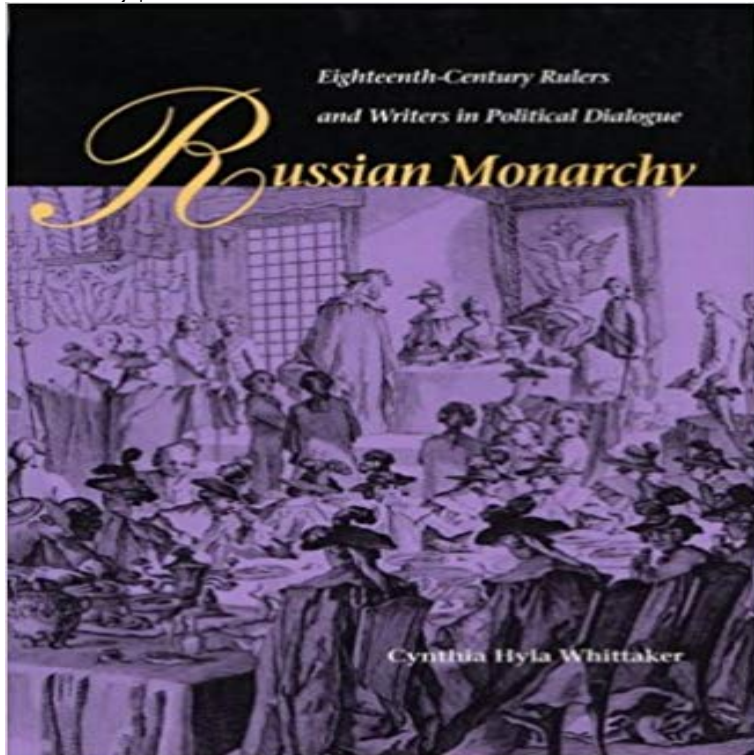


Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue



Russian monarchs have long been regarded as majestic and despotic, ruling over mute and servile subjects in a vast empire isolated from the rest of the European continent. Challenging this view, Whittaker uncovers a political dialogue about the nature and limitations of monarchy in eighteenth-century Russian interchange that took place between rulers and writers under the influence of western and central European Enlightenment thinking. Roughly 250 authors participated in this public discourse on monarchical power, producing more than 500 publications and official pronouncements on monarchy. Beginning with Peter the Great, Russian rulers shifted the foundation for legitimacy from its religious underpinnings to a secular basis, as notions of a monarch's duty to reform began to replace divine right as the justification for absolute power. During the recurring crises of succession in the eighteenth century, monarchs sought further legitimacy and celebrated their election by the people (that is, key members of the elite). Writers, in turn, engaged rulers in public discussion via the printed word as they examined monarchical legitimacy and debated its feasibility with sophisticated arguments drawn from the arsenal of classical and current European ideas. Intended for the eyes of both the sovereign and the educated elite, publications in nearly every genre contained didactic passages explaining proper conduct for a monarch. Writers also warned of the dire consequences awaiting the ruler who did not abide by these accepted standards of behavior; and in the course of the century, three monarchs lost the throne. *Russian Monarchy* shows how this eighteenth-century dialogue between elites and their monarchs revolutionized the concept of rule and gave writers a role in shaping their political environment.

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