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A Proposed Re-Examination of Russian History

George Yaney

I. Introduction

A. Purpose

It is the habit of experts and other species of intellectual to think of the current reform movement in the Soviet Union as a process that should fulfill European political aims. If European preconceptions are confirmed, Perestroika will be a success. If they are not, whatever happens will be labelled collapse and failure. It is not my purpose to oppose this way of thinking. It is quite possible that the Soviet Union will adopt European institutions, go on to expand their GNP, join the community of free nations, etc. And even if we be persuaded that these goals are illusory, it may still be true that trying to attain them is the best thing her leaders can do. It seems to me, however, that more than goals are involved. There is also the question of what the Soviet Union is and what it has been. Experts give this question very little attention. The official rejection of Stalinism seems to have brought an abrupt end to all attempts to study the problems Stalin's regime confronted and weigh its achievements in the context of these problems. Once again, scholars are following the old European tradition of construing Russia's past as nothing but a succession of crimes, failures and mistakes.

The tradition is solidly established. For well over two centuries, historians have confined themselves to showing what Russian government has *not* been. Virtually every book about Russian history drones through the same recital of the rulers' failure to be liberal, constitutional, efficient, democratic, "truly" communistic, modern, humane, or what have you. This reflexive habit of thought makes it all too easy in the present day to dismiss extant Russian practices and institutions as emanations of "backwardness" and to confine all thinking about the development of the Russian state to the single question of how it pushed its people into their difficulties. In effect, and sometimes in so many words, we insist that the Soviet Union escape from its past. This is a mistake.

My purpose in this paper is to suggest that we inquire into the significance of Russia's past. I want to focus on two features of Russian society that have distinguished it historically from all others. One is the institution of autocracy; the other is the collective willingness of Russians to admit outsiders to full membership in their social / political structures.[1] It is my contention that these features have complemented each other. By making all

laws and institutions fluid, autocracy has made it possible for Russian society to bring in aliens and grant them equality; without this capability, the Russian government could not have brought order to central and northeastern Eurasia. It is conceivable, then, that these two features are something that Russians should appreciate.

If there be any merit in this suggestion, then Russian autocracy may be of global significance. If it be acknowledged that growing interdependence requires the formation of an effective world government – that is, some arrangement that is capable of holding all nations together while admitting all men to citizenship – then it is surely of interest that there exists in the world a political order that has held itself together for hundreds of years while admitting aliens to its ranks without imposing inferior status upon them. Russian history may contain images and insights that are at least as meaningful as the conventions of European political "science."

I do not intend to advocate autocratic government or justify it. Least of all do I wish to demonstrate that Russian autocracy has been liberal, efficient, democratic, etc. I want only to perceive, or at least envision Russian autocracy as an operational arrangement among real living people, challenging them to identify themselves and providing them a context within which they have been able to conceive of human dignity. Surely, it is worth our while to examine what significance Russians may have seen in their autocracy during the long centuries of their participation in its development.

It will not do simply to describe Russian government in its modern forms. Since the time of Peter the Great (d. 1725), autocracy has been ashamed of itself. Most articulate Russians – the self-styled intelligentsia – have swallowed European fantasies whole and adopted a European view of themselves. Government officials have affected an attitude of distaste when contemplating their continuing reliance on the characteristic procedures of autocratic administration (e.g., bribery, official spying on subordinates, influence peddling).[2] Instead of recording how the government used these procedures to operate, administrators have made a conscious effort to obscure their ways of acting. The lamentable result is that discussions of Russian government since the 1700s have been channelled into an unceasing, persistently irrelevant debate between those who are engaged in maintaining false appearances of Western-style operation and would-be exposers of these frauds. Neither side has been concerned to investigate or explain how autocracy works. Speaking generally, our evidence – government records and political pamphlets alike – contains only hymns and denunciations. Worse, anyone who does undertake to describe actual procedures is drawn into this futile controversy. If he detects a European facade in some document, he will sound as if he were denouncing the author rather than explaining how the author actually functioned. If he fails to denounce autocratic institutions and behavior with the conventionally angry tones, he will be understood as a singer of hymns. Thus, the controversy is not only meaningless; it poses a formidable obstacle to any search for meaning. It has

created a self-sustaining universe of discourse, a black hole of sorts, exerting such a powerful inward pull that it gobbles up all statements about political order in modern Russia and attaches them firmly to assertions about the prospects for Russia's movement or non-movement toward Western models. If we are to discuss modern Russian autocracy on some other basis, we must first go back to a time when educated Russians were not so ashamed of it. We must gain insight into the centuries-long experience from which it emerged.

B. Definition

I begin with the assumption that the essence of Russian autocracy is not a constitutional arrangement in which certain men "possess" authority but an abiding element in collective behavior in central Eurasia. Instead of describing the forms of government, my account centers upon the fact that the inhabitants of the territory now occupied by the Soviet Union have been prone to justify and explain their actions by advancing statements purporting to be commands from a higher authority. A free man in Russia has been one who can construe what he wishes to do as his duty to his superior (whereas a free man in the West is one who can construe what he wishes to do as his legal right).

This way of describing autocracy renders the concept more or less independent of any particular form of government. An autocratic society is only governed by a living, breathing autocrat when it happens to be unified under a single political order, and this condition does not necessarily obtain at all times. For example, it did not obtain during most of Kiev Rus' history. Nevertheless, autocracy as a habit of thought has been continuous. Society in central Eurasia was still autocratic during those times when the Russian social-political order was not centralized.

Conceived in this way, as a social-historical phenomenon, Russian autocracy has evolved over time, and its history is its definition. We may begin to define it by saying that it arose in central Eurasia, the area in and around the steppe, where conditions during the period from the 700s B.C. to the 1700s A.D. favored the formation of large, highly mobile but unstable fighting forces. Political order, such as it was, took form around these forces and could only survive over time by sustaining their allegiance. Under these circumstances, politics assumed certain characteristic forms. There was a premium on rapid decision making. Groups had not only to be able to act collectively and drastically on short notice but also to rearrange the relationships among the participants to meet swiftly changing conditions. New members had to be absorbed, and places had to be made for them. The characteristic quality of all social groups, from the smallest clan to the largest horde, was a heavy reliance on direct personal trust unconstrained by formal arrangements. Russian autocracy first arose among people who strove to meet these "requirements" and considered it proper and moral to act so as to meet them.

This is not to say that Russian autocracy was inherently effective as a basis for collective action. Autocracy allows for swift decisions, but real autocrats are often unable to make them. Even when the necessary decisions are made, the results are not necessarily desirable.

Consider the situation in which an autocratic ruler works. His commands are responses to reports from followers and guesses as to which of them are the most reliable. Even if he be an able and conscientious man, he cannot be sure which report to believe, nor can he know what his followers will do in response to the commands he utters – to say nothing of his followers' followers. Even if the ruler's followers are unswervingly devoted to his service, they will still interpret his pronouncements variously, understanding his words in ways useful (meaningful) to themselves and to their followers in turn. Their loyalty does not prevent them from clashing with one another and accusing one another of treason. On the contrary, it is their loyalty that provokes them to clash and accuse. Fundamentally, autocracy constitutes a manner of expression used by self-proclaimed subordinates to identify their roles in society and their relations with each other in terms of a common duty, but since autocratic government is innately lacking in mechanisms for controlling what subordinates do, one can be sure that the autocrat's commands bear any relation to what is done in his name.[3]

We shall come closer to the reality of autocratic authority if we imagine the man to whom it is attributed to be a stage performer. Insofar as he wishes to produce this or that specific result, his words proceed not from his own will but from his sense of what the audience wishes to hear. He is not your usual performer, of course, with an audience visible before him, responding to his words and deeds in ways he can readily perceive. Only his closest followers hear his words. The remainder of the audience – his henchmen's subordinates and the rest of the hierarchy below them – receive his will only at second or third hand. Even so, the metaphor of performer and audience is meaningful, for it focuses our attention on the autocrat's inability to control or even know the actions being taken on his authority. It makes a little clearer the point that Russian autocracy derives its historical significance not from the efficacy of its methods but from the persistent will to collective action that its endurance over more than two millennia has embodied.

C. Caveats

First, it must be emphasized that I am not speaking of a mode of thinking that is *characteristically* Russian. In fact, situations resembling the one described in the foregoing paragraph can be found in all societies, modern and primitive alike. Shakespeare's major tragedies and many of his historical dramas depict the dilemmas of autocracy with unparalleled accuracy, but Shakespeare knew nothing of Russia. Any group of people, however elaborate its laws and customs, must occasionally face unprecedented situations wherein custom gives no meaningful direction, and collective action must be taken by heeding and legitimizing the commands of one person, though they

be in clear violation of law or custom. One thinks, for example, of the many non-European people in the early days of Europe's imperialism who responded to the first white man they saw by proclaiming him a god.[4] When I say, then, that autocracy has been an abiding element in Russian behavior, I am only suggesting that autocratic behavior has loomed larger in central Eurasian forms of collective action than elsewhere.

Second, I am using the term, "will to collective action" to identify an element in a social-historical evolution; therefore, it does not describe a character trait in individual Russians. Any person residing in central Eurasia during the last two millennia has had somehow to deal with the prevalence of an autocratic mode of "collective action," but this fact of life does not impart to him a particular way of thinking or acting. It does not determine what he does. If we say in a general way that the inhabitants of central Eurasia have customarily accomplished their purposes by attaching themselves to persons "in power," we need not conclude that they are somehow more "docile" than other peoples, or less inclined to formulate laws, or less respectful of the "rights" of others. The need to make regulations is quite as keenly felt among participants in a predominantly autocratic society as elsewhere; perhaps more so. Russian autocrats have exhibited a veritable passion for enacting effective laws.[5] Similarly, individuals, villages, and military detachments, have been wont to protect themselves from the perilous vagaries of unlimited personal rule and responsibility by erecting and enforcing laws, sometimes even striving to oppose this or that personal ruler under the aegis of these laws. It is vitally important to keep in mind that there is no mechanical connection between individual behavior and the social framework within which it takes place.[6]

II. THE AMALGAMATION OF THE GREAT RUSSIAN PRINCES: 1452-1613

A. Ivan III

The Russians formally united themselves under their own native tsar in 1547, when the sixteen-year old Ivan IV took the crown.[7] The ceremony was Byzantine, but in fact Ivan was taking over the legacy of the Tatar empire that Batu Khan (grandson of Genghis Khan) had established three hundred years before, when the Russian church had recognized Batu as tsar and ordered all believers to pray for him regularly. Since the 1390s, a propaganda campaign had been underway to blot the old allegiance to Tatar rulers out of the Russian memory and persuade believers that Tatar rule had been a "yoke." The campaign had succeeded. Ivan IV considered himself to be the true heir of Christian Rome. The problems he faced, however, and the traditions under which his government operated, were those of a steppe empire.

The crowning of 1547 proceeded from much earlier events. During a period of about seventy years, from the 1450s to 1522, the princely house of

Moscow had expanded and consolidated to bring the other princely households in the Great Russian area within its domain. History textbooks tell us that this was principally the work of Ivan III, Grand Prince of Vladimir and of Moscow, often referred to as "Ivan the Great." What they do not tell us is that the amalgamation of the Russian princes constituted a profound social revolution.

It began in 1452, when Dmitrii Shemiaka's death ended a long civil war between the children and grandchildren of Dmitrii Donskoi and left Prince Vasili II solidly ensconced on the Moscow throne. Vasili's house had long been the most powerful of the Russian princedoms. Its princes had been regularly appointed to the position of Grand Prince of Vladimir since about 1330, and this had once meant that they had been the chief tribute collectors for the Tatar horde in the Great Russian area. In 1389, Dmitrii Donskoi had claimed the position as Moscow' s own by bequeathing it to his son without waiting for the Tatar Khan to make the appointment, and thenceforth the grand princedom had been a possession of Moscow. In the 1400s, its influence was shadowy at best, but it embodied a significant tradition.

Of somewhat greater importance was the church's position. Moscow had been the center of the Russian church since the 1320s, when the so-called Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia had made Moscow his official residence. In 1458, the leading churchmen of the Vladimir area decided to break with the patriarch of Constantinople, and the metropolitan's sway over the whole of the original Kievan empire was broken. Within the area of Great Russia, however, the "Metropolitanate of Moscow and all Russia" was a strong institution, and in the 1450s it knew what it wanted. For over a century, the metropolitans had been fending off all efforts by the patriarch of Constantinople to move their office to Lithuanian territory; within Great Russia, the house of Moscow had enjoyed consistent church support in its wars with other Russian princes; during the recent struggle among Dmitrii Donskoi's heirs within the Muscovite household, the metropolitans had worked to unite the household under a single head. It was clear in the 1450s that if Great Russia was to have a center, Moscow would be it.

Russian political order now underwent a major transformation. Under Ivan III, whose reign lasted from 1462 until 1505, Moscow's household definitively submitted to the autocratic rule of its head man while bringing the princes and boiars of Vladimir land into its organization. A time-honored though constantly squabbling federation of princes was massed into one single household, and service to the prince of Moscow became the principal mark of social status throughout the ancient territory of the Vladimir grandprincedom. A term signifying servant (*dvorianin*) was about to become the Russian equivalent of aristocrat.

Chroniclers and historians have customarily described the amalgamation of the Great Russian princedoms as a conquest of the princedoms by Moscow, but it was much more. The people who did most of the submitting were Moscow's own servitors. Many of the alien princes and boiars – including not

only Russians but also Lithuanians and Tatars – were set above long established servitor families. The mechanics for absorbing the new princes and boiars are not well recorded, but the central point to be understood is that the process was a demanding one. By radically expanding the Muscovite household and cramming themselves together in its ranks, the alien warrior-servitors brought on a crisis so severe that it fundamentally altered the nature of their association. It is impossible to account for this massive redistribution of land and status except by recognizing in the participants a keen sense of personal responsibility toward a political entity much grander than a mere family or association of families. Somehow, the boiars and dvoriane of Russia had learned to take upon themselves a holy sense of duty that transcended clan ties. It was more or less natural for them to accept an institution that embodied the new transcendence, and as the leading families jostled each other into new social and political positions, they attributed unlimited power to Moscow's prince. They demanded that he assert his power over his own family as well as themselves, and now all families, including the ruler's own, became autocratic within themselves, so that the members could sacrifice themselves and be sacrificed at the ruler's command. Herein lay the essential organizational achievement of Vladimir's princes and boiars during the 1400s-1500s. We are justified in calling it a social revolution.

Not surprisingly, there was violence. Newcomers could not be set over old servitors on a grand scale without causing disruption. The resulting civil strife was intense and long- lasting, ending only with the crowning of the first Romanov tsar in 1613. In the end, however, Moscow's warrior-servitors accepted their drastic reshuffling and learned to live with it.

* * *

Historians do not find anything remarkable in this achievement. Indeed, they do not even mention it, preferring to focus their attention on violence, cruelty, oppression, enserfment, and tyranny. But the servitors' accomplishment and the self-sacrifice it demanded, was and is the very centerpiece of Russia's development.

The ability to *amalgamate* alien organizations and transfigure a household into an empire has manifested itself only in Russia. There was no trace of such a procedure in the history of Byzantium, or ancient Iran, or Rome. No other political formation in central Eurasia did anything comparable. The German crusaders simply expanded their holdings by hiring or enslaving new hands to work under the rigorously maintained authority of established German commanders. In Poland and Hungary, the knights resisted all change that was not in their own narrowly conceived self interest and were content to form loose confederations under the persistently piddling suzerainty of elected, charter-bound kings. The Ottoman sultan barred his long-time servitors from positions of high authority and ruled through agencies staffed by alien slaves and eunuchs. The emerging absolute

monarchies of England and France centralized their governments but only by separating the person and household of the prince from royal authority and government. Only the Russian boiars placed all authority and government within the person of the prince.[8]

Let us contemplate some things that did *not* happen during and after the great amalgamation. Moscow's organization did not fall apart into squabbling clans and gangs (as the Tatars had done). Muscovite Russians did not ordinarily sell each other to foreign slave traders (as the Kievan Rus' had done on a large scale under Saint Vladimir and Vladimir Monomakh). The Russian people did not suffer virtual annihilation at the hands of conquistadors and Calvinists (as the American Indians did), nor were they set under a government staffed by alien slaves and eunuchs (as were the subjects of the Ottoman Turks). Unlike the sultans, sheiks, rajahs, and shahs of the Middle East and India; the Russian tsar did not allow European traders to exploit his people unrestrainedly. Unlike contemporary European colonizers in Africa, Asia, and the Americas; Moscow did not exterminate and/or enslave the peoples she took over in the 1500s and thereafter. We are prone to dwell on the things Muscovite government failed to do. Add these to the list.[9]

B. The Nature of the Muscovite State

In 1522, Vasili III, son and heir of Ivan the Great, took over Riazan, thus completing the revolution that his grandfather Vasili II had begun. In 1533, Vasili died, leaving a single heir, Ivan IV, who was then only three years old. This was when the troubles began.

In a way, the strife helped to unite the Muscovite state. Unlike all previous civil strife in central Eurasia, it was almost invariably conducted in the name of the ruler. In the 1300s, strife among the Russian princes had raged between princely households; in the early 1400s, the same contenders were in the field, but they were fighting for separate lines in the house of Moscow. These earlier struggles had involved struggles between rivals. Each contending prince bore specific claims to inherited prerogative or Tatar support. In the decades after the great amalgamation, almost all fights were conceived quite differently. All participants, even rebels against the incumbent ruler, declared themselves to be supporters of the "true" Muscovite ruler. There were no rival claimants; all battles were between groups of self-styled servitors of a single transcendent ruler. The only way a commander could command the loyalty of his followers was to accuse his enemies of treason. The result of every fight was a victory for the prince/tsar of Moscow. We are wrong to understand the movements that formed around the pretenders in the early seventeenth century as risings and rebellions against Russia's oppressive social structure by savages who lacked the most rudimentary forms of political consciousness. To be sure, the participants were selfishly grabbing for and protecting their own social status, but their campaigns were serious attempts by elements within Russia's social-political structure to preserve/restore autocracy and to *sustain* the social structure.

We shall perceive the nature of this new transcendent autocracy a little more clearly if we return to a remark that I made in the last paragraph of the preceding section, pointing to the contrast between post-amalgamation autocracy in Russia and the absolute monarchies of western Europe. Let us pursue this contrast. It is well known that Ivan III and Vasili III refrained from seizing the Russian church's lands, whereas Vasili's contemporary, King Henry VIII of England (1509-1547), took over the English church's lands and sold them for the benefit of the state treasury. This contrast is not interesting in itself, but it will be instructive to consider the concepts that the spokesmen for the respective rulers advanced to explain what they were doing.

In England, it was a question of law. King Henry saw his move – or affected to see it – as a reform in England's legal order, carried out to make English government conform to scholarly concepts of divine and natural law. The monks and administrators who debated for and against the king formulated their arguments by asking which legal principles applied and how.

Things went quite differently in Russia. There was a debate over the church lands in the 1490s-1500s, and it appears to have been a serious one, involving not only churchmen but also warrior-servitors and even the grand prince himself. At one point, Ivan III may have proposed that the crown take over the church's lands and distribute them to its servitors. However, it is doubtful that Ivan was serious. By the 1490s, the church had come solidly under his thumb, and he had no reason to involve himself in the fights that would arise among his servitors in the course of dividing the church's extensive possessions among them. If he raised the question, it only indicated how hard the servitor clans were pushing him. In the end, the Russian church kept its lands (and would continue to manage them until 1764).

It is not the outcome of the debate that interests us here but the arguments used by the two sides to justify their positions. Unlike the English churchmen, the Russians argued over holiness, not law. The main ideological contenders based their stands on the ideas of two Russian monks, Nil Maikov (Sorskii) and Joseph Sanin (Volotskii), and the basic difference between these two lay in their respective definitions of holiness.

Nil's followers expressed the belief that the church should separate itself from all political affairs. Suiting his actions to words, he and a few followers abandoned their monastery and wandered off to the north to take up a simple life in the woods, far from worldly cares and delights. Holy men, said these "trans-Volga elders," should do this sort of thing. They should cut themselves off from government by renouncing material possessions beyond the bare essentials for staying alive. Monasteries and bishops should give up the management of their huge estates; monks and priests should refrain from engaging in trade, administration, or political action. The church's only proper function was to set an example of piety.

Joseph disagreed. He thought that the church owed it to Christ to remain in the world of men and manage practical affairs. Monasteries and bishops

should hold lands and do the necessary politicking to protect the Russian people, just as the church had been doing ever since the first monk appeared in Kiev. Above all, the church should go on serving the grand prince of Vladimir (i.e., the prince of Moscow) and supporting him. Holiness resided in social duty as well as personal purity. Volotskii could have added – though to my knowledge he did not – that the church's wealth was needed on a large scale to ransom the Russians who were being carried off in increasing numbers by Tatar raiders to be sold as slaves in Istanbul.

The issues raised by Nil and Joseph were far from new, and their disagreement was of no consequence in itself. What makes their debate important here is that the leading men in Muscovite society resorted to Nil's and Joseph's positions in order to sanctify and justify self-seeking purposes, and this assures us that the issues raised in the debate had real meaning. The leaders who used them for rhetoric may or may not have believed in what they said, *but it is certain that they took the sincerity of their audience's belief for granted.* The historian may be reasonably certain that Nil and Joseph were giving expression to authentic Russian attitudes toward government.

From a European point of view, the most striking feature of Joseph's and Nil's writings is the absence in them of any concept that included God and the world of men in a single, universal structure defined by law. Joseph and Nil both recognized the grand prince's authority as a divinely instituted power existing abstractly, but since they felt no need to imagine a divine *plan* of the universe, it did not occur to them to discuss the respective places that church and state might occupy in such a plan, a topic Western scholars had been developing for several centuries before the 1400s. Joseph and Nil asked only how the individual should submit to the grand prince. The former argued that the holy individual was bound to serve actively; the latter responded that he was bound only to submit. This was enough to express the full range of Russian attitudes toward government in their day.[10]

If the Tatar tsar had still stood at the head of a unified political order in 1500, Joseph might have had to argue with some other learned monk over which ruler the church should accept, khan or grand prince. Had the Greek patriarch still been sending metropolitans to rule over a church organization extending beyond Moscow's domain, any supporter of grandprincely prerogatives over the church organization would have had to find some justification for allowing the grand prince to disregard its institutional forms. Someone might have formulated arguments in abstract terms about the distinction between the Muscovite state and competing institutions, thereby inadvertently attributing institutional form to the state itself. In 1500, however, there was only the grand prince. One either served him, thereby acquiring personal identity and a place in society, or one simply submitted to him, eschewing political aims and striving singlemindedly to set a good personal example of unswerving devotion to God. In either case, there was no need to discuss the *nature* of one's service or the place of the autocrat's power in a divine scheme.

In England, neither Nil's nor Joseph's positions could have been used to justify political decisions. An English monk could have followed Nil's example by renouncing wealth and keeping apart from politics, but his actions would not have involved him in the debate over the monasteries. King Henry would not have quoted Nil in the course of finding justifications for his actions. As for Joseph's insistence on the church's duty to carry out the ruler's commands, none of the participants in Henry's "reform" could have comprehended it. If anyone in Tudor England had declared that the purpose of state, church, and all political institutions was to execute the king's personal will, the king himself would have taken offense. Henry acted arbitrarily on many occasions, but he and his supporters never *claimed* that his actions were above law. When Henry violated statutes and precedents, he always hired scholars to find justifications, and these justifications rested on the basic assumption that royal action served a higher law. It was all very well for God to exercise arbitrary authority in heaven, but the day was long past when He could pull it off in England. Likewise, His agent, the king of England, could not act without first hiring scholars to conceptualize what he was going to do as part of a scheme of divine and natural law resting on universal principles.

Historians speak of the 1500s-1600s as the age of divine- right monarchy, and they are wont to lump Russia's rulers with their Western counterparts. We see, however, that the consolidation of Russian government around the person of the Muscovite prince (after 1547, the tsar) was radically different from the developments going forward in the monarchies of western Europe. Russian bishops and abbots kept their holdings by appealing to the ruler's personal authority; thus they sustained and enhanced the principle of personal authority. The English monks lost their holdings, but since the king seized them in the name of law his action ultimately served to deepen the throne's involvement in the terms of legal system. Not only was the Russian perception of government vastly different from the European. The Russians actually lived in a different world. The more they saw of the transcendent world that their autocrat signified to them, the more powerful and awesome the autocrat became. And as they raised their autocrat to ever higher levels of power, so they maintained their sense of individual responsibility – that is, their freedom – as his servitors.

C. The Zemskii Sobor and the Time of Troubles

During the time when Russia's revolutionary amalgamation was unfolding, legends surfaced in various places suggesting that Russia was the center of true Christianity. Moscow was the third Rome, and the Muscovite prince was the true representative of Christ on earth. As was typical of Russia's early literary development, these legends were of south Slavic origin. They were concocted, apparently, by Balkan monks agonizing over the Ottoman conquest of their homelands. Originally, the legends referred to various places in Russia, not only Moscow. By Ivan IV's time, however, they

had acquired a fairly unified form, and Moscow was clearly identified as the inheritor of the glory that Rome and Byzantium had forfeited by diverging from true Christianity. The tales emphasized that it was the Muscovite *ruler* who had inherited the glory, not the Russian government. Specifically, he had inherited it from Kievan princes, either Riurik or Vladimir Monomakh.

The legends gave expression to authentic Russian inclinations, but they had the embarrassing effect of rendering the new state entirely dependent on genetic accident. If and when the house of Moscow could not come up with heirs, the truth that resided in Moscow would vanish. In 1598, the line of Ivan IV did indeed ran out, and, as was to be expected, there were troubles in Russia. It seemed for a few years as if the state would disappear altogether. The evidence tempts one to think that if the Polish king had been a little more clever or the Swedish king a little more interested in central Eurasia, the very concept of Russia would have disappeared. But it is a fact of Russian life that European states take no serious, sustained interest in governing the barbarians of central Eurasia. Russia was left to resolve its own problems, and, after a few years of horrendous chaos, she did. Russia re-established her autocracy *independently of her ideology* by employing a device invented by the advisors of Ivan IV: the zemskii sobor – assembly of the land.

Scholars have not decided when the first sobor met, but it was active during the 1550s, and several were summoned during the 1560s, when Ivan IV launched his oprichnina and his war in Livonia. By 1598, everyone seems to have had some idea of what it was or should have been, otherwise Boris Godunov would not have resorted to it as a means to legitimize his aspiration to be the tsar of Russia. If the zemskii sobor was a familiar idea, however, it was still not established solidly enough to replace biological inheritance. There were a number of princes in Moscow who claimed descent from Riurik and Vladimir Monomakh, and the legends of the third Rome gave them ample justification for opposing Godunov, whose family roots went back only to a line of boiars. There followed the time of the pretenders: a period of about fifteen years, during which men who claimed to be heirs of Ivan IV led factions of servitors against the official regime of tsars who claimed to be elected by zemskii sobors.

The violence following Boris Godunov's election was not merely ideological. The locus of the opposition to the regimes legitimized by zemskii sobors was in the steppe borderland. It was here, along the southern edge of the forests and the lower Volga, that social tensions reached sufficient force to cause men to form armies. If we understand what was bothering the settlers in the steppe, we shall be close to understanding the social roots of the turmoil, and this will provide yet another glimpse into the nature of Muscovite autocracy.

By 1600 the Tatars had lost all semblance of unity, and their chieftains had fallen into a more or less continuous warfare among themselves. The Ottoman sultan had asserted suzerainty over the Crimean horde in 1475, and the Muscovite tsar had taken over Kazan and Astrakhan during the 1550s,

but neither sultan nor tsar could exert effective influence in the steppe. The usual technique, bribing chieftains, no longer worked well, because the chieftains could not control their own followers. The grasslands had become a continual source of unpredictable violence.

Tatar raiding on the Russian and Polish lands probably reached a greater intensity in the mid-1500s than ever before. Ottoman power and prosperity were reaching their zenith under Suleiman the Magnificent (d. 1566), and the business of kidnapping Christian slaves for shipment through the Crimea to Istanbul became boundlessly lucrative. More responsive to the possibilities of profit than the necessities of organization, the Tatars struck hard all along the line of Slavic habitation. The main challenge facing Ivan IV and Boris Godunov was to mount an effective resistance.

There was no easy way. Building a wall in Chinese fashion was quite beyond the slender resources available to the tsar. Ivan IV adopted the technique of compelling large numbers of his servitors to settle along the steppe border and set up peasants there to farm the land while patrolling the border. Sending peasants out of an already underpopulated land could not but have a devastating effect on Muscovite political order. Strife among the ruling families was bad enough as it was, and it was very closely connected to the shortage of labor on their lands; so much so that boiars and servitors had formed the habit of stealing each others' peasant farmers so as to acquire the resources they needed to meet the tsar' demands for service. Ivan's policy exacerbated an already unstable social situation, and although he seems to have succeeded in curtailing Tatar kidnapping by the 1570s, the accomplishment was marred by serious upheavals and harsh repressions in the homeland. It is not very surprising, therefore, that Ivan IV's government should have been oppressive. What is truly surprising and impressive is that somehow his servitors mustered the will to meet the challenge of the steppe.

The violence of the oprichnina during the 1560s seems to have restored order in the Great Russian lands, but the growing border settlements now began to pose serious problems. Boris Godunov speeded up the outflow of settlers while acting as chief minister for Ivan's moronic son Feodor (1584-1598), and when he took the throne himself, his popularity in the steppe must have been extremely low. In 1605, the tension erupted into the war of the pretenders.

We cannot trust our evidence regarding the war. All of it was written by officials sent out by the central government to beat off attacks coming from the borderlands. From the bands of "brigands" and "rebels" who joined in the campaigns against Moscow, virtually nothing has come down to us. It was to be expected that government propaganda – i.e., our evidence – would denounce the followers of pretenders for harboring drastic and ungodly plans to overthrow the social order. How else could the tsar's commanders rally their troops? Doubtless, the pretenders voiced similar accusations, but there is no reason to believe that anyone was really protesting against the social order. The forces that joined the first false Dmitrii after he entered Russia in

1605 were not commanded by peasants but by servitors in the government organization, and so it was with the pretenders who followed. It was not rebels but local administrators who rallied peasant farmers and cossack gangs in the steppe borderland to follow "true" tsars northward.

What angered the servitors in the borderlands? Mainly, they objected to being kept away from the tsar. Consigning a servitor to the steppe border did not present him with the opportunity to make his fortune, as colonial service sometimes did in European empires. It meant, rather, that he was doomed to a social oblivion whence it was virtually impossible to return. However much wealth and power a border lord might accumulate around his remote outpost, he and his heirs were virtually cut off from the tsar's court, the only society they cared about. When such a man followed a pretender, he was not helping common people to resist oppression or seeking to overthrow "boiars" for the sake of equality or justice. What he and his colleagues wanted was to eject high-ranking officials from their posts and estates in the Volga-Oka heartland and to take their places.

The angriest of the border gentry and the most prone to insurrection were those who had openly declared themselves at odds with the government and ridden out into the steppe to form cossack gangs. It was not difficult for a border lord to do this. He was a commander of a military organization to begin with, and the exigencies of his service brought frequent occasions for converting his sentries and patrols into a fast moving fighting band. Motives for flight were not lacking. A servitor might be denounced by a rival or else find himself unable to meet the government's demands upon him. Under such circumstances, he had only two paths open to him: run to the unsettled steppe with his men, or secure the protection of another servitor, usually by becoming his slave and joining his retinue.

Under the circumstances, there could be no sharp distinction between cossack gang leaders and the cossack servitors who continued to man government outposts and draw revenue from peasant settlements. Obviously, Moscow wanted very much to distinguish "brigands" from servitors, but fortune in the borderland reversed itself with relative ease. It was not much harder for a cossack leader to switch back to being a government official than it had been to take up outlawry in the first place. For that matter, it was no big change for one servitor to become the slave of another or to return to being a servitor after spending time as a slave. In some cases, a servitor's most trusted soldiers were his slaves. It was not difficult, then, for cossack leaders and government servitors to join forces when and if an opportunity arose to march on Moscow.

The war of the pretenders almost wrecked Russia, but at last it ended, and order was restored in the house of Moscow. A zemskii sobor met, and on 21 February 1613 it unanimously elected a *boiar*, Michael Romanov, to be tsar. It was some time before Michael appeared, for it was not easy to seek him out and bring him safely to Moscow. All went well, however; the new tsar arrived in May. During the months of waiting, the sobor had ample time to

recommend constitutional provisions. It is reasonably certain, however, that no such recommendations were made. Doubtless, the new tsar made the usual vague promises to maintain law and prevent injustice, but Michael was never asked to sign anything. The members of the sobor were content to promise their service to the autocrat and leave it at that.

This marked the end of the social revolution that had begun in the 1450s. The sobor's action in 1613 made it crystal clear that the amalgamation of 1452-1522 had been an authentic expression of social realities in Russia and that autocracy was developing and changing dynamically as an expression of deeply rooted Russian attitudes toward government.

* * *

The sobor of 1613 reflected an attitude toward government quite different from that which informed the English settlers in Massachusetts in the 1620s. On the *Mayflower* in the year 1620 and in Boston in 1629, assemblies met to establish governments; that is, they performed the same basic task as the great sobor had in 1613. In New England, however, the purpose was not at all the same as that which animated the Russian sobor. The Massachusetts assemblies strove to draw up constitutional documents setting forth limits within which the men in their government would have to operate. There was no discussion of *who* the men in government would be. The New Englanders organized themselves by setting forth general principles of law and hoping that good, dutiful officials would emerge in due course to implement them. The assembly of Russians did the reverse. They named their ruler and left the making of laws to him. They wanted no covenant or contract but a leader to whom they could pledge their unequivocal support and from whose divine person they could derive their own legitimate authority. The New Englanders were concerned to identify their individual rights; the Russians wanted to remind one another of their common duty to the autocrat. The New Englanders trusted one another to obey laws; the Russians trusted one another to obey a ruler who could make necessary decisions.

Insofar as they constituted an institution, the sobors of 1598-1613 bore some resemblance to the janissary slave corps that served the Ottoman sultan. The janissaries were recruited from among the sultan's Christian subjects. They were gathered up (by force) as children and raised in the palace as Muslims. As slaves, they could be trained to serve the sultan with a devotion that would – hopefully – suffer no dilution by considerations of clan heritage. Like the Russian tsar in Muscovy, the sultan was the source of legitimate political power in his empire, and in a sense his janissaries received the emanation of this power collectively, as a corporate body. Each janissary was supposed to perceive himself not as a segment in a hierarchy, struggling to get himself and his family into a better position, but as a participant in divinity. Thus, the corps of Ottoman slave officers served the same overall purpose as the Russian zemskii sobor: to embody the Ottoman

imperial government as a single entity and to prevent its breakup into clan factions and/or territorial enclaves.

On the other hand, it will not do to overemphasize the similarities between Russian and Ottoman notions of duty. The sobors of 1598-1613 brought together officials already set in hierarchical positions and engaged in their work. They had not been torn away from their clans in order to serve the tsar. On the contrary, they had joined the tsar's household on their own initiative and brought their families and family heritages along with them. Considered from this angle, the Ottoman slave corps could not have been more different from the Russian sobor. Like the court eunuchs, the janissaries had been brought into the government with the explicit purpose of *excluding* established servitors from the sultan's administration. The emergence of the Ottoman empire had *not* been a process of amalgamation among the sultan's followers. His despotic power notwithstanding, the sultan could not trust his followers, which is to say that they could not trust one another.

The contrast is instructive. By viewing the Russian autocrat's servitors through an Ottoman prism, we shift our focus from the ever festering interclan rivalry of the Russian boiars, and we perceive how well the Christian servitors and churchmen of Russia had learned to subordinate clan privileges to the common good, articulated in the demands of a clan-transcending autocrat. With the experience of the amalgamation/revolution behind them, they had the sense that they themselves had created the Russian autocrat, and it would have been unthinkable for their ruler, once crowned, to follow the Turkish model: to replace his warrior-servitors with alien slaves. The Russian autocrat could shift his servitors from one part of the land to another; he could massacre whole groups of servitors when he could find no better way to settle their disputes. But he did not exclude his servitors from his government in a body. The tsar's authority, unlike that of any Oriental or Moslem ruler, resided in his servitors' uniquely unequivocal sense of duty.[11]

III. Autocracy After the Revolution

After 1613, Russia's political power grew while that of her neighbors crumbled, and the pressure of powerful military enemies diminished for a time. In the 1600s, however, Russia's environment was generating other pressures, and Russians met them in their established way: by trusting the autocrat to meet them. As always, this trust was active, not passive. Government servitors continued to hold themselves responsible for the tsar's power and to see themselves as emanations of it. Thus, as the range of personal authority grew yet more sweeping, autocracy made ever greater demands on its servants.

The autocrat's power to impose sacrifices on his people achieved its most extreme expression in the mid-1600s, when Tsar Aleksei (son of Michael Romanov and father of Peter the Great) formally rejected the concept of the

third Rome and abruptly outlawed many of the religious practices of his people. He not only published a decree to this effect but also required that every community in the land be assembled and compelled to take an oath to obey the decree. This action, taken on the advice of foreign experts, would have been absolutely unacceptable to Russians had it not come to them as an expression of the tsar's will; yet the reform abruptly swept away the ideological structure that had been dredged up over the last two centuries to legitimize the tsar's will.

The assault on popular religion was partly a result of the spread of printing. From the 1620s on, church liturgies were printed and widely distributed, and this exchange of data, so to speak, exposed an enormous variety in religious practices from one area to another. Russian churchmen, believing the tsar to be the holder of truth, now beheld that his truth was scattered, and some of them launched a passionate crusade to reassemble it. That is, they sought to establish one single liturgy and impose it on all churches. Understandably, these "zealots of piety" quickly fell to disagreeing with one another. One group concluded that the true liturgy was to be found in the original Greek texts from which the Russian liturgy had been translated hundreds of years before, and this view ultimately prevailed. During the 1650s, Tsar Aleksei brought in Ukrainian churchmen from Kiev to formulate the necessary changes, and they were duly enacted in 1667.

The Ukrainians played a pivotal role. Their keen interest in Moscow had been aroused by Russia's gradual expansion into the steppe, which was bringing Russian settlers into closer contact with the Ukrainian cossacks in Polish territory. Unlike the Russian cossacks, the Ukrainians were hostile to their Roman Catholic king. Their Orthodox faith had come to be an ideology of rebellion, and in the mid-1600s the monks of Kiev found themselves nominated, so to speak, as spiritual leaders of an ever more violent movement of opposition against Polish rule. Some of them turned their thoughts to the tsar of Moscow, and they began turning up in Moscow as early as the 1640s. They were well educated men. A century or more of Polish mistreatment and Jesuit huckstering had given them a long experience at organizing themselves and their people and refining their teachings. Many of them had attended European universities and studied the writings of the Protestant Reformation. It was easy for them to slide into the idea of upholding the tsar's autocratic authority while urging him to earn the submission of scholars by using his power to unify the diverse practices of the Russian church. It was not difficult for Aleksei to seize upon the Ukrainians' urgings as a way out of the dilemma that his native zealots had posed.

It is conventional to see in Aleksei's religious reform a move toward enlightenment and then to jump from this idea to the notion that autocracy must have been weakened by it. As contemporary Russians perceived it, however, the reform was an arbitrary assault by the state on the Russian people's deepest religious convictions. Aleksei knew very well that there would be bloody upheavals. Countless sincere believers would be slaughtered

precisely because they were sincere. People could survive only through self-betrayal. Needless to say, the reform was neither enlightened nor just. Far from reflecting or causing any diminution in the strength of autocracy, however, the successful implementation of the religious reform clearly showed that *even without its traditional ideological structure the belief in autocracy was stronger than ever.* More, Aleksei's victory showed that the Russians could only survive their responses to a rapidly modernizing world by reasserting their trust in autocracy. Peter the Great would have no need to expand the power of the autocrat any further. Indeed, he could not possibly have grown more autocratic than his father. When Tsar Aleksei rejected the ideology that underlay his own authority – an action that only the Judaic-Christian God can imaginably perform and still retain his legitimacy – he brought autocratic authority as close to divinity as it could go.

But if Peter and his immediate successors could not grow more autocratic than Aleksei in deed, their style of governing reflected a growing need among their servitors for the exercise of arbitrary personal power. Paradoxically, it was Peter's insistence on introducing regularity and legality into the work of his servitors that intensified the need to rely on personal connections and arbitrary authority. Peter and his advisors simply did not know what it meant to *introduce* systematic organization. In his last years, when paper frameworks drawn from Sweden and Germany were hastily and crudely imposed upon Muscovite administration, both Russians and Europeans naively expected their paper edicts to induce mechanical perfection into the interactions of administrators. Their expectations were not realized, and, thinking in autocratic fashion, the tsar held his servitors personally responsible for their "failure" to act like machinery. It quite escaped his attention and just about everyone else's that the basic purpose of systematic law and regulation is to *limit* personal responsibility, not to extend it. This was why the new codes, far from converting Russian government into an instrument, grotesquely magnified the personal responsibility of each servitor to satisfy all manner of entirely novel expectations. Not surprisingly, the servitors continued to conduct their affairs through networks of personal relationships in which the responsibility of each servitor knew no limit.

Only in the time of Catherine the Great, when the settlement of the steppe reached its last stages, did anyone recognize that legal autonomy would have to be kept separate from the autocratic kind. Some Russians were coming to understand that the tsar could not utilize laws and systems to control his servitors unless he actually let them hide behind these laws and systems. The "freedom" of the man who was doing his duty to the tsar had to be limited by the "freedom" guaranteed by legal norms.

But the idea of written guarantees grew haltingly. It was very difficult for Russians to learn to put their trust in autonomous individuals hiding behind paper walls. Formal limits to personal responsibility contradicted and weakened relationships based on unlimited personal trust, and the government could not operate without these relationships. Each new reform

designed to limit the autocrat also served to demonstrate the need for unlimited authority, and so the luxury of consistency was denied to Catherine and her successors. Rights and jurisdictions were written into law, but men with autocratic authority were still held responsible if the law was violated. Catherine's son Paul (1796-1801) did this openly but unsystematically. His son and successor, Alexander I (1801- 1825), did the same, though he did not manage it by himself but instead assigned his right hand man, Aleksei Arakcheev, to the task. Nicholas I (1825-1855) fired Arakcheev and set up a separate group of formally appointed autocrats to police his would-be bureaucracy.[12] In short, the tsar's administrators had to sustain an ostensibly unified organization by consciously sustaining a contradiction within it. It was impossible to *replace* autocratic autonomy with legal statements. It was equally impossible to separate the one from the other. It was only possible to *strive* to keep them separate.

Catherine commenced the struggle to establish paper autonomy by granting civil and political rights to the gentry and merchantry. Her "charters" suffered some bruises during Paul's short reign, but they were religiously upheld through the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I. One consequence was that the serfs found themselves in a difficult position. The charter to the gentry had made them the private property of their lords, and this meant that the tsar's authority could no longer protect them. The serfs were required, at least on paper, to accept unlimited personal responsibility to lords, but their lords were no longer unequivocally responsible to the tsar. After a time, it would occur to Russians who yearned for orderly government that this was an intolerable situation, and pressure mounted to bring an end to it. It took quite a while. It was Nicholas I's notion, which he took directly from the faith of the Enlightenment, that if he upheld the gentry's legal rights and required them to be educated, they would grow to be virtuous and resolve the dilemma by their own action. He seems to have been mistaken, but historians are quite wrong when they flatter European preconceptions by blaming the delay of abolition on the *tyranny* of Nicholas I. It was legality, not tyranny, that stood in the way of the development of legality – just as it did in the American south until war freed the slaves.

Alexander II scrapped Catherine's constitution in 1861. He thrust aside the serfowners' paper autonomy by arbitrary decree – that is, he confiscated their property – in order to extend paper autonomy to the serf villages. Later, in 1906, Nicholas II thrust aside the villages' autonomy to extend paper autonomy to the peasants as individuals. In that same year, a constitution was introduced by arbitrary decrees that violated every one of the constitutional and procedural laws that had come into use during the previous half-century. We observe, then, that although the rule of law made great strides forward in Russia during the centuries of Romanov rule, autocracy did not cease to play an important role whenever the time came for forward steps.[13]

From the late 1890s, a movement of social protest spread through Europe and Russia. In every country, the privileged classes opposed it with greater or lesser success by erecting legal and administrative structures that were designed to protect wealth and privilege. The movement was more violent in Russia than elsewhere, and in 1905-1906 she experienced a rash of strikes, peasant risings, and military mutinies that lasted long enough and spread far enough to earn the name of revolution.

In Russia, we have seen, autocracy was the traditional institutional means to restrain the tendency to make personal privilege stronger than social obligation. For a few years, beginning in about 1899, a brief attempt was made to set the tsar directly over the labor movement and to involve his agents in bargaining with factory owners on the workers' behalf. The idea seemed promising, but, for better or worse, the government bureaucracy squelched it. This may have reflected a serious decline in Russian willingness to depend on autocratic authority even before 1905.

But in 1905, the tsar's authority was still strong. Autocratic methods not only stopped the violence but imposed significant reforms. However, autocracy now became visibly weaker, not only in its institutional forms but also in the rapidly growing dependence of all elements in the population on paper structures. After 1906, the tsar abruptly abandoned his practice of forgiving personal debts on a large scale and his government fostered the very rapid spread of government sponsored but essentially private credit institutions that insisted on collecting from their borrowers. The enormous success of these institutions was perhaps the clearest indication that the Russian attitude toward government had undergone basic changes. An autocrat who could not forgive debts was a hollow symbol, and the readiness of all classes to accept this unprecedented hollowness suggests that the Russians were really learning to commit themselves to the forms of legality.

It is impossible to say exactly what happened after 1906. One can paint a picture of rapid progress: e.g., the spread of literacy, industrial expansion, sharply increasing agricultural productivity, and the introduction of modern financial institutions. On the other hand, violent forms of protest reached high levels in Russia (and all of Europe) during the last years before World War I, and it was fashionable among the privileged classes to talk of disintegration. Perhaps contradictory trends were carrying Russia forward; perhaps they were tearing her apart.

In any case, war broke out in 1914, and it wrought radical social changes. In Russia and in all the belligerent powers of continental Europe, there was an initial period of nationalistic euphoria, but then the contradictions of modern, interdependent society made themselves felt. City people suddenly learned that their lives depended on a very complex world economy. In countries where this economy could no longer function (chiefly Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the little kingdoms of eastern Europe), the citizenry reacted to their suffering by blaming their governments for it. A number of governments fell at the end of the war, and all the armies,

victorious and beaten alike, suffered various forms of collapse. The tsarist government was the first to collapse and its fall brought on several years of violence.

The ultimate result of the violence in Russia was a government whose methods and organization reflected an attitude closely resembling that of the participants in the zemskii sobor of 1613. People formed "soviets" all over Russia and undertook to participate directly in the operations of government. After a few months' experience, the would-be popular representatives grew increasingly desperate, mainly because the government was unable to stop the war, and they ultimately accepted a form of autocratic rule so extreme that the ruler was not only able to stop the war but also to junk the ideology on which his power ostensibly rested. This was approximately what had happened during the wars of the pretenders.

I make this point not in order to compare events from the remote past with events in the Soviet period but to contrast the *approach* that I have taken to the earlier events with the conventional way of talking about Soviet affairs. The continuity that I wish to emphasize in the history of Russian autocracy lies not so much in the ways men found to resolve conflicts and accomplish their ends as in the collective striving of the peoples in central Eurasia to hold together and bring order to their lives. As said earlier, it is this striving that constitutes the base line of Russian history. It did not stop in 1917, and the state did not cease to be a reflection of it. The approach that I have been suggesting to earlier centuries might also be useful in the Soviet period.

IV. The Origins of Russian Autocracy

A. The Steppe

It will not do to leave the subject of Russian autocracy's unique achievements without some discussion of how it came into being. Unfortunately, there is very little evidence, and what there is distorted. As Gumilev has pointed out, the peoples of central Eurasia had no historical memory.[14] They did not write histories of themselves or even keep records until the 1000s A.D., and by that time steppe autocracy was already established. Aside from archaeological finds, we have only Chinese, Iranian, Greek, and Latin sources, and all of these are informed by the deeply rooted assumption that the peoples who lived in and around the Eurasian steppe were "barbarians." They only became visible to writers of "evidence" when they made raids on "civilized" people, and so the overwhelming impression that comes from this evidence is that the steppe peoples never did anything significant except to pillage and loot.[15]

It is possible, however, to ask a few questions of our own. If we are limited to a discussion of warriors and hordes, we can at least contemplate their evolution and seek explanations for it. Whatever and whoever the participants in battle hordes were, their political orders existed long enough to attract the attention of clerks, and this permits us – indeed, requires us –

to make conjectures about what they had to do to maintain unity among themselves.[16] If nothing else, we shall improve on the scholarly convention that all political development in central Eurasia must be explained by the influence of "civilization."

Let us begin by dropping the question of national identity. The people we traditionally call the Rus first appeared in central Eurasia in the early 800s A.D., but in fact the Rus did not introduce autocracy. The territory in which they established themselves was not an empty wilderness. Politically speaking, the decisive feature of the territory was the steppe, a continuous ocean of high grass extending more than twenty-five hundred miles from the Carpathian Mountains in the west to the Altai in the east. It was a vast hayfield, by far the largest in the world, and it afforded a natural concentrator and conduit for hordes of mounted warriors. It was an arena, so to speak, in which bodies of warriors could grow large and be shaped into shadowy governments. By the 800s A.D., a variety of peoples had been inhabiting the grasslands and river routes for centuries, and they had learned ways of acting collectively on a large scale. They were producing and transporting goods, making war, and establishing large-scale political orders that extended over vast stretches of land. The Rus' did not build a state. What they did was to learn how to participate in steppe society. It was no small achievement. No other group of Europeans have ever done it.[17]

B. The Horse Archers

We know one thing about the nature of politics in the steppe: it compelled its practitioners to mobilize and/or cope with fighting hordes. Since the most effective warriors in the grasslands were horse archers, we may say in a general way that political order in central Eurasia took much of its form from the peculiarities of horse-archer warfare. Horse archers prevailed for a very long time. As early as the 700s B.C., mounted bowmen appeared on battlefields in Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent, and they gave a good account of themselves against the thitherto invincible war chariots. In the steppe, where chariots could not function, the archers must have been winning battles even earlier.

The main advantage of mounted bowmen over other types of combatant lay in the ease with which both horses and fighting men could be recruited and supplied. The small but very strong ponies of the Eurasian steppe required no supply at all, for they could subsist entirely on grass. As for the riders, they travelled light. They did not ordinarily wear metal armor or carry a shield or sword. Animal hides sufficed them for warmth and also protection, so long as they avoided hand-to-hand combat. They had more difficulty finding nourishment than their ponies did, but, given the inexhaustible mobility of their mounts – as many as eight to a man – they could find food by hunting as they moved. Large hordes had only to form circles in the high grass and then ride inward, killing birds and animals with their arrows as they came. Training and equipment were not a problem. All

inhabitants of the steppe were horsemen, and they knew how to shoot from their saddles. Not only could they shoot; they could also keep their bows in repair and even manufacture them. Thus, a leader of horse archers had only to find a way to persuade men to follow him, and logistics would take care of itself. His forces could make much longer treks and assemble in far greater numbers on a single battlefield than any other form of military organization in the world.[18]

The further from the grasslands a horde went, the more dependent it became on extrinsic sources of supply, and its mobility, its greatest asset, slowly eroded. From the 500s B.C. on, Greek and Roman infantry could and frequently did defeat armies of mounted bowmen that ventured away from the steppe; so did the heavily armed cavalry of ancient Iran and medieval Europe. In the grassland, however, no force carrying heavy arms and armor (and riding horses that required grain) could campaign by itself for any length of time against a competent horde of horse archers. *It followed that no enterprise could be carried on in the steppe for any length of time unless a horde of horse archers actively participated in its management. Russian autocracy was first of all, a way of conducting collective political action in an arena dominated by this fact of central Eurasian life.*

This is not to say that the horse archer was necessarily the only kind of fighter in a steppe horde. Individuals could and did learn to use a variety of weapons, and a particular horde might include all kinds of fighters. All serious hordes seem to have had their contingents of heavy cavalry wielding sabres and wearing metal armor. Still, the horse archer remained indispensable. Toe to toe on a battlefield, one of them was no match for an armored horsemen, but horse archers usually did not fight toe to toe. Typically, they went into battle by forming ranks and riding headlong at the enemy force, one rank after another. Each rank would ride up close to the enemy formation, stop before coming into contact, discharge a volley or two of arrows, and then ride back to allow the next rank to come forward and do the same. The idea was to keep up a barrage of arrows until the exasperated foe came out in pursuit. Chasing masses of horse archers was an exhausting affair for soldiers bearing heavier arms and armor, and the enemy forces were likely to lose their formation. The archers could then turn about, reform their ranks, bring in reserves in overwhelming numbers, and ride down their scattered foes piecemeal.[19]

Steppe hordes usually originated with feuds between nomadic tribes.[20] Most feuds probably did not lead to the formation of a horde, but conditions in the central Eurasian grassland made it very easy for conflict to spread. If a dispute between two clans brought them to battle, it behooved both to bring a maximum number of combatants to the field. Both sides, then, usually consisted of hastily assembled allies feeling varying degrees of allegiance. If the sides appeared to be roughly equal, combat was likely to ensue. If one side had a much larger force, the other might break up without fighting. In either case, fleeing warriors would be rendered desperate and reckless by their

setback. Groups of them, inspired by a sense of having nothing to lose, would now be inclined to sustain their unity and recoup their losses by joining another group, perhaps the same army that had just defeated them, or else attacking the tribes that they found along the path of their flight. The men who fled from battlefields were highly dangerous, perhaps even more dangerous than a victorious horde. Coming suddenly upon their victims, they were likely to overwhelm them, and the survivors would then take to flight in their turn. A chain of desperate encounters could develop in this way, and many groups of dangerous, driven men could come into being, all of them seeking to assemble around a victorious leader. A victorious leader, keenly aware of this state of affairs, was anxious to accept new recruits. More decisive, his subchieftains, down to the smallest unit leaders, were all on the lookout for recruits to replace men who had perished in battle or failed to keep up on the rapid marches. A subchieftain who failed to keep up the number of his followers was likely to be accused by his superiors of disloyalty, and he was generally more than happy to pick up new hands without asking too many questions. Thus, violence could snowball very far and fast in the steppe. A fair sized horde could materialize simply from the coincidence of a few victories and a streak of appropriate weather. Once it materialized, it could only hold together by moving further.

All the peoples who inhabited central Eurasia, sedentary farmers and nomadic shepherds alike, were participants in the larger political orders that the horse archers created. Even the most isolated villages harbored memories of encounters with bands of horse archers, and they ordered their lives and relationships with the possibility of sudden attack in mind. One thinks of a school of dolphins hovering about one of the females as she gives birth, protecting her from the sharks that will smell the blood and come after her in their primal, unmanageable stupidity. But horse archers organized into hordes were more than sharks. In time, a parasite-host association took form, to use William McNeill's metaphor, and complex relationships of inter-dependence evolved between them and the peasant villages.[21] Villagers were prepared not only to flee from or fight approaching invaders but also to cope with them; e.g., to hire out, sell, or surrender a certain number of men and women, negotiate long term arrangements for tribute and protection, or appeal to one war leader for help against another. Village leaders were likely to take a keen interest in events that transpired at a great distance from their own fields and pastures. They could perceive the political advantages of paying tribute to a faraway ruler and invoking his name against would-be disruptors of order in their locales. We may imagine that living on or near the steppe bred a kind of political sophistication in people, despite the absence of scholars writing treatises.

Henri Stahl's remarkable study of the Moldavian (Rumanian) steppe bears out these conjectures. He tells us that the Tatars ruled there (during the 1200s-1300s A.D.) by using the village elders to collect tribute and administer the agricultural population. The result was that the elders gradually lost

their direct association with village societies and became a hereditary caste.[22] If this profound social impact could transpire within little more than a century around the Moldavian steppe, we can be sure that two millennia of association with nomadic war bands produced similar effects upon sedentary populations all along the perimeter of the Eurasian steppe.

Another important element in the politics of steppe life was the array of urban-agricultural civilizations that flourished to the south: chiefly China, Babylonia/Iran, and the Hellenistic/Roman empires. As readers of the Old Testament know, the impact of these settled civilizations on pastoral nomads predated the horse archer (i.e., the 700s B.C.). From the 1400s B.C., Israel's tribes interacted continuously with the neighboring Philistines and ultimately learned from them how to form a monarchy. Even earlier, in about the 1800s, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, and, acting as the pharaoh's prime minister, he in turn enslaved them. The Israelite horde travelled on foot in deserts and mountains, but their encounters with sophisticated political orders must have resembled in some respects those of the horsemen in the central Eurasian grassland. We must infer that interaction between the southern cities and the steppe was continuous and intense even before the era of the horse archer.

The cities produced an endless supply of generals anxious to hire warriors. Caravan routes traversed the steppe, and they needed guarding. Perhaps most important, wealthy cities needed a constant intake of slaves. Thus, the waves of terror that a clan fight could set off among the peoples of the steppe could be much augmented by the larger opportunities afforded by civilization. An enterprising leader of horse archers could grow powerful as a raider of cities, or he could become a mercenary guard against raiders, or he could aim his raids at the population of central Eurasia, and pick up marketable slaves to sell in the cities. At a "higher" stage of development, he could organize the population into a network for collecting and delivering slaves from among themselves on a regular basis. This was one of the major achievements of the princes of Kiev Rus'.

C. Steppe Autocracy

Given the above conditions, autocratic rule can be imagined to have served several purposes in central Eurasia. Unquestioning obedience to a single leader was obviously desirable during battles. It was equally essential after the fighting ended, when booty had to be collected and divided without provoking disruptive conflicts.[23] These hurdles past, the horde had somehow to divest itself of its riches. The horse archers depended on mobility, and whenever they had to carry loot or lead columns of slaves, they lost much of their military strength. If a successful band was to become a proper horde and go on conquering long and far enough to gain the attention of chroniclers and legend singers, carriers and traders had to be found - fences, to use the modern term. Not only did they have to be found; they had to be protected. Caravans, caravan routes, and cities had to be guarded, maintained, and,

ultimately, governed. It was particularly important to make these complex arrangements rapidly and decisively at the conclusion of a successful campaign, before fighting could break out among the victorious commanders and before rival hordes could take form among refugee leaders. The need for an autocrat was as crucial at this point as it had been in the thick of battle.

But it will not do to lay too much stress on the practical problems of possessing wealth. They were weighty, but they were not unique to the steppe, and in any case leaders of horse archers generally preferred to get other people to deal with them. Since we are primarily concerned with what horde leaders did on their own, we focus on the need to amalgamate and unify a fast-growing crowd of warriors. As said before, a war gang's successes invariably created would-be followers: survivors, refugees, and/or smaller gangs seeking riches. A self-respecting horde had to absorb these elements rapidly. New units, often composed of former opponents, had to be brought in. *Veteran followers had to be compelled to accept the newcomers into their ranks.*

Conceivably, the exigencies of campaigning and pillaging could have been met by a chief whose autocratic authority was only temporary. History outside the steppe is full of examples of non-autocratic political orders that were capable of investing special powers in military commanders without having to form social and political institutions around these powers. Pre-Davidic Jews, Greek city-states prior to the Peloponnesian War, pre-empire Romans, and tribal Germans fielded armies without submitting to autocrats on a permanent basis. But the steppe horde was fundamentally different from these relatively stable and long-lasting social orders. Its essence lay in the suddenness of its forming. Its social-political order was and had to be an outcome of combat, not a pre-existing institution in whose name its members fought.

The men who won a horde's initial victories often knew no common bond save their battle leader and no common language save battle signals; yet they had to be made to yield personal prerogatives to new groups of archers and, ultimately, to accept arrangements made for the convenience of traders, craftsmen, carriers, bureaucrats, et al. The only constitutional principle that would allow this pell mell development into organization was absolute, unquestioning obedience to a single, godlike leader: a permanent obedience, transcending battles and campaigns and occasionally even taking precedence over considerations of clan and individual status. There could be no permanently established rights, no status or prerogative that was not revocable at the leader's command to meet the overwhelming exigencies of unavoidable expansion. This is not to say that hordes of horse archers were composed of highly ethical men who readily made painful sacrifices, but such behavior was certainly regarded as ethical, and it commanded the esteem of "good men." In a successful horde, it must have been often demanded and at least occasionally proffered.[24]

After a horde came to the end of its conquest, the leader had increasingly to cope with the weakness of the bonds holding his followers together. He

could do little by way of governing except to reward his important followers – brothers, generals, allies – with subject populations, and as these viceroys became involved in the problems of their separate provinces, their sense of interdependence dimmed. The need to make sacrifices on command seemed remote, and the horde turned readily into a loose confederation. Gumilev describes the Tiurkiut regime (which held together for over a century in eastern Eurasia during the 500s-600s A.D.) as a balance between conflicting tendencies toward separatist clan oligarchy and unifying autocracy, and this seems to have been typical.[25] The point here, however, is that hordes did take form and hold together for long periods of time in central Eurasia, and when this happened it was not simply a gathering of clans. Clan leaders had to transcend the frameworks of their social and political institutions and to acknowledge autocratic rule.

Autocracy *worked* in the steppe. Horse archers rejoiced when they could rely on the authority of a single commander; villages and pastoral tribes much preferred a single tribute collector to an assortment of bandit gangs. When large and enduring political orders emerged in and around the grassland, their participants manifested a distinct tendency to seek unity under a single chief, and they seem always to have regretted any division among their leaders. Kiev Rus, for example, did not remain consistently autocratic in form throughout its long history, but its participants and political theorists never ceased to take the view that it should have.[26]

V. Overview

I have suggested that Russian autocracy originated in an area where geographical and historical circumstances made it possible and desirable to unite exceptionally large and mobile hordes of fighters and then form them into more or less permanent extortion rackets. Seen in this way, Russian government has never been the political expression of a single people; it has always resided in groups of men drawn from a variety of cultures, speaking different languages, united primarily by their common willingness to submit to and serve autocrats. The Soviet government took over a Russian heritage.

The autocrat's purpose has undergone change over time. By origin, he was a bandit. When the exploits of his gang brought him recognition, one or more of the "civilized" powers to the south used him as a hit man. For over a thousand years, this was about as far as steppe autocrats went. Their empires were short-lived and their "governing" consisted of little more than keeping the allegiance of outpost commanders. As for the shepherds and peasants of central Eurasia, they could join a horde as individuals, but as groups they were treated as commodities, to be gathered up in batches and led off for sale in distant markets.

Later, under the Khazar and Kievan empires (600s-1100s A.D.), the autocrat vastly increased the portion of his tribute that took the form of produce, and he became increasingly dependent on productive labor. As a

result, a new attitude gradually manifested itself. At about the time that the steppe empire came under Christian influence, the ruler undertook to *protect* his subjects against kidnapping and enslavement in foreign lands. The tsardom of Muscovy and the Russian empire grew up out of a massive effort to regularize this protection.

The form of autocratic rule also evolved. In Kievan days, the church shed its blessing on an old principle of steppe politics by legitimizing/sanctifying the authority of single leaders over the steppe empire and within each princely household. During the political disorders of the 1100s-early 1200s, a new idea took hold: uniting the princes by bringing them under the rule of a heathen steppe conqueror. The resulting empire – Batu's horde and its agency, the grandprincedom of Vladimir – proved to be politically more stable than any of its predecessors, but Batu's line came to an end in the 1360s, and the Tatar empire split up into several minor hordes. During the following century, the princes and churchmen of northern Russia created an independent state by becoming servants in the household of the Muscovite autocrat, a process that found symbolic expression in 1547 with the crowning of Ivan IV. Ivan established a line of outposts along Moscow's southern border in the steppe, and his successors were able to push it continually southward and eastward. During the decades after his reign, government servitors learned to establish an autocrat by collective action. In the mid-1600s, Moscow's intellectuals were compelled to take notice of something that they had hitherto been able to ignore: namely, that the third Rome, the divine order in which they believed themselves to be participating, was competing with the European world view. Partly as a result, they began to whip themselves and their amalgamated peoples into radical organizational upheavals that have continued down to the present day. In the course of these upheavals, they have proven themselves endlessly capable of enduring the impact of radical reform.

* * *

In sum, autocratic government has evolved in central Eurasia as an expression of the needs and attitudes of real people. Today, one surmises, formally autocratic government is a thing of the past, but people are still very deeply involved in its history. Not only the Soviet people. Everyone. There are no more remote islands. We are all dolphins, and all the sharks have access to us. Never has there been such a crushing need for collective action that has no basis in tradition and cannot be conceived of by electorates. The need for personal trust grows ever more desperate while the reasons for extending it seem to disappear. In short, the world is rapidly becoming the kind of place that Russians know well. I am an admirer of Max Weber, but when he coined the phrase "the routinization of charisma," he was talking nonsense. Modernization, including routinization, was and is inconceivable without charisma.

Notes

1 This willingness is, of course, comparative. It does not characterize Russian culture but only distinguishes it from other varieties.

2 Here is a story of proper autocratic functioning. It dates from the reign of Alexander I (1801-25). Some peasants secured government approval for the liberation of their village from serfdom. Their owner had agreed to the liberation, but an official had to be found who would convey the petition to the tsar. Luckily, the peasants found a high-level dignitary who was willing to take care of the matter personally (that is, he hand carried the paperwork to the minister of internal affairs). When the matter had been accomplished, the dignitary required the peasants to pay him some money, not as a reward to him but to cover "expenses." He was referring to the money he had paid the clerks who ordinarily would have received bribes if the petition had followed normal channels. This, explained the official, was only common courtesy. Aleksandr Artynov, *Vospominaniia krestianina sela Ugodich Iaroslavskoi gubernii Rostovskogo Uezda* (Moscow, 1882), p. 7-9. Some accounts of autocratic administration in Soviet times are in Joseph Berliner, *Factory and Management in the USSR* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), pp. 182-230.

3 These generalizations apply to all levels of Russian government. Serfowners experienced the same inability as the tsar to translate their "power" over their peasants into effective control. See Vadim A. Aleksandrov, *Sel'skaia obshchina Rossii* (Moscow, 1976), pp. 77-111, 177-78.

4 See, e. g., O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban* (New York, 1964).

5 During the 1930s, Andrei Vyshinskii was working to impose a legal system on the Soviet government at the same time he was acting as Stalin's agent in the purge trials – Eugene Huskey, "Vyshinskii, Krylenko, and the Shaping of the Soviet Legal Order," *Slavic Review*, XLVI (Fall/winter, 1987), pp. 414-28. The tsarist government's efforts to codify its law continued almost without interruption throughout the century of wildly ad hoc administration that followed the reign of Peter I.

6 The conceptual problems that arise when descriptions of a society are used to explain individual behavior (and the reverse) are discussed at length in Alvin Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis in Western Sociology* (New York, 1970).

Despite my intent to emphasize the social nature of Russian autocracy, the ensuing pages often refer to the words and deeds of more or less autocratic rulers. Princes and tsars will be seen to make war, take cities, formulate policies, write law codes, and put down rebellions – as if one person, by virtue of some mystical quality in his personality, could do such things by himself. In fact, of course, no ruler can; not in Russia or anywhere else. Statements of this sort are only conventional metaphors. They are not descriptions but meanings that have been attributed to

events. On this point, see Nikolai M. Korkunov, *Ukaz i zakon* (St. Petersburg, 1894), esp. pp. 132-90. For a brief comment on Korkunov's thought in English, see my "Bureaucracy and Freedom," *American Historical Review*, LXXI (January 1966), pp. 468- 86.

7 Actually, Ivan IV was at most one fourth Russian. His grandmother was Greek, and his mother was Lithuanian.

8 A recent article by Nancy Kollmann offers insight into the meaning autocracy acquired in the eyes of its servitors during this period: "Ritual and Social Drama at the Muscovite Court," *Slavic Review*, XLV (Fall, 1986), pp. 486-502. The institutional arrangement of "mestnichestvo," which seems to have been the chief mechanism for the great amalgamation, is discussed in S. O. Shmidt, "Mestnichestvo i absoliutizm," N. M. Druzhinin (ed.), *Absoliutizm v Rossii (XVII-XVIII vv.)* (Moscow, 1964), pp. 168-205. See also Stepan B. Veselovskii, *Issledovaniia po istorii klassa sluzhilykh zemlevladel'tsev* (Moscow, 1969), pp. 475-76.

9 Richard Hellie, *Slavery in Russia* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 21- 23, tells us that Muscovy did not outlaw the sale of its own people to the Tatars until the 1550s (though attempts to discourage this practice dated from the late 1400s). However, he says, the Russian state took much of its form from efforts to stop Tatar slave raids.

10 Joseph, Nil, and almost all Russian writers who discussed the authority of the ruler during their century, frequently referred to and copied from the teachings of one Agapetus, a Byzantine deacon of the 500s A. D. The key phrase that informed their thinking was as follows: "Though an emperor [i. e., tsar] in body be like all other, yet in power of his office he is like God.... For on earth, he has no peer. Therefore as God, be he never chafed or angry; as man, be he never proud...." This was it. This was all the Russians had to say about the state's relation to a universal order, and it wasn't even their own line. See Ihor Shevchenko, "A Neglected Byzantine Source of Muscovite Ideology," *Harvard Slavic Studies*, II (1954), pp. 141-80. The quotation is on p. 147.

11 Most of the above remarks about the Ottoman sultanate are based on Halil Inalchik, *The Ottoman Empire, The Classical Age: 1300-1600* (London, 1973).

12 This was the notorious "third section" (tretee otdelenie sobstvennoi ego imperatorskogo velichestva kantseliarii). It was absorbed into the regular police force and deprived of all special powers in 1880. See P. S. Squire, *The Third Department* (Cambridge, 1968), and my *Systematization of Russian Government* (Urbana, Illinois, 1973), pp. 223-28.

13 Petr Zaionchkovskii has suggested in many of his works that administrative operation actually became less systematic and more arbitrary after Alexander II's reign. He came to this conclusion, I think, by exaggerating the arbitrariness he could document and ignoring the

institutions where legality was rapidly developing. See my *Systematization*, chapters six through nine, and also Brian Levin-Stankevich, "Cassation, judicial interpretation and the development of civil and criminal law in Russia, 1864-1917" (unpublished PhD dissertation, SUNY at Buffalo, 1984).

14 L. N. Gumilev, *Drevnie Tiurki* (Moscow, 1967), p. 340. The Tiurkiuts of the 700s A. D. had no recollection of their Hun predecessors, and the Mongols of the 1100s had no idea of their roots in the Tiurkiut empire. Legends sometimes survived from one horde to another, but they were altered to please their listeners, thus excluding any recollection of their historical origin.

15 See O. J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns* (Berkeley, 1973), pp. 6-25.

16 On this point, see William McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 2-14; and Owen Lattimore, *Studies in Frontier History* (London, 1962), pp. 146-54.

17 Recent Soviet works emphasizing the contributions of steppe nomads to Russian political order include M. I. Artamonov, *Istoriia Khazar* (Leningrad, 1962); Gumilev's two studies, *Drevnie and Otkrytie Khazarii* (Moscow, 1966); and O. Suleimenov, *Az i Ia* (Alma Ata, 1975). In the West, several historians have called for a re-evaluation of the significance of steppe political order. See, for example, Maenchen-Helfen, *World*; Omeljan Pritsak, "The Origin of Rus," *Russian Review*, XXXVI (1977), and "The Polovcians and Rus," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, II (1982); Thomas Noonan's articles, e. g., "Monetary Circulation in Early Medieval Rus," *Russian History*, VII (1980); and the works of Charles Halperin – e. g., *Russia and the Golden Horde* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1985), and "The Ideology of Silence: Prejudice and Pragmatism on the Medieval Religious Frontier," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXVI (July 1984).

18 George Vernadsky, *The Mongols in Russia* (New Haven, 1953), pp. 111-14. A more recent and much more insightful account of horse-archer logistics is John Masson Smith, Jr., "Mongol Campaign Rations: Milk, Marmots, and Blood?" in Pierre Oberling (ed.), *Turks, Hungarians and Kipchaks*, vol. 8 (1984) of the Journal of Turkish Studies. Smith attaches less importance to hunting as a source for the archers' own food and points instead to the importance of horse meat. On a long campaign, the archers simply ate their extra horses as they went.

19 David Ayalon tells us that the bow was "the most prestigious weapon" in central Eurasia during the 800s-900s A. D. (in his *Outsiders in the Land of Islam*, London, 1988, p. 111-117). However, a number of scholars have stressed the importance of heavy cavalry in steppe hordes: e. g., Gumilev, *Drevnie*, pp. 67-70. It seems that when a horde got big and made forays outside the steppe, its arsenal was likely to become more elaborate.

The latter generalization works well for the Mongols (Tatars). The

stories in the "Secret History" about Genghis Khan's youth in the late 1100s A. D. are all about archers – see Arthur Waley (ed.), *The Secret History of the Mongols* (New York, 1963), pp. 227-84. The accounts of Mongol battles in Rashid Al-Din, written a century later, are about swordsmen riding horses that fed on grain – see Rashid Al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan* (New York, 1971), e. g., pp. 150-53, 260.

All this, however, is beside the logistical point. Heavy cavalry was not limited in its efficacy because of battlefield performance but, basically, because the heavier horses required grain and grain had to be transported. If a war leader in or near the steppe could mobilize horse archers and hold them together long enough to reach a battlefield, he could always outnumber and outmaneuver a force that had to rely on supply trains – unless, of course, the slower army was accompanied by an ample escort of its own mounted bowmen.

The modern reader can estimate the chances of a slow-moving force in the grasslands by reading a description of steppe combat in the 1730s written by C. H. von Manstein, a Russian general who saw quite a bit of it. By Manstein's day, modern armies had at last gained the capability of driving off hordes of highly mobile horsemen while moving through the grasslands, but only by surrounding themselves with their own light horsemen. Manstein's account makes it clear that it was not primarily the Tatars' weaponry that made them dangerous but their superior mobility. See Manstein's *Contemporary Memoirs of Russia* (London, 1968), pp. 137-236.

20 On this point, see the stories in Waley, *Secret History*.

21 McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier*, p. 7.

22 See Stahl's *Traditional Rumanian Village Communities* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 32, 42.

23 It is impossible to exaggerate the political importance of centralized booty control in any military order. The God of Moses insisted upon it at some length (Numbers 31: 21-54; Joshua 7: 10-26), and the Koran also emphasizes it (Surah 8: 1, 41; Surah 59: 7).

24 See the tales in Waley, *Secret History*, and Faruk Sümer (ed), *The Book of Dede Korkut* (Austin, Texas, 1972).

25 *Drevnie*, pp. 53-63. See also Sümer, *Book*, p. 38; Stahl, *Traditional*, pp. 28-29; T. Sulimirski, *The Sarmatians* (New York, 1970), pp. 17-18; H. F. Schurmann, "Mongol Tributary Practices of the Thirteenth Century," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, XIX (December 1956), pp. 304-12.

26 See Boris Romanov, *Liudi i nravy drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad, 1966), pp. 18-22. Romanov uses a literary work from Kievan times (Daniil Zatochnik) to emphasize the pitiable condition of a princely servitor who found himself without a prince to serve. It was as if he had no social existence at all.