

All the Empire's Men: Monuments in the Romanov Empire, 1855–1917

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Public monuments appeared in the Romanov Empire as a result of a conceptual transfer from Western Europe in the early nineteenth century (Eremeeva 2015). Inspired by Richard Wortman, historians of the empire have studied projects of monumental commemoration as instruments through which imperial authority was produced in urban space (Wortman 1995–2000). For example, Theodore Weeks's study of the 1898 Mikhail Murav'ev monument in Vilnius demonstrates how a subscription-funded statue was used to advance Russian-nationalist claims to a predominantly Jewish and Polish city, while generating Polish, Lithuanian, Jewish, and socialist protests (Weeks 1999). Hubertus Jahn's account of the Mikhail Vorontsov monument in Tbilisi foregrounds the practical and material work of imperial commemoration that was not centrally coordinated and, to a large extent, was led by the initiative of individual people and also accommodated local interests (Jahn 2014). Conversely, the 1903 unveiling of Ivan Kotliarevsky monument in Poltava shows how a legal monument and symbol of permissible Little Russian patriotism could be used to assemble and enact a Ukrainian community spanning the Romanov and Habsburg empires (Kotenko 2026: 192–97).

The workshop invites participants to build on these previous studies by discussing not only what monuments represented, but the process of making imperial power and its limits visible in imperial borderlands through funding, design, production, emplacement, inauguration, maintenance, and contestation.

We are especially interested in how monuments were used to mobilise various forms of public participation: how inhabitants across the empire were invited – or compelled – to contribute donations to fund commemorative projects in both their own and distant cities; how monuments were presented as collective possessions; and how concepts of “national patrimony” and the co-ownership of “public things” (Pravilova 2014: 131) shaped their political and cultural meanings.

Contributors are encouraged to address, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- How were public subscriptions and fundraising campaigns to build monuments organised? How were appeals disseminated, what arguments were made to persuade people to donate, who contributed, and why? What were the necessary prerequisites for monumental projects not to fail and turn into unrealised “nonuments” (Benjamin 2024)?

- What forms of collaboration, negotiation, and conflict unfolded between local monument committees and voluntary associations, provincial and municipal institutions, and the central imperial government? To what extent was the process of building a monument the result of a participatory dialogue between the state and society (Eremeeva 2015: 15) or the result of top-down coercion and imposition?
- Which material forms did monuments take, who designed, and made them?
- How were monuments perceived in the public sphere, including unveiling ceremonies and their reception in the media, and how did this perception change throughout the nineteenth century?
- How were monuments or attempts to destroy them (Naumov 1998) used as tools of imperial, regional, and nationalist mobilisation, including projects that repurposed imperial careers or cultural figures for non-imperial national narratives?

Case studies: The workshop takes its title from the military commanders, governors, officials, and cultural figures selected for commemoration to promote the empire, and we welcome contributions related to any of the above. We are equally interested in monumental projects proposed by various groups that sought to challenge and undermine the empire in the long nineteenth century.

Outcome: Participants are expected to pre-circulate a paper of approximately 3–4,000 words, which will then be discussed during the workshop. The organisers plan to develop selected revised contributions into a peer-reviewed edited volume or a journal special issue.

Funding: The organisers will cover participants' accommodation and travel expenses.

Deadline: Please submit an abstract of 200 words (introducing a description of the topic and relation to the research questions of the workshop) together with a short CV to Anton Kotenko at anton.kotenko@ut.ee by **15 December 2026**. We will inform participants in early January.

Organisers: This workshop is being organised by members of the project "Empire of Solidarities: a Connected History of Private Charity Across a Decentred Romanov Empire, 1855–1914" and is supported by ERC grant (EMPSOLID grant no. 101162204).

🌐 **Project website:** <https://empsolid.ee/>

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