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Rectorship in the System of Higher Education in the 19th and early 20th centuries: The Case of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir

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Abstract

This paper explores the institution of rectorship through the example of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir in Kiev (1834–1917).

An analysis of the role and functions of rectors was conducted through the lens of the following three major models of the university: pre-classical (represented by the medieval university corporation), classical (the research university of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries), and post-classical (the mass university of the 20th and 21st centuries).

The analysis helped gain an insight into the key trends in the development of higher education in Ukraine and the Russian Empire as a whole. The findings revealed that there was a transformation in the functionality of the university rector from a mere appointee to a leader in the scholarly community enjoying a high level of public recognition.

A distinctive characteristic of rectorship in the Russian Empire was its dual status – (1) representing a given university's academic community and (2) representing the state's bureaucratic machine. The latter was associated with the need to maintain close touch with the local nobility and to secure the backing of the trustee of a given educational district and the nation's Minister of Public Education.

The institution of rectorship at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir was explored through the lens of the following key aspects: legal, organizational, social, and ethnic.

Keywords: rector, trustee, model of the university, classical university, education policy, higher education.

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1. Introduction

The post of Rector in universities in imperial Russia was nominally elective. A rector was the head of a university corporation, a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages and adopted in part from German universities. Unfortunately, the principle of electing rectors was breached all too often by educational district trustees and the Ministry of Public Education.

Thus, it can be asserted that there were objective barriers to the continuity of European elective practices in Russian universities. In large part, this was associated with the fact that in the Russian Empire the rector was part of the system of administrative power relations and was viewed as an element in the state's bureaucratic machine.

Consequently, the functionality of the rector in universities in the Russian Empire was different from that in Europe. Rectors in Europe enjoyed a set of specific political rights. They presided over corporate meetings and chaired meetings of the university court. The post of Rector was, for the most part, consensual from the standpoint of social and institutional candidacy acceptance and did not require outstanding scholarly achievements. Rectorship gradually evolved from an institution "performing the functions of the administrative body at a university to an institution performing the functions of the body of authority over it" (Andreev, Posohov, 2012: 295). A similar situation was observed in respect of imperial Russian universities. It is only by the end of the 19th century that the practice of using a candidate's scholarly achievements as the determining criterion when appointing a rector became universal in Russia.

It is to be noted that the institution of rectorship evolved depending on the model of the university. There are three such models: pre-classical, classical, and post-classical. The pre-classical model is represented by the medieval corporate university, the classical model (beginning in the early 19th century) – by the research university, and the post-classical model (beginning in the second half of the 20th century) – by the modern mass university (Andreev, Posohov, 2012: 7). The classical model of the university emerged in Germany and has to do with a transformation of universities as privileged corporations into the university of a new type. The operation of classical model universities, which were funded by the state, was based on the "unification of sciences" principle. It is based on this model that Moscow University was established in 1755, followed by the rest of the nation's imperial universities, with the system of Russian universities emerging as a result.

A change in the model of the university typically caused a change in the functions and role of the rector. Such changes were reflected in the shift from socially significant and institutional criteria for the choice of rectors in the pre-classical model of the university to scholarly and pedagogical criteria in the classical model. In large part, this was also facilitated by the narrowing of the rector's functions, which were now confined to regulating the educational process and scholarly activity.

In the realities of imperial Russian universities, rectorship retained rudiments of the pre-classical model – in Russia, alongside the scholarly component, of importance was also maintaining direct touch with the local nobility and the educational district trustee. All of the above attests to the rector's ambivalent status in imperial Russia – as an element in the state's bureaucratic machine and a leader in the scholarly community.

2. Materials and methods

In putting this work together, an analysis was conducted of various relevant sources and documents, which can be nominally divided into two major types. The first group, focused on the formation and evolution of the nation's university space, includes 'A Collection of Ordinances for the Ministry of Public Education', which contains a set of major regulatory documents dealing with this agency (Sbornik postanovlenij, 1864). This group also includes relevant government documents setting out the rules governing the operation of Russian imperial universities (Akt postanovleniya, 1802; Polnoe sobranie, 1830). Worthy of a separate mention are the Imperial Statutes of 1804, 1835, 1863, and 1884 (Tablica ustavov, 1901) and the constituting documents for the Imperial University of St. Vladimir specifically (Korotkyi, 1994). An analysis of these documents helped gain an insight into the role and functions of the university rector in the system of corporate culture within the nation's higher education sector and in the bureaucratic system of the Russian state.

The second group includes a set of relevant bibliographical publications containing information on teaching staff at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir (Ikonnikov, 1884;

Skopenko, 2006). A major source of information on the university's rectorate is general lists of officers from the Memorandum Books for Kiev Governorate (*Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1856-1915*). The use of these sources helped gain a valuable insight into the institution of rectorship at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir in terms of its legal, organizational, social, and ethnic characteristics.

The study's methodological basis is grounded in the principles of objectivity, historicism, and analytical integrity. Use was made of both general and special historical research methods, including the historical-analytical method, classification and categorization, historical-logical analysis, the chronological method, and the structural-systems method.

3. Discussion

To date there has been no dedicated research on the rectorate of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir. An analysis of the historiography of the subject revealed the absence of fundamental research works on this topic and a paucity of attempts to explore particular aspects of the development and activity of the institution of rectorship at the university in Kiev.

Articles, monographs, and collections of documents that come out now and then in conjunction with the anniversaries of the university and its rectors tend to offer only a partial insight into its rectorate (*Shul'gin, 1860; Narysy istorii, 2004; Narysy istorii, 2009; Zhmudskiy, 1959; Vladimirkij-Budanov, 1884*). In fact, many of the heads of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir have been long consigned to oblivion.

It is worth classifying the existing research on the subject into several thematic blocks. The first block includes research works by the actual rectors at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir. Many of these scholars and department professors left behind articles or monographs. While these fruits of their work give us only a faint idea of their input as a rector, they do provide us with insight into certain aspects of their activity.

The works in the second block are focused on the scholarly legacy of the university's rectors. The available research on, say, the jurists K.A. Nevolin and K.A. Mityukov and the economist N.K.P. von Bunge may be quite significant for conceptualizing the scholarly legacy of the university's rectorate. However, it appears to be little informative about their work in the actual office of the Rector.

There appears to be more value in the sources and materials comprising the third thematic block – obituaries. This material contains valuable facts about the life of the university's rectors and professors and can give us an idea of their contribution to the development of the university and the units there that they headed. We can subsume under this group some other documents and sources on the history of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir, like reminiscences by contemporaries (*Korotkiy, 1994*).

Worthy of a separate mention is the reference and encyclopedic literature containing information about university rectors as members of the scholarly class and a scholarly corporation and as members of the higher ranks in the Russian Empire (*Ikonnikov, 1884; Potyomkin, 2019*).

Certain aspects of the operation of the institution of rectorship in the Russian Empire can be traced in the context of the development of the country's higher education system (*Andreev, Posohov, 2012; Rossijskie universitety, 1998; Tomsinov, 2012*), the making and development of its bureaucratic system (*Posohov, 2017*), and the development of its system of university education in a European context (*Andreev, 2009; Dement'ev, 2016; Tomsinov, 2009*). Issues that are important for understanding the figure of the rector include legal support for their activity (*Chernyh, 2011*) and their relationships with other members of officialdom (*Zhukovskaya, 2009*).

The development of university education in Ukraine has been explored in a number of research works, some of which are focused on the organization of the educational process (*Lebid, Shevchenko, 2021a; Lebid, Shevchenko, 2021b*), some on relevant ethno-social and ethno-political processes and their influence on the system of education in Ukraine (*Tytskyi, 2010; Lebid, 2022*), and others on general trends in the development of the system of education in Ukraine in the period under review (*Siropolko, 2001*).

4. Results

Subsequent to the establishment of Kazan and Kharkov Imperial Universities in the early 19th century (1804 and 1805, respectively), there were plans to set up an imperial university in Kiev

as well. However, these plans materialized only a quarter of a century later. In 1833, Emperor Nicholas I approved a proposal brought in by the Minister of Public Education, Count S.S. Uvarov, and issued an edict establishing the Imperial University of St. Vladimir. The government brought forward a draft charter for the university and established its staffing structure.

In Ukraine, which was part of the Russian Empire, the Imperial University of St. Vladimir was the second institution of higher learning (after Imperial Kharkov University). Its establishment was in part a political decision on the part of the Russian government, which sought to counter Polish influence on the region's aristocracy and intelligentsia, with a focus on minimizing Polish cultural influence in the region and with a view to ultimately Russifying it (Tomsinov, 2012: LIV-LVI).

The university's first student admission, which enrolled 62 individuals, took place in late August 1834. Initially, the university only had one faculty – the Faculty of Philosophy, comprised of two departments (the Department of History and Philology and the Department of Physics and Mathematics). The faculty later split into two independent faculties – the Faculty of Law (1835) and the Faculty of Medicine (1841). The Imperial University of St. Vladimir operated with this structure up until 1917.

Note that when the university first opened its doors its staffing potential was quite modest – 17 instructors and 12 administrative staff.

The newly established university had a library (a stock of 34,587 volumes), a mineralogical laboratory (an inventory of 15,869 items), a zoological laboratory (an inventory of 12,399 items), a botanical garden (14,797 plant species and subspecies), a physics laboratory (an inventory of 264 items), a chemistry laboratory (540 pieces of equipment and consumable items), a mechanics laboratory (418 models and machines), and an arts laboratory (1,665 architectural drawings and an inventory of 400 items) (Patryliak, 2019).

The university's Faculty of Medicine was based on the Vilna Academy of Medicine and Surgery (some of its assets (zoological, physical, anatomical, and chemical) had been shipped to Kiev). Since the university did not have a building of its own as of yet, it had to rent spaces across the city.

The university moved into a building of its own (the “Red Building” at 60 Vladimirska Street) only in 1842. This was possible thanks to a contest for the best design of the university building, initiated by the Ministry of Public Education back in 1834. As a result, the size of the university's teaching staff increased from 20 to 37, with new instructors joining its ranks. All of this would facilitate Kiev's turning into the region's intellectual center.

Pursuant to the university's first charter, issued on December 25, 1833, the internal administration of the facility was to be managed by the Council under the immediate leadership of the Trustee of the Kiev Educational District. The Council was to be headed by the rector, who was to be elected by majority vote from among ordinary professors for a term of 2 years. The rector's duties were set out in the charter's Sections 24 through 26 (Korotkyi, 1994: 65-75)

The University Statute of 1835 only partially concretized and expanded the 1833 charter of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir, which, in a sense, typified the common university charter (Tablica ustavov, 1901). In essence, the University of St. Vladimir continued to operate within the framework of its first charter. It was not until June 1842 that a new version of the university's charter came out. The new charter expanded instructors' academic freedom (with the introduction of the institution of associate professorship) and restricted the right to elect rectors. The university was now comprised of the three faculties, the Council, and the Board (Sbornik postanovlenij, 1864: 228). The Rector, who was in charge of both the Council and the Board, was answerable to the Minister of Public Education via the Trustee of the Kiev Educational District.

While the University of St. Vladimir technically abided by the University Statute of 1835, its own charter of 1842 had some distinctive features. For instance, it had a regulatory provision whereby “the Council must elect two candidates for the post of Rector at the University”, with the Minister of Public Education then expressing his support in favor of one of them (Sbornik postanovlenij, 1864: 233).

Overall, the Statute of 1835 reduced the university's autonomy – it restricted the Council's authority to govern the university, eliminated the university court, and empowered the Minister of Public Education to appoint professors (Tablica ustavov, 1901).

The University Statute of 1863 is considered the most democratic of these statutes. And even this statute still let the Trustee wield virtually unlimited power over the university. Pursuant to

Chapter 4, the rector was a key figure in the university who was to be elected by the Council for a period of 4 years. Sections 28 through 36 set out the rector's duties (*Tablica ustavov, 1901*).

The University Statute of 1884 remained in force up until 1917, during which time it had undergone several revisions and modifications. It eliminated the elective principle in the university's self-government system, strengthened the Trustee's control over it, and bolstered the positions of the rector in its bureaucratic system. The rector was still not elected but appointed by the Minister of Public Education from among ordinary professors.

Over the entire imperial period of the existence of the University of St. Vladimir (1834–1917), it was headed by 15 rectors, who are as follows:

1. M.A. Maksimovich (Doctor of Slavic-Russian Philology (1834–1835));
2. V.F. Tsikh (Master of Language Arts (1835–1837));
3. K.A. Nevolin (Doctor of Law (1837–1843));
4. V.F. Fedorov (Doctor of Mathematical Sciences (1843–1847));
5. E.R. von Trautvetter (Doctor of Natural Sciences (1847–1859));
6. N.K.P. von Bunge (Doctor of Political Sciences (1859–1862; 1871–1875; 1878–1880));
7. N.D. Ivanishev (Doctor of Law (1862–1865));
8. K.A. Mityukov (Doctor of Law (March–September 1865));
9. A.P. Matveyev (Doctor of Medicine (1865–1871; 1875–1878));
10. K.M. Feofilaktov (Doctor of Natural Sciences (1880–1881));
11. I.I. Rakhmaninov (Doctor of Mathematical Sciences (1881–1883));
12. N.K. von Rennenkampff (Doctor of Law (1883–1890));
13. F.Ya. Fortinsky (Doctor of World History (1890–1902));
14. N.V. Bobretsky (Doctor of Zoology (1903–1905));
15. N.M. Tsitovich (Doctor of Political Economy and Statistics (1905–1917)).

It is worth examining the institution of rectorship at the University of St. Vladimir through the prism of the following key aspects of its operation: legal, organizational, social, and ethnic.

The first legal documents regulating the rector's powers in the Russian Empire were The Imperial University of Dorpat Establishment Act (1802) (*Akt postanovleniya, 1802*), Preliminary Procedures for Public Education (1803) (*Polnoe sobranie, 1830: 437*), and The Charter of Imperial Moscow University (1804) (*Tablica ustavov, 1901*). Subsequently, the exercise of the rector's powers would be governed by the University Statutes of 1835, 1863, and 1884.

Of interest is the way the rector interacted at the time with the educational district trustee, whose purview included control over the activity of an institution that was part of the district territorially. The trustee was one of the links in the hierarchical structure of the Ministry of Public Education, being immediately answerable to the Minister.

Pursuant to the Statute of 1804, which had a special focus on a university's autonomy, the trustee was to act as an intermediary between the Minister and the university. He was concerned with dealing with organizational (e.g., addressing the university's material needs) and staffing issues (presenting for approval Council-elected candidates for appointment as professors and members of the administration) and preparing financial reports. In addition, the Trustee was to deal with issues that were beyond the Council's purview (e.g., ratifying the university's financial expenditures in excess of 500 rubles). In essence, the rector's job boiled down to managing the day-to-day execution of directives.

Thus, during that period, the role of the educational district trustee mainly boiled down to informal control over the activity of teaching staff – the trustee's rights and obligations were not set out in the Statute in as detailed a manner as those of professors and instructors. Only the Statute of 1835 formalized one's rights and obligations in the 'rector-trustee' relationship system, incorporating the trustee into a university's structure as the highest-level officer in its administration.

Each Russian imperial university underwent a gradual transformation from a scholarly corporation to a centralized bureaucratic establishment. The rector was integrated into the bureaucratic model of management. Yet the post of Rector being an elective position contravened the nation's entrenched model of authority, with some educational district trustees even pushing for the government to discontinue the practice of electing rectors, as it "diminishes respect for one's superiors" (*Petrov, 2003: 135*).

What is more, the established principle of electing rectors was breached widely at the time. There were cases where the powers of “suitable” rectors remained in place even after the end of their term in office. On a petition of the educational district trustee, such rectors would be appointed for a new term. It was common to elect rectors based not on one’s qualifications and credentials but on one’s descent, family connections, closeness to the government, and social connections in town (Andreev, Posohov, 2012: 296). Over time, the practice of appointing rectors regardless of the Council’s recommendation became a fairly common one, resulting in changes in the degree of authority exercised by the rector (Andreev, Posohov, 2012: 308). Quite often, the final say in electing a rector was with the Ministry of Public Education.

The rector’s dual status was reflected not only in their relationship with the trustee but also in their combining of the duties of a member of a university’s scholarly corporation with those of a member of the centralized bureaucratic model of authority. The logic behind this differentiation in the status of the rector was determined by the hierarchical system of education in the Russian Empire. Within this system, universities administered control over inferior educational institutions such as gubernia and uyezd schools within a single educational district, and there were several such educational districts across the Russian Empire. It is natural, therefore, to consider universities as government institutions and the rector as a representative of centralized bureaucratic authority.

As regards the organizational aspects of rectors’ activity, of particular interest are the following themes: the sphere of one’s scholarly interests, one’s work experience gained prior to being appointed Rector, and the age composition of the rectorate in the Imperial University of St. Vladimir.

An analysis of the institution of rectorship in the Russian Empire revealed that, while a candidate’s specialty area did not matter much when electing or appointing rectors, most had a degree of Doctor of Law. On one hand, this was associated with the fact that during that period faculties of law (just like those of medicine) led the way in the size of both the teaching workforce and the student body. On the other hand, it was the result of the bureaucratization of university life (Posohov, 2017: 124).

Among the 15 rectors of the University of St. Vladimir, four had a degree of Doctor of Law and three had a degree in Natural Sciences. This reflected a national trend toward appointing to this post individuals with a high academic degree.

Pursuant to the period’s legislation, the post of Rector was to be held by ordinary professors exclusively. There was another noteworthy trend. Most university rectors had had extensive experience working in an executive position before being appointed or elected to this post. The primary focus in selecting a candidate was on the bureaucratic, organizational factor, as opposed to one’s scholarly background.

It is worth considering the following statistics for the University of St. Vladimir: 12 out of its 15 rectors had held an executive position prior to taking up office (eight had worked as a dean and four as a dean and then as a prorector (V.F. Tsikh, V.F. Fedorov, K.A. Mityukov, and A.P. Matveyev)). Of particular note is the case of K.A. Mityukov, who had worked as a rector for just a half-year but had had extensive experience working as a prorector (4 terms). In another case, prior to taking up the office of Rector, N.K. von Rennenkampff had served as Mayor of Kiev (1875–1879) and as Trustee of the Kiev Educational District (1886–1887, concurrently with being Rector).

Combining the office of Rector with scholarly activity would give some the opportunity for further career growth, in terms of both scholarly activity and public service. For instance, three of the rectors of the University of St. Vladimir were members of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences – M.A. Maksimovich and V.F. Fedorov were its corresponding members, and N.K.P. von Bunge was its honorary member. The latter also enjoyed a successful career in public service – he held the posts of Finance Minister (1881–1887) and Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers (1887–1895).

Of particular interest is the age of the university’s rectors at the time of assuming office. The youngest rectors (both in the University of St. Vladimir and in the national university system) were M.A. Maksimovich and V.F. Tsikh. At the time of assuming the office of Rector at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir, each was 30. K.A. Nevolin was 31. The institution’s oldest rectors were N.V. Bobretsky and K.M. Feofilaktov (60 and 62, respectively). The average age of the university’s rectors was 44.

The Imperial University of St. Vladimir was the alma mater of many of its rectors – five out of the 15. Another three were graduates of Moscow University. There were also among them graduates of Saint Petersburg and Dorpat Universities. There were no graduates of Imperial Kazan University among them.

In terms of ethnic background, seven of the rectors of the University of St. Vladimir were Ukrainians, six were ethnic Russians, and three were of German descent. Note that the University of St. Vladimir had been under considerable German influence. Instruction there was conducted mainly based on educational models used by German universities (Vladimirskij-Budanov, 1884; Dement'ev, 2016). Many of the professors employed in Kiev were Germans invited from the University of Dorpat. Some were Germans born in Kiev. Most of the German professors worked at the Faculty of Medicine.

In terms of social background, the overwhelming majority of the rectors of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir, nine, were of noble descent, three were descended from clergy, and one was descended from urban dwellers. Little is known about the social background of the rector V.F. Fedorov, except that he was born in Saint Petersburg and was brought up in an orphanage.

According to researcher S.I. Posokhov, the average length of service as a rector in the Russian Empire at the time was six years (Posokhov, 2017: 127). The figure for the Imperial University of St. Vladimir was 5.5 years, which overall matches the one arrived at by S.I. Posokhov. The way by a wide margin in this respect is led by E.R. von Trautvetter (1847–1859), F.Ya. Fortinsky (1890–1902), and N.M. Tsitovich (1905–1917), each of which held the office for 12 years. Note that N.M. Tsitovich was elected to the post four times for a term of three years. Of interest is the fact that, when the Provisional Government accepted his resignation in May 1917, he would continue in the capacity of Rector through to the start of the following school year, as no new officer had been appointed to the vacancy. However, the revolutionary events of 1917 would not let N.M. Tsitovich fulfill his potential as a rector in full. What is more, he would even not be let in the university building in September 1917. N.M. Tsitovich would later work as a department professor. Subsequently, the university went through three rectors within a half-year period. Finally, in April 1918 the post was filled by Dean of the Faculty of Law E.V. Spektorsky (1918–1919).

The reasons behind the inability of some rectors to serve out the entire term included health issues, death, and public resistance. Overall, the Imperial University of St. Vladimir had five such rectors in its history.

In terms of social status, the most common awards bestowed upon university rectors at the time were the Order of Saint Stanislas, the Order of Saint Vladimir, and the Order of Saint Anna (mainly 2nd and 3rd class). All of the rectors of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir were holders of one of these awards (Potyomkin, 2019). Over time, the number of rectors holding first-class awards would increase, which is indication of rectors being increasingly treated as top officials.

In terms of level in the Table of Ranks, three of the rectors of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir held the rank of state councilor, as many were an active state councilor, and seven were a privy councilor (Skopenko, 2006).

5. Conclusion

The institution of rectorship at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir in Kiev reflected the key trends in the development of this element in the university structure across the nation. On one hand, the establishment of this university helped boost Russian imperial influence in the region in terms of countering Polish influence there, with the rector acting in this respect as an important link in the hierarchical bureaucratic system. On the other hand, the emergence of this university was an additional attestation to the government remaining true to its policy of building a system of Russian universities, manifested in the establishment of the universities in Moscow, Dorpat, Vilna, Kazan, Kharkov, and Saint Petersburg earlier.

The Imperial University of St. Vladimir had all the qualities of a classical university. This is attested by its solid material base and robust talent pool, with the rector acting as a “patriarch” of the university’s values and traditions.

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