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***THE RUSSIAN NOBILITY IN THE AGE OF ALEXANDER I***, By Ayse Dietrich\*, Published by: Bloomsbury Publishing, Written by Patrick O'Meara, Year of Publishing: 2021. Subject Area: Russian Nobility. Book Type: Russian History. Total Number of Pages: 367. ISBN: 978-1-3501-8656-8, paperback, \$40,95.

This book is about the Russian nobility during the reign of Alexander I and their role in social and political life. It consists of six parts.

Part I is about the privileges and status of the Russian nobility in the age of Alexander I. The author introduces the main privileges used by the hereditary nobility such as “freedom from service and privileged access to military and civil service, and hence to rank; freedom from personal taxes; freedom from corporal punishment; inviolability of noble status, except following trial by peers and subject to the tsar’s confirmation; and, finally, the right to own estates (*votchiny*) and hence serfs”. He goes on to state that the corporate identity of the nobility lost its influence during Alexander’s reign and the majority of the nobility’s social prestige and career expectations were directly connected to an individual’s close relationship with the tsar.

Part II examines educational system, foreign tutors, boarding schools, foreign language acquisition, parental supervision, inadequacies of the educational system, key reforms to raise the educational standards of the nobility, expansion of their cultural horizons and the government’s role in this process. The author particularly pays attention to the predominantly Francophone nobility’s foreign language acquisition.

In Part III the author discusses the nobility’s role in provincial and local government, the office of marshal of the nobility and its role, the noble assembly and the district courts, the marshals in Nizhniy Novgorod and their responsibilities to the province’s governor, and the participation of provincial nobleman in the Patriotic War.

Part IV examines Alexander I’s personality and his relationship with the Russian nobility, leading members of the government, the challenges individual nobles faced in their dealings with the Tsar

and how his unbalanced character affected the running of the Empire's administration. The author also discusses the question of constitutional reform and the nobility's reaction to it. O'Meara provides information from the memoirs of nobles and the observations of foreign diplomats.

In Part V the author provides information on reforming serfdom, Alexander's own attitude towards peasant reform and discusses the significance of the 1803 decree on 'free cultivators'. He also gives the differing opinions of liberal and conservative sections of the nobility and the official reaction to reformist initiatives.

In Part VI O'Meara discusses the influence of Napoleonic Europe and its political institutions on the Russian nobility, their demands for political and social reform, the government's response to their demands by introducing strict censorship and secret police control, the changing character of the Russian nobility due to their personal experience of life in Western societies, the growing opposition to the government, the formation of the secret Decembrist society, their impacts on the Russian nobility, the long-term consequences of the Decembrist uprising and the reaction of the Russian nobility.

*The Russian Nobility in the Age of Alexander I* is a very well-written scholarly work that paints a political portrait of the Russian nobility during the reign of Alexander I. The author uses a "wide variety of rarely cited sources, both published and unpublished, personal collections, local government papers, memoirs, diaries and correspondence". This book can be highly recommended to anyone with an interest in any of these topics.

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