



PETER THE GREAT

The Struggle for Power, 1671 – 1725

PAUL BUSHKOVITCH

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This book is a history of Russian politics over the fifty years that saw the transformation of Russia into virtually a European monarchy by Peter the Great. It shows, however, that Peter was not the all-powerful tsar working alone to reform Russia, and that he moved into a system with powerful and contentious aristocrats whom he struggled to control in order to achieve his goals.

Paul Bushkovitch reveals the intense battles within the boyar elite in the 1670s and the ultimate victory of Peter's family and their boyar supporters in the 1690s. But Peter turned against them and tried to rule through his favorites Golovin and Menshikov. This experiment ended in the establishment of a decentralized administration controlled largely by the great aristocrats, followed by the establishment of an equally aristocratic Senate in 1711. As the aristocrats' hegemony came to an end in 1716–18, in the final years of the reign – those of the most long-lasting reforms – Peter ruled through a complex group of favorites, a few aristocrats, and appointees promoted through merit.

Thus Peter managed in his reign to master a contentious and powerful elite through a series of compromises, at first tilted toward the tsar and his favorites, then toward the aristocrats, and finally toward a mix that favored new men but which did not exclude the aristocrats entirely. The outcome was a new balance of power at the center and a new, European, conception of politics.

PAUL BUSHKOVITCH is Professor of History, Yale University. His publications include *The Merchants of Moscow 1580–1650* (Cambridge, 1980) and *Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1992).

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The Struggle for Power, 1671–1725

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Preface

In fifteen years of research I have acquired debts too numerous to repay as they deserve. Without the staff of the Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents, and in particular M. P. Lukichev and S. R. Dolgova, the work could not have been done at all. I owe thanks as well to the staff of the Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, and in particular to Dr. Leopold Auer. My thanks are due to the Svenska Riksarkiv in Stockholm, the Danska Rigsarkiv in Copenhagen, the Algemeene Rijksarchief in the Hague, the Public Record Office in London, and the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France in Paris. Many libraries as well have helped enormously, the Historical Library and the Russian State Library in Moscow, the Russian National Library (Publichka) in St. Petersburg, the British Library, and the Slavic Library of the University of Helsinki (and especially Irina Lukka) all made my work easier. My greatest debt among librarians goes to the staff of the Sterling Memorial and Beinecke Libraries at Yale University. Tatjana Lorković and Susanne Roberts were an unfailing source of assistance and provided me with a continuous stream of new and old material. The Interlibrary Loan office, Maureen Jones and Liz Johnson, found arcane and unknown works in the most unlikely places. The Circulation Desk staff, Barbara Gajewski, Pearlene Ford, and their colleagues solved more problems than could ever be imagined. A particular debt goes to Kevin Pacelli and the staff of the Microtext Room of Sterling Library, who kept me and several elderly machines going with unfailing courtesy and good humor through several phases of rebuilding and ultimate reequiptment. Of course none of the work could have been done without the support of the International Research and Exchanges Board, the Yale Center for International and Area Studies, the American Philosophical Society, the Scandinavian American Foundation, the Deutsch–Amerikanische

Austauschdienst, and several provosts of Yale University. None of their valuable support would have been much good if Merete and Nils Bormanis had not been there to get me to where I needed to be.

My colleagues and students gave greater help than most of them realize. Charles Halperin, E. H. Melton, and Samuel Ramer read through the entire manuscript with great attention, improving my style, finding all sorts of errors, and assuring me that I was on the right track. Nikos Chrissidis took an active and welcome interest in Peter and was always ready with references and assistance. In the final and most hectic stages of this work, he was a person to rely upon. David Schimmelpenninck made sure I did not get lost in the many byways of one of his ancestral countries. Maria Arel, Jason Lavery, Cathy Potter, Carla Schmidt, Vera Shevzov, Jennifer Spock, Kathy Stuart, Cherie Woodworth, and other Yale graduate students survived years of professorial preoccupation and kept up a dialogue in Russian and European history that was invaluable. In Russia, S. O. Shmidt provided a forum on Peter where it belonged, while the late D. S. Likhachev solved a small but crucial problem. Vladimir Skopin's help and knowledge were crucial at several points. Sergei Kondrat'ev introduced me to parts of Russia I never expected to see. L. V. Betin and his family remained essential to my experience in Russia, through the years of Peter as before. Outside of Russia my debts are almost as numerous. Wladimir Berelowitsch and the faculty and students of the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris heard an early version of my work on Peter and provided invaluable responses and criticism. The American Philosophical Society and Tulane University performed a similar service. Many colleagues and friends around the world are probably unaware of the importance of their encouragement and intellectual stimulation, but it is no less great. Let me mention them: the late Gustave Alef, Aleksei Chagin, Robert Crummey, Ol'ga Dmitrieva, Harvey Goldblatt, Andrea Graziosi, Nancy Kollmann, Alexandra Korros, Eve Levin, Gael Moullec, Marshall Poe, Frank Turner. Christine Restall and Peter Hasler were an oasis in long archival sessions and provided never-failing hospitality and humor. D. C. B. Lieven not only gave me a place to stay and write in London, but also introduced me to a part of the Russian past I would otherwise never have encountered. Hans Torke deserves a particular place in my thanks. His contribution to my understanding of history, to broadening my scholarly contacts, and to the sheer pleasure of the

profession was immense. I regret that he will not see this book in print, to whose early stages he provided a much needed platform. Finally, Sven-Erik and Tora Johnsson gave me my first sight of one of Peter's battlefields, and the many Möorns introduced me to the farther reaches of Peter's world.

My greatest debt, however, is to Maija Jansson, Director of the Yale Center for Parliamentary History, who was the original inspiration for this work and sustained it over many years. It was she who first showed me that apparently hackneyed themes could be fundamentally rewritten with new material, and that an old and familiar story might simply be wrong. A historian cannot ask for more.

Abbreviations

ADM.	A. D. Menshikov
AME	Archive du Ministère des affaires étrangères
ARSG	Algemeene Rijksarchief, Staaten Generaal
ChOidr	<i>Chteniia v imp. Obshchestve Istorii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete</i>
DR	<i>Dvortsovye razriady</i>
DRV	<i>Drevniaia Rossiiskaia Vifiiofika</i>
GPB	Gos. Publichnaia Biblioteka=Rossiiskaia Natsional'naia Biblioteka
GSAPK	Geheime Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz
HHStA	Haus- Hof und Staatsarchiv
PI	Peter the First
PiB	<i>Pis'ma i bumagi imperatora Petra Velikogo</i>
RBS	<i>Russkii biograficheskii slovar'</i>
RGADA	Rossiiskii gos. arkhiv drevnikh aktov
RIB	Ruskaia istoricheskaja biblioteka
RS	<i>Ruskaia starina</i>
SHSA	Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv
SR	Svenska riksarkivet
SRIO	<i>Sbornik Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva</i>
TKUA	Tyske kancelli, udenrigske avdelning
ZA	<i>Zakonodatel'nye akty</i>
ZhMNP	<i>Zhurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia</i>
ZORSA	<i>Zapiski Otdela russkoi i slavianskoi arkheologii Imp. Akademii nauk</i>

Introduction

After three hundred years Peter the Great retains his hold over the imagination of Russia as well as the rest of the world. For Russians in particular, the absorbing issue is the significance of his reign and of what are usually called his reforms. Did they really change Russia? Were they a good thing or a bad thing? Did they lead to democracy? To 1917? To the participation of Russia in European culture? To the alienation of Russia from its spiritual home in Orthodoxy? These are the questions which the story of Peter the Great will elicit in Russia and probably always has elicited, and this book will offer a direct answer to none of them.

I will offer no direct answer because it is my argument that Peter's reign has remained in large and crucial areas unknown. We cannot evaluate the significance of Peter's actions until we know what they were, and the traditional accounts have this in common that they do not tell us enough about those actions. It is my aim to rewrite the political narrative of the reign and its antecedents, using sources which have been largely bypassed or underutilized in the study of the period. The principal result of a new narrative of the politics of Peter's time will be to elucidate the informal structures of power in the Russian state.

Russian and Western historiography of Peter reflects the grand divisions of thought on the Russian past, perhaps more thoroughly than any other subject. To a large extent it breaks down into the "state" school and its opponents, including but not restricted to the Slavophiles. The state school looked at Russian history as the development of statehood (*gosudarstvennost'*), by which it meant formal bureaucratic institutions. The leading idea was the development of legal order, essentially of the *Rechtsstaat*, which would supposedly lay the foundations for representative government. Not surprisingly, the state school crystallized in the era of the Great

Reforms of Alexander II, but its way of looking at Russian history has to a large extent survived the original ideology and political subtext. Its methods and concerns are found whether the historian is largely hostile to Peter (P. N. Miliukov) or favorable (M. M. Bogoslovskii). Soviet historiography, on the rare occasions when it turned its attention from agrarian history and the class struggle, followed largely in the path of the state school, looking at formal institutions. We see its outcome in the work of E. V. Anisimov. Similarly, the Western historians who have turned their attention to Peter, most notably Reinhard Wittram, have been firmly in this tradition.¹

There is nothing wrong with the history of formal institutions, unfashionable as it may be today. Without this sort of study, the historian could not make sense of the shifting political structure of Russia, particularly in Peter's time. The difficulty that such history presents, however, is that it does not really get at the actual levers of power and the mechanism of political action in Russia before the nineteenth century. It has had to rely on the autocratic tsar as a sort of *Deus ex machina*, whose magic wand effects all change in a society that is a vacuum and by means of a state that is merely a series of passive, if rather incompetent, instruments. The other result of the state school is that it produces a history without living people. The state is essentially an abstraction, as is the tsar-autocrat.

Naturally, no historian is entirely the prisoner of his conception. Bogoslovskii and Wittram managed to combine a fundamental allegiance to notions derived from the state school with a lively account of the culture, personalities, and much of the politics of Peter's time. Nevertheless, they did not escape far enough to examine the social groups which were crucial to Peter's success or failure, and with whom he lived and worked and often struggled against. By this group I mean the ruling elite, essentially the old

¹ Nicholas. V. Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, New York, 1985; S. M. Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, 15 vols., Moscow, 1960–66, vols. VII–IX (originally vols. XIII–XVIII, 1863–67); Solov'ev, *Publičnye chteniia o Petre Velikom*, Moscow, 1872; P. N. Miliukov, *Gosudarstvennoe khoziaistvo Rossii v pervoi chetverti XVIII stolietia i reforma Petra Velikogo*, St. Petersburg, 1892; M. M. Bogoslovskii, *Oblastnaia reforma Petra Velikogo: provintsia 1719–1727 gg.*, *ChOIDR* (1902), pt. 3, 1–208; pt. 4, 209–522, appendix 1–46; E. V. Anisimov, *Gosudarstvennye preobrazovaniia i samoderzhavie Petra Velikogo*, St. Petersburg, 1997; Reinhard Wittram, *Peter I: Czar und Kaiser*, 2 vols., Göttingen, 1964; Marc Raeff, *Comprendre l'ancien régime russe*, Paris, 1982, 46–68; Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, New Haven, CT, 1998.

boyar aristocracy with the addition of the new favorites and officials of Peter's reign.

The ruling elite of the Russian state in the early modern era has been the subject of intensive research, but largely focussing on the sixteenth century. S. B. Veselovskii, A. A. Zimin, R. G. Skrynnikov, A. P. Pavlov in Russia, and Gustave Alef, Ann Kleimola, and Nancy Kollmann have, for all their different approaches, given us a thorough and detailed picture of the composition of that elite.² The seventeenth century has not been so fortunate, and until recently has attracted more attention outside Russia itself. Richard Hellie's sociology of the whole landholding class as a military elite has come to rest aside Robert Crummey's prosopography of the boyars to provide two very different accounts. The present work rests for its knowledge of the boyar elite mainly on that of Crummey, supplemented by Marshall Poe, and on the studies of John LeDonne and Brenda Meehan on the eighteenth century.³

It is the American historians Kollmann, Crummey, and LeDonne who have posed most sharply the issues of the composition and political role of the ruling elite of Russia in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. They share a belief that the traditional picture of the tsar-autocrat is unrealistic, requiring a degree of power in his

² S. B. Veselovskii, *Issledovaniia po istorii klassa sluzhilykh zemlevladel'tsev*, Moscow, 1969; A. A. Zimin, "Sostav boiarskoi dumy v XV–XVI vv.," *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1957 g.*, Moscow, 1958, 41–87; A. A. Zimin, *Formirovanie boiarskoi aristokratii v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XV–pervoi tretii XVI v.*, Moscow, 1988; R. G. Skrynnikov, *Nachalo Oprichniny*, Uchenye zapiski Leningradskogo gos. pedagogicheskogo instituta im. A. Gertsena 294 (Leningrad, 1966); R. G. Skrynnikov, *Oprichnyi terror*, Uchenye zapiski Leningradskogo gos. pedagogicheskogo instituta im. A. Gertsena 374, (Leningrad, 1969); Skrynnikov, *Rossia posle Oprichniny: ocherki politicheskoi i sotsial'noi istorii*, Leningrad, 1975, 5–108; A. P. Pavlov, *Gosudarev dvor i politicheskaiia bor'ba pri Borise Godunove (1584–1605 gg.)*, St. Petersburg, 1992; Gustave Alef, *The Origins of Muscovite Autocracy: the Age of Ivan III*, *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 39 (1986); Ann M. Kleimola, "The Changing Face of the Muscovite Autocracy: The Sixteenth Century: Sources of Weakness," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 25 (1977), 481–93; Kleimola, "Up Through Servitude: The Changing Condition of the Muscovite Elite in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 6/2 (1979), 210–29; Kleimola, "Patterns of Duma Recruitment 1505–1550," in Daniel Waugh, ed., *Essays in Honor of A. A. Zimin*, Columbus, OH, 1985, 130–58; Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345–1547*, Stanford, CA, 1987.

³ Richard Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy*, Chicago, IL, 1971; Robert O. Crummey, *Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia 1613–1689*, Princeton, NJ, 1983; Marshall Poe, *The Consular and Ceremonial Ranks of the Russian 'Sovereign's', Court 1613–1713*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Humaniora*, (forthcoming); Brenda Meehan-Waters, *Autocracy and Aristocracy: The Russian Service Elite of 1730*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1982; John P. LeDonne, "Ruling Families in the Russian Political Order 1689–1825," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 28, no. 3–4 (July–December 1987), 233–322; LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700–1825*, New York, 1991.

hands that is not attested to in the sources. They have correctly emphasized that the boyar elite was not a transitory series of great men but a congeries of clans, some at the pinnacle of society since the fourteenth century, and who remained at that pinnacle at least until the end of the eighteenth century. This is not to say that there were no new additions, but that there was no "fall of the aristocracy" and "rise of the gentry" posited particularly by S. F. Platonov. The American school has correctly identified the actual path of promotion to and within the Duma ranks, and its dependence on ancestral position and the complex and informal rules by which such promotions occurred. It has also pointed out the absolutely central role of the marriage politics of the ruling dynasty. In the seventeenth century, neither Dolgorukii, Streshnev, Naryshkin nor Apraksin would have been great names without marriages to the tsar. Even the rejected Lopukhins managed to maintain an important position in Russia after Peter's death.

The American studies of the ruling elite posit, however, a relationship of the great clans to politics which is not sustained in all aspects by the investigation of actual political action. Kollmann, Crummey, and LeDonne all see kinship relations as absolutely crucial to the political role of the great families. Yet the great families were not necessarily united within themselves. In the 1680s two first cousins, Princes Boris Alekseevich and Vasilii Vasil'evich Golitsyn, battled for predominance in the Russian state. V. V. Golitsyn paid for his failure with a twenty-five-year exile in the Russian north. Yet his victorious cousin Boris tried hard to prevent a worse fate, acting largely from family solidarity. In the course of Peter's reign there were many other families which split along political lines. The sense of kinship and solidarity was real, attested to many times, but it was not enough to allow the historian to infer similar political goals and feelings. The American school also assumes that the aim of the great families was their maintenance at the peak of power and control of the progression of their relatives and others up the ranks. Yet the political life of Peter's time was not a naked struggle for power, position, and access to the treasury. To a large part it was about the character of the informal structure of power, about concrete issues such as foreign policy, and occasionally about the larger political and cultural direction of the country. The issues were not the same in every decade or every case.

The study and elucidation of the composition of the ruling elite

runs the risk of substituting sociological abstraction for institutional abstraction. The belief that the great clans really ran Russia in conjunction with the tsar, not as his passive instruments, cannot really be sustained without the examination of the political events of the time. It is there that we shall see or not the action of the great families. Hence to really understand the functioning of the state, that is, the tsar, the ruling elite, and the institutions of state, we need to write the political narrative of the time. In the case of Peter, this means largely to rewrite the narrative, for the one we have is seriously lacking.

There are many problems with the existing narrative. The most dramatic is that of simple falsification, primarily in the case of events for which historians have relied on the work of N. G. Ustrialov. His falsification and omission of crucial documents from the affair of Tsarevich Aleksei Petrovich has misled historians for a century and a half.⁴ There are the many legends about Peter and his reign, deriving from sources which are unreliable, late, or both, such as de Neuville, Matveev, Kurakin, and the collections of real and spurious anecdotes about Peter from the late eighteenth century. The largely worthless biographies of Peter manufactured in the West soon after his death circulated in Russia, often with spurious documents, and influenced the early historians of Peter such as I. I. Golikov. From Golikov and other sources these legends entered the history of Peter and are very hard, if not impossible, to expel. E. Shmurlo tried to do this at the turn of the century, but much of his work has been forgotten. Thus the romantic story of the encounter of Tsar Aleksei and Natalia Naryshkina at the house of Artamon Matveev is still alive a hundred years after Shmurlo proved it untenable.⁵

The legendary history of Peter is not merely an annoyance for the historian or a goldmine for the popular biographer. As I will show later, the romantic story of Natal'ia and Aleksei, attested to only a half century after the events, fundamentally distorts the history of the political career of Artamon Matveev, of the evolution of the Naryshkin faction, and thus of the origins of the political crises of the

⁴ N. G. Ustrialov, *Istoriia tsarstvovaniia Petra Velikogo*, vols. I–IV and VI, St. Petersburg, 1858–63 (esp. vol. VI); Paul Bushkovitch, “Power and the Historian: The Case of Tsarevich Aleksei 1716–1718 and N. G. Ustrialov 1845–1859,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141, no. 3 (June, 1997), 177–212; and Bushkovitch, “Istorik i vlast': delo tsarevicha Alekseia (1716–1718) i N. G. Ustrialov (1845–1859),” in Michael David-Fox, ed., *Amerikanskaia rusistika*, Samara, 2000, 80–120.

⁵ See below, chapter 2.

later seventeenth century. This incident also points to another issue, the excision of Peter's "private life" from the mainstream of historical debate. Inattention to Peter's private life is a basic methodological error. Neither Russian tsars nor any other monarchs of the pre-modern world had a private life in the modern sense. Every bit of their lives, whether minor household appointments, journeys, forms of recreation, mistresses, or places of habitation, had some political overtones. Peter's affair with Anna Mons, his divorce, and his attachment to Ekaterina and his subsequent marriage to her were all in large part political acts. Unfortunately, the female households of the Romanov dynasty as well as the mistresses are largely unknown, and worse yet, the domain of unreliable semi-journalistic history, particularly that of M. I. Semevskii from the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Semevskii was the last to write about most of the women of Peter's time, and his works mix legend, fantasy, and solid information in a manner that is at times impossible to disentangle. As he was looking at "private life" as he understood it, he at least wrote about the women in Peter's life, though from a point of view which marginalized their political role. No one has looked at the household and inner structure of the court since the antiquarian I. E. Zabelin, who in any case stopped at 1700.⁶

To rewrite the political narrative of Peter's time it is necessary to integrate what is now known of the family and clan structure of the elite, the so-called "private life" of Peter, and the institutional history which the state school and its offshoots have left us. The narrative of politics will allow us to reconstruct the informal structure of power, but to tell the story we need sources that make it possible. Writing the narrative of seventeenth-century Western European politics (or history) is not all that difficult: there is a multitude of diaries, correspondence, and memoirs that allow us to get behind the façade. For Peter's Russia there is no Madame de Sevigné or Duke de Saint-Simon to tell us what we want to know.⁷ Surviving correspondence is extremely rare, and much of it is very formal, the ritualized exchange of greetings more common among European noblemen of the sixteenth century. Peter's own letters, collected in the *Pis'ma i bumagi Petra Velikogo*, ongoing since 1887, goes only up to the middle

⁶ I. E. Zabelin, *Domashnii byt russkogo naroda v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh*, 2 vols., Moscow, 1862–69; M. I. Semevskii, *Tsaritsa Praskov'ia 1664–1723*, St. Petersburg, 1883; Semevskii, *Tsaritsa Ekaterina Alekseevna, Anna i Villim Mons 1692–1724*, St. Petersburg, 1884.

⁷ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Saint-Simon ou le système de la Cour*, Paris, 1997.

of 1713 and in any case contains relatively little of either personal correspondence or letters and memoranda setting out Peter's motivations. In most of the letters he gives orders to subordinates, passes news to the favorite Aleksandr Menshikov or other major figures, commands the army, and exchanges diplomatic messages with other sovereigns. He does not tell us about the factional struggles at court, or give us private thoughts on Menshikov or Field Marshal Sheremetev. Only Menshikov himself, Sheremetev, Prince B. I. Kurakin, and a few others left substantial bodies of correspondence but it too is largely devoted to administrative, diplomatic, or military matters.

The one large body of source material to illuminate the political life of the Russian court continuously and in detail is the dispatches of the many foreign diplomats at the Russian court. Since the time of Leopold von Ranke historians of Western Europe have regarded diplomatic reports as crucial documents for the study of court politics, as well as for diplomacy. Russian historians, in contrast, have largely ignored these sources or used them opportunistically to write the history of Peter's time, though they have been used widely for later periods. Perhaps the problem has been that many of them are unpublished, and also that many of them are unknown. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century the Russian Imperial Historical Society began to publish (mostly excerpted) the reports on Russia from England, France, Prussia, and Austria for the eighteenth century, but only those from England and France covered Peter's time. Their value varied. England did not have an ambassador in Russia for much of Peter's reign, and Charles Whitworth, an accomplished diplomat who represented Queen Anne in 1704–10 spent more time on negotiations than on collecting information. France had no permanent presence until 1715, when the French commercial agent, Henri Lavie, arrived, only to spend much of his time drinking and repeat what was generally known in the diplomatic community.⁸

The Russian Historical Society missed the most interesting diplomatic series for Peter's time and immediately before. Beginning after the treaty of Andrusovo (1667), Russia began to attract the increased

⁸ A more positive view of Lavie is found in Samuel Baron, "Henri Lavie and the Failed Campaign to Expand Franco-Russian Commercial Relations (1712–1723)," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 50 (1995), 29–50.

attention of European powers. Until that moment the only state to maintain a regular resident in Russia had been Sweden. The reports of Swedish agents begin in 1630 and continue until the outbreak of the Northern War in 1700, forming one of the most important sources and one of the least known for Russian history in those years. After 1667, the Swedes began to acquire colleagues. A Danish ambassador arrived in 1673, and a Dutch ambassador in 1676. Both countries had more or less permanent representation from that time.⁹ The Holy Roman Empire was also aware of the rising power to the east, and sent more and more frequent envoys to Moscow. In 1692 the Imperial embassy left behind one Otto Pleyer, a young man with high-ranking relations in the Vienna bureaucracy and court, to learn Russian and observe the country. In the wake of the 1697–98 Imperial embassy Pleyer became the recognized Imperial representative and from then on provided monthly or even weekly reports for twenty years. At the outbreak of the Northern War, Pleyer was joined by ambassadors from Prussia and Peter's temperamental ally, Augustus II of Poland-Saxony. As the Polish constitution did not allow the king to maintain a permanent diplomatic staff abroad, Augustus used the Saxon Electorate to provide such emissaries, and their voluminous reports remain in Dresden today, unread by Russian historians since the 1880s. Similarly, only fragments of the Prussian reports from Peter's reign, extensive and highly informative, made it into print. It is all these reports that form a solid basis to construct the continuing thread of political life at the Russian court, yet only small fragments have been published.

Diplomatic sources are not terribly fashionable today, perhaps because of the misapprehension that they exclusively concern diplomatic negotiations. Many of the powers in question had no important business with Russia for years on end, or when they did, sent high-ranking extraordinary ambassadors. The residents and agents remained, sending out endless reports of Russian happenings, some of which were then pirated, legally or not, and often rewritten for

⁹ G. V. Forsten, "Datskie diplomaty pri moskovskom dvore vo vtoroi polovine XVII veka (1648–1700)," *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* 355–56 (September 1904); and Forsten, "Snosheniia Shvetsii s Rossiei vo vtoroi polovine XVII veka (1648–1700)," *ibid.*, 315–17 (1898), 323 (1899), 325 (1899); Heinz Ellersieck, "Russia under Aleksei Mikhailovich and Feodor Alekseevich 1645–1682: The Scandinavian Sources," Ph.D. University of California at Los Angeles, 1955; Thomas Eekman, "Muscovy's International Relations in the Late Seventeenth Century: Johan van Keller's Observations," *California Slavic Studies* 14 (1992), 44–67.

the emerging newspaper market.¹⁰ The diplomats were not merely rumor-mongers. They took considerable care to indicate when they knew something firsthand, from observation or from direct conversation with the principals, when they knew it from trusted sources, when something was the general talk, and when it was plain rumor. Obviously their firsthand conversations with Peter or Menshikov are more trustworthy than other sources, but their network of sources was not trivial.¹¹ Reading the dispatches year after year allows the historian to reconstruct the network of the diplomat, to see where he got his information and thus to infer the climate of feeling among certain of the courtiers or officials. Pleyer is a prime example, for his dispatches in the years 1700–09 reveal his contacts with the Sheremetev family, and later on with some of those implicated in the case of Tsarevich Aleksei, Avram Lopukhin and Vasilii Alekseevich, the Siberian tsarevich. These were all oppositional circles, while the Danish ambassadors first allied with the Naryshkin faction in the 1680s and later had more contact with Peter and Menshikov than with the discontented grandees whom Pleyer cultivated. All the diplomats had good access to the Russian court and government offices, most startlingly on the occasions when they reported in detail on supposedly secret investigations of political crimes.

To be sure, the diplomats had their agenda. Issues of no importance to their sovereigns they ignored. Thus the church and the cultural changes going on in the church almost never figure in diplomatic reports. The church appears only on the rare occasions where it impinged on high politics or on foreign relations. There are cultural blind spots, but on the whole the diplomats do not present

¹⁰ In the seventeenth century the Swedish reports were regularly purchased and appeared, with frequent changes, in the German newsletters: Martin Welke, "Rußland in der deutschen Publizistik des 17. Jahrhunderts (1613–1689)," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 23, (1976), 105–276. The same occurred even more often in Peter's time. The most often cited and plagiarized history of the tsar was that of Jean Rousset, a French protestant *émigré*, who published in Amsterdam in 1728–26 his *Mémoires du règne de Pierre le Grand* under the name of Iwan Iwanowits Nestesuranoi. The work was a compilation of public and diplomatic sources. His account of the affair of Tsarevitch Aleksei, for example, is a combination of the official Russian manifesto and the dispatches of the Dutch resident, Jacob de Bie. See vol. IV, p. 33, where the description of the ceremony of abdication of the tsarevich is a fairly exact translation of de Bie's report for 6/17 February 1718 in ARSG Rusland 7368, 1718. Rousset, like the earlier German journalists, evidently did not have access to the encoded portions of the despatches. On Rousset and the plagiarism of his work, see R. Minzloff, *Pierre le Grand dans la littérature étrangère*, St. Petersburg, 1873, 40–3.

¹¹ On some of the methods and terminology of the diplomat's reports see Paul Bushkovitch, "Aristocratic Faction and the Opposition to Peter the Great: The 1690s," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 50, (1995), 80–120.

an exotic story of wild orgies and barbaric cruelties such as dot the pages of many of the published accounts of Russia in the early modern era. The diplomats were in Russia to conduct business. They needed to know how the country worked, who was powerful, who was on the rise and the opposite, what was Peter like and what did he want. They did not find the Russian court impenetrably alien or incomprehensible. In the 1670s and 1680s they certainly realized that it did not run on European lines and that its culture was different, but they saw it less as alien or foreign than primitive. The Russians lacked the culture assumed in Europe since the Renaissance and so naturally (they thought) its customs were backward and ignorant. The diplomats did not have any trouble understanding the political structure. Unlike many later historians who have agonized over the exact nature of the Russian elite, for the European diplomats of Aleksei's time or Peter's, it was clearly a nobility: *Adel* or *noblesse*. Within it they identified "the great" (*die grossen, les grands*), the favorites, both from great families and from lesser, and the various factions. They saw the women of the ruling house and some others engaged in political life, and reported it without shock or surprise. As Russian culture, particularly at court, became more European, the diplomats' understanding of Russian politics began to match that of the Russian elite, who abandoned the religious terminology of earlier centuries.

Russian sources naturally form the core of the study of Russian history, though they cannot by their nature answer all questions. The mass of documents of the *Razriad*, with its year by year recording of promotions to Duma and court ranks, combined with the records of appointments to head the various chancelleries, allows a precise tracking of the official positions of the elite for the seventeenth century. Unfortunately, no similar body of data exists for the eighteenth century, but in recompense the historian has the letter collections of Menshikov and a few other grandees. Mostly bureaucratic correspondence and formal greetings, they nevertheless contain crucial nuggets of information. I have scarcely been able to exploit their varied uses. Among the most valuable records are those of the investigation and trials of various opponents of Peter within the elite, particularly the Tsykler-Sokovnin case and the investigation of Tsarevich Aleksei. Ustrialov's very selective publication of the records of the case of Aleksei has required a reexamination of the archival originals. Finally, the huge mass of bureaucratic docu-

ments retains its value, particularly when the historian uses the information which they contain on the personnel of the institutions as well as the records of formal structures and actions. Only with such sources can we retell the story of the elite politics of Peter's reign.

The result is a new story of Peter the Great, some episodes familiar, some with new elements, some entirely new. As it has been my principal aim to reconstruct the narrative, I have mostly refrained from repeatedly entering the historiographical battles which have surrounded Peter since his death. Where unavoidable, I have relegated these to the notes. It has been my aim to strip away many of the legends and anachronistic conceptions of the events of Peter's reign, but also to construct a picture of the politics of the time. It is my hope that a new narrative of Peter's time makes clear the informal rules of the political game, the need of the monarch to balance the factions at court and to compromise even when carrying out radical changes. The narrative will also demonstrate that the rivalries of the boyars had an autonomy of their own, under both a strong ruler and a weak one. Within these rules, Russian politics was not a stagnant pool of routine autocracy, rather it was in continuous motion, a myriad of competing forces seeking an unattainable equilibrium. It is my hope that the demonstration of the truth or falsity of this conception of Peter's reign and its immediate antecedents will arise from the story.

The reader is advised that square brackets in footnotes quoting diplomatic reports indicate material in code in the original.

Prologue: Court politics and reform

The reign of Peter the Great was one of the great turning points in Russian history, and indeed of European history as well. In so far as Peter's transformation of Russia increased the speed of its rise to the status of a great power, he affected the whole history of western Eurasia, laying the foundations of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the advance of Russia into Transcaucasia and Central Asia. His transformation of the Russian state, moving it toward a bureaucratic monarchy of the European type, did not outlast the Romanov dynasty, but his transformation of Russian culture was permanent. Russia entered the sphere of West European culture, including that of secular political thought.

These were momentous changes. But how did Peter do it? For thirty years, from the mid-1690s to his death in 1725, he gave thousands of orders which added up to fundamental changes in Russian life. Many of the orders were not popular, and in the early years, roughly from the musketeer revolt of 1698 to the end of the Bulavin revolt in 1708, there was much opposition from the common people of Russia. As we shall see, for virtually the whole of the reign the other pole of society, the ruling elite, was rife with discontent, discontent aroused as much by Peter's reliance on a small circle of favorites (especially Menshikov) as by Peter's larger goals. This elite discontent came to a head with the affair of Tsarevich Aleksei in 1716–18. Thus Peter carried out his transformation of Russian society against the will of some of the most powerful of Russia's elite as well as that of his own son. His success was not due to having a powerful state apparatus at his command. The old administrative and governmental system he inherited from the seventeenth century had coped with its normal tasks fairly well, but in no sense was it an efficient modern bureaucracy. In any case, it ceased to function after about 1700, and for the next twenty years,

the time of crucial tests of strength, the state apparatus was a series of improvisations held together by a desperately overworked tsar and his equally overworked favorites.

Peter's success came from his ability to manage the politics of the court and the elite as much as it did from his personal abilities in administration, in military and diplomatic affairs. For Peter was not alone at the head of the Russian state. He had inherited a wealthy and traditionally important ruling elite, essentially the boyars and others with Duma rank, who had served his father in virtually all important offices, civil and military. Most of these people were to a greater or lesser extent unhappy with his changes, yet he managed ultimately to conciliate them enough to remain in power and carry out his will. As we shall see, this was more than just a matter of issuing orders.

CHAPTER I

Tsar and boyars: structures and values

The deadly rivalry among the boyars after the death of Tsar Aleksei in 1676 can only be understood in the context of the value system and political structure of the court and the court elite in the last years of the life of Peter's father. At the time of Peter the Great's birth, 30 May 1672, the feast of St. Isaac of Dalmatia, the scene of Russian political life was the court of his father, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. The setting for the tsar's court in those years, as it had been for centuries, was the Kremlin in Moscow, primarily the tsar's palace in the southwest corner.

Most of that space today is taken up by the Grand Palace of the time of Tsar Nicholas I, but some fragments of the old palace of the tsars remain, immediately adjacent to K. A. Ton's classical pile. The original palace was roughly in the shape of the letter "U," with the lower part of the "U" facing east toward the small square formed by the bell tower of Ivan the Great and the two cathedrals, the Dormition and Archangel Michael.¹ This lower part included most of the public rooms, the audience chambers where the tsar received ambassadors and where the Duma met. In the sixteenth century the two arms of the "U" running roughly west toward the wall were the private rooms of the ruling family, and behind them were the offices of the palace administration, the stables, the workshops, and the storehouses. Projecting from the lower part of the "U" were two additional structures connected to the main palace. One was the palace chapel, the Cathedral of the Annunciation from

¹ S. P. Bartenev, *Moskovskii Kreml' v starinu i teper'*, 2 vols., Moscow, 1912–16. The seventeenth-century palace has been the least studied of the Kremlin structures, the best account remaining is that of I. E. Zabelin, *Domashnii byt russkikh tsarei v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh*, 2 vols., Moscow, 1868–72 (reprint of vol. 1, *Gosudarev dvor ili dvorets*, Moscow, 1990). N. A. Geinike, N. S. Elagin, E. A. Efimova, and I. I. Shitts, *Po Moskve: progulki po Moskve i ee khudozhestvennym i prosvetitel'nym uchrezhdeniiam*, Moscow 1917 (reprint, 1991), 161–91 and endpaper maps.

the 1480s with its even older icons, some from the brush of Andrei Rublev. The other was the Hall of Facets, the work of Venetian builders, Marco Ruffo and Pietro Antonio Solari (1487–91). For the Kremlin, that most Russian of all places, is largely the work of Italians. Ruffo and Solari built the walls (1485–95) after the pattern of Italian fortresses, Aristotele Fioravanti the Dormition Cathedral (1475–79) and Alevisse Novi the Archangel Cathedral some twenty years later. Fioravanti amazed the Russians with his engineering skills in putting up the church, but he and his colleagues adhered to a traditional Russian design, weaving in a few Renaissance decorative elements.

In the time of Tsar Aleksei's father Michael, much of the Kremlin had to be rebuilt. The fighting of the Time of Troubles (1604–18) and the resultant occupation of the Kremlin by Polish soldiers had left its mark. The palace was rebuilt, following roughly the old “U”-shaped plan but with the more decorated style of the seventeenth century. The resulting structure had no symmetry, no grand entrance and no Palladian columns. The roof was a jumble of different heights and different forms. The facade was irregular with the Hall of Facets and the Annunciation Cathedral jutting out and the main entrance (the Red Staircase) on the left wall of the Hall of Facets, not in the center. While the Hall of Facets (and perhaps the exterior of the Golden Hall) reflected the Renaissance style to some extent, the rebuilt living quarters were entirely Russian. Peter's father and grandfather had moved the main living quarters (the *terem*) from the left arm to the right arm of the “U,” and rebuilt them in Russian style. The window frames were elaborately carved and throughout the facade and low rooms floral decoration and carving ran riot. The most striking fact about the palace, however, was how small it was and how modest compared to the churches around the palace square. The Hall of Facets had only four windows on its main floor facing the square, and five on the two sides. It rested on a sort of high basement, with one full floor and a low attic. Its roof did not come up to the roof line of the Dormition Cathedral immediately adjacent, or that of the Archangel Cathedral across the square, to say nothing of the bell tower. The new living quarters, in the right arm of the “U” back of the Hall of Facets, were a bit higher, for there were two full stories with a high basement and one large attic room. Seen from across the Moscow river, it was not the palace that dominated the silhouette as it does today, it was the churches. The

message of the Kremlin at the time of Peter's birth was that God is great and man is small, even the tsar.

The new decoration and modest increase in the size of the tsar's living quarters did not affect this message, essentially established at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Peter grew up in a structure utterly different in conception from the European royal palaces of the Renaissance. The kings of Europe built their palaces to exalt royal power, whether in Madrid, Paris, London, Copenhagen, or Warsaw. Philip II of Spain made a move toward a more religious conception with the monastic palace of the Escorial, but his descendants did not follow him, as the example of Buen Retiro shows. Philip II had few imitators in Europe (Peter's contemporary Karl VI of Austria at Klosterneuburg was one of the few), and kings both Catholic and Protestant preferred to exalt royal power rather than God, even the very Catholic Sigismund of Poland in the first version of the royal palace in Warsaw.²

The Kremlin not only conveyed a different message than did its counterparts in Europe, it also used a different artistic language. By the seventeenth century the Italian contributions had been largely overwhelmed by native Russian styles, though in 1634 the Holstein ambassador Adam Olearius still recognized the Italian look of the palace.³ He did not see the Italian aspects of the churches, which were indeed matters of minor decoration, nor the Italian basis of the Kremlin walls themselves. The walls had come to look entirely different in the seventeenth century. The towers received pointed roofs on the flat-topped Italian towers, giving the whole its characteristic "Russian" appearance. That Russian look was a curious amalgam of massive decoration over a basically functional design. The churches had to be built in certain ways because they were a sacred space. They had to have certain elements and be painted with

² Philip IV's Buen Retiro, though built around a monastery, was a typical Baroque monument to the king and his glory. See Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II*, New Haven, CT and London, 1998, 97–98; Jonathan Brown and J. H. Elliott, *A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV*, New Haven, CT 1980; Werner Kitlitschka, "Kunstgeschichte der Neuzeit," in *Klosterneuburg: Geschichte und Kultur*, vol. I. Klosterneuburg, and Vienna, c. 1990, 157–65; Simon Thurley, *The Royal Palaces of Tudor England: Architecture and Court Life 1460–1547*, New Haven, CT, 1983; Jerzy Lileyko, *Żamek warszawski: Rezydencja królewska i siedziba władz Rzeczypospolitej 1569–1763*, *Studia z historii sztuki* 35, Wrocław, 1984, 93–97; and the many works on Versailles, such as Yves Bottineau, *Versailles, miroir des princes*, Paris, 1989 and Guy Walton, *Louis XIV's Versailles*, Chicago, IL, 1986.

³ Adam Olearius, *Vermehrte neue Beschreibung der Muscowitischen und Persischen Reyse*, Schleswig, 1656, reprint edition, Tübingen, 1971, 146.

only a small number of possible themes and with the high icon screen before the altar. The disposition of the icons was not random, it was fixed by the notions of the icon screen's message. A church was not the object of artistic creativity, it was the meeting place of this world and the beyond, something much too important for man to alter. The palace also was largely functional. It was not there to convey the glory of the tsar, but to house him and his family and provide space for the activities of rule. The rooms were not grand halls designed to overwhelm the visitor, they were small and low and designed to retain heat in the winter, with large tiled stoves taking up much of the space. The windows were small and set deeply into the thick walls and contained panes of mica in metal frames rather than glass. The palace, or at least its public rooms, also had a message to convey, but that came not from its overall architecture but from the painting on the wall of the Golden Hall and the Hall of Facets.⁴

In those paintings the Kremlin palace of Peter's childhood did not proclaim the glory of the earthly tsar. They demonstrated the place of the tsar in the divine plan of the world. The iconographic program is clear from the descriptions and remains of the main public rooms, the Golden Hall of Ivan the Terrible, decorated 1547–53, and the Hall of Facets, decorated 1584–98. All of these were low-ceilinged, vaulted rooms, with small windows which must have preserved heat well but seemed dark and cramped by Renaissance and Baroque standards. The ceilings and walls were not designed to be finely proportioned in themselves, but to be functional and to carry the iconographic program of the palace.

The program of the Golden Hall was centered on Christ, not on the tsar. Christ enthroned as the Saviour Emmanuel looked down from the ceiling on the hall, surrounded by the Mother of God, the apostles, saints, and prophets, and allegories of the virtues and vices and God's creation of the world. On the next row were the saintly princes (Boris, Gleb, Michael of Tver', Alexander Nevskii) as well as Ivan III and Vasilii II and the story of Gideon (Judges 6–8), the

⁴ The Hall of Facets still remains, with its paintings heavily "restored" in the nineteenth century. The Golden Hall was torn down with adjacent rooms in 1752 to make way for Empress Elizabeth's Kremlin Palace, which in turn fell victim to Nicholas I and Ton. What is known of the paintings survives from very detailed seventeenth-century descriptions. Bartenev, *Moskovskii Kremľ*, 2, 183–93; O. I. Podobedova, *Moskovskaia shkola zhivopisi pri Ivane IV*, Moscow, 1972, 59–68, especially the appendix: K. K. Lopialo, "K primernoi rekonstruktsii Zolotoi Palaty Kremlevskogo dvortsa i ee monumental'noi zhivopisi," 193–98.

judge of the people of Israel who led them against the infidel Midianites. Below Gideon and the princes the wall showed the stories of the baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kiev in 988 and the legend of the acceptance of the Byzantine regalia by Vladimir Monomakh, one of the justifications for the introduction of the title of tsar by Ivan IV in 1547. The entrance hall to the Golden Hall was similar. Again Christ sat on the lap of the Lord Sabaoth in the ceiling, looking down first on allegories of Christian virtue, then on the Old Testament kings and the story of Moses. Along the walls was a detailed story of Joshua's conquest of Canaan. As in the case of the story of Gideon, the message was that faith in God led to victory over His enemies. All the paintings revealed the power of God primarily in the stories of the Old Testament. Byzantium played a decidedly secondary role, there only to introduce Christianity and the regalia. There was no depiction of Constantinople on its own or Byzantine history apart from Russia. Moscow was the New Jerusalem, not the Third Rome, and even Russia's princes paled before Gideon and Joshua.⁵

Thirty years later the message of the Hall of Facets had not changed and indeed most of the subjects of the Golden Hall were repeated. Painted in the time of Boris Godunov and repainted in 1672, the eastern wall of the Hall of Facets (where the throne stood) illustrated the legend of the descent of Riurik from Augustus Caesar, the genealogical foundation legend of the dynasty that ruled until 1598. The 1672 repainting kept this subject, just as the written histories of the Romanovs stressed their succession to the throne of the Riurikovichi. The Hall of Facets retained the story of the translation of the Byzantine regalia to Vladimir Monomakh, but omitted the story of the baptism of St. Vladimir. It showed instead the story of Joseph in great detail and vignettes of David and Solomon. The entrance hall displayed Joshua, Constantine, and the story of David and Goliath. Three small depictions of virtuous rulers, one confronting treacherous aristocrats, another showing the good tsar handing over the sword of retribution, and a third more

⁵ Podobedova, *Moskovskaia*, 59–68. Zabelin, *Domashnii*, I (1990), 193–215. Podobedova, following Zabelin, saw in the depictions of Joshua a reference to Ivan's conquest of Kazan' and in the stories of the healing of sick rulers a reference to Ivan's life as well. Joel Raba, "Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Jerusalem," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 50 (1995), 297–308, and Daniel Rowland, "Moscow – The Third Rome or the New Israel," *Russian Review* 55, no. 4 (1996), 591–614, esp. 606–07.

detailed story of the good and evil judges, added to the whole. The Russian princes appeared on the sides of the deeply set windows. The details varied from those of the paintings in the Golden Hall, but once again the Old Testament vastly predominated over Byzantium. The room demonstrated the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty and its Augustan descent on a background of the Kings of Israel, stories of virtuous princes and of the power of God.⁶

The other part of the palace that carried a message was the Annunciation Cathedral, not a free-standing church but the main palace church attached to the main buildings by a covered corridor. Russian churches of the pre-Petrine era were simply churches, and any dynastic or “political” messages they might carry were strictly secondary. In the gallery of the church the wall showed the Tree of Jesse, the genealogy of Christ, not of the tsar, even in his principal chapel. The Tree of Jesse was appropriate for a church dedicated to the Annunciation of Christ’s birth, and the wall paintings of the church itself were almost entirely devoted to the life of Christ, other than the traditional depiction of the Apocalypse on the southern wall. Only the pillars revealed the dynastic connection, for there stood the Russian princes and the Greek warrior saints, along with Constantine and Helen, the Byzantine emperors Michael and Theodora (the restorers of Orthodoxy after iconoclasm) and St. Vladimir and St. Ol’ga, the founders of Russian Christianity. The pillars, however, were not the place of honor, and the Annunciation Church remained a church dedicated to the Annunciation of Christ’s birth, not to the patron saints of the dynasty, Moscow, or individual members of the dynasty.⁷

Just as the Old Testament predominated over the Byzantine world in the palace wall paintings, the great churches and the bell tower dominated the main Kremlin square, not the palace. The palace church of the Annunciation was tiny by comparison to the two main churches, the Dormition and Archangel Cathedrals. These were quite different in function and conception. The Dormition Cathedral was the principal church of the patriarch of Moscow, and was dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God, one of

⁶ Zabelin, *Domashniĭ*, I (1990), 215–22; Andrei Batalov, *Moskovskoe kamennoe zodchestvo kontsa XVI veka: problemy khudozhestvennogo myshleniia epokhi*, Moscow, 1996, 249–59.

⁷ In the *terem* there were chapels which were dedicated to the patron saints of the members of the dynasty. Though richly appointed, they were small and private, not part of the public expression of the consciousness of the tsars.

the most important Russian Marian festivals. The dedication was typical of many Russian cathedral churches of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries and included in it the idea of the intercession of the Mother of God for Christians, for the Russian Land. Built by Fioravanti and painted soon after, it was restored in great detail in 1643 by Tsar Michael's orders. The iconographic program was primarily Marian, not political. Most of the walls were covered with a detailed history of the life of the Mother of God, with the western wall reserved for the Day of Judgment. The side altars also were dedicated to Marian themes ("Praise of the Mother of God"), and the wall dividing the altar space from the rest of the church was covered with paintings of holy monks from the earliest times through the Russian monastic saints. As the church of the patriarch, who came from the monastic clergy by Orthodox tradition, the monks were highly appropriate.⁸

Even the wall paintings of the Archangel Cathedral, dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, and the necropolis of the Russian princes and tsars, stuck almost entirely to theological and biblical themes. The western wall depicted the Symbol of Faith, including a large section with the Day of Judgment. The southern wall showed the archangels Gabriel and Michael and other Old Testament figures, while the northern wall continued the story of Michael the archangel to include his Christian miracles, including helping the emperor Constantine. Only on the lowest row, at eye level just above the coffins of the princes and tsars, stood depictions of the Russian princes, the Moscow dynasty and its ancestors. The princes stood in armor or monks' robes, and each with a nimbus around his head, saintly in death. This row of solemn princes was the closest that the Kremlin churches and palaces got to glorifying the dynasty, and by western standards, it was not very close.⁹

⁸ T. V. Tolstaia, *Uspenskii sobor Moskovskogo Kremliia*, Moscow, 1979, 15–26; *Uspenskii sobor Moskovskogo Kremliia: materialy i issledovaniia*, ed. E. S. Smirnova, Moscow, 1985, esp. O. V. Zonova, "O rannikh altarnykh freskakh Uspenskogo sobora," in *ibid.*, 69–86.

⁹ Iu. N. Dmitriev, "Stenopi's Arkhangel'skogo sobora Moskovskogo Kremliia (materialy k issledovaniiu)," V. N. Lazarev *et al.*, eds., *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo: XVII vek*, Moscow, 1964, 138–59; and E. S. Sizov, "Datirovka rospisi Arkhangel'skogo sobora Moskovskogo Kremliia i istoricheskaiia osnova nekotorykh siuzhetov," in *ibid.*, 160–75; Michael Cherniavsky, "Ivan the Terrible and the Iconography of the Kremlin Cathedral of the Archangel Michael," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 2, no. 1 (1975), 3–28. All of the princes have the nimbus, even those never proclaimed saints, which reflects the more general use of the nimbus in Russian religious art than in the West. It conveyed general holiness and piety, not specific sainthood.

CEREMONIAL

Like the physical setting, the ceremonial of the court emphasized the divine over the human. In its almost exclusively religious presentation of the tsar the Russian ceremonial differed not only from that of post-Renaissance Europe, but even from Byzantium, where powerful elements of the secular glorification of the emperor remained.¹⁰ In Moscow the two most important of the annual court ceremonies were the blessing of the waters at Epiphany and the Palm Sunday procession. At Epiphany the tsar, the whole court and the people of Moscow came down to the frozen Moscow river where the patriarch blessed the waters of the river, then sprinkled the water on the tsar and the boyars. At Palm Sunday the patriarch recreated Christ's entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey with the tsar walking before him and holding the bridle. Both of these ceremonies emphasized the tsar's respect for the church, not the majesty of the tsar.¹¹ Outside of the capital, the tsar showed his piety by the numerous pilgrimages to the Russian monasteries. The most important was the September pilgrimage to the Trinity Monastery to pray at the shrine of St. Sergii of Radonezh on his feast day, but usually the tsar went to the Trinity Monastery at least one other time in the year and often went much further afield, even to the Vologda monasteries in the north and the monastery of St. Kirill at Belozero. Each of these pilgrimages was a major enterprise, the tsar going with most of his family and innumerable courtiers and servants.

These ceremonies emphasized the respect of the tsar for the church. These were not the only public ceremonies, for the coronation of the tsar was also crucial to the presentation of the tsar to the people. This was the fullest "autocratic" presentation of the tsar,

¹⁰ On Byzantine ideology and court ceremonial see most recently Henry Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, Dumbarton Oaks, 1997. Byzantine official ideology, expressed in the culture and ceremonial of the court as well as in literature, was much more complex than Russian. It incorporated elements of Roman Imperial ideology and Byzantine learning based on pagan Greek culture as well as Christianity. It was also more self-consciously "autocratic." Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143–1180*, Cambridge, 1993; and Otto Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell*, Jena 1938, and Darmstadt 1956.

¹¹ Crummey, "Court Spectacles," 130–58; Paul Bushkovitch, "The Epiphany Ceremony of the Russian Court in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Russian Review* 49, 1 (1990), 1–17; Michael S. Flier, "Breaking the Code: The Image of the Tsar in the Muscovite Palm Sunday Ritual," in Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland, eds., *Medieval Russian Culture*, vol. II, Berkeley, CA, 1994, 213–42; and more generally Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. I, Princeton, NJ, 1995, 22–41.

based on a Byzantine prototype which emphasized that his power came from God, and on the Russian legend of Riurik's descent from Augustus Caesar. It was more respectful of the church than the Byzantine ceremony, but remained a powerful presentation of the majesty of the tsar, the equal of the Byzantine and Holy Roman emperors. A more frequent if less dramatic portrayal of the tsar as great monarch took place at the state banquets, where the tsar ritually distributed food to his courtiers and servants. These were long affairs, with the name of each guest read out before he received his food, an honor so great he was not actually expected to eat the food in the presence of the tsar but to take it home. The ritual of generosity was also central to the tsar's presentation of himself, for generosity was one of the principal virtues of the good tsar.¹²

This traditional ceremonial, much of it so out of keeping with the increasing pretensions of the Russian tsars, had to change, and change it did. The vehicle of change in Tsar Aleksei's time was the teaching of the monks trained in the Kiev Academy, Orthodox Ukrainians and Belorussians from the Polish Commonwealth. The first such monks, Epifanii Slavinetskii and his contemporaries, stuck pretty much to religion, influencing the court culture by altering the exclusively liturgical content of church services to include sermonizing in the best Baroque manner. In the 1660s the Belorussian monk Simeon Polotskii came to Moscow, and continued the sermon tradition, but also went farther. He composed elaborate panegyric poetry for increasingly complex court ceremonies, ones that incorporated various elements of a Polish-inspired secular culture. He even produced a poem celebrating the beauty and convenience of the tsar's new house at his country residence at Kolomenskoe, calling it with clichéd exaggeration the eighth wonder of the world. The celebration of a secular building was an entirely new idea in Russian literature and culture, ironically composed in Baroque forms for one of the last specimens of truly Russian architecture still largely uninfluenced by the West.¹³ Simeon's poetry was something new, but

¹² V. Savva, *Moskovskie tsari i vizantiiskie vasil'evy*, Khar'kov, 1901, 110–270; E. V. Barsov, "Drevnerusskie pamiatniki svyashchennogo venchaniia tsarei," *ChOIDR* 1, pt. 1 (1883), 1–160; Michael Cherniavsky, "Khan or Basileus: an Aspect of Medieval Russian Political Theory," in Michael Cherniavsky, ed., *The Structure of Russian History*, New York, 1970, 65–79; Daniel Rowland, "Did Muscovite Literary Ideology Place Limits on the Power of the Tsar (1540s–1680s)," *Russian Review* 49 (1990), 141.

¹³ Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, ed. I. P. Eremin, Moscow and Leningrad, 1955, 103–08; A. N. Robinson, *Bor'ba idei v russkoi literature XVII veka*, Moscow, 1974; Paul

it was only an addition to the older tradition. The tsar continued to go to church virtually every day, and the banquets went on.

The essentially religious character of the culture of the court and of Russia generally did not mean that the tsar and the elite had no political ideas at all. It meant that they expressed these ideas in a religious and moral framework, one that did not contain notions such as sovereignty, natural law, or social contract.¹⁴ Also, the Russians produced no systematic political thought, and besides the ceremonial, it is in their chronicles and tales for the most part that their ideas were contained. The chaos and drama of the Time of Troubles gave rise to many such tales, but most of them were written or compiled by writers far from the boyar elite (Khvorostinin, Shakhovskoi, Katyrev-Rostovskii). The only one to reflect the official point of view was the so-called New Chronicler, a work compiled about 1630.¹⁵ The New Chronicler laid stress on the boyar rivalries at the beginning of Fyodor's reign and then went on to detail the exile of aristocrats at the instigation of Boris Godunov, as well as his hatred of the boyars. At the election of Vasili Shuiskii in 1606 the New Chronicler omitted any reference to boyar rivalries, but criticized the boyars for not consulting anyone beyond a narrow circle. He also gave some space to Vasili Shuiskii's oath at his election. The text of the oath seems to say that Vasili promised not to execute anyone without the agreement of the boyars, but the New

Bushkovitch, *Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, New York, 1992. For an attempt to explain the developments in Russian culture of the period without reference to Western influence see: V. M. Zhivov and B. A. Uspenskii, "Tsar' i Bog. Semioticheskie aspekty sakralizatsii monarkha v Rossii," in B. A. Uspenskii, ed., *Iazyki kul'tury i problemy perevodimosti*, Moscow, 1987; and Victor M. Zhivov, "Religious Reform and the Emergence of the Individual in Russian Seventeenth-Century Literature," in Samuel H. Baron and Nancy Shields Kollmann, eds., *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine*, DeKalb, IL, 1997, 184–98.

¹⁴ The older literature on political thought in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Russia focusses almost exclusively on notions of the power of the tsar and suffers from the search for constitutional precedents and their absence. V. Val'denberg, *Drevnerusskie ucheniia o predelakh tsarskoi vlasti*, Petrograd, 1916; M. A. D'iakonov, *Vlast' moskovskikh gosudarei*, St. Petersburg 1889; Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, New Haven, CT, 1961. For newer conceptions see Daniel Rowland, "The Problem of Advice in Muscovite Tales about the Time of Troubles," *Russian History/Histoire russe* 6, no. 2 (1979), 259–83; and "Muscovite Literary Ideology, 125–55." See also George G. Weickhardt, "Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Russia," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1994), 316–37; Marshall Poe, "What Did Russians Mean When They Called Themselves 'Slaves of the Tsar'?", *Slavic Review* 57, no. 3 (Fall 1998), 584–608.

¹⁵ *PSRL* 14, St. Petersburg, 1910, 23–154; Ia. G. Solodkin, "Letopisets Novyi," *Slovar' knizhnikov . . . XVII v.*, 3/2, 257–62. The text refers to the year 6138 (1629/30) as the present and breaks off in July, 1630: *PSRL* 14, 146, 154.

Chronicler interpreted the oath to mean that Vasilii would not take revenge on those who had helped or even instigated Boris Godunov to persecute him, and claimed that he later went back on his promise. Vasilii and Boris were thus bad tsars who did not live in harmony with the boyars or the people.¹⁶

The election of Tsar Michael in 1613 was the central turning point for the New Chronicler. In his description, the Russian people wanted to choose a tsar according to their own ideas, forgetting the words of scripture: "God gives not only the kingdom but the power to whom he wants." The people fell silent, and then God gave a ruler as he had given Saul to Israel. These events were God's will, not the people's or Michael's.¹⁷ The New Chronicler went on to describe the reign of the new God-given tsar in terms of the ideal of harmony, where the tsars, boyars, and people are united in their struggle to expel the Polish and Swedish invaders. The comet of 1618/19 was a sign of the new order. At first the tsar and the people were terrified, but then "wise philosophers" explained it to them: the head of the comet was over Russia, which demonstrated that order and peace would return, while the tail was over Germany and Poland, which would be racked by war, dissension, and bloodshed. So it came to pass, for Poland continued at war and the Thirty Years War broke out in Germany. The portrait of harmony in Russia came to some extent at the expense of truth, however. The New Chronicler described Michael's second marriage to Evdokiia Streshneva in 1626, but there was no mention of the scandal over Mariia Khlopova and the exile of the Saltykovs.¹⁸

This was the central ideal, that of the powerful tsar ruling in harmony (moral-religious harmony, not secular constitutional harmony) with the boyars. Tsar Aleksei himself expressed it in a letter to Prince Nikita Ivanovich Odoevskii: "[God] has given us, the great sovereign, and to you the boyars to judge with one soul the people of His light by justice, equally for all."¹⁹ The image was in

¹⁶ *PSRL* 14, 35–36, 40, 47, 52–54, 69–70. This ideal of harmony was shared by the other tales of the Time of Troubles, whether from the secretary Timofeev or the *stol'niki* and Moscow gentlemen Khvorostinin, Shakhovskoi, and Katyrev-Rostovskii: Paul Bushkovitch, "The Formation of a National Consciousness in Early Modern Russia," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10, 3/4 (December 1986), 369–73. See also Rowland, "Advice," and "Muscovite Literary Ideology."

¹⁷ *PSRL* 14, 129.

¹⁸ *PSRL* 14, 146, 150–52.

¹⁹ P. I. Bartenev, ed., *Sobranie Pisem tsaria Alekseia Mikhailovicha*, Moscow, 1856, 225 (Aleksei to N. I. Odoevskii, 3 September 1652).

many ways contradictory, for it presented both the tsar's power and the harmony of a wise and meek tsar with the equally wise and humble boyars. In the mind of the Russians of the time, it was the tsar's virtue that reconciled the two: a good tsar could be powerful and at the same time live in harmony with elite and people.

The idea of harmony was so strong that it was in that light that Tsar Aleksei interpreted the one text available to him that discussed the nature and requirements of ruling without explicit reference to Christianity or religion, the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum secretorum*. Translated into East Slavic in the fifteenth century as the *Tainaia tainykh*, this was not the work of Aristotle but that of an Arab scholar of roughly the eighth to tenth centuries, widely known in the West in two Latin translations as well as vernacular translations from the Latin. The version known in Russia, however, was made from the Hebrew version, apparently translated in Kiev and brought to Novgorod with other translated philosophical texts at the time of the so-called heresy of the Judaizers (1480s).²⁰ The text presents itself as the advice of Aristotle to his pupil Alexander the Great, and is essentially a typical example of the Muslim and medieval European genre known as the mirror of princes, an advice book for rulers. It tells the prince how to be generous and avoid avarice, how to rule himself and live a moderate life, how to be just and how to deal with his servants. It then goes on to more specific advice on how to appoint various kinds of officials, how to send embassies and conduct wars, and concludes with a long section of medical advice with interpolations from the works of Maimonides and Al-Razi. It even tells the prince to avoid pale men with thick hair or blue eyes, all signs of bad character. Tsar Aleksei read the work, for he quoted it in a letter to Prince N. I. Odoevskii from July, 1658. In reproaching Odoevskii for supporting the unjustified complaints of his colleagues P. V. Sheremetev and Prince F. F. Volkonskii the tsar said, "And

²⁰ A. I. Sobolevskii, *Perevodnaia literatura Moskovskoi Rusi XIV–XVII vekov*, Sbornik Ordeniia russkogo 74/1, St. Petersburg, 1903, 419–23; M. N. Speranskii, ed., *Iz istorii otrechennykh knig: IV Aristotelevy vrata ili Tainaia tainykh* Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti i iskusstva 171, St. Petersburg, 1908; D. M. Bulanin, "Tainaia tainykh," *Slovar' knizhnikov* 2/2, 427–30; W. F. Ryan, "The *Secretum secretorum* and the Muscovite Autocracy," in W. F. Ryan and Charles B. Schmitt, eds., *Pseudo-Aristotle, the Secret of Secrets: Sources and Influences* (Warburg Institute Surveys 9), London, 1982, 114–23; Moshe Taube, "The Kievan Jew Zacharia and the Astronomical Works of the Judaizers," *Jews and Slavs* 3 (1995), 168–98; Taube, "The 'Poem on the Soul' in the *Laodicean Epistle* and the Literature of the Judaizers," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 19 (1995), 671–85; Taube, "The Spiritual Circle in the *Secret of Secrets* and the 'Poem on the Soul'," *ibid.*, 18 (3/4) December 1994, 342–55.

Aristotle writes to all sovereigns, ordering them to select such a man who would reconcile his sovereign to people, not to anger them.” This statement appears to be a reference to book II of the *Secretum*, where “Aristotle” advises Alexander to speak to the people through servants who will make peace, not trouble, for the ruler, but it is not an exact quotation.²¹ It was the means to harmony between tsar and people that Aleksei remembered from the tract, not any sort of call to autocracy. In theory at least, Aleksei’s idea of the autocrat and his power was that of his 1660 letter to Sheremetev: he would appoint boyars according to their ancestry and God’s will, but sometimes he might choose not to make the appointment and he might also promote deserving men of lower rank. Aleksei may have had autocratic power in practice, but his conception of it was much milder, a conception that bound him to respect the traditions of the state and the elite and behave as a meek and proper Christian.²²

THE BOYARS AND THEIR VALUES

In May of 1660 Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich wrote a letter to the boyar and governor of Kiev, Vasiliï Borisovich Sheremetev. The tsar’s letter was in answer to the report he had received that Sheremetev wanted to come to Moscow, to the court, and Aleksei was annoyed. The situation in Kiev was unsettled, for the war with Poland was still on,

²¹ “A Aristotel’ pishet ko vsem gosudarem, velit vybirat’ takova cheloveka, kotoroi by gosudaria svoego k liudem primiril, a ne ozlobliat,” A. Barsukov, *Rod Sheremetevykh*. 8 vols., St. Petersburg, 1881–1904, IV, 1884, 422–23. Cf. Speranskii, *Tainaia*, 144. Prince N. I. Odoevskii’s wife was born Evdokiia Fyodorovna Sheremeteva, a cousin of P. V. Sheremetev: Aleksandr Barsukov, *Rodoslovie Sheremetevykh*, St. Petersburg, 2d ed., 1904, 8–9.

²² Some Byzantine texts on kingship were also known in seventeenth-century Russia, most importantly the *Ekthesis* of the sixth-century deacon Agapetus and the work known as Pseudo-Basil, probably of the ninth century. Agapetus was widely copied in the Orthodox Slavic world, including Russia, by the sixteenth century. Pseudo-Basil was translated by the fifteenth century and known in Russia. It was printed in the Ukraine in the late sixteenth century and then in Moscow in 1661/63 and 1680. On Agapetus see Ihor Ševčenko, “A Neglected Byzantine Source of Muscovite Political Ideology,” in Michael Cherniavsky, ed., *The Structure of Russian History*, New York, 1970, 80–107; Moscow: Paul Bushkovitch, “The Life of Saint Filipp: Tsar and Metropolitan in the Late Sixteenth Century,” in Flier and Rowland, *Medieval*, 29–46 (on the uses of Agapetus). On Pseudo-Basil see Herbert Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, 2 vols., Munich, 1978, I, 157–65; Sobolevskii, *Perevodnaia*, 20; and F. I. Setin, “‘Testament’ v izdanii Simeona Polotskogo,” in A. N. Robinson et al., eds., *Simeon Polotskii i ego knigoizdatel’skaia deiatel’nost’*, Moscow, 1982, 116–33. Text: Pseudo-Basil, “Kefalaia parainetika”, *Patrologia graeca* 107, xxi–lvi. Pseudo-Basil is a strikingly un-autocratic text, stressing the responsibility of the monarch for his subjects, his faith, learning, justice, temperance, sobriety, and similar virtues. It also tells him not to glory in victories over his enemies (“Kefalaia,” liii).

the Crimean Tatars were a potential threat, and the Ukrainian cossack host was rife with internal conflict. Sheremetev was needed in Kiev. Besides ordering him to remain, the tsar explained his views of a boyar's service to his monarch. He sent him a little treatise, starting with a question: "Why is your honor of boyar not a simple thing?" The honor was not a simple (in the sense of unrefined, low) thing because God had willed Sheremetev to become a boyar to serve his sovereign, to serve faithfully and virtuously, for the cause of the tsar was the cause of God. Sheremetev should not be offended at the orders to stay at his post, for he was general of the earthly army of the great Tsar of Tsars in heaven. Aleksei continued:

You know yourself that the great eternal Tsar wanted you, Vasilii Borisovich, to be a boyar with us, the great sovereign and mortal tsar, not in vain. And we, the great sovereign, know that by your inheritance the honor of boyar is eternal, and it is given by the will of the great and eternal Tsar and heavenly ruler and by our appointment. And it sometimes happens that you lords who have had your fathers in the honor of boyars yourselves do not receive that honor even until your death, and others who live a long time without that honor but with other of our, the sovereign's, ranks, when they are old are introduced into that honor of boyar by the will of the great and eternal Tsar of Tsars by our mortal appointment. And it is not proper to boast that that honor is inborn nor is it proper to hope for it strongly, for it is to be remembered from holy scripture: 'let the wise man not boast of his wisdom nor the strong of his strength, but boasting boast of knowledge and understanding of the Lord and of doing justice and right in the midst of the earth, and especially of having cleanliness and love; of these is the kingdom of heaven.'²³

Nothing could sum up better the complexities of status of the Russian ruling elite at the end of the seventeenth century than Tsar Aleksei's letter. Sheremetev was to serve his sovereign at the rank his family had traditionally held, but he was not to get too cocky: the tsar was still the tsar, and the tsar was put on earth by the Tsar of Tsars in heaven, whose will was supreme. At the same time, if a boyar grew too restive, the tsar might write him a letter, half scolding and half cajoling him. The tsar was not a tyrant, and he needed his great men on a daily basis to run the state, command the armies, and advise him on future steps to take as the sovereign of Russia.

²³ Tsar Aleksei to V. B. Sheremetev, 6 May 1660, *ŽORSA* II (1861), 749–55. The tsar seems to be using the word "eternal" (*vechnyi*) in its secondary sense of belonging to the world of the spirit, as opposed to the earthly world.

For the Russian state of the seventeenth century, politics consisted largely of the relationship of the court elite to the tsar, and to one another. The Duma was the council of nobles who held one of the four Duma ranks. At the top of this hierarchy were the boyars, about twenty-five men in the last years of the reign of Tsar Aleksei. Below them in dignity were the *okol'niche* (about fifteen or sixteen), the *dumnye dvoriane* (about twenty-five), the *dumnye d'iaki*, and the Duma secretaries (seven to eight). Appointment to these ranks was not arbitrary, but reflected the traditional place of the various aristocratic clans in the precedence system (*mestnichestvo*). Some families were gradually promoted through marriage to the tsar's family or by simple favor, but they then remained in the court elite, gradually fitting in with the older families.²⁴ This was the formal system: informally there were also favorites of the tsar among this elite who exercised greater power than their official position implied.

The Duma seems to have been the locus of much important decision-making, at least formally, but it was an institution about which we know remarkably little. The term itself comes from modern scholars, the contemporaries simply referred to "the boyars."²⁵ Nevertheless, it seems that almost all laws and decisions involving the army and appointments to civilian offices were decrees of the tsar alone, while matters of finance and land were decrees of the tsar and boyars, the result of some Duma discussion.²⁶ Foreign affairs were in large part under the purview of the Duma as well. Committees of boyars conducted negotiations with foreign ambassadors, not the tsar or the head of the Ambassadorial Chancellery alone. Translated newsletters from abroad were customarily read out in the Duma, and later chapters will show that many issues of

²⁴ Crummey, *Aristocrats*, 12–33, 177; V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Boiarskaia Duma drevnei Rusi*, 4th ed., Moscow, 1909; N. P. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii, *Gosudarevy sluzhilye liudi*, *Sochineniia*, I, St. Petersburg, 1909, 128–46.

²⁵ Russian historians since the middle of the nineteenth century have been fascinated by the tsar himself and the "bureaucracy." On the latter, see Hans-Joachim Torke, "Gab es in Moskau Reich des 17. Jahrhundert eine Bürokratie?," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 38 (1986), 276–98; Peter B. Brown, "Muscovite Government Bureaus," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 10, no. 3 (1983), 269–330; N. F. Demidova, *Sluzhilaia biurokratiia v Rossii XVII v. i ee rol' v formirovanii absolutizma*, Moscow, 1987. The only attempt to study the Duma was the classic study of Kliuchevskii, *Boiarskaia Duma*.

²⁶ A. G. Man'kov, "Statistika i dinamika zakonodatel'nykh aktov Rossii vtoroi poloviny XVII v. (O nekotorykh osobennostiakh stanovleniia absolutizma)," *Vspomogatel'nye istoricheskie dissipliny* 20 (1989), 175–87; and Man'kov, *Zakonodatel'stvo i pravo Rossii vtoroi poloviny XVII v.*, St. Petersburg, 1998, 12–32.

foreign policy were discussed there.²⁷ More than that we cannot say, and to ask if the Duma was a limit on the power of the tsar is to ask a question that cannot be answered and perhaps should not be posed. Given the absence of a learned juridical tradition and the religious character of all political thought, formal legality was not even an issue. The crucial question is where the real power lay, and that question can only be answered by the narrative of events.

At the time of Aleksei's death in 1676, there were twenty-three men with the rank of boyar, ranked according to the order of their appointment. There were also twelve *okol'nichie*, the next rank down, nineteen Duma gentlemen, and eight Duma secretaries, as well as the cupbearer (*kravchii*), treasurer (*kaznachei*), head chamberlain (*post-el'nichii*), and keeper of the seal (*pechatnik*). The Duma secretaries were heads of major offices, but not part of the social elite, forming the elite of the professional administrators only.

Most of the boyars are only names to us, men whose careers we can trace in the records of the court, the army, and the *Razriad*. For a few we have glimpses of their character and their cultural world, primarily because of the various foreign ambassadors who noted down what they could learn of the major figures at court, such as Augustin von Meyerberg, whom the Emperor Leopold sent to Moscow in 1661–2.²⁸ More unusual was the work of the Polish nobleman, Paweł Potocki. Potocki was captured by the Russian army in 1656 and remained in captivity in Moscow until 1668. He was free to walk about the city, he appeared at court and seems to have obtained the favor of Tsar Aleksei and even married one of the Saltykovs. On his return home he produced an account of the Russian court unique for its information about the men who held boyar rank the year of his departure.²⁹ Of course, even more

²⁷ Most of the literature on the Ambassadorial Chancellery focusses on the officials of that office: S. A. Belokurov, "O Posol'skom prikaze," *ChOIKR* pt. 3 (1906); L. A. Iuzefovich, "Kak v posol'skikh obychaiakh vedetsia," Moscow, 1988; Robert M. Croskey, *Muscovite Diplomatic Practice in the Reign of Ivan III*, New York, 1987; E. V. Chistiakova and N. M. Rogozhin, eds., "Oko vsei velikoi Rossii," Moscow, 1989.

²⁸ Augustin Maierberg, "Puteshestvie v Moskoviiu Barona Avgustina Maierberga, trans. A. N. Shemiakin, *ChOIKR* (1873), 3–5; (1874). A more complex source is the account by one of Tsar Aleksei's English doctors, who includes some sensational stories about Khitrovo's alleged Polish mistresses among apparently reliable data: Samuel Collins, *The Present State of Russia*, London, 1671.

²⁹ Paulus a Potok Potocki, *Moschovia sive brevis narratio de moribus Magnae Russorum monarchiae*, in *Opera omnia*, Warsaw, 1747. Paul Bushkovitch, "Cultural Change among the Russian Boyars 1650–1680: New Sources and Old Problems," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 56 (2000), 91–112; Mirosław Nagielski, "Potocki Paweł," *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. xxviii,

revealing would be the private papers and correspondence of the Russian boyars themselves, but they are few and far between. Most surviving papers of boyar families are estate correspondence with stewards in far-away villages, and even these are only a handful. In compensation there is some correspondence of Tsar Aleksei himself, which throws a sharp light both on the tsar and his aristocracy.³⁰ To identify the tsar's favorites and the structure of court factions, it is the ambassadors who provide the most complete information.³¹

At the time of Meyerberg's embassy there were seventy or so men of Duma rank, five of whom he regarded as more powerful than the rest. First was B. I. Morozov, the tsar's old tutor, who was by then in poor health and died while Meyerberg was in Moscow (on 1 November 1661). If he had not been so avaricious, he would have been able to run the state in the tsar's name.

After his death the most powerful was I. D. Miloslavskii, the tsar's father-in-law. In Meyerberg's account, Miloslavskii's significance was in spite of the tsar's evident dislike and contempt for him. Supposedly Aleksei had no hesitation in insulting him verbally (and crudely at that) and pulling his beard. That is what happened at the Duma on 10 November 1661, as the tsar was discussing remedies for a recent defeat at the hands of the Poles and Miloslavskii bragged that he would bring back the king of Poland's head. Miloslavskii's besetting sin was also avarice.³²

According to Meyerberg, another influential figure who lacked the moral defects of Morozov and Miloslavskii and who enjoyed the tsar's affection was F. M. Rtishchev. In spite of his virtue he earned the hatred of the people for his role in debasing the coinage (the "Copper Revolt" of July 1662). An emerging favorite was B. M.

Wrocław, 1984–85, 117–19. P. Matveev in "Artamon Sergeevich Matveev v prikaze Maloi Rossii i ego otnosheniia k delam i liudiam etogo kraia," *Russkaia mysl'* 8 (1909) 1–23; 9, 46–75, first identified as Potocki's work the partial translation published by Bulgarin and Grech (from an anonymous manuscript, not the printed text) as "Kharaktery vel'mozh i znatnykh liudei v tsarstvovanie Alekseia Mikhailovicha," *Severnyi arkhiv* 17, no. 20, 295–314; 18, no. 22, 105–12.

³⁰ *ŽORS4*, II (1861), 702–79; Bartenev, ed., *Sobranie pisem*.

³¹ See Solov'ev, *Istoriia*, V–VI, Philip Longworth, *Alexis: Tsar of all the Russias*, New York, 1984; Crumme, *Aristocrats*; Heinz Ellersieck, "Russia under Aleksei Mikhailovich and Feodor Alekseevich 1645–1682: the Scandinavian Sources," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1955.

³² Miloslavskii headed six major offices from 1646–50 until his stroke in 1666: the Great Treasury, the Musketeers, Mercenaries, and Cavalry Chancelleries, as well as the Treasury and Apothecary Chancelleries: S. K. Bogoiavlenskii, *Prikazyne sud'i XVII veka*, Moscow, 1946, 14–15, 25–27, 55–56, 70–71, 149–50, 165–66.

Khitrovo, whose military and civilian abilities the tsar respected.³³ Earlier on, the Imperial ambassador thought that Prince Iurii Ivanovich Romodanovskii was perhaps the closest friend to Aleksei and a wise man to boot, but more witty than really intelligent. He too was fond of gifts. Finally, Meyerberg realized that in previous years Patriarch Nikon had been among the first favorites, but since 1658 was entirely out of power.³⁴

Potocki's account was fuller than Meyerberg's. The year the Pole returned home, 1668, the senior boyar was Prince B. A. Repnin (died 1670), who entered the Duma in 1640 as the favorite of Tsar Michael. He had long since lost importance, deservedly, for his harshness, Potocki implied. He held a number of administrative positions and other posts, but was no longer a favorite. In 1668 he was first in order of rank simply because he had lived longer than most of his contemporaries.³⁵ Next in order was Prince Nikita Ivanovich Odoevskii. He had received boyar rank in 1640 from Tsar Michael and served Aleksei as diplomat, general, and administrator for the whole of the reign. The Odoevskii's were Riurikovich princes, descended from the princes of Chernigov, who had come with their lands to serve Ivan III of Moscow at the end of the fifteenth century. The first to hold boyar rank seems to have been Prince Nikita Romanovich Odoevskii, whom Ivan IV transferred from the Staritsa appanage of his cousin Vladimir to the *Oprichnina* about 1570, giving him boyar rank in the process. Like most *Oprichnina* officers, Prince Nikita did not live long, for he was executed in 1573. From then on, however, the Odoevskii princes remained at the pinnacle of power and landed wealth. Prince Nikita was not only a distinguished servant of the tsar, by the end of life he was the wealthiest man in Russia.³⁶

Paweł Potocki thought well of Nikita Odoevskii. He believed that

³³ Collins called Khitrovo the "whispering favorite," since Khitrovo preferred to work behind the scenes rather than openly in the Duma. Khitrovo first entered the Duma as *okol'nichii* in 1647 and survived until 1680. In 1655 Aleksei appointed him to head the Armory House in the Kremlin, and he went on to gain control of most of the palace offices: Bogoiavlenskii, *Prikaznye*, 19–21, 43, 48, 53, 82–3, 90–91, 97–98, 157–58, 162–63, 179–80, 219. I. A. Selezneva, "Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi deiatel' XVII v. B. M. Khitrovo," *Voprosy istorii* 1 (1987), 78–87.

³⁴ Maierberg, "Puteshestvie," 167–71; Collins, 103–06, 119–20, 130.

³⁵ Potocki, *Moschovia*, 194; Crummey, *Aristocrats*, 185. Solov'ev, *Istoriia*, V, 262, confirmed Repnin's favor under Tsar Michael, though relying on Tatishchev writing in the 1740s.

³⁶ Crummey, *Aristocrats*, 119–21, M. M. Krom, *Mezh Rus'iu i Litvoi*, Moscow, 1995, 36–44, Zimin, *Oprichnina*, 201, 338, 478.

Odoevskii was much more polished than many of his colleagues, and was learned in the study of Slavic letters and the history of Poland. A man with innate sparks of generosity and a prudence more than just slyness, his age and illness kept him from the inner councils of Tsar Aleksei. Potocki thought that he was worthy of a freer soil and country (meaning, of course, Poland).³⁷ Tsar Aleksei valued him as well, up to a point. When Odoevskii's son Mikhail died in November 1653, the tsar wrote him a letter of consolation. He did not think much of his political talents, however: in 1658 the tsar had to write to his general, the boyar Prince Iu. A. Dolgorukii, assuring him of his continued favor even though Dolgorukii had disobeyed his orders, and the tsar blamed Odoevskii for convincing him: "I suspect that Prince Nikita Ivanovich convinced you, and you should not have listened. You know yourself what sort of operator he is. Just listen to how they sing about him in Moscow."³⁸

Potocki also reported that Prince Nikita Odoevskii's son, the boyar Iakov was learned in Slavic letters like his father, though the son's abilities came more from nature than application. He was a good administrator rather than a soldier, gaining boyar rank in his youth as a result of his governorship of Astrakhan' (1663–66). Better education and knowledge of the world would have helped him to overcome his natural pride and the arrogance typical of Russian boyars. Potocki was less impressed with Prince Iurii Romodanovskii than Meyerberg had been. Romodanovskii, head of the artillery office in 1665–73, was another boyar with better education than usual: "a bit versed in Latin and our vulgar [= Polish] letters." In his case, learning only served to conceal his vices, pride and hypocrisy. A bold man, he calumniated his enemies in private and praised them in public.³⁹ This was the man whom Meyerberg had seen as a particular friend to the tsar.

³⁷ Potocki, *Moschovia*, 192: "Liberiore dignior solo et patria, si prudentiam non omnino callidam et innatae, nondum penitus extinctas scintillas, spectes generositatis. Eo accessit studium literarum Sclavonicarum exactissimum, alicui notitiae Historiarum Polonarum conjunctum . . . Cumulata morbis senectus, saepe eum ab intimo et sacratori Principis excludit consilio, cui si pristina constaret alacritas et valetudo, non utique illum inter saevientis instrumenta Tyrannidis numerarem, sed ut naevus unus aut alter pulchritudine corporis nihil detrahit, ita eminentior in uno Virtus, tantorum scelerum congeriem, quorum feracissima haec regia est, nunquam velat." Potocki (died 1675) married the daughter of the boyar Petr Saltykov, whom he praises to the skies (*ibid.*, 195–96).

³⁸ Barsukov, *Rod Sheremetevykh*, vol. IV, 1884, 420–23; *ŽORSA II* (1861), 702–06; 756–58.

³⁹ Potocki, *Moschovia*, 193, 196; Bogoiavlenskii, *Prikaznye*, 136–37; Bushkovitch, "Cultural Change," p. 103.

For Bogdan Khitrovo, in contrast, Potocki could not find enough praise. He was always open to the petitions of the unfortunate, especially from foreigners, and used his position in the palace to bring such matters to the tsar. He used his control of the Treasury to win friends for the tsar, not to abuse his liberality. Khitrovo had the distinction of being the longest lasting favorite of Tsar Aleksei, sitting in the Duma from 1647 until his death in 1680 and accumulating control of the major palace offices from 1655. His role was in part a result of the increasing size and importance of the tsar's household and court. Potocki was also lavish in his praise of A. L. Ordin-Nashchokin for the peace with Poland and of the *okol'nichii* F. M. Rtishchev, a "new man" promoted from below, a man of virtue and learning.⁴⁰

One important family which Potocki disliked was that of the Princes Dolgorukii. The Pole hated Prince Iurii Alekseevich Dolgorukii, claiming that he was worse than Catiline and that his cruelty and injustice was responsible for unrest among the Don cossacks.⁴¹ The Dolgorukii clan had a complicated history. At the end of the seventeenth century the Princes Dolgorukii were considered among the most aristocratic of Russian families, yet the first one to attain boyar rank was Prince Vladimir Timofeevich in 1606. The sixteenth-century Dolgorukiis were simply a minor branch of the then much more important Obolenskii clan, and first attained significant rank (*okol'nichii*) in the 1570s. They were hardly new arrivals, since the Obolenskii clan had served the Moscow princes at the highest ranks since the fourteenth century. Prince Vladimir made the family fortune first by supporting Prince Pozharskii's resistance to the king of Poland in 1612 and then marrying his daughter to the first Romanov tsar, Michael, in 1624. In exile from 1629/30, Prince V. T. Dolgorukii died in 1632/33. The next Dolgorukii to enter the Duma was Prince Iurii Alekseevich in 1648.⁴² Prince Iurii was a major

⁴⁰ Potocki, *Moschovia*, 196–98. Potocki left before the rise of Matveev and does not mention him in his account.

⁴¹ "Fabium iste simulat, cum sit deterior Catalina. Servilis tumultus potius quam belli et refractariae Cosacorum Dunensium contumaciae incensor et lituus." Potocki, *Moschovia*, 196. Potocki's comparison of Dolgorukii to Catiline suggests that the Pole thought Dolgorukii wanted to exploit popular unrest for his own ends.

⁴² Crummey, *Aristocrats*, 179, 188. Zimin, *Formirovanie*, 43–44, 295. Prince Timofei Ivanovich Dolgorukii became an *okol'nichii* in April, 1578 and disappears from the records in 1581: Zimin, *V kanun*, 47, 87. Prince Vladimir was presumably his son. The 1624 marriage of Maria Vladimirovna to Tsar Michael ended rapidly in her death the next year, but by the 1640s the family was back in prominence.

commander in the war against Poland, and ultimately led the defeat of Stenka Razin's revolt in 1670. Whatever Dolgorukii's character was, he was certainly one of the most powerful of the boyars, an important general even if not any particular favorite of the tsar.

The formal political role of the boyars, their families, and even the basic features of their economic role are clear to us. Their mental world is not, and much remains unknown.⁴³ What they were not is either aristocratic constitutionalists or secular absolutists, for such thinking required a secularization of culture unknown before Peter's time. The boyars were part of the Russian culture of their time, religious to its core, and their life reflected it. They spent enormous amounts of time in the religious ceremonial of the court, went on pilgrimages with the tsar and on their own. Each great clan had one or two monasteries where they buried their dead and to which they were especially generous, the Trinity Monastery for many clans, the Novospaskii Monastery near Moscow for the Romanovs.⁴⁴

The monastery burial grounds were not the only focus of loyalty for the great clans. Each of the clans had elaborate genealogies and genealogical legends. The princely clans could look back to the dynasty of Riurik, the rulers of Kiev Rus' and earlier Russia, or to the house of Gedimin, the grand princes of Lithuania in the Middle Ages. Others claimed descent from more or less mythical ancestors from Prussia, Poland, the Golden Horde and other more exotic lands. The Tatar tsarevichi could claim descent from Chingis Khan himself.⁴⁵

The clans were jealous of their honor, as the precedence system encouraged and even required. The disputes over rank at court and in the army were endless, no matter how much the tsars tried to

⁴³ For some idea of the elite's values see Crummey, *Aristocrats*, 135–63 and Bushkovitch, *Religion*, 32–50. For the values of the provincial gentry see Valerie A. Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces: The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century*, Stanford, CA, 1996.

⁴⁴ Bushkovitch, *Religion*, 39–40.

⁴⁵ M. E. Bychkova, *Rodoslovnye knigi XVI–XVII vv. kak istoricheskiĭ istochnik*, Moscow, 1975. For an example of a new family trying to get into the elite, see Marshall Poe, "The Imaginary World of Semen Koltovskii: Genealogical Anxiety and Falsification in Late Seventeenth-Century Russia," *Cahiers du monde russe* 39, no. 3 (July–September 1998), 375–88. In the second half of the seventeenth century, boyar and gentry clans began to compile even more fanciful genealogies, influenced by Polish genealogical literature, and to claim kin with the great Polish families: M. E. Bychkova, *Legendy moskovskikh boiar*, Moscow, 1997 and Ignatii Rimskii-Korsakov, *Genealogiia iavlennoi ot sotvorenii mira familii . . . Korsakov-Rimskikh*, ed. A. P. Bogdanov, Moscow, 1994.

curb them, until the final abolition of the system in 1682.⁴⁶ Even then, the abolition of the system involved the compilation of an official Book of Genealogy, which would preserve the glory of each clan. Privately, boyars and lesser landholders kept records of their service and that of others, and preserved these records well into the eighteenth century, long after the old rank system and offices had gone.⁴⁷

The more political values of the boyars are harder to grasp. They shared many of the official ideas reflected in the New Chronicler and the letters of Tsar Aleksei as well as in the writings of the more humble historians of the Time of Troubles. As in other cases, it is from the chronicles connected with the boyar clans that we can trace some of their ideas. By the middle of the seventeenth century the great chronicle tradition of fifteenth-sixteenth century Russia had changed radically. In place of the enormously long annals of the Russian state reaching back to Kievan times the chronicles had grown shorter, more “literary” in composition, and without pretence of full coverage of the past in all its complexity. Some of these new, shorter chronicles, whose subject matter was exclusively more recent history from the time of Ivan the Terrible onward, were compiled with one or more boyar clans in view. Such were the Piskarev Chronicle, which reflected the interests of the Golitsyn clan and the Belaia Chronicler, evidently the product of the Prozorovskii clan’s patronage.⁴⁸

At one level the connection of the seventeenth-century chronicles with aristocratic clans was very simple. They told the story of the recent past and included notices borrowed from the *Razriad* books of the military, diplomatic, and administrative services of the great boyars, giving particular detail for certain families. They also included excerpts from the official genealogies of the great clans,

⁴⁶ Nancy Shields Kollmann, *By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia*, Ithaca, NY 1999. Kollmann concludes that the precedence system simply preserved the status quo of the ruling elite and the existing relations with the tsar. It was neither an example of aristocratic privilege nor an instrument of the tsar against the elite: *ibid.*, 165–67.

⁴⁷ For example, see the manuscript containing the so-called *Žapiski* of I. A. Zheliabuzhskii (in reality the work of Mikhail Zheliabuzhskii), which also includes several *raziady* for particular families. RGADA, f. 181, d. 125. D. Iazykov, ed. [I. A. Zheliabuzhskii], *Žapiski*, St. Petersburg, 1840.

⁴⁸ *PSRL* 34, Moscow, 1978. The Piskarev Chronicler received that name from that of a nineteenth-century bibliophile and collector, while the Belaia Chronicler allegedly showed special interest in that region near Smolensk. See Ia. G. Solodkin, “Letopisets Bel’skii,” and “Letopisets Piskarevskii,” *Slovar’ knizhnikov*. . . XVIII v, 3/2, 234–36, 250–52, 269–74.

mainly the stories of clan origins from the Genealogy of Patriarch Filaret.⁴⁹ Information of this type was not absolutely new: the great chronicles of the sixteenth century often did the same, though more evenhandedly than the seventeenth-century boyar chronicles. The sixteenth-century chronicles simply included the names of the more important boyars when they came into the story. The seventeenth-century boyar chroniclers, in contrast, were trying to stress the role of a particular family in Russian history and thereby glorify the clan. They did not try to glorify the clan by voluminous and exaggerated praise or a radical distortion of the past. They merely inserted into the general story the particular accomplishments of the clan in question, real or fictitious, important or trivial.

The Piskarev Chronicler noted the arrival of the Lithuanian grand prince in Novgorod in 1333 for no other reason than to add that he was the “root of the Golitsyns” (*Golitsynykh koren'*).⁵⁰ He followed the fortunes of the Golitsyns, whether they played a major role in events or not. For the 1578 campaign in Livonia the Chronicler informs us that Tsar Ivan sent “princes and generals, Prince Ivan Iur'evich Golitsyn and associates, with a great army,” naming no other names, but in fact Golitsyn was only one of seven generals, playing a larger role only in one encounter.⁵¹ Though a boyar, Prince Andrei Ivanovich Golitsyn played no important role in the reign of Boris Godunov (Golitsyn was out of favor), yet the Chronicler mentions a precedence dispute and his tonsure as a monk.⁵²

⁴⁹ “Rodoslovnaia keleinaia kniga sviatishego gosudaria Filareta Nikiticha Patriarkha vseia Rossii,” *Iubileinyi sbornik imperatorskogo S.-Peterburgskogo Arkheologicheskogo Instituta, 1613–1913*, i–xxvii, 1–118. This text is a revision of the “Sovereign’s Genealogy” (*Gosudarev rodoslovet*) of the 1550s: Bychkova, *Rodoslovyie*, 32–85.

⁵⁰ Narimant came to Novgorod both to be baptised (with the name Gleb) and take possession of some Novgorodian territories. The Nikon Chronicle described all this (*PSRL* 10, 206) without mention of the Golitsyns. The Piskarev Chronicler tells the reader nothing about the reason why Narimant came to Novgorod, only noting the connection with the Golitsyns (*PSRL* 34, 109), evidently taken from the Genealogy of Filaret: “Rodoslovnaia,” 5–6. Similarly, the Piskarev Chronicler lists the witnesses to the will of Grand Prince Vasilii I Dmitrievich (1389–1425), including Prince Iurii Patrikeev (the grandson of Prince Narimant) “who first of the Golitsyns came from Novgorod” (*tot pervoi v Golitsynykh vyekhal s Novagoroda*) (in 1408), even though the Golitsyns branched off from the clan of Prince Iurii a century or so after he witnessed the will (*PSRL* 34, 186). On the Patrikeev–Golitsyn connection see Kollmann, *Kinship*, 225–26.

⁵¹ *PSRL* 34, 193. Compare V. I. Buganov, ed., *Razriadnaia kniga 1475–1598 gg.*, Moscow, 1966, 286. The Piskarev Chronicler misdated the campaign to 7087 [1579] instead of the correct date 7086 [1578].

⁵² *PSRL* 34, 203–04; Pavlov, *Gosudarev dvor*, 77, 117. Two sons of Prince A. I. Golitsyn entered the Duma, Ivan Andreevich in 1634 (died 1654) and Andrei Andreevich (1638, died the same year): Crummey, *Aristocrats*, 184–85.