
Part I

Russian Absolute Monarchy 1649–1725

In the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, a “papal revolution” in Catholic Europe effectively separated a civil sphere of monarchy and lordship from a religious sphere of canon law and church governance. This separation into spheres of civil and religious authority then paved the way for the development of “national” states with centralized systems of law and administration. Modern political thought followed, appearing in the “city republics” of Renaissance Italy, though only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did the Protestant Reformation and subsequent wars of religion convince Europe’s governing classes of the need for a strong state power. Following decades of bloody and destructive religious strife, national political claims began to take precedence over Catholic universalism, and the theory of absolute monarchy acquired unprecedented legitimacy. In powerful states such as Britain, France, Austria, and Prussia, recognition of the need for good order accorded well with the ambitions of “modern” state building.¹

In recent decades, a growing number of historians have expressed dissatisfaction with the concept of absolute monarchy that long has dominated depictions of early modern states. These historians correctly note that the terminology of absolutism implies a degree of control and coherence unthinkable before the advent of mechanized systems of production, transportation, and communications. This is all well and good, except that when previous generations of historians used the phrase “absolute monarchy,” they by no means intended to imply that absolute monarchs wielded absolute control. In their vocabulary “absolutism” referred not to the “absolute” power of a modern centralized state, but to a set of political institutions and relationships presided over by a monarch whose authority was assumed to be God-given and hence “absolute.”² That said, it is important to remember that despite the absence of constitutions, civil liberties, and democratic representative government, early modern monarchies exercised much less

effective control over the lives of their subjects than do today's liberal democracies over their free citizens. The political principles of old regime monarchies may have been undemocratic, hierarchical, and absolutist, but their administrative reach and ability to know what their subjects were doing remained exceedingly limited. For that reason, it is useful to think of "absolute monarchy" as a concept that conveys the modern aspiration to control rather than the reality of actual control.

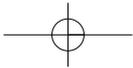
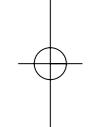
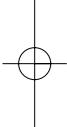
Already in the middle ages, the monarchs of Western and Central Europe began to accumulate judicial and legislative powers that eventually allowed them to assert authority over the great lords and bishops of their realms. By the seventeenth century, the concentration of political power could be seen in central offices of government, and in the appearance of rulers whose authority exceeded the traditional functions of judge, lawgiver, and military commander. Early modern monarchs sought to mold socioeconomic development, and they viewed legal prescriptions as administrative tools designed to impose change, mobilize resources, and encourage productivity. In order to subordinate noble elites and keep external enemies at bay, monarchs needed armies and revenues, and in order to maintain armies and collect revenues, they needed regularized bureaucracies and cadres of trained officials able to track resources and regulate subject populations. Even more important, monarchs needed large numbers of subjects whose labor power could be exploited and wealth extracted for the "common good" of the country or national state. What distinguished absolute (or administrative) monarchies from their immediate predecessors was that "they made the state a part of everyone's daily existence."³ Social relationships remained rooted in hierarchies of birth that people continued to accept as part of the divine order. Economic relationships, while increasingly commercialized, remained untouched by industrial transformation. Administrative authority remained *de facto* dispersed and rural lands undergoverned, but the aspiration of monarchy to regulate behavior and impose control appeared thoroughly "modern."

The development of a Russian "national" state did not follow the historical pattern of a single monarch bringing great lords and bishops under his authority and control. In Russia, centralized monarchy arose toward the end of the fifteenth century, as the grand prince of Moscow liberated his lands from Mongol rule (established in Russia since 1240) and subjugated the independent principalities of other princes whose lineage he shared. The process of uniting the "Russian" lands ended around 1521 with the annexation of Riazan, and in the reign of Ivan IV (ruled 1533–84), serious institution building began with the creation of central administrative offices and standing military units. The first Russian ruler to be crowned tsar, Ivan IV also transformed Russia into an expansive imperial power when he conquered the khanates of Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556). But Ivan left a problematic legacy. Acts of mass murder and terror, unleashed against individual subjects and entire territories, marred his successes, leading in turn to depopulation

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and economic devastation. Recovery began under Ivan's son, Fedor (ruled 1584–98), a man with serious disabilities, whose brother-in-law, Boris Godunov, actually governed the tsardom. When Fedor died childless in 1598, the ruling dynasty came to an end and instability again erupted. Russia entered a period of unprecedented social rebellion, civil war, and foreign occupation aptly called the Time of Troubles. Only after the election of Mikhail Romanov as tsar in 1613 did order finally return, and by the 1630s a process of “modern” state building got under way. The emergence of a Russian absolute monarchy designed to mobilize the resources of society for military and political purposes could be glimpsed in central administrative offices, the core of a standing army, liturgical reforms, subordination of the church to the monarch, and codification of serfdom. Like the Wars of Religion in Western and Central Europe, the Time of Troubles in Russia had shown the need for a strong state power, which powerful subjects, institutions, and territories at last seemed prepared to accept.



Chapter 1

Face to Face in Russian Society

Throughout Russia's age of serfdom, the basic unit of social organization remained the patriarchal household, composed of a nuclear, co-resident, or multigenerational family and its dependents. Until relatively recent times, patriarchy also represented a global institution – an institution that in practically every society gave to a family's senior adult male absolute authority over his wife, children, wards, and servants. Current scholarship tends to situate patriarchy within the history of the family and gender relations. From this perspective, patriarchy appears to be an authoritarian institution designed to ensure male dominance and the subjugation of women and children.¹ Our present-day sensibilities, influenced as they are by the civil rights and feminist movements of the late twentieth century, affirm the authoritarian image. But what did Russians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries think of the patriarchal relationships that defined their lives? And why did generations of women accept as natural and God-given the hierarchies of age and gender embodied in patriarchy?

Some historians respond to these questions by rejecting stereotypes of female passivity, highlighting instead the social spaces in which women carved out an autonomous existence and played meaningful public roles. In both Muscovy and Imperial Russia, noblewomen achieved autonomy through the administration of dowry estates, which remained their personal property even after marriage. A second autonomous space, limited to the Muscovite era, arose in the special women's quarters or *terem*, where elite women lived in semi-seclusion from male society. Despite the apparent isolation of these women, the *terem* became a forum from which they negotiated marriage arrangements, dispensed charity and patronage, and helped relatives forge political alliances.² To a significant degree, segregation in the *terem* brought not marginalization, but power and influence.

Clearly, to the men and women of early modern Russia, the hierarchies of age and gender associated with patriarchy did not seem as oppressive as they do today. Injustice and inequity did not go unrecognized, but basic problems of physical survival tended to override any budding concern for egalitarian principles. Among laboring people, women had no choice but to work, both in the home (cooking, cleaning, and clothing) and alongside men in fields or workshops. If women did not die young from childbirth or disease, they might nonetheless die relatively young from the cumulative exhaustion and physical weakness brought on by child-bearing, years of heavy physical labor, and the chronic infections that plagued rich and poor alike. With the exception of childbearing, God's unique gift to women, men worked equally hard and suffered equally from disease. Men, women, and children labored together, according to a customary division of tasks, not because patriarchy required them to do so, but because they needed to do so in order to survive. What patriarchy did do, in the eyes of those who accepted its strictures, was to impose control on potentially explosive social relationships. By articulating a moral ideal of obedience, duty, and obligation, patriarchy created the basis for good order in the family and by extension in society at large.

That so many people could remain obedient in the face of patriarchal inequities seems mind-boggling in a world of mass mobility and political contestation. But not unlike our own ancestors of no more than a couple of generations past, Russians of the Muscovite and Imperial periods imbibed a culture of duty – duty to family, country, church, tsar, and God. Duty meant obligation, and to fulfill one's obligations – whether as husband, wife, parent, child, servant, or superior – brought peace of mind, which in turn represented freedom and happiness. Whatever suffering the individual might be called upon to endure, he or she also believed that the fulfillment of duty ultimately brought happiness, if not in this life, then in the life to come. Similarly, whatever the individual might strive to achieve, he or she also knew that the fulfillment of duty always took precedence over the satisfaction of personal desire. Self-mastery, both in exercising authority and in submitting to it, ensured social order.

Indeed, the call to duty was a two-way street. Alongside deference to authority, patriarchy also taught that the household head fulfilled duties to family members and other subordinates. The duty to protect and provide for dependents; the duty to love a wife, honor parents, and educate children; the duty to treat servants kindly and to discipline them justly; the duty to show generosity toward the unfortunate – these were just some of the obligations imposed by God on persons in positions of power. Literature, legal prescription, and religious teachings all assumed that if the individuals joined together in a household carried out their duties, human passions would be mastered and good order prevail. Patriarchy did not then represent a mechanism for imposing male dominance and female subjugation, though this might be one of its results. Patriarchy developed as an

institution designed to reconcile individual desire with social order. By organizing household relationships around the principles of obedience, duty, and obligation, patriarchy effectively harnessed human passions in the interest of a shared good. The wellbeing of the individual person simply could not be disentangled from the wellbeing of the entire family.

Of course, it is impossible to know the extent to which individual Russians lived up to the principles of obedience, duty, and obligation that defined the patriarchal ideal. Hagiography, biography, memoirs, literature, and judicial testimony are filled with stories about the abuse and humiliation suffered by dutiful wives, children, and servants. Much cruelty no doubt remained hidden, and officials proved reluctant to intervene in private household relations. Both the church and government recognized a need to condemn offenses such as forced marriage (even of serfs) and unjustified physical violence. Consistent with the religious and official admonitions, more formal mechanisms of social and economic self-defense also developed, as Russians of all statuses, including serfs, employed legal prescriptions and judicial proceedings to defend family honor, challenge abuse, or petition for redress of grievances. Muscovite and Imperial authorities dealt gingerly with the “right” to complain and tried repeatedly to limit petitioning, but the government never completely blocked the channels leading to justice through the intervention of higher authority. Appeals to the tsar, primarily for nobles and only occasionally for ordinary Russians, remained a basic feature of legal-administrative practice until the final demise of the Romanov monarchy.

The concrete results that Russian subjects achieved through petitioning cannot be calculated with any certainty, but in the realm of social relationships, the promise of redress seemed more important than the reality. Courtiers and nobles enjoyed decisive advantages in the art of supplication, because of their personal access to powerful patrons and even to the monarch. Elite individuals repeatedly appealed for help when they fell into debt, faced the possibility of an unfavorable judicial decision, or sought to advance or rescue a career. Landowners also sometimes responded when peasants complained of excessive obligations or cruel treatment at the hands of stewards or village officials. Such responses followed closely the dictates of patriarchy. When transposed into the public realms of society and polity, patriarchy encouraged reliance on personal relationships and interventions. Our modern ideal of a private life protected from the sphere of public action simply did not apply. Most Russians lived within the confines of the family and locality, separated from the monarchy by geographic distance and primitive communications. In these circumstances, personal relationships and appeals to private interventions constituted an effective social glue that integrated people into the Muscovite and Imperial systems of government. Precisely because legal-administrative power barely touched the patriarchal household, personal relationships dominated political life.

Serfdom and Muscovite Social Organization

In 1648–9 an Assembly of the Land (*zemskii sobor*) gathered in Moscow to approve the project for a Law Code (*Ulozhenie*) that defined the organization of Russian society and government.³ Although the patriarchal household remained Russia's primary social institution, legal prescriptions made clear that the monarchy intended to harness the human and material resources of the Russian people. The Law Code of 1649 codified serfdom and identified a variety of social groups and ranks distinguished by their service obligations, legal privileges, and occupational or economic functions. With respect to peasants living on noble lands, the Law Code envisioned a class of agriculturalists who provided revenues and recruits for the monarchy, together with a reliable livelihood for the tsar's noble servicemen. Not only nobles, who since the mid-sixteenth century had been required to serve, but all groups in society would fulfill obligations to the tsar and his government. To that end, officials began to ascribe peasants and townspeople to the communities in which they lived and into which future generations would be born. With the exception of clergy, whose special calling fell under church authority, all the tsar's subjects became members of legally defined social categories. Numerous, changeable, and imprecise, the categories or ranks (*chiny*) of Muscovite society embodied the amorphousness of a social structure that to this day confounds historians. The categories cannot be ignored, however, because of their critical role in Russia's long-term social development. In Muscovite times, and continuing throughout the age of serfdom, birth into one or another official category remained at the heart of Russian social organization.

By the mid-seventeenth century, serfdom stood at the center of Russian society, and the enserfment of the Russian peasantry had set the stage for defining and binding other social groups. The actual process of enserfment dated from the late fifteenth century, when the Moscow grand prince emerged to become the ruler of a centralized Russian monarchy. At that time, provincial nobles began to receive land grants in return for military service, and in order to supply a labor force for noble lands, the monarchy took steps to restrict peasant movement and enforce peasant obligations to the landowner.⁴ Law Codes of 1497 and 1550 continued to guarantee peasants a right to move, but only for a two-week period around St George's day (November 26), which marked the end of the harvest season. During the 1580s decrees on "forbidden years" temporarily banned peasant movement in specified areas, and in 1592/93, historians infer from court cases, all peasant movement became permanently illegal. Still, peasants continued, with relative ease, to flee the clutches of increasingly vigilant landowners. The monarchy could do little to prevent peasant flight and even imposed a statute of limitations (five to fifteen years) on the right of landowners to reclaim fugitives. Only with

the promulgation of the Law Code of 1649 did the government eliminate the statute of limitations and commit itself to enforcing prohibitions on peasant movement. Seigniorial peasants belonging to noble landowners became serfs in the full legal sense, and peasants living on state, church, and crown lands also became bound to their communities. To the extent that no peasant enjoyed an unequivocal right to move, and all owed labor or monetary dues to a legally recognized authority, it can be said that the entire peasantry had become “enserfed” or bound to the state, church, crown, or nobility.⁵

Based on the household census of 1678, historian Ia. E. Vodarskii estimates that the population of male serfs and state peasants in Russia, including Ukraine, numbered 3.4 million and .9 million respectively.⁶ In 1678 peasants accounted for 89.58 percent of the male population, and in 1719, the year of the first poll tax census, the figure reached 90.18 percent. In 1857, the year of the last census prior to the emancipation of the serfs, the proportion fell to 83.67 percent. But in 1914–17, by which time military recruits no longer left their original social status, the proportion again rose to 86 percent.⁷ However historians calculate population data from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth century, the proportion of peasants reaches a consistent 80 to 90 percent. Until the era of Soviet industrialization in the 1930s, Russian society remained overwhelmingly peasant, diversified by a smattering of dynamic urban classes (educated and uneducated) and ruled (or ostensibly guided) by relatively small noble, bureaucratic, and professional elites.

The status of Muscovite peasants changed over time, and their obligations varied according to region and category of peasant (state, church/monastery, crown, or seigniorial). Even so, the basic forms of Muscovite exploitation survived until the abolition of serfdom in 1861.⁸ Seigniorial peasants, or serfs, performed labor services for the noble landowner, an obligation referred to as *barshchina*, or paid dues in money or kind, referred to as *obrok*. On some estates they did both. In addition, seigniorial peasants delivered a range of agricultural products and supplies to the landowner and might be required to perform construction or repair work on his (or her) property. Levels of exploitation also varied. The government did little to regulate the master–serf relationship, so that despite customary and legal restrictions, the landowner usually could impose any obligation he wished. But peasants of all categories also played a role in defining their obligations. They appealed to landowners, to government and church officials, and even to the tsar when the demands placed upon them became too onerous⁹ They also might show up late for obligatory labor and take long or frequent breaks during the workday. Landowners, moreover, had an interest in nurturing rather than draining the economic strength of their peasants. Prosperous peasants increased the wealth of the landowner, whereas poor peasants dragged him down.

It is impossible to measure the levels of exploitation imposed on Muscovite peasants, but historians generally believe that serfs who paid dues in money or

kind (*obrok*) enjoyed greater freedom and lighter obligations than those who performed labor services (*barshchina*) under the direct control of the landowner or, more likely, his representative. Church peasants belonged in effect to a private landowner and, like serfs, performed additional labor obligations for the monarchy. State and crown peasants did not have churchmen or private landowners feeding at the community trough, but in addition to paying dues, they also performed labor services. All peasants, moreover, paid taxes to the government. Until the mid-seventeenth century, the government levied a direct tax based on the quantity and quality of land cultivated by each household. Beginning in 1645–7, the household assessment combined the value of land holdings with an additional flat tax. Finally, in 1679, following completion of the household census of 1678, the government began to collect a fixed payment from individual households. Land no longer figured into the equation, and peasants could lighten their tax burden by living together in households composed of multiple generations (grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren) or co-resident brothers and their families.¹⁰ The levy on households remained in place until the 1720s, when Peter I significantly increased government revenues by imposing a poll tax or capitation on the “head” of every male peasant.

In addition to the fulfillment of labor and tax obligations, some peasants also performed military service for the monarchy. During the sixteenth century, the government drafted auxiliaries (*pososhnye*), who lacked military training but could be employed in construction, digging, and carting. Other (not necessarily peasant) dependents of nobles – for example, the “boyars men” (*boiarskie liudi*) and “donated men” (*datochnye*) – accompanied their masters who served in the cavalry militia, and sometimes they too ended up performing combat functions. Beginning in 1630, the Muscovite government established “new-model infantry and cavalry regiments,” conscripted from landless noble servicemen, Tatar converts, peasants, and Cossacks. The appearance of these regiments signaled the development of a regular army on the European model and greatly increased the service burden imposed on peasants and other groups in the laboring population. Conscription levies, based on the number of peasant households held by a landowner, became an established feature of Russian life. In 1630/31 the burden stood at one recruit per ten households, and in 1646 at one per twenty. By the 1660s, the government conducted general levies throughout Russia. Historians estimate that during the Thirteen Years’ War (1654–67) with Poland military drafts swept up about 100,000 men, many of whom served for life. The introduction of lifelong service stood in sharp contrast to the traditional practice of calling noble servicemen and their dependents to arms for the duration of seasonal military campaigns. This and the recruitment of laboring men into new-model forces constituted important steps toward the establishment of regular conscription. Indeed, in the early eighteenth century, the tentative drafts of the

Muscovite government became massive annual levies borne overwhelmingly by Russian peasants.¹¹

Historians long have recognized the connection between the Russian monarchy's military needs and the development of serfdom. From the outset, serfdom developed as a mechanism to support noble and church landowners and to mobilize resources for the government. To ensure compliance, officials bolstered the authority of the peasant commune by introducing the principle of collective responsibility (*krugovaia poruka*) for the fulfillment of labor, monetary, and service obligations. Collective responsibility meant that the entire village community became liable for meeting the obligations of all its members. The commune, which served as the intermediary between the community and the landowner or government, distributed and administered these obligations. Controlled by the heads of member households and elected peasant officials, the commune supervised agricultural production in open fields and regulated the use of pasture, forest, and water resources held in common. Although communal regulation of production and common resources reached back into earlier times, before peasants became subject to government and landowner demands, with the introduction of collective responsibility the commune's authority and functions increased substantially.¹² For officials and landowners, the commune represented a highly effective instrument of administrative control.

For peasants, the commune remained a time-honored institution that served the social and economic requirements of the entire village community. As members of the commune, peasants collectively devised strategies of production and community organization both in response to higher levels of exploitation and in keeping with the primary need to provide subsistence for member households. The commune helped peasants adapt to changed conditions by altering established practices and introducing innovations that did not threaten security. Leveling mechanisms such as communal land tenure and periodic repartition of land aimed to ensure that every household possessed sufficient resources to meet its obligations. Although as late as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Russian peasants held their arable land in hereditary household tenure, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, beginning in areas of especially harsh exploitation such as the seigniorial *barshchina* estates of the Central Non-Black Earth region, a shift to communal land tenure occurred. From the Central Non-Black Earth region the practice quickly spread to the Central Black Earth region, and from the mid-eighteenth century communal land tenure and periodic repartition of land became widespread throughout central European Russia. In the Northern and Urals regions, in Siberia, and along the old steppe frontier of the southeast, communal tenure and periodic repartition did not make significant inroads before the early nineteenth century. Nor did these practices ever become established in Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, or the Baltic provinces. As the regional variations show,

the pressures producing the shift resulted from conditions in peasant society and from the demands of landowners and officials. In contrast to the idealized images propagated by later generations of Russian radicals, the egalitarian collectivism of Russian peasants had nothing to do with any innate “peasant socialism.”

Like peasants across the globe, Russian peasants lived off the land. They farmed primarily to meet subsistence needs and engaged in production for profit on the open market only as a secondary consideration. Peasants planted much of their arable land with grains, mainly rye or oats, but also barley or wheat in some regions. Methods of cultivation varied, and simple systems survived into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: slash-burn, field grass-husbandry, long and short fallow, two-field, and three-field. The most advanced of these systems, the three-field, tended to become dominant over time. But again, the shift came quite late and did not reach all areas. Beginning in the fifteenth century, population pressure and the demands of large noble and church landowners led some peasants to move from the two-field to the three-field system of production. In the two-field system, dating back to the late middle ages, peasants divided arable land into two fields which they cultivated in alternate years. In the three-field system, a more intensive form of cultivation, arable land was divided into three open fields, which were further divided into strips farmed by individual households. Peasants planted one field with a winter crop and a second field with a spring crop, leaving the third field fallow to allow the soil to replenish. As in the two-field system, peasants alternated the fields under cultivation from year to year. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the three-field system first became dominant in the Central Non-Black Earth and Northwestern regions and then spread out, along with peasant settlement and population growth, into the Central Black Earth and Mid-Volga regions. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the system reached further south and east into the open steppe and Siberia.¹³

Whether one looks at communal land tenure, periodic repartition of land, or development of the three-field system, the peasant’s relationship to the land appears at once moral and practical. No matter how oppressive serfdom became, peasants enjoyed a near universal right to arable land. The irony is that access to land became stronger as serfdom became more entrenched. The peasant’s right to arable land served the interests of all parties to serfdom – the government, landowner, peasant commune, and individual household – by guaranteeing that each family possessed enough land to meet not only subsistence needs but also monetary and labor obligations. In addition, because arable fields varied in quality and accessibility, the commune allotted land in strips, so that each household possessed equal access to the most fertile, least productive, most convenient, and least accessible fields. As long as the peasant commune possessed or “owned” the land (which legally also could be said to belong to the state, church, crown, or noble landowner), member households cooperated to ensure that each family used its land effectively and in

a manner consistent with the needs of the entire community. Planting and harvesting, the use of fallow land to graze livestock, the choice of crops, and changes in methods of cultivation – all these practices needed to be managed collectively within the framework of the peasant commune.

As individual peasant households grew or declined, in accordance with the coming and going of the generations, the number of able-bodied adults and dependents also changed. Consequently, land distribution and the allocation of obligations depended on the size of the household and especially on the number of husband–wife labor teams (*tiaglo*) within a household. Because a large household was more likely to occupy a prosperous, secure, and powerful position within the community, near universal and early marriage remained characteristic of Russian peasant society into the twentieth century. Peasant families often lived together in multigenerational households that included a father and mother, their married or unmarried children, and grandchildren. As families grew, they became entitled to larger shares of land, which then could be inherited by the adult sons of the household head. When the senior adult male died, married sons tended to part ways and establish their own separate households. These separations led in turn to further adjustments in the distribution of communal resources, especially arable land, and to reallocations of the tax and other obligations owed by individual households. The principle of collective responsibility made wealthier households responsible for the obligations of the poor, which meant that all peasants had a stake in preserving the economic viability of each and every household.

Shared interests notwithstanding, Russia's harsh natural environment guaranteed that not every crisis could be averted. Depending on the region, growing seasons could be short (less than six months in the forest heartland) and rainfall unreliable (in the steppe zone). Crop failure, epidemic, and even starvation represented very real possibilities. Although peasant society displayed a remarkable durability, individual families remained painfully vulnerable to economic crisis. Some died out or became absorbed into larger households, and others, judged unworthy of communal support, suffered exclusion from the community. The organization of the Russian village aimed to prevent such drastic outcomes, and on average the agricultural economy met the everyday needs of peasants while also providing adequate support for landowners and the monarchy. The deep structures of production and community relationships helped peasants adapt to environmental fluctuations caused by weather, war, and patterns of exploitation. For this reason, peasants did not look to innovate, but rather approached life and work so as to avoid risk. Their risk-averse strategies stood well the test of time. The basic organization of peasant society, developed already in the Muscovite period, survived until its forced destruction in the Stalinist collectivization drive of 1930.¹⁴

Serfdom defined the relationship of peasants to the land and the degree of exploitation they endured, but serfdom also represented a moral order. As social

subordinates, all peasants were expected to be obedient and hard-working. Within the household, the senior adult male reigned supreme. Within the village, household heads, elected peasant officials, appointed stewards, and on occasion the landowner himself governed with few constraints. But the various authorities and social superiors who lorded it over peasants, including government officials and the tsar, also were responsible for the wellbeing of the people under their command. Paternalistic solicitude, moral guidance, fairness in the meting out of punishments, assistance in times of hardship – these were just a few of the responsibilities that accompanied power and the right of economic exploitation. Across Russian society, hierarchy and obedience to hierarchy were regarded as divinely ordained, but so too was fulfillment of God's commandments. No person or power, not even the tsar, stood above or outside God's law.

Of course, here on earth God's law was not sufficient to ensure justice, equity, or good will. Landowners and officials abused their subordinates, and peasants defied the divine order by openly rebelling. The Stepan Razin revolt of 1670–1 erupted under the leadership of a Don Cossack whose Cossack followers had for decades been experiencing losses of autonomy and privilege as the Russian government extended its reach into the steppe frontier. Among Razin's supporters, fugitive peasants, townspeople, and non-Russian Finnic and Turkic minorities in the Volga basin likewise had been feeling the heavy hand of increased government or landowner control. Razin's revolt also sparked significant peasant unrest in the Mid-Volga region and in limited areas of the Non-Black Earth and Central Black Earth regions.¹⁵ But open rebellion was a dangerous game, and most peasants contented themselves with less dramatic forms of protest: work slowdowns and stoppages, non-payment of taxes and dues (which might not at all represent protest but rather result from genuine hardship), petitions for redress of grievances (which also implied recognition of established authority), and flight (which officials and landowners sometimes tolerated in order to attract labor to underpopulated regions and borderlands). Although any and all forms of protest were illegal, and if necessary repressed by military force, peasants sometimes managed to reduce obligations, achieve intervention by a higher authority, or create a new social identity. There is no reliable way to measure the levels of abuse inflicted on Russian peasants; much depended on the character and moral qualities of their superiors. Like the forces of nature, which threatened physical survival, the forces of authority could be arbitrary, unpredictable, and overwhelming. But such was the natural order of things, accepted or at least expected by peasants and other groups in Russian society.

Living only slightly above peasants in terms of social status and the burden of obligations were the ordinary townspeople or *posad* people (*posadskie*), defined as registered members of the urban community (*posad*).¹⁶ According to the household census of 1678, the urban population of Russia, without Ukraine, numbered

about 185,000 males; of these, 134,000 belonged to the official townspeople.¹⁷ Legislation from 1600–2 identified two markers of townsman status: 1) social origin or birth into the urban community, and 2) participation in trade or craft production within the urban community. Townspeople were supposed to be registered to their communities of origin and/or employment, and like peasants, they paid taxes and performed service for the monarchy. Unlike peasants, however, their livelihood could not be secured with access to a plot of land. In trade and craft production, townspeople always faced competition from non-members of the urban community, who did not share in the tax and service obligations of registered townspeople. Numerous peasants and dependents of church and noble landowners lived in “white” or tax-exempt settlements (*slobody*) that formed around official urban communities. Data from the first half of the seventeenth century (excluding Siberia and Ukraine) reveal that out of 107,413 households in 226 towns, only 29 percent, located in 73 towns, belonged to the official (and therefore taxed) townspeople.¹⁸ No matter how the government defined membership in the urban community, townspeople shared their social and economic space with a host of permanent “outsiders.”

To meet their tax and service obligations, urban communities sought to preserve, and hopefully also to augment, the number of their members. Individual townspeople, by contrast, sought to escape taxation by fleeing to the white settlements or mortgaging themselves to wealthy individuals. Because, as with peasants, the government made the entire urban community responsible for paying communal taxes (additional taxes were assessed individually), a larger number of townspeople meant a lighter individual tax burden. Beginning in 1619, the government responded to complaints about lost townspeople by conducting investigations to recover runaways and dependents. Three decades later, the Law Code of 1649 abolished tax-exempt settlements and granted townspeople a monopoly on trade and manufacturing within the urban community. In addition, privately held settlements and estates located within or adjacent to towns became state property, incorporated into the urban community together with their commercial and manufacturing population. These settlements might contain dependents (*zakladshchiki*) who had mortgaged themselves to wealthy masters, peasants and slaves (*khology*), limited service contract slaves (*kabal'nye liudi*), and various “men recruited for service” (*sluzhilye liudi po priboru*), including musketeers (*strel'tsy*), artillerymen or gunners (*pushkari*), artillerymen responsible for light cannon (*zatishchiki*), fortress gate-guards (*vorotniki*), new Cossacks (enrolled in service after the Smolensk War of 1632–4), infantrymen (*soldaty*), coachmen (*iamshchiki*), and keepers of hunting dogs (*psari*).¹⁹ Free persons who resided on church lands located within towns and who made a living from trade or handicrafts also became members of the urban community, as did ecclesiastical groups such as priests' children, church readers (*tserkovnye d'iachki*), and sacristans (*ponomari*).

Others, such as permanent contract slaves (*vechnye kabal'nye liudi*) and peasant farmers (*pashennye krest'iane*), had to sell their shops and enterprises to official townspeople and return to the homes and estates of their masters. Peasants continued to be allowed to trade and produce handicrafts in towns, but only on a temporary basis. No longer were they permitted to operate permanent shops or businesses.

Among the “men recruited for service,” those who lived outside the private settlements represented yet another category of urban resident engaged in trade and handicraft production. Toward the mid-seventeenth century, these men numbered over 60,000 in 150 cities and included musketeers, Cossacks, artillerymen, dragoons, fortress guards, state carpenters, and state farriers.²⁰ All enjoyed the right, according to the Law Code of 1649, to sell their shops and leave the taxpaying population. But among those who continued to ply an urban trade, artillerymen, fortress guards, and state artisans were required to fulfill tax and service obligations together with the townspeople. By contrast, musketeers, Cossacks, and dragoons – groups that theoretically received government salaries for military service – paid customs duties and taxes on their shops but were not included in the urban tax assessment (*tiaglo*) and did not perform the service obligations of townspeople. The Law Code went a long way toward delineating the economic privileges and occupational functions of official townspeople; however, as the persistent presence of the “men recruited for service” suggests, towns were dynamic and diverse places. Urban populations remained far too adept at evading authority to make towns the preserve of a relatively small group of legally recognized residents.

The most privileged groups in the urban population included elite merchants (*gosti*), the “merchants’ hundred” (*gostinaia sotnia*), and the “cloth hundred” (*sukonnaia sotnia*). The members of merchant categories usually came from townspeople who had risen to become commercial agents for the state treasury and financial advisors to the ruler. The elite merchants, numbering thirteen in 1649, each held a special charter granted by the tsar. Elite merchants paid taxes in connection with some privileges, but were free from quartering obligations and enjoyed a variety of special rights: the right to be judged in the tsar’s court, the right not to kiss the cross (a form of judicial test used to determine guilt or innocence), and the right to travel abroad for trade, heat homes and baths, brew drink, and even possess patrimonial estates (*votchiny*).²¹ The trading people of the merchants’ hundred, numbering 158 in 1649, ranked just below the elite merchants. In 1613 the hundred received a collective charter granting its members most of the privileges enjoyed by elite merchants. Members of the merchants’ hundred did not, however, possess the right to travel abroad or possess patrimonial estates. The trading people of the cloth hundred, numbering 116 in 1649, came from wealthy provincial merchants and enjoyed privileges comparable to those of the merchants’ hundred. Both groups served in Moscow customs houses and the mint, though

in positions below those held by elite merchants. On the Muscovite social scale the elite merchants ranked just below hereditary noble servicemen (discussed below), whereas the trading people of the merchants' hundred and cloth hundred were close in social status to the "men recruited for service."

The "men recruited for service" (*sluzhilye liudi po priboru*) occupied the lowest rungs of the Muscovite service hierarchy. Encompassing a variety of military ranks associated with different forms of weaponry and organization, they also frequently overlapped with the urban and peasant classes.²² The "old formation" servicemen consisted of musketeers (*strel'tsy*), town Cossacks (*gorodovye kazaki*), artillerymen or gunners (*pushkari* and *zatinshchiki*), and fortress gate-guards (*vorotniki*). The "new formation" servicemen counted among their numbers infantrymen (*soldaty*), cavalymen (*reitary*), and dragoons (*draguny*). The old formation servicemen can be described as functional or proto-professional ranks in which membership was hereditary and all males served for life. But in addition to their military obligations, the old formation servicemen also engaged in petty trade and agriculture in order to support their families. An important group among the urban classes of Moscow and provincial towns, they became prominent participants in urban riots and disorders of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

In contrast to the old formation servicemen, whose service ended up being part-time and whose military skills were becoming obsolete in the seventeenth century, the men of the new formation forces represented the core of the future standing army. Trained in linear tactics and the use of flintlock muskets, these servicemen were supposed to form "regular troops paid and supplied by the central government." But because government resources always fell short, the new model forces sometimes quartered in military settlements, where they "were required to provide for themselves much as the traditional forces did."²³ The new model regiments became established from the 1630s to the 1650s, and in the second half of the seventeenth century the peasant recruits who manned these forces began to serve for life. In addition to peasants, the government also conscripted landless provincial nobles, especially after 1678, when nobles possessing fewer than 24 peasant households were excluded from service in the noble cavalry militia. These nobles were required instead to serve as infantrymen or cavalymen in the new model forces, a status that despite offering some limited opportunities for promotion to officer rank, generally meant downward social mobility.²⁴ Still, at a time when the traditional militia was becoming militarily obsolete, conscription into the new model forces provided poor provincial nobles with a livelihood and a way to transition into the future standing army.

Prior to the creation of new model regiments, all noble servicemen, both high and low, belonged to the elite category of "hereditary servicemen" (*sluzhilye liudi po otechestvu*).²⁵ Distinguished by their right to exploit peasant labor, a right explicitly denied the "men recruited for service," these ranks eventually agglomerated into

the landowning nobility of Imperial Russia.²⁶ Like the “men recruited for service,” hereditary servicemen also belonged to a variety of ranks, ranging in their case from privileged members of the tsar’s council or *duma* (*dumnye chiny*) to men serving from the metropolitan Moscow list (*chiny moskovskie* or *sluzhilye liudi po moskovskomu spisku*) to men serving from provincial towns. The nobles serving from provincial town lists began to comprise a social group in the reign of Ivan III (ruled 1462–1505), when in return for grants of populated land, they agreed to serve the tsar in the noble cavalry militia. Also called *pomeshchiki* or holders of “conditional land grants” (*pomest’ia*), their ranks included, in ascending order, boyars’ sons from the town lists (*gorodovye boiarskie deti*), boyars’ sons from the court lists (*dvorovye boiarskie deti*), and selected nobles (*vybornye dvoriane*).²⁷ In the seventeenth century, another category of servicemen called *zhil’tsy* (sing., *zhilets*), literally “residents,” stood at the head of the town lists and served in lower-level military and administrative positions. Some historians also describe *zhilets* as the lowest metropolitan Moscow rank, noting that servicemen of this rank performed ceremonial duties and served in the tsar’s personal bodyguard.²⁸ Clearly, a man who began his service career as a *zhilets* might be able to advance into the Moscow ranks, which included, in ascending order, Moscow nobles (*dvoriane moskovskie*), *striapchie*, and *stol’niki*. The Moscow nobles held offices such as governor, ambassador, chancellery official, and regimental commander, whereas the higher Moscow ranks, the *striapchie* and *stol’niki*, held more prestigious positions such as town governor and military commander.

At the very top of the Muscovite service hierarchy stood the members of the tsar’s council, the “*duma* ranks,” which included, in ascending order, *duma* nobles (*dumnye dvoriane*) and *duma* secretaries (*dumnye d’iaki*), *okol’niche*, and boyars (*boiare*). Appointment to the council, called the Boyar *Duma* by historians, occurred in recognition of distinguished service and represented the peak of social privilege and political power. Council members advised the tsar and helped to make decisions about domestic and foreign policy. Constantly on the go in service to the sovereign, they commanded armies, governed provinces, supervised the government’s central administrative offices (*prikazy*), and heard judicial appeals. Men of *duma* rank usually held this appointment for life, though only after years of military or civil service and only so long as they did not suffer disgrace or exile.

During the course of the seventeenth century, the composition and size of the tsar’s council fluctuated. Overall, however, its membership increased and thus became less distinguished. In 1613, the year of Mikhail Romanov’s election to the throne, only 20 men sat in the council; by 1649 the number had risen to 52. After 1676 appointees to *duma* rank also included growing numbers of younger men with no service experience outside the court. In 1682 Tsars Peter I and Ivan V ascended the throne, and 107 individuals held *duma* rank; by 1690 the number reached 153. At century’s end, the men of *duma* rank had become far too

numerous to act as an effective decision-making body. The “inflation of honors” rendered *duma* rank less exclusive and encouraged rulers to bypass the council and rely instead on a select circle of chosen advisors. When in 1711 Peter I established the Senate, thereby abolishing the traditional council, his action caused neither administrative disruption nor even elite protest.²⁹

The precise relationship between lineage, service, and political power in Muscovy is not always easy to define. To a significant degree, the most powerful men in Muscovy held rank and office at the ruler’s pleasure. The tsar appointed individuals to *duma* rank, and his disfavor could bring removal from the council. But the ruler also needed the consent and assistance of powerful nobles in order to govern his vast and diverse territories. Nor did he enjoy complete freedom in making appointments. Although the tsar appointed personal favorites and relatives to his council, the men of *duma* rank nonetheless tended to come from a relatively small group of princely and Moscow boyar families. Not all men of power and wealth attained *duma* rank, yet the men of *duma* rank included Russia’s richest landowners and most important generals and officials. No one sat in the tsar’s council by hereditary right, yet the ruler remained morally, politically, and even legally obliged to select his advisors based in part on genealogy.

Beginning in the late fifteenth century, as the Moscow grand princes consolidated their rule over the appanage territories and brought local princes and service elites into the Muscovite polity, a place system developed to regulate relations within the newly constituted governing class. Called *mestnichestvo*, the place system combined lineage and service to establish a rank ordering of elite families that determined precedence in service appointments and at court. No individual was supposed to occupy a position or receive an appointment above another whose family held a higher place in the genealogical hierarchy. *Mestnichestvo* disputes undermined the corporate power of the nobility and kept many a family and official busy with time-consuming litigation. But *mestnichestvo* also represented a source of social cohesion, based on shared notions of family honor, and a real limit on the power of the tsar. Before the abolition of *mestnichestvo* in 1682, the ruler may have been free to appoint favorites and men of undistinguished lineage or service to high office and *duma* rank, but not with complete disregard for the genealogical hierarchy institutionalized in *mestnichestvo*.³⁰

Data from the seventeenth century show that successive rulers often appointed council members from a small group of prominent families. About 43 percent of appointees had a relative already sitting in the tsar’s council. During “the entire seventeenth century 36 percent of all boyars and *okol’niche* were direct descendants of men who held the same ranks at least thirty years earlier.” Heredity and lineage clearly mattered, but they were not sacrosanct or inviolable. The tsar could at any time bring representatives of new families into his council, a practice that increased as the seventeenth century progressed. During the reign of Aleksei

Mikhailovich (ruled 1645–76), appointments to the council included “unprecedented numbers of social upstarts.” From 1659 to 1676, a mere 16 percent of “appointees to the Duma’s top ranks had direct ancestors who had served in the same capacity.”³¹ These changes in the composition of the tsar’s council illustrate the fact that while Muscovy boasted a rich and powerful noble elite – one that supplied the monarchy with generations of officials, generals, and courtiers – no individual except the tsar possessed an hereditary right to any office or rank. In order to govern, tsars relied on the entrenched Muscovite elite, but also regularly added to it. Throughout the period of Romanov rule, lasting from 1613 to 1917, the Russian nobility remained relatively open to newcomers, and the only way for a commoner to achieve nobility was through service to the sovereign.

Service also provided access to land ownership and hence to noble wealth. From provincial servicemen to men of *duma* rank, Russian nobles enjoyed the right to possess populated estates. Some held land on condition of service, the *pomest’*e estates described above, and others owned land outright as patrimony or *votchina*. Nobles of all ranks could hold both kinds of property, though men of higher rank depended less on conditional grants of land. Ownership of *votchina* also carried greater prestige and allowed nobles to move serfs between estates. Even more striking in effect than the form of land tenure were the differences in wealth that divided Russian nobles. Among the *duma* men of 1678, for example, boyars owned an average of 862 peasant households, while *okol’niche* owned 226.³² Significant economic differentiation remained characteristic of the Russian nobility until the end of the monarchy in 1917.

The sources of inequality changed over time; however, the practice of partible inheritance, on the basis of which all sons (and some daughters) became heirs, stands out because of its social and political implications. Sons usually received equal portions of their father’s estate, so that over the generations, land holdings tended to fragment and family wealth easily dissipated. In order to preserve a family’s wealth (and attendant status), it became necessary to purchase land, marry one’s sons to women with dowries in land, or seek additional grants of land through service to the tsar. For generations a core group of noble families managed to maintain their property and social position independent of service. Yet still their senior males served. Many other families, moreover, depended almost entirely on service to ensure the prosperity needed to support a noble way of life. In Muscovy, and later in Imperial Russia, service to the tsar brought access to power, status, and wealth just as often as wealth brought access to power, status, and the tsar.³³

Indeed, if one focuses on the connection between land ownership and political power, the legal and economic distinctions dividing nobles appear less striking. From the mid-sixteenth century, all nobles were required to serve; consequently, the distinction between lands held on condition of service and those held as

patrimony became less significant in defining noble status. (In the early eighteenth century, Tsar Peter I abolished the distinction outright.) Wealth, status, and power always would be linked in Russia; however, by the late seventeenth century, it also became clear that while wealth facilitated access to rank and office, land ownership did not automatically confer rank or office. The boyars and other *duma* ranks can be described as a class of aristocratic magnates whose power rested on inherited wealth and closeness to the tsar. These men advised the tsar directly; served as policymakers, generals, and high-level officials; and during times of disputed succession, decided who would rule. But the *duma* ranks were not inherited, and although the tsar frequently appointed great nobles to such rank, he also could elevate men of lesser status or undistinguished service. Muscovy's hereditary servicemen (*sluzhilye liudi po otechestvu*) thus constituted both a service class and a landowning nobility with no clear distinction between the two.

Beyond Moscow, among townspeople and provincial nobles, appointment to office and rank likewise depended on the tsar's favor. During the seventeenth century, the elective offices found in provincial towns tended to be replaced by appointed officials representing the central bureaucracy in Moscow.³⁴ Nor did Muscovy develop corporate bodies – bodies such as diets, *parlements*, provincial estates, Estates General, or the English Parliament – in which nobles sat based on property ownership or inherited title.³⁵ Historians incessantly debate whether or not Muscovy's nobles constituted an autonomous landed gentry with local roots and a meaningful corporate identity or a service class beholden to the tsar. Nobles up and down the social hierarchy looked after their estates and families, served in local or central offices, and developed relationships with neighbors and relatives. But lacking the independent power embodied in inherited offices and corporate bodies, they belonged to a service class, composed of individuals in direct and personal relationship to peers, superiors, and the tsar.

The profusion of social ranks and categories that made up Muscovite society can seem painfully complicated and arcane to a modern-day brain. The lists of categories and sub-categories, each defined by specific service or socioeconomic functions, overwhelm and confuse those of us accustomed to a system in which precise legal rights are accorded to individuals rather than social collectivities. But it is impossible to describe seventeenth- and even eighteenth-century Russian society without noting the multiplicity of categories. The Muscovite ranks revealed a legalistic understanding of society, though not one grounded in the rule of law or the principle of inalienable natural rights. The Muscovite ranks represented medieval grants of privilege that the tsar could rescind at any time. Although such privileges could be inherited, they did not automatically confer membership in any particular social or political institution. Individuals or collectivities received privileges, and through the granting of privileges the monarchy could move people between established, or not so established, categories and statuses.

The Muscovite ranks are best understood as tools of administration imposed by the government on subjects and servitors of the tsar. Designed to mobilize resources for the monarchy and bring order to fluid, diverse, and dynamic social relationships, the ranks did not always correspond to actual conditions on the ground. Especially in the towns, people of various origins and legal statuses could be found engaging in trades meant to be the preserve of official townspeople. The gap between official definitions and concrete realities suggests that the government remained legally free but practically limited in its ability to mold social relationships and institutions. For this reason, the Muscovite vocabulary of social ranks often appears inadequate to encompass the substance of actual relationships. Yet in a culture dominated by Orthodox Christian universalism, this vocabulary, however cumbersome and confused, gave broad secular meaning to the activities and obligations of everyday life. From the monarchy's point of view, the definition of ranks represented a giant step toward realization of the effective population controls needed to support modern state building. From the historian's point of view, it marked the onset of a long process whereby Russians, both individually and collectively, ventured beyond familism, localism, and parochialism into "society."

— Social Organization in the Reign of Peter the Great —

During the reign of Tsar Peter I (ruled 1682/89–1725), the need to mobilize Russia's human and material resources took center stage in the development of social policy and political institutions.³⁶ In the seventeenth century, the Muscovite government bound peasants and townspeople to their communities of origin or residence for purposes of taxation and conscription. Muscovite law also established a clear connection between social rank or status on the one hand and service or economic function on the other. Family relations and local ties continued to define the realities of everyday life, but in "society" writ large functional attributes mattered most. Although the Petrine reforms did little to change these basic patterns, they did much to enforce legal distinctions and obligations to the state more effectively. Social and political relationships that the Muscovite government left vague and amorphous, Peter's government set out to define and regulate.

Emblematic of the Petrine government's drive to control population and resources was the introduction of the poll tax or capitation. Decreed in 1718 and implemented from 1719 through 1728, the poll tax reform identified the social groups liable for taxation and imposed an annual monetary payment on every male soul ascribed to one of these groups. The vast majority of Russian subjects, primarily peasants and townspeople, fell into the taxpaying population, while a range of smaller groups – nobles, ordained clergy, and various nonnobles in

military or civil service – remained exempt. The reform began with a population count of taxable males, a process repeated in subsequent censuses of 1743–7, 1761–7, 1781–2, 1794–5, 1811, 1815–17, 1833–6, 1850–3, and 1857–8.³⁷ In each instance, officials compiled lists, which then served as the basis for collecting the capitation and conscripting recruits. As in Muscovite times, the fulfillment of obligations, in this case payment of the capitation and delivery of recruits, was the responsibility of the entire peasant or urban community, with landlords or local officials determining precisely how the burden would be distributed.

Historians no longer follow the lead of prerevolutionary historian Pavel N. Miliukov (1859–1943), who claimed that the fiscal and military policies of Peter I ruined the Russian population and devastated the economy. But they do recognize that the burden of taxation and service imposed by Peter was unprecedented in the history of Russia. Instead of taxing every household or the amount of the land or capital held by a household, the government now taxed every male living in every household (74 kopecks a year, reduced to 70 soon after Peter's death). And instead of haphazard calls to arms, in 1705 the government instituted regular conscription levies which transformed recruits into lifelong soldiers, known collectively as the "lower military ranks." Back home in the peasant village or provincial town, as the monarchy's standing army grew, so too did the quartering, carting, and provisioning obligations imposed on local (primarily peasant) populations. Introduction of the capitation, like census-taking across Europe, gave to the government an effective tool for tracking a dynamic and, in the Russian case, residentially bound population. As a result, taxes could be collected, recruits mustered, and labor services imposed.

Although conceived as a tool of administration, the capitation also had significant social consequences. Above all, it created in Russian society a fundamental divide between the privileged few who enjoyed exemption from the tax and the unprivileged many who filled the ranks of the army and labored to support social elites and government institutions. The taxpaying population encompassed Russia's commercial and laboring classes, the "common people" and backbone of the economy. Groups exempted from the capitation included nobles, ordained clergy, technical and cultural specialists, and upwardly mobile groups that might some day achieve noble status by rising in the service hierarchy. The poll tax divide did less to highlight differences between untaxed nobles and taxed nonnobles (high versus low) than between untaxed service classes (high and low) and taxed commercial and laboring classes (also high and low in terms of socioeconomic standing).

The poll tax reform also can be seen as part of a larger process of agglomeration from the multiple Muscovite ranks into the larger social categories of the Imperial period – the *sostoianiia* (sing., *sostoianie*) or *sosloviia* (sing., *soslovie*).³⁸ Like the Muscovite ranks, the Imperial "estates" (an inadequate translation but the best

available) were hereditary legal categories defined by privileges, obligations, and service or socioeconomic functions. The main categories included the nobility, clergy, merchants and townspeople, and various subcategories of peasants (state, church/monastery, crown, and seigniorial). Although legal distinctions further subdivided the clergy, urban classes, and peasants, the members of each of the main categories shared a common set of obligations to the monarchy. In addition, around the edges of the main categories, Petrine legislation delineated a host of smaller groups, the “people of various ranks” (*raznochintsy*), defined by service, socioeconomic, and cultural functions.³⁹ Agglomeration from ranks into estates strengthened the government’s ability to manage the Russian population, especially servicemen and taxpayers, but as the phenomenon of the *raznochintsy* attests, social boundaries remained porous and indeterminate. At the same time that policymakers sought to regulate society by assigning every subject to an appropriate legal status, they also contributed to social mobility by freeing from the capitation a variety of specialists and servicemen recruited from the taxpaying population: common soldiers, petty clerks in the bureaucracy, and technical specialists and craftsmen in government service. Changeable social definitions and an amorphous social structure thus accompanied the process of social agglomeration, a process conceived and engineered by the central government.

The combination of stricter regulation and social amorphousness that resulted from the poll tax reform is strikingly evident in the relationship of Peter I’s government to the Russian peasantry. As noted above, the basic organization of peasant society barely changed before the onset of Soviet modernization in the second quarter of the twentieth century. By contrast, the main innovations of the Petrine period, imposition of the capitation and regular conscription, altered forever the role of the government in peasant life. The first step in imposing the capitation was the population count of 1719–28, elaborated in a table of 1738. The table identified a total peasant population of 5,331,673 male souls (93.5 percent of the taxpaying population), including 1,022,081 state peasants (18.2 percent of taxpayers) and 4,279,492 church, crown, and seigniorial peasants (75.3 percent of taxpayers).⁴⁰ Regular conscription began years before the poll tax reform, but once the population count was completed, it also became the basis for determining who was liable for military service. While estimates of the number of inductees into Peter’s army vary, one recent account gives a figure of at least 205,000 in the period 1700–11 and “a bare minimum” of 140,000 in 1713–24.⁴¹ Peter’s conscription levies took in townspeople (a category numbering 188,665 male souls, according to the 1738 table) and in 1721 even clergy, though the vast majority of recruits came from the peasantry.⁴²

For Russian peasants, regular intrusions by the government, primarily in the form of conscription levies, constituted the most significant effect of Peter I’s policies. Within each peasant (and urban) community, conscription created a painful source

of conflict, as landowners and village (or town) officials set about deciding whose son, husband, father, or brother would be sent to the army. Peasant (and urban) communities could use conscription levies to rid themselves of troublesome or economically weak members, but all too often it proved necessary to take a healthy adult male from an upstanding family. However implemented, the loss of an able-bodied adult male represented a blow not only to his loved ones, but also to the community as a whole, concerned as it was to ensure the viability of member households. Landowners and village officials tried to limit the impact of conscription by selecting single men from larger households and sparing households with fewer grown males. But corruption and abuse, the ability of the wealthy to pay a bribe or purchase a substitute, and the vagaries of village politics did not always make for an equitable selection process.⁴³ Prior to 1793, conscription brought permanent year-round service, which continued until disability or death ended a soldier's active military career. Not surprisingly, peasants viewed conscription as an unmitigated disaster and mourned each recruit as dead. Hence the peasant proverb: "One son is not a son. Two sons are half a son. Three sons are a son."⁴⁴

Once a recruit was carried off, sometimes in chains, his family and community still faced the problem of what to do with his wife, assuming he had one, their offspring, and any children that she might produce in the future. Soldiers conscripted from the taxpaying population, including serfs, became legally free – free from the capitation and from any obligations previously owed to the landowner or community. Soldiers' wives and any children born to soldiers after the start of active service also enjoyed legal freedom. If a couple had children prior to the husband's conscription, these children remained in their father's former status and would have been entitled to full membership in the peasant (or urban) community. But a wife left behind with no children, in light of her legal freedom, had no place in village society. Unable to remarry without proof of her husband's death, she lived at the mercy of in-laws, relatives (perhaps her own natal family), and neighbors. If a soldier's wife eventually gave birth to illegitimate children, they too shared her precarious status. To cope with the uncertainty, soldiers' wives sometimes left the village voluntarily, if they were not already driven out by force, and went to live in towns or alongside the troops. The government also eventually responded to the welfare problem posed by abandoned wives and illegitimate children. A decree of 1721 created the category "soldiers' children" (*soldatskie deti*), defined as children born to fathers in active service, and legislation from the early nineteenth century added to the category illegitimate children of soldiers' wives and daughters. Soldiers' children belonged to the military domain (*voennoe vedomstvo*), and the males among them were obliged to attend garrison schools and enter military service. The category "soldiers' children" thus embodied the possibility of upward social mobility that was built into the Petrine service state. Soldiers' wives, by contrast, continued to lack secure social moorings. While they might

find an informal or even illicit place in society, especially among the laboring classes of the towns, their plight illustrated all too starkly the social disruptions caused by Peter's poll tax and military reforms.

Townsppeople likewise suffered from the consequences of conscription, but because Russia's official urban population remained small (3.3 percent of the taxpaying population, according to the 1738 table), the actual number of urban residents affected was never very large. Of greater concern to urban communities and government officials was the continuing presence of unregistered town residents, some of whom encroached on urban trades and none of whom fulfilled the tax and service obligations of official townsppeople. Data from 1701 show that out of 16,500 households counted in Moscow, only 6,800 belonged to registered urban residents.⁴⁵ Of course, Moscow was the administrative and cultural center of the country, and many householders belonged to social categories that carried their own service obligations – nobles, clergy, civil servants, and military servicemen. Still, throughout the eighteenth century, peasants, *raznochintsy*, and even local officials continued to practice urban trades that were supposed to be the preserve of registered townsppeople.

In its treatment of townsppeople, the government of Peter I followed precedents enshrined in the Law Code of 1649, which had attempted to restrict urban trades to specific social categories by defining who could trade what and where they could operate. In an effort to enforce privileges and obligations, Petrine legislation also divided urban residents into regular and irregular "citizens." Irregular citizens, sometimes called the "base people" (*podlye liudi*), tended to be wage laborers who lacked capital, a profession, or membership in a craft organization. Regular citizens belonged to one of three guilds, depending on occupation and the amount of capital a person possessed, or to craft organizations (*tsekhi*), designed to supervise craftsmen and ensure their inclusion in the taxpaying community. Like the peasant commune, the guilds and craft organizations administered their own affairs. In addition, regular citizens came under the authority of a special legal-administrative body or court, the magistracy, to which they sent elected representatives.⁴⁶

Probably the most dramatic social changes associated with the reign of Peter I affected the nobility and educated service classes. In Muscovy, there had existed an array of noble ranks, with men of *duma* rank occupying an exalted status that clearly distinguished them from poor provincial nobles. Petrine legislation made these distinctions less transparent by agglomerating the multiple noble ranks into a single noble status and linking that status directly to service. The nobility remained internally differentiated with respect to wealth and social prestige, and the tsar continued to appoint individuals from elite noble families to the highest positions in military and civil service. But in strictly legal terms, Peter equalized or leveled the various noble ranks, so that in principle all nobles enjoyed the same rights, privileges, and obligations. Ranks did not disappear; however, from the

time of Peter onward, they referred solely to a man's position in the service hierarchy.

In 1722 Peter I, called Emperor since October 1721, bureaucratized military, civil, and court ranks (and radically altered terminology) when he introduced the Table of Ranks. One of the most significant and enduring of Peter's innovations, the Table of Ranks consisted of fourteen classes or grades, each of which corresponded to specified titles (*chiny*) and offices (*dolzhnosti*) in the service hierarchy. A "place system" of a different sort, the Table of Ranks tied noble status and the attainment of noble status to service rank. In military service, promotion to rank 14, the lowest commissioned officer rank, brought automatic ennoblement. In civil service, any official who reached rank 8 became a noble, whereas those serving in ranks 14 to 9 or in administrative positions that fell below the Table of Ranks could be noble or nonnoble.⁴⁷ Somewhere around the age of fifteen, a young nobleman began his career in the military or bureaucracy, supposedly on the lower rungs of the service ladder. Promotions occurred more rapidly in military service, which nobles preferred anyway, and members of prominent families also benefited from connections to powerful patrons. As in Muscovy, the attainment of high position hinged on lineage, the tsar's favor, and a measure of merit.

The Table of Ranks did not transform the Petrine service state into a meritocracy, but it did regularize and institutionalize promotions based on talent and zeal. The dramatic growth of the military and bureaucracy, combined with the pressing need for educated servicemen and technical specialists, increased the opportunities for men of humble origins to rise. Promotion in service became more closely linked to education, and clear criteria of merit joined birth and patronage in the calculus of advancement. At the same time, even though social origin became less important in defining service position, elite status and high position tended to go hand in hand. Nobles, and to a lesser degree the sons of nonnoble officials, enjoyed greater access to education and thus could more readily be identified as men of talent. Petrine policy sought not to dislodge Russia's great nobles from their position of social and political dominance, but rather to ensure that all nobles acquired the education and skills needed to compete in a modern European world. On a scale unimaginable to Peter's predecessors, service defined the lives of nobles and the meaning of noble status. For nobles, as for peasants and townspeople, the burden of service increased enormously. In the case of nobles, the government also began to intervene in everyday life. Ordered to shave their beards, adopt contemporary European dress, congregate in mixed social company, and educate their children to meet the military and administrative needs of the monarchy, nobles no longer enjoyed the possibility of leading quiet provincial lives. Although in Muscovy noble service already had become obligatory, in Peter's Russia this service became lifelong, year-round, and much more strictly

enforced. Nobles became part of a single noble class (*dvorianstvo*), which in turn represented the core of the educated service classes.

Conclusion

Historians long have noted the absence of a clear distinction between civil administration and social institutions in eighteenth-century Russia.⁴⁸ Already implicit in the organization of Muscovite society, the pattern became particularly noticeable in the hands of Peter I's activist and self-consciously reformist government. The reason for the blending of government and society was not the autocratic nature of the monarchy or the servility of the Russian people; it was the institutional weakness of both the state and society. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the absolute monarchies of Central and Western Europe expended great effort to plug new government institutions into corporate bodies that had functioned in society since the middle ages. The Russian monarchy, by contrast, itself initiated the building of both local and central (translocal) institutions, which it then called upon different groups in "society" to fill. One result of the Russian reliance on government initiative was a relatively peaceful process of state building in the seventeenth (after 1613) and eighteenth centuries. Although between 1682 and 1801 court coups occurred with frightful regularity, Russia's social elites did not mount any organized opposition to established political institutions before 1825. Other consequences of the government's role as initiator included a lack of formal institution-based social integration and a reliance on personal authority and relationships to negotiate public life. Before the mid to late nineteenth century, Russians outside of government did little to build institutions that connected individuals, families, and communities to their cohorts in other localities.

For most Russians, links to the monarchy remained tenuous and transient throughout the age of serfdom. Because nobles served the tsar directly, they always were tied to the monarchy and its administrative center through personal relationships and vertical institutional structures. The very limited links to the political center maintained by peasants and townspeople also tended to be personal and vertical. Laboring people generally handled their own daily affairs within the confines of self-governing and largely self-sufficient communities that had little need for a larger "society" or government. When relations of trade, marriage, or service required formal legal sanction or mediation across the boundaries of community, then peasants and townspeople, like nobles, turned to government officials for assistance. This brought them into direct contact with the monarchy, but only because outside the immediate village or urban community locally constituted bodies designed to mediate civic relations did not exist. Appeals beyond one's immediate neighbors had nowhere to go other than to the noble landowner

(sometimes mediated through his steward) or town official. Appeals beyond the landowner or town official, or against them, had nowhere to go other than to a higher government authority. Finally, appeals beyond high-level government officials, or against them, had nowhere to go other than to the tsar. The same can be said of church peasants and servicemen, who could appeal to the monastery head, then to the bishop, and eventually to the patriarch (later the Synod) or tsar. Beyond the tsar, there was no one and nothing, except for God and conscience.