The Façade of Legitimacy: Exchange of Power and Authority in Early Modern Russia

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From the middle of the nineteenth century until recently, the only acceptable way to discuss political developments in early modern Europe was in terms of the rise of absolutism. "Absolute monarchy" was the political theory of early modern states formulated by ideologues of their respective regimes. Later historians accepted this ideology as the way these monarchies operated and formulated a model called "absolutism," which posits a monarch who accrues power at the expense of the nobility. During the last three decades, however, a number of historians, whose studies focus on elite politics, have undermined this historiographical model. Through their archival research on the operation of regimes in early modern Europe, these historians have instead described an interlocking relationship between ruler and nobility in which the ruler acted as legitimizer of the nobility and adjudicator of differences among its members.[1] Then, in a strongly argued book, *The Myth of Absolutism,* Nicholas Henshall delivered what many specialists consider to be the *coup de grâce* to the absolutism model as a worthwhile way of discussing early modern European governments.[2]

Meanwhile, non-specialists still hold, write, and teach the construct as it was developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Textbooks still espouse "absolutism" as part and parcel of the centralization and nationalization of the state. And a number of specialists continue to use the term and concept of absolutism while at the same time incorporating some and ignoring other objections of the revisionists. What is the absolutism model and what is its appeal for explaining early modern European domestic politics?

In the standard absolutism model, a visionary monarch, who is often allied with the bureaucracy and/or military, acts in opposition to the childish and selfish (feudal) nobility in order to create a national state, which in turn evolves into the modern nation-state.[3] While the term "absolutism" began in the early nineteenth century as a pejorative term, it soon gained a "progressive" sound in the hands of historians as it began to be seen as a necessary phase in the transition away from "feudal" decentralization.[4] In the most recent (5th and 6th) editions of a popular Western Civilization textbook,[5] for example, the reign of Henry IV (1589–1610) is described as "progressive and promising" (5th, p. 526; 6th, p. 534) for he "laid the foundations of later French absolutism" (5th, p. 525; not in 6th). Moreover, the nobility was "the greatest threat to monarchy" (5th, p. 524; 6th, p. 531), and the French nobility in particular, "with its selfish and independent interests, had long constituted the foremost threat to the centralizing goals of the Crown and to a strong national state" (5th, p. 526; 6th, p. 534). People like Richelieu, who "set in place the cornerstone of French absolutism" were trying "to break [6th, "curb"] the power of the nobility" in order to accomplish those goals (5th, p. 526; 6th, p. 534). But the main difference on this matter between the 5th and 6th editions is the use of half a column of textbook space to discuss the views of the "revisionist" James B. Collins, who has declared his belief that "the prevailing historiographical concept of 'absolute monarchy' is a myth, promulgated by the royal government and legitimized by historians."[6] Nonetheless, the textbook continues to present the absolutism construct as the preferable way for describing early modern monarchies.[7] In this construct, the government of France is considered the exemplar of absolutism while the government of Russia is an extreme variant, which historians often call "autocracy."

No doubt, the transition from specialists' research to textbook surveys and popular accounts takes time, but there may be another reason for the prevailing dichotomy: the absence of a new model to replace the old one. A monarch in opposition to his or her own nobility is an easy construct to learn and remem-

[1] Adamson has described the emerging pattern of understanding this way: "At the most 'absolutist' of courts, the exercise of authority was always in some sense a negotiation founded, in the final analysis, upon the community of interest between the crown and the noble elites. The court, far from being an instrument whereby monarchs could weaken the nobility, as was once supposed, provided the forum in which that compact could be subjected to a regular process of revision and renegotiation." John Adamson, "The Making of the Ancien-Régime Court 1500–1700," in *The Princely Courts of Europe 1500–1750,* ed. John Adamson (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 39.

[2] Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy* (London: Longman, 1992). See also Henshall "The Myth of Absolutism," *History Today* 42 (June 1992): 40–47. He pointed out that "absolutism" is a term coined in 1823 to apply to the contemporary ruler Ferdinand VII of Spain, and argued that it is an anachronism for us to apply it to earlier centuries.

[3] On the difference between "national states" and "nation-states," see Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 2–3.

[4] For a recent restatement of this view of absolutism as a necessary phase, see Christopher Pierson, *The Modern State* (London: Routledge, 1996), 44–47.

[5] John P. McKay, Bennett D. Hill, and John Buckler, *A History of Western Society,* 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995); 6th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). Hill wrote this chapter of the textbook.

[6] James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.

[7] A similar progression may be occurring here as with the same textbook's gradual (over three editions) acceptance of revisionist views on the French Revolution.

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ber. It has drama; and there is evidence of such conflicts occurring from time to time. As a result, this old, unsatisfactory model (unsatisfactory from the point of view of correspondence with the available evidence) continues to be espoused by teachers and scholars despite the muted objections of a few specialists to deter them.[8] In addition, some specialists still accept the term "absolutism" but with different understandings of what that term means. While a number of historians have asserted that centralization is the key component of the French absolutist monarchy, Richard Bonney has argued that "[t]he term 'centralization' is best avoided by the historian of early modern France" for the term is a later coinage and the concept was "alien to sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century political theory."[9] Furthermore, "centralization" may be too grand a term for the process of formalization of lines of administration, especially when one considers how little central control the monarchies were able to exert during this period.

In short, at present we may be in the throes of a paradigm shift but without a new paradigm crystallizing sufficiently for a fresh consensus to form around it. One group of historians holds to the traditional ruler-vs.-nobility understanding of absolutism. A second group still uses the term "absolutism," but sees more cooperation than conflict between ruler and nobility. And a third group rejects the term "absolutism" altogether as misleading and anachronistic. It may be time for an assessment of where we are at the moment and try to determine where we are heading. While doing so, I will make comparisons with other polities where appropriate. Outward manifestations of governmental relations change from country to country, but the internal dynamics of relationships remained fairly consistent throughout early modern Eurasia and North Africa, where the prevailing form of government was some variant of the monarch-in-council type. In structural-functional terms, we can describe this phenomenon as structural changes and functional continuities.

Perhaps the most fruitful recent line of study in regard to relations between the ruler and nobility is that of the historian John LeDonne, who has applied the ruling class model to the study of eighteenth-century Russia.[10] It is true that the ruling class model is not new. We find the most thorough exposition of it by

[8] Elizabeth A. R. Brown argued against the idea that it is perfectly alright to practice one thing in one's research but to teach another to undergraduates (the thinking being that one can correct those who become graduate students when it comes time for them to do their own research). See her "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *American Historical Review* 79 (1974): 1070.

[9] Richard Bonney, "Absolutism: What's in a Name?" *French History* 1 (1987): 94. On the issue of whether absolutism necessarily represents centralization of power and administration, see Emile Lousse, "Absolutisme, Droit divin, Despotisme éclairé," *Schweizer Beiträge zur Allgemeinen Geschichte* 16 (1958): 92.

[10] For a discussion of the ruling class and the ruling elite, see John P. LeDonne, *Absolutism and the Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700–1825* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–9, 311–12; and John P. LeDonne, "The Ruling Class: Tsarist Russia as the Perfect Model," *International Social Science Journal* 136 (May 1993): 285–300.

Gaetano Mosca.[11] And it certainly has had its critics, among them Suzanne Keller, who characterizes Mosca's model as chiefly the struggle "between two minorities: those who hold and those who seek political office."[12] Mosca's understanding of the ruling class and its relationship to the ruled is a little more complex than that. He writes that there are two classes—the ruling class and the ruled class. But this is applicable only in the sense of classification. In the sense of group self-consciousness, which is the way LeDonne sees it, there is only one class—the ruling class, the members of which defined their position as an occupation in relationship to others in the ruling class and to those of the ruled directly under their direction. Each member of the ruling class had an identity with and allegiance to everyone else in the ruling class, in terms not only of vertical hierarchical relations but also horizontal political association. These vertical relations and horizontal associations were held together by kinship, since no one in the ruling class was more than a few degrees of kinship away from anyone else within the ruling class. Those who were not members of the ruling class (the overwhelming majority of the population) also defined their social position according to occupation, but not necessarily in relationship to anyone else of that same occupation. Their primary entity of identification was the village or town, and they defined their political position solely in terms of a vertical relationship to the member or members of the ruling class with whom they were clients. They lacked any concomitant horizontal political association.

Similarly, remonstrances have been made to the use of the term "class" because it signifies a much more homogenous economic group than the nobility was. This understanding of "class," however, is a special use by Marxists and not the more generic way LeDonne, Mosca, Weber, and others used it. In this respect, we can accept Collins' definition: "the ruling class, the landlords, was also, by and large, the ruling order, the nobility."[13] Although the ruling class model considers the monarch to be part of this ruling class, perhaps, to avoid confusion, we can refer to the ruler and ruling class together as comprising the ruling order.

In Russia, only those holding positions of power were part of the ruling order. No other group sought those positions, so there was no struggle between the "ins" and "outs" that Keller attributes to the model. To be sure, when a new ruler ascended the throne, "the deck was reshuffled," as the status of members of the ruling class changed in relation to the new ruler, but these changes occurred within the same hierarchy.[14] Division between the upper and lower rul-

[11] Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class (Elementi di Scienza Politica)*, trans. Hannah D. Kahn, ed. Arthur Livingston (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939).

[12] Suzanne Keller, *Beyond the Ruling Class: Strategic Elites in Modern Society* (New York: Random House, 1963), 11.

[13] Collins, *State in Early Modern France*, 4.

[14] Whittaker used the phrase "the deck was reshuffled" specifically in relation to heirs to the throne. Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, "Chosen by 'All the Russian People': The Idea of an Elected Monarchy in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 18 (2001): 9. But it seems an apt

ing class could and did result in distrust, as members of the lower ruling class feared their access to the monarch would be blocked by members of the upper ruling class. In addition, groups of families, or family constellations, allied by marriage was a feature of the system, with competition and antagonism often developing between and among these family constellations.

Thus, on one side was the ruling order, which was a relatively tightly bound group. On the other was everyone else, the ruled, who were distinguished only by not being part of the ruling order and who did not identify with others of their type in any significant way. This is an important distinction for I will argue that, while the dominant mode of behavior among members within the ruling order was cooperation and consultation, the dominant mode of behavior of the ruling order toward the ruled was one of absolute sovereignty backed by claims of divine origins of the ruler's authority. Even the *par excellence* example of the absolute ruler, Louis XIV, in his advice to the dauphin on how to rule, does not write of subduing the nobility. Instead, he expresses "warm sentiments" toward them.[15] Likewise, in the Testament of Frederick II, the Prussian king wrote: "An object of policy of the sovereign of this State is to preserve the nobility. . . ."[16]

Admittedly, there were conflicts between the ruler and ruling class, but they represented more a breakdown, a design flaw in the system as it were, than how the system was supposed to operate. Historians who see "absolutism" as a transition phase between feudalism and modern democratic nation-states tend to focus on the conflicts as evidence of that particular type of transition occurring. Likewise, there were times when a monarch acted despotically, but that too represented an anomaly, not the system itself. Or as Henshall wrote: "The concept 'absolutism' erects into an organized system what was almost unanimously recognized before 1789 as a malfunction."[17]

Instead, a façade of legitimacy was created by members of the ruling class through declarations of abject allegiance to, and ritual glorification of, the monarch in order to underwrite the coercive power of the ruling class toward the rest of society. By "façade of legitimacy," I mean a front presented to cover the various divisions, factions, compromises, and personality conflicts within the ruling order, so that decisions seem to emanate from a single authority—

description for what happened within the ruling class in general. Robert A. Dahl has found what he calls "the ruling elite model" insufficient to help in explaining political systems, from multinational states to city governments. Robert A. Dahl, "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," *American Political Science Review* 52 (1958): 463–69. LeDonne makes the point, however, that such criticisms of the ruling class model are based on its insufficiencies in explaining modern industrial societies. Instead, LeDonne found the model perfectly applicable to pre-industrial Russia.

[15] Louis XIV, *Mémoires for the Instruction of the Dauphin,* trans. Paul Sonnino (New York, 1970). The characterization of Louis as manifesting "warm sentiments" toward the nobility comes from Sonnino's introduction (ibid., 11).

[16] *Das politischen Testamente Friedrich's des Grossen,* ed. Gustav Berthold Volz (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1920), 29.

[17] Henshall, *Myth,* 211.

the monarch. Implicit in this notion is a "self-policing" mechanism to ensure that all members of the ruling class were "on the same page" in regard to support for the regime and its actions.[18] Reaffirmations of this allegiance through rituals of submission were continually being made to create the impression that the ruling order's rule was legitimate—that is, based on something more than brute force.[19] In middle and late Muscovy, these reaffirmations of allegiance were especially important because, outside the boyar rank and prelates, there was little else in the nature of dress or behavior to distinguish members of the ruling class from the rest of the population.[20]

One of the most significant characteristics of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Muscovite state was formal consultative institutions. Muscovite tsars required the approval of the "Boyars" (often called the Boyar Duma or Boyar Council by historians) for the most important governmental matters, such as law codes, foreign treaties and correspondence, and any precedent-setting measures. In addition, the grand prince was not to meet with any ambassadors or envoys from foreign courts without the boyars being present. Moreover, the Assembly of the Land (*Zemskii sobor*) was convened on an *ad hoc* basis to advise the tsar, choose a new tsar when necessary, and, on at least one occasion, depose a sitting tsar.[21] In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Muscovy, wide lee-

[18] The term "façade of autocracy" has been used in a similar, but not necessarily the same, sense as I am using "façade of legitimacy." See Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345—1547* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 146–51; and Lindsey Hughes, "The Courts of Moscow and St. Petersburg c. 1547–1725," in *Princely Courts of Europe,* 296. Cf. Edward L. Keenan, "Muscovite Political Folkways," *Russian Review* 45 (1986): 147, where he refers to the "central myth of the political system—that of the all-powerful and divinely appointed tsar." Rowland uses the term "myth of autocracy" in the same sense as I am using "façade of legitimacy." Daniel Rowland, "Did Muscovite Literary Ideology Place Limits on the Power of the Tsar (1540s—1660s)?" *Russian Review* 49 (1990): 152.

[19] Even so, when faced with disobedience or protest among the populace, the "absolute" ruler had to decide whether to attempt to crush the resistance or give in to avoid full-scale revolt. When, in 1704, Louis XIV was informed by the governor and intendent at Quebec that "the people of the colony were so profoundly opposed to such a tax [the taille] that open rebellion would inevitably follow," Louis rescinded his declared intention to extend it there. See Stanley B. Ryerson, *The Founding of Canada: Beginnings to 1815,* 2d ed. (Toronto: Progress Books, 1963), 127. Likewise, in 1666, Louis reduced the number of saints' days so as to increase agricultural output, but took no action when the peasants continued to celebrate those days. W. H. Lewis, *The Splendid Century* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953), 71–72. Similarly, in 1648, when the Muscovite populace threatened to revolt over widespread governmental corruption, Tsar Aleksei made sweeping changes in the government and convoked an Assembly of the Land that resulted in the promulgation of a new law code. See Valerie Kivelson, "The Devil Stole His Mind: The Tsar and the 1648 Moscow Uprising," *American Historical Review* 98 (1993): 733–56.

[20] For an illuminating article on such declarations of abject servility by Muscovite boyars, see Marshall Poe, "What Did Russians Mean When They Called Themselves 'Slaves of the Tsar'?" *Slavic Review* 57 (1998): 585–608. For further examples, see Nancy Shields Kollmann, "Concepts of Society and Social Identity in Early Modern Russia," in *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine,* ed. Samuel H. Baron and Nancy Shields Kollmann (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 35–36.

[21] For a discussion of these points with accompanying citation of evidence, see Donald Ostrowski, "Muscovite Adaptation of Steppe Political Institutions: A Reply to Halperin's Objections," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1 (2000): 268–89; and *idem,* "The Assem-

way was given to local officials to make decisions,[22] and landholders enjoyed relative autonomy at lower, provincial levels.[23]

From the middle of the seventeenth century on, these consultative and decision-making institutions began losing their respective roles. Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich (1645–1676) increased the number of boyars, possibly in an attempt to gain greater control over the Boyar Council with his own appointees. In effect, though, he may have strengthened the ruling order by bringing more members of the lower ruling class into the decision-making process. The resultant opening of lines of communication between upper and lower strata within the ruling class could be one of the main reasons the Russian government survived the decades-long turmoil following Aleksei's death. Peter I (1682–1725) ended the Boyar Council and replaced it with an administrative oversight board, the Senate. The Assembly of the Land was phased out during the course of the seventeenth century, its last convocation occurring in 1683. The Orthodox Church, which in the person of the patriarch could at times be a powerful influence on the ruler, was subsumed as a department of the state in 1721. Nonetheless, Church prelates were still expected to speak up whenever they thought the government was in error.

In France, during the same time, the monarchy also moved toward more informal means of consensus building. The most prominent example is the noncalling of the Estates General after 1614 and the Council of Notables after 1627. At roughly the same time that Aleksei Mikhailovich was increasing the size of the Boyar Council in Muscovy, Louis XIV was decreasing the size of the Council of State in France.[24] In France, however, formal institutional restraints existed that did not exist in Russia, that is the provincial Estates[25] and the *parlements*. These for the most part cooperated with the ruler, but on occasion, as during the *Fronde* and in the 1780s, they could and did resist the ruling authority.

In contrast, in two other states, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

bly of the Land (*Zemskii sobor*) as a Representative Institution," in *Modernizing Muscovy: Reform and Social Change in Seventeenth-Century Russia,* ed. Jarmo Kotilaine and Marshall Poe (forthcoming). On the history of the Assembly of the Land, see L. V. Cherepnin, *Zemskie sobory russkogo gosudarstva v XVI—XVII vv.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1978). For critical comments on Cherepnin's book, see Peter B. Brown, "The *Zemskii Sobor* in Recent Soviet Historiography," *Russian History* 10 (1983): 77–90; and Edward L. Keenan's review in *Kritika* 16 (1980): 82–94.

[22] Valerie Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces: The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 129–30. The local official could, however, "kick" the decision upstairs by requesting a determination from Moscow or, later, from St. Petersburg, if he so desired.

[23] Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces,* 268. According to Kivelson, some gentry after 1650 began asking for more central government involvement, especially in returning runaway serfs, in contrast to before 1650 when those same gentry resisted such involvement.

[24] Olivier Chaline, "The Valois and Bourboun Courts c. 1515–1750," in *Princely Courts of Europe,* 79.

[25] Henshall describes the importance in France during the seventeenth century of these formal local consultative bodies. Henshall, *Myth,* 180.

(*Rzeczpospolita*) and England, institutional and codified limitations increased during this period. In the Commonwealth, the pre-existing idea of the elected monarchy (*pacta coventa*) was invoked in practice after the death of the last Jagellionian king in 1572, with civil wars resulting on at least four occasions—1576, 1587, 1697, and 1733—and the power of the Sejm (representative assembly) was strengthened. In England, Charles I did not call Parliament into session between 1629 and 1640, although he met with his Privy Council, made up of members of the nobility, on almost a daily basis.[26] Eventually he had to acquiesce to reconvening Parliament because the government needed money. During the course of that century, English monarchs were chosen on three occasions (James I, Charles II, and William and Mary) and two kings were deposed, in one case (Charles I) through beheading and in the other case (James II) through being asked to leave the country. Throughout these three centuries in all these polities what is most striking is the functional continuity of the ruling class.

The respective ruling classes had different origins, traditions, and practices among themselves, as well as differing customary relationships with the ruler. But in early modern Russia as elsewhere, the ruler governed only with the permission of the ruling class and by virtue of the power that members of that class held. Throughout Eurasia and north Africa[27] during this period, the monarch (or person acting in that capacity, such as the shogun in Japan) was the central point upon which the interests of the ruling class converged. The most prominent case of this again is France, where the historian William Beik has analyzed the corresponding aspect of the reign of Louis XIV in relation to the French nobility of Languedoc. Dissatisfied with the traditional explanations of how Louis was supposed to have subdued the nobility by having some of the nobles move to Versailles, Beik concluded that Louis' willingness to protect the aristocracy's patronage networks was a better explanation for ending the resistance of those who took part in the *Fronde.*[28] The strategy of protection provided a tradeoff by means of which the ruler gave the aristocrats the *authority* to keep their patronage networks intact and the aristocrats gave the ruler the *power* to act.

A similar tradeoff occurred in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Muscovy,

[26] On this point, see Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 202, 205, 262–64.

[27] I have in mind the Ottoman Empire and Sharifian Morocco, but the same might be said about Sahel states like Kano and Songhay.

[28] William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3–4, 279–328. Kettering agrees with Beik that Louis XIV achieved the cooperation of the nobility but differs from him in how it was achieved. She believes Louis secured elite collaboration through seriously weakening "if not entirely destroy[ing] the provincial power bases of [his] most formidable rivals, the great nobles." Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 236, and 298 note 6. Beik claims Louis achieved it through "reinforc[ing] class rule" (Beik, *Absolutism,* 333) and in strengthening the provincial power bases of his allies, the nobles.

where each boyar headed a patronage network that, besides members of his own clan, included clients from every social stratum of society.[29] Even Ivan IV, when he established his terroristic state within a state, the *Oprichnina,* was not trying to crush the boyars or to engage in class warfare by favoring some other group over the boyars. The similarity in the social compositions of the *Oprichnina* and its non-terroristic counterpart, the *Zemshchina,*[30] indicates that Ivan was dividing the patronage networks that ran vertically down through the society against each other.[31]

The old absolutism model views the aristocracy's power as decreasing as the monarch's power increases, and vice versa, a zero-sum game between two opposing sides. And it sees the monarch as representing the broader interests of the state against the narrow interests of the nobility. Yet, customary behavior was for the monarch and nobility to reach agreement over division of the spoils and exploitation of the populace.[32] In this way, the ruler and the ruling class were mutually reinforcing. The members of the ruling class acquired power through their patronage networks and exchanged some of that power for the authority of the ruler to maintain those networks intact. The ruler acted not only as the keystone of the system but also as an adjudicator of differences among the members of the ruling class. In other words, although individual members might lose their power, the aristocracy *as a whole* gained power along with a strong monarch. This was Montesquieu's point about the flow of power through the nobility within a true monarchy.[33]

Recognition of this principle helps us to understand better, among other ruler-ruling class dynamics, the relationship within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the monarch with the *szlachta.* The monarchical government of Poland-Lithuania was at its strongest for almost two hundred years after the signing of the Privilege of 1454 at Nieszawa, by which the king and upper nobility agreed to consult with the lower nobility concerning all major decisions. In time, individual *szhlachta* members gained formidable power within the

[29] Kettering describes the relations between patrons, brokers, and clients in early modern France as transitional phenomenon connected with the centralization of governmental power. Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France,* 5. Instead, I suggest that these relations are a characteristic phenomenon of early modern states, not just a transitional phenomenon to something else.

[30] For a comparison of their respective social compositions, see V. B. Kobrin, "Sostav oprichnogo dvora Ivan Groznogo," *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1959 god* (Moscow, 1960): 16–91; cf. S. B. Veselovskii, *Issledovanie po istorii Oprichniny* (Moscow: Nauka, 1963).

[31] Horace Dewey discussed aspects of the patronage networks in regard to joint surety documents in sixteenth-century Muscovy. Horace Dewey, "Political *Poruka* in Muscovite Rus'," *Russian Review* 46 (1987): 117–33. For a discussion of aspects of patronage and collective guilt in regard to the *Oprichnina* of Ivan IV, see Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 191–97.

[32] On this point, see LeDonne, *Absolutism and the Ruling Class,* 297.

[33] [Charles Louis de Secondat] Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois,* ed. Gonzague Truc, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions Garnier freres, 1961–1962), book 2, ch. 4, 19–22.

Commonwealth, but the *szhlachta* as a whole found itself weakened (as is evident from its inability to institute necessary reforms to save itself or resist the partitions of the late eighteenth century). The casting of the first *liberum veto* in 1652 and its subsequent abuse were outward manifestations of the deep divisions and fragmentation that had developed within the Commonwealth's ruling class. Until then, the declaration of "nie pozwalam" (I forbid) by a Sejm delegate was resolved through negotiation and only temporarily delayed the legislative process.[34] In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as elsewhere, a strong, united nobility was a precondition for a strong monarchy.

This example shows that it was not a question of a monarch's expanding his or her power at the expense of the nobility when the nobility was divided, because it was precisely when the nobility was divided that the monarch was weakened. During the *Fronde,* for example, some members of the nobility gained power in relationship to other nobles, but both the monarch and the nobility as a whole declined because the nobility was in conflict with itself and with the monarch. Likewise, although Ivan IV gained some freedom of action when he divided his realm into *Oprichnina* and the *Zemshchina* parts, he weakened his power overall as is evident from the devastating Crimean Tatar attack on Moscow in 1571. Another period of weakness in Muscovy was in the early seventeenth century, the Time of Troubles, when a series of weak tsars followed one another as a result of divisions among the boyars.[35] In none of these cases could the respective realms of France and Muscovy have endured much longer with their respective ruling classes so divided.

A unified nobility that negotiated and reached agreement with an engaged monarch was to the mutual benefit of both nobility and monarchy. Gustavus Adolphus II (1611–1632), generally regarded as Sweden's greatest king, ruled effectively for twenty years after signing the *Accession Charter of 31 December 1611,* in which he agreed to seek the consent of the Council (*Riksråd*) for making laws, imposing taxes, levying troops, deciding foreign policy, and summoning the Assembly (*Riksdåg*). Gustavus Adolphus also agreed to protect the rights of the Lutheran Church and to ensure that the most important civil and military positions went to members of the Swedish nobility.[36] Furthermore, Gustavus Adolphus appointed Axel Oxenstierna, who was the main drafter of the *Charter,* as chancellor, and worked closely with him throughout his reign.[37]

[34] Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland,* 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1: 345–46.

[35] V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia,* 8 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1958), 3: 39–40. Kliuchevskii sees the division as being between the higher and lower boyars.

[36] "Gustav Adolf's Accession Charter, 31 December 1611," in *Sweden as a Great Power 1611–1697: Government, Society, Foreign Policy,* ed. Michael Roberts (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), 7–10. Cf. Michael Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus,* 2d ed., (London: Longman, 1992), 23; V. G. Kiernan, *State and Society in Europe 1550–1650* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 157.

[37] Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus,* 24–25.

This arrangement was renewed in 1634 under Gustavus Adolphus' daughter, Christina.[38] Although Christina was a child at the time and Sweden was under a regency of five officers of the state (each of them a nobleman), when she came of age she ruled according to the 1634 formulation.[39] To be sure, relations of the Council with Christina were less harmonious than during her father's reign. Nonetheless, she did not miss many meetings of the Council: of the seventy-three meetings of the *Riksråd* in 1652 and 1653, Christina attended sixty-three.[40] Again we see the ruler and the ruling class working together to the mutual benefit of both.

Early modern rulers ruled successfully only as long as they cooperated with the oligarchy, the ruling elite, and through it with the ruling class. Significantly, Tsar Fedor I (1584–1598), known as the "Bell-Ringer," whose mental capacities were minimal at best, was regarded by seventeenth-century political writers as an exemplary tsar,[41] in part because of his piety but also because agreement prevailed between him (or whoever acted for him) and the ruling class. In addition, earlier claims in the historiography that his successor, Boris Godunov, supported the middle- and lower-ranked servitors against the boyars have been substantially refuted.[42] Harmony and cooperation between the ruler and the ruling class, just as harmony and cooperation between the secular ruler and head of the Church, was the ideal for tsars throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even the change in the composition of the ruling class through the addition of new members in these centuries did not significantly alter this relationship.[43]

A traditional historiographical break in analyzing Russian state development is the reign of Peter I, as though everything was so different after Peter as to make comparisons with Muscovy meaningless. Yet, the core of the Muscovite system—hereditary ruling-class families, political appointments, and distribution of spoils—remained a constant throughout the eighteenth century. Peter did not destroy the old prominent families, which is clear from the fact that most

[38] "The Form of Government, 1614," in *Sweden as a Great Power,* 18–28.

[39] Henshall, *Myth,* 168–69.

[40] Michael Roberts, *From Oxenstierna to Charles XII: Four Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 56–57. In contrast, Elizabeth I of England rarely attended Council meetings but kept herself well informed concerning what was discussed at those meetings.

[41] On this point, see Rowland, "Did Muscovite Literary Ideology Place Limits?" 134–35.

[42] On this point, see Chester L. Dunning, *Russia's First Civil War: The Time of Troubles and the Founding of the Romanov Dynasty* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2001), 91.

[43] On these changes in the 1530s and 1540s, see Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics,* 162–80; on these changes in the seventeenth century, see Robert O. Crummey, *Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia 1613–1689* (Princeton, 1983), 22–33; as well as the series of studies by Marshall T. Poe, *The Russian Elite in the Seventeenth Century. A Quantitative Analysis of the "Duma Ranks," 1613–1713,* <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~hst1505/seminars/PoeBK.pdf> (18 Mar. 2001); *idem, The Consular and Ceremonial Ranks of the Russian "Sovereign's Court," 1613–1713* (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Sciences, 2001); and *idem,* "Absolutism and the New Men of Seventeenth-Century Russia," in *Modernizing Muscovy: Reform and Social Change in Seventeenth-Century Russia,* ed. Jarmo Kotilaine and Marshall T. Poe (forthcoming).

of the same families remained in positions of power after Peter's reign as were there before he came to the throne.[44] Peter instituted extensive administrative reforms, but he did not establish a system where promotion was by merit (meritocracy), as has been claimed.[45] Creating an officialdom with some ability may have been the intent, but promotion in the Table of Ranks was meant to be "by seniority" (*po starshinstvu vremeni*), not by merit per se.[46] Prince M. M. Shcherbatov complained about this very aspect of the Table of Ranks later in the eighteenth century: "For it was no longer birth that was respected, but ranks and promotions and length of service."[47] Peter's hope, no doubt, was to eliminate favoritism and to ensure that officials would develop a certain level of ability by being in any one position long enough before being promoted to the next rank, but that does not seem to have always worked in practice.

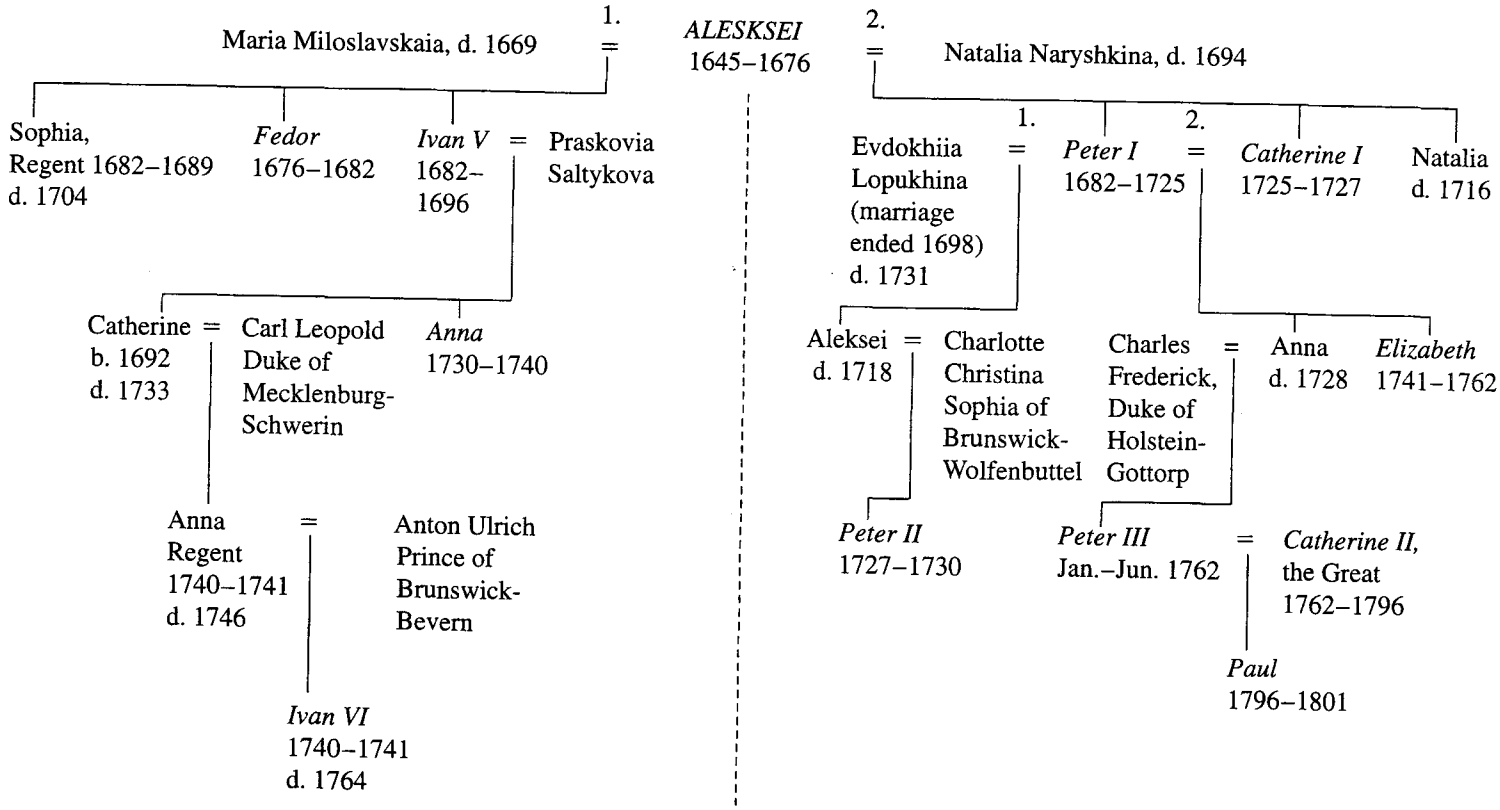
Even the political legacy that remained after Peter I's reign, as LeDonne has pointed out, was a continuation of the same one that had crystallized after the death in 1676 of his father Aleksei Mikhailovich who had married twice—first Maria Miloslavskaia and then, after she died, Natalia Naryshkina (see Fig. 1). Examining those times when consensus broke down or was threatened allows us to see how it was then reconstituted. The Miloslavskii family and its allies, among them the Saltykovs, Dolgorukiis, and Khitrovos vied for influence with

[44] M. D. Rabinovich, "Sotsial'noe proiskhozhdenie i imushchestvennoe polozhenie ofitserov reguliarnoi russkoi armii v kontse Severnoi voiny," in *Rossiia v period reform Petra I,* ed. N. I. Pavlenko, L. A. Nikiforov, and M. Ia. Volkov (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), 141–42; Brenda Meehan-Waters, "The Muscovite Noble Origins of the Russians in the Generalitat of 1730," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviètique* 12 (1971): 28–75; Brenda Meehan-Waters, *Autocracy and Aristocracy: The Russian Service Elite of 1730* (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 30–37. Crummey traces back to the writings of F. A. Kurakin the notion that Peter was anti-aristocratic. Robert O. Crummey, "Peter and the Boiar Aristocracy, 1689–1700," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 8 (1974): 274–75. See *Arkhiv kniazia F. A. Kurakina,* 10 vols. (St. Petersburg: V. S. Balashev, 1890–1902), 1: 63–64.

[45] See, e.g., B. H. Sumner, *Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia* (New York: Collier Books, 1976), 33; Ransel, "Bureaucracy and Patronage," 157, 162; Robert Massie, *Peter the Great: His Life and World* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1980), 759–61; Evgenii V. Anisimov, *The Reforms of Peter the Great: Progress Through Coercion in Russia,* trans. John T. Alexander (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 186; and Aleksandr B. Kamenskii, *The Russian Empire in the Eighteenth Century: Searching for a Place in the World,* trans. and ed. David Griffiths (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 114; and Paul Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power, 1671–1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 430. Kliuchevskii wrote a bit more accurately that the Table of Ranks "established a bureaucratic hierarchy of merit and service in place of the aristocratic hierarchy of family pedigree . . . ." Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia* 4: 83. The case of Alexander Menshikov is usually cited as an example of someone who rose in rank through merit. Menshikov, however, was promoted by special decrees of Peter, that is, outside the system, not within it as such, and his promotions, in any event, occurred before the Table of Ranks was established in 1722.

[46] *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii s 1649* (*PSZ*), 1st series, 45 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1830), 6: 486, no. 3890 (24 Jan. 1722).

[47] M. M. Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia,* ed. and trans. A. Lentin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 152–53. In pre-Petrine Muscovy, promotions were determined primarily on the basis of birth and service. Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces,* 41. Despite the stipulation of promotion by seniority in the Table of Ranks, we still find birth and, on occasion, merit being used as criteria for promotion in post-Petrine Russia.



All rulers appear in *italic*.
The dates given beneath names of rulers and regents, unless otherwise stated, mark the periods during which they exercised power.

Figure 1

the Naryshkin family and its allies, among them the Trubetskois, Golitsyns, Lopukhins, and Streshnevs.[48] We do not know the exact decision-making involved, but LeDonne's research helps us to understand that the issue was division of spoils, not any policy position or separate ideology.

The vying is most clearly seen in the succession struggles in two cases: after the death of Fedor II in 1682 and after the death of Peter's grandson, Peter II, in 1730. In the first case, the Naryshkins, supported directly by the Iazykovs and Likhachevs as well as indirectly by the Cherkasskiis, Odoevskiis, and Sheremetevs, had the Assembly of the Land declare Peter Alekseevich tsar in place of his older half-brother, the Miloslavskii-supported Ivan Alekseevich. Also they were initially able to get Peter's mother, Natalia, declared regent. The Miloslavskiis, however, benefited from already-existing dissension among the *strel'tsi* and townspeople.[49] As a result of the turmoil, the Miloslavskiis managed to have another Assembly of the Land declare Ivan co-tsar with Peter, and Ivan's older sister Sophia declared regent instead, at least until 1689 when the Naryshkin-centered network of families restored Peter's mother as regent.

In the second case, in 1730, the Miloslavskii faction, utilizing reaction to Peter's excesses, was able to get their candidate—Anna of Courland, the granddaughter of Maria Miloslavskaia—accepted for the throne. Because her mother was a Saltykov, Anna brought many Saltykovs to positions of prominence, to the extent that they replaced the Miloslavskiis as the core of that network.[50] Members of the Naryshkin network accepted her and, most likely, hoped they would continue to hold influence. She could rule only as long as she provided for the Naryshkin network's sharing in the spoils.

Historians have generally interpreted the "Conditions" that Anna signed in 1730 as an attempt by the ruling elite to codify limitations on an otherwise absolute monarch.[51] In doing so, they resort to the conflict mode of explaining re-

[48] John P. LeDonne, "Ruling Families in the Russian Political Order 1689–1825," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 28 (1987): 233–322.

[49] According to A. A. Matveev, the son of A. S. Matveev who was killed in the subsequent uprising, the Miloslavskiis instigated the opposition. [A. A. Matveev] "Zapiski Andreia Artamonovicha grafa Matveeva," *Zapiski russkikh liudei. Sobytiia vremen Petra Velikogo*, ed. I. P. Sakharov (St. Petersburg: Sakharov, 1841), 12–14, 18–19. Lindsey Hughes argues that the uprising "was a continuation of the trouble immediately preceding Fedor's death" and was aggravated by the "[i]nactless behaviour on the part of the Naryshkins." Thus, according to Hughes, it occurred independent of any instigation on the part of the Miloslavskiis or of Sophia herself. Lindsey Hughes, *Sophia, Regent of Russia 1657–1704* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 58–62. The Miloslavskiis did manage to link *strel'tsi* dissatisfaction toward certain of their commanders, such as Prince Iu. A. Dolgorukii and Prince G. G. Romodanovskii, with opposition to the Naryshkins. Nonetheless, the deaths of these commanders seems to have resulted more from their own poor leadership characteristics than from any alliance with the Naryshkins. See Crummey, *Aristocrats and Servitors*, 92–93.

[50] Similarly, by 1734, the Trubetskois replaced the Naryshkins as the core of the rival network. LeDonne "Ruling Families," 297–99.

[51] For relevant literature, see Cynthia Whittaker, "The Reforming Tsar: The Redefinition of Autocratic Duty in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *Slavic Review* 51 (1992): 87 fn. 44. Whittaker argues that the members of the Supreme Privy Council were sincerely concerned because Anna's prede-

lations between ruler and ruling class.[52] Instead, the "Conditions" should be seen as an attempt by the Supreme Privy Council to articulate in some formal way an already existing informal arrangement. The "Conditions" specifically prohibited Anna from making war, concluding peace, and raising taxes without consulting the Supreme Privy Council.[53] Yet, monarchs usually did none of those things anyway without consulting their close advisers in the ruling elite and, by extension, the ruling class, and ascertaining whether such or another action would be acceptable. In fact, the seventeenth-century Muscovite chancellery official G. K. Kotoshikhin tells us that every tsar between Ivan IV and Aleksei Mikhailovich had to agree in writing that they would "deliberate about all matters with the boyars and the duma men, and do nothing secretly or openly without their consent" (*bez vedomosti ikh*).[54] Anna was not allowed to designate her successor, which meant only a return to the situation before Peter's decree on succession. Other stipulations of the "Conditions,"—namely not promoting anyone to a high rank, not depriving nobles of life, property, or honor without due process, and not granting estates and villages—amounted to only marginally new limitations since rulers generally abided by these as de facto limitations anyway.

What was different was the codification of these informal limitations and the naming of a specific oligarchic institution (at the time controlled by Dmitrii Golitsyn and members of the Dolgorukov family) from which the ruler must obtain approval. This last aspect of the "Conditions" gave the impression of excluding the rest of the ruling class from access to the monarch. LeDonne has already pointed to the opposition of the upper nobility, including both the Saltykovs and the Naryshkins to this arrangement,[55] but there may have been also another source of opposition within the ruling class. General Christopher von Manstein, a German in Russian service, reports, in his *Memoirs,* that the lower nobility was led to understand this arrangement would mean "that none

cessors on the throne—Catherine I and Peter II—had been weak rulers, but that the rest of the elite were not convinced of the Council members' sincerity. Ibid.: 87.

[52] Richard Pipes, for example, described this as one of only three attempts, all of which failed, "on the part of the service élite to stand up to the monarchy and restrain its unlimited power." Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 184. The other two are the stipulations to Władysław, the son of the Polish king Sigismund III, to become tsar in 1610 and the Decembrists Revolt in 1825. Raeff asserted that the failure of the nobility to impose the "Conditions" meant that Anna "assumed complete autocratic power" and that "her reign may be considered among the most tyrannical and arbitrary of the eighteenth century." Marc Raeff, ed., *Plans for Political Reform in Imperial Russia, 1730–1905* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 43.

[53] D. A. Korsakov, *Votsarenie imperatritsy Anny Ioannovny* (Kazan': Tipografiia Imperatorskoi universiteta, 1880), 17–18.

[54] Grigorii Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii v tsarstvovanie Alekseii Mikhailovicha,* 4th ed. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Glavnogo Upravleniia Udelov, 1906), 126. For relevant secondary literature regarding Kotoshikhin's statement, see Benjamin Phillip Uroff, "Grigorii Karpovich Kotoshikhin, *On Russia in the Reign of Alexis Mikhailovich*: An Annotated Translation," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1970, pp. 553–55.

[55] LeDonne, "Ruling Families," 296.

of them stood any chance of obtaining any preferment of the least consequence while the Council of State should have all the power in their hands; as each member would make a point of procuring the most considerable employments for his own relations and creatures. . . ."[56] The "Conditions" would most likely have had a better chance of acceptance if they had included an additional stipulation, as similar Polish and Swedish declarations did, that the Supreme Privy Council would advise the ruler only after it consulted others in the nobility, both upper and lower. Three other plans offered at the time called for a larger Supreme Privy Council and strict limitations on numbers of members from any one family.[57] In contrast to the "Conditions," these plans contain no principle of limiting the monarch as such but only of having the interests of other members of the ruling class considered. Toward the end of January 1730, the Supreme Privy Council, apparently in an effort to meet the criticisms of the lower nobility, drafted a plan of government, known as "Points for an Oath," that attempted to reassure members of the ruling class that their positions and lands were secure, and that consultations would occur.[58] But this draft was not completed or made generally known.

Once in power, Anna was able to tear up the "Conditions" with impunity because other members of the ruling class did not wish to have their powers threatened by what they perceived as a small clique. They preferred to have the relationship between them and the monarch remain fluid, and thus open, rather than have the terms of the relationship written down and possibly made exclusive. Although her personal behavior as Empress resulted in the embarrassment and humiliation of a number of members of the nobility, it is difficult to point to any action taken by Anna that violated the spirit of the "Conditions." When she ridiculed a particular member of the ruling class, it was as a punishment for that person's having transgressed the conformitive behavior of the court.[59] Alexander Lipski has argued, convincingly in my opinion, that the accusations of tyrannical, anti-Russian, and anti-noble policies during her reign are unfound-

[56] Christopher Hermann von Manstein, *Contemporary Memoirs of Russia, from the Year 1727 to 1744* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1856), 32–33. The Florentine diplomat Lorenzo Magalotti made a similar complaint in 1674 about the Swedish constitution, that is, the Council used its position "to hinder access to the king's person [*till honom*]. . . ." Lorenzo Magalotti, *Sverige under år 1674,* trans. Carl Magnus Stenbock (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Soner, 1912), 2.

[57] Raeff, *Plans,* 46–50. See also Valerie A. Kivelson, "Kinship Politics/Autocratic Politics: A Reconsideration of Early-Eighteenth—Century Political Culture," in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire,* ed. Jane L. Burbank and David L. Ransel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 17.

[58] G. A. Protasov, "Verkhovnyi tainyi sovet i ego proekty 1730 goda," *Istoricheskie raboty* 1 (1970): 69–81. See also David L. Ransel, "The Government Crisis of 1730," in *Reform in Russia and the U.S.S.R.: Pasts and Prospects,* ed. Robert O. Crummey (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 50–51.

[59] For example, Prince Mikhail Golitsyn, because he married a Roman Catholic, was forced, among other things, to imitate a hen. Mina Curtiss, *A Forgotten Empress: Anna Ivanovna and Her Era 1730–1740* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973), 183–84.

ed.[60] When Anna died, and her grand nephew Ivan VI, who was an infant, was declared tsar initially under the regency of Count Biron and then under that of Ivan's mother Anna Leopoldovna, a reaction set in against the Saltykov-Miloslavskii network and against Biron because of the excesses of Empress Anna's personal behavior, not her state policies. At this point, the Naryshkin side, benefiting from a nebulous nostalgia for Peter's reign, took action against their rivals and manufactured a coup that put Elizabeth (1741–1762), the daughter of Peter I and thereby a Naryshkin, on the throne. In a series of manifestoes, Elizabeth claimed power as the result of election and dynastic inheritance and promised to restore Petrine rule.[61]

Reaching consensus with the ruling class, which Muscovite rulers practiced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, continued to be the "secret" of successful rulers in eighteenth-century Russia, especially during the reigns of Elizabeth and Catherine II (1762–1796), so that decisions could be made and actions taken. Catherine herself described what happened when consensus could not be reached in response to a foreign policy initiative during the reign of Elizabeth: "In the year 1744 . . . the German Empire offered the Empress Elizabeth the guarantee of the laws, liberties, and privileges of that Empire. Russia did not respond to this proposition because the Russian court was divided and neither side had a preponderant influence; sometimes the advice of one was followed, sometimes that of the other, by fits and starts, according to who was more or less in favor on any particular day."[62]

Since neither side could gain an upper hand, no decision could be reached and no action was taken. Catherine described this as a "missed opportunity," but she likewise could not take action during her reign when the court was similarly divided. The most prominent example of divisions within the ruling class stymieing action was in regard to the Legislative Commission of 1767, for which Catherine wrote extensive, detailed *Instructions.* Despite 203 sessions, as well the setting up and meeting of nineteen special committees to deal with particular issues, and the transfer of its venue from Moscow to St. Petersburg, the Commission was disbanded after a year and a half without any practical results being implemented. Catherine was able to draw upon the materials gathered and draft proposals for subsequent individual reform measures, such as her *guberniia* and urban administrative reorganization, and her Charter to the Nobility of 1785, but its immediate legislative effect was inconsequential.

On-going political coalitions or interest groups within the Russian ruling class do not seem to have existed as such. Although David Ransel, among others, has pointed to the importance of "familial and personal patronage networks" for bestowing favors on clients,[63] these networks did not support different political actions or stand for competing policies. The priorities of those in the ruling class were different. What was important to them was sharing in the spoils through appointments, influence, and bestowing favors.[64] Ivan Morris' description of court struggles during the Heian Period in Japan is also directly applicable to the Russian court: "they were mainly contests for power between individuals or factions, not clashes about issues, let alone about ideology. The members of the ruling aristocracy were not divided on such questions as whether or not to build up closer relations with China, or how best to control the provinces or to improve communications. What concerned them was to acquire supreme office and its many delightful trappings, to hold it against all comers."[65]

In other words, it was not so much what was being decided that was important as who was deciding it. At times, political issues cut across lines of family and patronage, but these *ad hoc* coalitions on particular issues were temporary and constantly changing. They quickly reverted to the "prevailing winds" of the family constellations and spoils distribution. Understanding this may help provide a better appreciation of Catherine II, whose reign seems to have puzzled a number of historians.

One of the standard interpretations of Catherine II portrays her as a hypocrite who paid lip service to the ideals of the Enlightenment and then cynically ignored those same ideals. A prominent historian called them "window dressing and propaganda."[66] Another prominent historian summed up a widely held assessment when he wrote: "in spite of Catherine's enormous display of enlightened views and sentiments and of her adherence to the principles of the Age of Reason, it remains extremely difficult to tell what the empress actually believed, or whether she believed anything."[67] Such views can apparently be supported by Catherine's claim in her Instruction to the Legislative Commission of 1767: "The Sovereign is the autocrat; for there is no other power but that

[60] Alexander Lipski, "A Re-Examination of the 'Dark Era' of Anna Ioannovna," *American Slavic and East European Review* 15 (1956): 477–88.

[61] *PSZ* 11: 542–44, no. 8476 (28 Nov. 1741); 11: 544–46, no. 8480 (12 Dec. 1741), and 11: 567–77, no. 8506 (22 Jan. 1742). See Whittaker, "Chosen by 'All the Russian People,'" 14.

[62] Catherine II, *Sochinenie Imperatritsy Ekateriny II,* ed. A. N. Pynin, 12 vols. (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia akademiia nauk, 1901–1907), 12: 529.

[63] David L. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 1. For an attempt to identify political coalitions in seventeenth-century Muscovy, see Robert O. Crummey, "Court Groupings and Politics in Russia, 1645–1649," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 24 (1978): 203–21.

[64] For a description of the kinds of favors clients requested of their patrons, such as job appointments and transfers, loans and cancellation of debts, and intervention in judicial cases, see Ransel's analysis of an eighteenth-century form-letter book in his article "Bureaucracy and Patronage: The View from an Eighteenth-Century Russian Letter-Writer," in *The Rich, the Well Born and the Powerful: Elites and Upper Classes in History,* ed. Frederic Cople Jaher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 167–78.

[65] Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), 73.

[66] Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772–1839* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), 31.

[67] Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia,* 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 256.

which centers in a single person, that can act with a vigor proportionate to the extent to such a vast domain."[68] If she was an "autocrat" in her "power," then these historians have some justification to wonder why she did not implement the reforms that she said she wanted to. Other historians have already provided an answer: the nobility, with whom Catherine was in alliance, were not in agreement with her or with each other that such measures were a good idea.[69] Catherine did introduce gradual reforms, most notably in administration, education, especially for women, and in granting the right of private property to members of the ruling class.[70] But when juxtaposed to the sweeping administrative changes Peter I had introduced, her measures seem timid in comparison.

Why then was she apparently so easily thwarted by the nobility from making sweeping changes? To answer that question, we can look at her reign in the context of her having three potential political liabilities: she was a woman in a patriarchal and blatantly male chauvinist society; she was German and raised Protestant (although she converted to Orthodoxy when she came to Russia in her teens); and she was a usurper. After the overthrow and death of her husband Peter III (who ruled for six months in 1762), their son Paul could have been made ruler by the principle of primogeniture, perhaps under a regent, who might have been Catherine herself.[71] Yet, Catherine was made ruler in her own right. At the time, to be sure, primogeniture was not the official principle of succession. Rulers, as defined in the decree of 1722, had the right to choose their successor.[72] And to honor that stipulation, the captured Peter III was prevailed upon to abdicate and acknowledge her as ruler.[73] Peter, however, did not formally designate Catherine as his successor and would certainly not have chosen her on his own, so who did? The answer is a small group within the ruling class. But they did so with the consent of the ruling class as a whole. Those in the ruling class who were opposed to Catherine could always threaten to establish the "rightful" succession. And we know of various conspiracies designed to restore the imprisoned Ivan VI (until he was killed) or to enthrone Paul.[74] But these plots were isolated and did not amount to much within the court, owing in great part to Catherine's own political skills. What was of more concern was the Pugachev Rebellion of 1773–1774 with the intention of restoring "Peter III" to the throne. Yet, Catherine survived Pugachev, as well as a dozen other pretenders, many of whom were Old Believers, claiming to be her husband Peter. She had to be extremely careful, satisfying each court faction or family grouping in turn, always being sure to maintain a consensus. Her ability to do so neutralized her political liabilities. As early as 1763, the Prussian envoy Solms had reported this characteristic of Catherine: "Those who are interested in maintaining the old confusion or in opposing the success of an affair have found a *cheval de bataille* of which they make use on each occasion. They make the Empress fear that, by this or another action, she would displease the nation. This fear of losing the love of her subjects, which has taken root, makes her hesitant to act . . . ."[75] This success in maintaining favor accounts in great part for the stability of her reign.

Those who question why Catherine did not push reforms forcefully against the nobility, as Peter the Great was supposed to have done, can find their answer in the fact that Peter did not have Catherine's political liabilities and, thus, had much more elbowroom for his activities. He was able to pursue measures forcefully against particular individuals within the ruling class but only because he maintained the support of the ruling class in general, most likely because there was no feasible alternative at the time. Such a consideration helps to explain his harsh treatment and ultimate execution of his son Aleksei, who could have become a focus of opposition among disgruntled members of the ruling class.

Likewise, in sixteenth-century Muscovy, Ivan IV, because of his own outrageous behavior, would not have lasted long if he had not generally had the consensus approval of both the boyars as a group and the middle servitors. And, as was the case throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the process of changing status of powerful families was a slow one. They provided the continuity between regimes. Most of the same families remained in power at the end of Ivan's reign as had been in power at the beginning.[76] Nonetheless, we know of various plots to get rid of Ivan IV. Besides the attempts to put his cousin Vladimir Andreevich Staritskii on the throne, some Muscovites were involved in a plan, according to Daniel Prinz, envoy of the

[68] *PSZ* 18: 193, no. 12,949, art. 9.

[69] Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 584–85. See also David Griffiths, "Catherine II: The Republican Empress," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 21 (1973): 323–44.

[70] On Catherine's educational reforms, see Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great,* 490–502. In 1785, Catherine granted the nobility their estates outright, so that they no longer held their property solely on the basis of the ruler's favor. Charter to the Nobility (1785), art. 11: "A noble will not be deprived of his property without due process of law." This measure had been foreshadowed by the decree of 28 June 1782, in which the state abandoned claim to ownership of mineral wealth, which from then on belonged to the proprietor of the land. *PSZ* 21: 614, no. 15,447, art. 1.

[71] According to Princess Catherine Dashkova, this was the plan of Nikita I. Panin, the tsarevich's tutor. *Mémoires de la Princesse Daschkoff. Dame d'honneur de Catherine II impératrice de toutes les Russies,* ed. Pascal Pontremoli ([Paris]: Mercure de France, 1966), 49–51.

[72] *PSZ* 6: 496–97, no. 3893.

[73] *Perevorot 1762 goda. Sochineniia i perepsika uchastnikov i sovremennikov,* 4th ed. (Moscow: Moskovskoe knigoizdatel'skoe tovarishchestvo, 1910), 89, 102. See also Peter's three letters to Catherine from Ropsha. *Perevorot 1762 goda,* 142–43.

[74] For a brief list of the conspiracies and plots to install Paul, see Hugh Ragsdale, *Tsar Paul and the Question of Madness: An Essay in History and Psychology* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 8–9.

[75] *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* (*SRIO*), 148 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1867–1916), 22: 126, no. 67 (4/15 Oct. 1763). By "subjects" Solms meant those in the court. Catherine had virtually no contact with the peasants.

[76] See, e.g., Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics* 3, 183. For the seventeenth century, see Crummey, *Aristocrats and Servitors,* 65–81, 164–65.

Holy Roman Emperor, to replace Ivan IV with the Crimean khan.[77] In the end, however, the lack of a feasible alternative, the sixteenth-century equivalent of a Catherine II or Alexander I (1801–1825), may have saved Ivan IV from a fate similar to that of Peter III or Paul.[78]

The patronage networks also operated in an informal manner rather than through any formal government-sponsored procedure. Before attempting the coup against Peter III in 1762, Catherine needed to be sure she had support for herself among the ruling class. In so doing, she was careful not to tip her hand to the wrong people, even otherwise trusted friends. She had told Catherine Dashkova as late as December 1761 that she had no plans to usurp the throne, to which Dashkova responded, "Well, Madam, then I believe your friends must act for you."[79] Yet Catherine later wrote to Poniatowski that she had to keep secret from Dashkova such plans as there were because Dashkova's sister, Elizabeth, was Peter III's mistress and because Dashkova frequented Peter's court.[80] According to Dashkova, Peter had ordered her to visit his court at Oranienbaum every day and "to spend more time with me than in the company of the Grand Duchess."[81] Even if Catherine had been convinced of Dashkova's unswerving loyalty, under the circumstances it would have been unwise to divulge much of anything to her.

When Catherine took over in 1762, she was supported by a tenuous consensus that cut across the family networks, and she also claimed to having been chosen by a broader constituency ("zhelanie vsekh Nashikh vernopoddannykh").[82] At the time of her accession, she was involved with Grigorii Orlov and had given birth to his son less than three months before the coup. Her pregnancy was one of the reasons she could not act sooner to gain the throne. The Orlovs were from Novgorod, one of the provincial noble families that often acted as intermediaries between the two large rival family constellations. But the ruling class that Catherine set out to convince that reforms were needed was not

[77] Daniel Printz [Prinz], *Moscoviae ortus, et progressus* (Gubenae: Christopher Gruber, 1681), 76, as reprinted in *Scriptores Rerum Livonicarum,* 2 vols. (Riga and Leipzig: Eduard Franken, 1853), 2: 702. Daniil Prints [Prinz], "Nachalo i vozvyshenie Moskovii," trans. I. A. Tikhomirov, *Chteniia v Obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete,* no. 3 (1876): 22.

[78] Hellie puts more emphasis on the lack of institutional and social restraints to explain Ivan's behavior, but he also mentions the importance of Ivan's position of legitimacy within the Danilovichi as a consideration. Richard Hellie, "What Happened? How Did He Get Away with It? Ivan Groznyi's Paranoia and the Problem of Institutional Restraints," *Russian History* 14 (1987): 199–224, esp. 219–24.

[79] *Mémoires de la Princesse Daschkoff,* 37.

[80] Catherine II, *Sochinenie,* 12: 553–54.

[81] *Mémoires de la Princesse Daschkoff,* 32.

[82] For Catherine's manifesto, see *PSZ* 16: 3–4, no. 11582 (28 June 1762). Although ostensibly in the Naryshkin camp as a result of her marriage, she had already had a well-known affair with a Saltykov, who it was rumored was the father of her son. If Sergei Saltykov indeed was the father of Paul, then the irony is that, although it would appear the dynasty was being continued through the Naryshkin line, it in fact was continued through the rival Miloslavskii-Saltykov line. My thanks to John LeDonne for this observation.

one that altogether welcomed innovation. The interest of many of its members was in maintaining the status quo and avoiding any change that would threaten their position.

Catherine did what she could when she could, which may have been little enough from our point of view. But in the end she was a successful ruler. She died a natural death while still the reigning empress, despite having usurped the throne, despite being the "wrong" gender, and despite being a foreigner. Those who have second-guessed Catherine for not acting forcefully enough in pursuing her reform proposals would themselves most likely not have reigned long if they had tried to follow their own advice in her place.

Similarly, the inability of Peter III and of the Emperor Paul (1796–1801) to understand cooperation with the ruling class as the key to successful rule led to their respective premature demises. Assassination was one way for the ruling elite to deal with monarchs who did not support their interests and those of the ruling class, or whose actions threatened the legitimacy of the ruling structure. And the outrageous behavior of Peter III certainly challenged that legitimacy. Catherine describes her husband's mischievousness at the funeral of the Empress Elizabeth:

> [T]he Emperor was in a particularly good mood that day, and during the sad ceremony, he invented a game for himself. He lingered from time to time behind the hearse and allowed it to advance about thirty *sashen* [about seventy yards], and then he would run to catch up with it as fast as he could. The elder courtiers, who carried the train of his black robe of state, especially Lord Marshal Count Sheremetev, who had the end of the mantle, could not keep up with him and were obliged to let the mantle go. As the wind blew it out, Peter III was still more delighted, and repeated the joke several times. So it happened that I and all who followed him remained far back behind the coffin. Finally a message had to be sent up to the front and the whole mourning procession halted until those who were behind could catch up again. This undignified behavior was talked about a great deal, not to the Emperor's advantage, and there were all kinds of stories about his foolish actions on many occasions.[83]

In writing about Peter III at this time, Catherine Dashkova confirms this assessment and, in the process, provides the clearest explanation for the motivations behind the coup. After a public humiliation of Catherine by Peter at a banquet, Dashkova writes: "The Empress gained increasing sympathy, while contempt for the Emperor grew in proportion. Thus, every day he smoothed out for us the difficulties in the way of his overthrow—a lesson to the great of this world teaching them that contempt for the ruler is as likely to cause his fall as will his own tyranny. For this of necessity brings in its wake chaos in administration and distrust of the judiciary, and unites everyone in one desire—the desire for a change."[84]

Similar feelings among the ruling elite thirty-nine years later led to the assassination of another emperor, Catherine's son Paul. Adam Czartoryski writes

[83] Catherine II, *Sochinenie,* 12: 508–9.

[84] *Mémoires de la Princesse Daschkoff,* 46–47.

that widespread complaints were expressed within the ruling class that "Paul was precipitating his country into incalculable disasters and into a complete disorganization and deterioration of the Government machine," but this was just venting on their part. "The real motive of Paul's assassination," Czartoryski tells us, was the continual disturbance to individuals and to "the peace of families in the ordinary relations of life" rather than any threat to the community as a whole.[85] Paul was known to punish and humiliate members of the court and military for the slightest infraction, especially during formal ceremonies.

The importance of using symbolic statements and court spectacles by Renaissance rulers to maintain the loyalty of aristocratic subjects has been written about by Roy Strong.[86] And in a recent book on the importance of court ritual and pageantry in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia, Richard Wortman has called attention to the importance of the outward display of power and authority that "by 'acting on the imagination' tied servitors to the throne as much as the perquisites and emoluments they received from state service."[87] Besides relative proximity to the ruler who in his or her person represented the legitimacy of power and authority combined, the nobility gained privileges and tax exemptions as well as special access to state resources. When Peter III undercut the solemnity of court ritual, as he did at the funeral of the Empress Elizabeth, and when courtiers feared participating in the rituals as they did under the Emperor Paul or the Empress Anna, then the act of ritual had the opposite effect—to alienate the elite symbolically and the ruling class in reality from the ruler.[88] The common front that the ruler and ruling class presented in court ceremony broke down and threatened the affirmation of consensus between the two, and even within the ruling class itself.

[85] *Memoirs of Prince Adam Czartoryski and His Correspondence with Alexander I,* 2 vols., ed. Adam Gielgud (London: Remington, 1888), 1: 232–33.

[86] Roy Strong, *Splendours at Court: Renaissance Spectacles and the Theatre of Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), esp. 6–10.

[87] Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy,* vol. 1: *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–4. For court rituals in seventeenth-century Muscovy, see Robert O. Crummey, "Court Spectacles in Seventeenth-Century Russia: Illusion and Reality," in *Essays in Honor of A. A. Zimin,* ed. Daniel Clark Waugh (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1985), 130–46. Crummey concludes that ceremony depicting "the reception of ambassadors [which] presents the Tsar . . . as senior colleague, representing his people with the help of his leading courtiers . . . . is the idealized picture that [perhaps] is closest to the real political and social conditions at the Muscovite court, at least in the seventeenth century" (ibid., 141). Recent research on the Epiphany and Palm Sunday ceremonies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has tended to focus on the meaning of the rituals in the relationship between the secular and ecclesiastical leaders. See Paul Bushkovitch, "The Epiphany Ceremony of the Russian Court in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Russian Review* 49 (1990): 1–17; Michael S. Flier, "Breaking the Code: The Image of the Tsar in the Muscovite Palm Sunday Ritual," in *Medieval Russian Culture,* vol. 2, eds. Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 213–42; and Michael S. Flier, "The Iconology of Royal Ritual in Sixteenth-Century Muscovy," in *Byzantine Studies: Essays on the Slavic World and the Eleventh Century,* ed. Speros Vryonis, Jr. (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A. D. Caratzas, 1992), 53–76. Yet, such ceremonies also confirmed the status of the secular ruler's subjects who participated in them.

[88] Raeff has made the point that "an autocrat's individual comportment—especially when it does not conform to the ruling elite's expectations—becomes a crucial factor in the stability and success of the reign." Marc Raeff, "Autocracy Tempered by Reform or by Regicide?" *American Historical Review* 98 (1993): 1147.

In the end, it was not his policies that brought about Peter's downfall,[89] it was his inappropriate behavior, which threatened to undermine the façade of legitimacy. When Catherine came to the throne, she affirmed and successfully implemented almost all the measures enacted during her husband's brief reign, including the peace agreement with Prussia (although she stopped short of having Russia join in the attack on Denmark). But she implemented them in a different way, that is, with the propriety due her position as Empress and capstone of the pyramid of power. The relationship between the ruler and the ruling class thus needed to be continually reinforced for the ruling order to survive.

It was not a question of the ruler's pandering to the nobility or issuing decrees to curry their favor, such as Elizabeth's decree of 19 July 1754, giving the nobility a monopoly on production of liquor,[90] or even Peter's so-called "emancipation" of the nobility from mandatory state service.[91] The "emancipation" that Peter III decreed gave the nobility a choice of whether to serve or not, and may also have meant the government did not have to find things for them to do, especially during the demobilization following the Seven Years War. Perhaps for this reason, Catherine was content to approve the requests of those who no longer wished to serve and used the very wording of Peter's Manifesto to do so. In 1775, Catherine wrote that "the majority of nobles live on their estates."[92] But, as Walter Pintner pointed out, the percentage of nobles in state service in point of fact *increased* following the decree from 17 percent in 1755 to 35 percent in 1795. The increase, according to Pintner, came mainly from the greater number of nobles in civil offices—from 1,200 in 1755 to 14,880 in 1795. The percentage of the nobility in military service remained steady—between 16 percent and 20 percent—during those years.[93]

The nobility opposed, as a matter of principle, the logical next step after their

[89] As Raeff wrote: " . . . it is difficult, on balance, to see why Peter's social and economic policies should have resulted in his violent overthrow." Marc Raeff, "The Domestic Policies of Peter III and His Overthrow," *American Historical Review* 75 (1970): 1302.

[90] *PSZ* 14: 184–86, no. 10,261. LeDonne argues that this was done because merchants were too successful at producing liquor and "were about to become the major producers in the land, a disquieting prospect to powerful noblemen who were seeking to develop their large estates on a capitalist basis." John P. LeDonne, "Indirect Taxes in Catherine's Russia: II. The Liquor Monopoly," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 24 (1976): 174. As a result, the only competition the Russian nobility faced in this regard was alcohol manufactured abroad, which may have been behind Shcherbatov's complaint about the importation of "English beer." Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals,* 222–25.

[91] *PSZ* 15: 912–15, no. 11,444 (18 Feb. 1762).

[92] "Ekateriny II kak pisatel'nitsa," *Zaria. Zhurnal uzheno-literaturnyi politicheskoi,* June 1870: 7.

[93] Walter Pintner, "The Burden of Defense in Imperial Russia 1725–1914," *Russian Review* 43 (1984): 256. Pintner estimated the number of male nobles in the mid-eighteenth century to be around 59,000. Troitskii put the number of nobles in civilian service in 1755 at 1,160. S. M. Troitskii, *Russkii absoliutizm i dvorianstvo v XVIII v. Formirovanie biurokratii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), 21. But see Leonard who estimates the percentage of nobles in combined military and civilian service in the mid-eighteenth century to be "up to 60 percent." Carol Leonard, *Reform and Regicide: The Reign of Peter III of Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 67.

own emancipation from obligatory service, that is, the abolishment of serfdom, for to emancipate the serfs might undermine the legal distinction the nobility held. The concern was real because, under certain circumstances, nobles without serfs could be reclassified as state peasants. There were also economic considerations to be sure. In the provinces of European Russia in 1777, for example, according to figures compiled by V. I. Semevskii, 32 percent of the landed nobility owned fewer than ten serfs; 30.7 percent owned ten to thirty serfs; 13.4 percent owned thirty-one to sixty serfs, and 7.7 percent owned sixty-one to one hundred serfs. Of the 16.2 percent who owned more than one hundred serfs, only 4.1 percent owned more than five hundred.[94] LeDonne divides the ruling class into three groups mainly according to the number of serfs owned. In the top group, the ruling elite, LeDonne places 8,500 members of the nobility, 8,000 of whom owned more than one hundred serfs (Semevskii's 16.2 percent above).[95] It is the members of this top group who have the wherewithal to attend court and, through their family connections, have some impact on distribution of spoils. For those who had fewer serfs, their income would not allow the lifestyle that a member of the nobility in St. Petersburg was expected to lead. If a nobleman had five serfs and extracted from each of them the average 20 percent *obrok* (quitrent) payment,[96] then he could lead a lifestyle that was roughly equal to that of one of his serfs. If he had ten serfs, he could live only twice as well as any one of them. A serf who lived on a very small estate might be just as economically exploited as one who lived on a large estate, but his owner did not reap any extravagant rewards for this exploitation.

Russia remained an agriculturally challenged country where seed-to-yield ratios barely exceeded an average of 1:3, the minimum necessary for subsistence.[97] A ratio of 1:5 is generally regarded as necessary for a civilization to take hold.[98] This means that Russian agriculturists, in the best of times, could support only a small ruling class in terms of percentage of the total population. It has been estimated that, in the eighteenth century, the nobility made up only a little over 0.5 percent of the total population.[99] Among the landed nobility in 1777, only the top 4.1 percent (about 2000 nobles) benefited extravagantly from the system, while the next 12.1 percent (another 6000 nobles) benefited somewhat. Then the economic benefit for the ruling class dropped off sharply as the agricultural yield could not support more. We can suppose, therefore, that the economic motivations for serfdom appealed more to the elite, while the legal distinction appealed more to the lower nobility since the economic benefits they received were significantly lower.

[94] V. I. Semevskii, *Krest'iane v tsarstvovanie Imperatritsy Ekateriny II,* 2 vols., 2d ed. (St. Petersburg: M. M. Stasiulevich, 1903), 1: 31–32.

[95] LeDonne, *Absolutism and the Ruling Class,* 4–5; cf. LeDonne, "The Ruling Class," 288.

[96] For the provinces of Moscow, Orel', Riazan', and Tver' in the late eighteenth century, the average *obrok* payment as percentage of peasant income was 19.4 percent. I. D. Koval'chenko and L. V. Miller, "Ob intensivnosti obrochnoi ekspluatatsii krest'ian tsentral'noi Rossii v kontse XVIII—pervoi polovine XIX v., *Istoriia SSSR,* no. 4 (1966): 67.

[97] For a general discussion of the economic importance of yield ratios, see B. H. Slicher von Bath, "Yield Ratios, 810–1820," in *Afdeling Agrarische Geschiedenis Landbouwhogeschool, A.A.G. Bijdragen,* no. 10, 1963, pp. 12–19. Slicher von Bath gathered data on yield ratios of grains and vegetables for various European countries including Russia up to the early nineteenth century. Ibid., 29–260. See also Arcadius Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer and the Knout: An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 48–50.

[98] Slicher von Bath, "Yield Ratios," 14; see also Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime,* 7–8.

[99] LeDonne, *Absolutism and the Ruling Class,* 22 and 318 n. 1; Leonard, *Reform and Regicide,* 66. If one considers only the hereditary nobility, then one obtains an even lower percentage of the male nobility in relationship to the male population as a whole: 0.43 percent in 1762 and 0.41 percent in 1795. See V. M. Kabuzan, *Narodonaselenie Rossii v XVIII—pervoi polovine XIX v. (Po materialam revizii)* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1963), 154, 159–65.

[100] Crummey noted, for example, that he came across no case of a boyar family's falling into bankruptcy during the period of his study (1613–1689). Crummey, *Aristocrats and Servitors,* 167.

[101] Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

But even more crucially, this economic component helps us to understand the necessity of mutual reinforcement between the ruler and ruling class throughout Russian history. A fragmented or divided ruling class or one in opposition to the ruler would see its tenuous hold on whatever economic surplus there was quickly evaporate. But a mutually reinforcing ruler-ruling class relationship ensured its own survival at the expense of the peasantry even during times of bad harvest and lowered crop yields.[100] In contrast, the conflict mode of explanation, which proposes that the ruler and ruling class undermined each other's authority and legitimacy, does not explain well at all how a Russian state could exist, let alone flourish, in such agriculturally adverse circumstances. Thus, the need to preserve the façade of legitimacy was reinforced by the urgency of economic scarcity.

Rulers need a power base, and during this time that power base rested within the ruling class. In societies of privilege, as most societies were before the French Revolution, this power base did not reside within the civil service or bureaucracy. It is simply anachronistic to apply such a frame of reference to societies that had not undergone the type of transformations that the French Revolution wrought. And, indeed, it was precisely from the anti-aristocrat propaganda of the French Revolution that this anti-aristocrat frame of reference emanated. The idea that the nobility in France, Germany, or Russia was childish and selfish and petulantly blocking the far-seeing visionary that was the king is not entirely supported by the evidence (although it made for a great movie, Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*).

To be sure, the civil service of western European countries was expanding rapidly in the eighteenth century to the point where they became powerful enough in France to provide the means and expertise to overthrow the monarchy.[101] In early modern Russia, there was a recordkeeping apparatus and it was rather well developed, but I would avoid calling it a "bureaucracy." It is misleading and somewhat anachronistic to speak of "bureaucracy" in the denota-

tive sense ("rule by bureaus") anywhere in Europe before the French Revolution. It was only as a result of the introduction of principles of professionalism and governance by standardized procedures in civil service ranks that such an aspect of modernization as "bureaucracy" can be said to exist in the Western context.[102] Furthermore, it was still acceptable practice for members of the nobility to intervene to overturn administrative decisions. The introduction of "bureaucracy" is quite different from the old ruling class of monarch and nobles, and is sharply antagonistic to it.

In non-constitutional monarchies, the aristocracy along with the king or queen *were* the rulers of the country. Like the samurai under the Tokugawa Shogunate, "their vocation was government," in the words of the historian R. P. Dore, "and good government was largely a matter of correct dispositions on the part of the governors."[103] The administration of Russia, as it was in Japan, was in the hands of the aristocracy—that is, rule by the "best" (*aristos,* best + *-kratia,* rule). That was their job and they were born to it. Why else, they might have said to themselves, would God have made them aristocrats if they were not meant to rule? From their point of view, it is only the aristocracy that has the interests of the common good at heart, and the ruler and the nobility together were the state.

The nobility would have found it crass to describe their activities as dividing up the spoils or exploiting the serfs. For them, the serfs were something less than adult humans, perhaps more like children, so "parenting" them was in the natural order of things, and, in order to do this, control had to be maintained over the various *sosloviia* of society. Such a view had its ironies since the nobility seemed often to occupy the role of children at play while the serfs and peasants were in the role of hard-working adults. Princess Dashkova herself eloquently defended the institution of serfdom to Diderot:

> At one time I held the same opinions as you, and thought of giving more freedom to my peasants and making them happier. I changed the administration of my estate in the Orel Province with this end in view, and yet I found they merely became more liable to be pilfered and robbed by every little employee of the Crown. The welfare and wealth of our peasants create our own prosperity and increase our revenues. A landowner would have to be cracked-brained to want to exhaust the source of his own riches. The gentry serve as intermediaries between the peasants and the Crown, and it is in their interest to defend the peasants against the rapacity of Provincial governors and officials.[104]

Here, Dashkova is not alluding to "bureaucratic absolutism," an alliance of monarch and bureaucrat against the nobility,[105] but to officials who were abusing their power and overstepping their legal limits. Members of the aristocracy had their rationalizations for why they did what they did, and they expected to be rewarded for their efforts in maintaining the natural order, which basically consisted of keeping themselves in a position of dominance. "[E]ach will keep to his own station (*sostoianie*)," in Shcherbatov's hopeful phrase,[106] and not get above himself.

The monarch was part of this process, which explains why neither Catherine II nor any other Russian ruler before Alexander II (1855–1881) did much to alleviate the lot of the serfs. The political and economic status of the ruling order was dependent on serfdom, and the members of the ruling class were the monarch's administrators of that institution. It was not a question of having the government limit the power of the nobility, because the nobility, from their point of view, ran the government. And, as Princess Dashkova pointed out, the nobility felt they had to intervene to limit the abuse of power by non-noble government officials.

Nonetheless, this arrangement between the ruler and the ruling class could result, as LeDonne pointed out, in "permanent tension."[107] To ameliorate the tension and to deter the arbitrary exercise of power by the monarch, the principle of *zakonnost'* (literally, "lawfulness") was invoked. *Zakonnost'* meant the rulers of Russia were obliged to limit their own power in accordance with precedent established by the actions of their predecessors and of themselves. The ruling elite was there to ensure that the ruler respected those limitations, at least toward themselves. Russian rulers, at times, felt and expressed frustration concerning this constraint. For example, Ivan IV, in his letter to Metropolitan Afanasii in 1565 after leaving for Aleksandrova Sloboda, complained that prelates, in collusion with members of the ruling class, were interfering in his governmental activities, particularly in preventing him from investigating and punishing "his boyars and all the civil officials (*prikaznykh liudei*) as well as the serving princes and *deti boiarskie* for their misdeeds. . . ."[108] Even a master of working within the system like Catherine at times felt impinged by this principle of self-limitation, if we can believe her staunch critic Prince Shcherbatov: "Nothing can irritate her more than that when making some report to her, men quote the laws in opposition to her will. Immediately the retort flies from her lips: "Can I then not do this irrespective of the laws?" But she has found no one with the courage to answer that she can indeed, but only as a despot. . . ."[109]

What Shcherbatov is describing here is self-limitation on the part of the

[102] See, e.g., Max Weber's six principles of bureaucracy in his *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* eds. Gunther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 956–1005.

[103] R. P. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 41–42.

[104] *Mémoires de la Princesse Daschkoff,* 106–7.

[105] For a description of "bureaucratic absolutism," see Raeff, *Michael Speransky,* 35–36. See also Brian Downing's use of the phrase "military-bureaucratic absolutism." Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 10–11.

[106] Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals,* 258–59.

[107] LeDonne, *Ruling Russia,* 11.

[108] *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (*PSRL*), 40 vols. (St. Petersburg, Petrograd, Leningrad, and Moscow, 1841–1995), 13: 392; 29: 342.

[109] Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals,* 246–47.

ruler's advisers as much as the ruler herself. Clearly, no one was willing to support Catherine in transgressing the laws, only in changing them through accepted procedures. Catherine said as much herself when a court secretary, V. Popov, began flattering her about her unlimited power. She reproved him by pointing out:

> It is not as easy as you think. . . . In the first place, my orders would not be carried out unless they were the kind of orders that could be carried out. You know with what prudence and circumspection I act in the promulgation of my laws. I examine the circumstances, I take advice, I consult the enlightened part of the people, and in this way I find out what sort of effect my laws will have. And when I am already convinced, in advance, of general approval, I issue my orders, and have the pleasure of observing what you call blind obedience. And that is the foundation of unlimited power. But believe me, they would not obey blindly were orders not adopted to customs, to the opinion of the people, and were I to follow only my own wishes, without thinking of the consequences. In the second place, you delude yourself if you think that everything is done only to gratify me. On the contrary, it is I who must seek to oblige everyone, according to his deserts, merits, tastes, and habits; . . . it is much easier to please everyone than to get everyone to please you.[110]

This last statement echoes her own third goal as she stated it (in the third person) in her epitaph: "At the age of fourteen she formulated a triple project to please her consort, Elizabeth, and the nation. She neglected nothing in order to achieve this."[111] Probably the most prominent example of this third project occurred when Catherine issued her *Instruction to the Legislative Commission* in 1767 and called for, among other things, equality before the law for all citizens,[112] which in this respect would have preempted the French Revolution by over twenty years. The ruling class was not willing to accept such a radical notion, and it was not instituted in Russia until 150 years later.

In the end, what was going on in eighteenth-century Russia was fundamentally the same phenomenon that was going on in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Muscovy. Within the upper echelons, members of the ruling class exchanged some of the power they acquired as a result of their patronage networks with the ruler for the authority of that ruler to maintain those same patronage networks. And we also find traditional informal restraints between both the monarch and nobility. In contrast, when the monarch and nobility were in agreement with each other, we find no restraints against the rest of the population. The coercive power of the state was effective because the monarch and

[110] "Pis'mo V. S. Popova imperatoru Aleksandru ob imperatritse Ekaterine II i ee pravitel'stvennykh priemakh," in N. K. Shil'der, *Imperator Aleksandr Pervyi. Ego zhizn' i tsarstvovanie,* 4 vols., 2d ed. (St. Petersburg: A. S. Suvorin, 1904–1905), 1: 280 (translation from LeDonne, *Ruling Russia,* 2). Louis XIV seems to have had a similar understanding of his "unlimited power." He advises his oldest son to hear reports "on all the sides and on all the conflicting arguments" before making any important decision. Louis XIV, *Mémoires for the Instruction of the Dauphin,* 38.

[111] Catherine II, *Sochinenie,* 12: 797.

[112] *PSZ* 18: 196, no. 12,949, art. 34: "The Equality of the Citizens consists in this: that they should all be subject to the same laws."

ruling class had reached consensus, and they had reached consensus in order to ensure their own survival. In Russia, that ensuring was particularly intense because of the economic marginality of the area.

Each ruling class developed its own ways of negotiation, consultation, and consensus. Once that consensus was reached, the decision was enacted under a façade of legitimacy centered on the monarch. The monarch backed by the ruling class had absolute power over the rest (the non-ruling class part) of society, but when dealing with the ruling class itself the monarch violated the informal limitations and formal restraints of power at his or her own peril. The system may not have been pretty, but it worked in Russia and elsewhere at least until the civil servants and lawyers, first in France, then in other countries, began to think they had a better way of doing things and, in the name of the state and society, began to replace the old ruling order with themselves.