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**Transformation of autocracy in the Russian Empire**

**at the beginning of the 20th century: Sergei Witte’s viewpoint**

*Abstract*. The article examines the opinions of Sergei Witte, one of the first Russian public politicians and one of the most influential officials of the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, on the transformation of the Russian autocracy. The *Memoirs* of Sergei Witte as well as documents from his personal fonds stored in the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) constitute the source basis of the research. The interdisciplinary research paradigm of the performative turn was adopted as the methodological basis of the research. S. Witte’s views on the process of transformation of autocracy are considered through the prism of the following scientific categories: the image of power, scenario of power, authoritative discourse, political myth, performative shift, the principle of outsideness. The analysis of the historiography presented in the article allows us to justify the relevance of the performative approach to the study of Russia’s historical realities in the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Special attention is paid to the personal characteristics of the last two Russian emperors, which were given by Sergei Witte in the pages of his *Memoirs* and became an important part of Witte’s representation of the process of evolution of the institution of autocracy in Russia in the pre-revolutionary period. Of considerable academic interest are his substantial “portraits” of Russian political parties at the time of their institutional design and programmatic self-identification. Interesting nuances of Sergei Witte’s resignation presented by him in the extremely subjective optics of perception remain of high relevance for the analysis of various materials on the subject. The final part of the article draws conclusions about the content and elements of the concept of transformation of autocracy and describes the influence of new political institutions on that transformation in socio-political situation which had been changing.

*Key words*: Sergei Witte, Sergei Witte’s memoirs, autocracy, monarchy, Russian Empire, Nicholas II, Alexander III, images of power, performative turn

**Introduction**

**Main bode**

**Conclusion**

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