

УДК 94(477.74)

**HISTORIOGRAPHY OF FAVORITISM IN
THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN
EMPIRE AND UKRAINE IN THE MIDDLE
AND SECOND HALF OF THE XVIII CENTURY:
HISTORICAL DISCOURSE**

**ІСТОРИОГРАФІЯ ФАВОРИТИЗМУ В
ПОЛІТИЧНІЙ ІСТОРІЇ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ІМПЕРІЇ ТА
УКРАЇНИ В СЕРЕДИНІ ТА ДРУГІЙ ПОЛОВИНІ
XVIII СТ.: ІСТОРИЧНИЙ ДИСКУРС**

Shymko V. V.,

master, Faculty of Historic Education, National
Pedagogical Dragomanov University (Kyiv, Ukraine),
e-mail: v_shimko@ukr.net

Шимко В. В.,

магістр, Факультет історичної освіти,
Національний педагогічний університет
ім. М. П. Драгоманова (Київ, Україна),
e-mail: v_shimko@ukr.net

In the XVIII–XIX centuries, a unique situation is emerging – the construction of a career of dignitaries of the Russian Empire. During this period, the model «government–dignitary» prevails, based on the benefits of a representative of the government, which gradually passes over to the entire state–administrative structure «government–official». Traditions of favoritism create a unique type of person, which is simultaneously the object of state power and the subject that implements it. It was this factor that influenced the formation of modern bureaucracy as a whole. Today, the phenomenon of favoritism is comprehensively studied and is an actual topic for study in the modern plane. He is trying to understand and explain the representatives of various sciences: history, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, political science. Many issues related to favoritism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remained largely closed to the bulk of the population over a long period of time.

Keywords: favoritism, historiography, palace revolutions, Russian empire.

У XVIII – XIX століттях відбувається унікальна ситуація – побудова кар'єри сановників Російської імперії. У цей період переважає модель «влада–сановник», заснована на перевагах представника влади, що поступово переходить на всю державно–адміністративну структуру «влада–чиновник». Традиції фаворитизму створюють унікальний тип людини, який є одночасно об'єктом влади держави і суб'єктом, який її реалізує. Саме цей фактор вплинув на становлення сучасного чиновництва в цілому. Сьогодні феномен фаворитизму піддається всебічному вивченню та є актуальною темою для вивчення в сучасній площині. Його намагаються осмислити і пояснити представники різних наук: історії, психології, соціології, культурології, політології. Багато питань, пов'язаних з фаворитизмом XVIII – початку XIX століть впродовж тривалого проміжку часу залишилися закритими для основної маси.

Ключові слова: Фаворитизм, історіографія, палацові перевороти, Російська імперія.

(стаття друкується мовою оригіналу)

Favoritism, in the feudal states, is the patronage of the monarch or other high–ranking persons to their favorites, giving them high positions, titles, privileges. In Europe, favoritism has become widespread in the era of absolutism. Favoritism is characterized by the delegation of some (or even most) powers of a monarch to his favorite or to his protagonists. Favoritism has become most widespread in the absolute monarchy. The reason for favoritism lies in the intentions of the monarch to focus the supreme power in the hands of a very small group of people who often do not possess outstanding qualities, but who are personally devoted.

At the same time, favoritism did not necessarily have to do with the intimate relationships of a monarch

(or their spouse) with a favorite, as is often the case in contemporary stereotypes. So, Duke Buckingham could have been a favorite of Jacob I, but remained the second man in the country also by his son Charles. There was also no sexual component in the Spanish position of «the valid» (Duke of Lerma, Count–Duke de Olivares), whom the kings entrusted with state affairs due to personal inability and predisposition to piety, and in the status of the favorites of Peter I (Franz Lefort) or Charles XII (Georg Hertz).

In the 17th–18th centuries, favoritism became a completely everyday phenomenon in the life of society. In France, there was even the notion of «official favorite», who differed from everyone else by having virtually unlimited influence on the king. One of such favorites was, for example, Marquis de Pompadour.

In the Russian empire, favoritism reached its climax by the reign of Empress Catherine the Great.

Cultural prerequisites for the highest development of favoritism have been shaped by the spread of ideals and moral norms of the Enlightenment [13].

Favoritism is a phenomenon often encountered in history. Its feature is that, while in an inextricable connection with power, it occurs in various forms of power, in different epochs and in different parts of the world. At the same time, not only the old absolutist power, but also democracy, cannot be freed from the presence of favorites at the state court. Undoubtedly, and now this phenomenon is not an exception, that's why we must know the mechanisms and sources of the germination of favoritism.

One can say that the phenomenon, when next to a political leader appear figures and individuals who have a special influence on him, exists as many years as the institution of power itself. In the history of Russia, favoritism grew up in the era of palace revolutions. One can say that favoritism is a matter of the past. But if we turn to the relatively recent past, then we will meet influential and sometimes even omnipotent figures standing by the helm of power. Here one can even recall the influence that was provided on an aging General Franco by his wife, Del Pilar, and General Carrera Blanco in Spain.

The era of leaders in Russian historiography is well–known and is studied in detail. However, this era still remains devoid of dark spots of history, and the phenomenon of favoritism conceals unsolved mysteries and secrets.

In these conditions, a unique social phenomenon, a new social lift, called favoritism, is emerging. Let me tell a little about the evolution of this institute. The institution of «casual people» achieved its highest development in the era after Petr. In the era of palace revolutions, there is an increase in dependence on the grace of the monarch. At this time, the monarch is perceived as the embodiment of all state life and a source of well–being. This is, first of all, due to the rule of the representatives of the female sex. «People wanted to be more attached to the emperor and the nobles, as a sources of wealth and rewards, this affection was not good, for it was not exactly to the person of the state governor, but to their own advantages», – M. M. Shcherbatov writes [15].

The typical situation for favoritism was that by assigning favorites to key positions in the state, the monarchs delegated partly their powers, while the emperor or the sovereign enjoyed balls, hunting, and were not interested in the state affairs. Only this fact shows already that the phenomenon of favoritism lies in the unlimited power, in the absence of the responsibility of the ruling person to his people, impunity and confidence that nothing can break the strength of the throne. That is why the favorites so often appeared in absolute monarchies and authoritarian dictatorship.

Favorites, as a rule, enjoyed the special favor of their patron and often thanks to his support received enormous power, privileges, money.

The monarchs did not try to conceal their sympathy for their favorites. On the contrary, they endowed their favorites with precious stones, estates, land lots, gave them titles, medals and other high state awards, tried in every possible way to emphasize the special position of these people.

In this way the rulers tried to buy the devotion of their close people. However, in the soul of each monarch, there was still a fear that sooner or later a favorite will betray him. Undoubtedly, the study of this issue is of particular interest, as at that time the basis of the construction of modern bureaucracy was germinating.

Based on the problem–chronological approach, one can distinguish three main periods of the development of the study of the topic: pre–revolutionary, Soviet and post–Soviet. Each of the selected periods is not homogeneous and has its own specifics. Different methodological approaches lie at the heart of this division: the method of collecting and processing of the materials, the extent of the involvement of the historical sources, the depth and the validity of the conclusions that existed at different periods of the development of the historiography.

Historians, until the end of the 20th century, actually ignored the phenomenon of favoritism. They studied the era of favoritism, but not the phenomenon itself. This is due to the fact that during the tsarist era, the invasion of the monarch private life was limited, and in Soviet times, this hypostasis was not of the serious significance.

Pre–revolutionary historians: S. M. Solovyov, V. O. Klyuchevskiy, N. I. Kostomarov considered favoritism a negative phenomenon, and viewed it mainly as the influence of the favorites on the sovereigns and the state. There is no any analysis of this phenomenon in their writings. Then there are abstracts from the works, which is proved by this statement: «The muddy wave of palace revolutions, favorites and opals with its surf...» [9, p. 221]; «Biron and those alike him in their personal features, are not worth the high positions, along with the crowds of foreigners, raised by them and similar to them, they were the parasites that caused the painful condition of Russia during the reign of Anna Ioanivna» [10, p. 342]. However, S. M. Solovyov also mentions the positive qualities of some of the favorites, which makes his work more objective.

The theme of palace revolution along with favoritism was not popular in the 20th century, moreover, historians treated it with some contempt. This is due to the fact that in Soviet historiography favoritism was regarded as «the struggle of court aristocratic groups for power, for the right to steal the treasury with impunity and to plunder the state» [8, p. 4]. Rigorous methodological rules severely restricted the researchers of the Soviet school. Partly because of this, Soviet historians completely eliminate all the merits of the favorites and characterize them only from the negative side.

At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, Karamzin wrote «The History of the State of Russia», in this work describes the «palace revolutions» in detail, there was a very little trace of the phenomenon of favoritism in this writing, it reflects the main events without the detailed description, therefore it is very difficult to analyze the events that took place, based on this source [8].

Also in the 18th century I. V. Kurukin wrote «The Age of Palace Storms». This work describes the problem of the appearance of the palace revolutions, where the determining role is given to the guard. The book describes the plots of the overthrow of the monarchs and the rise of the new ruling power [12].

We should not forget the works of P. Bartenev, who published the historical collection of «The Eighteenth Century» in 1869. This collection carries the valuable information about the events of that time, it represents the historical exploration, which concerns not only the palace revolutions, but also the study of the phenomenon of favoritism as a whole; on the basis of this material one can draw conclusions about the phenomenon of favoritism and its origin in Russia in the 18th – early 19th centuries. It is also necessary to mention the journal «The Messenger of Europe». This magazine published the Notes on Russia of the 17th and 18th centuries, according to Dutch residents in 1868. In the magazine one can observe the attitude and the situation on the part of the foreign guests. It should be noted that the memories of foreigners about Russia are a common source of pre–revolutionary time. The reminiscences were left by Marquis de Shetardy, Manstein, Duke Lyriysky, diaries by Gordon, notes by Yust Yuli, they note the peculiarities of the era of the «palace revolutions», as well as favoritism in general. The well–known work of K. Valyshevsky «The Kingdom of Women» was published in 1911 and was reissued 3 times.

In the early years of the Soviet period in national historiography there was a break in the study of Russian statehood, this was due to a change in the directions in historical research. In the early 1920s, several works were devoted to certain historical events of the post–Petr era. In the early 1930's, M. Pokrovsky attempted to rethink the history with the Marxist approach. It should be mentioned that in Soviet historiography, the negative point of view prevailed on «favoritism», this phenomenon was estimated as «the struggle of the court aristocratic groups for power, for the right to steal the treasury and plunder the country with impunity».

In the Soviet period, there was a single point of view, namely: the state one, the only alternative to which could be the novels by V. Pikul. Certainly, the well–known

historians of that time began to study this period. For example, G. A. Nekrasov was studying the foreign policy during the times of favorites. Only some authors tried to see in the struggle of the court «parties» something more than the transfer of power from one «handful» of feudal lords to another: the reaction of the nobility to the monarchy strengthening. According to Ya. Ya. Zutysa, «The Biron Era» was not an anti-, but a pro-nobility policy or «system of terror», in the interests of the Russian nobility, directed against the «old names», in which the «Germans» were only the performers. This policy, with the exception of terror, took place later on; so that in its class essence, the Elizabethan reign was by no means a negation of the Biron era, but its natural continuation.

In the middle of the 1960s, S. M. Troitsky turned to the problem. He is the author of a special essay «about the era of the palace revolutions», in his work he says that the history of Russia of the 18th century did not attract the due attention to the Marxist historiography. In 1964 a collection «Absolutism in Russia» was published by N. I. Pavlenko, Schmidt and other authors. N. I. Pavlenko carried out the most accurate study. Based on versions of V. O. Klyuchevskaya, Ya. Ya. Zutis, S. M. Troitsky, who considered the cause of the «palace revolutions» in the exacerbating of the internal class contradictions between the nobles, in connection with its consolidation into a single nobility state.

It is interesting, that the historians of the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods avoid the term «favorite», replacing it with «companion», «favorite person», «new aristocracy», «new people» or «circle of assistants».

Speaking about the contemporary authors we need to highlight E. V. Anisimov, A. B. Kamensky, I. V. Kurukin, K. A. Pisarenko, O. I. Yeliseyeva, N. Yu. Bolotin. They study the favorites of the eighteenth century and publish a large number of works of this direction.

In the work «Disasters and Temporary Performers» E. V. Anisimov analyzes the main sources for this epic, many of which are translated and published for the first time.

The historian O. P. Volodkov in his book «Favoritism in Russia of the 18th Century» analyzes the origins of favoritism and its essence, examines the reasons for the fall of one or another favorite, and raises the issue of the military strength of the favorites.

Yu. A. Vyuniv, A. V. Mankho in the monograph «Supreme Power and Favoritism in Russia» distinguishes two types of leaders: of statesmen and anti-statesmen. To the first type they included I. I. Shuvalov, G. A. Potemkin; to the second one: E. Biron.

The article by L. V. Shabanov, M. V. Malynikov «Favoritism as a Factor of the Formation of the Tradition of the Russian State Administration» is especially highlighted. This article is unique in describing favoritism of the era of the palace revolution inextricably linked to the past of our country. «The traditional system of the hierarchy of power in Russia resembled the hierarchy of the eastern despotisms, when next to the first person of the state there was formed some kind of an advisory body (Middle Council, Secret Committee, etc.)...» [16, p. 2]. Thus, the authors of the

article distinguish two types of favoritism in Russia: the pre-Petr (type of Eastern despotisms from Ivan the 4th) and post-Petr (Western European type). In favoritism of the pre-Petr type there prevail «those who grew up and were brought up with the monarch, they were with him till the end and determined his policy» [16, p. 2]. Accordingly, in the Western European type there are mainly «casual people», who used to be influential for a short period of time.

In recent decades, the most interesting monographs were written by N. Ya. Eidelman, E. V. Anisimov, Ya. A. Gordin, Boytsov, who aimed to understand the political system and culture of the post-Petr era. Modern historiography is represented by a large number of specialists who are interested in this topic. Yu. Matyukhin «Favorites of the Rulers of Russia», Yu. A. Vyuniv, Mankov «Supreme Power and Favoritism in Russia», also D. F. Popov, P. P. Tolochko, A. B. Kamensky, M. N. Afanasyev, A. N. Sakharov, Yu. L. Bessmertny became famous for their works, which reflect the point of view on the subject of the «palace revolutions».

There were new historical and biographical works about A. D. Menshikov, I. I. Shuvalov, the Orlov brothers, G. A. Potemkin, and other favorites. The greatest attention is paid to Potemkin, as one of the largest representatives of favoritism, but the work of Yu. A. Bespyatykh «A. D. Menshikov: Myths and Reality» is also interesting; the author breaks the myths around the Duke, basing on a large source database. In particular, about his illiteracy. The significance of this work is enormous: even the favorite Menshikov, around whom the halo of his ignorance was formed, according to the modern research was not only a talented man, but also an educated favorite. The notions of atemporary ruler and a favorite are separated, the stages of the formation of favoritism in Russia are identified, and the phenomenon is described in historical connection with the past centuries.

There are appearing the works that describe the influence of the favorites not only on the state affairs, but also on the culture of their time. For example: N. Yu. Bolotin in the work «The Almighty Duke G. A. Potemkin-Tavriysky and the Cultural Life of Russia at the End of the 18th Century», for the first time describes the protection of the creative elite by Potemkin and his patronage.

The mildest estimation is made by the historian Kamensky Oleksandr Borysovych in the monograph «Life and Fate of the Empress Catherine the Great». He expresses the opinion that favoritism was an integral part of the era of Enlightenment, and the possession of the favorites by the Empress used to be the norm. It is worth noting that the temporary executors of the Catherine's reign have never been fully omnipotent. It is very important to note the peculiarity of the monographs of Kamensky Oleksandr Borysovych. In his books, the era of the reign of the Empress Catherine II is described in very positive tones, resulting to some degree in the loss of the objectivity.

Vvedensky Rostislav Mikhailovich in the article «Catherine II» expresses the opinion very close to the one of Kamensky Oleksandr Borysovych. According to the author, Catherine brought very often close to herself those people whom she needed for solving

the state affairs, and he explains her boundless generosity not only as a measure of affection but also as a reflection of the greatness of the royal person. However, the author notes that Catherine always held the power firmly in her hands [2].

Currently, researchers have written a number of scientific works and monographs that are devoted to this issue or indirectly affecting it. Among these, one can highlight the article by Anisimov Yevhen Viktorovich «And the Heart Burns Again...», written in 2010. The author describes the relations of Catherine II with her favorites. The scientist believes that the Empress, who was born for love and for the family, was unhappy during the whole life, because the person, whom she could have loved, was not born to the world [3]. We see that the author of the article also justifies the behavior of the Empress Catherine and the events that took place at her court, when she was in search of her feminine happiness.

Finally, the Soviet historian Pavlenko Mykola Ivanovych expressed the most critical point of view on the historian, whose era of reign is described in his work, the monograph «Catherine the Great», published in 2003 in the series of Life of Remarkable People. N. I. Pavlenko expresses the opinion that neither before Catherine II nor after her, the wantonness never reached such a widespread scale and did not manifest itself in such a frankly provocative form [4].

In foreign historiography, there is no the unanimous assessment of the institute of favoritism. Among the foreign historians who are relevant to this topic, above all, it is worth to highlight a monograph «Catherine the Great» by Henri Troyat, the French historian of the 19th century. In his work, the author notes the wantonness and immorality of the court of Catherine, but he writes that she was not a nymphomaniac [5]. Expressing such an opinion, the author found the so-called «golden middle» in a dispute between N. I. Pavlenko and other native historians.

The more critical assessment of this phenomenon is given by the Polish historian Kazimir Valishevsky, the author of the work «Catherine the Great. The Novel of one Empress», published at the end of the 19th century, in which he describes the intimate life of Catherine, mentions the traditions of the Petersburg court. He expresses the opinion that the Empress created a government institution of favoritism and that it was the main wheel of her state mechanism. In addition, Kazimir Valishevsky gives some figures obtained by Caster. It's about the amount that was spent on favorites. It amounted to 92.6 million rubles [4]. Favoritism was very expensive for the state treasury!

Consistent with the opinion of Kazimir Valishevsky, historian Rahmatullin Morgan Abdullovykh writes that during the reign of Catherine II, favoritism essentially acquired the function of a state mechanism. Therefore, when it revealed the failures, it was reflected to some extent on the state affairs [10].

Thus, we can conclude that in historiography, both in Russian and in foreign, there is a fairly large number of points of view regarding the assessment of personality of Catherine II and the phenomenon of favoritism in her court. Some authors call her a «semi-literate whore», who turned the royal palace into a

public house. Other researchers write that the woman overcame a politician in herself, while the others justify the Empress stating that Catherine was looking for the ordinary women's happiness.

In general, it should be noted that in historiography there are two extremely sharp assessments of the phenomenon of favoritism. Negative and positive. Most of the negative assessments are given by the historians of the Soviet school, while the positive ones are mostly coming from the modern scientists. But for the impartial and correct assessment of favoritism as a phenomenon of the socio-political life, it is necessary to observe at least two conditions: to abandon bias and to understand the era in which this or that historical person lived and acted. In contemporary historiography, unlike in previous centuries, favoritism is seen as a holistic phenomenon, the influence of which extends to the different aspects of social life.

References

1. Any'sy'mov, EV., 1991. 'Bezvremeny'e y' vremenshy'ky' (Timelessness and temporary workers)', L. // https://royallib.com/book/anisimov_evgeniy/bezvremene_i_vremenshchiki_vospominaniya_ob_epohe_dvortsovih_perevorotov_1720_e_1760_e_godi.html (last accessed: 18.03.2019).
2. Bespyatux, YuN., 2005. 'Aleksandr Dany'lovych Menshy'-kov: My'fu y' real'nost' (Alexander Danilovich Menshikov: Myths and Reality)', SPb., 240.
3. Boloty'na, YYu., 2000. 'Deyatel'nost' G. A. Potemky'na v oblasti vnutrennej poly'ty'ky' Rossy'y' (Activity of G. A. Potemkin in the field of Russian domestic policy), Moscow, 20.
4. Valy'shevsky'j, KF., 1989. 'Ekateryna Vely'kaya. Roman odnoj y'mperatry'czu (Catherine the Great. The romance of one empress)', Moscow: *Vsya Mosva*, 804–805.
5. Volod'kov, OP., 1996. 'Favory'ty'zm v Rossy'y' XVIII veka (Favoritism in Russia of 18th century)', Omsk, 46–64.
6. V'yunov, YuA., 2010. 'Verhovnaya vlast' y' favory'ty'zm v Rossy'y' (konec XVII–XVIII vv.) (Supreme power and favoritism in Russia (late XVII–XVIII centuries)), Moscow: *VK*, 219.
7. Kamensky'j, AB., 1997. 'Zhy'zn' y' sud'ba y'mperatry'czu Ekaterynu II (The life and fate of Empress Catherine II)', Moscow: *Znanie*, 118.
8. Karamzy'n, NM. 'Y'story'ya gosudarstva Rossy'jskogo (History of the Russian State)'. // <http://онлайн-читать.рф/картамин-история-государства-российского/> (last accessed: 18.03.2019).
9. Klyuchevsky'j, VO., 2005. 'Y'story'chesky'e portretu (Historical portraits)', Moscow: *Veche*, 473.
10. Kostomarov, NY., 2009. 'Russkaya y'story'ya v zhy'zney'sany'yax ee glavnejshy'x deyatelej (Russian history in the biographies of its main figures)', Moscow: *Ekmo*, 1024.
11. Kuruky'n, YV., 2015. 'Platon Zubov – «my'ny'str vsex chastej pravleny'ya»: favory'ty'zm na y'sxode XVIII stolety'ya (Platon Zubov – «the minister of all parts of the government»: favoritism at the end of the 18th century)', Yekaterinburg, 1–4.
12. Kuruky'n, YV., 2003. 'Epoha «dvorcovux bur'»: Ocherky' poly'ty'cheskoj y'story'y' posle petrovskoj Rossy'y', 1725–1762 (The Epoch of «Palace Storms»: Essays on the Political History of Post-Petrine Russia, 1725–1762)', *Novejshaya rossy'jska yav'story'ya: y'ssledovany'ya y' dokumentu*, Ryazan, 570. // <http://romanov.rhga.ru/upload/iblock/769/> (last accessed: 18.03.2019).
13. Raxmatully'n, MA., 2010. 'Ekateryna II, Ny'kolaj I, A. S. Pushky'n v vospomy'nany'yax sovremenny'kov (Catherine II, Nicholas I, A. S. Pushkin in the memoirs of contemporaries)', Moscow, 634.
14. Solov'ev, SM., 1989. 'Chteny'ya y' rasskazy po y'story'y' Rossy'y' (Readings and stories on the history of Russia)', Moscow, 768.
15. Mel'ny'chuk, OS., 1977. 'Slovy'k inshomovny'x sliv. Za redakciyeyu O. S. Mel'ny'chuka. Golovna redakciya Ukrayins'koyi radyans'koyi ency'klopediyi (Dictionary of foreign words. Edited by O. S. Melnychuk. Home edition of the Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia)', Kyiv, 776.
16. Shabanov, LV., Maly'nny'kov, MV., 2012. 'Favory'ty'zm kak faktor formy'rovany'ya trady'cy'y' rossy'jskogo gosudarstvennogo upravleny'e (na pry'mere sanovny'kov XVIII – nachala XIX v.) (Favoritism as a factor in the formation of the tradition of the Russian state administration (for example, the dignitaries of the XVIII – beginning of the XIX century))', *Bulletin of the Tomsk State University*, 3, 5–10.