

## LETTERS

## TO THE EDITOR:

Although Professor Mocha is to be sincerely commended for exposing yet another of the curious machinations of F. V. Bulgarin (Frank Mocha, "The Karamzin-Lelewel Controversy," *Slavic Review*, September 1972), the importance of "the attack on Karamzin" remains somewhat obscure. It may be that Lelewel succeeded in "undermining Karamzin's reputation as an historian," at least among Polish patriots, future Decembrists, and "scientific" scholars (none of whom required much convincing), but it is an undeniable fact that *The History of the Russian State* remained immensely popular and greatly influential among the educated Russian public for at least another two decades. And Karamzin made little effort to shield himself from criticism—it is a matter of record that he encouraged M. N. Muraviev to publish a review which took issue with the *History* on a number of key points. Therefore, it would appear that the "undermining" succeeded in an ideological, political sense, and that the resurrection of the "controversy" is intended as another historiographic blow for Poland and liberalism. Once again Karamzin has been made to figure as a spokesman and representative of the regime, an influential and somehow typical policy-level adviser whose comments clearly represent the views of the conservative Imperial Establishment. However, despite the fine nineteenth-century traditions from which it derives, this assumption concerning Karamzin's political importance is misleading. For example, in the case of the *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, which is generally thought to be "one of the most important documents of social thought in Alexander's era" and a most influential critique, there is no evidence that Alexander even read it; all that is known is that it moldered among the thousands of other papers received and filed away by the emperor. Again, with respect to the "Opinion of a Russian Citizen" of October 18, 1819, we have no evidence that this highly confidential statement "made a great impression on Alexander and on Russian public opinion"; in fact, all we really have is Karamzin's own recollection that hard political considerations terminated the planned "Polish concessions," and his complaint that such a reasoned protest was of no significance to the emperor. An incident concerning anti-Polish bias in Karamzin's *History* only serves to emphasize the historian's lack of "influence" on this as on so many other questions; in the summer of 1822, having personally proofread the eleventh volume, the emperor felt constrained to request that subtle slights against the ancestors of his Polish subjects be toned down. It is perhaps regrettable, but nonetheless true, that the later reign of Alexander I had no spokesman of Karamzin's eloquence.

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## DR. MOCHA REPLIES:

I would like to thank Professor Cole for his sincere commendation of my article. While I enjoyed his distinction between Karamzin's "popularity" with the public and his "influence" with the emperor, I found it odd for him to defend Karamzin by trying to make him appear less important than he really was. He is also some-