future, still gives me pleasure <...> It was extremely pleasant for me to meet especially kind and friendly disposition of all your relatives and their sympathy for our marriage. Pray God that it be a harbinger of good higher consent and mutual feelings¹⁴.

In later family life, the Kopytovs did not always have an opportunity to be together on their wedding anniversary. But if Nikolai Vasilyevich was at sea or his wife was leaving for treatment, he wrote especially warm letters to “his priceless Sana,” recalling the years and significant events experienced together, each time declaring his love, and telling in detail about how and with whom he spent this day away from her:

I remind you of the existence of your husband, who lives for you and gets more and more devoted to you with each passing day. Every minute with you makes me increasingly happier, and therefore, June 30 is certainly not just a new year for me, but [a source] new happiness. It is very sad that we are apart, but the consolation for me is that this is for the benefit of your poor health¹⁵.

In 1890, on the 25th wedding anniversary, Kopytov wrote to his wife:

My dear, a quarter of a century ago you gave me your carefree life bravely, without hesitation, and entrusted it to me. Your decision brought you many hardships and various disappointments. Your husband could not arrange your life comfortably and calmly. I tried my best and I would very much like to conduct my affairs better, but for this one should be skillful, and not a slob like me. But you, with your golden heart, have loved me, and therefore I am always as happy as a person can be <...> I wish all our life would be like the first wedding day – for me it is like that or even more, because the more I get to know you, the more I love you and the more I see that I do not deserve you. In addition to the happiness you brought, you made me human. Without you, my life would be quite different. In short, Sanya, you do not know what you mean to me and how much I love you – be indulgent towards your sailor, as you have always been so far¹⁶.

On the wedding anniversaries, especially being away from her husband, Alexandra Alexandrovna tried to please him with some surprise. In a letter Nikolai Vasilyevich thanked her for the gift for the wedding anniversary, which was handed to him by his colleague in the Indian Ocean. He enthusiastically writes:

¹² RGA VMF, f. 12, op. 2, d. 111, l. 14.

¹³ Translated from French as “my good airushi.”

¹⁴ RGA VMF, f. 12, op. 2, d. 25, l. 8–8 ob.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, d. 111, l. 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, d. 24, l. 80–80 ob.

I want to kiss you, my Angel, my dear, for your priceless surprise for me today <...> Of course, you can't imagine how much your concern touched me. I appreciate your love which revives me. If you are not with me, my dear, I immediately fall into some kind of apathy. There is neither life nor pleasure for me <...> Your heartfelt attention gave me the most joyful holiday that I could dream of at sea <...> this gift served as clear proof to me that you, my dear, support me in the step I took, so hard a step, and that you approve that I did not give up my duty. Your support is extremely important to me. Then I will be sure that you, with resignation to fate, endure our separation and I will certainly feel much easier...¹⁷

Being away from each other, it was such tokens of appreciation that were especially valuable and memorable for each spouse.

The style of the letters and the attitude towards his wife did not change throughout their life together; at different periods he writes to her that “the goal of my life is to see you cheerful and contented. This is where all my thoughts and concerns are directed.”¹⁸ In 1882, Kopytov sadly says that:

at every moment I feel the absence of your hands that made for me all the little things of life comfortable and pleasant¹⁹.

Practically in all the letters there is praising of his wife, and appreciation of her qualities, words of gratitude, while quite often the author belittles his own personality, doing this clearly not to please his wife, but does it by his own volition.

In the letters to his wife, Nikolai Vasilyevich neither expressed prohibitions nor insisted on his decision on any issue by taking into account the position of the head of the family, male or status superiority. This cannot be regarded as his indifference to family affairs, weakness, or infantilism. In the letters to his wife, there are advice, care and concern, rather than a guide to action:

take care of yourself, be healthy and come to your loving hubby soon²⁰.

In another letter he recalls: “Don't forget my order, take a photo of your face and show me how much it is tanned.”²¹ More often, there were requests in his letters: “I beg you, go and breathe clean air, you need it more than you think.”²² Kopytov expressed even dissatisfaction with his wife's actions gently and lovingly:

you should tell me about your health. You won't calm me down by hiding the truth...²³

Even criticism of some of his wife's actions was always due to concern for her well-being and health.

Being an officer, Kopytov could command and demand the fulfillment of his orders, he was a firm and decisive person, as evidenced by his career and the positions he held, but he was not severe to his wife. There were other principles and priorities in the relationship. Above all, he supported and protected his family, he solved all complex issues, sometimes even when he was at sea, he vividly responded to her problems, gave advice, expressed compassion, but at the same time he neither dictated mandatory requirements, nor controlled her actions or financial expenses.

¹⁷ RGA VMF, f. 12, op. 2, d. 112, l. 16–17.

¹⁸ Ibid., d. 111, l. 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., d. 112, l. 4 ob.

²⁰ Ibid., d. 22, l. 22 ob.

²¹ Ibid., d. 111, l. 62.

²² Ibid., d. 25, l. 1 ob. – 2.

²³ Ibid., l. 16 ob.

The courageous commander, who should be responsible not only for himself, but also for the crew of the ship writes in the letters to his wife that:

I look at everything through your eyes, and now it has become even clearer to me <...> You are not here, you fill and enliven everything²⁴.

In another letter Kopytov points out that:

I would rather be in St. Petersburg <...> next to you, my dear friend, my priceless darling, and I count the days and look forward to meeting you²⁵.

He hopefully states that “the more pleasant it will be to look forward to the delicious treat of my dear wife.”²⁶

Despite frequent and rather long absence of her husband, Alexandra Alexandrovna enjoyed his full trust, there were no words of jealousy in the letters; on the contrary, he wished his wife did not get bored, but spent more time communicating and traveling with friends or relatives:

Have a good rest before my arrival, and do not stay in your room, go to the theater and wherever you like to please yourself; you should never be like a nun. I will come soon, and it will be more pleasant for me to see a healthy and cheerful wife, and not an enclosed nun²⁷.

Despite occasional sad thoughts about himself, Nikolai Vasilyevich always encouraged his wife and tried to inspire optimism:

I hope you will behave like a real captain, or, as Kellet said, like an admiral, i.e. you will always be cheerful <...> as a brave sailor should be, to the class of which you belong <...> Be brave, my priceless friend, not for yourself, but for the husband who only lives for you²⁸.

Being away from his wife, Kopytov wrote:

My dear, try to bear the burden of separation courageously, and God will not leave us <...> Being away, you clearly see for whom you live. It's better not to talk about it, but to endure it patiently²⁹.

In each letter he kept declaring his love to her: “bless your husband, who loves you more and more with each passing day.”³⁰

The spouses wrote letters to each other even when Nikolai Vasilyevich served in Kronstadt and was often at home. At that time, he tried to delve into all things of everyday life and give relief to his wife:

Such pain apart from all the worries and troubles! It's just terrible. And there are no servants. The whole day is in chaos. Let me send you Ivan for a few days until everything is in order³¹.

Surprising is Kopytov's ability to skillfully combine his professional duties, to write articles for the “Naval Collection” on the development of the fleet and at the same time to participate in solving problems of everyday family life, and to support his wife despite his service, without distancing himself from household chores.

²⁴ RGA VMF, f. 12, op. 2, d. 22, l. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, d. 23, l. 6 ob.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, d. 24, l. 53 ob.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, d. 25, l. 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, d. 111, l. 5–5 ob.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, d. 112, l. 15 ob.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, d. 22, l. 111 ob.

³¹ *Ibid.*, d. 24, l. 68.

N.V. Kopytov's self-criticism

Nikolai Vasilyevich also greatly respected the opinion and taste of his wife, appreciated her mind and human qualities, and sometimes he focused on his own shortcomings without hesitation:

I wish you, like a sorceress, would make me a little softer, as in response to your tender sincere lines as I write a matter-of-fact report. I still think that under the influence of the one that I love very much, more than myself, I will change. I will gradually become like you and from the bottom of my heart will always bless that moment, when I met my priceless Alexandra³².

As evidenced by the content analysis of his letters, being in the Pacific Ocean, Nikolai Vasilyevich showed particular self-criticism to himself by assessing his unsuitability for diplomatic functions, which he was to perform in accordance with his position and the tasks set to him:

There should be people here who are pleasant in all respects, but on the contrary, I am unpleasant in all respects. I wish you would turn me into a sweet and amiable person³³.

But Kopytov's sense of duty and patriotism were first; despite his self-flagellation and dissatisfaction with himself, he always performed all tasks honorably.

Kopytov shared his worries, doubts and problems with his wife not hiding anything from her; he even reflected on his own shortcomings and urged her to help him get rid of them:

I sorted through papers and reread your notes, letters and I thought about how good you are, and I felt both offended and annoyed why you don't scold me but praise me. I clearly see the difference between us, and you want to equate me with praises to yourself, but don't you see that through this you are dressing up a crow in peacock feathers. You had better scold me, expose my shortcomings, and then I will begin, little by little, get rid of my laziness and therefore improve myself and in fact I will approach you, my ideal³⁴.

It is hard to believe that a person who spent a significant part of his life at sea and in the service of the Naval Ministry and made a successful career was characterized by laziness; most likely it was a very demanding attitude towards himself and deep feelings for his wife; he never ceased to admire her, and never hid his weaknesses, hoping that "maybe I am still able to improve myself and get along with people."³⁵ He did not consider that self-criticism in the letters to his wife somehow hurt his pride, or could change her attitude towards her husband.

Being in the service, Kopytov was characterized by a sense of responsibility, duty to the Motherland and patriotism, therefore his career was successful, he was appreciated as a specialist, professional, and was promoted. He wrote to his wife about his shortcomings related to oratory skills, his communication with colleagues, even his knowledge of French:

at the farewell ceremonial dinner at the Consul, where he said very kind words addressed to me, I answered awkwardly as always. The non-social person like me leads a public life, it always torments me³⁶.

³² RGA VMF, f. 12, op. 2, d. 22, l. 4 ob.

³³ Ibid., d. 23, l. 3.

³⁴ Ibid., d. 25, l. 79 ob. – 80.

³⁵ Ibid., l. 17.

³⁶ Ibid., d. 23, l. 5 ob.

In another letter he states: “I am not very eloquent.”³⁷

Nikolai Vasilyevich trusted his wife, her virtues and wisdom so much that he did not hesitate to admit that “I compare myself with you, how nasty and worthless I am...”³⁸ In the service Kopytov was distinguished by integrity and desire to prove his case, regardless of rank and position, which often caused problems for him:

What can I do to change my unbearable character and not to quarrel with everyone? I should not have power; I should stay quietly at home with my wife and not see anyone³⁹.

He shared with his wife all his thoughts and problems, sometimes even showed his weakness, being confident of her understanding, support and indulgence towards him.

Many letters show that in a number of issues the wife was for him a criterion of moral qualities and a model of behavior:

I think that for my chatter, I would get it hot and strong from you if you heard it, since my tongue was very loose⁴⁰.

But probably Alexandra Alexandrovna wisely and tactfully treated her husband's self-criticism, she supported his faith in himself, rather than his skepticism.

Concerns about wife's health

Judging by Kopytov's letters, Alexandra Alexandrovna had health problems, so every time he wrote he not only took a keen interest in this, but also gave advice, sometimes strict instructions, but above all expressed concern:

I pray to God for your health and for our meeting soon. Take care of yourself, be healthy and come to your loving hubby soon⁴¹.

In another letter he writes:

Yesterday I forgot to ask you to be as careful as possible when you go to the bath, for God's sake don't catch a cold afterwards, and don't be in the bath for a long time⁴².

Even being away from his beloved woman, he delved into all her problems in detail and gave advice. Throughout the years of marriage, the health of his wife was the subject of Kopytov's constant concern:

you shouldn't neglect your health. Do it at least for me. If it is warm, then you had better get some medical treatment⁴³.

At the same time, care and attention to his wife were neither of a formal nature nor just polite communication.

There was a traditional question in his letters: “How are you doing?”⁴⁴ Nikolai Vasilyevich always empathized with his wife on various occasions, sometimes expressing dissatisfaction because of her inattentive attitude towards herself:

³⁷ RGA VMF, f. 12, op. 2, d. 24, l. 78.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, d. 22, l. 4 ob.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, d. 23, l. 4 ob. – 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, d. 23, l. 7 ob.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, l. 22 ob.

⁴² *Ibid.*, l. 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, d. 24, l. 79 ob.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, d. 111, l. 3–3 ob.

How sad and painful it is to read every day for so long about your suffering from unbearable migraines. I get headache hearing such hard news. Tell me frankly the reason for them. Take care of yourself, my darling, do not bother and do not worry much⁴⁵.

The Kopytovs had no children of their own. Nikolai Vasilyevich had an adopted daughter, Zinaida, but it was not possible to find out any details about her from the documents; there is also no reason to speculate that she was his illegitimate child. After Kopytov's death, Zinaida Nikolaevna Kostomarova filed a petition for getting pension for her father. In the letters to his wife, the admiral never used the word "daughter."

For several years, the couple did not give up hope. Alexandra Alexandrovna got medical treatment, followed the prescriptions of doctors; they prayed to God, even made wishes during a starfall. From Moscow, Nikolai Vasilyevich wrote to his wife about visiting the icon of the Iberian Mother of God,

I kissed the icon and asked the priest to serve a prayer service for the health of Alexandra and Nikolai. I certainly prayed not only for your health, but also for your constant ardent desire that God give us a child and bless our lives⁴⁶.

In another letter he wrote that

I asked God very much to keep you safe and sound for many years for the joy and happiness of our children, if God blesses us with them⁴⁷.

Kopytov said that

when stars fall, I always think about you and your desire. Maybe God will give us what we want, so it will come true⁴⁸.

Later, while being in Gibraltar, Nikolai Vasilyevich expressed hope for the treatment of Alexandra Alexandrovna:

You write to me about a famous homeopathist and a female doctor. I will be very glad if you consult with him, especially on account of your weakness and what interests you most; for a whole year you have needed good doctoral advice, God willing there may be good consequences⁴⁹.

In subsequent years, there was no disappointment in the letters, not to mention reproaches to his wife concerning childlessness. Alexandra Alexandrovna probably satisfied her maternal instinct by taking care of the "pupils" Olya and Zulya mentioned by Kopytov.

Financial situation of the family

Despite his high social status and material wealth, Kopytov was prudent in regard to spending on daily needs. This applied to how he rented a house, and bought firewood, clothing, paying servants, transport, etc. He shared his opinion on prices and expenses with his wife, being sometimes indignant at the high cost of certain goods and services, not fearing that she might consider this as greed or stinginess.

At the same time, when it came to money for needs, medical treatment, renting a summer house for Alexandra Alexandrovna, Nikolai Vasilyevich never expressed dissatisfaction; he only encouraged his wife in making decisions: "Please take care of your

⁴⁵ RGA VMF, f. 12, op. 2, d. 111, l. 30.

⁴⁶ Ibid., d. 22, l. 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., d. 25, l. 81.

⁴⁸ Ibid., l. 80.

⁴⁹ Ibid., l. 19–19 ob.

clothes. I told you in London that you absolutely have nothing to wear.”⁵⁰ In another letter he advised: “Try to make a velvet dress both for me and for cost saving purposes.”⁵¹

In one of the letters to his wife, Kopytov expressed dissatisfaction concerning her trip, but it was not done in a categorical form; and it was up to her to decide. There was given reasoned substantiation based on the interests of Alexandra Alexandrovna and the financial situation of the family:

Please, don't write any more about the trip to Cannes. Do as you know. Such fantasies are too hard for me to say anything. A whimsical idea came to you to rush to different parts of Europe. We have no money, and I again borrowed a thousand rubles from Olga in order to somehow start arranging an apartment <...> Of course, my decision will upset you as disagreeing with your will...⁵²

In St. Petersburg, the Kopytovy gradually lived in different places in accordance with Nikolai Vasilyevich's promotions, showing a change in their financial situation and status as they inhabited different apartments; in the summer the family rented a summer house, usually in Peterhof or on Kamenny Island⁵³. Having no additional income from the inherited estate and land, Kopytov could only rely on the salary from the Naval Ministry; therefore, he tried to rationally plan the family budget, but at the same time he was periodically forced to borrow money. Although, it was not possible to find out from the letters the reason for the material problems that arose.

Conclusions

Getting acquainted with Kopytov's service career and merits to the Motherland and the Navy, it is sometimes difficult to fully understand how emotional sensitivity and exactingness coexisted in one person, how he could separate personal and official aspects of his life? It is this originality that attracts people to his letters and his personality.

An analysis of the texts of the letters does not give reason to consider that the relationship between the admiral and his wife and his understanding of family roles were influenced by the progressive trends of the post-reform period in Russia. They lack reflection on social processes and political events. N.V. Kopytov was a conservative patriot of his country; he swore an oath to the Motherland and devotedly served it.

The letters, even indirectly, are not evidence of manifestations of gender inequality in the family, there was no sign of him belittling the role of the wife as a woman, or an attempt to focus on her weakness, both from a physical point of view and her moral or legal rights. Also, there are no issues demonstrating a paternalistic model of relationships, the letters are full of care and are not full of instructions and guidelines for the wife's actions. In the Kopytov family, even despite being separated, they jointly made decisions and supported each other, which for the second half of the XIX century was an exception rather than a typical characteristic of the Russian metropolitan family.

The future Vice Admiral was a representative of the nobility, but his education in the cadet corps from an early age was reflected in his mentality and life principles. He did not have a negative experience of seeing the secondary or subordinate position of a woman in his family. To add to this, the frequent absence of the admiral from home and, as a result, a careful attitude towards his family, show a desire to care and love even being away from home. Staying abroad on business and personal matters also contributed to the formation of his vision and understanding of family relations. The Kopytov family

⁵⁰ RGA VMF, f. 12, op. 2, d. 111, l. 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, d. 25, l. 59 ob. – 60.

⁵² *Ibid.*, d. 111, l. 36–37.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, d. 22, l. 19 ob.

is clear evidence that it was not just a happy marriage of two loving people, but also a marriage in which there was mutual understanding and equality, as well as consideration of the interests of the partners, a relationship contrary to the legislative regulation of gender roles in Russian society.

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