

# On Nineteenth Century Russia, Seen Through the Eyes of a French Traveller. A Resurgence of Old Polemics?

Dan-Alexandru POPESCU \*

## Abstract

*Published in the mid nineteenth century, "Lettres de Russie. La Russie en 1839" (Letters from Russia. Russia in 1839) is not only the travel journal of a European nobleman visiting the Far East, but also a mirror image - albeit, of course, tainted by its timely context - of a society situated too far away from the perception and genuine knowledge of the West. The Marquis Astolphe de Custine, the author of these memoirs (which, it is worth mentioning, have been printed in dozens of editions in French, as well as in various other languages, and number hundreds of thousands of copies sold, in the immediate aftermath of their publication) describes, in a succession of troubling and authentic images, Eastern despotism's forms of manifestation, the absolutist character of the state and the despotic nature of the emperor, the tsar, along with the specificities of the Russian world which he encounters during the few months spent there, almost anticipating the dramatic historical experiences which were to follow - both for Russia, and for Europe.*

**Keywords:** *Russia, Marquis de Custine, memoirs, despotism, Russian Empire*

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\* Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu, Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane, B-dul Victoriei 40, 550024, Sibiu, România (dalex.popescu@gmail.com).