

## THE ASSEMBLY OF THE LAND (*ZEMSKII SOBOR*) AS A REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTION

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A significant aspect of "modernization" has been the development of representative institutions, such as the English Parliament and the American Congress, that make laws and act as a check on the executive and judicial branches of government. From 1906 to 1917, a representative institution such as this called the Duma convened in Russia. But earlier, in the nineteenth century, Russian intellectuals, seeking evidence of representative institutions in Russian history, focused on the activities of the Assembly of the Land (*Zemskii sobor*).<sup>1</sup> Their aim was to show that Russia previously had a representative assembly similar to those of European countries of the time and that Russia should once again have one to bring its government closer in form to the contemporary governments of western Europe and the United States. The hypothesis of this paper is that the Assembly of the Land was a representative institution but not of the European type contemporaneous with it. Furthermore, trying to interpret the conduct and composition of the Assembly of the Land in European terms has led to a distortion of the historical understanding of its role and function in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In discussing the Assembly of the Land, we need to settle on a precise definition to distinguish it from other assemblies and councils of the time in Muscovy. To do so, we can profitably use Ellerd Hulbert's discussion of the issue as a starting point. He defined the composition of an Assembly of the Land as having at least three components present: 1) the Holy Synod; 2) the Boyar Council; and 3) "representatives of some other group."<sup>2</sup> Hulbert initially considered

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<sup>1</sup>The term "*Zemskii sobor*" was coined by the Slavophil writer Konstantin Aksakov in an unpublished work dated to ca. 1850, where he wrote: "tsar' sozyval Zemskuiu Dumu ili Zemskii Sobor." Konstantin S. Aksakov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii K. S. Aksakova*, 3 vols. (Moscow: P. Bakhmetev, 1861-80), 1: 11. Previously, in 1846, he merely used Karamzin's phrase "*Zemskaiia Duma*" (Ibid., 599 and "Semisotletie Moskvy," *Moskovskoi vedomosti*, no. 39, 1846). In the sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is referred to variously, when given any designation at all, as the "Land" (*zemlia*), the "Council of All the Land" (*sovet vseia zemli*), or simply as the "Council" (*sobor* or *sovet*) with the understanding that it was an assemblage of certain notable people who represented the "land" as a whole. Despite reservations that have been expressed to the term (see below), I will use "Assembly of the Land" when referring to these gatherings.

<sup>2</sup>Ellerd Hulbert, "Sixteenth-Century Russian Assemblies of the Land: Their Composition, Organization, and Competence" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1970), 3. Zaozerskii had suggested that precise definition of the Assembly of the Land is not possible since those gatherings have such a wide diversity of composition and function.

Platonov's definition that the Assembly of the Land consisted of three elements: the Holy Synod, the Boyar Council, and "land people (*zemskie liudi*) who represented their own various groups of the population and various regions of the polity."<sup>3</sup> Hulbert pointed out that "[s]tandard Soviet definitions closely parallel that of Platonov." Then he cited two examples. One is Iushkov who stated that the third element must be "an assembly of representatives from people of every rank, i.e., the landed servitors (*pomestnoe dvorianstvo*) and the merchants."<sup>4</sup> The other is Eroshkin, who stated that the third element consisted of "representatives of the landed servitors (*pomestnoe dvorianstvo*) and the higher townspeople (*posadskie verkhny*)."<sup>5</sup> It is clear that the difference between Platonov's definition and those of Soviet historians is the matter of whether regional representation was a consideration. Although an attempt was made in the case of some Assemblies of the Land to get a wide selection of lower ruling-class participation, there is no stipulation or apparent regulation that such wide regional participation was required. Nor have I seen sufficient evidence that selection by region was a consideration in general for choosing members to participate in the Assembly of the Land.

Cherepnin proposed that we think of the participants of an Assembly of the Land in terms of four categories: 1) Holy Synod; 2) Boyar Council; 3) "chosen people from the *dvorianstvo* and 4) from the urban (*posadskikh*) people."<sup>6</sup> Other historians have also argued that representatives of townsfolk needed to be present for a "complete" Assembly of the Land to exist. Otherwise, those historians call it an "incomplete" Assembly.<sup>7</sup> Vladimirskii-Budanov argued that a gathering lacking

Aleksandr I. Zaozerskii, "K voprosu o sostave i znachenii zemskikh soborov," *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia*, June (1909): 299-301. As Hulbert remarked, if we leave it undefined, then "we might end up writing the history of all meetings in which two or more people participated" (3).

<sup>3</sup>See Sergei F. Platonov, *K istorii moskovskikh zemskikh soborov* (St. Petersburg: Ministerstvo Putei soobshcheniia, I. N. Kushnerev, 1905), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup>Serafim V. Iushkov, *Istoriia gosudarstva i pravda SSSR*, vol. 1, 3rd. ed. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1950), 273.

<sup>5</sup>Nikolai P. Eroshkin, *Ocherki istorii gosudarstvennykh uchrezhdenii dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Uchebno-Pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva prosveshcheniia RSFSR, 1960), 29.

<sup>6</sup>Lev V. Cherepnin, "Zemskie sobory i utverzhenie absoliutizma v Rossii," in *Absoliutizm v Rossii (XVII-XVIII vv.): Sbornik statei k semidesiatiletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia i sorokapiatiletiiu nauchnoi i pedagogicheskoi deiatel'nosti B. B. Kafengauza*, ed. N. M. Druzhinin, N. I. Pavlenko, and L. V. Cherepnin (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), 93.

<sup>7</sup>Nikolai P. Zagoskin, *Istoriia prava Moskovskogo gosudarstva*, 2 vols. (Kazan': V Universitetskoi tipografii, 1877-1879), 1: 311-12; see also *Ocherki istorii SSSR. Period feodalizma konets XV v.-nachalo XVII v.*, ed. A. N. Nasonov, L. V. Cherepnin, and A. A. Zimin (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1955), 321: "byli eshche nedostatochno shirokimi po sostavu"; and Eroshkin, *Gosudarstvennykh uchrezhdenii*, 30. Helleie describes a "full zemskii sobor" as one that "consisted of two chambers, an upper and a lower." Richard Helleie,

any of the "necessary and organic" (*sushchestvennyia i organicheskiia*) elements of an Assembly of the Land was "not incomplete, but impossible."<sup>8</sup> Such a formulation takes a dogmatically structural approach to determining what an Assembly of the Land was, whereas function was also important. Moreover, although townspeople often were present, we do not have any stipulation in the sources that they had to attend for an Assembly of the Land to be considered legitimate. In contrast, we do have ample documentation that members of the middle and lower service ranks were required to be present. Therefore, instead of accepting Cherepnin's classification of four categories of participants, I propose that we accept Hulbert's definition and consider there to have been three categories, of which the third category had to include representatives from the service ranks but could also, and often did, include representatives from the townspeople. While accepting the gist of Hulbert's definition, we can make it a bit more specific by adding the corollary that this "other group" did not include peasants, serfs, slaves, or women—that is, it did not include representatives from the mass of the population. This fact, however, did not prevent the Assembly of the Land from being considered somehow "representative" of the entire country.<sup>9</sup>

Hulbert goes on to add two other criteria for determining whether a gathering can be classified as an Assembly of the Land: "the assembly [must] be summoned by the tsar, and . . . the business of the gathering [must] be national in scope and importance" (4). We can adopt Hulbert's second criterion—that the tsar summoned the Assembly—but again with a corollary: the summoning could be solely by the Boyar Council or the Patriarch when there was no tsar (as, for example, in times of choosing a new tsar) or to depose a sitting tsar. I will return to the question of the specific business of the Assembly of the Land below, but for the time being we can accept the criterion that the issues the Assembly advised upon were significant matters of policy for the government that affected "the land" in general.<sup>10</sup> With

"Zemskii Sobor," in *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, 60 vols., ed. Joseph L. Wieczynski (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1976–2000), 45: 227.

<sup>8</sup>Mikhail F. Vladimirkii-Budanov, *Obzor istorii russkogo prava*, 3rd ed. (St. Petersburg: N. Ia. Ogloblin, 1900), 194–95.

<sup>9</sup>Torke pointed out that the term "*zemlia*" did not have the meaning of "the people" (*narod*) at that time. Instead, such a meeting should, in his view, be considered a "State Assembly" (*Reichsversammlung*). But, because of the post-Petrine meaning of "state," Torke proposed we call them "Moscow gatherings" (*moskovskie sobraniia*). Hans-Joachim Torke, *Die staatsbedingte Gesellschaft im Moskauer Reich. Zar und Zemlia in der altrussischen Herrschaftsverfassung, 1613–1689* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 135–36; idem, "Tak nazyvaemye zemskie sobory v Rossii," *Voprosy istorii* (1991) no. 11, pp. 4–5.

<sup>10</sup>Some scholars have looked to gatherings that Ivan III held in 1471 and 1478 before his attacks on Novgorod and that Ivan IV held in 1550 before an attack on Kazan' as "incomplete" or "ancestor to the" Assemblies of the Land. But each of these gatherings, in my opinion, was what has been termed *vazriadnyi sbator*, or war council (lit. "military tent"), to discuss strategic and tactical issues of a specific campaign, not the general policy question of whether to embark upon or continue a war. For the 1471 and 1478 gatherings, see *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (PSRL), 41 vols. (St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad and Moscow,

these criteria and corollaries established as our working definition, we can now begin to discuss why historians have been so disappointed in the operations of the Assembly of the Land.

In the opinion of Aksakov, as well as other conservative writers, the Assembly of the Land represented the popular will. Although Aksakov emphasized the "originality" (*samobytnost'*) of the Assembly of the Land, in contrast to Western assemblies, because of its harmonious relationship with the tsarist governments,<sup>11</sup> the most common approach since then has been to find similarities with European parliaments. The Assembly of the Land almost always suffers in this comparison. B. N. Chicherin, a nineteenth-century liberal historian who emphasized the role of the state in the historical process, dismissed the Assembly of the Land as an insignificant phenomenon. According to Chicherin, none of the Assemblies represented estates because the concept of estates had not developed in Russia at that time. Nor did members of the Assemblies lobby for political rights for those non-existent estates.<sup>12</sup>

Marxist historians have seen in the Assembly of the Land an estate-representative institution that could have limited the ruler's activities. Its failure to do so as well as its demise in the second half of the seventeenth century contributed, in their view, to the rise of absolutism in Russia.<sup>13</sup> Although conservative historians have tended to stress the uniqueness of the Assembly of the Land, liberal and radical historians have stressed the perceived similarities with European assemblies.<sup>14</sup> And the views of liberal and radical historians have dominated the historiography. The general consensus, then, has been that the Assembly of the Land did not meet expectations; that instead of developing into a British-style Parliament it merely approved the decisions of the tsar; and that, as a result, it did not act *in opposition* to "the government." In that sense, historians have decided that the Assembly of the Land left its potential unfulfilled. Although writers have differed over the degree of similarity of the Assembly of the Land to

1841–2002), 25: 286, 310; for the 1550 gathering, see *PSRL*, 29: 57–58.

<sup>11</sup>Aksakov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 296

<sup>12</sup>Boris N. Chicherin, *O narodnom predstavitel'stve* (Moscow: Grachev, 1866), 355–82. For discussions of whether there were estates in Russia, see Gunther Stöckl, "Gab es im Moskauer Staat 'Stände?'" *Jahrbücher für Osteuropas* 11 (1963), 321–42; and Boris N. Mironov, with Ben Eklof, *The Social History of Imperial Russia 1700–1917*, 2 vols. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 1: 198–203.

<sup>13</sup>Cherepnin, "Zemskie sobory i utverzhenie absolutizma v Rossii," 92–133; Serafim V. Iushkov, "K voprosu o soslovno-predstavitel'noi monarkhii v Rossii," *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo* (1950) no. 10, 39–51; Liudmila A. Steshenko, "O predposylkakh absolutizma v Rossii," *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta: Pravo* (1965), no. 3, 46–54; and Aleksandr L. Shapiro, "Ob absolutizme v Rossii," *Istoriia SSSR* (1968), no. 5, p. 74.

<sup>14</sup>Latkin's 1885 study of the Assembly of the Land is more of an attempt to find parallels with assemblies in early England, France, Germany, Hungary, Spain, and Sweden than it is an analysis of the evidence for the characteristics specific to the Assembly of the Land itself. Vasilii N. Latkin, *Zemskie sobory drevnei Rusi: Ikh istoriia i organizatsiia sravnitel'no s zapadno-evropeiskimi predstavitel'nymi uchrezhdeniiami* (St. Petersburg: L. F. Pantelev, 1885).

European parliaments, few scholars have seen a positive or significant political role for the Assembly (except possibly during the Time of Troubles in the early seventeenth century and in the compilation of the *Ulozhenie* of 1649). My contention is that, precisely because the starting point of scholars' analyses and evaluations of the Assembly of the Land has been a comparison with European representative assemblies, their conclusions are adversely affected.

To show more specifically what I mean I selected for critique a well-known article published by John Keep in 1957, which attempts to synthesize aspects of and to improve upon the various historiographical views.<sup>15</sup> Keep asserts that "[f]undamentally the same historical process was at work" in Russia as in western Europe. Both areas had "absolute monarchies" and the Assembly of the Land, despite being "a much more primitive institution than its contemporaries in other countries . . . in its way . . . represented a threat to the absolutist order" (122). The government had "to put a stop to the assembly before it became too dangerous" by not convening it after 1653 (121). He finds "the similarities between the . . . [Assembly of the Land] and the early representative assemblies of other European countries . . . [to be] far more striking than the differences." Nonetheless the Assembly of the Land "as an institution was still at a primitive stage of development" because "in Russia the state power developed earlier and more rapidly than the social 'estates' (*sosloviya*) . . . ." The primary indication of the Assembly of the Land's being "primitive" is the absence of "any clearly-defined division into chambers, each with its spirit of corporate solidarity." Keep then states that "the election of deputies took place separately, by estates" and quotes from Latkin that, "in this respect, there exists between our Sobors and the European assemblies not only an analogy but even complete identity."<sup>16</sup> Keep points out that in both Russian and Western assemblies "the higher-ranking members attended *ex officio*, while others were elected." He sees "[t]he parallels, especially with regard to procedure at elections and in the assembly itself . . . [as being] numerous and often impressive" (102).

Keep goes on to make a distinction between Assemblies of the Land in the sixteenth century (he recognizes only two—that of 1566 and of 1598), which he "regard[s] as entirely non-elective" (102, fn. 15), and those of the seventeenth

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<sup>15</sup>John L. H. Keep, "The Decline of the Zemsky Sobor," *Slavonic and East European Review* 36 (1957–58), 100–22; reprinted without footnotes in *Readings in Russian History*, ed. Sidney Harcave, 2 vols. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1962), vol. 1: *From Ancient Times to the Abolition of Serfdom*, 195–211; reprinted in its entirety in John L. H. Keep, *Power and the People: Essays on Russian History* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1995), 51–72. Keep presents a brief historiographical survey (100–01), but for more extensive surveys, see Lev V. Cherepnin, *Zemskie sobory russkogo gosudarstva v XVI–XVII vv.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 7–47; and Ira Lynn Campbell, "The Composition, Character and Competence of the Assembly of the Land in Seventeenth Century Russia" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1984), 5–40.

<sup>16</sup>Latkin, *Zemskie sobory*, 407. Latkin perceived a sense of unity among members of the Western estates against the government that he felt to be lacking in Muscovy.

century, "which aspired to give effect to the popular will" (103). He declares that "[t]he Sobor in its present [seventeenth-century] form was the child of chaos, a stranger to the Muscovite political scene, and a phenomenon that accorded ill with absolutist traditions" (104–05), but that "the threat to the monarchy came, not from the Sobor, which continued to act in the most loyal manner, but from the leading boyar families" (105). The problem was that "the clumsy Muscovite autocracy could not collaborate with any representative institution, even one of such proven loyalty" (107). Some of the Assemblies of the Land, in particular that of 1639, which was convened to discuss the response to Crimean Tatar treatment of Muscovite envoys, "genuinely express[ed] the popular mood" (111). By the middle of the seventeenth century, according to Keep, "active elements came to realise the opportunities which the Sobors presented for the exertion of pressure upon the government" (112). Keep sees in the Assembly of the Land of 1648–49, which framed the Law Code (*Ulozhenie*) of 1649, "a sign that the Sobor was maturing as an institution" because it had "two chambers: an 'upper house' of clergy and boyars . . . and a 'lower house' of elected delegates." He quotes favorably the opinion of the Slavophil writer A. P. Shchapov that there was extensive "popular influence" on the *Ulozhenie* (115).<sup>17</sup> In Keep's view, the Assembly of 1648–49 "did not consolidate its position of authority, and its moment of greatness was followed by a rapid decline." He sees the reason for calling an Assembly of the Land in 1650 was "not to take a decision on policy, but mainly for propaganda effect—to pacify the population in Moscow . . ." Furthermore, he claims that "[t]he moderate line taken by the assembly in 1650 may well have added to the government's distrust of the Sobor, particularly when it dealt with domestic affairs" (116). For Keep, the Assembly of 1653 "was the last consultation with popular representatives to which the title of Zemsky Sobor can properly be attached" (118).

In 1985, Keep wrote an "Afterword" to his article.<sup>18</sup> In the "Afterword," he discussed mainly the studies on the Assembly of the Land of L. V. Cherepnin and Hans Torke that had appeared since the first publication of his article. Keep's discussion of changes and corrections are limited to details of specific Assemblies, as he reaffirmed his main themes. These main themes are: the Assembly of the Land was like Western representative assemblies but only in a primitive form; the Assembly of the Land represented the popular will; it was perceived at times to be a threat to the government or at least to the absolutist monarchy although it acted in the most loyal way; and it failed to develop after 1650 along the lines it had been developing before then—that is, as an institution in opposition to the government. We can discuss each of these themes in turn.

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<sup>17</sup>Afanasii P. Shchapov, *Sochineniia*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: M. V. Pirozhkov, 1906–08), vol. 4 (Irkutsk: Vostochnosibirskoe oblastnoe izdatel'stvo, 1937), vol. 1, 720. Shchapov does not use the term "popular influence," but "general advice (*obshchii sovet*) . . . from all the ranked people."

<sup>18</sup>John L. H. Keep, "The Decline of the Zemskii Sobor: An Afterword," in *Power and the People*, 73–85. My thanks to Paul Dukes for bringing this item to my attention.

The notion that the Assembly of the Land was like Western representative assemblies is based on two points: (1) certain similarities in election and procedure and (2) the same historical process that was operating in Europe was also operating in Russia. As for the first point, despite Keep's claim of numerous and impressive parallels, there are virtually no procedures or election practices that are similar or "parallel" in any way among the various European assemblies, on the one hand, and the Muscovite Assembly of the Land, on the other. In Muscovy, the *ex officio* members of the Assembly of the Land were made up of the entire Boyar Council and the entire Church Synod. In no European country did the entire State Council and all the prelates sit in the assembly. In addition, the members of the Assembly of the Land were not elected by the members of the "estate" that they supposedly represented but were either drawn from whichever members of the service ranks happened to be in Moscow at the time or chosen by local government officials. In selecting delegates, provincial governors had to take into consideration not only who was of the appropriate service rank as well as who did not have other service obligations at the moment but also who had sufficient wherewithal to afford the expenses involved with travel to and from Moscow, not to mention living there for the duration of the Assembly sessions. It is little wonder these governors had difficulty finding delegates and often encountered resistance from the pool of potential candidates.<sup>19</sup> In any case, it is unclear in what sense "estates" existed in Muscovy if there was no corporate identity. Keep seems to accept Latkin's claim that selection was by estate when he is discussing supposed similarities between the Assembly of the Land and European representative institutions, but then draws back from that claim when he discusses the reasons for its primitiveness in relation to those same institutions.

In regard to historical process, Keep has to argue that it was the same in both Muscovy and Europe because there is no evidence of direct influence of Western representative assemblies on the Assembly of the Land. That is, the founding, conduct, and functions of the Muscovite representative assembly cannot be traced to any Western assemblies. The only way then to explain perceived parallels and similarities is by a deep-structural common historical process. And because the founding, conduct, and functions of the Assemblies of the Land did not exactly match those of the Western representative assemblies, it must, according to this line of argument, be because Muscovy was behind the West in terms of its political development. Such an argument assumes that Muscovy was on the same track of political development as the West. It is a decidedly Eurocentric view if only because it does not allow for the possibility that Russia was on its own track of political development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries separate from that of the West. Once we cast aside the assumption that Muscovy was part of the same

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<sup>19</sup>Campbell, "Composition, Character and Competence," 43-70. See also Gr. Shmelev, "Otnoshenie naseleniia i oblastnoi administratsii k vyboram na zemskie sobory v XVII v.," in *Sbornik statei, posviashchennykh Vasiliiu Osipovichu Kliuchevskomu* (Moscow: S. P. Iakovlev, 1909), 492-502.

historical process as Europe at this time, then we can jettison the characterization of the Assembly of the Land as a "primitive" version or "poor relation" of Western representative assemblies.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the apprehension that a two-chambered assembly is in a state of more mature development than a one-chambered assembly confuses structure with function. The current British Parliament, for example, is, in terms of political power, a one-chambered assembly, but that does not signify in itself any primitiveness or lack of maturity.

The second theme in Keep's discussion—that the Assembly of the Land represented the popular will—requires a substantiation that Keep and the Slavophil historians do not give it. To say that the Assemblies of the Land somehow represented the popular will or "popular mood" in a country in which the population was around 90 percent peasant and in which the peasantry was not represented in any of the Assemblies of the Land is, to say the least, a stretch. Keep asserts that 11 or 12 peasants participated in the Assembly of 1613 to choose a tsar (104 and fn. 22). Yet the term *uezdnye ljudi*, which is used to describe these delegates, does not mean "peasants," but "provincials" (lit. "district people"). Keep does mention Platonov's determination that they were probably members of the lower service class,<sup>21</sup> but then dismisses it with the statement: "Some who were actually peasants may have attended this and later Sobors as representatives of the urban communities (*posady*), for there was no clearly marked division between town and country" (104, fn. 22). Later, Keep returned to this question of peasant participation ("Afterword," 76) since such participation would help support the notion that the Assembly represented the popular will. Yet, even if peasants participated in one or more Assemblies of the Land, a claim for which the evidence is ambiguous at best, Keep acknowledges both in his original article and in his "Afterword" that their representation would have been indistinguishable from that of the townsfolk. Many decades previously, Kliuchevskii, in response to those who asserted the Assemblies of the Land represented the popular will, stated that the Assembly of the Land "served not the recognition of the popular will" but only the power it supported.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, he had argued that the Assembly of the Land was isolated from the general popular opinion and reflected the narrow views of the service and urban elements.<sup>23</sup> At most, we can say that the Assemblies of the Land brought to the attention of the upper ruling class the opinions of members of the lower ruling class as well as of representatives from the residents of Moscow and on occasion from other towns as well.

A third theme in Keep's study is the idea that the Assembly of the Land was perceived at times to be a threat to the government or at least to the absolutist monarchy. This notion of a representative assembly's developing in opposition to

<sup>20</sup>Keep uses the term "poor relation" in his "Afterword," 85.

<sup>21</sup>Platonov, *K istorii moskovskikh zemskikh soborov*, 56–57.

<sup>22</sup>Vasilii O. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs Russkoi istorii*, vol. 3 in his *Sochineniia*, 8 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi literatury, 1956–59), vol. 3, 200.

<sup>23</sup>Vasilii O. Kliuchevskii, "Sostav predstavitel'stva na zemskikh soborakh drevnei Rusi," in his *Sochineniia*, vol. 8, 9.



the monarch corresponds to the development of Parliament in England during the seventeenth century and to the breaking off from the Estates General of the National Assembly in France in 1789.<sup>24</sup> Although Keep characterizes the Assembly of the Land as a perceived threat by the monarchy, he does not provide any direct evidence of the monarchy's perceiving it this way. The evidence he cites is indirect—Tsar Aleksei did not convene any Assemblies of the Land after a certain date, and, therefore, he must have perceived it as a threat. In seeming contradiction to the view that the Assembly posed or could potentially pose a threat to the tsar's government, Keep wrote:

The whole perspective changes when we consider the Sobors, not as regularly constituted assemblies of deputies specially elected for the purpose, but as *ad hoc* consultations between the government, the ecclesiastical and secular hierarchy, and men chosen by such provincial gentry as chanced to be in the capital at the time, and by the Moscow townspeople (111).

Such a consideration does indeed substantially change the perspective. A consultative assembly convened by the tsar and members of the upper ruling class to include the opinions of members of the lower ruling class and Moscow townspeople in the decision-making process and thereby to enlist their support for those decisions was a smart move. We see throughout Europe, Asia, and northern Africa during the course of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries strong ruling classes dependent on consultation between their upper and lower strata.<sup>25</sup> When that communication broke down, so too did the strength of the ruling class as a whole. In the process of consultation, the tsar and boyars could also acquire information. At the 1642 Assembly, for example, the delegates were asked "to think hard ... and make their thoughts known in writing" in order for the tsar to be "informed concerning all these matters."<sup>26</sup> Other Assemblies of the Land that conveyed information to the government about conditions in the provinces and whether sufficient resources were available to wage war include those that met in 1616, 1621, 1639, 1651, and 1653.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, the "Muscovite autocracy" appears decidedly less "clumsy" than Keep declares it to be.

The fourth theme—that the Assembly of the Land failed to develop after 1650 along the lines it had been developing before then as an institution in opposition to

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<sup>24</sup>In his "Afterword," Keep points out that he was not asserting the Assembly of the Land "was, or could have become, a Western-style parliament," but that he did imply its "inadequacies, its failure to develop into a viable legislative institution with clearly defined juridical powers, were a misfortune for Russia" (74).

<sup>25</sup>See my article "The Façade of Legitimacy: Exchange of Power and Authority in Early Modern Russia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44 (2002), 534–63.

<sup>26</sup>Iurii V. Got'e, *Akty, otnosiashchiesia k istorii zemskikh soborov* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1920), 39.

<sup>27</sup>Campbell, "Composition, Character and Competence," 148

the government—is a difficult one to demonstrate. Indeed, Keep has to resort to speculation and unsupported assertions: “The relations between the government and the assembly, it is now clear, were characterised by suspicion rather than confidence, by conflict rather than collaboration.” He goes on to cite the Assembly of 1648–49 as “an almost revolutionary body” and that the “recommendations [of the Assemblies of 1650 and 1651] did not accord with official policy” (121). Yet, these Assemblies were convened by Tsar Aleksei, included his own Council of State and most trusted advisors,<sup>28</sup> and the “almost revolutionary body” of 1648–49 passed a law code that he personally approved.<sup>29</sup> Beyond speculation as to why Aleksei did not call any Assembly of the Land into session after 1653, there is no direct evidence that he or any member of the ruling class saw it as in any way a threat. Any imagined similarity with, say, Charles I’s not calling Parliament into session between 1629 and 1640 is a false one. These were two very different situations and two very different institutions, for open antagonism prevailed between the English Parliament and the monarch, a circumstance lacking in relations between the Assembly of the Land and Tsar Aleksei. As well received and influential as Keep’s article has been, we have to find fault, in the end, with its interpretation and lack of sufficient supporting evidence for its main conclusions.

If the Assembly of the Land did not originate in Western institutions or from the Western historical process, then in what and from where did it originate? Some writers have looked to earlier Rus’ history for the origins of the Assembly of the Land. Cherepnin, one of the main proponents of the indigenous-origin theory, sees the roots of the Assembly of the Land in the institutions that had formed in Rus’ by the fourteenth century.<sup>30</sup> As antecedents for the Assembly of the Land, he eyes the *snem* (meetings [*s’ezdy*] of independent Rus’ princes with each other); the *duma* (prince’s consultations with their boyars in council); the princely-boyar courts of arbitration (which resolved disputes between independent princes); and the *veche* (town assembly). Although Cherepnin acknowledges that the *snem* had different characteristics and was of a different time from the Assembly of the Land, he declares that the demise of one was the precondition “for the birth of the other” (57). And although he acknowledges that the composition of the *duma* was “more or less narrow,” he states that “the *duma* became the nucleus of the new representative organ—the *zemskii sobor*” (59).

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<sup>28</sup>Sergeevich claimed that, similar to their western European counterparts’ summoning of popular assemblies to weaken the power of their nobility, Muscovite rulers summoned Assemblies of the Land to weaken the power of the boyars by appealing to the people (*narod*). Vasilii I. Sergeevich, *Lektsii i issledovanii po drevnei istorii russkogo prava*, 4th ed. (St. Petersburg: M. M. Stasiulevich, 1910), 175–81. This claim fails for the same reason—that is, it is not likely the tsars would have used a council so well stocked with boyars to overcome that same group.

<sup>29</sup>One can contrast Keep’s view with that of Kliuchevskii, who has argued that the *Ulozhenie* of 1649 granted greater central authority to the government through standardization of administration practices. Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia*, 3: 141–42.

<sup>30</sup>Cherepnin, *Zemskie sobory*, 55–63.

But none of these indigenous institutions had the same components or functioned in the same way as the Assembly of the Land did. Besides, the Assembly of the Land convened in Moscow, but Moscow does not seem to have ever had a *veche*.<sup>31</sup> How and why the *veche* traditions would suddenly show up in Muscovite governmental practice in the mid-sixteenth century have not been adequately explained. Nor does an indigenous-origin model provide an explanation for why the first Assembly of the Land was convened under Ivan IV, and not before. The notion that Ivan wanted to use the lower ruling class as a kind of counterweight to the boyars fails because of the large amount of direct evidence against it. Even less likely is the notion that he looked to merchants and craftsmen in the towns through introduction of a *veche* to counter his own ruling class. Indeed, Ivan III, the grandfather of Ivan IV, had ended the *veche* meetings in Novgorod in order to limit the independence of the townspeople when he annexed the city in 1478. So, postulating his grandson's reinstating them in Moscow over 70 years later is somewhat paradoxical. Likewise, the *snem* and princely-boyar courts of arbitration were phenomena of an age when the Muscovite prince was little more than one among a number of Rus' princes. There is no lucid reason why the Muscovite tsar would want to revive such institutions in the middle of the sixteenth century when he had become the sovereign over these other princes.

Finally, none of these "antecedent" institutions performed all the same functions of later Assemblies of the Land. In Novgorod and other towns, the *veche* could choose a prince-ruler for the city but could not advise the grand prince of Vladimir (Rus') or the tsar. The Boyar Council could advise the grand prince and tsar but could not choose a prince-ruler. Church synods dealt with the grand prince on matters of the external Church but could not advise the ruler on secular issues. It may be possible to consider the Assembly of the Land as some kind of combination of the functions of these separate gatherings. And it certainly could be argued that its composition and structure drew on indigenous antecedents. Yet, the drawback to this indigenous-origin interpretation is the absence of motive for the

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<sup>31</sup>Vernadsky considered the temporary seizing of power by Muscovite townspeople as described in the *Tale of Tokhtamysh* to be "a typical example of the revival of the *veche* in times of crises..." George Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 346. I am reluctant to take this highly fictionalized *Tale* as sound evidence for Muscovite governmental institutions, especially when no evidence exists to show that there had previously been a *veche* in Moscow to be revived, and no corroborative evidence exists that such a seizure of power took place in 1382. For the *Tale of Tokhtamysh*, see *Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi*, 11 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978–87), XIV—*seredina XV veka*, 190–207. Cherepnin claimed that an uprising of townspeople in 1445 was a *veche* on the basis that it was against the Tatars, occurred without a prince present, and, therefore, was like the 1382 "*veche*" mentioned above. Lev V. Cherepnin, *Obrazovanie russkogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva v XIV–XV vekakh: Ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi i politicheskoi istorii Rusi* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1960), 779–83. If any uprising of townspeople against the Tatars when the prince was absent can be called a *veche*, then it could hardly be considered a precursor of the Assembly of the Land.

tsar or Boyar Council to want to dilute or share their power with another group. When one considers that the first Assemblies of the Land met in the middle and late sixteenth century when the central government was formalizing its administration, the rationale for calling in representatives from the service ranks and townsfolk becomes even more tenuous. Although the effect of the Assemblies of the Land was to increase communication between the upper and lower strata of the ruling class and townspeople, that does not seem to have been the main motivation for calling them, especially in the absence of any demand on the part of the lower ruling class and townspeople for such a gathering. Instead, something else was going on here.

Another way to look at the activities of the Assembly of the Land, I suggest, is as the Muscovite version of the steppe *quriltai*. When examining the evidence we have for the *quriltai* from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, we find a representative institution that, besides advising the khan on serious issues that required a broad consensus to carry out effectively, could choose a khan after the previous khan had died and could depose a reigning khan.<sup>32</sup> Since a *quriltai* was an institution with specific functions relating to the advising, choosing, and deposing of a khan, then we would not expect to find such an institution in Muscovy before 1547—that is, before the Muscovite grand prince formally adopted the title of tsar, which was equivalent in rank to the steppe khan. Even if one wants to hold on to the notion that the Assembly of the Land was entirely an indigenous institution, one has to admit the absence in the indigenous sources of any rationale for its coming to fruition in the middle of the sixteenth century. In contrast, the steppe *quriltai*, with which Muscovite leaders were familiar as the result of their dealings with Tatar khanates, provides a ready explanation for the setting up of a similar institution in Muscovy. The indigenous-origin explanation asks us to accept the twin propositions that not only did the Assembly of the Land arise in the middle of the sixteenth century for an-as-yet-undetermined reason, but also the founders of it managed to select exactly those functions from previously existing gatherings in various parts of Rus' that just happened to coincide with the functions of the *quriltai*. Such a complex explanation is dependent on an extraordinary and highly unlikely concomitance of circumstances. Instead, looking to the existence of the *quriltai* as a catalyst provides a simpler and, for now, more likely explanation for the establishment of the Assembly of the Land than trying to manufacture out of whole cloth some kind of internal Muscovite scenario exclusive of any outside influence.

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<sup>32</sup>Myers claimed "that representative assemblies, as vigorous, established and organized institutions, with important powers, were unique to western civilization." Alec R. Myers, *Parliaments and Estates in Europe to 1789* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 47. He does not, however, consider the *quriltai*, which although differing from Western assemblies in terms of vigor, establishment, and organization, was a representative assembly that provided advice and rendered determinations on important matters of policy.

A likely model for the Assembly of the Land was the *quriltai* of Kazan', as Jaroslaw Pelenski has proposed.<sup>33</sup> If the Muscovite government's adoption of a political body that performed the same functions as the Kazan' *quriltai* was more situational than institutional,<sup>34</sup> then we can see that the time of the calling of the first Assembly of the Land (1549) was crucial—that is, after Ivan IV was crowned tsar but before the Khanate of Kazan' was taken by Muscovite forces (1552) and placed under the rule of the Muscovite tsar. By adopting the title "tsar," Ivan IV was declaring himself a khan in steppe terms so that he could legitimately lay claim to being the ruler of a khanate—in this case, the Khanate of Kazan' and, shortly after, the Khanate of Astrakhan' (1556). To enhance the claim that he was a khan, he had to have a *quriltai*-type institution because, quite simply, khans had *quriltais*. The situational argument also helps to explain why 17 years elapsed between the calling of the first and second Assemblies, and an additional 14 years between the second and third Assemblies. Once the initial Assembly of the Land was convened in 1549 to advise on matters concerning provincial administration, it had also served its function to help legitimate Ivan IV as tsar. The Assemblies of 1566 and 1580, on the other hand, discussed the question of whether to continue the Livonian War, which required a broad consensus among the ruling class. Neither the Assembly of the Land nor the *quriltai* was meant to be a check on or balance of the tsar's or khan's power, but both did act as consulting assemblies, the advice of which the tsar or khan was free to accept or reject. To be sure, he ignored that advice at the risk of the policies he wished to have carried out.

As a Muscovite adaptation and modification of the steppe *quriltai*, the Assembly of the Land performed its duties well. For it to develop, however, from a *quriltai*-type institution to a National Assembly-type institution would have required the existence of a literate group of lawyers and civil servants such as those who resided in France in 1789. But this was lacking in Muscovy. Western representative assemblies were fundamentally financial assemblies, whose approval was needed for new taxes to be imposed. Subsequently, their approval was sought for important laws and they often acted as courts of justice.<sup>35</sup> Neither the Assembly of the Land

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<sup>33</sup>Jaroslaw Pelenski, "State and Society in Muscovite Russia and the Mongol-Turkic System in the Sixteenth Century," in *Mutual Effects of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian Worlds: The East European Pattern*, ed. Abraham Ascher, Tibor Halasi-Kun, and Béla K. Király (Brooklyn: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 98; reprinted in *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 27 (1980), 156–67. See also my discussion of Pelenski's suggestion in *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier 1304–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 185–86.

<sup>34</sup>This point was proposed by Leslie McGann in an unpublished paper. I am accepting the arguments of Hulbert and Cherepnin in favor of the conclusion that the first Assembly of the Land was 1549. See Hulbert, "Sixteenth-Century Russian Assemblies of the Land," 81–101; Cherepnin, *Zemskie sobory*, 68–78. The *Continuation of the Chronograph of 1512* is our source of evidence for this Assembly. See Sigurd O. Shmidt, "Prodolzhenie Khronografa redaktsii 1512 g.," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 7 (1951), 295–96.

<sup>35</sup>Myers, *Parliaments and Estates*, 29–34.

nor the *quriltai*, in contrast, had specific financial or legislative responsibilities. Although an Assembly of the Land helped formulate the *Ulozhenie* of 1649, its approval was not required for any particular laws to be issued. A number of Assemblies of the Land did discuss financial levies, especially during and immediately after the Time of Troubles. But once the government re-established financial stability, regular discussion of these matters at Assemblies of the Land ceased. Moreover, the official approval of the Assembly of the Land was never required for instituting new taxes. That responsibility, along with legislative powers, lay with the Boyar Council. This division of responsibility in Muscovy between the Boyar Council and the Assembly of the Land paralleled the division of responsibilities in steppe khanates between the diwan of *qaraqi beys* and the *quriltai*.<sup>36</sup>

A closer parallel to the Assembly of the Land in western Europe than the English Parliament or even French Estates General might be the French Council of Notables (although the Council of Notables did not choose the monarch or formulate law codes). Just as French monarchs avoided convening the Council of Notables after 1627 or Estates General after 1614, so too Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich did not convene an Assembly of the Land after 1653, but not because he feared it. Instead, he broadened the representation in the Boyar Council,<sup>37</sup> which in turn seems to have allowed him to better obtain consensus within the ruling class. This result is shown especially in the gathering of the Boyar Council in 1674 when Aleksei announced his son Fedor as his legal heir without consulting an Assembly of the Land. Likewise, Keep has suggested that the infrequent calling of the Assembly of the Land during the reign of Mikhail Romanov after 1622 was due to a substitute means that Mikhail and his father, Patriarch Filaret, had developed for consultation with members of the lower ruling class and townspeople. From 1621 on, Mikhail and Filaret began having daily receptions in their separate courts, which members of various social groups (other than peasants) attended.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps, as

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<sup>36</sup>On the relationship of the Boyar Council to the diwan of *qaraqi beys*, see Donald Ostrowski, "The Mongol Origins of Muscovite Political Institutions," *Slavic Review* 49 (1990), 531, 533; idem, *Muscovy and the Mongols*, 46; as well as the exchange of views: Charles Halperin, "Muscovite Political Institutions in the Fourteenth Century," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1 (2000), 239–47; and Donald Ostrowski, "Muscovite Adaptation of Mongol/Tatar Political Institutions: A Reply to Halperin's Objections," *Kritika* 1 (2000), 268–83, 288–89.

<sup>37</sup>For the latest data on Aleksei's augmenting the size of the Boyar Council, see Marshall T. Poe, *The Russian Elite in the Seventeenth Century: A Quantitative Analysis of the "Duma Ranks," 1613–1713* and idem, *The Consular and Ceremonial Ranks of the Russian "Sovereign's Court," 1613–1713* (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Sciences, 2001), as well as idem, "Absolutism and the New Men of Seventeenth-Century Russia," above in this volume.

<sup>38</sup>For a discussion of these receptions, see Marius L. Cybulski, "Political, Religious and Intellectual Life in Muscovy in the Age of Boyar Fedor Nikitich Iur'ev-Romanov a.k.a. The Grand Sovereign The Most Holy Filaret Nikitich, Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' (ca. 1550–1633)" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1998), 427–33.

Keep argued, these receptions "provided an adequate substitute for the Sobor, at least in the eyes of the government" (109).

Fedor II, however, did convene an Assembly of the Land in 1681 to discuss military, financial, and land reforms. When Fedor died in 1682, an Assembly of the Land was called into session by the patriarch to decide Fedor's successor. The choice of Peter, a Naryshkin, in April was not entirely acceptable to the strong Miloslavskii-led faction, so a second Assembly of the Land was called into session (or perhaps the first was reconvened) in May 1682, which decided on co-tsars, Peter and his half-brother Ivan, who was a Miloslavskii. Although in 1683 one final Assembly was convened (to advise on peace with Poland), no Assembly of the Land to choose a tsar was convened after that. But the notion that the tsar was somehow chosen continued on into the eighteenth century with the idea that has been dubbed the "elected monarch." Catherine I, Anna Ioannovna, Elizabeth Petrovna, and Catherine II all made use of the idea that they had been chosen by some wider representative group (which, however, never met),<sup>39</sup> and this can be seen as a carryover from the by-then defunct Assembly of the Land.

Those historians who have downplayed the importance of the Assembly of the Land as an institution tend to dismiss claims about the occurrence of certain meetings of it on the basis that, with the exception of some years (such as 1566 and 1598), no formal procedures were involved in choosing delegates. Thus, they question whether the meetings that occurred in 1584 and 1682, for example, can rightfully be called meetings of an Assembly of the Land. Yet, the evidence we have does not stipulate that any formal procedures for choosing delegates for meetings of the Assembly needed to be followed. Even the absence of official stipulations for selection has led some historians to claim that the Assembly of the Land was, therefore, not a formal institution. Such a claim, however, may simply be the result of applying present-day Western concepts to an earlier time and different place.

In some years, it is true a more or less formal request was issued instructing provincial governors to choose delegates from among the men of the province (e.g., in 1612,<sup>40</sup> 1619,<sup>41</sup> and 1648<sup>42</sup>). In other years, no such formal request seems to have been made. In those years, delegates were taken from people who happened to be in Moscow at the time (e.g., in 1614, 1621, 1634, 1639, and 1642). Even in 1648, nonetheless, those chosen delegates were made up largely of *dvoriane* who had been gathering in Moscow for a campaign. In 1682, those chosen delegates were made up mostly of people who lived in Moscow. But this practice of choosing delegates from outside the highest levels of government provides a key for

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<sup>39</sup>Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, "Chosen by 'All the Russian People': The Idea of an Elected Monarchy in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 18 (2001), 10, 12, 14, and 16.

<sup>40</sup>"Akty podmoskovnykh opolchenii i zemskogo sobora 1611–1613 gg.," ed. Stepan B. Veselovskii, in *Chleniia v Obschestve istorii i drevnosti rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete* (CbOISR), 1911, bk. 4, p. 99, no. 82.

<sup>41</sup>Got'e, *Akty*, 23–24.

<sup>42</sup>Pavel P. Smirnov, "Neskol'ko dokumentov iz istorii Sobornogo Ulozheniia i Zemskogo sobora 1648–1649 gg.," in *CbOISR*, 1913, bk. 4, pp. 6–7.

understanding what constitutes an Assembly of the Land. In a number of Assemblies, including those of 1566, 1598, 1642, 1651, and 1653, representatives from the service ranks (*dvoriane*, *deti boyarskie*, and *pomesbchiki*) alone made up more than 50 percent of the known delegates.<sup>43</sup> This need for a “third” socio-political group helps us to understand why it was sufficient on occasion to pull in people off the streets of Moscow for an Assembly of the Land to be constituted. It was not enough just to have the boyars and Church prelates meet. In those years when time and inclination allowed, a choosing of delegates from the provinces occurred. Otherwise, the third group could apparently be assembled through other means.

Differences in terminology, social composition, and political roles need to be resolved before we can establish a connection between the Assembly of the Land and the *quriltai*.<sup>44</sup> In both gatherings, we find an assembly of notable people who seem to have been considered representative of the larger society. The social composition most likely varied according to place and time. Neither gathering was a “constitutional” body as such, since each was convened on an *ad hoc* basis to perform one of three functions: (1) choose the tsar/khan, (2) depose a reigning tsar/khan, and (3) advise the tsar/khan on important issues. In other words, whenever a consensus of the larger society was needed, then a *quriltai/zemskii sobor* was called. So those who are looking for a regularly convened Western-style parliament or democratic institution are disappointed and then dismiss the Assembly of the Land out of hand because it did not act like these European institutions. When, however, we compare the actions of the *quriltais* and Assemblies of the Land and see what they actually did, we find a similarity in function that cannot be so easily dismissed.

#### MONGOL QURILTAS<sup>45</sup>

- 1155(?) – chose Qutula as khan of Mongols
- 1187 – chose Temujin as khan of Mongols
- 1200 – advised Temujin and Ong Khan on attack against the Taiji’ud
- 1206 – chose Chingiz Khan as leader of the confederation
- 1206 – advised on setting up of the confederation
- 1211 – advised on war against northern China
- 1218 – advised on campaign against the Qwarezm Shah
- 1229 – chose Ögödei as Qayan (Khaghan)
- 1229 – advised on a campaign in western Steppe
- 1234 – advised on campaign against Qipchaqs, Magyars, and others<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Hulbert, “Sixteenth-Century Russian Assemblies of the Land,” 123, 201–02; Campbell, “Composition, Character and Competence,” 79–82.

<sup>44</sup>Observation made by Charles Halperin to me in a private communication.

<sup>45</sup>I know of no monographic study of *quriltais* as such. The most comprehensive treatment of its antecedents and functions that I am aware of is Elizabeth Endicott-West, “Imperial Governance in Yüan Times,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46 (1986), 525–41. The following list represents only those Mongol *quriltais* mentioned in the sources familiar to me.

<sup>46</sup>Ala-ad-Din ‘Ata-Malik Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. John Andrew



- 1237 – advised on campaigns against the Rus'  
 1241 – convened to choose a successor to Ögödei  
 1246 – chose Güyük as Qayan  
 1251 – chose Möngke as Qayan; advised on campaigns in west Asia, Korea, and southwestern China  
 1259 – advised on campaign against the Southern Song  
 1260 – chose Ariq-böke as Qayan  
 1260 – rival *quriltai* chose Qubilai as Qayan  
 1264 – advised Qubilai on fate of Ariq-böke  
 1269 – convened by Qaidu to discuss the fate of Transoxiana<sup>47</sup>  
 1294 – chose Temür Öljeitu as Qayan  
 1307 – chose Qaishan as Qayan  
 1307/8 – deposed Chapar as khan of the *ulus* of Ögödei and chose Yangichar in his place<sup>48</sup>  
 1311 – chose Buyantu as Qayan  
 1640 – codified Oirad law<sup>49</sup>

After the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368, *quriltais* do not seem to have been called to choose or depose khans. In 1911, a *qural* was held to declare Mongolia's independence from China and to declare the Eighth Jebtsundamba Living Buddha of Urga as ruler.<sup>50</sup> The *qural* draws its inspiration from the earlier Mongol *quriltai* and is the name given to the present-day Mongolian representative assembly.

In addition, Khudiakov pointed out fourteen instances of the Rus' chroniclers' using the term "all the Kazan' land" [*vsia Kazanskaia zemlia*] or "all the people of the Kazan' land" [ *vse liudi Kazanskoi zemli*] between 1497 and 1551. He identified these references with the *quriltai* of Kazan'.<sup>51</sup>

Boyle (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 196–200; and Rashīd al-Dīn, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, trans. John Andrew Boyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 53–54. Boyle, following Muhammad Qazvini, dated this *quriltai* to 1235 on the basis that Rashīd al-Dīn placed it in "the Year of the Sheep" i.e., 1235. But Endicott suggested a more likely date is the one that appears in the *Yüan shih*: May 30–June 27, 1234; see Endicott-West, "Imperial Governance," 537, citing YS 2.33. Cf. *Istoriia pervykh chetyrekh khanov iz dom Chingisova*, trans. Iakinf (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Karla Kraiia, 1829), 230.

<sup>47</sup>On this *quriltai*, see Michal Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), 25–29. Wassāf dates this *quriltai* in the year 1267 and places it on a plain south of Samarkand, but I am accepting the conclusions of Biran's analysis that Rashīd al-Dīn is correct in dating it to 1269 and placing it in Talas (Biran, *Qaidu*, 144, n. 80).

<sup>48</sup>Biran, *Qaidu*, 76–77.

<sup>49</sup>See Sechin Jagchid and Paul Hyer, *Mongolia's Culture and Society* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 341, 358.

<sup>50</sup>Jagchid and Hyer, *Mongolia's Culture*, 338–39.

<sup>51</sup>Mikhail G. Khudiakov, *Ocherki po istorii Kazanskogo khanstva* (Kazan': Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1923), 191–95.

**KAZAN' QURILTAS**

- 1496 – chose Abdüllâtif as khan.<sup>52</sup>  
 1516 – chose Abdüllâtif as khan.<sup>53</sup>  
 1518 – sent an embassy to Moscow about the choice of a khan.<sup>54</sup>  
 1519 – chose Şah Ali as khan.<sup>55</sup>  
 1524 – discussed peace with Muscovy.<sup>56</sup>  
 1530 – discussed peace with Muscovy.<sup>57</sup>  
 1531 – deposed Sefa Girey as khan.<sup>58</sup>  
 1531 – chose Can Ali as khan.<sup>59</sup>  
 1535 – deposed Can Ali as khan.<sup>60</sup>  
 1541 – discussed deposing Sefa Girey as khan.<sup>61</sup>  
 1546 – chose Şah Ali as khan.<sup>62</sup>  
 1546 – discussed relations with Muscovy.<sup>63</sup>  
 1551 – deposed Ötemiş Girey and chose Şah Ali as khan.<sup>64</sup>  
 1551 – gave an oath to Muscovy that Kazan' would not intercede on behalf of the "Mountain side" (*Gorniaia storona*)—that is, the Mountain Cheremis (Chuvash) to the west as well as the Mordvinians to the southwest of Kazan'.<sup>65</sup>

If we do not accept Khudiakov's conclusion that these references are to the *quriltai*, then we have no adequate explanation for what they do refer to.

The following list of Muscovite Assemblies of the Land, I am basing, with some modifications, on Cherepnin's list provided in his monographic study of these Assemblies.<sup>66</sup> I have eliminated from his list Assemblies in 1615 and 1618 (220, 227–29). There is no direct evidence for the meeting of the Assembly of the Land in either year. Cherepnin was extrapolating from the fact that a monetary levy was imposed in 1615 and in 1618 and from the direct evidence that the Assembly of the Land met in other years that a monetary levy was imposed. But this extrapolation tries to make the Assembly of the Land into a legislative institution that always had

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<sup>52</sup>PSRL, vol. 6, 41; vol. 8, 232; vol. 12, 243; vol. 20, 364; vol. 24, 213; vol. 26, 290; vol. 28, 328; vol. 39, 171; and *Ioasafovskaia letopis'*, 131–32.

<sup>53</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 260; vol. 13, 25; vol. 28, 351.

<sup>54</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 266; vol. 13, 31.

<sup>55</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 267; vol. 13, 32.

<sup>56</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 271; vol. 13, 44.

<sup>57</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 274; vol. 13, 47.

<sup>58</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 276; vol. 13, 54–55.

<sup>59</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 277; vol. 13, 57.

<sup>60</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 291; vol. 13, 88, 424; vol. 29, 20.

<sup>61</sup>PSRL, vol. 8, 295; vol. 13, 100.

<sup>62</sup>PSRL, vol. 13, 148–49, 447–48; vol. 29, 47–48.

<sup>63</sup>PSRL, vol. 13, 149, 450.

<sup>64</sup>PSRL, vol. 13, 167, 468; vol. 29, 64.

<sup>65</sup>PSRL, vol. 13, 169, 470; vol. 29, 65. On the significance of this concession, see my "Ruling Structures of the Kazan' Khanate," in *The Turks*, 6 vols., ed. Hasan Celâl Güzel, C. Cem Oğuz, and Osman Karatay (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2002), vol. 2: *Middle Ages*, 844–45.

<sup>66</sup>Cherepnin, *Zemskie sobory*, 382–84.

to approve monetary levies, which it surely was not. Likewise, I am rejecting claims that gatherings in 1575, 1576, 1579 (115–20) and 1636 (253–54) were Assemblies of the Land, at least until such time as more reliable evidence and better arguments can be made in their behalf.

#### MUSCOVITE ASSEMBLIES OF THE LAND

- 1549 – advised on administrative reforms in relation to the composition of a law code (*Sudebnik*)
- 1566 – advised on continuation of Livonian War with Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth
- 1580 – advised on continuation of war with Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth
- 1584 – chose Fedor as tsar
- 1598 – chose Boris Godunov as tsar (February 17 – March 9)<sup>67</sup>
- 1598 – discussed approach of Crimean Khan Gazi Girey to Serpukhov (April 20)
- 1604 – advised on organizing an attack on forces of Gazi Girey
- 1606 – chose Vasilii Shuiskii as tsar
- 1607 – advised what to do following the ouster of first False Dmitrii
- 1610 – discussed possible negotiations with Sigismund (Zygmunt) III (not later than January 18)
- 1610 – discussed Sigismund III's answer (February 14)
- 1610 – deposed Vasilii Shuiskii as tsar and placed the government under a boyar committee headed by F. I. Mstislavskii (July 17)
- 1610 – chose Władysław as tsar (August 17)
- 1611 – chose Gustavus Adolphus as tsar (June 23)<sup>68</sup>; recommended administrative reforms (June 30)
- 1611 – discussed activities of “Council of all the land” (*sovet vseia zemli*)
- 1612 – discussed siege of Moscow
- 1613 – chose Mikhail as tsar
- 1614 – advised on stopping movements of Zarutskii and the Cossacks

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<sup>67</sup>Skrynnikov raised doubts about the authenticity and accuracy of the sources for the Assembly of 1598 a number of times. See, e.g., Ruslan G. Skrynnikov, “Zemskii sobor 1598 i izbranie Borisa Godunova na tron,” *Istoriia SSSR* (1977) no. 3, pp. 141–57; idem, “Boris Godunov's Struggle for the Throne,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 11 (1977), 325–53; idem, *Boris Godunov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 103–30; and idem, *Rossiiia nakanune “smutnogo vremeni”* (Moscow: Mysl', 1980), 120–50, 197–201. Skrynnikov concluded that Godunov dismissed the Assembly before receiving approval for his accession. But see the response of Aleksandr A. Zimin in his *V kanun groznykh potriasanii* (Moscow: Mysl', 1986), 212–33, 287–92. Also compare the common sense explanation in Hulbert, “Sixteenth-Century Russian Assemblies of the Land,” 183–88.

<sup>68</sup>The original document for the June 23 decision is no longer extant. A seventeenth-century Swedish historian quoted extensively from it before it was lost. See Johannes Widekind, *Thet Swenska i Russland Tijo ährs Krijgg-Historie* (Stockholm: Niclas Wankijff, 1671), 361–65; Latin trans.: *Historia belli Sueco-Moscovitici decennal* (Stockholm: Niclas Wankijff, 1672), 292–96. Chester Dunning asserted that the Riazan' dvorianin Prokofii Petrovich Liapunov forged this document. *Early Slavic Studies List-serv* (ESSL), <mpoe@fas.harvard.edu> April 25, 2001. But Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath asked if “there is any direct evidence of the document's being forged” (ESSL, April 27, 2001, May 11, 2001), to which Dunning responded no (ESSL, May 14, 2001).

- 1616 – discussed conditions of peace with Sweden and a monetary levy
- 1617 – advised on a monetary levy
- 1619 – advised on raising of Filaret to the patriarchal throne
- 1621 – advised on war with Poland
- 1622 – advised on war with Poland
- 1632 – advised on the collection of money for the Polish campaign
- 1634 – advised on the collection of money and on the Polish campaign
- 1637 – advised on an invasion of the Crimean Khan Sefat Girey and the collection of money
- 1639 – advised on response to Crimean treatment of 2 Muscovite envoys
- 1642 – recommended support of Don Cossacks in relation to the taking of Azov (Mikhail ordered it abandoned)
- 1645 – chose Aleksei as tsar
- 1648 – advised the composition of a new law code
- 1648–49 – *Ulozhenie sobor*
- 1650 – advised on the movement of people into Pskov
- 1651 – advised on Russo-Polish relations and Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi
- 1653 – advised on war with Poland and support of Zaporozhian Cossacks
- 1681–82 – advised on military, financial, and land reforms.
- 1682 – chose Peter as tsar (April 27); chose Peter and Ivan as co-tsars (May 26)
- 1683–1684 – advised on peace with Poland

There has been some doubt expressed about the existence of the Assembly of the Land of 1645 to choose Aleksei as tsar. For example, Longworth, in his biography of Aleksei, states: "There was no question of Alexis being elected Muscovy's Tsar by a parliamentary Assembly of the Land (Zemskii sobor), as wishful-thinking historians trying to trace Russia's chance of a democratic evolution have sometimes imagined."<sup>69</sup> Cherepnin wrote in his study of the Assemblies of the Land that whether one thinks an Assembly was convened in 1645 depends on how one understands the term "*izbiratel'nyi*" (elected) in regard to the tsar. His point is that it

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<sup>69</sup>Philip Longworth, *Alexis, Tsar of All the Russias* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984), 19. Ol'ga Kosheleva asserted in an on-line discussion that chancellery documents contain no evidence that an Assembly of the Land took place in 1645. ESSL, April 12, 2001. See also Ol'ga Kosheleva, "Leto 1645 goda: smena lits na rossiiskom prestole," in *Kazus. Individual'noe i unikal'noe v istorii*, ed. Iu. L. Bessmertny and M. A. Boitsov (Moscow: Izdatel'skii tsentr Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo gumanitarnogo universiteta, 1999), 148–70. In addition, Hellie has pointed to Ivan Ushakov's denunciation of M. A. Pushkin in 1645 for his criticism that Aleksei Mikhailovich had not been elected to the tsarstvo as evidence that no Assembly of the Land met to elect Aleksei. Richard Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 359 n. 68. Yet, what Ushakov reported Pushkin as saying is that "Aleksei Mikhailovich ruled in the Muscovite state not by their choice" (*ne po ix' vyboru*). *Akty moskovskogo gosudarstva*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia akademiia nauk, 1890–1901) 2: 167–68; Nikolai Ia. Novombergskoi, *Slovo i delo gosudarvny. Prossesy do izdaniia Ulozheniia Alekseia Mikhailovicha 1649 goda* (Moscow: A. I. Snegirev, 1911) [in *Zapiski moskovskogo arkeologicheskogo instituta*, vol. 14], 369–72. Since Pushkin had participated in the elective Assemblies of 1598 and 1613, he probably meant that neither he nor any immediate member of his family took part in the election of Aleksei, not that Aleksei had not been elected at all.

was clearly not an election among a number of candidates but a choice of whether to approve the single candidate, Aleksei. As with all the other cases where the Assembly of the Land "chose" the tsar, they could, of course, decide to reject the single candidate. The seventeenth-century chancellery official Grigorii Kotoshikhin seems to think there was a gathering of precisely those elements that made up an Assembly of the Land, and that Aleksei was "elected to the tsardom" [*obrali na tsarstvo*] by them.<sup>70</sup> It is unlikely Kotoshikhin is carelessly using the phrase here to mean the oath of allegiance to the new tsar because he adopts a similar phrasing when he writes that all the tsars after Ivan IV "were elected (*obirany*) to the tsardom."<sup>71</sup> In addition, Adam Olearius, a German scholar who visited the Muscovite court four times between 1634 and 1643, mentions "unanimous consent of the boyars, the magnates, and the whole community."<sup>72</sup> One criticism of Olearius' testimony is that, if Aleksei was crowned tsar on the day after his father's death (as Olearius states), then there would not have been enough time to call an Assembly of the Land. Since Mikhail had been sick for some time, the convening of the Assembly of the Land could have been prepared ahead, in the event of Mikhail's death or further incapacitation. With members of the Boyar Council and Holy Synod already in Moscow at the time, enlisting the other delegates necessary for an Assembly of the Land—that is, representatives from the service ranks and townspeople—could be accomplished rather quickly.<sup>73</sup> One problem with this idea is the evidence that, up to that time, those Assemblies of the Land that chose a new tsar after the death of the previous tsar did so on the 40th day (not counting Sundays) following the day of demise.<sup>74</sup> But the elective Assembly that subsequently chose Peter as tsar in 1682 met on April 27, the day after Tsar Fedor died.

Olearius' information, however, was second-hand since he was not in Moscow at the time of Aleksei's accession, and he may have been confusing different events—the elective Assembly with the oath of allegiance taken by members of the court, which did not have a 40-day prohibition attached to it. In addition, his testimony leads to the complication of postulating two coronation ceremonies, one on July 13, for which we have no other evidence, and the other on September 28, for which we have extensive evidence.<sup>75</sup> Another source, Griboedov's *History*,

<sup>70</sup>Grigorii Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii v tsarstvovanie Alekseia Mikhailovicha*, 4th ed. (St. Petersburg: Glavnoe Upravlenie Udelov, 1906), 4.

<sup>71</sup>Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii*, 126.

<sup>72</sup>*The Travels of Olearius in Seventeenth-Century Russia*, trans. Samuel H. Baron (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 195.

<sup>73</sup>Other Assemblies were convened in one day. The 1634 Assembly of the Land was ordered by Tsar Mikhail on January 28 and met the next day. Cherepnin, *Zemskie sobory*, 249. In 1642, an Assembly of the Land that he ordered on January 3 also met the next day. Got'e, *Akty*, 49.

<sup>74</sup>Hulbert, "Sixteenth-Century Russian Assemblies of the Land," 177.

<sup>75</sup>Archimandrite Leonid, "Chin postavlennia na tsarstvo tsaria i velikogo kniazia Alekseia Mikhailovicha," in *Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti*, vol. 16 (St. Petersburg, 1882), 3–39.

written 25 years later, in 1669, tells us Aleksei ascended to the throne on July 13 but was not formally crowned until September 28.<sup>76</sup> And Griboedov makes no mention of an elective assembly. One possible indication that an elective Assembly met derives from the Pskov Third Chronicle, which states: "On September 2, the sovereign tsar and grand prince of all Rus' Aleksei Mikhailovich was designated as sovereign" (*narekli na gosudarstvo*).<sup>77</sup> The September 2<sup>nd</sup> date corresponds more closely than Olearius' "next day" to Kotoshikhin's "a little time passed" (*malo vremia minushe*) between the death of Mikhail (July 12) and the meeting of the elective Assembly.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, in order to account for the evidence at hand, we can provisionally assign the date of meeting of the Assembly of the Land that elected Aleksei Mikhailovich to September 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The Assemblies of 1610 and 1682 have been called "fictional" Assemblies because they depended on the Muscovite crowd as a component part. But this is again misunderstanding the case. If one remembers the criteria for the composition of an Assembly of the Land's existence established above—that is, the presence of the Church prelates and the Boyar Council as well as a third group usually made up of representatives from the service ranks and townspeople—then one can see that the criteria are met for the Assemblies in both years. Although other Assemblies, such as those of 1566, 1584, and 1648, showed much more interest in calling the "good" men from the provinces, an Assembly of the Land, like a *quriltai*, did not depend on the quality of the representation or the process of choosing to be considered legitimate.

In comparing the Assembly of the Land with the Mongol and Kazan' *quriltais*, we can see that they performed the same three functions of advising the ruler on matters of significance affecting the realm, choosing rulers, and deposing rulers. In Muscovy, the Assembly of the Land met mostly to advise on policy. Although no Assembly chopped off a sovereign's head as the English Parliament and French National Assembly did with their respective monarchs, an Assembly of the Land did vote to depose Vasilii Shuiskii in 1610.

When Peter I became tsar in his own right, he revamped the governmental administration in Russia, with resulting general chaos as administrators did not know what they were supposed to do. When they were able to figure it out, most of them were not trained to carry out their responsibilities. Peter and, before him, his father Aleksei may have seen their elimination of the Assembly of the Land as a form of modernization in order to make the functioning of their respective governments more efficient. The bringing of people from the service ranks into the Boyar Council, and thereby vastly increasing its size, by 92 percent from 50 members in 1646 to 96 members in 1676 (the year of Aleksei's death), and an

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<sup>76</sup>Feodor Griboedov, *Istoriia o tsariakh i velikiakh kniaziaxh zemli russkoi*, ed. S. F. Platonov and V. V. Maikov, in *Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti*, vol. 121, (St. Petersburg, 1896), 57–58.

<sup>77</sup>*Pskovskie letopisi*, ed. A. N. Nasonov, 2 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1941, 1955) 2: 286.

<sup>78</sup>Campbell, "Composition, Character and Competence," 179–83.

additional 57.3 percent to 151 members in 1682 (the year of Fedor's death), acted to some degree as a substitute for the functions of the Assembly of the Land. Information and opinions from middle ranks were brought to the attention of the court, at least initially as these new members drew on their lower ruling-class backgrounds. With the passage of time, however, the ability of the vastly enlarged Boyar Council to continue to perform this function deteriorated as, in the natural order of things, those now in the Council became distanced from their former status. Perhaps, as a result, the ruling elite felt the need to call into session Assemblies of the Land in the first half of the 1680s (those of 1682 were convened by the Patriarch). They ceased being convened under the regent Sophia, which in turn may have contributed to her isolation.

Hellie has proposed two other circumstances that could have contributed to Aleksei's not needing to convene an Assembly of the Land during the last 23 years of his reign: (1) "the development of the chancellery (*prikaz*) system ... to the point that after 1653 Moscow had the apparatus at hand to find out what the condition of the periphery was at any time..." and (2) "a ready pool of recent governors [the result of the establishment in the seventeenth century of a new system of provincial governors (*voevody*), which] was always available in Moscow to enlighten policy-makers about conditions in the provinces..."<sup>79</sup> Miliukov claims that the demand by Muscovite townsmen for an Assembly of the Land in 1662 "was a formal protest against the substitution of committees of experts" in place of the Assembly.<sup>80</sup> Aleksei ignored their requests while continuing to build up the Boyar Council, the chancellery system, and provincial governors.<sup>81</sup>

When Peter assumed power, he continued the policy of non-convocation. Although Peter may have modeled much of his administrative reform on Sweden's government,<sup>82</sup> where the *Riksdag* (Assembly) had played an important role, Peter's reforms came at a time when the *Riksdag* was in eclipse in Sweden.<sup>83</sup> But in 1718, he decreed a regulation for evening gatherings, or "assemblies," to be held in St. Petersburg.<sup>84</sup> At these soirees, not unlike the receptions of Mikhail and Filaret

<sup>79</sup>Hellie, "Zemskii sobor," 232-33.

<sup>80</sup>Paul Miliukov, "Alexis Mikhailovich (1645-1676)," in Paul Miliukov, Charles Seignobos, and L. Eisenmann, *History of Russia*, 3 vols., trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Empire of Peter the Great*, 154-55.

<sup>81</sup>During the course of Aleksei's reign, according to statistics compiled by Demidova, the number of civil officials (*sud'i*, *d'iaki*, and *pod'iachie*) rose from 866 in 1646 to 1,601 in 1677. Nataliia F. Demidova, *Sluzhbilata biurokratstva v Rossii XVII v. i ee rol' v formirovanii absolutizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), 23, Table 2. That is an increase of 84.9 percent in a little over 30 years.

<sup>82</sup>Claes Peterson, *Peter the Great's Administrative and Judicial Reforms: Swedish Antecedents and the Process of Reception*, trans. Michael F. Metcalf (Stockholm: A.-B. Nordiska, 1979).

<sup>83</sup>Myers, *Parliaments and Estates*, 116.

<sup>84</sup>*Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii, s 1649*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 45 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1830), (PSZ), vol. 5, 597-98, no. 3241. See also Friedrich Christian Weber, *The Present State of Russia*,

almost a hundred years earlier, members of the upper and lower ruling class, chancery officials and their wives and children as well as prominent townspeople (merchants and craftsmen) could socialize and discuss matters, either business or pleasure in nature. Such gatherings helped break down the isolation of the upper ruling class and continued on a restricted-access basis through the reigns of Peter's successors, who do not seem to have given much thought to reviving the Assembly of the Land. Peter also ended the Boyar Council and, in addition to not appointing a new patriarch to head the Holy Synod, had delegated the patriarch's duties as protector of the external Church to a department of his government. So, even if his successors had wanted to revive the Assembly, they would have had to come up with a new composition. Indicative of this point is the fact that in the Legislative Commission of 1767, which Beliaev, among others, described as the closest gathering to an Assembly of the Land in the eighteenth century,<sup>85</sup> the clerical establishment was excluded, except for one representative (Metropolitan Dmitrii) from the Holy Synod. Moreover, during interregna, there was no longer a Boyar Council or Patriarch to convene an Assembly of the Land to choose a new monarch or to depose a sitting tsar.

In his study of the Assemblies of the Land in the seventeenth century, Campbell pointed to three types of circumstances that could lead to the convening of an Assembly of the Land: when the tsar was weak; when there was a crisis; and when the government was looking for a source of legitimacy. As the government and dynasty became more established and stable, the requirement of legitimacy from the Assembly was needed less.<sup>86</sup> One might also suggest that the elimination of the Assembly of the Land reflected the simple fact that the government no longer saw its legitimacy as deriving from the tsar's position as a steppe khan. Siberia had been conquered and all the immediately neighboring khanates (save that of Crimea) had been subdued or disappeared.

Until the end of the fifteenth century, the general direction of diffusion of inventions, ideas, and innovations was from east to west across Eurasia and northern Africa. Then, by 1500, the general direction of diffusion reversed to a west-to-east flow. For much of the history of Muscovy, "modernization" meant changing to accommodate the last phase of the influence from the east. Thus, the adoption and modification of the steppe *quriltai* into the Assembly of the Land can be seen as one of the last (if not the last) adaptation by Muscovy to this "old" modernization. Then, as western Europe began its rise to global hegemony, the Muscovite orientation gradually shifted over the course of two centuries to the "new" modernization. Although we find examples of this new or westerly "modernization" occurring from as early as the end of the fifteenth century (with

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2 vols. (London: W. Taylor, 1723), vol. 1, 186–88. Weber tells us these "assemblies" were held three times a week in the winter.

<sup>85</sup>Ivan D. Beliaev, *Zemskie sobory na Rusi*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: A. D. Stupin, 1902), 73–76. See also Shchapov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 1, 727.

<sup>86</sup>Campbell, "Composition, Character and Competence," 186–87.



Italian architecture in the Kremlin) and the sixteenth century (with the gunpowder revolution), this new orientation, toward Europe, began imposing itself on Muscovite policy more emphatically in the reign of Peter's father Aleksei. Yet, at this point when Muscovites were coming into more or less direct contact with European governments, most of those governments had already ceased convening their representative assemblies.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, the formal advice-giving role of the Assembly of the Land was replaced by informal consultation with members of the ruling class. In any case, it is a mistake, in my opinion, to attribute the demise of the Assembly of the Land to the so-called "rise of absolutism" in Russia.<sup>88</sup>

The contention of this paper is that studying the Muscovite Assembly of the Land through the lens of European parliaments and other Western representative institutions skews our understanding of the Assembly, its operation, and its functions. Nor does asserting the indigenous origin of the Assembly explain either its sudden appearance in the middle of the sixteenth century or its specific composition and duties. Instead, we find a number of answers by seeking its origins in the steppe *quriltai*, an advisory group of notable men called on an *ad hoc* basis to advise the khan on significant issues of policy, to select a new khan, or depose a sitting khan. We can then explain why the Assembly of the Land appeared when it did in Muscovy as well as its operation and functions.

No longer is it necessary to denigrate the Assembly of the Land as "primitive," "insignificant," or "incomplete," or criticize it for not turning into something it was never intended to be. As an *ad hoc* consultative assembly of the highest notables in the realm as well as a representative selection of men from the ranks of the lower ruling class and townspeople, the Assembly of the Land was never intended to represent non-existent "estates" in Muscovy. Nor would it have fulfilled its functions if it were to act in opposition to "the government," although it could in theory be called by the ruling elite as a means of deposing the ruler or approving the selection of a new ruler. The Assembly of the Land was an integral part of the

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<sup>87</sup>European states where representative assemblies ceased meeting in the seventeenth century include, besides France, the Spanish Netherlands (1632), Naples (1642), Prussia (1653), Denmark (1660), and Bavaria (1669). Myers, *Parliaments and Estates*, 97–143.

<sup>88</sup>On the inadequacy of the absolutism model to explain the available evidence about early modern monarchies in general, see Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern Monarchy* (London: Longman, 1992); and on its inadequacy for early modern Russia in particular, see my "The Façade of Legitimacy."

Muscovite ruling process, and, in that capacity, operated honorably and competently throughout its 135-year existence.

# MODERNIZING MUSCOVY

Reform and social change in  
seventeenth-century Russia

*Edited by*  
*Jarmo Kotilaine and Marshall Poe*

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