

## Introduction

# The Kingdom of Poland and Petersburg Rule

DECEMBER 22, 1913, SHOULD HAVE BEEN A FESTIVE DAY FOR WARSAW. THE time had finally come to open the city's third bridge across the Vistula River, built over a period of ten years. But a lack of enthusiasm dulled the occasion. Tsarist bureaucrats squabbled with Polish locals over which bishop should bless the new piece of infrastructure. Should the privilege of dedicating the bridge go to the Russian Orthodox or the Catholic cleric? Imperial officials refused to let the Catholic Church be involved in the ceremony and this swayed a large number of Warsaw's dignitaries to boycott the event. Rumors of worse forms of protest spread through the town, and local security authorities took additional measures to maintain order. Eventually the ceremony proceeded as planned, without any noteworthy disruption, but nevertheless one tsarist official complained that the dispute had "considerably spoiled" the day.<sup>1</sup> The construction of a new bridge over the Vistula manifested how well the imperial authorities in Petersburg, the administration in Warsaw, and Polish entrepreneurs and engineers were capable of working together. But the struggle surrounding control over the dedication ceremony revealed the fragility of such social consensus in the Kingdom of Poland. The parties disagreed even on *who* had built the bridge. The Polish public saw the project as having been financed by the city of Warsaw and local taxes. Thus, they argued that the Catholic Church should preside over the dedication ceremony. Officials, in contrast, saw it as a building brick of imperial infrastructure that had been planned, funded, and built by Petersburg's administration. In their eyes, the honor of inaugurating the bridge belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The quarrel among dignitaries over such ritual hierarchies reflected deep-rooted claims to power within the metropolis on the Vistula and in the Kingdom of Poland in general. The struggle over symbols in 1913 shed light on the many forms of antagonism that over decades had come to characterize Polish regions under Russian rule. At core it was the issue of who had the fundamental legitimate right to govern the province, or to whom—as the official who found the dedication ceremony disappointing put it—the Kingdom and the City of Warsaw “belonged.”<sup>2</sup> It was an expression of the confrontation between society and bureaucracy that had shaped Polish–Russian relations since the old Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth had been broken up, and that had gained additional momentum after the January Revolt of 1863 had been suppressed. The origins of that antagonism, the forms it exhibited during the half century between the Uprising of 1863–1864 and the onset of World War I, the changes it underwent, and the people most involved in it are the subjects of this book.

This also raises the fundamental question of the forms, structures, and agents of imperial rule in the late tsarist multiethnic empire. The encounter of bureaucracy and population in the Polish provinces, their interaction and their many disputes, give us an idea of the condition of the Romanov Empire in general and of the forces that transformed it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The story of the Vistula Land reveals the complexity of a multiethnic and multiconfessional state and the basic problems of imperial administration under those circumstances, especially when the periphery presents a patchwork of individual administrative systems and legal jurisdictions.<sup>3</sup> It spotlights the challenges of integrating such a heterogeneous entity, and it discloses the sources of its increasing fragility. The story also tells of the everyday exercise of imperial power and the ways it left its imprint on the social and cultural structures of one of the empire’s most important provinces. It shows the complex conditions of conflict-ridden communication between imperial officials and local citizens that nonetheless often produced breakthroughs, consensus, and cooperation.

St. Petersburg’s administrative elite take center stage in this story. They defined the rules for managing the heterogeneity of the vast empire. They represented tsarist power and implemented its regime at the periphery. Their influence was particularly strong in the Kingdom of Poland because after the January Uprising, all officials at senior posts in local administrations there were external officials appointed by the tsar or minister of the interior. To make things worse, no institutions of local self-governing were introduced to the kingdom, which lacked any counterbalance to the bureaucrats’ omnipotence.

We can profile these agents of imperial power in the most important province of the Russian Empire by examining how they fulfilled their duties, how

they communicated with people within and outside of the administration, and what kind of self-images they generated. The Vistula Land was essential to the overall cohesion of the empire. Poland presented one of the most populated, militarily strategic, and economically valuable peripheral regions of the empire.<sup>4</sup> As the Russian Empire's western outpost and situated directly next to and competing with the Polish territory partitions held by Austria-Hungary and Prussia, the multiethnic and multiconfessional Kingdom of Poland was in many ways a test ground where the imperial government devised and developed ways to secure power and to force integration, experimented, and then discarded some of them. The Vistula Land thus played a prominent role in the strategic and programmatic plans and decisions made in Saint Petersburg. For this reason, study of the Russian imperial rule in the Kingdom of Poland sheds light on the techniques that the Russian Empire used in incorporating and transforming the areas at the periphery. It also reveals the reciprocal effects that the peripheral regions had on the entire empire and how these ultimately threatened that entity's stability.<sup>5</sup>

I have restricted this study to a specific period and region because giving a dense description of the particular weave of interaction found there is the best way to demonstrate the complexities, inconsistencies, and formative dimensions of the imperial context. The situational approach lends clarity to the confusing mixture of hierarchies and actors, interdependent interests and self-perceptions, and the reciprocal effects of policies and actions for both the center and the periphery.<sup>6</sup> The territorial and chronological approaches used in writing history from a national perspective are often problematic because they posit enduring entities that historically speaking either did not exist or—as was the case for the partitioned Polish regions—were suspended for long periods of time. Instead, we discover the force with which the imperial powers forged the framework in which a nation and a society could develop. The ruptures in both time and space enforced by imperial powers determined this framework and its transformation. This book therefore focuses on the Vistula Land—an entity created by the mercy of Petersburg—and the severe breaks that occurred in 1864 and 1915 and mark its existence as such. The main focus is on Warsaw, the center of Vistula Land bureaucracy, where there was considerable interaction between the imperial administration and the local population.<sup>7</sup>

Six main topics will be discussed in this book. The first and most important is that of the administrative apparatuses that the tsarist authorities established for the purpose of controlling the rebellious provinces. They were set up after the Polish Uprising of 1863 and existed in the Vistula Land until 1915. We will examine the structure and inner logic of state administration and become acquainted with the most important figures in that constellation. Following a period of reform, the administration was complex and heterogeneous

and marked by the ambivalence of increasing professionalization alongside the persistence of networks made up of nobility and patronage. Disputes within the administration disclose how severely conflicted the relationship was between the imperial bureaucrats at the empire's center and the local officials at the periphery. The struggle over competences within the administration itself had a real influence on policies of maintaining imperial power in the Polish provinces.

Particular attention will be given to the office of the viceroy, which after 1874 was that of the governor-general, the highest official position in the Vistula Land. The incumbent was crucial for exercising Petersburg's power. Each of these officeholders shaped local governing practices, while also influencing the decision-making bodies in Petersburg. They were the tsar's direct ambassadors, equipped with broad authority and considerable freedom for interpreting imperial policy at their station. The style of leadership preferred by each one of the governors-general reveals the extent to which the political options available to contemporary officials varied and changed. The governors-general were ordered to prevent uprisings, promote centralization, execute Russification and de-Polonization in both the region and the administration, and to find a *modus vivendi* with the locals at the very same time. Such conflicts in objectives caused tensions within the state institutions and led to numerous frictions between competing officeholders. The depiction of this panorama of governing practices provides some insight into the character of the Russian Empire's policymaking after 1860, including its concepts, strategies, techniques, and paradoxes.

Particular elements of the imperial apparatuses spawned confrontations between tsarist bureaucrats and the local Vistula Land population. And that is the second main topic of this book. The workings of imperial rule were formed through interaction with the local society in the province. There was some interplay between the authoritarian attempts to establish Petersburg hegemony and the actions and reactions of the Polish and Jewish citizens in the Vistula Land. The result was a conflict-fraught community marked by endless exchange among antagonistic actors.<sup>8</sup> Petersburg's efforts to keep the indigenous population out of decision-making positions in provincial administration informed the basic pattern and dynamics of continual confrontation. The indigenous population found itself permanently up against an external, powerful bureaucracy. Although several of the officials were posted for many years in the Vistula Land, circulating within the Polish administration and becoming experts on conditions in the region, that did not change the fact that they were outsiders sent in from other regions of the empire.

We will look at some examples of the interaction and conflict. Besides the practices developed for the administration in modern Warsaw, tsarist censorship and state policy on education and religion also spotlight Petersburg's

everyday exercise of power. They also show how much, in turn, the “special conditions” in the kingdom, as contemporaries called them, changed bureaucratic practices, especially during long periods that were not primarily characterized by armed confrontation or extreme violence. Quotidian struggles in the Vistula Land reveal many reciprocal mutations among officials and the population and the kinds of cooperation that evolved among different ethnic and confessional groups. And they show us where the limitations lay. We find spheres and patterns of cooperation, but also boundaries; we identify the existence of parallel worlds, but also the crossing of the boundaries setting them apart. We discover renitency, resistance, and even armed uprising clashing with tsarist measures and means for enforcing repression. The years of crisis from 1905 to 1914 demonstrate particularly well how these various patterns of interaction often existed at one and the same time. Using military strength to squelch insurgence and at the same time developing a legalized public sphere were not contradictory. Both efforts not only took place at the same time but also were mutually supportive processes.

The Revolution of 1905–1906 presented a temporary threat to autocracy and the Petersburg dominion of the Vistula Land; it also advanced many of the events and conflicts that were to define the final prewar decade of the Russian Empire. The tsarist authorities were forced to devise new strategies to maintain power in the face of uprisings that unsettled the existing system. They created new political and social parameters for exercising imperial rule and articulating public opinion, and they created new forums to represent political interests. We therefore also take a look at the revolution and its influence, going through the events in chronological order. The dynamics of revolution and the escalation of violence necessitate a chronological look at how the conflict originated and then grew the proportions of a revolution that spread throughout the Polish provinces.

Finally, the revolution made clear just how much Petersburg rule had shaped social formations and their corresponding political demands in the Kingdom of Poland after 1860. This constitutes the third major topic of this book. Using the example of the Vistula Land, it illustrates the formative dimension of the exercise of imperial power. The autocracy’s administrative apparatuses, its staff, and the bureaucratic regulations that it issued or implemented had the power to heavily influence social and political developments in the kingdom. The practices of imperial rule that formed through the interaction of bureaucrats with the population were vital to the social and cultural changes taking place in the Polish provinces and defined the boundaries for conflicts between the state and society. Even the unintended and counterintentional consequences of tsarist administration techniques reveal how formative they were in nature: they created the framework that enabled the transformation of local sociability and its corresponding cultural designs.

This was also true for how the elite determined their place within society, a point that makes up the fourth major topic we will address. For the elite, knowing one's station was not an immutable article of faith, it was relative and always subject to change. Forms of interaction within the conflict-ridden community in the kingdom had an effect on how imperial officials saw themselves. We will take a look at the mental horizons of officials and how they shifted when the Polish and Jewish communities challenged the legitimacy of the presence of Petersburg in the Vistula Land. The concepts, both abstract and concrete, that guided the stance of imperial officials materialized when the logics of imperial administrative apparatuses, the political backgrounds of the persons involved, the dynamics of the encounter (which was often confrontational), and the indigenous population had an effect on one another. The idea of the fundamental nature of the empire and what threatened it, along with the role one felt to be playing in maintaining order were formed by communicating with the locals in the course of conflicts with them. Experiencing the Catholic and Jewish environment in the Vistula Land had an effect on how ambassadors from Petersburg viewed their own identity. Their ideas of what is Russian, the criteria they used to identify cultural differences and their notions of what hierarchy existed for subjects—even whole populations—of the empire were shaped by distinguishing themselves from their Polish counterparts as the “others.”

The strength that the confessional paradigm had for determining the otherness of entire populations and for upholding local skepticism toward achieving harmony or an amalgamation of Slavophile and pan-Slavic thought can be understood by reviewing the contentious conditions experienced throughout the kingdom.

At the same time, the demeanor of the representatives of Petersburg gave shape to the image that Polish and Jewish subjects had of the Russian Empire and Russian foreign rule. The symbols and rituals used in a culture of differentiation and discrimination became daily confirmation of just how foreign Russian culture was. This, in turn, directly shaped the idea of what it is to be Polish or Jewish. Petersburg felt threatened by modern schemes of ethno-notation, the new forms of organization that had begun emerging in the 1890s, and increasingly articulated demands for political participation and self-determination, all of which were closely interwoven with the hierarchies and practices of Petersburg dominion. But here again, confrontation was not the only mode of interaction; many ways were found to overcome boundaries. In this book we therefore also take a look at the Polish Jewish social circles to whom the empire offered opportunities for careers, mobility, and business. This allows a more positive interpretation of the entire context of the empire than that of being merely a subordinating and occupying power.

The Vistula Land's strength at influencing developments becomes

increasingly clear when we turn to the origins of imperial society in the Polish provinces, and particularly in Warsaw. The fifth main topic of this book profiles the social and cultural world of this imperial diaspora. The circle of contemporary people who considered themselves representatives of the empire was not limited to the small group of officials in the tsarist bureaucracy. In the period following the uprising, many people took up residence in the metropolis on the Vistula River. They saw themselves as members of an imperial community without belonging to the exclusive circle of state officials in the narrower sense of the word. Some of them, like academics, engineers, and statisticians were employed by the government, but saw themselves as private individuals. Others, like realtors, lawyers, publicists, and publishers went into business for themselves in Warsaw. The predominantly Russian Orthodox members of this imperial diaspora populated the parallel universe of Russian Warsaw and developed their own independent urban cultural landscape that was for the most part isolated from their Polish and Jewish neighbors.

Distinguishing themselves from non-Orthodox urban communities characterized by other religions and making claim to higher rank gave the members of this community an impetus to reflect on what is special about being Russian and to demand privileges within the composite of the empire. The Revolution of 1905 energized and strengthened the position of those who had stood up for the radical nationalization of the empire. By this time, at the latest, friction was obvious between the imperial administration in Petersburg and the imperial community in Warsaw. The multinational and supranational administrative elite of the overall multiethnic empire became an offending group of people for the nationalistic population that increasingly equated the empire with Russian identity. As we shall see, this was an additional challenge for the tsarist bureaucracy on the eve of World War I.

That was as true of other regions at the periphery of the empire and for the city of Petersburg itself as it was for the Vistula Land. But the Kingdom of Poland was a special case within the empire because conflicts there had effects on the empire's interior and the metropolis on the Neva itself. These reciprocal relationships between the Polish periphery, other peripheral areas, and the imperial capital constitute the sixth main topic of discussion. Dependencies among these areas were promoted by the principle of rotation followed by the administration. State officials who had experience in service and with confrontation in the Vistula Land were often later appointed to other peripheral regions. As experts for the periphery they fulfilled leading positions in the border governorates, some of them even moved up to the center of power in Petersburg. They took with them their knowledge of governing practices that had been successful in the kingdom. These officials with imperial biographies brought their experience in dealing with and solving conflicts from one province to another and eventually from the periphery to the center of power.

The Vistula Land was a “breeding ground” for the kind of confrontation that eventually contributed to the erosion of the authority for Russia’s supra-national dynasty.<sup>9</sup> It includes not only the revolutionary spectrum of Polish and Jewish provenience. In debates across the empire, imperial officials and especially representatives of the Russian congregation in Warsaw made their views known on the “Polish question.” They spread depictions of “rebellious Poles” and the “Russian watch on the Vistula River,” spoke of the “battle of peoples” at the western periphery of the empire, and last, but not least, they spoke out in support of an imperial hierarchy made up of the core and the borderlands, in that order. Some eagerly published their views in an attempt to reach others inside Russia. Officials and opinion makers with experience in regions along the borders published memoranda based on their “Years in Warsaw” as a convincing theme for advancing the popularity of nationalizing the empire. By increasingly shaping the discussion of “national issues” in Saint Petersburg and foisting their opinions onto the pages of the publications of political parties, these experts about the otherness of the Polish regions contributed to making the market of opinions in the Russian Empire’s capital more provincial.<sup>10</sup> The reciprocal influence that forged opinion in the province and the metropolis shows the extent of interdependence between the periphery and the center.

Studying Russian rule in the Kingdom of Poland between 1864 and 1915 provides some insight into the processes of transformation that characterized the late tsardom. It is about more than describing Petersburg dominion in just another imperial province. Using the example of the Vistula Land, this book explores how imperial rule was received in the complicated, ever changing network of administrative apparatuses and practices. It explores the conceptual horizons of the actors, what they considered to be their task, and their concrete experiences, encounters, and conflicts on-site. It also explores the sustained effect that this power arrangement had on local developments and what they were worth within the framework of the empire in general. All this illustrates the heterogeneity of the Russian Empire, the complexity of its actors, its efforts at integration, and its destructive forces. In general, these kinds of conflicted communities reveal the true complexity of imperial rule in multiethnic empires.

THIS BOOK EXPLORES THE IMPERIAL ELITES OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE AND its most western province, the Kingdom of Poland. The focus is on the small, exclusive circle of the highest state officials who were part of the decision-making body in Petersburg and part of the local administration in the Vistula Land, and who shaped policy and how it was implemented. Above all, Warsaw’s governors-general were among those from generally higher nobility



who acted as officials in state administration and governmental authorities. Dominic Lieven has portrayed them as the leadership elite of the ancien régime and Dieter Geyer has aptly described them as the multinational power elite in public service who clung to the idea of preserving the unity of the empire.<sup>11</sup> This book, however, also includes the governors of the Polish provinces and other officials from local administrations, thus extending the circle of actors beyond the core elite of the autocratic court, as Richard Wortman once characterized them. I favor Brenda Meehan-Waters's understanding of the elite that considers the four highest degrees of rank as constitutive for belonging to the Russian Empire's elite.<sup>12</sup> These were the people who not only shaped the look of imperial rule but also significantly influenced the fundamental direction it took and the way it was carried out in the provinces.

This raises the question of what we mean by imperial rule. I will not make yet one more attempt to create a narrow definition for the multiform and variable structure of the empire. Instead, I would like to mention a few ideas from the many debates on empires that have been inspiring for this book. A few insights from new imperial history have opened new perspectives for exploring the Russian presence in the Kingdom of Poland. When we look at the relationship between the center of power in Petersburg and Poland at the periphery we neither find a clear hierarchical dichotomy of the metropolis versus the province nor see a clear colonial project, one that might involve the full Russification of the periphery. Instead, we find tight mutual relationships and hierarchies that could be renegotiated and changed. We find many different and competing notions of how to integrate the provinces into the empire and how those notions were penetrated by the central apparatuses. Here the debates over the "Polish question" accumulated content in the contacts and conflicts between the peripheral and the central actors.<sup>13</sup>

This sheds light on the formative dimension of imperial rule because the constellations of power and the processes of exchange in the conflict community described here shaped not only the social, economic, and political structures of the Vistula Land. They also left deep marks on the protagonists' understanding of themselves and the "others." Imperial practices of rule rarely worked the way their supporters had imagined they would. But their fundamental principles of inclusion and exclusion changed the parameters within which people interacted with one another and settled their disputes.

Thus, if we want to know something about the dynamic process of how groups ascribe attributes to themselves and to others, it is worth taking a closer look at the encounters and cultural communication of contemporaries, with all the productive misunderstandings involved. The much-quoted gaps could sometimes be highly significant; they were ambivalent zones of encounter where interaction began shifting existing concepts of one's own station. But in light of the antagonism between the bureaucracy and the population

in the Vistula Land, the spheres in which otherwise forbidden unorthodox interaction could take place, the forums where cultural differences could be negotiated outside of the otherwise tightknit hierarchies, were, indeed, very limited.<sup>14</sup> And yet, even in that kind of confrontational context, there were mutual cases of influence, the development of the ideas each group had of itself was reciprocal, and the conflict-laden encounters generated a common perception of the problems at hand—despite the differences in proposed ways of solving them. In a certain sense they agreed in thought, but reached no consensus. Even hostile, bitterly arguing protagonists referred to the same issue when it came to the “Polish question” because they were constantly exchanging their views on it.<sup>15</sup> Command over the bayonets in the army did not imply authority in the competition of worldviews. As we shall see with regard to the debates on nationalizing the empire, often conceptual initiatives came from the “colonized” peoples themselves. The contentious community at the periphery also often shaped how ambassadors from the center of power saw themselves. And they communicated this back to the public in the imperial capital.

This brings up another basic idea behind this book, namely, the ideas, concepts, and practices that often originated in the provinces and were then circulated throughout the empire via communication and transfer networks. To depict the history of the empire as one of interrelations, circulation, and rotation means surrendering a fixation on the center—a fixation that has long defined the writing of the history of tsardom. Particularly regarding the Kingdom of Poland, it has proved to be innovative to think of the province as one of “colonial modernity’s” fields of experimentation.<sup>16</sup> The potential is two-fold: first, the Vistula Land presented a laboratory for modern administrative practices that had a tendency toward interventionist state bureaucracy and often exceeded the administrative measures that the autocracy took within the inner regions of the empire. And as other European colonial empires also experienced, the practices, wealth of knowledge, and ideas established at the periphery often returned to the metropolis and had influence there. More recent research on the Habsburg monarchy has shown that these movements took place not only in European empires abroad but also within a continental land empire.<sup>17</sup>

Second and in contrast to the colonies of other European imperial powers), the Kingdom of Poland and particularly its urban center Warsaw were to a certain degree linked to pan-European developments. This was true of few other regions within the tsar’s empire. Warsaw was Russia’s new window to the West and many of the nineteenth-century transformations experienced by large European cities came to the Romanov Empire through that opening. “Colonial modernity” thus meant something different in the Vistula Land: the periphery became a bridgehead to the ways of Europe that had not lost their relevance as role models for the tsarist elites at the turn of the century. And

yet the debates that this inversion of the military relations of power triggered in cultural hierarchies indicated how heavily the contact zone of the Vistula Land competed with the many current ideas about modernity. At the fin de siècle the authority to interpret the imaginary “sole way” to European progress was anything but uncontroversial among state officials and the Russian public. In particular, the debate over the Polish idea of Latin Europe strengthened the position of those who wanted a Russian interpretation of civilization and a different road to development for the coming century. Some stylized themselves as being “antimodern.” Many shared a vague uneasiness about the ambiguities of a modern way of life and new visions for society. All these ideas were an expression of the great variety that at the time existed for conceptions of modernity.<sup>18</sup>

The dynamic character of the periphery was also noticeable in other areas. The escalation of violent measures that marked the last phase of the tsarist monarchy began in the peripheral regions of the Russian Empire. As was also the case in other large European empires, spaces in part susceptible to extreme violence first opened up far from the center of power. The intensity of armed and bloody struggles indirectly also increased the level of violence across the empire. To a certain degree this mirrors the paradigm of “colonial modernity” because the peripheral provinces were where the practices and logistics of “cleansing,” displacement, deportation, and concentration camps were developed. The periphery was where the categories used to separate specific sections of the population by ethnicity or race were developed and used to register individuals in these categories. Many of these practices of exclusion, repression, and destruction that came to mar Europe in the era of civil and world wars were first generated and tested in the border regions of empires.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, the dynamics of violence that emerged at the periphery were also a result of the weak presence of imperial authority. Recourse was often taken to the logic of massacre as a strategy for communicating authority in places very distant from the center. Especially where few representatives of the crown were visible, some groups found that burning villages was the most effective means of demonstrating who was in charge of discipline and punishment.<sup>20</sup> These state-managed acts of repression generally mirrored the aggressive acts of those who aimed to overthrow the regime. Assassinations carried out by revolutionary terrorist groups within the tsarist empire often took the form of massacres. A dead police officer at the roadside or a governor murdered in his carriage were signs of asymmetric warfare and revolution. In this respect, too, the empire’s periphery proved to be a place of particularly intense violence.<sup>21</sup> Often enough, in the borderlands these logics of violence mutually ignited one another in an escalating spiral of force that affected the experience and expectations of everyone involved. It was not rare for former front fighters from the periphery to return to the central metropolis and heighten

the level of conflict there. We will see this kind of dynamic at work when we discuss the revolution in the Vistula Land.

One more point must be mentioned about the concepts that provide the framework for this study. Despite all the skepticism raised in other research about seeing a strict dichotomy between the metropolis and the province, the term “colony” should be reserved for the overseas possessions of European empires. It is misleading to speak of the Kingdom of Poland as being a colony. Although the domineering proportions of the power apparatuses and the segregation of the imperial administrative elite may appear to suggest a colony-like arrangement, several things can be said against calling the Vistula Land a colony and Warsaw a colonial city. For one thing, in their depictions of themselves, the imperial actors in question never considered colonies a relevant factor. This was because, although the Russian Empire actually created a number of areas with special jurisdiction along its periphery, the autocrat’s claim to absolute rule and will to incorporate the frontiers into the empire ran contrary to the notion of protectorates existing there with varying degrees of dependency. The self-concept of Russian autocracy maintained that all territories of the empire were subordinated to the ruler in the same manner.<sup>22</sup>

This concept of imperial integration had far-reaching consequences for imposing imperial rule on the periphery. Although a lack of resources and staff weakened administrative structures, the center’s claim to the unity of the empire as one nation remained unquestioned. The period of the Great Reforms, at the latest, showed how Petersburg had begun dismantling the special status of the provinces and pressing for empire-wide standardization in administration and law. The unification project included the Kingdom of Poland. The tsar considered the Vistula Land an imperial province at the periphery, not independent external territory.

The concept of the colony also obscures the fact that in the partitioned Polish regions there was a considerable lack of clarity regarding the dominance relationship between the metropolis and the province. While the tsar’s army may have secured Petersburg’s military hegemony, even the imperial officials thought that in terms of economic and cultural developments, others took the lead. This explains why when it comes to the mission to civilize (a mission that is so characteristic of European colonialism), it is difficult to see how and why it would apply to the Polish provinces. All Russian imperial attempts to claim that Petersburg was pursuing a civilizing mission at its western periphery were met with antagonistic rejection by the Poles and their own plan whose strength lay not only in their own long tradition but also in the recourse they took to shared European values.<sup>23</sup>

In the face of Russian imperial hegemony and the demand that the kingdom be incorporated in the empire, Polish national identity, confidence, and justified autonomy drew on those shared values. The idea of a Polish nation

and upholding the memory of the country's long tradition posed a continual challenge to the rule in Petersburg. Thus, any study of the antagonism between Poland and the Russian Empire necessarily touches on the complex and conflict-laden relationship between national empires and the plans and aspirations of nations and nationalities. Multiethnic empires have rightly focused on the system-eroding potential of many competing nationalisms. They eventually undermined the legitimacy of monarchies and centralized authority and contributed to the demise of empires. The writing of national histories, however, even in recent times, tends to present the founding and victorious rise of nations as a teleological development. Most theories of nationalism tend to follow that dramaturgy. The ultimate triumph of nation-states over crumbling empires, however, should not lead us to depict the events of history as inevitable developments. We need to understand, for example, why, despite their fragility, empires lasted as long as they did, and even withstood the extreme burdens of the first years of war.<sup>24</sup>

But above all, we should not reduce empires to mere sites of the events leading toward nationalization that eventually let those empires fall apart.

We need to research and understand imperial rule as a context that had a considerable influence on the debate over national identities and on contemporary visions of how a nation should organize itself.<sup>25</sup> The underlying theme of this book is the mesh of imperial policy and the gradual nationalization of the empire in the era of nationalism. This explains my preference for a situational approach of the kind worked out by Aleksei Miller.<sup>26</sup> It takes a close look at exactly how imperial and national interests bore on one another in one part of the empire to expose the complex cast of actors and to reveal the origins of the notions of self and the other that formed within that relationship of reciprocal exchange. At the core of these observations we find joint communication, bitter controversy over the "Polish question," clashing and competing symbolizations for the empire and the nation, and numerous contradictory attempts to demarcate the two.<sup>27</sup> The representatives of political claims to power competed with and influenced one another.<sup>28</sup> The multiethnic and religiously conflict-ridden community in the Vistula Land shows this clearly.<sup>29</sup> From that fabric of relationships, the state's agents and their concepts and practices of imperial rule stand out as the major focus of this book. Their position of power was central to confrontations in the kingdom. And surprisingly, in contrast to other regions within the empire, the imperial elite in the Vistula Land have been barely researched. Much work has been done on the Baltic Sea provinces, the Caucasus, and the general governorates of Kiev and Vilnius, while with respect to the Kingdom of Poland there remains a need for studies on the scope of local decisions, on strategies of representation, and on the pressure on the imperial elite to enforce policies. We need to explore the complexity of the imperial elite, the antagonisms present within

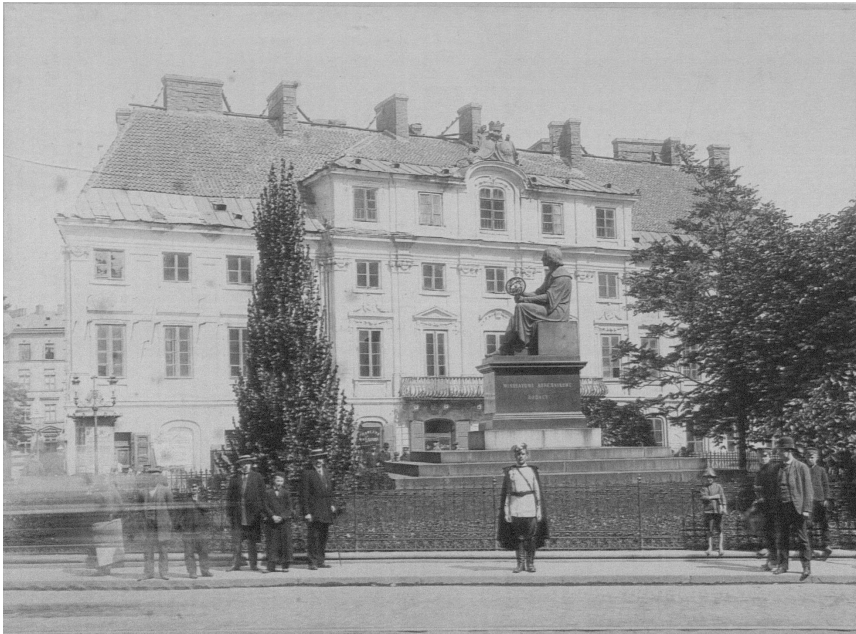


Figure 1. Imperial representatives and local society in front of the Nicolaus Copernicus Monument in Warsaw. Photograph by Antoni Gürtler (1910). Source: Olgierd Burdewicz, *Przedwczorajsza Warszawa: Fotografie ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* (Olszanica, 2006), 86.

that circle of people, and the conflict-laden communication they had with the local population.<sup>30</sup>

Many questions remain unanswered. What sort of arrangement were the representatives of Petersburg rule a part of? What institutions of imperial power did the tsar's authorities establish in the Kingdom of Poland after suppressing the Uprising of 1863–1864? Who were the crucial agents within that administrative system? What were their precise spheres of influence and how did the struggle over competencies that was so characteristic of tsardom emerge within those administrative apparatuses? And finally, what were the programmatic concepts, notions of the empire, and self-ascriptions that informed the actions of these officials? These are the main concerns that a history of the complex apparatus and the network of actors in Petersburg rule of the Vistula Land should explore.