Wojciech Materski

OD CARA DO „CARA"

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FROM THE TSAR TO THE "TSAR" A STUDY OF THE RUSSIAN POLITICS OF MEMORY

Overview
Wojciech Materski. 2017. *Od cara do "cara". Studium rosyjskiej polityki historycznej* [From the Tsar to the "Tsar". A Study of the Russian Politics of History]. Warsaw: Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. 371 pp. ISBN 9788364091889.

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Wojciech Materski synthesised the politics of history of the Soviet and Russian state stretching for over several hundred years. Parts devoted to both the twentieth and twenty-first century highlighted the monographic character of the publication, with a critical apparatus accompanying the academic study. How the author conducts the argument possesses typical features of historiographic books, yet the scholar employs a political science approach.

Wojciech Materski is a Polish political scientist and historian. He holds the title of a professor of humanities. He graduated from the Faculty of History of the University of Warsaw. In 1974, he was awarded a doctorate from the Faculty of Journalism and Political Sciences, University of Warsaw on the basis of a dissertation titled *Poland and the USSR in 1923–1925* (see Materski 1981). Between 2004 and 2012, he undertook the duties of the director of the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences where he has worked until now. Materski specialises in the history of the Soviet Union, the transformation of the post-Soviet area, Polish–Soviet relations, and the history of Georgia. Moreover, the scope of his research interests includes the history of diplomacy and international institutions of collective security, see (Materski 1981; Materski 1990; Materski 1994; Materski 2005; Materski 2010). He is an author or co-author of over five hundred academic papers on history and political science and thirty books published both in Poland and abroad, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Finland, and Georgia. Also, he served as a academic secretary for the Polish–Russian edition of the documents *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni* [Katyn. Documents of the crime] (*Katyń* 1995; *Katyń* 1998; *Katyń* 2001; *Katyń* 2006) and a member of editorial committees for both Polish and foreign revues. He participated in the works of the Polish–Russian History Commission, led by the Polish Academy of Sciences—Russian Academy of Sciences, the Polish–Russian Group for Difficult Matters and the Polish–Belarusian Group of Historians.

Materski's task of tackling the issue of the politics of history entailed a need to confront the definition of a concept that is yet not deeply rooted in the social sciences. While citing different opinions in the introduction to his book, the author agreed with the definition of politics of history as a tool used by political entities for shaping a desired vision of the past events of both state and nation and exerting an impact on the historical consciousness of society in an attempt to gain its members for the purposes of their policy (pp. 8 and 10). Generally speaking, the politics of history serves to legitimise power (author refers among others to: Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 2000). Materski contrasted the politics of history with

academic history, the latter of which is principally aimed at broadening knowledge (p. 10). The definition, which refers to the purpose of the activity, along with a causative entity, is both exhaustive and useful.

What is yet debatable is a statement that the above-defined politics of history seeks to reap temporary benefits. Such a short-term approach is by no means equivalent to ephemeral actions and effects, as exemplified by the remark that attempts to discuss a politics of history emerge fruitfully only if they are pursued both in a systematic matter and by adequate institutions tasked with promoting a unified vision of history (p. 9). Also, when referring to initial considerations, one may contemplate whether the vision of history welcomed by state leaders is always manipulated, which is a view towards which the author is inclined (p. 8), or whether a coherence arises between such a desired interpretation and that resulting from the actual research. This problem may be classified as of the second category when the politics of history tends to be defined by its purposes while assuming that if an interpretation disseminated within the state policy overlaps with what results from the actual state of knowledge, it is because what is "welcomed" corresponds to academic knowledge.

In the introduction, the author outlines a significant description boundary, saying that the politics of history invokes actions undertaken by the state apparatus that encompasses the Tsar, the General Secretary, the President and all state structures involved in exercising power, along with the tsar's court, administration or party. This gives rise to the question of whether social organisations, opposition forces, or individuals may be committed to carrying out the politics of history. Materski is aware of this issue yet avoids speculation, pointing out that what he describes in his book refers to the state's politics of history (p. 11).

The author deals with the topic of the Great Russian statehood throughout the centuries, from the late fifteenth century—the period after the Grand Duchy of Moscow was formed, laying the groundwork for the Russian state, to the twenty-first century. A historical limit has yet not been sharply outlined while Materski stipulates that, referring back to before the nineteenth century, it is *de facto* challenging to discuss the politics of history as it was then carried out in a barely

systematic manner, with Russian national consciousness being not yet formed back then (p. 15). The study is chronologically divided into the following chapters: *In the Tsarist empire*, *From Lenin to Stalin*, *From Khrushchev to Chernenko*, *Gorbachev—or traps of Glasnost*, and *The 1990s—Yeltsin's decade*, *21st-century—under the sign of Vladimir Putin*. All of the chapters consist of subsequent sections compiled chronologically and according to the issue they tackle. Adopting such a system required both erudition and a wide range of literature while excluding some of the matters as discussed earlier. Materski has successfully responded to the challenge; however, his interests emerge visibly in parts of his book broadly referring to the Soviet and post-Soviet period rather than to the tsarist era.

When initiating his logical argument, the author focuses on the primary myths surrounding the politics of history of the Grand Duchy of Moscow—Russian Tsardom, showing how they were established and later nurtured as a tool for the politics of history carried out by the Rurik dynasty and the House of Romanov. Also, he depicts how these imaginations contributed to achieving crucial political goals, among which were efforts to consolidate the monarch's power and expand the state's territory. The list of the best-known myths includes a late medieval doctrine of Moscow being the Third Rome—the ultimate centre of the Christian world—and the idea of the early modern Holy Russia as the unique area of genuine faith and unspoiled customs. The latter concept could be traced back to the Time of Troubles, a crisis weathered by the demise of the Rurik dynasty after a *levée en masse* initiated jointly by Prince Dmitry Pozharsky and the merchant Kuzma Minin in a bid to drive Poles and Lithuanians out of the Kremlin in 1612. The author analysed some rarely discussed elements of the tsarist politics of history, including the figure of Alexander I Rurikovich, known better as Nevsky, as a leading hero of both the dynasty and the state. Materski juxtaposed the methods adopted by Ivan the Terrible to create a story of always independent and victorious ancestors and their importance in perpetuating authority with what is known both about Alexander Nevsky and the Battle of the Neva in 1240, when he defeated Swedish intruders, the latter the author employed to depict how history may be subject to manipulation (pp. 19–20). Attention should be, however,

drawn to what is not mentioned throughout the text, which is that the historical myths of the Old Russian period tended to be profoundly rooted in religion or were given such connotations in the aftermath of sacralising events, as shown by canonising Alexander Nevsky as a saint of the Russian Orthodox Church. Materski takes an interesting approach in portraying the role of the story of the Roman origins of the Rurik dynasty, revealing its similarity to other European dynastic myths (p. 16). He also indicates similarities in the Russian-made concept of the state as the Third Rome to a convergent idea that earlier evolved in Bulgaria. The reader will be able to trace more such parallels and borrowings, yet the book cannot be referred to as comparative but rather a study of Russian and Soviet times.

In a separate subsection, Materski describes how Russia introduced history courses in schools (pp. 26–28). He focuses on the fact that history emerged as a school subject in the mid-seventeenth century, yet it had not been consolidated until the end of the eighteenth century during the reign of Catherine the Great. Such a tilt resulted from a set of factors, including Peter the Great's irreverent approach towards teaching history (p. 27). The emergence of history in school curricula was used as a tool for the politics of history. Until the end of the tsarist period it was deemed preferable not to develop a complex narrative but to control the historical message through reducing its content to technological progress at the expense of political history, with the latter as a sphere for people whose education consisted of transmitting a set of myths that were yet not confronted with the ever-evolving research findings.

The author skilfully depicts the moment when history started to be seen in Russia as a research-based scholarship focused on source criticism. He points to the pivotal significance to the pioneer work of Nikolay Karamzin (pp. 29–30) in his *History of the Russian State*, whose first edition was printed back in 1818 (Karamzin 1818). The *oeuvre* laid the groundwork for setting a palette of interpretations that exerted a powerful impact on the future direction of Russian historiography and politics of history as an intermediary for shaping Russians' understanding of the past. That is, an understanding that focused around prioritising values of the state, that was robust towards international players and citizens.

In further subsections dedicated to the nineteenth century, the author provides his readers with a balanced description of the idea of Slavophilism–Pan-Slavism (pp. 35–37) as both an inspiration and tool for pursuing the state's politics of history; yet it was cautiously tackled by Russian tsars due to its dubious usefulness of addressing an essential policy objective, that of justifying and maintaining the tsarist autocracy. Materski attaches little importance to tracking historical events, both closely linked to mythology and employed as an element of the politics of history, examples of which are the Napoleonic wars, with the Patriotic War of 1812 at the forefront. In his book, the author makes a substantial effort to outline the significance of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878 that led to creating an autonomous Bulgarian state; thus feeding the myth of Moscow being the Third Rome, tasked with liberating all Orthodox Slavs from Turkey while bringing Constantinople, referred to as the Second Rome, back to Christianity (p. 36).

Before completing the journey throughout the tsarist period, readers are provided with Materski's presentation of the Russian politics of history at the turn of the centuries, that uses of the old myths and new ideologies, takes advantage of the education system, and applies hitherto scholarly achievements and guidance from historians. Also, the author includes an example of how the politics of history was employed during the World War I in a bid to reinterpret Russian–Polish relations; the Russians had long stigmatised Poles as traitors to Slavdom, despite being called to take Russia's side while fighting against Germany in 1914 (pp. 46–47). These attempts were nevertheless doomed to fail and exerted a limited effect due to inconsistency and incoherence with Russia's earlier policies. Neither did these activities manage to safeguard the Romanov Empire nor were they saved by politics of history measures seen as more critical yet not mentioned in Materski's publication—those aimed at mobilising Russians that influenced the future fate of the Russian Empire. Such endeavours included the change of Germanic names into Russian ones, as exemplified by renaming Sankt Petersburg to Petrograd.

In the chapter *From Lenin to Stalin* the reader gets familiar with a cross-sectional outline of the politics of history carried out by the communist leaders between 1917 and 1953 that,

according to the author, covered with its scope humanities, educational literature and art while refusing to admit there was yet another vision of history in society (p. 52).

While discussing the Bolshevik revolution and the 1920s, Materski announces the emergence of a new domain within the politics of history tasked with researching the labour movement and the interpretation of Marx's and Engels's doctrine. It became essential to adjust Marx's ideology to the victory of communism in feudal Russia and not in the much more developed Western European states (p. 49). Materski draws the reader's attention to how the history of both Russia and the world was after 1917 interpreted by communism in line with a materialist conception of history—a phenomenon that focuses on economic issues, the inevitable succession of social formations, competition between the social classes with an emphasis on personalities who originated from the "oppressed" social layers yet managed to play a progressive role in later stages of history. Also, the author writes that under Lenin's rule, monuments, anniversaries, patrons of the schools, street names, and literature topics had gradually been replaced by their newer equivalents (p. 53). To illustrate the phenomenon he cited the example of Lenin's "maquette" monuments.

Materski's *From Tsar to the "Tsar"* does not convey a solution to the dilemma of whether the decade following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 brought the concept of Russian politics of history or a state policy that bore both totalitarian and internationalist features. Does it, while referring to the period between 1917 and 1920 in Russia, invoke the state policy or what was pursued by the international revolutionary staff to implement their plan for world revolution? Materski puts this question into consideration; he includes nonetheless the period of the revolution and Lenin's rule into a further sequence of Russia's politics of history without providing the reader with a broader motivation. Among the arguments in favour for such an approach, though presented in a barely convincing manner, are both the ephemeral character of the international politics of history and attempts to identify links with other periods of the Russian history, including the maximalist and dichotomous perception of the world, or the parallel concept of Moscow being both the Third Rome and the heart of a worldwide revolution.

Such a short-spanned nature of the period of internationalist politics of history is particularly demonstrated by the description of the Stalinist period that gives an impression of the times when the Soviet politics of history became nationalised. Also, the latter idea was not intended to disregard the communist ideology but to be linked to the tradition of Great Russian statehood. Published in 1938, the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, a history textbook made mandatory both in the Soviet Union and Soviet-dominated states, disseminated Joseph Stalin's version of the history of the social-democratic (communist) party in Russia and the revolution, while condemning all deviations from what was included in the publication (pp. 74–75). In the 1930s, Stalin deliberately and intensively took advantage of both pre-revolution events and heroes, examples of which included the 1812 French invasion of Russia and Alexander Nevsky, while also referring to the figure of Ivan the Terrible, whom he highly esteemed for his efficiency, based on both cunning and brutality. Sergei Eisenstein's 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky* did not depict Nevsky's fight against the Swedes near the Neva River, instead of focusing on portraying his victory over the Teutonic Knights on Lake Peipus in 1242, which better corresponded to historical knowledge and addressed the need to demonstrate the German danger. The latter solution was abruptly abandoned in 1939, prompting the authorities to replace all anti-German elements with anti-Polish ones. Though the author mentions the tilt in the Soviet politics of history, he skipped over these ideas, and declined to show the Soviet phraseology of planning a defensive war that did not yet require any outside intervention of the worldwide revolution in a bid to galvanise society for the Red Army's offensive activities (Nevezhin 2000, pp. 79–82, 96–97, 109–127).

In the late 1930s and 1940s, the Soviet politics of history emerged as a tool for implementing the mission of proletarian revolution and Russia, both of which were consistently and reportedly understood as leading to the empire's formation. On the one hand, the politics of history promoted the superiority of communism over capitalism while praising pre-revolutionary triumphs on the other. The nationalisation of communism proved useful during the World War II.

Referring back to the early idea of "clustering" territories at the expense of the Polish–Lithuanian state, this was applied across the lands of the Romanov Empire. Russianness thus arose as a pretext used by Joseph Stalin to justify his invasion of Poland in 1939, arguing in official state propaganda that Ukrainians and Belarusians were oppressed by the Polish state, and to explain the annexation of Lithuania, Latvian and Estonian territories, that were viewed as part of the Romanovs' Russia. The process of nationalising the Soviet politics of history reached its pinnacle during the Soviet–German war of 1941–1945 when "The Internationale" was replaced with a new anthem (p. 93) and military decorations named after Prince Alexander Nevsky and the two tsarist generals Alexander Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov were established (p. 91). At that time, the Soviet-German war was hailed as the Great Patriotic War.

The Soviet politics of history, which recognized as its primary goal the need to expand the Moscow-ruled communist empire, was not subject to any modifications yet its accents were slightly corrected. As argued by Materski, the Stalinist regime made a return to some previous ideological positions, giving priority to the conflict between socialism and capitalism while putting aside the Great Russian element (p. 98). Also, under Stalin's rule, a decision was made to abandon acute anti-German phraseology and to show in a bad light "Nazis" (fascists) to clearly distinguish them from "Germans", who were seen as positive and pro-Soviet (p. 106).

Further periods of Soviet history were measured by the rules of subsequent general secretaries whose figures were discussed in the chapter *From Khrushchev to Chernenko*.

By demonstrating his expert knowledge, the author outlined most significant moments that determined the direction of the policy, an example of which was the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that denounced the personality cult of Joseph Stalin, leading to de-Stalinization (p. 112). When criticising Stalin and praising Lenin, Khrushchev introduced a brand-new element to Russian politics. The attitude to Stalin is what has until today differentiated the Russian and the state's politics of history into periods of either criticism, marked by Khrushchev's and Yeltsin's rules, or acceptance of him yet with some reservations.

Denouncing flattery of Joseph Stalin and some of his crimes emerged as a vital element of Khrushchev's politics of history and a tool for strengthening his authority. In his publication Materski argued that acknowledging Stalin's policy in 1967, followed by criticising Khrushchev, became a feature of the politics of history pursued later by Brezhnev, who in 1965 made a personal initiative to celebrate the Victory Day of May 9, 1945 and upheld the tradition of the Second Patriotic War (p. 134).

Materski's *From the Tsar to the "Tsar"* does not put adequate emphasis on the fact that the Soviet politics of history—from Khrushchev to Chernenko—focused on promoting the attractiveness of socialism worldwide as a model that in the past reportedly enabled the fastest socio-economic development and would ensure such again in the future. This is deemed as understandable if one bears in mind how the Communist ideology spread across Europe after the World War II, and then also throughout the Third World countries, as well as in the light of the Soviet confrontation with the United States. Internal fractures both within the camp and the communist movement, related to a set of factors, including China, gave rise to emphasising the unique importance of Russia's Great October Revolution and the primacy of the Soviet Union among other Communist states. As indicated by Materski, the USSR's special position, which was justified by its historical role, served to legitimise the state's interventions in the event of a threat to the socialist system, both abroad and in Central European countries; though the latter materialised as part of the Brezhnev Doctrine (pp. 132–133, 148).

Using the politics of history, Russianness was promoted in the USSR and strongly identified with the Russian language and the ethos of Great Russian statehood. The education system in all its republics insisted on teaching history from a Russian perspective along with promoting the supremacy of Russian culture (p. 134). Such an approach seemed to have been justified by a thesis on the establishment of the Soviet Union, adopted under Brezhnev's rule; according to that idea, the country emerged as a combination of all the nations of the Soviet Union as a result of a historical process (p. 133). This alliance was both understood and implemented as a number of small national streams joining the mighty river of Russian civilisation whose course ended in a vast Soviet

sea, seen as the peak achievement of humanity. Under such an assumption, Russianness did not conflict with Sovietness but constituted its essential source along with the social class conflict that led to significant shifts within social formations. Incorporated into Sovietness, of which it became an essential component, Russianness explained the state's supremacy over less powerful Soviet nations. As noted by the author, such a politics of history—developed under Brezhnev's regime—disturbed non-Russian Soviet nations (p. 134). Materski did not, however, notice that Russianness was promoted to a lesser extent in the Central European countries of the Soviet bloc, mainly with compulsory Russian learning at schools and the popularisation of Russian culture.

The triumphs of the Soviet politics of history relied on both the political and military achievements of the Soviet Union, linked to the state of Soviet economics. During the 1980s, the Soviet economy was very much behind that of the Western countries and was plunged into a crisis; these factors contributed to the multidimensional stagnation of the late Brezhnev era. Also, the Soviet economic model lost its impetus worldwide while there gradually solidified a publishing movement acting independently of the authorities whose scope of activities involved a different vision of both culture and history (pp. 138–139). Materski argues that the said stagnation encompassed the Soviet politics of history in the first half of the 1980s as it lacked fresh ideas which needed to be put forward by a general secretary yet Brezhnev's short-term successors had neither the will nor the opportunity to adopt such solutions. When making a reference to the rules of Andropov and Chernenko from 1982 to 1985, the author cites a set of interesting details, such as the former's decision to include Felix Dzerzhinsky, the first director of the Soviet security police, into the pantheon of heroes as well as to loosen the state's control over the politics of history, as depicted by the 1984 film *Repentance* (*Покаяние*, dir. Tengiz Abuladze) that covered a blatantly anti-Stalinist topic and was screened under the Chernenko regime (p. 152).

No changes had been introduced until Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary in 1985. His rule is discussed in details in the chapter *Gorbachev—traps of Glasnost*. His *perestroika* movement for reform and *glasnost* are both

linked to changes to the Soviet politics of history. Materski describes Gorbachev's program as inconsistent, as exemplified by his paper delivered at a session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in November 1987, in which he outlined the need for changes yet did not delineate their feasible directions. Speaking of sensitive issues, the General Secretary adopted a shaky stance and did not overtly condemn Stalin (p. 171). Also, school curricula did not contain any content criticising the cult of Stalin's personality or mass repressions (p. 169). Furthermore, Gorbachev emphasised the superiority of socialism while saying that the popular uprisings in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland stemmed from mistakes committed by local parties and not their attempts to relinquish their dependence on the Soviet Union, as imposed by the latter (p. 172). The author justly sees Gorbachev's politics of history as chaotic while perceiving *perestroika* as a way to reform and strengthen the Soviet Union as a socialist state and not to dismantle its internal structures; however this ultimately took place as the entire process got out of control. This loss of control was particularly visible in the sphere of the politics of history, with Gorbachev's glasnost making it possible to articulate a number of distinct visions of such politics in the Soviet Union. With the opening up of the Soviet citizens' freedom of assembly and expression, referred to as an unprecedented phenomenon for that state though vaguely delineated, national narratives gradually began to prevail over their central counterpart both in the Central European states and in the USSR republics, with the Baltic ones at the forefront (p. 172). Among these narratives were those that seemed closer to verified facts, including the signing of the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, along with a secret protocol under which Germany and the Soviet Union agreed to carve up Eastern Europe. Yet they were all subject to various interpretations, eventually becoming a base of national politics of history. Gorbachev took steps to handle the crisis; in April 1989, the Soviet Union admitted that the Katyn Massacre had been perpetrated by NKVD yet no document evidencing the decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party was eventually revealed. On the other hand, the Soviet authorities commanded to propagate the a*nti-Katyn* propaganda that laid the groundwork for false information

about mass murders that Poles had allegedly perpetrated on Russian prisoners of war during the Polish–Soviet war of 1919–1921 (pp. 184–185). Such undertakings, however, failed to save the Soviet politics of history. As a result, Gorbachev's decision paved the way for the emergence of independent visions of history, impeding the state's ability to impose its interpretations.

The chapter *The 1990s—Yeltsin's Decade in Power* describes an attempt to set up a new politics of history that could reject the legacy of its Soviet equivalent. Yeltsin's undertakings were motivated by a thought that he had been consistently pushing to put into effect until 1993. The collapse of the Soviet Union, on the ruins of which the Russian Federation was founded and to which Yeltsin contributed, set the direction that shaped Russia's politics of history of a country with grand superpower ambitions yet no longer universalist (p. 199). This suggested the need to show the pre-revolutionary era in a good light while presenting the Communist system as both criminal and destructive to Russia. A timid attempt to incorporate the period of the Russian Republic (1917) into the state's national ethos failed as a result of the ephemeral nature of this experiment, seen by the Russians as a transitional phase leading onto the Great October Revolution. It was risky to rely on the nineteenth-century liberal opposition movement, which was also in conflict with the state, as a role model in the politics of history. With its freedom for choosing state authorities, democracy emerged in Yeltsin's policy as a positive value; however, the president many times came into conflict with representative bodies, which, though intended to introduce changes, eventually failed to consolidate democracy among Russian citizens (p. 200). That said, referring to tsarist and Old Russian statehood traditions did lead to success, mostly thanks to the presence of some of their elements in the Soviet politics of history. Primary importance was ascribed to the alternative nature of such redefinitions, under which most Russian citizens saw both Russia's republican episode and liberal tradition as unattractive. Materski depicted how the then politics of history referred to tsarist Russia, also by adopting a new anthem, three national colours that brought back the Romanov period and an emblem, codified during the reign of the Ruriks (pp. 206–207). A vital component of

the new politics of history was the Orthodox Christianity that had never before occupied such a place in the Soviet reality even when it was sometimes used by Joseph Stalin (p. 96). Under Yeltsin's rule, the Russian Orthodox Church became part of state celebrations.

Any attempts to cut off Russia from its past Soviet heritage were doomed to failure. Yeltsin drew attention to the destructive influence of Russia's Soviet past and he disclosed in 1992 the contents of the famous "Packet No. 1," along with the 1940 decision of the Politburo of the Communist Party (*The note of the Chief of the NKWD L. Beria to J. Stalin, March 1940*, in: *Katyn* 1993, pp. 18–25; *The excerpt from the protocol of the Politburo. The decision of March 5, 1940, (to L. Beria)*, March 5, 1940, in: *Katyn* 1993, pp. 10–11; see: *Katyn* 2007). Also, the president issued a decree banning the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that he considered guilty of the aborted *coup d'état* in August 1991; he also launched preliminary work to judge communist crimes in the Soviet period and to declare the Communist Party as a criminal organisation. Once successfully enacted, the president's legal acts would have largely contributed to the success of his politics of history. And yet, the Constitutional Court toppled almost all of Yeltsin's anti-CPSU decrees and so was the case of the president's bids to judge the communist regime (pp. 208–210). Also, no information on the full scale of Soviet crimes was included in school curricula in the 1990s while thousands of communist monuments and hundreds of thousands of names of streets, squares and town were left unchanged (p. 213). The above-mentioned failures complete the general picture of the fiasco of this attempt to de-communise Russia, that collapsed before the history of politics—negating the Soviet period—could have impacted the society. In the years 1995–1999, Yeltsin himself refrained from applying acute anti-communist rhetoric and, starting from 1995, he began to refer to the myth of the Great Patriotic War yet putting the nation—and not the state—in the centre (Nikžentaitis 2018, pp. 44–45).

The book's final chapter titled *21st Century: under the sign of Vladimir Putin* provides the reader with a description of how Russia's politics of history developed under Vladimir Putin's rule as well as giving an insight into the country current political affairs. Instead of delineating a model of

the politics of history, the author begins his considerations with a statement that the Russian politics of history had been shaped over many years. No thought-out solution had evolved until the 60th anniversary of the Great War in 2005 and the machine of state has been used for this purpose since 2011 (p. 236). The author says that Putin, while coming to power in 2000, outlined his strategic goal to make Russia a global superpower, based on the country's great achievements that laid the groundwork for legitimising its dominant role, see (Menkiszak 2002). Menkiszak then both made a diagnosis and prognosis of Putin's policy, referred to as pro-Western and not oriented towards strengthening Russia as a global superpower. Although present in the beginning of his rule, this pursuit had not revealed itself until the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. This proves that in parallel to these events no one noticed any superpower element in the Russian policy that could collide with US and NATO policies. Though far from being erroneous, this assessment indicates the specifics of Putin's first years in office when the Russian president did not feel strong enough to formulate or reveal ambitious foreign policy goals while the model of his politics of history remained unclear. This served to indicate that he would go back to the times when Russia was a mighty state, presenting the country as a role model (p. 235). This emerged simultaneously with some signals that the country's power did not depend on its social system but on how powerful its authorities are, and it should be measured by the state's importance worldwide, its political and military strength, its territorial reach and sphere of influence. All these made together a model of the state's politics of history. Having excluded the Yeltsin era, the last years of the Soviet Union and the Romanov Empire as well as the Russian Republic of 1917, the authorities faced a challenge to develop a broad coverage of tsarist and Soviet Empire times.

Materski argues that Eurasianism has surged as the first thought behind the vision of Russia as a renewed superpower that also allowed the selection of appropriate examples from the state's history. At this time, Putin's meeting with Aleksander Solzhenitsyn may have given rise to this concept as the president saw the novelist as the new Pyotr Stolypin. This political movement, which stipulated connecting

Russia's European and Asian traits, thus endowing the state with a unique role to be played on this giant continent, was initiated in the nineteenth century. It was developed by the Russian *émigré* community after the Bolshevik Revolution (pp. 47–48), and later renewed by Russian geopoliticians in the 1990s. For those who pursue Putin's policy, Eurasianism was basically equivalent to integrating Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan with Russia and then subordinating the rest of the post-Soviet zone to Moscow, thus encompassing its domination over the Eurasian continent. Materski, however, writes that the concept has evolved over the years to adapt its assumptions to circumstances, such as those under which the idea of the post-Soviet zone may be either narrowed down to the former Soviet Union or extended, covering with its scope the entire Eastern Bloc. The geopolitical theory of Eurasianism has welcomed the idea of Russkiy Mir ("Russian World"), as the mythologised sphere of Russian culture and historical community, with the centre in Moscow, embracing Russia, Ukraine ("Little Russia") and Belarus and possibly also Kazakhstan, Moldova, the Baltic States and Transcaucasia. As a political scientist, Materski recognises a model within Putin's politics of history while, as a historian, he stresses how variable and dubious this model might be. Putin has pursued a specific politics of history while making this concept more coherent (a point on which the author seems to insist) or empowering it with a rather gradual momentum—which better defines this issue—only a few years after the president came to power. This has resulted from Putin's drive for success, which allowed him to refer to the times when Russia was a mighty superpower and compare the state under his rule, yet without risking ridicule. To successfully implement the superpower-oriented policy, Russia had in 2000 to conquer the Chechen capital, Grozny, which forced Moscow to prove during the guerrilla warfare there, that was going on for a few years, that success is by no means ephemeral and to carry out the first (yet unnoticed in Materski's publication) lesson of the politics of history that consisted of inspiring a feeling that the war, to which many Russian citizens referred to as civil and unnecessary, ultimately ended in a notable success for the country. After this had been achieved mainly through the mass media and film (Kajtoch 2011, pp. 48–53), the Russian

authorities fell back on a wide range of themes and measures employed for the purpose of the politics of history.

In his book Materski identified Russia's victory in the Patriotic War of 1941–1945 as the core theme of the state's politics of history and the greatest contemporary state-national myth (pp. 266–276). Also, the author stressed the manipulations that both marginalised and reinterpreted an almost two-year period of cooperation between the Soviet Union and Adolf Hitler before June 1941, claiming all the merit for the victory over Germany and promoting the narrative, under which Central Europe was liberated by the Soviet Union, though it had no other choice than to become dependent on the USSR, while Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia along with some regions of Poland, Romania and Finland were incorporated into the Soviet Union. Besides, Materski cites the means through which Russia sought to perpetuate the myth, for instance by upholding the pride of victory through art and anniversary celebrations and exerting pressure on neighbouring countries, including Estonia, to preserve the monuments commemorating the Soviet triumph (p. 275). The author attracts the reader's attention to how negative aspects of the Soviet Union's participation in the war were silenced. Similar steps were taken while speaking of the Katyn Massacre—both relativised when referring to Gorbachev's policy and questioned in connection with false information about the unknown fate of the prisoners of war that might even have been murdered by the Germans during the World War II.

Having viewed the Soviet victory in the World War II as the main reason for Russian national pride, Putin referred to the Soviet legacy, making it yet another dominant aspect of the contemporary Russian politics of history. And these links could be noticed at multiple levels, ranging from: the declarations from both Putin and all of the people executing his policy on the need to appreciate Soviet achievements, the lack of legitimacy in calculating the death toll of communist crimes with the use of contemporary methods, depicting the collapse of the Soviet Union as a geopolitical disaster, through the content of school textbooks and various publications, to electronic media coverage (pp. 249–252). Another symbolic element consisted of restoring the Soviet anthem, though with different lyrics, on New Year's Eve 2000.

Also, Putin's era is characterised by the rise of Joseph Stalin's cult of personality, both backed by its defenders or even ardent followers, as well as a group of opponents who enjoyed support under Yeltsin's rule and who were then left by his successor (pp. 252–256). Putin himself remained cautious when assessing Stalin's rule and he praised him for victory in the Patriotic War and effectiveness in exercising power. However he suppressed the urge to remember the victims of this "period", understood as a necessary in Russian history rather than merely the decision-making time of a given leader (pp. 255–256). Praising Stalin has gained momentum over the past few years and has received support from the state. Given the scale of the phenomenon, the author only indicates how the personality cult of Russia's biggest criminal became present in publications, television and the Internet. Thus this policy has manifested through various forms. As of 2015–2016, Materski presents a non-exhaustive list of ten places where monuments of Stalin were unveiled; and notes that a museum dedicated to the Soviet leader was created in the Tver region, thanks to some help of the Russian Minister of Culture (p. 264).

Materski writes that Putin in parallel refers to tsarist Russia and the Orthodox Church. Among his favourite characters were Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, both of whom went down in history as strong rulers who contributed to extending the country's territory. Attention was also paid to the tsarist Prime Minister, known for his reformatory efforts, Pyotr Stolypin, who so far had not occupied any vital place in Russian consciousness or the state's politics of history. However, he had made attempts to strengthen the state by more subtle means than those used by other national heroes and had not been negatively associated by neighbouring nations. However, a monument to Ivan the Terrible was unveiled in 2016 in Russia in a move viewed as accepting the cruelest methods of wielding authority if they served to centralise power in the country (p. 286). Inspired by distant pre-revolutionary times, Putin established National Unity Day on 4 November, which coincides with the name of Russia's ruling party United Russia, to commemorate the expulsion of Polish occupation forces from the Kremlin in 1612 (p. 278). Not incidentally, the selection of such a date stemmed from

Putin's desire to replace the commemoration of the October Revolution, known as the Day of Great October Socialist Revolution during the Soviet period, formerly observed on November 7, that did not match to the politics of history of a state whose elite had gained a gigantic fortune from assets nationalised as a result of revolutionary turmoil. Materski argues that creating this main public holiday, second only to the Victory Day of 9 May, has not been as successful as hoped, even despite the considerable expenses incurred for the epic historical period drama film "1612" (p. 283). And yet, even among Russians the historical memory of this event can hardly be referred to as vivid while Pozharsky and Minin, known for their leadership in the 1612 *levée en masse*, had never before been widely exposed to the public. However these two figures had been recalled by Joseph Stalin in his speech delivered on November 7, 1941 in a critical moment for the Soviet Union (p. 91) (Stalin 1945, p. 26). Choosing such an event, however, has pointed to an essential purpose of the politics of history while making Russian society more sensitive to the threat from the West against which its members, once united, were expected to fight and win.

The Russian Orthodox element has to a great extent marked the Russian politics of history. As an organisation, the Russian Orthodox Church, along with its history, serves to justify the distinction of Russia from the West—referred to as Catholic, Protestant or atheist—while emphasising the unity of Russkiy Mir, defined in terms of Russia's special relationship with Ukraine and Belarus whose largest Orthodox churches are subordinated to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus (p. 242). In his book, Materski outlines the struggle between the Patriarchs of Moscow Alexy II and Kirill I over preserving their domination over the divided Ukrainian Orthodox Church (p. 243).

According to the author, the marriage of many elements, along with a firm reference to the Soviet era, is the most characteristic feature of Putin's politics of history. Its spirit seems best reflected by combining all of the elements together, as illustrated by a poster portraying three Russian ministers of internal affairs: Malyuta Skuratov, an Oprichina leader during the reign of Ivan the Terrible ; Mikhail Loris-Melikov, a nineteen-century politician with relatively liberal views; and

Nikolai Anisimovich Shchelokov who served as an interior minister under Brezhnev's rule (p. 250). Bringing together both tsarist and Soviet heritage successfully in such an eclectic combination was by no means eyed by the Russians as an oddity.

In the final remarks to his book, Materski focuses on summarising and juxtaposing the main features of the Russian politics of history while reflecting the current state of historical consciousness among members of Russian society. As an erudite historian, the author outlines all of the vital stages of the Soviet and then Russian politics of history while paying attention to present-day Russia and evoking further examples. When arguing the essential features of the contemporary Russian politics of history and blending different traditions, Materski quotes an example of the cult of personalities of Lenin and Alexander Kolchak running in parallel (p. 303). What is noteworthy is that Materski noticed that the Russian politics of history had been pursued under both an absolute monarchy and later on a totalitarian Soviet state; hence, the then authorities had no limitations in imposing their will as it had "been implemented by docile representatives of the cultural *milieu*, mainly writers and publicists, who became committed to guessing the wishes of the authorities." (p. 301). Speaking of this, the author highlights how far from this assumption the Yeltsin era eventually turned out to be (p. 306).

Based upon all the material collected in the book, Materski formulated a critical thesis statement that the Russian politics of history did not change much throughout its history, from tsarist times, through the Soviet era, to present-day Russia. As he says: "the contemporary Russian politics of history does not look different much from similar manipulations observed in the times of the Russian Empire or the Soviet federation." (p. 301). This continuity emerges through adopting of some schemes in order to explain the world, as exemplified by transforming Moscow–Third Rome into Moscow as the centre of communism and reviving the idea of Eurasianism. The state's entire historical message was at the same time almost invariably subordinated to the thesis of Russia's greatness and its missions to accomplish. Most importantly, the author states that the Russian politics of history relies upon the constancy of its goal, which consists of producing a pertinent image of the past so as to solidify power in the country, distract public

attention from any uncomfortable topics, create the cult of personality of a reigning tsar, general secretary or president and to depreciate both opposition forces and opponents on the international arena (p. 301).

All in all, Materski arrives at a logical conclusion, as materialised in his book's title *From the Tsar to the "Tsar". A study of the Russian politics of memory*, prompting similarity between the tsars and Putin and between the Russian and Soviet politics of history. This assumption was illustrated with collected material and some partial conclusions, though those referring to integrating the Great Russian ethos with communist ideology after 1917 do leave room for polemics. While drawing attention to the vital parallels between the tsarist politics of history and the communist period, the author fits into a broader dispute over the nature of the relationship between tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union whose origins could be traced back to the Bolshevik coup of 1917. The polemics over their potential affinity or dissimilarity is yet deeply rooted in Polish academic discourse, with the author taking the side of those who noticed analogies between the two systems, including Jan Kucharzewski, a Polish historian and politician (Kucharzewski 1923; Kucharzewski 1948), while rejecting claims on fundamental divergences, as argued by Marian Zdziechowski, a historian of culture (Zdziechowski 1923; Zdziechowski 1932; Zdziechowski 1937; Zdziechowski 1939). Just as it is impossible to solve the dispute, it is also challenging to precisely state whether the term of the Russian politics of history could be applied while speaking about the period of the Soviet Union. The material in the book points to the Russian aspect of the Soviet politics of history while Materski undoubtedly provides some arguments that uphold the thesis of the continuity of the politics of history pursued first by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and then also by the present-day Russian state. But it is a reader who should make the final assessment of whether they are sufficient to recognise the use of the Russian politics of history about the Soviet period. I, however, lean towards a negative answer, which yet does not negate the value of Materski's work as there is no doubt that the politics of history was pursued at the times of the Romanov Empire, in the Soviet Union, and it is still carried out in contemporary

Russia. Wojciech Materski provided a reliable and fascinating insight into all these historical periods.

To sum up, Materski's book will provide the reader with a full spectrum of both Russian and Soviet politics of history. What may be considered as an asset of the publication is that it depicts a long period of history, all this while maintaining a high level of argument. Facts, which the author shows competently, are then skilfully analysed and lead to logical conclusions. Also, the publication gives insights into that knowledge about both Russia and the Soviet Union that is later compared with the politics of history pursued by other countries. An additional advantage of Materski's book consists in illustrating his logical argument with vivid examples that refer in particular to the Soviet era, which—once combined with the author's skillful narration—suggests an element of popularisation. Although Materski devotes much attention to the issue of the Katyn massacre, this does not disturb the composition of his argument. Slight doubts arise, however, with the regard to some parts of the text, from a too detailed yet interesting presentation of the general political background as compared to the past events of politics of history.

The book *From Tsar to the "Tsar". A study of the Russian politics of memory is* a must-read for all those interested in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union as well as any issues regarding politics of history.

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