

# EARLY MODERN RUSSIAN HISTORY

Ayse Dietrich, Ph.D.

## **PART I - Muscovite Period**

Disunity Comes to an End, Independence of the Golden Horde, Doctrine of Third Rome, the Absolute Monarchy, Serfdom, the Time of Troubles

### *Introduction*

During the era of Ivan III Russia's centuries-long disunity came to an end, as Ivan III annexed most of the other principalities to Moscow. Likewise, the centuries of submission to the Mongols came to end when, in 1480, Ivan III officially declared Russia independent of the Golden Horde.

Before he could gather Rus lands beyond Moscow's borders, Ivan III had to secure the domains of his father, Vasily II, who had followed the custom then current of dividing his realm among his five sons into appanages.

Ivan III believed that one principality with five princes, each with local authority, was a formula for instability and weakness. He used a combination of force and diplomacy to push his brothers aside and consolidate control over Moscow. When Ivan III's brothers died and did not leave heirs, their territories reverted to Ivan III. Ivan III continued the process of gathering the Rus lands together, expanding and centralizing the Moscow state.

He also incorporated Novgorod under Moscow's control in 1470. Then in 1478 Ivan III once again invaded and seized the city. That acquisition alone almost doubled Moscow's size.

When Tver, Moscow's main rival, made an alliance with Lithuania in 1485, Ivan invaded the principality and also incorporated it into Moscow.

Ivan III also expanded Russia's borders westward at the expense of Lithuania. He used both diplomacy and military force against the Lithuanians, and in 1503 won considerable territory that had once belonged to Kievan Rus from them.

Governing and defending an expanded Russia required the creation of a small bureaucracy and more professional armed forces. Ivan III appointed governors and district chiefs to administer Russia's new territories. He arranged for the new territories to provide Moscow with revenue, most of which went to support the army, through a system of providing rations (kormlenie).

The ration system both enhanced the independent authority of regional governors, and encouraged corruption, since they were allowed to keep the surplus of what they collected.

In order to stop administrative abuses, a national law code *Sudebnik* was passed in 1497. This code standardized judicial authority and limited peasant mobility.

Ivan III relentlessly increased his powers as Grand Prince and called himself *Tsar* of all Russia. His claims were publicly supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, which strongly supported the evolution of absolutism in Moscow.

The concept of Moscow being the *Third Rome* gained importance after the fall of Constantinople to Sultan Mehmed II of the Ottoman Empire in 1453.

This idea blossomed during the reign of Ivan III, who married Sophia Paleologue, niece of the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine XI, allowing Ivan to claim he was the heir to the fallen Byzantine Empire.

The theory of Moscow as the third Rome evolved as a result of the prior development of political thought in Russia, the growth of national consciousness during the years of reunification of the Russian lands, final liberation from Mongol rule, and the consolidation of the independent Russian state.

The temporary loss of legitimate royal authority following the demise of the Rurikid dynasty in 1598, when Tsar Fedor Ivanovich died without an heir and Boris Godunov defeated rival boyars to become tsar, led to a political crisis period known as *the Time of Troubles*, which was characterized by dynastic struggle, devastating famine, widespread uprisings, and invasion by Polish and Swedish armies. It nearly resulted in the shattering of the Muscovite state, but finally ended in 1613 with the establishment of the Romanovs as the ruling dynasty.

### *Reading Assignments*

Kollman, N.S., *Muscovite Russia, 1450-1598*, *Russia, A History*, edited by Gregory L. Freeze, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 27-55.

Kollmann, N.S., *Muscovite Political Culture*, *A Companion to Russian History*, edited by Abbott Gleason, Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 89-105.

Hellie, R., *Slavery and Serfdom in Russia*, *A Companion to Russian History*, edited by Abbott Gleason, Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 105-121.

Martin, J., *The Emergence of Moscow*, *The Cambridge History of Russia*, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 158-187.

Ostrowski, D., *The Growth of Muscovy*, *The Cambridge History of Russia*, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 213-239.

Platonov, S. F. *The Time of Troubles*. Translated by John T. Alexander. Lawrence, Kans., 1970.

Perrie, M., *The Time of Troubles 1603-1613*, *The Cambridge History of Russia*, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 409-431.

### *Questions*

Why did Ivan III centralize principalities under Moscow?

Why did the theory of the Third Rome not gain wide acceptance?

What factors led to the Time of Troubles?

## PART II - 17th Century : Time of Recovery

First Romanovs, Relations with the West, First Westernizers, Split in Russian Orthodox Church, Old Believers

### *Introduction*

When the Romanov dynasty came to power, Russia gradually recovered from the Time of Troubles. This occurred under the first three tsars, Michael, Alexis and Fyodor III. In comparison to the decades that preceded it, the early Romanov era was relatively stable, but difficult nonetheless. The government was forced to spend beyond its limits and attempted to extract more revenue from the common people by imposing additional taxes.

When Michael Romanov took the throne the situation in Moscow was unpromising. Large areas of the state were still occupied by the Poles and Swedes; the treasury was empty and the economy was severely disrupted.

The situation was so bad that he was soon forced to approach the wealthy families for a loan. Russian merchants were able to maintain contacts with the outside world which was of considerable help in the treasury's recovery. Peasants, merchants, wealthy families and foreign traders all contributed to the growth of the Russian economy.

Church and State were closer in Russia during the reign of Michael Romanov than at any time previously. Michael's father, the Metropolitan Filaret, was both the real power behind the throne, as well as head of the Orthodox Church until his death in 1633.

Russia was at peace during Michael Romanov's reign. A treaty with Sweden in 1617 left Russia in control of Novgorod, but denied it access to the Baltic coast. A 1618 truce with Poland lasted until 1632; two years of fighting were followed by a peace treaty signed in 1634.

Alexis Romanov's reign in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a period of change for Russia. A group at the tsar's court became the first 'Westernizers' and Alexis chose Morozov, Nashchokin and Matveyev as his advisors. Alexis was dependent on advisors in the early part of his reign and Morozov directed the affairs of state at the beginning of his rule.

During his reign Alexis often followed the advice of his boyar advisors, whose greed and corruption provoked rebellions by peasants and Cossacks in 1648, 1662 and 1670-1671. The oppressive conditions of the peasants' lives were the main reason for this rebellion in 1670-1671 led by Cossack Stenka Razin.

Another significant event in his reign was the schism in the Russian Orthodox Church. This was the result of reforms in the church liturgy to correct errors that had been made over time in translating Greek texts into Russian. These reforms, included a modification of the sign of the cross to conform to Greek usage, and some restrictions were placed on the church's acquisition of additional lands.

These ritual changes met with strong disapproval from many, particularly traditional followers of the Orthodox faith, who became known as Old Believers (Starovery or Staroobriadtsy) and led by Avvakum. They separated from the official Russian Orthodox Church after 1666, and remain a small but significant sect within the Orthodox tradition to this day.

### *Reading Assignments*

Kizenko, N., *The Church Schism and Old Belief*, A Companion to Russian History, edited by Abbott Gleason, Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 145-163.

Marshall, P., *The Central Government and Its Institutions*, The Cambridge History of Russia, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 435-463.

Davies, B., *Local Government and Administration*, The Cambridge History of Russia, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 464-485.

Crummey, R.O., *The Orthodox Church and the Schism*, The Cambridge History of Russia, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 618-639.

Ragsdale, H., *Russian Foreign Policy, 1725-1815*, The Cambridge History of Russia, edited by Dominic Lieven, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 504-529.

### *Questions*

How did Russia recover from the *Time of Troubles*? Why did Russia find itself in the middle of two wars during the time of recovery? What was the reason for the uprising, known as the 'copper rebellion' in Moscow in 1662.

What was the relationship between the church and the state?

What led to a split in the Orthodox Church?

## Part III – 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

### Westernization, Age of Reforms : Promoting Enlightenment Ideas

#### *Introduction*

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Russia was still considered by Europeans as distant, backward, partially Asiatic and few viewed the country positively. By the end of the century Russia was recognized as a major European power. The growth of European influence on Russia, a process known as Westernization, continued throughout the century. Two rulers, Peter I the Great and Catherine II the Great, played important roles in this process. Each of their reigns was an era of both internal reform based on European models, and expansion abroad.

However, there was at least one major difference between their reigns. The reign of Peter involved serious changes in important institutions. Peter created the modern Russian state, and expanded the government's activities into most areas of national life. In addition, Peter founded the modern Russian army, built Russia's first major industrial base, and forced the country's elite to adopt certain Western customs and habits.

Peter I's most important administrative reforms were financial, which were designed to gain more revenue from the Russian people to feed his war machine. He collected more revenue he collected in 1701 was nearly triple that collected in 1681. He taxed everything from beards, beehives, and Old Believers to chimney stacks, ice blocks, watermelons, and non-Orthodox marriages.

He even introduced a head tax, which was a capitation tax paid by every male peasant and by urban artisans and burghers in 1723.

Peter I had great influence on education in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A modernized Russian alphabet replaced Church Slavonic. The School of Mathematics and Navigation was founded in Moscow in 1699 and was soon followed by schools of engineering, artillery and surgery. The Naval Academy in St. Petersburg was opened in 1715 and the Academy of Sciences was founded in 1725.

Despite his reforms, he was a product of the Russian political tradition. He believed that autocracy alone could establish and guarantee the power and greatness of Russia. Thus, he insisted that the nobility serve the state and that the people as a whole accept without question the state's demands and restrictions.

During Catherine's reign, St. Petersburg was beautified with the construction of new buildings. Catherine was also a patron of the arts, corresponding with leading thinkers of Europe's Enlightenment such as the French philosophers Montesquieu, Voltaire and Diderot. She issued her *Nakaz (Instruction)*, in the hope that it would be a major Enlightenment achievement. Catherine, firmly believed that Russia required autocratic rule, and left serfdom, an institution condemned by the Enlightenment, untouched.

Under Catherine the Great, the gap between the increasingly Europeanized educated elite, and the people in poverty was wider and deeper than ever.

## Reading

## Assignments

Hughes, L., *Petrine Russia*, A Companion to Russian History, edited by Abbott Gleason, Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 165-180.

Marker, G., *The Westernization of the Elite*, A Companion to Russian History, edited by Abbott Gleason, Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 180-196.

Evtuhov, C., Frank, D.G., Stites, R., *Peter the Great: Carving Out the New Russia, 1703-1725*, A History of Russia, Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 2004, p. 225-245.

Evtuhov, C., Frank, D.G., Stites, R., *Between the Two Greats, 1725-1762*, A History of Russia, Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 2004, p. 246-266.

Evtuhov, C., Frank, D.G., Stites, R., *Catherine the Great: In Pursuit of Enlightenment and Empire, 1762-1796*, A History of Russia, Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 2004, p.267-289.

Hughes, L., *Russian Culture in the 18th Century*, The Cambridge History of Russia, edited by Dominic Lieven, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 28-91.

Bartlett, R., *Russian Culture: 1801-1917*, The Cambridge History of Russia, edited by Dominic Lieven, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 92-115.

Hamburg, G.M., *Russian Political Thought, 1700-1917*, The Cambridge History of Russia, edited by Dominic Lieven, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 116-144.

Marker, G., *The Age of Enlightenment, 1740-1801*, Russia, A History, edited by Gregory L. Freeze, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 114-143.

## Questions

What were the outcomes of Peter the Great's reforms? How did the Russian people react to his reforms? Why did Slaphophiles denounce them?

How was Russian society affected by Enlightenment ideas?

Why was Catherine the Great unsuccessful in applying Enlightenment ideas in Russian culture?