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## **History And Autocratic Power: Vasily Zhukovsky As A Mentor Of The Tsesarevich Alexander\***

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**Abstract.** *The article is devoted to consideration of pedagogical program developed by Vasily Zhukovsky for the education of the heir to the throne – the future Emperor Alexander II. Pedagogical views of Zhukovsky are inseparable from his political preferences and philosophical-historical ideas. Pedagogical system of Zhukovsky in general terms is based on the concept of I. Pestalozzi, but it was adopted to the individual elitist education. The main task of Vasily Zhukovsky was the education of a monarch who would be able to set himself practical challenges and successfully resolve them, while based on Christian morality. The military component of the training should be reduced to a minimum. The most important means of education were history, and the personal views of Zhukovsky, transmitted to the crown Prince, were based on historical concepts developed by Karamzin and Johann von Muller. Archival materials indicate that to a large extent the teacher has achieved its objectives. In the historical views of Muller Zhukovskiy mostly singled out the idea of history as a means of moral education and the rule of law, combined with an enlightened autocratic rule. Such projects were actually doing him a "loyal opposition" and led to the resignation from the court service.*

**Keywords:** History, Intellectual history, Official ideology, Education, Historiography, V. Zhukovsky, N. Karamzin, J. von Müller.

### **Introduction**

Vasily Andreyevich Zhukovsky in the 1830 - ies was actively involved in the state and the ideological construction of the Nikolaevsky Russia. He was appointed the tutor of the heir to the throne – the future Emperor Alexander II, and accepted his position as an important mission. One of the most important threads, linking the romantic poet with the reigning house, were the events of the Decembrist uprising (Decembrist uprising) of 14 December 1825. It's characteristically, that this whole day Zhukovsky held in the Winter Palace. As a result, the poet was involved in discussions about the ideal monarch and the search for points of ideological pairing between Zhukovsky and the Imperial family. Overall, his views were Orthodox, but in the diary he allowed himself the criticism of a state mythology, in the construction of which was attended by himself.<sup>1</sup> In this context, of paramount importance is the consideration of his activity as a teacher-historian – mentor of the heir to the throne.

### **Materials and methods**

The works of V. A. Zhukovsky in education never constructed a single case and they were not systematized by him on purpose. Against this background, the special place occupies "The Plan of the teachings of His Imperial Highness the Sovereign Grand Duke Tsesarevich Alexander Nikolaevich" (Plan of the education of His Imperial Highness Grand Duke Tsesarevich Alexander Nikolaevich),

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<sup>1</sup> Ilya Vinitsky, *Vasily Zhukovsky's Romanticism and the Emotional History of Russia*, Moscow, Northwestern University Press, 2015.

compiled in 1818. Other texts, including those relating to the education of the future Emperor Alexander II, or the children of Zhukovsky, of specific literary, historical and linguistic aspects of education, or comments on certain provisions of the methodology.

In the presented study the materials of V. A. Zhukovsky were used, dedicated to the education of the Heir to the Throne, including a shortened version of "The Plan of Teaching" aimed at French to F. Gille in 1826, and the development of the initial plan, presented in 1827 to the Emperor Nicholas I. All of these materials entered the 12-volume collected works of Zhukovsky, published by the firm of A. F. Marx (Berlin, 1902). In the new collected works of Zhukovsky<sup>2</sup> in 20 volumes, started in 1999, these materials are placed in the not yet released volume. Pedagogical views of Zhukovsky are inseparable from its historical and political positions.

## Results

Pedagogical activity of V. A. Zhukovsky at the Court began in October 1817, when he was appointed a teacher of Russian for the Grand Duchess Alexandra Feodorovna (Alexandra Feodorovna, born Princess Charlotte of Prussia), wife of Nikolai Pavlovich (Grand Duke Nikolai Pavlovich). Later he held the same position with the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna (Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, born Princess Charlotte of Württemberg).<sup>3</sup> The new position – a teacher of the Heir to the Throne, demanded Zhukovsky to solve other tasks, as he had not to conduct a private course, but to coordinate the activities of different teachers under the universal education programs.<sup>4</sup>

The final version of the plan by Zhukovsky was published in the journal "Russian antiquity" (*Russkaya Starina*) in 1880, that is, during the life of Alexander II.

Zhukovsky supposed to implement the Plan for the education of the future Emperor in three stages, set as preliminary types of primary, secondary and higher education. The first stage is from 8 to 13 years – included a "preparatory exercise" (preparatory learning), i.e. the study of General subjects. The second period – from 13 to 18 years – provided for the "detailed teaching" (detailed learning), i.e. a systematic course of the basic Sciences, and the third period from 18 to 20 years – the "practical learning" (applied learning), focused on life practice of the Heir to the Throne, the circle of his "professional" duties.<sup>5</sup> The pedagogical system of Zhukovsky was based on the methods of I. G. Pestalozzi (1746-1827), who was the creator of an original system of education based on the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Zhukovsky was well acquainted with this system, and dedicated it several

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<sup>2</sup> Works of V. A. Zhukovsky, in 12 vols. Sankt Petersburg, A. F. Marx Publ. House, 1902.

<sup>3</sup> M. Soroka, C. A. Ruud, *Becoming a Romanov. Grand Duchess Elena of Russia and her World (1807-1873)*, London, Routledge, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> S. V. Kiselev, E. M. Zhilyakova, "The Education Plan is co ... of Tsarevich Alexander Nikolaevich" in the Context of V. A. Zhukovsky's Pedagogical Legacy," *Tomsk State University Journal of Philology*, VI (2014), no. 32, p. 125-136.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

articles in 1808 – 1811; in his personal library were books on pedagogy and works of Pestalozzi.

In practice, V. Zhukovsky has implemented the ideas of Pestalozzi in the training of Grand Duchess Alexandra Feodorovna in the Russian language in 1817-1820. He tried to coordinate classes with the daily life of the pupil and to use the other recommendations of the Swiss educator. It should be taken into account that the task for Zhukovsky was non-trivial: to adapt the model of Pestalozzi, developed for public schools, to an elite individual education. On the "preparatory stage" the main task is to teach the child logical thinking, to teach him to state the problems and their solution. The set of objects of that block was supplemented by Zhukovsky with Biblical history and Christian morality, that is, subordinated it to the teaching of moral education. The same principle was maintained at the second stage, when the systematic understanding of basic Sciences became only the basis for moral self-determination, the answer to the question, "what should I be" and "what I intended for."

Zhukovsky preserved and other principles of Pestalozzi, in particular, order and regularity, supplemented by forming of their own motivation and interest for further study. A considerable place in the program took the liberty, interpreted in the following way: "freedom means freedom and pleasure to do what the duty orders." In the second stage, visual aids played a huge role – the use of aids, including physical devices and mineralogical specimens, as well as interactivity, taking into account the individual qualities of the pupil.<sup>6</sup>

The specific of teaching of the Grand Duke was to minimize the direct influences of his duties – military and courtiers. They were inevitable, but, according to V. Zhukovsky, must be consistent with the whole system of education. He asked the Emperor Nikolai, to reduce the travel of the Heir and his participation in the Court ceremonies. The military classes had to fit in vacation time.<sup>7</sup> The fact is that the Emperor fulfilled the teacher's suggestions, and by his personal arbitrary decision for the first time sent his son off to military camps at 11 years of age, not at 9-year-old, as it was practiced previously.

A significant place in the Plan held the training of history as an important subject for the political activities of the sovereign. It was also the influence of the Swiss pedagogy, in this case – of Johann Muller (Johannes von Müller, 1752 – 1809), the letters of which, translated into the Russian language, Zhukovsky has published. In the historical views of Muller Zhukovskiy signed out most of all the idea of history as a means of moral education, and the rule of law, combined with an enlightened autocratic governing.<sup>8</sup>

The vast majority of researchers believed in the inseparability of the historical views of V. Zhukovsky from the concept of N. Karamzin, that is,

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<sup>6</sup> E. M. Almedingen, *The Emperor Alexander II: A Study*, London, Bodley Head, 1962.

<sup>7</sup> I. Grey, *The Romanovs*, New York, New Word City, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> L. Leighton, *Russian Romantic Criticism: An Anthology*, London, Greenwood Press, 1987.

however, true for their literary relations.<sup>9</sup> Teaching history for the Heir began with the initial stage, and for this purpose the poet has prepared a detailed synopsis of a volumetric work by Karamzin – 12- volume “The History of the Russian State”. The abstract is preserved, it included that part of the works of Karamzin, which is dedicated to the history of Russia from the 1230-ies to 1480, i.e. Tatar-Mongol invasion on Rus’. The issue of creating a centralized monarchical state was studied as the key one. The pedagogical task demanded more detailed, than at Karamzin’s, consideration of the nature of the Monarch’s power; selection and presenting of specific historical material and evaluations were due to the pragmatics of the classes with the Heir.

It is typical, that the figures of Russian rulers, driven for example were directly correlated with the personality of Nikolai I. The most important qualities of the Emperor (these epithets were used by Zhukovsky, Karamzin and even A. S. Pushkin) were "the mind, kindness and firmness". The latter is equivalent to "power." Judging from the 1831 essay about Alexander Nevsky, written by the Heir, he had not perceived the concept of Zhukovsky. For Alexander Nikolaevich the ancient Prince was endowed with the traditional heroic and the Christian traits of humility and self-sacrifice. It is possible due to the influence of his father, who made notes for family reading with personal impressions of the Decembrist uprising of 1825, which accompanied his accession to the Throne. Nikolai I endured the sacrifice and heroism, and the same traits were emphasized by Zhukovsky in the description of his reign. A later essay of Alexander II is preserved, which shows that ultimately the initiative of Zhukovsky had a success. The Heir announced as the most important achievement of Alexander Nevsky the ability to secure the trust of citizens in times of severe crisis and war. The slip is notable, when he called Alexander Nevsky the Emperor, that is, in a schoolboy’s essay on a historical theme there is a reflection on the present times.<sup>10</sup>

Another work by the Crown Prince was dedicated to the historical portrait of Ioann III, in which he has also highlighted the features that were important to Zhukovsky – the desire of the Tzar to autocracy, his care about the people's welfare, love for justice. Judging by the will of Nicholas I to his successor from 1855, the ideals of the monarchy and the relations with citizens, the principles of governing the State, political priorities, which have been indoctrinated with the parent-Emperor and Zhukovsky-a teacher are largely the same. First of all, it dealt with the challenges of moral education.<sup>11</sup>

In this context, it is possible to quote the main theses of the notes by Zhukovsky "The Use of history for the Emperors", dated by 1829 (this is an extract from "The plan of education"). It begins with a definite phrase: "The Treasure of the Royal enlightenment is the history, teaching with the experiences of

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<sup>9</sup> D. Offord, D. "Nation-Building and Nationalism in Karamzin's "History of the Russian State," in *Journal of Modern Russian History and Historiography*, III (2010), no. 1, p. 1-50; J. Schneider, *The Age of Romanticism. Westport (CT)*, London, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> T. Guzairov, *Žukovskij – istorikii deolo gnikolaevskogo carstvovanija*, *Dissertationes philologiae Slavicae universitatis tartuensis*, Bd. 19. Ulikoolikirjastus Tartu, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

the past, they explain the present and predict the future". Then follows a list of "rules of the Royal activities":

1. The power of the Tzar comes from God. Here is the remark "not to put himself above the court of the people, but to subordinate himself to the Supreme Court of God."

2. The respect for the law of people is determined by personal example of the Ruler, who respects the laws.

3. The spread of education, which is "the strongest support of the well-intentioned government." It is easier to make ferocious rebels of blind slaves; educated people appreciate the good order and laws.

4. Respect for public opinion, which is "the strictest judge of the executors of the Royal Will."

5. Love of freedom, which means respect for the personal safety and rights of people. The law needs to protect citizens, first and foremost, from the officers of the law. Freedom and law enforcement – are one and the same.

6. The government is realized not by force, but by order. "The true power of the Sovereign is not in the number of his soldiers, but in the solid welfare of the people".

7. True to his word: without the trust of his people, the Emperor is powerless.

8. "Surround yourself with worthy of you assistants." If the Tzar will alienate people, exceeding him in moral character or in competence, he will become a victim of the "greedy slaves".

9. "Respect your people, then they will become worthy of respect".

10. "Without love of the Tzar to the people, there is no love of the people to the Tzar".

11. The Sovereign must have in his soul the ideal of beautiful, that could protect him from contempt for humanity.

A set of commandments ends with a quote from "The World History" (Vier und zwanzig Bücher allgemeiner Geschichten) by Johann von Muller, calling for moderation and order.

## **Discussion**

T. Guzairov determined Zhukovsky as "the loyal opposition". His position was not understood by his contemporaries, primarily because of the aesthetic, but not pragmatic, approach to reality. From the position of V. Zhukovsky, the history is the life of the people, and the Monarch is responsible for each of them. In the first place in his political, historical and pedagogical approaches, Zhukovsky nominated the Monarch as the person, but not the Monarch-hero.

## **Insights**

Thus, the course of history is determined by the spiritual search of each person, and its only content is the simultaneous search of harmony and God. In the diaries of V. Zhukovsky the thoughts on modern life are inseparable from the ideas about education, and the religious search was expressed in the writing of

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political articles. However, in conditions of the tsarist Russia, an idealistic pragmatism of Zhukovsky could find expression only in the sphere of literature but not in state activity.