

**Mikhail Kizilov**

**Between Leipzig and Vienna.**

**The Visit of Russian Emperor Alexander I to England in 1814 as Seen through the Eyes of Contemporaries<sup>1</sup>**

*Northern Sphinx: Alexander I of Russia and his visit to England*

Alexander I *Blagoslovennyi* ("The Blessed One," 1777-1825), called by one of his biographers "Northern Sphinx," indeed was one of the most enigmatic and unusual monarchs Russia ever had.<sup>2</sup> As early as 1793, when he was only 15 years old, he was married to Louise of Baden (a.k.a. Tsarina Elizaveta Alekseevna), who was then 14 years old. He succeeded his father, Paul (Pavel) I, after the latter's violent death in 1801. Being raised by his grandmother, Catherine II, in the liberal spirit of French enlighteners, he changed his views and became a reactionary around 1820/1821. He was equally "liberal" in his private life and had as many as nine illegal children with six different favourites. During his rule he took active part in many important European congresses and political alliances, including Congresses of Vienna (1815), Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen, 1818), and Laibach (1821). He was instrumental in defeat of Napoleon by joint European forces in 1813. Alexander's strange and sudden death in November 1825, which caused so many rumours in Russia and Europe,<sup>3</sup> had many repercussions, the Decembrists' anti-Tsarist uprising being perhaps the most important of them.

Alexander I was one of the key-figures in the history of the development of Anglo-Russian relations in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. He was perhaps the only Russian Emperor who spent such a comparatively long time (three weeks) in England.<sup>4</sup> His visit to England drew attention of many English litterateurs of the time,

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<sup>1</sup> For various reasons I was unable to publish this paper (please, refer to this paper as published online at [www.academia.com](http://www.academia.com)). The author would like to express his gratitude to Rodger Highfield (Oxford), for his advice concerning Alexander's stay in Oxford. A word of thanks also goes to Julian Reid, the archivist of the Merton College library, for his help in the author's work with archival documents.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Troyat, *Alexandre I<sup>er</sup>. Le sphinx du Nord* (Paris, 1980); cf. Francis Gribble, *Emperor and Mystic. The Life of Alexander I of Russia* (London, 1931); M.K. Dziewanowski, *Alexander I: Russia's Mysterious Tsar* (New York, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> One of the most consistent was the rumour that Alexander I in fact did not die, but spent the rest of his life in Siberia under the name of the monk, Fedor Kuzmich (see the false "memoirs" by Fedor Kuzmich in Michael Klimenko, *Notes of Alexander I, Emperor of Russia* (New York, 1989). Members of the Romanovs' dynasty, however, vigorously denied even the faintest possibility of the fact that the monk and Alexander I were the same persons (Velikii Kniaz' Nikolai Mikhailovich, *Imperator Alexander I. Opyt istoricheskogo issledovaniia* (Petrograd, 1914; reprint Moscow, 1999). In spite of the fact that this article is dedicated only to the stay of Alexander I in England in 1814, I would like to draw the attention of the scholarly audience to two nineteenth-century sources which provide interesting data regarding the cause for the Emperor's death (Gustaw Olizar, *Pamiętniki Gustawa Olizara* (Lwów, 1892), 181; James Webster, *Travels through the Crimea, Turkey, and Egypt; Performed during the Years 1825-1828: Including Particulars of the Last Illness and Death of the Emperor Alexander, and of the Russian Conspiracy in 1825*, vol. 2 (London, 1830), 333-339). These sources seem to have escaped the attention of previous students of Alexander's biography (e.g. Leonid I. Strakhovsky, "Alexander I's Death and Destiny," *American Slavic and East European Review* 4:1/2 (1945): 33-50).

<sup>4</sup> Peter the Great was the first Russian Tsar to visit England in person (see John Simmons, *Oxford's Russian Honorary Doctors* ([Oxford], 1996), 3-4; A.G. Cross, "Russian Students in Eighteenth-Century Oxford (1766-1775)," *Journal of European Studies* 5 (1975): 91). A few more members of the Romanovs' family visited Britain afterwards (Peter Hayden, "British Seats on Imperial Russian Tables," *Garden History* 13:1 (1985): 17-32).

including famous authors such as Thomas de Quincey and George Gordon Byron.<sup>5</sup> During his visit Alexander was unanimously proclaimed by English audience “the deliverer of the world.”<sup>6</sup> An official chronicle of his visit in England wrote: “Alexander, in particular, does not perhaps breathe a wish, that is not in some measure connected with the good of mankind [...] The homage he received here [i.e. in England] was directed more to the man than to the Sovereign, and his discriminating mind felt the tribute; whilst his heart perhaps acknowledged it as one of the most grateful rewards to which his services for the human race are entitled.”<sup>7</sup>

English people rushed to see the Emperor and crowded the streets of London. He was often called to appear on the balcony of his hotel amidst vociferous applauses and shouts.<sup>8</sup> Oxonian students and professors composed sycophantic speeches, poems and odes in English, Latin, and Greek in his honour.<sup>9</sup> The mayor of London called him “the Almighty Giver of all Victory” and the “august, illustrious, and magnanimous Ally of our revered and gracious Sovereign.”<sup>10</sup> People on the streets were shouting “Hosanna to Jehovah, Britain, and Alexander.”<sup>11</sup> London became completely “wild” during the stay of the illustrious visitors, and the “Emperor-hunting” was the only activity entertained by its populace.<sup>12</sup> A contemporary report mentioned that during the Emperor’s visit the cows were too frightened “by the constant huzzas” to provide milk, people could not get their clothes washed, engagements were broken and the general confusion “beggared all descriptions”.<sup>13</sup> Ladies often stopped his carriage “to ram bank-notes into the emperor’s hand to get them consecrated by his touch;” some even “threw themselves toute éplorée with nosegays at his feet” to obtain a kiss of Alexander’s hand.<sup>14</sup>

Alexander’s visit to England took place several months after the defeat of Napoleon in the Battle of Nations in Leipzig (16-19 October, 1813) and several months before the famous Congress of Vienna (September, 1814 to June, 1815). The Emperor’s stay in England has been briefly discussed in several earlier studies.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas de Quincey, “London Reminiscences,” in *The Collected Writings of Thomas de Quincey*, ed. David Masson, vol.3 (London, 1897), 63-67; George Gordon Byron, *The Age of Bronze* (London, 1823), 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> *Scenes of Russian Court Life, Being the Correspondence of Alexander I with His Sister Catherine*, ed. the Grand Duke Nicholas, transl. Henry Havelock (London, [n.d.]), 220.

<sup>7</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings of the Allied Sovereigns,” *Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 84:1 (1814): 691.

<sup>8</sup> “Otryvok iz vospominanii kniagini Lieven,” in Velikii Kniaz’ Nikolai Mikhailovich, *Perepiska Imperatora Aleksandra s sestroi Velikoi kniaginei Ekaterinoi Pavlovnoi* (Sankt Peterburg, 1910), 234-235; Mary Berry, *Extracts from the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry from the Year 1783 to 1852*, ed. Lady Theresa Lewis, vol. 3 (London, 1866), 26.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. *A Correct Account of the Visit of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, and His Illustrious Guests, to the University and City of Oxford, in June, 1814* (Oxford: N. Bliss, 1815), 35-48; Robert Montgomery, “Oxford, a Poem,” in *The Poetical Works of Robert Montgomery* (Oxford, 1831), 37-38.

<sup>10</sup> *An Account of the visit of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent and Their Imperial and Royal Majesties the Emperor of all the Russias and the King of Prussia, to the Corporation of London, in June 1814* (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1814), 81-86.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Stanley, *Before and after Waterloo. Letters from Edward Stanley, Sometime bishop of Norwich (1802; 1814; 1816)*, ed. Jane H. Adeane and Maud Grenfell (London, 1907), 84.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Frampton, *The Journal of Mary Frampton: From the Year 1779, Until the Year 1846*, ed. Harriot Georgiana Mundy (London, 1885), 214, 218.

<sup>13</sup> Frampton, *Journal*, 224-225.

<sup>14</sup> All these made Mary Mitford be “a little ashamed of my country, and still more of my sex” (Mary Russell Mitford, *The life of Mary Russell Mitford, Told by Herself in Letters to Her Friends*, ed. A.G.K. L’Estrange, vol.1 (London, 1870), 221).

<sup>15</sup> Konrad Waliszewski, *La Russie il y a cent ans. La règne d’Alexandre I<sup>er</sup>* (Paris, 1924); Gribble, *Emperor and Mystic*; Alan Palmer, *Tsar of War and Peace* (London, 1974); Troyat, *Alexandre I<sup>er</sup>*;

Nevertheless, none of these studies dwelled sufficiently on rich and varied memoir literature and eyewitness descriptions of Alexander's visit. Furthermore, none of previous students of this problem managed to outline the exact itinerary of Alexander's stay in England and describe main events that happened during his visit. This article fills in this lacuna in the biography of Russia's most enigmatic Tsar largely from the standpoint of contemporary accounts and memoir literature of the first half of the nineteenth century. I also outline a day-to-day itinerary of Alexander's stay in the country. The article introduces several little known published sources as well as archival, epigraphic and illustrative materials discovered by the author in British libraries and archives.

Generally speaking, narrative sources pertaining to the Tsar's visit are twofold. Official printed sources represent Alexander's visit as that of ideal friendship and mutual understanding between him and British public. Alexander and his sister, Ekaterina Pavlovna of Oldenburg, their behaviour and demeanours, are characterized there only by superlative epithets. They barely mention contacts of the Russian visitors with members of the opposition and other "undesirable" circumstances of this type. Unofficial sources (private diaries, memoirs and correspondence), however, portray us a completely different picture. They do not hesitate to describe in detail numerous conflicts, misunderstandings, and open hostility which arouse between the Tsar and Grand Duchess on one hand, and Prince Regent and British official circles, on the other. Only a careful and comprehensive analysis of both types of sources allows one to restore the general picture, circumstances and outcome of the Emperor's visit to England in 1814.

*Grand Duchess, Prince Regent, and the Emperor: misunderstandings begin*

Ekaterina Pavlovna (1788-1819), Grand Duchess of Oldenburg, Alexander's sister, was one of the figures responsible for subsequent worsening of Russo-English relations. Ekaterina Pavlovna arrived in England about two months before Alexander. While in England she was still mourning the death of her husband, Peter-Friedrich of Oldenburg. Quite a pretty person, during her visit she suffered from nervous attacks and could not tolerate loud music and singing. Mary Berry found Ekaterina Pavlovna to be "very dignified and very gracious." She also mentioned the fact that the Duchess possessed a good command of English.<sup>16</sup> A detailed characterization of the Duchess has been left by Edward Stanley: "She is very little, and there is a strong expression of intelligence, vivacity, and youthful, unsophisticated animation in her countenance [...] She asks few questions, but those very pertinent. She is impatient at being detained long over anything, but anxious to silence those who would hence infer that she runs over everything superficially, without gaining or retaining real knowledge."<sup>17</sup> The diary by Countess Lieven characterizes Ekaterina as a very energetic and ambitious person who "never relinquished her commanding tone."<sup>18</sup> Lady Shelley,

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M.K. Dziewanowski, *Alexander I*; Janet Hartley, *Alexander I* (London, 1994), 126-128; S.K. Romaniuk, *Russkii London* (Moscow: Astrel', 2009), 39-46. Especially important is the article by Janet Hartley who analysed Alexander's visit to England largely from the standpoint of its diplomatic and commercial significance (Janet Hartley, "'It is the Festival of the Crown and Sceptres': The Diplomatic, Commercial and Domestic Significance of the Visit of Alexander I to England in 1814," *Slavonic and East European Review* 73: 2 (1995): 246-68).

<sup>16</sup> Berry remarked "She had spoken English, and very English" (Berry, *Extracts*, 22).

<sup>17</sup> Stanley, *Before and after Waterloo*, 90-91.

<sup>18</sup> "Otryvok," 228. Countess and later, Princess, Dorothea von Lieven (Russian: *Daria Khristoforovna Liven*, née Benckendorff (1785-1857)), was wife of Prince Khristofor Andreevich Lieven, Russian ambassador to England. She has often been called "the first Russian woman-diplomat." She was a

who initially found Grand Duchess rather charming, later changed her opinion under the influence of the Duchess' arrogant behaviour.<sup>19</sup> All these details are highly important in order to understand the reasons for her casual behaviour (combined with open hostility) with regard to Prince Regent.

The Duchess arrived in England on 31 March 1814.<sup>20</sup> Countess Lieven prepared for Ekaterina Pavlovna an apartment in Pulteney Hotel on Piccadilly. One of Alexander's biographers supposed that the Duchess was dispatched by Alexander to England with the hope that her charms and graces would win the sympathy of the Court, and first of all, of the Regent himself.<sup>21</sup> Alas, the effect was to the opposite. Her very first rendezvous with Prince Regent was a disaster. In spite of the fact that the Regent arrived in time, the Russian Duchess still was only half way through her *toilette*. Eventually, the Regent and the Duchess spent only 15 minutes *tête-à-tête* in the Duchess' room and parted with rather unsatisfied expressions on their faces. The Prince remarked to Countess Lieven *en passant*: "Your Grand Duchess is not pretty." Ekaterina confessed to the Countess: "Your Prince has bad manners."<sup>22</sup>

Their next official meeting, which took place in Carlton House, was even more disastrous. Prince Regent started making jokes about her mourning while Ekaterina Pavlovna ordered music to be stopped on the account of her nervous malady. According to Countess Lieven, from this moment on Grand Duchess and Prince Regent started hating each other.<sup>23</sup> This feeling was mutual and lasted until the end of Ekaterina's stay in England. Furthermore, Ekaterina transmitted this sentiment to her royal brother, Emperor Alexander, upon the latter's arrival. In most of her epistles from England Ekaterina Pavlovna spoke with derision about Prince Regent – and even sent a caricature of him to Alexander.<sup>24</sup> Thus, there is no doubt that even before the arrival Alexander already had a hostile preconception about the Regent. According to many sources, Ekaterina Pavlovna continued to deliberately ignore Prince Regent and his closest associates. Moreover, she secured friendship exclusively with members of the opposition, especially with Princess Charlotte of Wales (1796-1817).<sup>25</sup> At the dinner at Lord Liverpool Grand Duchess exasperated Prince Regent by her sarcastic

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trendsetter in English society of that time and her London salon was one of the most popular salons in England's capital; it was apparently she who introduced waltz to London aristocratic circles. She was engaged in a relationship with a number of outstanding politicians of that time including Prince Regent, Metternich, Duke of Wellington and many others. She used her contacts to procure secret information. The French original of her London diary was published only once ("Otryvok," 225-246; for English translation, see "Extract from the Memoirs of Princess Lieven," in *Scenes of Russian Court Life, Being the Correspondence of Alexander I with His Sister Catherine*, ed. the Grand Duke Nicholas, transl. Henry Havelock (London, [n.d.]), 265-291). I provide quotes from Lieven's diary in my translation into English. For more information about her biography, see *The Unpublished Diary and Political Sketches of Princess Lieven together with some of her Letters*, ed. Harold Temperley (London, 1925); John Charmley, *The Princess and the Politicians: Sex, Intrigue and Diplomacy, 1812-1840* (London, 2005); Judith Lissauer Cromwell, *Dorothea Lieven: a Russian Princess in London and Paris, 1785-1857* (London, 2006); Natalia Tan'shina, "Doroteia, sestra Benkendorfa," *Rodina* 10 (2007).

<sup>19</sup> She also provided other personal observations important for those interested in the personality of Grand Duchess of Oldenburg (Frances Shelley, *The Diary of Frances, Lady Shelley, 1787-1817*, ed. Richard Edgumbe, vol.1 (London, 1912), 60-63).

<sup>20</sup> Berry, *Extracts*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Gribble, *Emperor and Mystic*, 148-149.

<sup>22</sup> "Otryvok," 229.

<sup>23</sup> "Otryvok," 229.

<sup>24</sup> *Scenes*, 226.

<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, she left quite a sarcastic characterization of the Princess: "She looks like a boy, or rather, as a young rascal dressed as a girl... She is seductive, and it is a crime to have let her acquire such ways" (*Scenes*, 222).

remarks regarding his attitude towards Princess Charlotte to such extent that he loudly said to Countess Lieven: “This is intolerable.”<sup>26</sup> At the same time Ekaterina Pavlovna was involved in several romantic intrigues, one of which ended several months later by a marriage to her cousin, Crown Prince Wilhelm, later the King of Württemberg.<sup>27</sup>

In her letters written in April and May 1814 the Duchess many times suggested that Alexander come to England. Finally, on 6 June 1814 Alexander I of Russia together with the Prussian King disembarked in Dover. This was the second visit of Russian tsars to England, and the first of Prussian kings. On receiving the address from the inhabitants of Dover Alexander said an introductory phrase in English – but then switched to French which remained his main language of communication during the visit.<sup>28</sup> It seems, nevertheless, that Alexander could understand and speak English without particular difficulty.<sup>29</sup>

Next day both monarchs arrived in London. This is when the first troubles and misunderstandings began. Alexander, who was supposed to stay in St. James Palace, preferred... to stay with his sister in Pulteney hotel. This fact, when combined with the Regent’s animosity with regard to Ekaterina Pavlovna, thoroughly exasperated Prince Regent. This is why he never visited the Emperor at his place in the hotel. On 7 June Prince Regent was supposed to visit the Emperor in Pulteney. Crowds surrounding the hotel were getting thicker and thicker; hour passed after an hour, but Prince Regent still could not be seen. Four hours after the time of his supposed arrival, the Regent sent a message with Sir Benjamin Bloomfield saying that he was afraid to be insulted by the crowd and decided not to come. “What a confession and what a beginning for such a meeting!” – dramatically exclaims Countess Lieven in her memoirs. In her opinion, it was the fact that the Emperor decided not to live in his apartments in St. James palace that immediately evoked antipathy on the part of Prince Regent.<sup>30</sup>

Since these two seem to be central figures in the story of Russo-British relations in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, it is important to analyze the image of Alexander and Prince Regent as presented in the sources. The fact that the Tsar was so enthusiastically welcomed by English public thoroughly irritated Prince Regent. This is why the latter immediately perceived Alexander as his resolute and unequivocal rival.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Regent was very unpopular in England in those days and there indeed was a danger of his being insulted by the crowd saluting the Russian “Deliverer of Europe.” Countess Lieven informs that people were often hurling stones and mud in the direction of the Regent’s carriage.<sup>32</sup> Grand Duchess Ekaterina Pavlovna, who immediately and wholeheartedly disliked the Regent, left the following scathing notes about him: “The Regent, handsome as he is, is a man visibly used up by dissipation, and disgusting rather... with him and his brothers I have often had not only to get stiffly on my stiffs, but not to know what to do with my eyes and ears.”<sup>33</sup> Equally uncomplimentary characterization of the Regent was left by Countess

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<sup>26</sup> “Otryvok,” 243.

<sup>27</sup> “Otryvok,” 233-234.

<sup>28</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings,” 612.

<sup>29</sup> Etienne (Stephen) de Grellet, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours of Stephen Grellet*, ed. Benjamin Seebohm, vol. 1 (London, 1860), 315. A couple of days before his departure from England Alexander spoke English to the crew of a battleship in Portsmouth. The official chronicle found his command of the language to be “very intelligible” (“Diary of the Proceedings,” 689).

<sup>30</sup> “Otryvok,” 234-235.

<sup>31</sup> “Otryvok,” 237.

<sup>32</sup> “Otryvok,” 237.

<sup>33</sup> *Scenes*, 221.

Lieven: “There was nothing English about his character. His youth had been very stormy, his manners were very vicious, his tastes pompous, his habits idle.”<sup>34</sup>

Alexander’s image as portrayed by contemporary sources does not seem to be particularly eulogistic either. The sources normally agreed that the Emperor was quite a courteous and sympathetic young man, but then usually commented on his light- and even absentmindedness. Mary Berry described Alexander as a man with a “fine, tall, manly figure, with a clear complexion, and a good open countenance.” At the same time, however, she remarked that his face did not possess “remarkable intelligence.”<sup>35</sup> Lady Shelley found him shy, awkward, with a bad figure, and on top of that, “very deaf.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, she characterized him by such epithets as “a foolish, good-natured, dancing Dandy... a weak, vain coxcomb.”<sup>37</sup> Bishop Edward Stanley stated that “the Emperor looks like a gentleman but a country gentleman, not like an Emperor.”<sup>38</sup> Mary Mitford thought him to be “quite a bon vivant” with “fair complexions and round Tartar features.”<sup>39</sup>

Thomas de Quincey, who apparently saw the Emperor on the streets of London, left the following remark about his appearance: “It was a face wearing a northern fairness, and not perhaps unamiable in its expression; but it was overladen with flash, and expressed nothing at all; or, if anything, good humour, good nature, and considerable self-complacency.” The Emperor produced on him the impression of “blind and winning vanity.”<sup>40</sup> Some of Alexander’s remarks were repeated in English society of that time – but apparently, rather with irony than with admiration. For example, being asked whether he was not tired to dance until five or six in the morning, Alexander answered: “Oh, it is impossible to be fatigued when there are so many pretty things to be observed.” On another question he answered that the Englishmen were a nation of princes who lived in cottages.<sup>41</sup>

Alexander, who soon became aware of the weak position and unpopularity of Prince Regent, immediately accepted the same disdainful and cold approach towards the Regent that had earlier been accepted by his sister. He was cold and slightly derisive towards the Regent, polite with ministers, and friendly with members of the opposition. According to Metternich, he even asked one of them, Lord Grey, to prepare a project of organization of opposition in Russia.<sup>42</sup> He ironically and even derisively spoke about the Bourbons and the Regent both in public and in closer circles.<sup>43</sup> Apparently, being tricked by his sister’s casual treatment of the Regent, Alexander simply did not realize that fact that he was speaking not to a temporary administrator, but to the future ruler of one of the mightiest European powers. In spite of the fact that the Emperor was invited to numerous balls and soirées organized by

<sup>34</sup> “Otryvok,” 236.

<sup>35</sup> Berry, *Extracts*, 26-27.

<sup>36</sup> The fact that Alexander, his young age notwithstanding, was somewhat deaf is corroborated by other sources (“Otryvok,” 244; Klemens von Metternich, *Mémoires du Prince de Metternich*, ed. Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann, vol. 2 (Paris, 1959), 11).

<sup>37</sup> Shelley, *Diary*, 60, 62. Nevertheless, she considerably changed her opinion later in France. She found him to be a good interlocutor, true believer, and a statesman caring for his country (Shelley, *Diary*, 157-158). See the critical review of Shelley’s diary (“Lady Shelley; Her Diary, Exalting Her Own Vivacious Victories, the Record of a Gay and Varied Career,” *New York Times*, August 11, 1912).

<sup>38</sup> Stanley, *Before and after Waterloo*, 90.

<sup>39</sup> Mitford, *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford*, 215-216.

<sup>40</sup> de Quincey, “London Reminiscences,” 64.

<sup>41</sup> In original: *Ah, c’est impossible d’être fatigué quand il y a tant de belles choses à voir / Les Anglais étaient une nation de princes, qui vivaient dans des cabanes* (Shelley, *Diary*, 63).

<sup>42</sup> Metternich, *Mémoires*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> “Otryvok,” 245.

English aristocrats, he normally went only to those which were frequented by the members of Whig opposition. As a consequence, he was seldom invited to the Court and royal soirées, while the Regent stayed “worn out with fuss, fatigue and rage.”<sup>44</sup> One day, when the Emperor and the Regent were supposed to meet for a ride on Constitution Hill in Hyde Park, the Regent was an hour late. Several days later, however, the Emperor was two and a half hours late for a soirée in the Court. As an excuse he said that he visited Lord Grey – who was a prominent member of opposition.<sup>45</sup> Count and Countess Lieven, who in vain tried to improve the situation and make relations between the two rulers more acceptable, were forced to helplessly observe everyday conflicts and sword-play between the Emperor and Prince Regent. There is no doubt that the main role in this situation was played by the Grand Duchess who “completely and absolutely ruled her brother, the Emperor.”<sup>46</sup>

*London–Oxford–Portsmouth–Dover: misunderstandings continue*

Next day upon arrival, 8 June, having breakfasted by 8 in the morning, the Emperor could be seen together with his sister walking in Kensington garden. Afterwards he proceeded to view Westminster Hall, the Abbey, and the British Museum. In the evening he became personally acquainted with the Queen, visited the Queen’s palace and dined with the royal family at Carlton House.<sup>47</sup> According to Countess Lieven, the atmosphere of this dinner was more than cold and the Emperor even did not bother to address marquise de Hertford, who was the Regent’s mistress.<sup>48</sup> A few days later, during the ball at marquise de Cholmondeley’s place, marquise de Hertford tried to approach him again. The Emperor, however, found her too old and did not condescend to talk to her.<sup>49</sup> During the same soirée Alexander approached a “very fair and very dim”<sup>50</sup> Lady Sarah Bayley, who offered him... a flacon of eau de Cologne. By some misfortune the Lady poured the whole of the flacon straight on the Emperor’s handkerchief and caused some damage to his dress. The Emperor blushed (*rougit beaucoup*), but the whole affair passed unnoticed by everyone – apart from the observant eye of Countess Lieven.<sup>51</sup>

On 9 June the Emperor continued his tourist route. Between 7 and 8 in the morning he rode in Hyde Park in the company of Lord Yarmouth and Colonel Bloomfield, while in the afternoon, together with Duchess, proceeded through the Strand and City to the London Docks.<sup>52</sup> On 10 June all royal persons, including Alexander, his sister, Prussian King, Queen of England and other members of the royal family, arrived in Ascot to watch races. On 11 June royal visitors went to see the bank in Lothbury. For the visitor from Russia, where at that moment the bank system was still at the stage of its inception, this must have been quite an interesting experience to watch the fully-equipped and multifunctional system of an exemplary English bank. The same day in the evening the Emperor went to the Opera.<sup>53</sup> On 12 June Alexander and Ekaterina visited Princess Charlotte and spent about one and a

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Creevey, *The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of Thomas Creevey*, ed. Sir Herbert Maxwell (London, 1904), 197.

<sup>45</sup> “Otryvok,” 243.

<sup>46</sup> “Otryvok,” 241.

<sup>47</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings,” 613.

<sup>48</sup> “Otryvok,” 235-236.

<sup>49</sup> The Emperor said: *Elle est bien vieille* (“Otryvok,” 238-239).

<sup>50</sup> In original: *Très blanche et très bête*.

<sup>51</sup> “Otryvok,” 239.

<sup>52</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings,” 613-614.

<sup>53</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings,” 614-615.

half hour at her lodgings in Warwick house.<sup>54</sup> It is important to note that the official diary of Alexander's stay failed to mention this fact – apparently, because of tense relations between Prince Regent and Princess Charlotte. On June 13 the illustrious visitors embarked on 17 barges (!) to visit the New Warf and the Royal Arsenal. This trip, when taking into account all recent (and forthcoming) military actions, was apparently supposed to show the grandeur and importance of the English artillery – and English military forces in general.<sup>55</sup>

Royal visitors spent next three days on a trip to Oxford.<sup>56</sup> The trip was organized with the aim of giving honorary degrees of D.C.L. (Doctor of Common Law) to the most important figures instrumental in the defeat of Napoleon. Perhaps, it was this trip that received the most detailed attention in the press and sources of that time.<sup>57</sup> The leaders of the three important European countries – Russia, England, and Prussia – received lodgings in three adjacent Oxford colleges. Prussian King was lodged in Corpus Christi, Prince Regent – in Christ Church, while Alexander and his sister – in Merton. For his lodgings Alexander obtained one of the most prestigious rooms in the whole of Oxford, the “Queen’s Room” in Merton College. The room received its name after the Queen’s of England lodging there during the Civil War.<sup>58</sup> Glass-stained windows with the image of the Russian Imperial double-headed eagle and a lengthy inscription in Latin commenting on the Emperor’s visit to Merton were installed in the Queen’s room by the warden of Merton College, Peter Vaughan, soon after Alexander’s departure. In addition to this, there were a number of various material objects such as inscriptions, memorial plates, portraits and suchlike that were created to commemorate Alexander’s visit. They can now be seen not only in Merton, but also in Examination Schools<sup>59</sup> and other Oxford colleges.<sup>60</sup> In spite of the fact that the visit lasted for three days only, the Tsar and the Grand Duchess had enough time to visit the majority of the colleges, took part in a number of official gatherings and dinners. The Emperor also received his honorary degree of Doctor of Common Law in the Sheldonian. It is important to note that Grand Duchess again meddled into the

<sup>54</sup> *London Chronicle*, June 16-17, 1814.

<sup>55</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings,” 615-616.

<sup>56</sup> I intend to dedicate a separate article to the more detailed analysis of Alexander’s trip to Oxford.

<sup>57</sup> In 1814 Clarendon Press (later renamed to Oxford University Press) published a monumental volume recording the visit of Alexander I, Prince Regent of England and the Prussian King to Oxford (*An Account of the Visit of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent and Their Imperial and Royal Majesties the Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia to the University of Oxford in June MDCCCXIV* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1815)). This version of the account was apparently published in limited number of copies, mostly for the use of illustrious visitors. Two more variants, which were less pompous and less expensive, apparently were intended for the use of English audience. These leaflets contain essentially the same information with some slight variations; *nota bene*, the name of the Russian Emperor and King of Prussia is not present on a title page (*Authentic Account of the Visit of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent to the University of Oxford, June 14. MDCCCXIV* (Oxford: J. Cooke and J. Parker, 1815); *Correct Account of the Visit of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, and His Illustrious Guests, to the University and City of Oxford, in June, 1814* (Oxford: N. Bliss, 1815)). Cf. less official description of this visitation in *London Chronicle*, June 16-17, 1814.

<sup>58</sup> Concerning this room, see Geoffrey Haward Martin, John Roger Loxdale Highfield, *A History of Merton College, Oxford* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 204-205.

<sup>59</sup> Examination School houses a large portrait of Alexander which was painted by the French artist, François Gérard. It was donated to the School by Alexander himself (R. Lane Poole, *Catalogue of Portraits in the possession of the University, Colleges, City, and County of Oxford*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1912/1925), 144, no. 351).

<sup>60</sup> I publish some of the inscriptions in Mikhail Kizilov, “Russians in Oxford: a Short History,” in *Russian Oxford: A Collection of Articles in Honour of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Oxford University Russian Society*, ed. Denis Menshikov and Mikhail Kizilov (Oxford, 2009) (in press).



normal proceedings of the ceremony and demanded music to be ceased before the procession with those who were awarded the degree entered the Sheldonian.<sup>61</sup>

On June 15 Alexander and his sister visited Stowe and the palace of the Dukes of Marlborough in Blenheim. On the same day, after the ball in the Oxford Town Hall, Alexander left for a soirée in London. The circumstances of his return trip were quite unpleasant. Alexander and his sister travelled all the way from Oxford to London in an open carriage under the heavy rain and thunderstorm. Nevertheless, having arrived in London between 2 and 3 a.m., Alexander immediately left for a soirée organized by Lady Jersey. His hasty return from Oxford to attend Lady Jersey's soirée had been noticed even by the official account which modestly remarked that the Emperor "repaired with great expedition to the Countess of Jersey's festive meeting, where he remained till six."<sup>62</sup> Less official sources mention that he danced "scotch reel" until five.<sup>63</sup> The Emperor's conspicuous keenness to come to this event at such a late hour seems rather odd and can be explained only by the Emperor's marked interest in Lady Jersey. Lady Jersey was not only an attractive female, but also a member of opposition who openly hated Prince Regent. The Emperor apparently got acquainted with her during the ball at marquise de Hertford a few days before. During the ball the Emperor had a prolonged conversation with Lady Jersey and exchanged with her a few rather sarcastic remarks regarding Prince Regent.<sup>64</sup>

The story received continuation several days later, on the eve of the Emperor's departure for Portsmouth. As late as 1 a.m. the Emperor sent his cousin, Prince of Oldenburg, to Lady Jersey demanding her to leave the ball of Duke de Devonshire and come to his place to say farewell. The Lady was slightly worried about this late invitation, but could not refuse the Emperor. According to her report, she stayed with the Emperor until 3 a.m., but the only thing that he demanded from her was... kissing her hand. It may be questioned whether the Emperor's demands were so modest, but according to Lady Jersey, Grand Duchess also was present during this late meeting. This affair aroused many rumours in London.<sup>65</sup>

Let us, however, continue analysis of the Emperor's visit. Having returned from Lady Jersey's soirée in the morning on June 16, the Emperor have slept for four hours only<sup>66</sup> and already at 11.30 proceeded to St. Paul's Cathedral. There he witnessed "the annual assemblage of upwards of 6000 of the Charity children." At 3 p.m. Alexander and his sister viewed the New Mint, where the Emperor was presented with a gold medal with his portrait. In the evening Alexander visited Drury-lane theatre where he, together with the English public, sang "God save the King."<sup>67</sup> On June 17 the Emperor and his sister visited Military asylum, Chelsea and Greenwich hospitals. In the evening they went to a reception at Merchant Tailors' Hall which continued in Covent Garden theatre. On June 18 Russian royal visitors took part in the event organized by the Corporation of the City of London which occupied most of their day

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<sup>61</sup> "Diary of the Proceedings," 617.

<sup>62</sup> "Diary of the Proceedings," 684.

<sup>63</sup> "Otryvok," 244.

<sup>64</sup> "Otryvok," 244.

<sup>65</sup> "Otryvok," 245.

<sup>66</sup> Thus, during this visit the Emperor seemed to be absolutely healthy, cheerful and energetic young man who could refrain from sleep, dance the whole night long, drink alcohol, and without any difficulty wake up next day early in the morning. This state of affairs stands in a drastic difference to reports about his state of health about ten years after.

<sup>67</sup> "Diary of the Proceedings," 684-685.

and ended by a pompous dinner at Guildhall.<sup>68</sup> This and some other official dinners were marked by the Duchess' unusual demands which many found simply scandalous. At Guildhall, because of her nervous state, she could not tolerate music – and soon ordered music to be ceased. But what thoroughly irritated English public was the fact that she also forbade singing “God save the King” since it was also a kind of music. Only requests of Countess Lieven and receipt of an anonymous message forced her to allow the hymn to be sung.<sup>69</sup> In spite of the fact that only men were allowed to attend dinners at Sailors and Goldsmith Companies, Grand Duchess made a scandal and insisted on being invited.<sup>70</sup>

Next day, June 19 happened to be Sunday – which Alexander and his sister dedicated to spiritual matters. On that day they visited a “Russian private chapel in Welbeck-st.,”<sup>71</sup> went to a meeting of the Society of Friends in St. Martin's Lane, and received deputations from the Bible Society and from the Royal Humane Society. Alexander, who was a member of the Royal Humane Society “in consequence of having restored a Polish peasant, apparently dead by drowning,” was awarded the Diploma of the Society.<sup>72</sup>

Each of these visits had quite interesting historico-political consequences. Educated in the liberal spirit of French Enlightenment, Alexander tolerated not only mysticism and non-Orthodox varieties of Christianity, but also various less “desirable” sectarian movements such as the Karaites, Mennonites, Molokans, Subbotniki, Frankists, and even the Masons.<sup>73</sup> It was during his rule that various Catholic, Jesuit, and Protestant missionaries started carrying out active propaganda activity which was soon stopped by a new Russian Emperor, Nicholas I. Alexander's meeting with “the Society of Friends” (i.e. the Quakers) should be explained by his apparent interest in religious mysticism and pietism which culminated in his friendship with the famous mystic, Madame de Krüdener.<sup>74</sup> During this meeting Alexander got acquainted with two important Quaker missionaries, William Allen and Etienne (Stephen) de Grellet. On 21 June the Quaker leaders visited the Emperor at the Pulteney Hotel, exposed to him their religious views and donated some Quakers' books. Furthermore, the Emperor and Grand Duchess came to one of Quakers' meetings at Westminster meeting-house and later visited a Quaker couple on their way to Dover.<sup>75</sup> The

<sup>68</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings,” 685-687. For a most detailed official account see *An Account of the Visit of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent and Their Imperial and Royal Majesties the Emperor of all the Russias and the King of Prussia, to the Corporation of London, in June 1814* (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1814; contains the list of present persons; speech of the Mayor of London; Alexander's answer; an engraving depicting all those present during the event).

<sup>69</sup> “Otryvok,” 242-243.

<sup>70</sup> Waliszewski, *La Russie il y a cent ans*, 263-264.

<sup>71</sup> Apparently, this chapel functioned as a house of prayer for a small community of Russian diplomats and students who lived or resided in England at that time.

<sup>72</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings,” 687.

<sup>73</sup> Mikhail Kizilov, “Tolerantnost', mistitsizm i evreiskie religioznye sekty v epokhu Aleksandra I,” *Rossiiskaia Istoriia* (2009) (in press).

<sup>74</sup> Baroness Beata Julia Barbara Juliane von Krüdener (1764-1824) was a mystic author who seriously influenced Alexander's political and ideological views. According to some sources, it was she that suggested the Emperor establish *la Sainte Alliance*. She fell out of his favour ca. 1821. The rumour says that it was after visiting Baroness' grave in Karasubazar (the Crimea) in 1825 that the Emperor became seriously ill (L. Kolli, “Mogila baronessy Kriudener v Krymu,” *Izvestiia Tavricheskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Komissii* 48 (1912): 212-221; cf. Charles Eynard, *Vie de Madame de Krudener*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1849), 381-392; Ford Clarence, *The Life and Letters of Madame de Krudener* (London, 1893), 320-321).

<sup>75</sup> This is according to the memoirs of one Quaker leader (Grellet, *Memoirs*, 313-317; cf. a slightly abridged variant: idem, *A Concise Memoir of the Remarkable Evangelist, Etienne de Grellet*.

Emperor's contact with Allen and Grellet continued several years later when these missionaries went on a trip to Russia and had another interview with Alexander, this time in St. Petersburg, in 1819.<sup>76</sup> His meeting with the deputation from the Bible Society also had long-term consequences. In September 1814 British and Foreign Bible society opened its branch in St. Petersburg where it was active until 1826.<sup>77</sup>

20 June was largely occupied by the viewing different ranks of the English military detachments marching in Hyde Park. On 21 June Prince Regent, Alexander, and King of Prussia went to White's fête where they relaxed in the company of "the most handsome women ever seen in this country." It seems that Alexander, a great devotee of dancing and flirting, enjoyed this event more than the other. According to the official chronicle of the events, he remained "on the light fantastic toe" until 5 in the morning.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, next morning<sup>79</sup> Alexander had a half-hour meeting with Scottish politician and scientist John Sinclair (1754-1835) and discussed with him agricultural issues and Scottish statistical accounts.<sup>80</sup>

June 22 was the time for Alexander to leave the capital of Britain. The Emperor and his sister left London for Portsmouth in an open carriage and *en passant* viewed the Tower and London Bridge.<sup>81</sup> Having arrived in Portsmouth in the evening on 22 June, royal visitors spent the next day in visiting this base of English fleet. While examining one of the ships, Alexander descended to the place where the crew were receiving their allowance and asked them about the proportion between water and rum in the allowance. Being told that the proportion of water was six to one, the Tsar observed that "it would be no worse for being stronger" – and drank the usual mariner's allowance. A smaller quantity of allowance was drunk by the Grand Duchess.<sup>82</sup> On June 24 the Emperor sailed together with the Duke of Wellington on the board of the "Impregnable." On June 25 the Emperor and Grand Duchess left Portsmouth for Petworth and on June 26 finally reached their final destination, the port of Dover. According to Edward Nares, the illustrious visitors had been by mistake expected a day before. Nevertheless, the whole town was soon illuminated again: "Soldiers lined the street from one end of the town to the other. The Emperor himself was in an open carriage of the Prince Regent, accompanied only by his Sister the Grand Duchess of Oldenburgh, and though the weather was bad, and the night so far advanced, he condescended to set with his hat off through the whole town, visible to every inch by the light of the candles and lamps."<sup>83</sup> According to the official chronicle,

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*Concluding with a Full Account of His Interview with the Emperor Alexander I. of Russia, in the Year 1814, Extracted from the Work of Benjamin Seebohm, by Mrs. T. G. Tyndale* (Oxford, 1877), 120-125). For more information, see Richenda Scott, *Quakers in Russia* (London, 1964).

<sup>76</sup> After this the Quaker missionaries visited Southern Russia and the Crimea (Grellet, *Memoirs*, 409-411; idem, *Concise Memoir*, 151-154).

<sup>77</sup> See more in Ebenezer Henderson, *Biblical Researches and Travels in Russia* (London, 1826); Steven Batalden, "Musul'manskii i evreiskii voprosy v Rossii epokhi Aleksandra I glazami shotlandskogo bibleista i puteshestvennika," *Voprosy istorii* 5 (2004): 46-63. The Society was accused of undermining the authority of Russian Orthodox Church (which in fact it did) and was dissolved by Nicholas I in 1826.

<sup>78</sup> "Diary of the Proceedings," 688.

<sup>79</sup> Sinclair's diary informs that the meeting took place on 21 June. This, however, seems to be a mistake since Sinclair says that he met the Emperor "in the morning after the grand ball at White's", i.e. on 22 June (John Sinclair, *Correspondence of the Right Honorable Sir John Sinclair, Bart.*, vol. 1 (London, 1831), 14.

<sup>80</sup> Sinclair, *Correspondence*, 14-16.

<sup>81</sup> "Diary of the Proceedings," 688.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 689.

<sup>83</sup> See the manuscript of Edward Nares's diary in Merton College Library, call no. E. 2. 42, p. 172-174.

on 27 June, during the embarkation on a boat, the Emperor “was moved even to tears.” Alexander left England at half past six and arrived in Calais at seven next morning.<sup>84</sup>

*Alexander’s visit to England: a conclusion*

What were the main consequences of Alexander’s three-week stay in England? The Emperor apparently had a good time, visited a number of England’s tourist attractions, examined banks, hospitals, military institutions, met beautiful women, received an honorary degree at Oxford, and attended numerous balls and soirées. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated by Janet Hartley on the basis of archival documentation, discussions between Russian and British ministers during Alexander’s visit laid the basis for a financial and commercial agreement between Russia and Britain.<sup>85</sup> It does not seem, however, that the things that the Emperor saw in England induced him to change anything in Russia’s rather backward administrative and military system. Nevertheless, Alexander’s acquaintance with the Quakers and British Bible Society resulted in further spread of non-Orthodox Christian missionaries in Russia.<sup>86</sup>

The most important consequences of his stay were undoubtedly political ones. In spite of the opinion of Countess Lieven that Alexander’s visit originally “did not have any political aim,” there is no doubt that it considerably influenced Anglo-Russian relations in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Largely under the influence of his irresponsible and ambitious sister who did not care too much about Russia’s diplomatic policy, the Emperor managed to spoil his positive image of the “deliverer of Europe” by his highly casual and arrogant behaviour with regard to the royal family, British ministers, aristocrats and public. He was especially arrogant with the Regent whom he treated “as a sort of first magistrate, without any of the attributes of a king.”<sup>87</sup> The whole of the Emperor’s stay in England was satiated with numerous little conflicts and clashes with the Regent and his immediate entourage. The Regent, who himself was not particularly tolerant and patient person, in his turn, took a most hostile and aggressive stand with regard to the Emperor.

However, it was not only the Regent and his entourage that were scandalized by the Emperor’s behaviour. It seems that all strata of English public from ministers to ordinary observers were highly irritated as a result of his visit. To give an example, when Alexander left England, Thomas Creevey, an important politician, in his private documents characterized Alexander as “a vain, silly fellow” and even “a damned fool.”<sup>88</sup> One of the leaders of the opposition, Lord Grey, mentioned the Emperor’s “vulgar manners” and bad influence of his sister upon him.<sup>89</sup> Ministers Castlereagh and Liverpool seemed to be rather shocked by Alexander and his sister’s escapades and even stopped hiding their anger.<sup>90</sup> Not only high-ranking politicians, but also members of the British public were irritated by Russian visitors and alarmed by their contacts with the opposition: “one cannot help feeling afraid that something unpleasant may arise, the Opposition are seemingly so much favoured by the

<sup>84</sup> “Diary of the Proceedings,” 691.

<sup>85</sup> Hartley, “It is the Festival,” 268.

<sup>86</sup> According to Hartley, ironically, it was the meeting with “uninfluential Quakers” that produced the strongest impression on the Emperor during his stay in England (Hartley, “It is the Festival,” 268). One can argue, however, that we lack sufficient source evidence to this effect.

<sup>87</sup> Shelley, *Diary*, 158.

<sup>88</sup> Creevey, *Creevey Papers*, 195-196.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.

<sup>90</sup> E.g. the case when Lord Liverpool himself had to teach the Duchess manners after the dinner at Guildhall. According to Countess Lieven, from that moment on the English ministers “no longer concealed their anger against the Duchess” (“Otryvok,” 243).

Emperor... I sincerely wish that they were gone.”<sup>91</sup> To give another example of the negative portrayal of Alexander one can quote George Gordon Byron, who derisively called the Emperor “the coxcomb Czar, the autocrat of waltzes and of war.” He also wrote:

As eager for a plaudit as a realm,  
And just as fit for flirting as the helm;  
A Calmuck beauty with a Cossack wit  
And generous spirit,  
when ‘tis not frost-bit.<sup>92</sup>

To sum up, the public disapproval of Alexander’s behaviour during his visit was practically unanimous. It seems that it was only a few months later, in France, that Alexander realized what sort of grave error he committed by insulting British public.<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately, it was too late. The consequences “were not long in following, and they were lamentable.”<sup>94</sup> Further relations between Russian and English diplomatic courts were absolutely cold and hostile. This hostility culminated during the Congress of Vienna in 1815 when Britain, Austria, and France signed the alliance of mutual assistance that pledged to restrain Prussia’s and Russia’s political ambitions. In spite of the fact that it was not Alexander’s and his sister’s behaviour in England that became the only reason for signing this treaty, there is no doubt that their visit to England played a significant role in subsequent worsening of Russian-British relations.<sup>95</sup>

### Illustrations:

- 1) Portrait of Alexander I
- 2) Portrait of Ekaterina Pavlovna, Grand Duchess of Oldenburg
- 3) The view of Merton College which housed the Russian royal visitors in 1814
- 4) “Longitude and Latitude of St. Petersburg” (cartoon by George Cruickshank, 1813). The way English public perceived Russian diplomats, Prince P. Kozlovskii and Countess Lieven.

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<sup>91</sup> Frampton, *Journal*, 227-228.

<sup>92</sup> George Gordon Byron, *The Age of Bronze* (London, 1823), 22-23.

<sup>93</sup> Shelley, *Diary*, 158.

<sup>94</sup> *Scenes*, 11.

<sup>95</sup> Here I would like to disagree with Janet Hartley, who supposed that the results of Alexander’s English tour were “less decisive in European diplomacy than the account by Princess [*sic*] Lieven implied” (Hartley, “It is the Festival,” 249). In my opinion, Hartley slightly underestimated in her otherwise excellent article the value of Lieven’s diary and other eyewitness accounts from the first quarter of the nineteenth century (e.g. she relied on a rather outdated English translation of Lieven’s diary and not on the French original). As has been demonstrated by the analysis of memoir literature carried out in my article, it was not only Prince Regent who was offended by Alexander’s behaviour. Practically all other members of the royal family, most important British politicians and even public masses were scandalized by Alexander and his sister’s attitude. Undoubtedly, this fact, when combined with other factors, led to growing hostility in British-Russian diplomatic relations after 1814.