

The Greatest Emancipator: Abolition and Empire in Tsarist Russia

Willard Sunderland

[DRAFT. PLEASE DO NOT CITE OR COPY.]

The Emancipation of the Russian serfs was not just a *Russian* emancipation. Instead it was one piece within a fitful undoing of legal bondage that affected multiple communities within Russian space over the course of the long nineteenth century. By the eve of World War I, the tsars had formally freed over twenty-five million Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Gypsy (Roma), Moldovan, Georgian, Armenian, and Tatar serfs as well as serf-like Kalmyk commoners and Kalmyk, Kazakh, Persian, Yakut, and Circassian (Adyghe) slaves.

Serfs/Slaves	Year of Emancipation	Number Emancipated
Estonians	1816 (Estland Prov.)	188,000
Latvians	1817 (Kurland Prov.) 1819 (Livland Prov.) 1861 (Vitebsk Prov.)	1,300,000
Lithuanians	1861	1,500,000
Russians ("Great Russian" provinces)	1861	15,000,000
Belarussians ("White Russian" provinces)	1861	1,800,000
Ukrainians ("Little Russian" provinces)	1861	4,100,000
Gypsies (Roma)	1861	11,700
Landless Tsarane (Romanian: țăran) (Bessarabia)	1861, 1868	400,000
Georgians	1864 (Tiflis Prov.), 1865 (Kutaisi Prov.), 1866 (Mingrelia)	500,000
Persian slaves (Khanates of Khwārazm [Khiva] and Bukhara)	1866-1868, 1873	120,000
Slaves among the indigenous peoples of Siberia and the steppe		[Unclear]
Kalmyk "commoners"	1892	134,000
TOTAL		25,053,700

Sources: These numbers are incomplete and approximate (in some cases, highly so!), as are the national categories given that the Russian government tended to define groups by religion or language rather than nationality, even very late into the imperial era. Some "emancipated" groups (small numbers of Muslim peasants in the Caucasus region, for example) are also not listed here. A. Troinitskii, *Krepostnoe naselenie v Rossii po 10-i narodnoi perepisi* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Karla Vul'fa, 1861), ??? (serf population figures for Great Russian, Little Russian, and White Russian provinces + the South Caucasus (*Zakavkaz'e*); Andrejs Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 192, 221-222 (Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian-speaking serfs); P.A. Zaionchkovskii *Otmena krepostnogo prava v Rossii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury,

1954), 248-9 (Roma, *Tsarane*); Alexandr Kokhanovskii, "Otmena krepostnogo prava na territorii Belarusi: khod reformy, ee posledstviia i znachenie," *Dedy: daidzhest publikasii o beloruskoi istorii*, vyp.13 (Minsk, 2014), 48-57 (the 1861 serf population of the territory of "contemporary Belarus"); Jeff Eden, "Beyond the Bazzars: Geographies of the Slave Trade in Central Asia," *Modern Asian Studies*, 51, 4 (2017): 924 (maximum estimate of slave population of the Khanates of Khwārazm [Khiva] and Bukhara in the nineteenth century); A.G. Mitirov, *Oiraty-kalmyki: veka i pokoleniia* (Elista: Kalmyk. kn. izd., 1998), ??? ("Kalmyk population" of Astrakhan province in 1897); and K.N. Maksimov, *Kalmykii v natsional'noi politke, sisteme vlasti i upravleniia Rossii (xvii v. – xx v.)* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002), 207 (number of noions [nobles] within the Kalmyk population of Astrakhan province in 1897). Troinitskii proposes a total serf population for European Russia and Siberia in 1858-59 of 22.5 million and in the South Caucasus of 500,000, leading to the conclusion that the general serf population affected by the emancipations of the 1860s totaled some 23 million people. See Troinitskii, *Krepostnoe naselenie v Rossii po 10-i narodnoi perepisi*, 51.

This is over five times the number of slaves freed by law in the United States, twenty-six times the number freed by the two French emancipations of 1794 and 1848, more than thirty times the number freed in the British Empire by the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, roughly fifty times the number freed in Brazil by the Golden Law of 1888, and perhaps seventy-five times more than were freed by state and private manumissions in the Ottoman Empire over the course of the 1800s. The number of serfs freed in East Central Europe and the Balkans during the first half of the nineteenth century was likewise small by comparison.¹ In other words, the autocratic rulers of the most conservative state in Europe liberated more people than any other polity in the world in the imperial age, and they did this while fully enmeshed in the global liberal imperial emancipation enterprise of the times.

If this story sounds strange, it's because this is not the way that either the history of the Russian Emancipation or of international abolition is usually told.² Specialists on the Russian case rarely

¹ For the various numbers referenced here, see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Anti-Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 264-65; Lawrence C. Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802-1848* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3, ???; and James Brewer Stewart, "Antislavery and Abolitionism in the United States, 1776-1870," in David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and David Richardson (eds.), *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, Vol.4, AD 1804-AD 2016 [Hereafter: *CWHS*] (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 399; and Celso Thomas Castilho, "Abolition and its Aftermath in Brazil," *CWHS*, vol.4, 487. For an estimate of 8 million slaves freed in the Americas in the 1800s, see David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and David Richardson, "Introduction," *CWHS*, vol.4, 15. Alessandro Stanziani suggests that "30 million Russian peasants" were emancipated between 1780 and 1914. Though "Russian" was often an elastic category in the 1800s, this number seems too high. See Alessandro Stanziani, "Abolitions," in J.R. McNeill and Kenneth Pomeranz (eds.), *The Cambridge World History*, Vol.7, *Production, Destruction, and Connection*, Pt. 2, *Shared Transformations?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 112.

² For a notable exception that examines Russia in a world context, see Alessandro Stantsiani (Stanziani), "Otmena krepostnogo prava v Rossii: global'naia perspektiva," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 141, 5 (2016). See the online version at: [https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe_literaturnoe_obozrenie/141_nlo_5_2016/article/12172/] For additional works that treat the Russian case in comparative perspective, see Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Jerome Blum, *The End of the Old Order in Rural Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978). For a survey of Russian

have anything to say about non-Russian serfs freed within the empire, treating the famous Emancipation of 1861 not only as the only emancipation worth talking about but also as a largely Russian national story.³ They also rarely consider slavery (*kholopstvo*) and serfdom (*krepostnichestvo*) together when discussing emancipation, which is fair since Russian slavery effectively ended in the early eighteenth century, while the end of serfdom came a hundred and fifty years later.⁴ But this is just *Russian* slavery; other slaveries in the empire persisted.

Specialists on modern abolition outside of Russian meanwhile rarely if ever include Russia in their analysis, which focuses overwhelmingly on the slave societies of the Atlantic world and, to a much lesser degree, the Ottoman domains of North Africa and the Middle East or the Indian Ocean. In this, they're matched by the Russianists who show equally little interest in connecting or comparing their emancipation to similar emancipations elsewhere. Indeed, the focus for Russianists is so much on "Russia proper," that they rarely even mention Russia's contributions to international abolitionism, which began with the country's co-signing of the antislavery declaration of the powers at the Congress of Vienna and continued throughout the nineteenth century.

The categorical divide between serfdom and slavery is one reason for the disconnect between these histories, though a growing historiography on "dependence, servility, and coerced labor" has started to merge and expand the two fields.⁵ The fact that Russian abolitionism lacked a rich literary and public dimension has also obscured it from view, especially for outside

abolitionism with regard to both domestic and foreign slaveries, see Megan Dean Farah, "Autocratic Abolitionists: Tsarist Russian Anti-Slavery Campaigns," in William Mulligan and Maurice Bric (eds.), *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Eng.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 97-116. For expressly global approaches to abolition, see Stanziani, "Abolitions," 112-33; and Hideaki Suzuki, "Abolitions as a Global Experience: An Introduction," in Hideaki Suzuki (ed.), *Abolitions as a Global Experience* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), 1-24.

³ P.A. Zaionchkovskii's now classic work devotes a short chapter to the post-1861 abolitions of serfdom in the South Caucasus, the Caucasus, and Bessarabia, but this is an anomaly. See his *Otmena krepostnogo prava v Rossii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1954), Chapter 5. More common is to discuss the Baltic emancipations that preceded the Russian reform but otherwise leave the other serfdoms of the empire and the international context of antislavery out of the picture. See, for example, the authoritative work of David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, 1762-1907* (New York: Longman, 2001).

⁴ On Russian slavery, see Richard Hellie, *Slavery in Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

⁵ See, for example, David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, "Dependence, Servility, and Coerced Labor in Time and Space," in Idem (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, Vol.3, AD 1420-AD 1804 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-24; and M.L. Bush, *Servitude in Modern Times* (Cambridge and Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2000). See also Bush's edited volume: *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage* (London and New York: Longman, 1996).

specialists.⁶ More than anything, though, if Russia remains apart, it's because of the habits of geographical specialization. Russianists predictably focus more on their own domain, while Europeanists concentrate on Europe minus Russia, and Atlanticists on the Atlantic, where, to be fair, one can't fault them too much for not talking about the Russians since the latter were never more than minor Atlantic players.

Yet even in the Eurasian context where one finds considerable common ground and close interconnections, the scholarship of slavery and serfdom has only recently begun paying attention to cross-influences between Russia and its neighbors.⁷ The result is a curious picture: The Russian Emancipation is an event of world historical importance, but historians do not study it in a global framework, and, though it unfolded within an empire, much that was imperial about it is left out of the equation. National history has, in effect, made off with the Emancipation, spiriting it away from both its international and imperial contexts. Even the "imperial turn" and a burgeoning interest in transnational history in the Russian field have yet to change this.⁸

This article highlights these dimensions by retelling the Russian Emancipation as part of a complex politics of liberation from multiple forms of unfreedom that zig-zagged across the long nineteenth century, affecting Russians as well as numerous other peoples both within the empire and beyond. The dogged stereotype of the tsarist state as a "prison house of peoples" turns out to be a red herring. Rather than an unflagging jailer, the imperial government of the nineteenth century was equal parts enforcer and liberator, instructing its subjects on their obligations, one of which was defined, not without some irony, as the requirement to be free. A similar position echoed in the international arena where, as the jurist-diplomat Fedor Martens put it, to be a "civilized state" meant, in effect, to agree that "slavery should not exist" and that "no man should be the property of another."⁹

Of course, just what it meant to end slavery/serfdom was complicated. The sheer variety of who owned whom and how within the empire was staggering, reflecting the particularities of

⁶ This shouldn't be an excuse, however, since abolitionism of the Anglo-American sort was the exception rather than the norm in the world history of slavery. See the reflections in Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 128-9.

⁷ On such connections, see Christoph Witzel (ed.), *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom, and Abolition in World History, 1200-1860* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2015); and Alessandro Stanziani, *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

⁸ On the "imperial turn" in the historiography on Russia and the USSR, see Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander Martin, "The Imperial Turn," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* [hereafter: *Kritika*], 7, 4 (2006): 705-12. On transnational questions and the Russian field, see Michael David-Fox, "The Implications of Transnationalism," *Kritika*, 12, 4 (2011): 885-904.

⁹ F. Martens, *Sovremennoe mezhdunarodnoe pravo tsivilizovannykh narodov* (2d. rev. ed.; St. Petersburg: Tip. Ministerstva putei soobshcheniia, 1887), vol. I, 324.

imperial expansion over the centuries. The tension between being a servile state at home and (generally speaking) an anti-slavery state abroad – a contradiction that the country inhabited for most of the 1800s – also led to predictably sticky moments.

There was never a neat and tidy plan to get it all done, either. Addressing the Estland barons in 1802, Alexander I suggested that emancipation was an idea whose time had come, but what he really meant was that the time had come for lords and peasants in Estland, with Courland and Livland to follow.¹⁰ The reckoning for other lords and peasants would have to come later, though what seems clear, at least in retrospect, is that the closer one was to the Baltic the sooner that time would be. The tsarist emancipation impulse moved west to east, much as it did across the “servile lands” of Europe more generally. Thus, though little changed in landlord-serf relations between the 1810s and the 1850s, the critical moves that did occur tended to unfold in the more westerly parts of the country.¹¹

The key shift came with the Russian Emancipation. Once the government committed itself to dismantling the largest complex of servitude in the state, other emancipations followed in ready if sometimes delayed order, all of them framed in terms of advancing the spirit of 1861, though even with the Russian decree as a kind of standard, the various reforms around the empire were hardly all the same.

The engagement with ending slavery and slave trading followed a similarly slow and complicated path. On the one hand, the tsarist government’s stand against the African slave trade was unequivocal, stretching across the nineteenth century to the Brussels Antislavery Act of 1890, which Russia signed along with other European states, the US, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, the Congo Free State, and Zanzibar, and which – as Seymour Drescher has put it – “minted antislavery as the gold standard of Western civilization.”¹² Faced with choosing sides in the US Civil War, St. Petersburg chose the North, in part because of opposition to slavery. Russia was also an original signatory of the International Agreement for the Suppression of the “White Slave Traffic” in Paris in 1904.

Russian diplomats, military men, and statesmen likewise put an end to Crimean slavery with the annexation of the khanate in 1783, pursued the suppression of the Barbary trade in European slaves in the Mediterranean, closed slave markets and caravanserais in Central Asia as Russian

¹⁰ For Alexander’s letter to the head of the Estland *Ritterschaft*, see Eesti Ajalooarhiivi (EAA) [Estonian Historical Archives], f.39, n.1, s.182 (“Akte betreffend die Einsendung der Abschriften von allen in Bezug auf die den Estländischen Bauern verliehenen Freiheitsrechte, erlassenen Allerhöchsten Verordnungen zur Aufbewahrung in der Höchsteigenen Kanzlei seiner Kaiserlichen Majestät”), l.10.

¹¹ On the “servile lands,” see Blum, *The End of the Old Order in Rural Europe*, 3.

¹² Drescher, *Abolition*, 385.

armies moved into the region in the 1860s and 1870s, and denounced the Ottomans for their trade in Circassian slaves across and around the Black Sea.

Yet, at the same time, the government took decades to put an end to the enslavement of Kazakh children on the Siberian frontier, imposed slave-like relations on native peoples in Russian America, were inconsistent in clamping down on the Black Sea slave trade, even while hotly condemning it, and after demanding an end to slavery in Bukhara in 1873 nonetheless allowed slaves to remain the property of their masters for ten years while the emir worked out an emancipation plan.¹³ Intellectuals like Alexander Radishchev were quick to equate Russian serfdom and American slavery, but many more Russians were not, including long-serving foreign minister Count Karl Nessel'rode who had a hand in all the country's international anti-slave trade commitments of the first half of the 1800s yet adamantly opposed freeing the serfs, including his own.¹⁴

By the time the first rumblings of emancipation began in the late 1700s, Russian unfreedom was thus diverse and contradictory. Slaves and serfs were Russians, non-Russians, and foreigners, as were the would-be liberators. Each slavery and serfdom, too, was different, or at least imagined as such, which meant that emancipations had to be plural as well. As a result, the emancipators, many of whom doubled as serf owners, rarely linked the various operations or debates about freeing serfs or slaves at home and abroad despite the fact that the processes unfolded largely simultaneously, shared overlapping vocabularies, and tended to be mutually reinforcing, especially as the century moved on. If the "imposition of 'free' labor" was "torturous" everywhere in "the European-Atlantic arena," the process in Russian Eurasia was afflicted in its own special way.¹⁵

[Section break]

IN the late eighteenth century, the Russian Empire was home to some twenty-three million people, of whom perhaps only the tsar was free in the sense of being a "legally autonomous individual" who could "act unobstructed by others."¹⁶ Everyone else was obligated to one degree or another, with the least obligated being the nobles (less than one percent of the

¹³ Jeff Eden, "Beyond the Bazaars: Geographies of the Slave Trade in Central Asia," *Modern Asian Studies*, 51, 4 (2017): 945; and Kimura Satoru, "Sunni-Shi'i Relations in the Russian Protectorate of Bukhara, as Perceived by the Local 'Ulama," in Uyama Tomohiko (ed.), *Asiatic Russia: Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 198.

¹⁴ See Nessel'rode's letter to Nikolai Miliutin expressing regret at the impending emancipation: "Gr. Nessel'rode – N.A. Miliutinu. 1859," *Russkaia starina*, 7, 6 (1873): 855-56.

¹⁵ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Patrick Camiller, trans.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 698.

¹⁶ Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in his *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty* (Henry Hardy, ed.) (2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169

population), who were free from state service (as of 1762) and free to own other people, while the most obligated were slaves and serfs.¹⁷

The greatest number of serfs consisted of Orthodox Slavic peasants living in central European Russia, the heartland of what the Russians called *krepostnoe pravo* (literally: the law of ownership or title/deed [*krepost'*]).¹⁸ Most of the individuals who owned these serfs were likewise Orthodox Slavs. But there were other serfdoms besides: German serfdom in the Baltic provinces where German lords owned (mostly) Estonian and Latvian peasants; Polish serfdom in former Poland-Lithuania where Polish lords owned (mostly) Lithuanian and Ukrainian peasants; a Kalmyk quasi-serfdom on the southern Volga; and various serfdoms in the South Caucasus, where serfs and owners alike were Armenians, Tatars, and Georgians, among others, including Jews.

Slaveries were just as diverse. Up to 1723 when Peter the Great effectively abolished the category, the numerous types of people known in Russian as *kholopy* (debt slaves, limited contract slaves, hereditary slaves, indentured servants, and so on), perhaps ten percent of the overall population, included Orthodox Slavs as well as converted non-Russians and foreigners, many of whom were originally war prisoners or captives.¹⁹

Ownership, too, was multiethnic and multiconfessional. Muslim Adyghe and other “Circassian peoples” of the North Caucasus owned slaves. Yakut headmen (*toiony*) did as well, most of them fellow Yakuts as well as some Evenks (Tungus) and Evens (Lamuts). Meanwhile, slave-taking by Russians in Siberia was integral to Muscovite expansion. Upon establishing their forts (*ostrogi*) near the Siberian settlements, Cossack men would “take” native women “for sex” (*na bliud*) and men and women as hostages (*amanaty*), while collecting the fur tribute (*yasak*). Monasteries also acquired natives as serfs, extracting their labor in return for stock animals, tools, and seeds.²⁰ The most common slaves in the West Siberian settlements were Kalmyk

¹⁷ These population figures relate to the 1760s. See V.M. Kabuzan, *Narodonaselenie Rossii v xviii-pervoi polovine xix v. (po materialam revizii)* (Moscow: Izd. Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963), 11. In this period, peasants constituted roughly 94 percent of the total population of the empire, with privately owned serfs (that is, peasants residing on noble lands) equaling some 56 percent of the total. The remaining almost 38 percent of the peasant population was made up of rural people living on state, Church, or crown lands. On the release of the nobles from obligatory state service, see Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility, 1762-1785* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974) and I.V. Faizova, *‘Manifest o vol’nosti’ i sluzhba dvorianstva v xviii stoletii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1999).

¹⁸ On these terms, see Stanziani, *Bondage*, 102; and the entries for “Krepostnoi” and “Krepost’” in *Slovar’ russkogo iazyka xviii veka* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1997), vol.9, ????

¹⁹ Stanziani, *Bondage*, 68-75; Hellie, *Slavery in Russia*, 33-56; and Christoph Witzenrath, “Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia: An Overview of the Russian and Ottoman Empires and Central Asia” in Witzenrath (ed.), *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom, and Abolition in World History*, 18-23.

²⁰ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 44. On monastery enserfment in Siberia in the seventeenth century, see the case described in K.P.

captives, most of whom were seized by Kazakhs on the steppe who then sold them along the Russian lines or traded them to Bukharan merchants who then resold them to the Russians. According to Juraj Križanić [Iurii Krizhanich], “There [wasn’t] a man of means in Siberia [i.e. Western Siberia in the late 1600s] who [didn’t] own one or more Kalmyk slaves.”²¹

If anything, slave ownership in Siberia and elsewhere in the empire only expanded in the eighteenth century, at least for most of the period. Indeed, even as serf-ownership became an increasingly noble privilege in Russia proper, Siberia remained so short of “people of this sort” that the government made it legal in 1756 for practically anyone in the region to own “Asiatic captives,” with the added instruction that the owners were to baptize their new property and obtain a “certificate of ownership” (*vypis’ vladeniiia*) indicating the slave’s name, age, height, and other “physical characteristics.” (*prirodnye primety*)²² Even twenty years prior to this, however, slavery was common enough in Kamchatka for newly arrived Cossacks to claim “at least fifteen to twenty [native] slaves.” (Some owned from fifty to sixty.)²³ Slave-like exploitation then crossed the Northern Pacific as Russian *promyshlenniki* and the Russian American Company reached the Aleutians.²⁴ In the same period on the opposite end of the empire, Slavs remained exposed to enslavement themselves. The last Crimean raid on Russian territory (now central Ukraine) occurred in 1769. Smaller numbers of Russian subjects were abducted into Central Asia and the Caucasus.²⁵

Given the diversity of peoples living in unfreedom, not surprisingly, the unfreedoms themselves were different. Until 1771, Russian manorial serfs could be sold any way their owners pleased, including at auction. “Possessional peasants,” however, could only be sold along with their

Mikhailov, “Krepostnichestvo v Sibiri (stranitsy iz istorii inorodcheskoi i krest’ianskoi nevoli),” *Sibirskii sbornik*, 1886, n.1, pp.93-137, esp.102-3. The practice of hostage-taking continued in Russian America. See A.V. Zorin, *Indeiskaiia voina v Russkoi Amerike: russko-tlinkitskoe protivoborstvo (1741-1821)* (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2017), 86-7.

²¹ [Iu. Krizhanich], “Istoriia o Sibiri,” in A. Titov (comp.), *Sibir’ v xvii v.: sbornik starinnykh russkikh statei o Sibiri i prilezhashchikh k nei zemliakh* (Moscow: G. Iudin, 1890), 186.

²² “O pravilakh pokupki u Kirgiz-Kaisakov plennnikov,” *PSZ*, ser. 1, v.14, n.10,654 (19 Nov 1756), 676-79, esp. 677.

²³ The reference appears in an account of Kamchatka by the naturalist Georg Steller (1709-1746). See Andrei Zuev, ““Konkvistadorskii imperii’: Russkie zemleprokhodtsy na severo-vostoke Azii,” in [author: Ab Imperio], *Region v istorii imperii: istoricheskii esse o Sibiri* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel’stvo, 2013), 28.

²⁴ Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 75-6.

²⁵ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2004), 21-6; A.A. Novosel’skii, *Bor’ba moskovskogo gosudarstva s tatarami v pervoi polovine xvii veka* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izd. Akad. Nauk SSSR, 1948), 427-33, 434-42; Stanziani, *Bondage*, 84-8; Mikhail Kizilov, “Slave Trade in the Early Modern Crimea from the Perspective of Christian, Jewish and Muslim Sources,” *Journal of Early Modern History*, 11, 1-2 (2007): 15; Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History* (4th ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 176.

factories, while peasants living on Church lands were “freed” in 1762-64 from doing labor for “the clerical rank” (that is, the monks) and recategorized as “economic peasants” who paid a fixed 1 ½ ruble tax to the state.²⁶ Adyghe slaves couldn’t free themselves, but they had the right to change masters if they wanted, as did peasants in Abkhazia.²⁷ By contrast, though they could marry and own limited property, Yakut slaves (*kuluty*) were “tied” to their clans and therefore “completely dependent on the toions.”²⁸

The obvious factor linking these various forms of subordination was the Muscovite and later Petrine empire, which contained, endorsed, and/or was shaped by all of them. By and large, as the state expanded into new areas beginning in the sixteenth century, the “men of the tsar” (*tsarskie liudi*) either imposed their own forms of unfree labor, incorporated those they found *in situ*, or, did something of both, as in Siberia, for example, where Muscovite practices of slavery came to co-exist alongside native ones. Unfreedom was Eurasian, rather than Russian, and, generally speaking, a practical approach to the diversity of the condition was Eurasian as well. The most important players in a new territory from the center’s perspective were the “best people” (*luchshie liudi*) within a given community – that is, the mirzas, noions, toions, barons, tayishis, szlachta, and so forth, each of whom sat atop their respective social pyramids. As the Russians went about bringing these elites into the empire, they invariably brought their exploitations in along with them, usually with little debate over the particulars.

Incorporation thus brought change, but not necessarily right away or in the most predictable fashion. Following the conquest of Kazan in 1552, for example, the Muscovites made a point of “eliminating” (*izvelisia*) the “best [Tatar] princes and mirzas and Cossacks” who resisted, but they enrolled the rest in the *mestnichestvo* books and confirmed their lands and villages, including villages of new non-Russian converts and, in some cases, newly arrived Russian peasants, who found themselves gradually enserfed.²⁹ Though Muscovite legislation favored

²⁶ “O zapreshchenii auktsionistam prodavat’ s molotka liudei bez zemli,” *PSZ*, ser. 1, v.19, n.13634 (5 August 1771), 293; V.I. Semevskii, *Krest’ianskii vopros v Rossii v xviii i pervoi polovine xix veka* (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo ‘Obshchestvennaia pol’za,’ 1888), vol.1, ii-iii; “Kasatel’no novogo ustroistva ob upravlenii monastyrskikh i arkhieriiskikh nedvizhimykh imenii,” *PSZ*, ser. 1, v.15, n.11481 (21 Mar 1762), 948-53; and “O razdelenii dukhovnykh imenii i o sbore so vsekh arkhieriiskikh, monastyrskikh i vsekh drugikh tserkovnykh krest’ian s kazhdoi dushi po 1 rubliu 50 kopeek,” *PSZ*, ser.1, v.16, n.12060 (26 Feb 1764), 549-69.

²⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, “‘The Peasants Have Always Fed Us’: The Georgian Nobility and the Peasant Emancipation,” *Russian Review*, 38, 1 (1979): 47; A. Cherkasov, V. Ivantsov, M. Shmigel’, and V. Molchanova, “Rabovladienie i krepostnichestvo v Cherkesskom obshchestve v pervoi polovine xix veka” (unpublished paper).

²⁸ *Iakutiia ot 1630-kh godov do 1917 g.* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1957), 162; A.I. Gogolev, *Istoriia Iakutii (obzor istoricheskikh sobytii do nachala xx v.)* (Iakutsk: Izd. Iakutskogo universiteta, 1999), 74.

²⁹ G. Peretiatkovich, *Povolzh’e v xv i xvi vekakh (ocherki iz istorii kraia i ego kolonizatsii)* (Moscow: Tip. Gracheva, 1877), 233-34. Following the conquest, the great majority of non-Russian peasants in the Kazan region were re-categorized as “yasak people.” Still others became “monastic peasants.” See Matthew Romaniello, *The Elusive Empire: Kazan and the Creation of Russia, 1552-1667* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 169.

Orthodox over Muslim landlords, it wasn't until a hundred and fifty years *after* the conquest that the state got around to requiring the mirzas to convert if they wanted to own Orthodox peasants.³⁰

By the same token, pursuing a “politics of balance” in their new domains, the Russians banned Orthodox and Muslim servitors alike from enserfing Muslims, though some Muslim landlords, like the Tevkelevs in the Southern Urals, nonetheless managed to do so.³¹ In fact, turning a blind eye to cases like this made sense because, generally speaking, the government's main concern was preserving stability, and the surest way to do this was to give the “best people” what they wanted.

The German lords in the Baltic are a case in point. Eager to secure their allegiance during the Great Northern War, Peter I readily approved the barons' “rights and privileges,” including the right to run their estates as they pleased. The watchword of the day was “Let all remain as it was in the Swedish time” (*byt' po semu kak sie bylo pri Shvedskom vremeni*), which was simply another way of saying that, though a new empire had come to town, nothing much would change.³² In similar fashion, in 1785, Russian serfowner-like prerogatives were extended to Kalmyk noions, including the right to sell or give away their “commoners,” though the latter retained more latitude relative to their lords than their Russian counterparts as they could choose to leave one owner for another under certain circumstances.³³

³⁰ “O kreshchenii v Kazanskoi i Azovskoi guberniiakh Magometan, u kotorykh v pomest'iaikh i votchinakh nakhodiatsia krest'iane Pravoslavnoi very,” *PSZ*, ser. 1, vol.4, n.2734 (November 3, 1713), 66-7; and “Ob opisi i vziatii v kaznu krest'ian Pravoslavnoi very u pomeshchikov Magometanskogo zakona, za nevospriniatii onimi Khristianskoi very,” *PSZ*, ser.1, vol.4, n.2920 (July 12, 1715), 163. See also: N. Firsov, *Inorodcheskoe naselenie prezhnego Kazanskogo Tsarstva v novoi Rossii do 1762 goda i kolonizatsiia Zakamskikh zemel' v eto vremia* (Kazan': Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1869), 4; Boris Nolde, *La formation de l'empire russe: études, notes, documents* (Paris: Institut des Études Slaves, 1952), vol.1, 103; and Aidar Nogmanov, *Samoderzhavie i Tatary: ocherki istorii zakonodatel'noi politiki vtoroi poloviny xvi-xviii vekov* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), 32-35, 70-1.

³¹ By 1861, the Tevkelevs owned some 3,500 Muslim peasants. See G.B. Azamatova, *Integratsiia natsional'nogo dvorianstva v rossiiskoe obshchestvo na primere roda Tevkelevykh* (Ufa: Gilem, 2008), 75-77. On the “politics of balance” (*politique d'équilibre*), see Nolde, *La formation de l'empire russe*, vol. 1, 97, 101.

³² For this quote, see Mati Laur, “Die Verortung des Baltikums im Russischen Imperium zu Beginn der Regierungszeit Katharinas II,” in Olaf Mertelsmann (ed.), *Estland und Russland: Aspekte der Beziehungen beider Länder* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2005), 31-32. In fact, things didn't just stay the same for the barons—they got better. Prior to the Great Northern War, the Swedes had begun restricting Livonian serfdom. Once the Russians took over, they rolled the restrictions back. See G.V. Ibneeva, *Imperskaia politika Ekateriny II v zerkale ventsenosnykh putesthestvii* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2009), 119, 136.

³³ RGIA, f.1291, op. 85, d. 22 (“Ob osvobozhdenii kalmykov Astrakhanskoi i Stavropol'skoi gubernii ot vlasti noionov, vladel'tsev i zaitsanov”), ch.4, ll.199(b)-200; V.V. Batyrov, “Sotsial'naia struktura obshchestva xvii-xix vekov,” in E.P. Bakaeva and N.L. Zhukovskaia (eds.), *Kalmyki* (Moscow: Nauka, 2010), 67-8.

This habit of imperial governance helped to create a bumpy terrain. Almost everyone in the empire was unfree, but they were unfree in different ways, bound up within particularistic tangles of custom and regulation, or at least nominal regulation, because much about being unfree was, in fact, not written down. Even basic presumptions of Russian serfdom remained uncodified, such as the landlord's claim to own his or her peasants as property, for example, which was never established as such in "positive law," even during the Catherinian era when nobles gained extensive property rights.³⁴ Because of this general situation, neither freedom (*vol'nost'*, *volia*, *svoboda*), nor unfreedom (*nevolia*) for that matter, were clearly defined. Being unfree amounted to an untidy patchwork, like the empire itself.

[Section break]

The critical development that led – in time – to imperial abolition was the coming to power of Catherine the Great (1762-1796). *Devotée* of the Republic of Letters, occasional admirer of the philosophes, and Russia's first royal "convert to emancipation at some future point," Catherine was also the first Russian politician to lend moral and intellectual cachet to antislavery.³⁵ As she wrote in her *Instruction*, paraphrasing Montesquieu, "Because the Law of nature requires us to contribute as much as we can to the well-being of all men, We bear the obligation to ease the condition of all those within our power...It follows therefore that [we must also] avoid reducing men to slavery, *except when absolutely necessary*."³⁶ (Italics added – WS.)

This was obviously *not* abolitionism. As Catherine made clear a few lines later (again repeating Montesquieu), she saw no reason to proclaim a "general law" freeing "a large number of people all at once." By the same token, more specific "laws" to relieve the "abuse" and "danger" that accompanied "dependence" (*pokorstvo/dépendance*) were necessary and entirely reasonable. The empress stretched things somewhat to argue that Peter the Great, too, had wanted to protect the serfs from their masters, implying that her approach was really just more of the same. In truth, however, what she was doing, or at least asserting, was different. Peter's aim in ending Russian slavery (*kholopstvo*) had been less to free people than

³⁴ A.B. Kamenskii, "'Kreshchennaia sobstvennost'" v zakonodatel'stve xviii veka," in *Predstavleniia o sobstvennosti v rossiiskom obshchestve xv-xviii vv.: problemy sobstvennosti v obshchestvennom soznanii i pravovoi mysli feodal'noi epokhi* (Moscow: Institut Istorii RAN, 1998), 185 passim; Ekaterina Pravilova, *A Public Empire: Property and the Quest for the Common Good in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 24-25. For a more categorical argument that "serfdom as such was never institutionalized in Russia," see Stanziani, "Abolitions," 114.

³⁵ Shane O'Rourke, "The Emancipation of the Serfs in Europe," in *CWHS*, vol.4, 425. On "antislavery" as "a vague and flexible concept" that encompassed everything from "an organized social force; political activity aimed at eradicating the slave trade or slavery itself; a set of moral and philosophic convictions that might be held with varying intensities; [and/]or simply the theoretical belief that Negro slavery is a wasteful, expensive, and dangerous system of labor which tends to corrupt the morals of white Christians," see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 164.

³⁶ *Nakaz Imperatritsy Ekaterinoi II, dannyi Kommissii o sochinenii proekta novogo ulozheniia* (N.D. Chechulin, ed.) (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akad. Nauk, 1907), 74-75.

to generate recruits and revenue. He thus turned slaves, who did not have to pay taxes or serve in the army, into serfs who did. Catherine, by contrast, started from the position that “dependence” was a moral issue requiring government action to ensure the “tranquility” of “masters” and “slaves” alike.³⁷

The inclination to view bondage as a problem to be “improved” through reasonable laws reflected the “moderate Enlightenment” sensibility of both the court and the public, most of whose members, like the Glasgow-trained jurist, Semën Desnitskii, were far happier with regulating servitude (to the degree necessary and for everyone’s benefit) than with the prospect of eliminating it altogether.³⁸ As Catherine suggested to her supporters shortly after taking power, her credo was sensible change. “State your grievances; Say where the shoe pinches you. We will try to reform it. I have no particular system. All I want is the common good.”³⁹

Not surprisingly, this approach led to inconsistencies. The empress’ version of antislavery was less a policy than a predisposition, the world of unfreedom was vast and uneven, and the empire’s needs and peoples were many and particular, all of which worked to favor a selective approach. Catherine helped to turn the dial of Russian governance towards the value of a would-be uniform empire based on the *esprit de système*, and in time, the pursuit of a Russian-based standard for bondage and freedom would grow into a more influential expectation, but for now the habit remained to make peace with diversity. Certain people might thus be freed – or supported towards freedom – in certain circumstances. In others, however, the tendency was to introduce minor adjustments or simply look the other way. Also, unlike some of her contemporaries in the Republic of Letters (Bentham, Diderot, and Kant, for example) Catherine’s antislavery was not a rejection of imperialism per se as much as a protest against some of its worst abuses, and even some of the abuses turned out to be things she could live with.⁴⁰

Thus, at the same time that Church serfs around the empire were turned over to the state to spare them from “all diocesan and monastery labors,” free peasants in Little Russia found

³⁷ Ibid, 76.

³⁸ For Desnitskii’s views on servile reform, see his “Predstavlenie o uchrezhdenii zakonodatel’noi, suditel’noi i nakazatel’noi vlasti v Rossiiskoi imperii” (1768) [http://az.lib.ru/d/desnitskij_s_e/text_1767_predstavlenie.shtml]. On Catherine’s and much of the public’s embrace of the “moderate Enlightenment,” see Gary Hamburg, *Russia’s Path Toward Enlightenment: Faith, Politics, and Reason, 1500-1801* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 393.

³⁹ Quoted in Cynthia H. Whittaker, “The Reforming Tsar: The Redefinition of Autocratic Duty in Eighteenth-Century Russia,” *Slavic Review*, 51, 1 (1992): 92.

⁴⁰ On the late eighteenth-century critique of empire, see Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

themselves turned into serfs to placate the local nobility.⁴¹ The right of Russian subjects in Siberia to enslave “non-Christian Tatars and other [foreign] Asiatic peoples” (in particular, Kalmyks) was also upheld, though the Senate clarified that “yasak peoples” (that is, “Asiatics” who were not foreigners) could not be enslaved because they were needed to pay yasak.⁴² In the same manner, Catherine celebrated the freeing of “a multitude of Christians” in the Ottoman Empire as a result of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca but stopped short of enforcing the full abolitionist implications of the accord.⁴³ She also abolished the slave trade in the Crimea with the annexation of the Crimean Khanate in 1783, yet threw open the new imperial territory that replaced it (like the rest of New Russia) to serf colonization. (Few serf owners took advantage, however, because moving serfs was expensive.)⁴⁴

The rules for criticizing servitude were also tricky. On the one hand, following the empress’ lead, even bold criticism was now acceptable as long as one stuck to bondage in the abstract, in ancient times, or as practiced somewhere else. Thus the outspoken pastor-abolitionist Johann Georg Eisen, who found himself run out of Courland in the late 1770s for describing serfdom as “a tyranny...and a monster,” received refuge in Moscow, while the Free Economic Society awarded its first essay prize in 1766 to a French law professor from Aachen who proclaimed with biblical certainty that “all men [were] brothers,” including “peasants and kings [and] slaves and masters.”⁴⁵ Meanwhile Russian humanitarians joined their European and American

⁴¹ The quoted phrase is from “O razdelenii dukhovnykh imenii i o sbore so vseh arkhieriiskikh, monastyrskikh i vseh drugikh tserkovnykh krest’ian s kazhdoi dushi po 1 rubliu 50 kopeek,” 551. On enservment in Ukrainian areas, see Zenon Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s-1830s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1988), 242. For the argument that Catherine’s policies in the region and the empire more generally didn’t actually increase the number of serfs, see Isabel de Madariaga, “Catherine II and the Serfs: A Reconsideration of Some Problems,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 52, 126 (1974): 37.

⁴² “O proizvedenii sledstviia po vziatkam s Sibirskikh inogorodtsev; i o polozhenii Bukhartsev, zhivushchikh v Sibirskoi gubernii, po proshestvii l’gotnogo vremeni v oklad protiv gosudarstvennykh krest’ian,” *PSZ*, ser.1, vol.16, n.12041 (12 Feb 1763), 532-534, here: 534; and I.A. Mal’tsev, “Legal’noe rabstvo v Sibiri i Orenburgskom krae v xviii-pervoi polovine xix v.,” *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta*, Series 2, n.3 (2007): 73

⁴³ On the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774 as requiring “the virtual abolition of slavery in the Ottoman Empire,” see Will Smiley, “Let *Whose* People Go? Subjecthood, Sovereignty, Liberation, and Legalism in Eighteenth-Century Russo-Turkish Relations,” *Turkish Historical Review*, 3 (2012): 207. For Catherine’s account of freeing “a multitude,” see “Manifest o zakliuchenii mira s Ottomanskoio Portoiu,” *PSZ*, ser. 1, v.20, n.14274 (17 Mar 1775), 81.

⁴⁴ E.I. Druzhinina, *Severnoe Prichernomor’e v 1775-1800 gg.* (Moscow: ????, 1959), ???; Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 83-4; and Kelly O’Neill, *Claiming Crimea: A History of Catherine the Great’s Southern Empire* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017), 29-30, 200.

⁴⁵ Johann Georg Eisen, *Der Philanthrop, eine periodische Schrift* (Mitau: Jakob Friedrich Hinz, 1777), “foreword” (no page number indicated); Anne Sommerlat, *La Courlande et les Lumières* (Paris: Belin, 2010), 140-42; [Beardé de l’Abaye], *Dissertation qui a remporté le prix sur la question proposée en 1766 par la Société d’oeconomie &*

counterparts in denouncing the horrors of Atlantic slavery where “the coasts of Africa and America groan from the sugar planters’ inhumanity [*beschelovechiia*] towards the black-colored peoples.”⁴⁶

At the same time, when Alexander Radishchev dared to suggest an equivalence between the “sweat, tears, and blood” of African slaves and Russian serfs in his *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790), he clearly went too far, at least for Catherine, who immediately had him arrested and banned his book, denouncing it as “something out of Abbé Raynal” (*abbé Reynalien*), whose *Histoire des deux Indes*, incidentally, she also banned even though she seems to have allowed the beginnings of a translation.⁴⁷ At his trial, Radishchev then dutifully confessed that Raynal was indeed the source of all his troubles.⁴⁸

Catherine’s opposition to servitude thus amounted at best to an “uncertain commitment,” in particular with regard to Russian serfdom and especially after the French and Haitian revolutions, but her ambivalence marked a turning point all the same.⁴⁹ Every tsar who followed her down to the 1860s would wrestle with the contradiction she created of upholding a servile order on the one hand, while, in different ways, adjusting or undermining it on the other. For centuries the Russians had built their empire by incorporating other peoples’ servitudes and expanding their own. Beginning in the early 1800s, however, influenced by the state-based “rights talk” and “humanitarian big bang” of the revolutionary era, this dynamic gradually reversed.⁵⁰ Rather than imperialism through bondage, the Russians turned to

d’agriculture à St. Petersbourg: à la quelle on à joint les pièces qui ont eües l’accessit (St Petersburg: no publisher, 1768), 15-16.

⁴⁶ Fedor Karzhavin, *Novoiavlennyi vedun, povedaiushchii gadanie dukhov* (St. Petersburg: ????, 1795), 71. See also *Opisanie ostrova Sankt-Domingo s pokazaniem prezhdabyvshikh na onom korenykh dikikh zhitelei, ikh nraov, obychev i odezhd, takozhde poselivshchikhsia na sem ostrove Evropeitsov; nachatiia ego seleniia i raznykh s onym prikluchivshchikhsia peremen; o sostoianii sakharnykh i proch. tamoshnykh zavodov i trgovli, o proisrasteniakh, o pokupke i soderzhanii chernykh nevo’nikov, i vsekh prochikh dostopamiatnostiakh* (Moscow: Tip. Teatra u Khristofora Klavdiia, 1793), ???, and L.A. Shur, *Rossiia i Latinskaia Amerika: ocherki politicheskikh, ekonomicheskikh i kul’turnykh otnoshenii* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1964), 15. See also N.I. Novikov, “O nespravedlivosti rabovladieniia,” in his *Izbrannye sochineniia* (Moscow and Leningrad: Gos. Izd. Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, 1954), 562.

⁴⁷ For the comparison, see A.N. Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu; Vol’nost’* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1993), 74-5. For Catherine’s description, see Alexandre Stroeve, “L’Abbé Raynal et la Russie: un projet méconnu (1781),” in Georges Dulac and Sergueï Karp (eds.), *Les Archives de l’Est et la France des Lumières: guide des archives et inédits* (Fernelay: Centre international d’étude du XVIIIe siècle, 2007), vol.2, 640.

⁴⁸ S.A. Mezin, “Didro, Reinal’ i Radishchev: iz istorii filiatsii idei,” *XVIII vek*, 27 (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2013), 326.

⁴⁹ On “uncertain commitments,” see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823*, 169.

⁵⁰ The quoted terms are from Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 49; and Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 30-31.

imperialism via emancipation, advancing their interests either by ending servitude outright or, when that proved too difficult (or impractical), by restricting it far more deliberately than before.

The new orientation did not override the particularism of the empire or the prerogatives of *raison d'état*, however, which meant that things remained contradictory. Thus in 1797 Paul I prohibited Russian landlords from forcing their serfs to work for them on Sundays, while in 1803 Alexander I went further and encouraged them to manumit their serfs altogether, all of which indicated a desire to limit serfdom, yet both tsars approved the annexation of the "Kingdom of Georgia" in 1801, which presupposed the induction of several hundred thousand new serfs into the empire.⁵¹

Similarly, Alexander banned the "shameful trade" in Muslim slaves from the Caucasus in 1804 and ordered mirzas and mullahs in the Crimea to immediately free any slaves of this sort in their households in 1808.⁵² Yet that same year he reconfirmed that acquiring Kazakh children along the Orenburg and Siberian lines was the right of "all free Russian subjects" (including, presumably, Crimean mirzas and mullahs) as long as the owners agreed to record the purchase (retroactively, if necessary) and to free their underage slaves once they turned twenty-five.⁵³

This ruling then led to the filing of "documents of sale" like that of the Kazakh nomad Bukenbai Karazhigitov of the Lesser Horde who affirmed on December 14, 1812 that

for reasons of poverty and of having numerous small children to feed, and with the agreement of my wife Tamara and the permission of my elder (*starshina*)...and the members of my entire community (*aul*), I sold into permanent ownership my daughter Atykeia of six years to the *khорunzhii* and settler Ivan Zamiatin of the Syrtinsk outpost for the price of fourteen rubles.⁵⁴

⁵¹ On the annexation, see Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 250-264.

⁵² "O zapreshchenii Armianam trgovat' nevol'nikami," *PSZ*, ser.1, v.28, n.21246 (9 Apr 1804), 245; and Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA) [Russian State Historical Archive], f.383, op.29, d.296 ("O iassyrah, nakhodiashchikhsia v nevole u magometanskikh murz, ob osvobozhdenii ikh po ukazu Aleksandra I i o vodvorenii ikh na ravne s moldavskimi pereselentsami"), l.25-25(b), 45-45(b).

⁵³ "O dozvolonii rossiiskim poddannym svobodnykh sostoianii pokupat' i vymenivat' Kirgizskikh detei, kotorye po dostizheniiu 25-letnego vozrasta dolzhensvuiut byt' svobodnymi," *PSZ*, ser.1, v.30, n.23038 (23 May 1808), 275-6; Il'ia Aleksandrovich Mal'tsev, "Rabstvo v Sibiri i Orenburgskom Krae v xviii-pervoi polovine xix vv." (PhD dissertation, St. Petersburg Institute of History RAN, 2008), 200-1.

⁵⁴ "1812 g. dekabria 14 – Dogovor bedniaka-kazakha B. Karazhigitova s khorunzhim I. Zamiatinym o prodazhe svoei docheri," in *Kazakhsko-Russkie otnosheniia v xviii-xix vekakh (1771-1867 gody) (sbornik dokumentov i materialov)* (Alma-Ata: Nauka, 1964), 179, no.101.

Other Kazakh children were acquired by German colonists in Sarepta and Bukharan merchants in Tobol'sk.⁵⁵

The early nineteenth-century turn against "dependence of every kind" also did not have much of an effect on Russian serfdom, which remained by far the largest system of unfreedom in the country.⁵⁶ Though Alexander took up servile reform in the Unofficial Committee, the Napoleonophile Mikhail Speranskii described serf-ownership as "incompatible with a civilized state," and certain nobles denounced others for treating their serfs "like cattle," most had no interest in freeing their peasants and made their views plain to the tsar.⁵⁷ As the conservative Nikolai Karamzin noted in 1811, putting his finger on the crux of the matter, "the emperor...wishes to make [our] agriculturalists happier by making them free. But what if this freedom were to pose a danger to the state?"⁵⁸ Indeed, the danger of doing anything with regard to Russian serfdom appeared significant enough that the government's response was to do almost nothing at all. Emancipating people who were *not* Russian serfs, by contrast, seemed less problematic

Not surprisingly, then, the first targets of state abolitionist activity were not unfreedom within "Russia proper" but rather serfdom in the Baltic provinces and the Atlantic, North African/Mediterranean, and Black Sea slave trades, all of which had the advantage of being either somewhat or completely foreign as well as useful to address for geopolitical reasons. Efforts to "rectify the condition of the [Baltic] peasants" thus intensified following the French-inspired reforms in Prussia and the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807.⁵⁹ Between 1816 and 1819 each

⁵⁵ For these cases, see RGIA, f.383, op.29, d.919 ("O prodazhe kirgizami sobstvennykh svoikh detei v nevol'nichestvo khivintsam"), ll.237-237(b); and Gosudarstvennoe biudzhethnoe uchrezhdenie Tiimenskoi oblasti 'Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv v g. Tobol'ske' [State Archive in Tobol'sk], f.I-361, op.1, d.150 ("Po prosheniiu Tobol'skogo Bukhartsa M. Niiazova o vydache vladennoi vypisi na dvorovogo Karakalpaka"), ll.1-12. For additional references to Kazakh slaves along the Siberian line, see Yuriy Malikov, *Tsars, Cossacks, and Nomads: The Formation of a Borderland Culture in Northern Kazakhstan in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2011), 84-6, 131-6.

⁵⁶ Susan P. McCaffray, "Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution: Projects for Serf Reform in the Time of Alexander I," *Russian Review*, 64, 1 (2005): 6.

⁵⁷ S.V. Mironenko, *Samoderzhavie i reform: politicheskaiia bor'ba v Rossii v nachale xix v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), 69, 74; "Istoriia politicheskikh i pravovykh uchenii" (<http://www.bibliotekar.ru/istoria-politicheskikh-i-pravovykh-ucheniy-2/55.htm>) [for the quote from Speranskii]; and "Zapiska o rabstve krest'ian i dvorovykh liudei" [1814], RGIA, f.1409, op.1, d.956, ll.2-2(b).

⁵⁸ N.M. Karamzin, *Zapiska o drevnei i novoi Rossii v ee politicheskom i grazhdanskom otnosheniiakh* (lu. S. Pivovar, ed.) (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 73.

⁵⁹ The quoted phrase is from Tsar Alexander's letter to the Military Governor of Reval, dated 18 January 1812. See EAA, f.39, n.1, s.182, l.26. On the impact of the "Napoleonic ascendancy" on the process of Baltic reform, see Andrejs Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 190.

of the Baltic provinces then received its own emancipation law.⁶⁰ Meanwhile in 1804, the Russianized Georgian General Pavel Tsitsianov (Pavle Tsitsishvili) threatened Mingrelian and Imeretian courtiers with exile to Siberia if they didn't stop selling their countrymen to the Turks;⁶¹ and in 1815 and 1818 Emperor Alexander signed the anti-Atlantic slave trade declarations at Vienna and Aix-la-Chapelle.⁶² Reflecting the headiness of the moment, William Wilberforce hailed the Russian ruler as the "chief agent" of Europe's deliverance from Napoleon and, prospectively, the chief "earthly benefactor" of the "sable children" of Africa as well.⁶³

Though unfolding together and sharing a vocabulary of liberation, these various initiatives rested on different assumptions. The slave trades were regarded as "evils" that had to be undone "in the name of humanity" and "civilization," the Atlantic trade especially.⁶⁴ By comparison, ending Baltic serfdom was perceived more as a question of adjusting relationships and offering paternalist uplift. As the Livland Governor noted in 1819, the essence of the reform in his region was that the barons would give up their peasants but retain their lands, while the peasants would receive the title of "free citizens" and "the means to enhance their morality."⁶⁵ (In other words, it was a landless emancipation.) The supposedly selfless bestowal of liberty was integral to the design. Like slave emancipation, serf emancipation was cast as the sort of gift only the truly virtuous could provide. But the more practical issue from the government's perspective was the dismantling of "dependence." (*zavisimost'*) The nub of the Baltic reforms, and of every emancipation that followed, lay in determining exactly how this dismantling would occur.

⁶⁰ Each statute appeared in German and Russian. Estonian and Latvian translations were prepared separately. "Uchrezhdenie dlia Estliandskikh krest'ian," *PSZ*, ser.1, v.33, n.26278 (23 May 1816), 670-849; "Uchrezhdenie o kurliandskikh krest'ianakh," *PSZ*, ser.1, v.34, n.27024 (25 August 1817), 529-743; "Polozhenie o lifliandskikh krest'ianakh," *PSZ*, ser.1, v.36, n.27735 (26 March 1819), 542-734.

⁶¹ "Predpisanie kn. Tsitsianova s.s. Litvinovu, ot 12-ogo noiabria 1804 goda, n.475," in *Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Kommissieiu* (Tiflis: Glavnoe Upravlenie Namestnika Kavkazskogo, 1868), vol.2, 415.

⁶² Jenny S. Martinez, *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 32-3, 44-5.

⁶³ Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London: John Murray, 1838), vol.4, 181-182. See also Betty Fladeland, "Abolitionist Pressure on the Concert of Europe, 1814-1822," *Journal of Modern History*, 38, 4 (1966): 356. Wilberforce's quote dates from the summer of 1814.

⁶⁴ On the concept of "humanity" in abolitionist politics in the early 1800s, see Fabian Klose, "'A War of Justice and Humanity': Abolition and Establishing Humanity as a New International Norm," in Fabian Klose and Mirjam Thulin (eds.), *Humanity: A History of European Concepts in Practice from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2016), 169-186.

⁶⁵ EAA, f.2054, n.1, s.38 (Akte betreffend die Verhandlungen wegen Prüfung und Bestätigung des Entwurfs der neuen Livländischen Bauernverordnung), I.75(b).

For things to run smoothly, moving slowly seemed best. Thus the practical implementation of freedom in the tsarist context, as most everywhere else, was purposely drawn-out. Each of the Baltic statutes stipulated a fourteen-year progression through “intermediate freedom” to “complete freedom” in order to avoid “complications and misunderstandings” (and breakdowns in tax collection).⁶⁶ Even “completely free” ex-serfs in the Baltic weren’t allowed to move into nearby towns until 1848 or elsewhere about the country until 1857.⁶⁷ A similarly protracted approach applied to ending slavery in Siberia where the 1808 requirement that owners free their Kazakh slaves by the age of twenty-five was extended in 1819 to owners of “Kalmyks and other Asiatics,” followed by bans on slave trading along the Siberian line altogether in 1822 and 1825. Yet slave ownership itself remained legal for another generation, lingering on until the last child slaves attained their age of manumission or their masters passed away.⁶⁸

Abolition in the Black Sea was also complicated. Russian sea captains had orders to immediately release any slaves they found on Turkish ships, but some slaves resisted being sent home because their families had willingly sold them. Others were held for exchange against Russian POWs rather than freed outright.⁶⁹ Many ships carrying slaves were simply *not* intercepted, in part because standing naval instructions were to apprehend Ottoman vessels *approaching* the Caucasus coast rather than leaving it.⁷⁰

Policy could also shift depending on circumstances. Commanders like Tsitsianov and later Alexei Ermolov tried to break the Caucasus-Ottoman trade in the early 1800s, especially the buying and selling of Christians from the South Caucasus (i.e. the Georgian trade), but the position on Muslim slaves (mostly from the West Caucasus) was more ambivalent. As the soon-to-be War Minister Dmitrii Miliutin observed in 1858, looking back on a half-century of tsarist expansion in the region:

We have never confused the [Muslim] mountain peoples’ (*gortsy*) selling of their women and children [to the Ottomans] with the trade in African slaves as the two are completely different. Indeed, we have even permitted small numbers of [Muslim slaves]

⁶⁶ See, for example, “Uchrezhdenie dlia Estliandskikh krest’ian,” 670.

⁶⁷ T. Sudzuki, “Krest’ianskaia reforma v Kurliandii,” in L.G. Zakharova, S.V. Mironenko, and T. Emmons (eds.), *Petr Andreevich Zaionchkovskii: Sbornik statei i vospominanii k stoletiiu istorika* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopediia [ROSSPEN], 2008), 344-5.

⁶⁸ Mal’tsev, “Rabstvo v Sibiri i Orenburgskom Krae v xviii-pervoi polovine xix vv.,” 248.

⁶⁹ G.A. Grebenshchikova, *Rossiiskii flot pri Nikolae I* (St. Petersburg: ITD ‘Ostrov,’ 2014), 468-9.

⁷⁰ Julia Leikin, “Prize Law, Maritime Neutrality, and the Law of Nations in Imperial Russia, 1768-1856” (PhD Dissertation, University College London, 2016), 191-2.

to be removed to Turkey for sale...by sending them abroad with [other] mountaineers under the pretense of traveling to Mecca.⁷¹

In fact, relativism of this sort was common by the mid-1800s. The British foreign minister at the time said virtually the same thing to the Turks directly, urging them to abolish their “repulsive trade,” while at the same time acknowledging that Ottoman slavery was less repulsive than the Atlantic version.⁷² Hence the contrast between the Quintuple Treaty of 1841, which Russia signed with Britain, Prussia, Austria, and France to ensure “the complete cessation” of the “trade in Black Africans,” and the Treaty of Paris of 1856, which Russia concluded with the same powers plus Sardinia and the Turks to end the Crimean War but which omitted any mention of slave-trading in the Black Sea.⁷³

By the same token, however, there was no getting away from the fact that by the early nineteenth century “slavery” and “serfdom” had long since appeared at least semantically if not practically interconnected.⁷⁴ Within the empire, the patchy divides between “free” and “unfree” also seemed clear enough, at least to the unfree people. Chief of Police General Alexander Benkendorf informed Tsar Nicholas I in 1827 that Russian serfs “were well aware” that “of all the peoples of Russia only [they], the victor-people (*narod-pobeditel'*) [i.e. the people who had defeated Napoleon – WS], exist in a state of slavery (*rabstvo*). All the rest – the Finns, Tatars, Estonians, Latvians, Mordvins, Chuvash, and so forth – are free.”⁷⁵ Similarly, the following exchange was reported by the Third Section in the summer of 1857:

“They say” – one peasant said to another – “that we will soon be free (*vol'nye*).” “Probably, like the state peasants?” “No, that’s just it, completely free: they won’t ask for any recruits or taxes, and there

⁷¹ “Zapiska svity Ego Velichestva gen.-m. Miliutina, ot 14-go fevralia 1858 goda, No.3. O dozvolenii svobodnoi trgovli pokoriaiushchimsia nami gorskim narodam na zapadnom Kavkaze,” in *Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Kommissieiu* (Tiflis: Glavnoe Upravlenie Namestnika Kavkazskogo, 1904), vol.12, 503.

⁷² Yusuf Hakan Erdem, “Wherever Slavery Exists, the Whole Society Suffers’: The White Slave Trade Controversy during the Crimean War,” in Jerzy W. Borejsza (ed.), *The Crimean War, 1853-1856: Colonial Skirmish or Rehearsal for World War? Empires, Nations, and Individuals* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2011), 57-59.

⁷³ For the texts of these treaties, see F. de Martens, *Recueil des traités et conventions conclus par la Russie avec les puissances étrangères*, Vol.12, *Traité avec l'Angleterre* (St. Petersburg: A. Böhnke, 1898), 170-197; and Vol.15, *Traité avec la France* (St. Petersburg: Ministerstvo Putei Soobshcheniia, 1909), 312-325.

⁷⁴ In Catherine’s *Nakaz*, for example, the French word *serf* often appears as *rab* (slave) in Russian. Meanwhile in the *Dictionary of the Russian Academy* only *rab* appears, with no entry listed for *krepostnoi* (serf). Yet both terms share a similar meaning. To illustrate the term “slavery,” the dictionary offers the phrase “to free oneself from slavery” (*osvobodit'sia ot rabstva*), while the phrase provided for *volia* (freedom) is “to give a serf his freedom” (*otpushtit' krepostnogo cheloveka na voliu*). See *Slovar' akademii rossiiskoi 1789-1794* (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akad. Nauk, 1789-1794), vol.5, 2; and vol.1, 823.

⁷⁵ “Graf A.Kh. Benkendorf o Rossii v 1827-1830 gg.: ezhegodnye otchety Pervogo Otdeleniia i Korpusa Zhandarmov,” *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 37 (1929): 152.

won't be any bosses (*nachal'stva nikakogo ne budet*). We'll run things ourselves."⁷⁶

Russian nobles meanwhile knew all too well that the Church and the Baltic barons had been forced to give up their serfs, which meant, theoretically at least, that they might be required to do the same.⁷⁷

The fact that the government stood for abolitionism abroad but serfdom at home also created complexities. When Domingo Ivanov, an African slave in the household of the newly arrived Portuguese consul in St. Petersburg, ran away from his master in 1820, he appealed for his freedom on the basis of a Russian decree of 1815 that supposedly protected "foreigners of any nation" from being enslaved. In reality, however, given that the empire was home to millions of serfs of various ethnicities and religions and thousands of enslaved foreigners, no such law existed. That is, "Russian air" certainly did not make one free, though based on the rhetoric coming out of the Congress of Vienna, one can see why a "foreigner-slave" like Ivanov might have assumed it would.⁷⁸

[Section break]

Yet cracks in Russia's servile order were nonetheless beginning to appear – they were simply appearing according to a particular spatial logic. Part of Alexander I's thinking in pursuing peasant reform in the Baltic provinces was premised on the view that emancipation was a European idea and the Baltic was "Russia's Europe."⁷⁹ Reform would thus naturally debut there before moving to the rest of the country. This presumption of a geographical progression

⁷⁶ Quoted in V.A. Fedorov, "Trebovaniia krest'ianskogo dvizheniia v nachale revoliutsionnoi situatsii do 19 fevralia 1861," in *Revoliutsionnaia situatsiia v Rossii v 1859-1861 gg.* (Moscow: Izd. Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1960), 143. For a slightly different translation, see David Moon, *Russian Peasants and Tsarist Legislation on the Eve of Reform: Interaction between Peasants and Officialdom, 1822-1855* (Basingstoke, Eng., 1992), 171

⁷⁷ Moon, *Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 4, 43-5.

⁷⁸ On this case, see Martens, *Sovremennoe mezhdunarodnoe pravo tsivilizovannykh narodov*, vol.1, 324-5. Though two lower courts disagreed on Ivanov's petition, the Senate ultimately ruled in his favor, citing the fact that his master did not possess a proper bill of ownership.

⁷⁹ Karsten Brüggemann, "An Enemy's 'Outpost' or 'Our West'? Some Remarks about the Discourse of Russian *Pribaltika* in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union," in [Jelena Nömm, ed.], *Ethnic Images and Stereotypes – Where is the Border Line? (Russian-Baltic Cross-Cultural Relations); Proceedings of the III International Scientific Conference on Political and Cultural Relations between Russia and the States of the Baltic Region* (Narva, October 20-22, 2006) (Narva: Narva College of the University of Tartu, 2007), 81-98, esp.89-90; and also his "Ot soslovnogo obshchestva k natsional'noi nezavisimosti (1820-1920)," in D.E. Furman and E.G. Zadorozhniuk (eds.), *Strany Baltii i Rossiia: obshchestva i gosudarstva* (Moscow: Referendum, 2002), 114-168, esp. 115.

starting from the western edge of the state then went on to affect all the “spurts and zigzags” of the Russian reform down to 1861.⁸⁰

Thus in 1819, the year of the Livland statute, the governor-general of Belorussia proposed a Baltic-style emancipation for the district of Dinaburg, located next door to Livland. (The plan quickly stalled but was resurrected again in 1830.) Likewise, the Inventory Regulations of 1847-48 were introduced in Right-Bank Ukraine in response to developments in neighboring Austrian Galicia, followed in 1856 by the proposal for a trial run at emancipation on the royal estate of Karlovka in Poltava, which itself was not far from Right-Bank Ukraine. Then a year later, the publication of the so-called Nazimov Rescript, named for Vladimir Nazimov, Governor-General of the Northwest Territory (Vilno, Kovno, and Grodno provinces), where one found mostly Lithuanian serfs owned by mostly Polish lords, launched what quickly became the Russian emancipation itself.⁸¹

The reaction of Russian nobles to the rescript was mixed. Some cursed their Polish peers as “dangerous firebrands” on the “peasant question.” Others (presumably far fewer) lamented their own bungling in letting the Poles get the better of the situation and go first.⁸² By contrast, Emperor Alexander II, that is, Russian Noble Number One, appears to have had no problem kicking off the Russian reform with Polish assistance. As the soon-to-be “tsar-liberator” told Nazimov in Brest-Litovsk in May 1856, “Why the need [to start with the interior provinces]? It’s all the same to me where this good affair gets going, on the periphery or in the center of the state.”⁸³

⁸⁰ On the long and contradictory run-up to the reform, see Khristoforof, *Sud’ba reform*. The quoted phrase appears on p.10.

⁸¹ For these developments, see N.A. Miliutin, “Istoricheskaia zapiska o raznykh predpolozheniiakh po predmetu osvobozhdeniia krest’ian (Proekty Arakcheeva, Mordvinova, Speranskogo, Kn. Menshikova, gr. Perovskogo, S.P. Shipova, kn. Drutskogo-Sokolinskogo i dr., deistviia komitetov 1826, 1839, 1840, 1844, 1846 i 1848 godov),” in *Deiatnadtsadyi vek: istoricheskii sbornik* (Petr Bartenev, comp.) (Moscow: Grachev and Co., 1872), vol.2, 155-57; Daniel Field, *The End of Serfdom: Nobility and Bureaucracy in Russia, 1855-1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 77-101; Moon, *Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 44-5.

⁸² These quotes from the time appear in L.E. Gorizontov, “Pol’skii aspect podgotovki krest’ianskoi reform v Rossii,” in G.F. Matveev (ed.), *Ivan Aleksandrovich Voronkov – professor-slavist Moskovskogo universiteta: materialy nauchnykh chtenii, posviashchennykh 80-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia I.A. Voronkova* (1921-1983) (Moscow: Izd. Moskovskogo gorodskogo ob”edineniia arkhivov, 2001), 98, 100.

⁸³ For Alexander’s quote, see “Vladimir Ivanovich Nazimov: ocherk iz noveishei letopisi severo-zapadnoi Rossii,” *Russkaia Starina*, 16, 3 (1885): 577. Also: V.S. Manassein, *Osvobozhdenie krest’ian v Litovskikh guberniakh* (Grodno: Grodnenskie gubernskie vedomosti, 1902), 12-13. On the intersection between Russian policies toward the Poles and the Russian emancipation, see Mikhail Dolbilov, “The Emancipation Reform of 1861 in Russia and the Nationalism of the Imperial Bureaucracy,” in Hayashi Tadayuki (ed.), *The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2003), 205-236, esp. 210-12.

In fact, the Polish-Lithuanian connection to the Russian emancipation was integral from the start. Knowing his audience, Governor-General Nazimov cultivated support among the Polish lords by talking up the chivalrous tradition of the *szlachta* and evoking the legacy of Tadeusz Kościuszko.⁸⁴ Addressing a group of Polish serf owners from the Northwest in Moscow in the summer of 1856, Interior Minister Stepan Lanskoi put things more bluntly: “Our people here [i.e. the Russian nobles – WS] are hopeless. Things in your region will surely go more smoothly, so you need to get started there as soon as possible.”⁸⁵

Indeed, geographically and otherwise, the supposedly *Russian* emancipation was always more than a narrowly Russian undertaking. Of the over twenty-two and a half million serfs freed by the 1861 law, some 250,000 were Latvians, 1.5 million were Lithuanians, and at least six million were Ukrainians and Belarussians, though the latter groups were considered “Russian” by the government.⁸⁶ Meanwhile many of the “enlightened bureaucrats” who designed the reform were mid-level-to-high officials with borderland experience who doubled as members of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, read widely on serf and slave emancipations elsewhere, and studied the “local conditions of the empire” from “centers of calculation,” like the Ministry of State Domains, which was founded in 1837 to reform state peasant affairs and quickly became a “training ground” (*poligon*) for “new fiscal and administrative technologies.”⁸⁷ While the ministry didn’t have a specific borderland mandate, “no other central institution up to that point had more to do in a concentrated way with the problem of borderland economy and society.”⁸⁸

In keeping with this broader view, rather than a single law, the reform of 1861 was designed as a medley of statutes meant to apply differently to over fifty territorial units across the country

⁸⁴ Dolbilov, “The Emancipation Reform of 1861 in Russia and the Nationalism of the Imperial Bureaucracy,” 211.

⁸⁵ K.K. Geling, “K voprosu o nachale krest’ianskogo dela,” *Russkaia starina*, 17, 12 (1886): 546.

⁸⁶ For these numbers, see Andrejs Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 221-22 (Latvians and Lithuanians); and the totals of the serf population for Belarussian (White Russian) and Ukrainian (Little Russian) provinces noted in A. Troinitskii, *Krepostnoe naselenie v Rossii po 10-i narodnoi perepisi; statisticheskoe issledovanie* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Karla Vul’fa, 1861), ????

⁸⁷ W. Bruce Lincoln, “The Genesis of an ‘Enlightened’ Bureaucracy in Russia, 1825-1856,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 20, 3 (1972): 325; and I.A. Khristoforof, *Sud’ba reform: russkoe krest’ianstvo v pravitel’svennoi politike do i posle otmeny krepostnogo prava* (Moscow: Sobranie, 2011), 70-71. On “centers of calculation,” see Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 215-57. For the wide-ranging literature available to the designers of the Russian reform, see the list of titles (including some six hundred foreign books, mostly in French, German, and English) in the library of the Editing Commission, the high state body created to draft the emancipation law. Aleksei Popel’nitskii, “Sud’ba biblioteki redaktsionnykh Komissii po sostavleniiu zakonopolozhenii o krest’ianakh,” and List of Books Donated to the Library by Grand Princess Elena Pavlovna, RGIA, f.1180, op.1, d.125, ll.1-2 and ll.13-14(b).

⁸⁸ Willard Sunderland, “The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was But Might Have Been,” *Slavic Review*, 69, 1 (2010): 142.

(minus Finland, Poland, the Caucasus, and the Baltic provinces). The most administratively extensive of the statutes covered twenty-nine Great Russian provinces, plus three in New Russia, the province of Mogilev, and parts of Vitebsk. Two others bundled clusters of Little Russian (Ukrainian) provinces, while Bessarabia, Stavropol', the Don Cossack territory, and the Siberian provinces (including almost completely serf-less Eastern Siberia) each received "special regulations" of their own.⁸⁹

From the start, Alexander expected the essence of the reform to be adopted by "the nobility of the rest of the empire," and the 1861 arrangement soon emerged as an empire-wide model.⁹⁰ Indeed, on the very day that the Russian law was announced, the tsar wrote to his friend Governor-General Alexander Bariatinskii in Tiflis (Tbilisi) instructing him to begin work on emancipating the serfs in Georgia, which he did by convening the Tiflis nobles much the way things had been done in the Russian provinces.⁹¹ At the same time, no all-encompassing decree was ever issued, and the post-1861 laws reflected the presumption of regional particularism that usually guided government policy.

Thus, like the Baltic and Russian precedents, the provinces of the South Caucasus received their own emancipation laws in 1864, 1865, and 1866, the Kalmyks in the northern Caspian as well, though not until 1892.⁹² Meanwhile, though already formally "free," peasants in the Kingdom

⁸⁹ All of Eastern Siberia counted a population of just 624 serfs, most of whom were domestic servants (*dvorovye*). See Aleksandr Skrebetskii, *Krest'ianskoe delo v tsarstvovanie imperatora Aleksandra II: materialy dlia istorii osvobozhdeniia krest'ian*, Vol.4, *Gubernskie komitety, ikh deputaty i redaktsionnye kommissii v krest'ianskom dele* (Bonn: Tip. Fridrikha Kriugera, 1868), 756. On the territorial structure of the reform, see David W. Darrow, *Inventing a Moral Economy: Land Allotments, Statistics, and Agrarian Reform in Russia, 1700-1921* (University of Toronto Press, forthcoming). For English translations of the statutes, see *The Laws of February 18-19, 1861 on the Emancipation of the Russian Peasants* (Alan P. Pollard, trans. and ed.) (Idyllwild, Calif.: Charles Schlacks, Publisher, 2008), 142-331, 353-375, plus Addenda.

⁹⁰ L.G. Zakharova, "Aleksandr II i mesto Rossii v mire," in L.G. Zakharova, S.V. Mironenko and T. Emmons (eds.), *Petr Andreevich Zaionchkovskii: Sbornik stat'ei i vospominanii k stoletiiu istorika* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), 381; Alfred J. Rieber (ed.), *The Politics of Autocracy: Letters of Alexander II to Prince A.I. Bariatinskii 1857-1864* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 111.

⁹¹ Semen Spiridonovich Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska ob upravlenii Kavkazom* (Tiflis: Tipografiia 'Gutenberg,' 1907), vol.1, 305-6; RGIA, f.1268, op.10, d.61a ("O priniatii mer k osvobozhdeniiu krepstnogo sosloviia za Kavkazom iz pomeshchich'ei zavisimosti i o sostoiavshikhia vsledstvie sego, predpolozheniakh k osvobozhdeniiu iz etoi zavisimosti krest'ian Tiflisskoi gubernii"), 6-6(b).

⁹² "Pravila ob ustroistve sel'skikh obshchestv, ikh obshchestvennogo upravleniia i povinnostei gosudarstvennykh i obshchestvennykh v Tiflisskoi gubernii," *PSZ*, ser.2, v.39, pt.2, n.41351 (13 Oct 1864), 56-7; "Dopolnitel'nye k Polozheniiam 13 oktiabria 1864 g. pravila o krest'ianakh, vyshedshikh iz krepstnoi zavisimosti v Kuttaiskoi gubernii," *PSZ*, ser.2, v.40, pt.2, n.42551 (13 Oct 1865), 41-51; "Dopolnitel'nye k Polozheniiam 13 oktiabria 1864 g. pravila o krest'ianakh, vyshedshikh iz krepstnoi zavisimosti v Mingrelii," *PSZ*, series 2, v.41, pt.2, n.43927 (1 Dec 1866), 317-26; and "Ob otmene obiazatel'nykh otnoshenii mezhdru ot del'nymi sosloviami Kalmytskogo naroda," *PSZ*, ser.3, v.12, n.8429 (8 May 1892), 173-5. Though it took over thirty years, plans for a Kalmyk emancipation had begun in 1861. See "Ob osvobozhdenii Kalmykov-prostoliudinov ot zavisimosti Kalmytskikh vladel'cheskikh klassov i o preobrazovanii Kalmytskogo upravleniia," RGIA, f.1291, op.85, d.22 (pt.1), l.285(b); and "Ob upravlenii Komissii

of Poland were granted an “improvement to their condition” in 1864 “exactly three years to the day” after the signing of the Russian reform (and timed to undercut the ongoing anti-Russian uprising), while the so-called “tsaran serfs” of Bessarabia, who received their personal freedom in 1861, were allocated land in 1868.⁹³ In 1866, in keeping with the general logic, the state peasantry, a category subsuming an enormous range of Russian and non-Russian groups living on state lands, were likewise “freed” from the tutelage of the Ministry of State Domains.⁹⁴

The goal everywhere was to create a new class of citizen-subjects described in the laws as “free rural residents” (*svobodnye sel'skie obyvateli*) – that is, ex-serfs and serf-like people who would now be tied to the state and a “common civic order” rather than their former lords or bosses and, in the case of still more “backward” nomads like the Kalmyks and the Bashkirs, nurtured towards continuing sedentarization and therefore increased “civility” (*grazhdanstvennost'*) as well.⁹⁵ The last imperial echo of 1861 – “On the Ending of the Dependent Relations of the Rural Residents of Dagestan Oblast' and Zakatal'skii District” – was adopted by the Fourth Duma and affirmed by Nicholas II in July 1913.⁹⁶

The assault on slavery continued in tandem with all this since serfdom and slavery were intertwined. The imperial censor approved a Russian translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* just a month after the publication of the Nazimov Rescript.⁹⁷ (The timing was not a coincidence.) Then four years after the Russian reform and eight months after the first of the Georgian decrees, a Russian army took Tashkent, followed promptly by the demand from the general on

dlia obsuzhdeniia proekta preobrazovaniia Kalmytskoi stepi,” Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Kalmykii, f.I-9, op.1, d.219, l.10(b).

⁹³ Andrei Cusco, *A Contested Borderland: Competing Russian and Romanian Visions of Bessarabia in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2017), 54

⁹⁴ “O preobrazovanii obshchestvennogo upravleniia gosudarstvennykh krest'ian i o peredache sikh krest'ian v vedenie obshchikh gubernskikh i uездnykh, a takzhe mestnykh po krest'ianskim delam uchrezhdenii,” PSZ, ser.2, v.41, pt.1, n.42899 (18 Jan 1866), 34-7. On the various groups that made up the state peasantry at the time of the 1866 reform, see *Istoricheskoe obozrenie piatidesiatiletnei deiatel'nosti Ministerstva Gosudarstvennykh Imushchestv 1837-1887* (St. Petersburg: Iablonskii and Perott, 1888), vol.2, *Popechitel'stvo, Pozemel'noe ustroistvo*, i.

⁹⁵ A.N. Komandzhaev and N.P. Matsakova, *Reforma 1892 goda v Kalmykii* (Elista: Izd. FGBOU VPO ‘KalmGU’, 2011), 135; Charles Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire: Loyalty and Tsarist Authority in Bashkiria, 1552-1917* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2016), 123-5.

⁹⁶ A.K. Khalifaeva, “Agrarnaia reforma v Dagestane vo vtoroi polovine xix veka,” *Izvestiia vuzov. Severo-Kavkazskii region*, Series *Obshchestvennye nauki*, 4 (2004): 87. For the text of the law, see “O prekrashchenii zavisimykh otnoshenii posel'ian Dagestanskoi oblasti i Zakatal'skogo okruga k bekam i keshkevladel'tsam i ob uchrezhdenii v sikh mestnostyakh ustanovlenii po krest'ianskim delam,” PSZ, ser.3, v.33, pt.1, n.39734 (7 July 1913), 733-5.

⁹⁷ John MacKay, *True Songs of Freedom: Uncle Tom's Cabin in Russian Culture and Society* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 26-7.

hand that the town's slave-owners free their slaves. (Most slaves were Persian Shī'ites.)⁹⁸ This practice of abolitionism by bayonet then continued over the next two decades as the Russians conquered the remainder of Turkestan, spreading (or at least claiming to spread) "civilization" in the process.⁹⁹ Meanwhile other Russian armies completed the subjection of the Caucasus by forcibly deporting and/or encouraging the emigration of over half a million "mountain peoples" to the Ottoman Empire, thereby effectively ending the Caucasian slave trade by excising the population.¹⁰⁰

Though rapid and, in some cases, dramatic, none of these developments were particularly surprising. By this time the British and French had ended slavery in their colonies, the Mexicans, Argentines, and others had outlawed it across much of Latin America (Brazil was the great exception), the Union had just destroyed the Confederacy to abolish it in the US South, every serfdom in Europe had been undone, and most everyone agreed that the new global standard for "acting imperially" was "to recast empire as a developmental effort," which presupposed, among other things, a virtuous synergy between imperial expansion and abolitionist humanitarianism.¹⁰¹ The Russians in this sense were completely in step with the times. In fact, having liberated their serfs, in the eyes of some patriots at least, they had now jumped to the head of the class. As the conservative historian (and former serf) Mikhail Pogodin put it in 1861, capturing the nationalist verve of the moment, "Twenty-three million people have received their freedom. And this isn't the whole thing, not even the half of it...Listen: These twenty-three million are also obtaining the land...to support their existence for centuries to come. You Kants, Schillers, Rousseaus, and Wilberforces, take off your hats, bow yourselves to the ground."¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Eden, "Beyond the Bazaars: Geographies of the Slave Trade in Central Asia," 923. Despite claims going back to the 1830s of large numbers of Russian captives in Central Asia (in Khiva, in particular), the actual number of Russian subjects held as slaves in the region appears to have been very small. For background, see Alexander Morrison, "Twin Imperial Disasters: The Invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British Official Mind, 1839-1842, *Modern Asian Studies*, 48, 1 (2014): 282-83.

⁹⁹ On the high claims of Russian abolitionism in Turkestan versus the more complicated reality, see Jeff Eden, *Slavery and Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 183-212.

¹⁰⁰ Kurtynova-D'Herlughan, *The Tsar's Abolitionists*, 167-8; and Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 117-19.

¹⁰¹ On the link between abolitionism and empire, see Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). The quoted phrase appears in Kenneth Pommeranz, "Empires & 'Civilizing' Missions, Past & Present," *Daedalus*, 134, 2 (2005): 38.

¹⁰² M.P. Pogodin, "Nashe vremia v otnoshenii k russkoi istorii," in N.P. Barsukov, *Zhizn' i trudy M.P. Pogodina* (St. Petersburg: Tip. M.M. Stasiulevicha, 1904), vol.18, 26.

The verve, too, was unsurprising. With the great breakthrough of 1861 behind them, the Russians had effectively resolved their Catherinian contradiction. Once uncertain about how or even whether to be an abolitionist empire, they were now completely committed. As Fedor Martens observed in 1882 in his textbook on international law, despite the country's "sizeable contributions" to the "international war" on slavery, "serf-owning Russia" (*krepostnicheskaiia Rossiia*) had been unable to even devise a law that might free "foreigner-slaves" who reached Russian soil (viz. the case of Domingo Ivanov) let alone homegrown Russian serfs, whereas "today [i.e. the early 1880s] the principle of *l'air fait libre* has acquired the force of law in all...educated states."¹⁰³ True to his liberal imperial creed, Martens would go on to represent the tsarist state at the great antislavery, pro-empire conferences of the age, starting with Berlin in 1884 and Brussels in 1889.¹⁰⁴ At the Brussels meeting, he drafted much of the influential final antislavery declaration himself.¹⁰⁵

Yet for all this, it was precisely in this period that the broader imperial and international connections of the Russian emancipation began slipping from view. Peasant reform had always been an exercise in nation-making, at least in the eyes of the reformers. In the bureaucratic language of the moment, peasants appeared as special people "bonded to the soil," an "organic entity," while the Emancipation was an act of "rebirth," a step towards "new life."¹⁰⁶ As the head of the Secret Committee General Iakov Rostovtsev assured the tsar in 1856, the freeing of the peasants would "create in Russia such a nation as has never existed before."¹⁰⁷ Such, too, were the visual renderings of the Emancipation, which invariably depicted the event as a special moment in the "scenario of love" uniting tsar and people, with "the people" in this case clearly represented as *Russian* peasants (Russian peasant men in particular) as opposed to rural people of any other sort.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Martens, *Sovremennoe mezhdunarodnoe pravo tsivilizovannykh narodov*, 324.

¹⁰⁴ On Martens, see Lauri Mälksoo, "F.F. Martens and His Time: When Russia Was an Integral Part of the European Tradition of International Law," *European Journal of International Law*, 25, 4 (2014): 811-29. Martens also played a key role at the first Hague Peace Conference in 1899. On the Berlin and Brussels conferences and their impact on global antislavery, see Suzanne Miers, "Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues, 1890-1939," *Slavery & Abolition*, 19, 2 (1998): 16-37, esp. 19-21; and Daniel Laqua, "The Tensions of Internationalism: Transnational Anti-Slavery in the 1880s and 1890s," *International History Review*, 33, 4 (2011): 705-726.

¹⁰⁵ On Marten's role in composing the declaration, see Henry Queneuil, *De la traite des noirs et de l'esclavage: la Conférence de Bruxelles et ses résultats* (Paris: Librairie de la Société du recueil J.-B. Sirey et du Journal du Palais, 1907), 135-36.

¹⁰⁶ Dolbilov, "The Emancipation Reform of 1861 in Russia and the Nationalism of the Imperial Bureaucracy," 220-23.

¹⁰⁷ Cited in Olga Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855-1870* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 16.

¹⁰⁸ For examples of official and semi-official popular prints of the time, see Richard Wortman, "'Glas naroda': Visual Representations of Russian Monarchy in the Era of Emancipation," in his *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of*

Russian writing on the emancipation thus generally omitted references to servitudes or abolitions elsewhere, with the exception of the Baltic emancipations, which, being both prior and landless, were recognized as the important anti-model that ultimately prompted the government to implement a landed settlement in the Russian case. V.I. Semevskii, for example, explicitly restricted the focus of his authoritative history of serfdom to the history of the institution in “Russia proper” (*sobstvenno Rossiia*), noting in his preface that he would only allude to the Baltic when matters there had a direct relation to Russian situation. (He promised to say more about Little Russia, however, presumably because Little Russians were “Russian,” too.)¹⁰⁹

Other authors worked in similar fashion: Generic references to “peasant emancipation” (*osvobozhdenie krest’ian*) invariably meant the *Russian* Emancipation of 1861, with no allusion to non-Russian parallels, all of which gradually naturalized a conceptual triage of the imperial emancipation story.¹¹⁰ The study of serf reform in borderland areas like the Caucasus or Poland became part of scholarship and opinion related to those regions, the empire’s contributions to international abolitionism became filed under foreign relations, and the history of the Russian Emancipation was left to grow like a mighty oak in its own splendid isolation. Perhaps the most revealing proof of this was the lavishly produced six-volume retrospective on the Emancipation of 1861 published by Ivan Sytin in 1911 whose fifty-plus chapters have virtually nothing to say about other serfdoms, slaveries, or abolitions, whether before or after the Russian reform, or within or beyond the empire.¹¹¹ The book offers a tidy Russian national story, and the story has largely been told this way ever since.

In the moment of the Emancipation itself, however, things were more different. When Interior Minister Lanskoi submitted a memorandum on the history of Russian serfdom to Alexander II in December 1856, he attached an appendix listing 158 decrees that laid out the legal drift toward emancipation beginning in the 1760s. Twenty-eight of the laws – roughly eighteen percent of the total – pertain exclusively to non-Russian serfs, including Estonians, Latvians, Gypsies

Exploration: Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 192-96.

¹⁰⁹ V.I. Semevskii, *Krest’ianskii vopros v Rossii v xviii i pervoi polovine xix veka*, Vol. 1, *Krest’ianskii vopros v xviii i pervoi chetverti xix veka* (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo ‘Obshchestvennaia pol’za,’ 1888), iii.

¹¹⁰ This is the case, for example, with the entry on “Peasants” in the most famous Russian encyclopedia of the late imperial era where the text focuses only on the Russian case and encourages readers interested in emancipations in the Baltic and Poland to consult the chapters on those regions. (No other emancipations are mentioned in the chapter.) As it turns out, however, the emancipations in the Baltic and Poland aren’t mentioned much in the entries for those regions either. See “Krest’iane” in F.A. Brokgauz and I.A. Efron (comps.), *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’* (Reprint: 1991; St. Petersburg: 1895), vol.16, *Koialovich-Kulon*, 714. The entries on “Pribaltiiskii krai” and “Pol’sha” appear in volumes 25 and 24, respectively.

¹¹¹ *Velikaia reforma: russkoe obshchestvo i krest’ianskii vopros v proshlom i nastoiashchem; iubileinoe izdanie* (Moscow: Tip. t-va I.D. Sytina, 1911), 6 vols. A brief reference to the Baltic reforms appears in I.M. Kataev, “Zakonodatel’svo o krest’ianakh pri imperatorakh Pavle i Aleksandre I,” in vol.2, pp.84-5.

(Roma), Jews, Tatars, and Georgians. Lanskoï did not draw special attention to this fact. The diversity of the empire was simply woven into his presentation.¹¹²

The man behind the materials was Lanskoï's assistant, Aleksei Lëvshin, a long-serving "enlightened bureaucrat" and graduate of Khar'kov University who began his career as an inspector for the Orenburg Border Commission, wrote studies on Little Russia, the Ural Cossacks, and Kazakh nomads, served for six years as mayor of Odessa, was a founding member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, and found himself on Lanskoï's staff only because health concerns forced him to decline an appointment as governor-general of Eastern Siberia. His bureaucratic mentors were Pavel Kiselëv and Mikhail Vorontsov, both patrons of serf reform and high officials who, like him, had extensive borderland experience.

Shortly before his death Lëvshin recalled his early commitment to the cause. In 1828, as a young official sent on assignment to Paris, he had attended a luncheon at the editorial offices of the *Revue encyclopédique*, a journal known both for its passionate stand against slavery as well as its support for "enlightened colonization."¹¹³ There, he remembered, "surrounded by foreigners from the four corners of the globe, I pronounced a toast to the emancipation of the peasants of Russia."¹¹⁴

¹¹² RGIA, f.1180, op.1, d.77, ll.5-27 ("Istoricheskaia zapiska o krepostnom sostoianii v Rossii"), ll.28-43 ("Spisok zakonam o krepostnykh liudiakh, izdannym s 1766 po 1855 god").

¹¹³ On the *Revue encyclopédique*, see the works by Yves Bénot: "Grégoire défenseur de la cause des Noirs dans les revues de la Restauration," *Revue française d'Outre mer*, 87, 328-29 (2000): 153-162; and "Haïti et la *Revue encyclopédique*," in Léon-François Hoffmann, Frauke Gewecke, and Ulrich Fleischmann (eds.), *Haïti 1804: Lumières et ténèbres; Impact et résonances d'une révolution* (Madrid and Frankfurt: Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2008), 99-112.

¹¹⁴ A.I. Levshin, "Dostopamiatnye minuty v moei zhizni: zapiska," *Russkii arkhiv*, 8 (1885): 477.