

Summary

The history of the 18th century represents a relatively discrete chapter in Russian history, for this is a period in which the process of forming a truly modern state whose bureaucratic institutions and supports were built upon both worldly and ecclesiastical pillars was finalizing. The basis for this process were reforms that were put into practice by the Tsar-Emperor Peter I., who has been named “the Great.” The steps Peter took, starting from the beginning of the 18th century, led the Russian Orthodox Church to transform into a real support for the secularizing state machinery. Peter I. was not the first Russian ruler to make attempts at secularization; for example, the reality that the Russian state could function without concern about the arrival of Judgment Day without a reigning patriarch had been previously demonstrated by Peter’s predecessor, Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich. However, Peter undoubtedly took the most important step: he abolished the institution of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate and after several years of effecting gradual changes in the administration of the Russian Orthodox Church’s hierarchy, he eventually replaced it with the establishment of the much more amenable Most Holy Governing Synod.

Peter the Great certainly deserves credit as the creator of modern Imperial Russia. His was a Russia whose roots were not only to be traced to the Orthodox Grand Duchy of Moscow, the immediate predecessor of Peter’s Russia, but also back to a number of other sources rooting deeper in the past of the various nations and nationalities which — to a significant extent — represented mutually-distinct cultural and religious identities that, through the workings of fate (primarily through Russian power ambitions) became a part of the Russian Imperial whole. These various identities then influenced one another and blended together in order to create the specific character of the imperial culture and civilization, an only somewhat homogenous aggregate that developed over the following centuries in connection with the historical and social changes taking place in Russia as well as the rest of the world.

The Grand Duchy of Moscow found the purpose of its existence in the further development of its legacy from Orthodox Byzantium. However, for Peter’s Russia that was already an insufficient mission. In the spirit of the period’s ethical code, Peter needed to expand beyond the borders of Orthodoxy and what was to a significant extent an identical world of Slavic cultures. Again, of course, he was not the first Russian ruler to do so; conclusion of the process of so-called collection of the Russian lands and commenced the colonization of the ethnically non-Russian territories had already been initiated by Ivan IV, who was called Ivan the Terrible. Peter, however, did not content himself with mere expansion and colonization. He wanted to have complete control over the new territories, and with their help, to stand on the pinnacle of the world’s imperial pyramid. In order to achieve this, he instituted measures to fundamentally modernize

the entire Russian dominion. All of the steps toward reform that Peter took were in service to his goal of building a vigorous and strong empire. In order to do this, and in the spirit of his times, he concentrated on raising a strong and battle-ready army. For this, Peter required finances, and real experts, but also loyal subordinates. The goal of the modernization effort was to draw closer toward, but at the same time also distance the Russian Empire from the rest of Europe. To draw closer so that the new Russia could become competitive with the rest of Europe: politically, economically, and, above all else, militarily. But to distance itself so that Russia remained a special, exceptional, extraordinary totality that excelled over other states in its greatness, its disposition and its feeling. All of Peter's successors who ruled the Russian Empire in the 18th century continued developing his modernization program, which was composed from a great many specific reform measures that were often overlapping, but also gradually transformative. Some of these steps were more bold, and others less so. The later monarchs principally carried on as they could because Peter's reforms were merely the first step toward the overarching goals of achieving competitiveness and proving the exceptionality of the Russian state. Sometimes it was necessary to adjust some of the things that Peter had done, or to come at a problem from another angle. One of the most prominent Russian historians, Pavel N. Milyukov, was convinced that the reforms did not stem from an integrated plan, but rather that they arose spontaneously from the ambitions described above. Milyukov was right that Peter's interventions did not only change some aspects of Russia, such as its political system, economy, and laws, but truly transformed the entire state and consequently also the society. That is to say, gradually the entire Russian society transformed itself until it achieved its present multicultural and multiconfessional form. Actually, during the 18th century a new Russian civilization was born, one that was guided by the imperial principles and the cultural and civilizational values that derived from them. With the strengthening of these principles, Russian society's self-confidence grew, even including its traditional tragic self-delimitation against the supposedly eternally-injurious foreign countries. At its beginning there was a transformation of the identity of belonging to the Muscovite Tsar to belonging to the Emperor, a personality who not only protecting the state whole, but also was also able to create out of it a distinctive, well-rounded, massive cultural-civilizational multinational manifold that was able to compete with the West.

The end of the 18th century truly saw the finishing touches applied to the partially-Europeanized "Rossiyskaya imperiya," which had become an authoritarian bureaucratic state with constricted visions of its greatness and power. The authoritarian government was Peter's decisive means for maintaining the unity of his immense "Russian" territory, which was unevenly developed economically, culturally and socially, and actually contained more than several hundred disparate nationalities. Even the "enlightened" ruler Catherine II. was convinced that so long as the breaking up of tsarist authoritarian power in Russia and establishment another form of political system did not take place, Russia

would fall to pieces and perish. Even Karmazin, the pre-eminent Russian historian from the beginning of the 19th century, came to a similar conclusion, which posed a rather only rhetorical question, which he answered in advance throughout his entire oeuvre on Russian history – Russia cannot be governed by anything other than unlimited power.

The transformations that Russia went through in the 18th century, however did not only take place at the political level. Tremendous changes could also be observed, for example, in Russian art, which in the 18th laid new emphasis on man as a member of his society. He would not be portrayed just as a simple person, but an extraordinary individual in the service of Russia. This was also driving impulse behind Patriarch Nikon's church reforms that had been brought to fruition in the beginning of the second half of the 17th century. The ensuing dissention within the church was indicative of the general social disunion and the weakness of traditionalist state ideology. The riots (bunty) of the 17th century only underscored this crisis. Peter I. stood before the task of rescuing the situation. He found the way in strengthening the state's power and creating a new identity for Russian society.

Even though Peter's successors followed in his footsteps in many ways, they also changed some things, particularly under the influence of the Russian and non-Russian aristocracies. And thus it was under the Russian Empress Elizaveta, one of Peter I.'s most noteworthy successors, that the political restoration of Peter's model was enacted. Tsarevna Elizaveta, for example, restored the Senate, including its title of "Governing." Her policies on the one hand expanded the rights of the nobility, but on the other, she also reinforced peasants' subjection. Under the regime of her predecessor, Anna Ivanovna, the period of nobles' service was limited to twenty-five years. The reason behind all of this was again pursuit of economic profit. Whereas in 1730 there were in Russia thirty metallurgical works, then in 1750 there were about one hundred of them. In the beginning of the 1860s the number of inhabitants of the Russian Empire, in comparison with the beginning of the century, had increased by one third – by estimate, twenty-three million. Of these, ninety-four percent were peasants. In the cities lived less than seven hundred thousand people; i.e.: not more than five percent of the population.

During the reign of Elizaveta Petrovna of course Russia "only" transformed into an aristocratic monarchy. Its internal politics were fully in concurrence with the interests of the Russian nobility. Not, of course, with the interests of individual families, which the Miloslavs, Naryshkins and others had attempted to assert at the beginning of Peter I's regime. Then, the monarch remained the omnipotent: the highest decision-maker. This corresponded with the strengthening of Russia's position abroad as well.

Catherine II also fully followed in Elizaveta's policies, and it was during her reign that Russian tsarist autocracy entered its golden age. However, during Catherine II's regime serfdom also reached its apogee. The aftermath of Pugachev's Cossack rebellion was the liquidation of the Zaporizhian Sich, and the abolishment of Cossack self-government on the Don and the resettlement of the Cossacks from Ukraine to Kuban, which

was the Russian frontier of that period. Catherine renamed the Yaik Cossacks as Ural Cossacks and established police supervision over them.

Paul I. began with the dismantlement of serfdom: in 1797 he issued a manifesto in which he forbade serfs to work for their landlords more than three days a week, on Sundays, or on holidays. However, the path to the abolition of serfdom in Russia was very long. It was only under Alexander I., in the year 1803, that a tsarist manifesto was issued that allowed noblemen to free their serfs if they provided for the serfs' material welfare. However, it's clear that this immediately presaged serfdom's downfall. Isn't this also inspiration for contemplating the Russian state's other spheres of action? Perhaps further contemplation of Russia will also be sparked by the finding that despite the appearance of conservatism the picture of Russia during the 18th century and the 18th century in the subsequent periods changed significantly. Of course, it was built upon the firm foundation of mythologization of Peter the Great and his reforms that had purportedly been so radically innovative and created the new, modern Russia. From this, then, ensued the discourse that was typical for the 19th century – Slavophiles who defended Russia's characteristics and traditions before Peter vs. pro-Westerners who celebrated the changes that Peter the Great had introduced to the Russian world, without having fundamentally changed Russian traditions. The differences in Russia before Peter's reign and after it were also even expressed in art.