Cossacks and the Russian Empire, 1598–1725
Manipulation, rebellion and expansion into Siberia

Christoph Witzenrath

Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe
This book explores the ways in which the Russians governed their empire in Siberia from 1598 to 1725. Russian control over Siberia was extraordinary, dependent on a handful of men at a vast distance from the centre of imperial power, with no regular armed force and a cash-starved economy. It raises important questions concerning the nature of the Russian autocracy in the early modern period, investigating the hitherto neglected relations of a vital part of the empire with the metropolitan centre, and examining how the Russian authorities were able to control such a vast and distant frontier given the limited means at their disposal. It is argued that, despite this great physical distance, the representations of the tsar’s rule in the symbols, texts and gestures that permeated Siberian institutions were close at hand, thus allowing the promotion of political stability and favourable terms of trade. Particular attention is paid to investigating the role of the Siberian Cossacks, and explaining how the institutions of empire facilitated their position as traders via the sharing of cultural practices, attitudes and expectations of behaviour across vast distances among the members of organizations or personal networks. Overall, this book is a thorough appraisal of how the institutions of Russian imperial government functioned in seventeenth century Siberia.

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Christoph Witzenrath
For Friederike, Werner and Elisabeth
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I had become involved in the subject of this book when Ludmila Thomas, in a friendly manner, redirected my interest in early modern Russian town rebellions to Siberia. I was struck by their frequency and their sense of purpose, something I had expected everywhere but not in Russia. From this first, rather strange encounter, my own purpose has been to reconcile this impression with general views on the relations of the tsar and the people in Russian history – or vice versa.

I had to learn two things in the process: that military history could not be evaded and is actually quite interesting; and that people can make use of an image of the all-powerful ruler in ways that seem to defy the very idea of tsarism. From military history and sociology, I have learned that Cossacks can best be described as a specific form of group organization – the economic and defensive efficiency of the temporary primary group, which is among the main reasons for Cossack successes and adaptability to varying frontier environments.

A combination of military, service, cultural and trade aspects of Siberian Cossack activities explains the power resources they wielded and to which the tsars had to accommodate. Particularly during the first half of the seventeenth century, Moscow depended crucially on the Siberian fur riches to finance its military reforms, imports and Western experts. However, to cultivate reliability in a politically volatile environment and open the way to Moscow and the markets of Western Europe, the Siberian Cossacks swore an oath to the tsar and never failed in their claims to staunchly defend his interests. Service became the centre of their life and imperial culture the medium through which they expressed themselves and negotiated the terms of trade. A vigorous, if limited, public allowed reassuring themselves of mutual assistance and forming alliances. At the heart of my analysis is the insight that an institution like the tsar’s – or sovereign’s – affair or the oath has two principal effects: by basing its claims on time immemorial or divine providence, it makes actions and expectations reliable, which was immensely valuable for trade in a frontier area covering one-twelfth of the world’s territory. However, those with the necessary power resources could interpret it in various ways according to their needs, notwithstanding the requisite loyalty. A petition claimed to defend the interest of the tsar while it explained the need of deposing the governor in the same terms, and it united the undersigned Cossacks behind this purpose. In such a way, the image of unity camouflaged
conflict, fostering stability and an obligatory interpretation of events, limited though it was locally, temporary, or by social group.

But this was more than window-dressing; it was a hugely efficient device of integrating the rapidly expanding empire in its own right. Depending on the availability and distribution of power resources, institutional mechanisms allowed the parts of the empire to entertain very different relations with the centre; some parts of the frontier could even exploit weaker, ‘older’ areas. This book thus proposes a fresh interpretation of the Russian Empire’s expansion. The myth of the tsar served those who wielded some form of power, but they were not exclusively those living in the imperial centre or holding high ranks, and they could be more numerous than expected.
Without Robert Frost, I would not have written this book. His comments and hints have led to an incomparably more comprehensive framework and helped to develop my perception of Russia, reliably reading my drafts and bearing with my mistakes all along. Frost, Karin Friedrich and Roger Mettam have provided an amiable, welcoming and challenging environment in a city that surprised me. Ludmila Thomas’s insights, derived from alternate vantage points on both sides of the former iron curtain, have deeply impressed me. Dietmar Wulff had an open eye at a crucial moment, and Dittmar Schorkowitz helped with a new form of writing. Nikolai N. Pokrovskii took time to make me aware of the many scattered devices of work in the archives. Andrei Zuev admirably organized meetings and was ready for discussions. My thesis would never have been complete without the impressions and exchanges with, among others, Konstantin Mitupov and Marina G. Tsyrenova at Ulan-Ude and Irkutsk. Svetlana Dolgova and her colleagues at RGADA have done the best possible. Jörg Baberowski has offered to teach at Humboldt University; his straightforward critique and Martina Winkler’s congenial reply have reinvigorated my presentation. Of her own accord, Cathy Brennan magnanimously sent inaccessible and long-forgotten books. Maureen Perrie and Janet Hartley made invaluable and far-sighted requirements. I am grateful for my anonymous reviewer’s useful remarks and discussions with Peter Sowden. All of those mentioned before, as well as Christoph Schmidt, Carsten Goehrke, Andreas Kappeler, Nancy Kollmann, Valerie Kivelson, André Berelowitch, Brian Davies, Annette v. Stieglitz and Carsten Kumke have encouraged me in important ways. The exchanges with Ludwig Steindorff and Roger Bartlett gave me fresh insights. To some degree, the remarks and critique of Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, Joachim Schulze, Susanne Rau, and Christian Hochmuth, although concerned with a different, related draft, found their way into this book. Anna Zhukovskaia, Arturas Vasiliauskas, Martin Aust, Alfons Brüning, Guido Hausmann, Dmytro Rybakov, Cornelia Soldat, Vera Urban, Christoph Gumb, Patrick Tidball, Carolin Leutloff, Hannes Grandits, Almut Höffert, Angela Rustemeyer, Stefan Karsch, Valentina Leonhard and Uffa Jensen have at various times contributed to a favourable working atmosphere and inspiring debates.
The King’s College London Studentship Award secured my material life during the years in England and Russia, and the University of London funded travelling to Siberia.

Mark Sweetman, Rebecca Taylor, Martina vanderLeij, Evgeniia Danilevskaiia and Nadja Ambrosi have kept company and sheltered me at various times in both countries. Kate Wilson has done the same and discussed Polish history. Julia Vainzoff introduced me to people and places in Moscow and Samara; she has also rendered attempts at obtaining permissions for reproduction professional.

My students have refreshed me with thought-provoking questions.

My daughter will gather soon enough why I was not writing ‘yet another’ book. Without the sensitive support of my family, I could never have finished it. Gabriele Karl has kept up with separation, later tended our children and, approvingly, critically, and ever so wonderfully, from inception accompanied the whole undertaking, for which the responsibility is, of course, exclusively mine.
Figure 1 Map of Tobol’sk at the turn of the eighteenth century, by syn boiarškii S.U. Remezov.
Figure 2 Map of Irkutsk district by S.U. Remezov, based on sketches drawn locally sometime before 1701.
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Figure 4 Reception of Ermak’s Cossack envoys by Ivan the Terrible in the imagination of the Tobol’sk cartographer, Cossack and syn boiarstvo S.U. Remetzov more than a century after the events depicted. Despite the slight exaltation of Ermak (left, above), the representation of the Cossack group – especially its formation closed to the outside and same-size of the members – testifies to the author’s intimate knowledge of such groups.
Introduction

Aims and objectives

The history of the Russian Empire has recently been extensively reappraised and the role of imperial expansion has been reconsidered to explain Russia’s historical development since the reign of Ivan IV the Terrible. The empire has been reinvestigated from the multi-ethnic and ceremonial point of view, and from the perspective of international relations and power politics. However, the question how this large empire functioned internally, how the frontiers, the centre, and other parts interacted in the seventeenth century, and how, under early modern conditions, the huge territorial gains were sustained institutionally is still largely neglected. Writing about international relations, Alfred Rieber has pointed out that, besides the multicultural society and cultural marginalism, it was particularly the frontier conditions specific to the Russian context that have confronted the empire’s ruling elites and the mass of the population over long periods of time with both a range of possibilities and a set of constraints. In Siberia, these possibilities and constraints were taken to the extreme in that it was made up entirely of overlapping frontiers of the north and the steppe where the state’s authority was limited to a few fortified places, an enormous challenge and a bounty of opportunity to the newly arriving, their main reason for conquest being the soon-flourishing international trade with furs and luxury commodities. Siberia therefore is particularly well suited for studying how the empire’s institutional culture adapted to social change, since persistent expansion and the specific forms of organization required by the perilous and porous trading frontiers both challenged and highlighted imperial culture as the tsar depended much on their revenues. Moreover, the regions beyond the tax border at Verkhotur’e in the Urals, which will broadly define Siberia in this study, are interesting, since they permit to examine how the autocratic empire managed to fuse its organizational power and the forces of individual initiative necessary to establish communications throughout a rapidly expanding territory that remained dangerous and threatened by a break-down of communications with Moscow.

These questions have long been considered too dangerous to touch by historians or they have elicited approaches that are apologetic of empire, explain effectiveness in inappropriately modern terms, or underestimate the flexibility of
imperial culture. Already in the eighteenth century the German academic in the
desert服役的德国学者，G.F. Müller，表达了他对西伯利亚边疆城镇
towns merely executed government orders, looking after the tasks of defence and
the collection of the fur tax. Apart from such one-sided praise of tsarist power,
the question of how the empire was governed in practice and managed to sustain
its rapid expansion—as distinct from its own claims of power—was not accept-
able among nineteenth century Russian scholars. Even for the empire’s oppo-
nents, whether before or after the revolution, there was no point questioning the
effectiveness of the tsar’s power, and those who criticized Russia from a regional
point of view kept to Solov’ev’s and Kliuchevskii’s theory of colonizing Russia
instead of the state, a uniform mass of ordinary people was cast in the role of
the hero that left uniform, ‘grey’ traces, colourless in private expressions, while
colonizing empty spaces. Insofar as the relations between town and tsar are rep-
resentative for imperial relations, Novombergskii’s was a very influential posi-
tion, drawing on the theory of the Russian service town authored by Vernadskii.
Accordingly, the material and cultural growth of the town in Western Europe
occurred naturally and slowly within a self-contained sphere of guilds, while the
Muscovite state artificially interfered with this growth. Concerning the Siberian
towns, Novombergskii maintained, ‘the artificiality … is even more obvious’.

Thereby they accepted the powerful image of Russia propagated by enlighten-
ment political theorists in Europe, drawing on the body of travelogues. Travelling
authors in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries had readily taken over represen-
tations of power and omnipotence portrayed in court ritual designed by clerics
anxious to increase the tsar’s standing in the Orthodox world. The travellers had
interpreted these in the categorical terms of classical learning, among them
Aristotle’s concept of tyranny: ‘The Tsar … alone rules the whole country … he
treats [his people] as the master of the house does his servants’. The rhetoric
devices of Western theories of absolutism employed under Peter I and the consec-
utive, vigorous cult of Peter, ensured that this theme of all-powerful autocracy
and subservient society persisted throughout the eighteenth century. In the nine-
teenth century, Western and Russian views of Muscovy reinforced each other, and
perceptions of Russia as exotic contributed to the dominance of the patrimonial
vision in debates about the past. The state historical school gave primacy to the
state and dismissed society as inert (S.M. Solov’ev, Boris Chicherin). The
Soviet view of the tsar and the economic and political institutions guarding the
interests of the ruling feudal class further contributed to the canonization of the
coercion paradigm. Instead of asking how such a vast empire as Russia could be
governed at all, Western and exile historians from the revolution until the 1970s
readily succumbed to the myth of all-embracing, unrestrained tsarist power,
overly stressing military and administrative centralization, although this version
emphasized political coercion over social and economical forces.

Until very recently, this emphasis on the central perspective and, well into the
nineteenth century, severe censoring in a sensitive field of governance have dis-
couraged studies of internal relations within the empire. The main reason for the
failure before Kappeler’s recent celebrated study of the multi-ethnic empire to
produce anything remotely similar was the narrowing of the perspective to ques-
tions of the nation-state that occurred precisely when modern historiography
developed; thus the great Russian historians of the nineteenth century, Solov’ev,
Kliuchevskii and Platonov, conducted national history, as did the historians of
other countries. The history of the Russian empire thus became Russian history.\textsuperscript{12}
As already mentioned, regionalism can be added as another reason for the failure
to analyse imperial relations. As will be explained below, for ideological reasons
the Cossacks were rarely studied, until, in the late Soviet period, some historians
embarked on this line of research. These longstanding trends contributed to the
lack of research in the field of institutional culture of the Russian empire.

In this sense, the term ‘autocrat’, as already mentioned designed by clerics to
impress the Orthodox world, still overshadows the aspect of empire.\textsuperscript{13} However,
not only the term ‘Sibirskoe tsarstvo’ standing apart from ‘Moskovskaia Rus’ in
the tsar’s title shows that Muscovites perceived the realm as empire, but they also
used this distinction in petitions, charging officials with embezzlement.\textsuperscript{14} Russia
was also an empire in the sense of disparate parts under a unified authority by
virtue of the tax border between Siberia and Muscovy in the Urals.\textsuperscript{15}

Concerning the multi-ethnic empire, Kappeler has demonstrated that it was not
ruled exclusively by force and a bureaucratic hierarchy, but often by sharing
power with native elites. Below the level of ethnic elites, custom and law
remained untouched, and they ruled their people and tribes on their own account,
as long as Moscow regularly received tributes.\textsuperscript{16} This study poses similar ques-
tions, but applies them to a different part of the empire and a different social
group, the Siberian Cossacks. The main question is whether, in the Muscovite
empire, populations generally had access to the tsar and the chancelleries only via
high-ranking intermediaries, and could therefore influence political decisions
only through this channel – if at all. The Siberian Cossacks are a particularly use-
ful social group for the purposes of this investigation. Unlike the ethnopolitical
cases Kappeler and Slezkine studied, they were predominantly – though not
exclusively – Russians, and were never co-opted into the court nobility in the
same way as many native elites.\textsuperscript{17} At the same time, however, Siberian Cossacks
regularly travelled to Moscow and were received at the chancellery and some-
times by the tsar. Analogous to Kappeler’s questions, this study asks how the cus-
tom and laws of the Siberian Cossacks could be made compatible with the
institutional culture of the Muscovite empire. Unlike Kappeler’s cases, however,
the Cossacks, who were mostly of Russian origin, therefore had grown up with
the institutional culture of the empire ingrained within them. Thus, unlike the
native elites, they were not learning about something foreign. This is an interest-
ing point, especially because of the reputation of Cossacks as being rebels: the
reason they fled to the frontiers, it is widely supposed, is because they wished to
escape the restrictions of the Muscovite system. The Cossacks are renowned for
their ‘free spirit’.\textsuperscript{18} Yet this book shows that these ‘rebels’ possessed an intimate
knowledge of how to manipulate the imperial culture to their own advantage.
Also, unlike Kappeler’s ethnopolitical cases, ordinary Siberian Cossacks main-
tained direct contacts with the court without intermediaries and were relatively
frequently received in Moscow. The Cossacks in part adhered to established procedures to be awarded the opportunity to go to Moscow, where they also traded privately, but they also breached these procedures, quite often to the point of openly disobeying and even deposing the tsar’s representative and their official commander, the voevoda. Cossacks are famed for their love of freedom and a ‘democratic’ decision-making process, but historians have failed to put this observation into an analytical framework. Thus, important questions are not addressed: how could democratic institutions fit into the framework of autocracy, especially in Siberia, where historians suspect more rigid military command structures? How could a ‘free’ spirit co-exist with service to the tsar, and reconcile its aspirations to accepting the leadership of the tsar’s voevodas – nobles and landowners from the central areas of Muscovy? This study investigates what happened when empire, beyond the reach of its most effective coercive means of integration, had to rely on a group of people of non-noble, underprivileged origin who had grown up with the imperial culture and were able to work institutions to their own advantage.

In fact, an openly rebellious attitude of the delegates from Siberia constituted a serious problem for the court. In some of the century’s major risings in the capital, Siberian delegates did take part, for example in 1648, when the tsar had to sacrifice his highest dignitaries to the rebels. In most cases, however, the Siberian rebels found it more rewarding to keep within the boundaries of established institutions and nevertheless to press home their agenda, which included important elements of their specific Cossack customs. This ambivalence of institutional permanence and change constitutes one of the important areas of investigation throughout this book.

Institutional analysis applied in history has received considerable attention recently, especially at the Dresden project of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, ‘Institutionality and History’, largely triggered by the transformations in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. While there is a common notion of institutions as per se stable and enduring, the Dresden project has investigated the ways in which institutions become permanent, and the mechanisms of their transformation. Institutionality is characterized, paradoxically, by both permanence and change, since the quest for social stability is basic for its analysis.

Responding to the need for reliability and social order on which most people build their lives, institutions are established, although they, as any means for perpetuating order, are more likely to break down than to remain stable. Therefore, the main effort in maintaining institutions is to adhere to and to fuel the illusion of institutional stability and permanence. However, since empire is dynamic – and changed quickly in Russia due to the early modern Military Revolution and expansion – institutions had to answer to this change. In the literature on the Russian empire, however, institutional change has so far not been high on the agenda. As institutions are part of the cultural and social processes that result in change, institutional change is part of the rise and fall of empires. To uphold the vital illusion of permanence and stability, institutionality has to accommodate change. Siberian Cossacks, like other agents of empire – chancelleries, boyars,
nobles, voevodas, and clerics – answered to these ambivalences in petitions and other documents, finding ways to harness the empire’s institutions to their specific needs.

As is well known from the experience of others, for example large parts of the peasantry that lost their right to petition the tsar during the century and succumbed to serfdom, by no means all groups in the Muscovite empire succeeded in influencing institutions significantly. Yet, whoever can influence the way in which people perceive institutions practises important powers, since others have to rely on them and therefore to adapt to the established definition. Chapter 1 investigates how Siberian Cossacks organized and on which resources of power they drew to influence the tsar’s decisions and the institutional culture of the empire. Chapter 2 discusses the material underpinning of this position – to what effect did Siberian Cossacks communicate and negotiate with the tsar, and how did they maintain themselves? An implicit concern of these chapters is also the contribution Siberian Cossacks made that led other agents of empire to adapt partially to their demands. Chapter 3 investigates the symbolic forms of communication in imperial Siberia, the institutions, their interpretations, and change, in the context of power relations established in the preceding chapters. Chapter 4 explores the ways in which institutions and their interpretations structured administration, and the degree to which it can be called a bureaucracy. Regarding the extent of accountability and efficiency achieved in administration, one of the concerns of Chapter 3 – whether, and to what degree communication, negotiations, and the power resources at the disposal of Siberian Cossacks resulted in a public sphere – will loom large.

One of the major problems in Siberian history remains the question of how the tsar managed to squeeze at least 10 per cent of the state’s budget out of this wild, remote, almost uninhabited and by all contemporary standards inaccessible territory, bereft of virtually all infrastructure except a few wooden fortresses dotted around its vast expanses. The dilemma worsens if we consider that even states much better suited to the demands which the early modern military revolution made on their budgets had to rely on the structures they already found in society. Peter I, however, was surprised that not even the structures usually expected in Muscovite towns, such as the office of elder, existed in Siberia. Trying to explain how Muscovy managed its wealthy but unwieldy Siberian territories, Lantzeff and, following him, Dmytryshyn, have relied on the control the centralizing bureaucracy exerted over Siberia. However, this clear-cut image of control from above collides with the reality of frequent protest against misappropriation of funds by the tsar’s representatives in Siberia, and in general with the well-established insight that bureaucracies work just as well as the degree of public scrutiny to which they are subjected. This was all the more the case since one of the generally accepted reasons for the relatively even functioning of the administration, the considerable level of professionalization of the nobles who operated it, according to Lantzeff, did not apply in distant Siberia, where governors, as is often stressed, enriched themselves beyond all controls. Protest against the enrichment of voevodas, therefore, seems to be one of the
most likely candidates for an explanation of how Muscovy extracted the riches of the Siberian furs. Historical studies, however, have not established a framework for the forms of organization that fuelled these protests that stands up to comparative scrutiny. Therefore, one of the aims of this book is to establish the forms of organization of Siberian Cossacks (see Chapter 1) and to explore the ways by which they made themselves heard.

This book applies some of the results of the discussions of Habermas’s theory of the bourgeois public, which has recently been re-examined by historians more interested in the early modern genesis of the public sphere than in pure ideal types, to a small, but very important section of the Muscovite population, the Siberian town Cossacks. Clearly, the Siberian public does not fit readily into Habermas’s theoretical structure. While Habermas holds staunchly to his separation of the bourgeois public sphere from the ‘representational public’ of the princely court, which ‘did not represent the population but represented its own power to the population’, these historians have pointed out that the bourgeois public was rooted in early forms of public spheres that can best be understood as partitioned, based on face-to-face relations and primarily frequented by particular categories of the population, though generally open to other groups; these early forms of public spheres could even be thematically limited, unlike modern mass media, and did not depend on private property. Applying the conceptual framework of a partitioned and thematically limited public sphere to Muscovy is an approach that has not yet been explored. Kivelson has established that the provincial gentry of the central areas and the higher nobility had a say in government decisions, although their influence was limited to the interstices of autocracy; but all the lower ranks are still considered excluded from political influence.

Since public spheres, imperial institutions and local organizations are all intricately interconnected and only make sense in their mutual context, it is sensible to study and present them in their environment as completely as the sources allow. A narrow local focus helps to manage the diverse and plentiful sources such an approach involves, and a micro-study is best suited to produce the kind of data needed and highlight references between the elements of institutional culture. The last chapter will make use of a suitable body of sources drawing together the threads of the argument by concentrating on one major incident, the Selenga rebellion of 1696 and its repercussions. Focusing on a detailed study of one particular rebellion, Chapter 5 applies the insights developed in the first four chapters to shed new light on this greatest Siberian Cossack rising of the century, and on the ways in which centre and periphery negotiated authority.

**Siberia in the seventeenth century**

The forms of organization and the institutions that structured the complex relationship between Moscow and the Cossacks are related to the turns and twists of the history of the conquest of Siberia, showing that Moscow could not assert its power without compromising. In the early 1580s Ermak and his Cossacks conquered the khanate of Sibir’ in what is now called Western Siberia. After
their eventual defeat, Moscow’s armies took over, and the first Russian fortresses were founded during the late 1580s and 1590s on the territory of the former khanate. In 1604, Tomsk was founded as an important springboard to the east on the brink of the open steppe shielding east–west trade; already in 1608 the Tomsk Cossacks rebelled for the first time. There were further rebellions in 1628, in 1633–4 and in 1636–8; in 1642 the growing town was embroiled in a rebellion during Tukhachevskii’s campaign, and in 1648–50 it was governed by rebellious Cossacks and their elected voevoda. This does not mean that the intervening periods were calm. An inventory drawn up by an enemy of the Tomsk rebels, voevoda Osip Shcherbatyi, based on parts of the lost central archives, claimed as many as nine rebellions up to 1647. Such protests and concomitant periods of temporary self-rule were widespread, but locally limited. Nevertheless, they concerned almost all Siberian towns at different times. Moreover, the Time of Troubles (1598–1613) meant a serious decline of Moscow’s rule beyond the Urals. Despite such impediments to the tsar’s control, already in 1639 Cossack bands had reached the Pacific seaboard. Russian intrusion into Siberia took two paths — in the north a combination of navigation in small ships along the White Sea shore and river transport attracted merchants and trappers from Northern Russian towns. The late sixteenth century predominance of merchants in this area ended in 1601, when voevodas and Cossacks sent by the tsar set up the town of Mangazeia on the river Taz as a trading centre and for the collection of the fur tribute. Other outposts were set up in Turukhansk in 1604 and Khantasisk in 1620 on the banks of the lower Enisei. In the south, another network of rivers along the Irtish, Ob, Ket, Enisei and Angara led as far as Iakutsk (founded 1632) on the river Lena and the Pacific ocean by various waterways. On the portage between the Ket and a tributary to the Enisei, fort Makovskiy was founded in 1618, and Eniseisk in 1619 north of the confluence of the Enisei and Angara rivers. To the south, movement was far slower, and restricted to some mountainous pockets in the Altai, where Kuznetsk was established in 1618 south of Tomsk, and to Krasnoiarsk (1628), which remained an important but embattled outpost in the steppe throughout the century. In the partly wooded lands on the rim of the open steppe Russians encountered protracted nomad resistance, which they could not overcome until late Petrine times. During the 1640s the Buryats around Lake Baikal were subdued by Cossacks from Iakutsk and Eniseisk; but the emigration of the local Buryats meant that Irkutsk was founded only in 1661. During a phase of internal Chinese unrest Cossacks established an independent territory on the Amur, which, however, was forced to seek Muscovite support when the Manchus fought back to regain what they considered their dominion. The ensuing war lasted until the peace of Nerchinsk in 1689 returned the Amur to China in exchange for the promise of increased trade contacts.

By the early 1650s, Muscovy had, in little over half a century, extended nominal control over the enormous territory between the Urals and the Pacific, albeit not yet all of what today is called Siberia. The conquest thus was rapid, considering that today’s Siberia comprises about one-twelfth of the earth’s
landmass. Considering that tsarist power also suffered serious setbacks, this rapidity raises an important question. While military technology and the network of waterways contributed to this success,\textsuperscript{39} an explanation is lacking as to how the shortage of private capital in Muscovy, which could have impeded this quick expansion, was overcome. After all, Muscovy managed to out-maneuvre England’s powerful Muscovy Company, thwarted plans for a dominion over northern Russia and Siberia and a quest for direct trade with China all through the Time of Troubles, by withholding information but not without commanding significant local support (Chapter 1). This book asks how in a cash-starved country Muscovites managed to overcome distance in terms of power and economy and how this huge territory was integrated politically and institutionally (Chapter 2).

The renewed interest of historians in Siberia following \textit{Perestroika} and the break-up of the Soviet Union concentrated on the natives. Forsyth’s challenge to Soviet interpretations of a close partnership of Russian and native lower classes has highlighted the contribution of brute force to the Siberian balance of power, devastating the natives in particular during the first phase of conquest.\textsuperscript{40} In turn this challenge elicited a new concern with the natives’ own role in the economic conquest of a sub-continent which was ravaging the fur resources. These studies have also highlighted the fact that during the seventeenth century Russian power was largely restricted to the grid of rivers – with the exception of the more populated western Siberian areas immediately surrounding Tobol’sk, with settled or semi-nomadic native populations. They suffered from voevodas’ efforts to resettle Russian peasants to feed the Cossacks, occupying native grazing or hunting grounds in another voevoda’s district, often territorially overlapping with each other. However, collectors of the fur tax relied on native notions of taxes, which had developed under the Mongols. It was impossible regularly to tax nomadic hunters in the endless forests bare of infrastructure without attracting them by some means. This meant that a strong element of barter had to be added to the vague promise of security made by the Cossacks. While this exchange was unequal in terms of an ideal market, introducing a strong extra-economic element, the widespread claims that Cossacks deceived native hunters are partly misleading: the assumption that natives could not judge the value of goods offered betrays a degree of arrogance and ignorance of fundamental economic laws. Prices relate to the relative scarcity of goods in different locations and to the distances wares have to travel to reach markets.\textsuperscript{41} Kotoshikhin, the fugitive clerk of the Ambassadorial chancellery already knew that the depletion of furs in western Siberia and the need to turn further east had increased prices.\textsuperscript{42} The organizational efforts to overcome the enormous distances involved in the fur trade are one of the subjects considered here. Some of the frequent, but locally limited native rebellions in the Taiga and Tundra served to renegotiate the terms of trade. Fear reigned over the small and isolated teams of \textit{iasak} collectors in the endless forests. There, Cossacks were more than officials – they acted as agents of the tsar’s enterprise in the fur trade and simultaneously on their own account.
Outside Russia, this new interest in Siberian natives is not matched by any significant contribution to the study of their foes and partners: the Cossacks as the main agents of the tsar’s power in Siberia. Treating them briefly, Lantzeff considered the ‘esprit de corps’ of the Cossack organization as exclusively inspired by the Cossack oath, the hardships of their service and mutual responsibility to the tsar. However, he did not explain why, despite the substantial profits that could be made in Siberia, nobles either did not settle there – or turned into Cossacks.43 Longworth traces Cossacks in their diverse regional settings, refuting nationalist myths. He claims two different styles of living, the Muscovite, pertinent to the forest, and the Cossack, a ‘child of the open steppe’. Despite being ethnically Slavic, they were naturally opposed to anything Muscovite, unless they allied against still more formidable enemies, the Tatars:

Born of disorder and reared in the dangerous borderlands between the Russians of the northern forests and the destructive Tatars of the southern steppes, [they] had the self-reliant man’s contempt for security.

(Philip Longworth)

This romantic, individualist image of the Cossacks – besides denying nomads their right of pasture – collides with Siberian reality. Struggling to explain how freedom-loving men like Ermak’s Cossacks could become the ‘unwitting tentacle of the Russian empire’, Longworth suggests that they were unusually submissive to their leader from early on in the conquest of the Siberian Khanate.44 As Chapter 1 shows, from a Cossack point of view there is nothing particular in the chronicles concerning Ermak’s expedition. Rather, this narrative, which was soon promulgated throughout Russia, stresses the same mechanisms that functioned among the ‘free’ Cossacks of the western steppe frontier. They were further adapted to Siberian conditions, in particular since the Cossack way of life engulfed all the tsar’s Siberian servitors. Cossacks, musketeers and even the nominally higher-ranking deti boiarstke were known as ‘Cossacks’ and used this term about themselves.45 They also called themselves ‘servitors’ or even ‘serving Cossacks’, but there was no general rule as to the specific context in which this occurred – all sources are more or less related to service, and the few surviving private letters do not allow any firm distinction of the contexts in which these terms were used.

In the instructions issued in Moscow to each voevoda, they wielded impressive powers. Originally field commanders, they had first superseded civil administration by the namesnik late in the sixteenth century in frontier areas, where military leadership was essential; during the Time of Troubles they became more common in towns removed from the frontier. In larger towns, the voevoda was required to decide harmoniously – conjointly, without mutual hindrance, and without squabbles – with his associates, a second voevoda, a secretary or a pod’iachii s pripis’iu, who were usually appointed and given instructions together.46 In Siberia, this system, with roots in Byzantine ideas about power-sharing and in Mongol double-circuit administration,47 was conducive to
conflicts among the voevodas and afforded to Cossacks opportunities to interfere with administration. The voevoda commanded the Cossacks and headed the local voevoda’s office, consisting mainly of undersecretaries (pod”iachii) handling the records, and the sworn officials for tax and grain stocks. The voevoda held the supreme court of law on the local level and decided over recruitment of rank-and-file, service assignments, allotments of salary and the right to travel. His powers were, according to the instruction, restricted by divine advice, by the requirement not to offend the local population, by the associates’ mutual agreement, and by the tsar’s decree, although the exact delimitation of the voevoda’s authority and the issues to be referred to the chancellery and the tsar were not defined. Theory aside, some of his kin and servants accompanied the voevoda, if anyone at all, especially in smaller towns. When opposed by the Cossacks, he was in the minority; thus, rebellions frequently overruled the voevoda’s decisions, as Aleksandrov and Pokrovskii have shown. To explain the Cossacks’ tenacity, they have relied on Western European models of the ‘estate-representative monarchy’ and of absolutism, which have been criticized for their reliance on legal arguments even where applied to France or England. Concerning Muscovy, evidence of an ‘estate-representative monarchy’ which preceded absolutism is particularly scant. The so-called ‘zemskie sobory’ or assemblies of the land, Muscovy’s main participatory gatherings lacked codified regulations, were convoked by the tsar and served to consent to tax bills rather than discuss them. Recent studies of Cossack communities west of the Urals have not produced significant evidence for the assertion that Cossack identity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries hinged primarily upon the juridical status marking their distinction from other subjects of a ruler. According to Boeck, there was no common Cossack experience except for their extra deal with the ruler, accepting that Cossack history disappears in a ‘story … told in terms of diversity’. Though it will not be disputed that Cossacks adapted to their environment and were quite capable negotiators in remuneration and status issues, neither Boeck’s explanation nor the model of the estate-representative monarchy can adequately explain why they had the necessary resources to do so, and the nature of these resources.

As bureaucracy grew throughout the seventeenth century, Aleksandrov and Pokrovskii claim the tsar lost interest in the less controllable, but fully fledged estates. Yet, as recent studies on western princely states have shown, even the most ‘absolute’ monarchs had to rely on their estates to some degree, realizing the importance of consultation and consent. Thus the question needs to be addressed whether there were other reasons for the loss of political significance that Cossack forms of organization suffered in the eighteenth century.

Russian historians increasingly doubt the interpretation of the Siberian records in terms of an estate of the Cossacks. Akishin has unearthed the reformer Peter I’s surprise about the lack of the Muscovite precursors of the town hall in Siberian towns. Cossack groups lacked permanence and coherence to a degree that makes it dubious to consider them as estates. Vershinin has consequently re-evaluated Siberian voevodas’ aspirations and service, hitherto only discussed as an aspect
of increased state power, leading him to conclude that voevodas were the only moving force in Siberia.\footnote{56}

These studies, however, do not explore the relationship of Cossacks and the voevodas, or ask why Siberian Cossacks were useful to Moscow except being inexpensive. Studies of the Terek and Don Cossacks notice this usefulness, yet explain it merely by the Muscovite state’s weakness and the low maintenance sufficient for Cossacks. The early modern military reforms are usually measured in terms of increased discipline and regularization. However, the ‘mercurial’ – in terms of loyalty and discipline – Don Cossacks were often more effective against Tatar forces and Ottoman forts than regular Muscovite armies.\footnote{57} This is not the only unnoticed contradiction in current accounts of Cossacks. The assertion that Cossack institutions were at the same time despotic and democratic is left unexplained. Democracy among Cossacks is taken at face value, without further explanation as to how it worked, how far it was democratic and how this alleged democracy translated into – or at least co-existed with – military cost-effectiveness.\footnote{58} Thus there is a gap in our knowledge about how the Cossack group functioned, and how it related to the voevoda, to the tsar and to the chancellery system.

Based on military sociology and anthropology of the steppe rim, this study shows how the Cossacks developed flexible and inclusive forms of organization (Chapter 1). Concentrating on the Cossacks in Poland-Lithuania, Kumke has shown that a very specific form of primary group was responsible for the peculiar characteristics of the Cossacks, noticed but not explained satisfyingly in a welter of studies.\footnote{59} Such a group, which I will call after Kumke ‘Personenverband’,\footnote{60} served the Cossacks as a basis for the articulation of their needs.\footnote{61} These forms of organization and the institutional links between the Cossacks and Moscow offer a coherent explanation for the phenomena of the rapid establishment and consolidation of a Russian Siberia.

In a country renowned, even by early modern standards, for its cash-starved, weak market relations and paltry infrastructure, private entrepreneurs on their own could not unleash the enormous dynamism of the Russian expansion in Siberia. Pressing economic needs and political considerations contributed to setting up a surprisingly effective state enterprise. Monopolies bestowed on private merchant corporations by European colonial empires struggled with the same problems of local graft and petty trade undermining their privileges, as did Muscovy in Siberia.\footnote{62} Nevertheless, Siberian Cossacks were not simply brigands, as they are often portrayed.\footnote{63} The Siberian chancellery did its best to motivate Cossacks in the way Hanseatic merchants did by offering their sailors a small parcel of stowage room (‘\textit{Führung}’) during hauls.\footnote{64} Relying on the wording of petitions, and impelled under Soviet rule to present the Cossack lower class in Siberia as disadvantaged and poor, scholars have overlooked this issue (Chapter 2).

Studies of Siberian government and bureaucracy agree that it was ineffective and corrupt.\footnote{65} While accepting that this might be the outcome if modern criteria are applied, this study re-evaluates the very conditions of effectiveness under which the Siberian bureaucracy functioned. Challenging conventional interpretations,
this book shows that, under early modern conditions and in a frontier environment, enormously distant from the centre, the administration did surprisingly well (Chapter 4). To a considerable degree, charges of corruption still await scrutiny, since sources are sparse or do not contain the right kind of information. Yet, in several cases, close study of the sources shows that ‘corruption’ is often a misleading label for allegations of over-charging against officials; moreover, the concept was unfamiliar to seventeenth century Russians. These assessments concur with a number of recent reappraisals of early modern Russian bureaucracy, which concede that in essential issues, such as defending the frontier or redeeming slaves, Muscovite chancelleries were more effective than in extractive fields.66

Muscovite chancelleries can best be described as a historical bureaucracy, in particular since, diverging from modern terms, they coupled a considerable degree of professionalism and adherence to norms which they formulated themselves, with a general acceptance that people were to be treated according to scaled social value. Where the voice of a boyar weighed more than that of a member of the petty gentry, Cossacks and other lower class Muscovites needed mechanisms allowing them access to justice and the ability to defend their local interests. Yet individuals were often lost in this environment – chancellery clerks only considered claims promising a handsome reward.67 Even so, members of some non-noble groups could expect the defence of their needs in the chancellery system against infringements due to over-riding concerns such as taxation or military demands.68 The Cossack group therefore was essential to providing the necessary backing for soliciting Cossack needs in Moscow or with the voevodas.

Since Cossack groups were not permanent, while negotiations demanded a high degree of permanence and organization, a crucial question arises: How could these groups sustain an institutional order that allowed for regular negotiations about salary, the terms of service and exchange of valuable commodities? To answer this question, the nature of negotiations and soliciting has to be addressed. In Muscovy, the public was censored and public criticism often needed forceful backing akin to a rebellion to make itself heard. How could negotiation take place under such conditions? In this regard, perhaps, Siberia differed most from the rest of Muscovy. The use of institutions diverged on both sides of the Urals, not least since frontier conditions isolated each town – and even more so a Cossack group in the Taiga or the steppe – to a greater or lesser degree from influences outside its local area. Still, these men were in particular need of contacts to Moscow, the voevodas, and the chancellery system, for they lived on various kinds of trade or services delivered to merchants. Since the addressee of litigation was in all cases a Moscow chancellery or the tsar, it was essential that an institution common to both Siberia and Moscow was invoked. Social actors have commonly used institutions such as monarchy to express contradictory concerns. In doing so, litigants as well as wire-pullers had to rely on an approved language, claiming to derive from the fonts of monarchy rather than challenging its foundations. Cossacks – among others – learned to apply this language in a suitable way to convey their concerns. To explain this behaviour, this study makes use of recent developments in the analysis of institutions. In this book, institutions are seen as institutional
mechanisms, consisting of concepts, patterns of behaviour and symbolic representations of their aims. Institutions can be envisaged as ‘symbolic orders’ – not implying that institutions are ‘just’ emblematic, but that every ‘order’ bears an institutional form, in which its principles are expressed. This can be conveyed in any institutionally regulated action, in gestures and material signs. What usually, even in scientific vocabulary, is called an institution is on closer examination an organization or a form of interaction, in which the visibility of its order is put on centre stage: a church, state, family and kinship, educational establishments, sometimes also large-scale enterprises.69

It is true that organizations cannot exist without institutional mechanisms. However, institutional mechanisms can exist without organizations; for example in the etiquette governing letter-writing, the socially elaborated norms and symbols of romantic love or heightened forms of friendship. On the other hand, to codify and make even these norms controllable by specialists, an organization can be established, as in the eighteenth century German ‘friendship alliances’ (Freundschaftsbünde). Thus an institutional mechanism can be sustained as mere conventions, requiring a social base but not a permanent organization,70 as was the case with the Siberian Cossack Personenverbände.

Such a notion provides a possible resolution of recent controversies about the form of Muscovite government in the seventeenth century. The original meaning of the obligatory self-ascription as ‘slave of the tsar’ in the regalian salutation contained in petitions or, according to social rank and group, ‘orphan of the sovereign’ was eroded over a long time and even used in private correspondence.71 Kivelson has clarified Muscovites’ preference for the honourable state of servitude, which in their eyes was ethically different from that of abject slaves serving the infidels or unjust masters. To bring oneself into an unfree position could be an active, self-defending action: if the tax base eroded and neighbours fled wilfully, the subsistence, dignity, and cultural values of those left behind were endangered. Therefore the townspeople and peasants demanding the return of refugees – eventually, but unintendedly, leading to their own enserfment – did not demonstrate a spiteful, self-enslaving mentality, but aimed at securing fundamental rights of survival, order and continuity. On the one hand, the master who was considered rightful and observed Orthodox custom – for example, feeding them in case of bad harvests that were frequent due to climatic conditions at the margin of agricultural feasibility, even though in reality that obligation was naturally not always and by everyone observed – was allowed to do almost everything to them. On the other hand, there was still a notion of obligations that could mean that someone who acquired these powers without proper justification could be considered a sham. Considering the unsafe conditions in Muscovy, the tsar and chancellery system did a remarkably good job in propagating the tsar’s image of piety that secured the most basic needs and values – such as redeeming the vast numbers of captives taken during small-scale nomad raids that trickled through the frontier defences. Cash-starved Muscovy produced a welter of economic failures, and although the state was part of the process, it was not the only reason for this condition; it is thus not surprising that Muscovites perceived the state’s role as
rather relieving. In this sense, in seventeenth century Muscovite experience servitude and bondage were mostly preferably compared to an often, though not always and to everybody, exceedingly unsafe state of freedom or ‘at will’ – a notion that carried implications for both the victims and the perpetrators of acts of rebellion that were often difficult to distinguish from burgeoning criminality.\textsuperscript{72} The Muscovite nexus between enserfment, illegal migration, and criminality, however, cannot be observed in Siberia.

The meaning of the salutation depended only partly on changing connotations of the words, but also on the actual balance of power, which according to Goldfrank and others, was tilted decidedly to the advantage of the tsar.\textsuperscript{73} Among the more convincing arguments are fiscal demands, requirements to serve and impoverishment by demands of service, and the crown’s sense of its prerogatives – according to this view, consilium in Russia never bound the ruler – which prevented coalescence of classes or of estates demanding political rights.\textsuperscript{74} Furthermore, the prohibition of private societies, clubs and education until the second half of the century, and the sowing of mutual distrust via slovo i delo gosudarevo – the obligatory denunciation of broadly defined utterances and actions directed against the tsar – rendered individuals incapable of resolute action.\textsuperscript{75} Yet, as will be demonstrated, in Siberia at least, the balance of power was much more equal. Western historiography has overlooked this, since the main agent of power in Siberia, the Cossacks, seemed organizationally elusive.\textsuperscript{76} However, flexibility should not be misunderstood as absence of structure. More inclined to take seriously the evidence of everyday life than narrowly confined legal or constitutional issues, Soviet historians have provided deep but ill-defined insights which have until now proven difficult to reconcile with general historical terms and concepts.

Intriguingly, Pokrovskii and Aleksandrov have claimed that the sovereign’s word and affair (slovo i delo gosudarevo)\textsuperscript{77} promoted unity and resolute action in Siberia, despite the understanding of this norm for Muscovy west of the Urals. This, in turn, contradicts their own conviction that a unified ‘political structure’ existed on both sides of the Urals.\textsuperscript{78} Thus, a coherent explanation of local resolute action in the framework of the institutional culture of empire is lacking.\textsuperscript{79}

Analysis of the ‘sovereign’s word and affair’ (Chapter 3) with the institutionalist toolbox sheds new light on a protracted controversy. In the last two decades, several approaches have been suggested for the study of the particularistic interests and the aspect of litigation expressed in the terms of the sovereign’s affair, which is identified as an ideology. As Perrie concludes, their drawback is the impossibility of reconciling monarchist illusions of the rebels with their insubordination to the monarch’s decrees, especially when the latter became more openly condemning of the rebels’ actions.\textsuperscript{80} All these approaches to the sovereign’s affair fall short of resolving a general problem – how could both Cossacks and their superiors appeal to the sovereign’s word and affair to uphold divergent interests, given that they had to make use of the same unified symbolic order in which the arbitrary decision of the tsar was considered binding?

Rehberg, Schimmelpfennig and other recent theorists of institutions agree that institutions often function exactly in this way. Institutions provided a common
point of reference for divergent interests. The actual meaning of empire, of papal authority, of English, French or German monarchy was never beyond dispute. Relative to specific localities, social groups, time and the distribution of power in society, divergent interpretations of an institution were prevalent. These interpretations were always contested and, at the same time, to foster stability and permanence in a social reality that is always more prone to institutional break-down, claimed to derive from authoritative sources and to be expressed in approved idioms. To stress this function of a forum for divergent interests within what was considered divine providence, or what in modern organizations is a set of rules and symbolic representations, these authors have coined the term ‘guiding idea’.81

An institution is contested since those who are physically, intellectually and socially capable of claiming it for their actions can apply it as a resource of power.82 Institutional analysis identifies different guiding ideas competing for the legitimate interpretation of an institution. A guiding idea is a determination of what ‘the state’, the Roman Catholic Church, ‘art’ etc., or ‘the’ sovereign’s affair should be at a given moment. Institutional analysis shows that this selectively gains acceptance from among a multitude of guiding ideas, which compete and are contested. Every guiding idea is only temporarily successful by being set apart from and above a complex of often-incompatible potential orientations. Since the guiding idea is a product of struggle and a synthesis of contradicting issues, it disowns many of the competing senses and drafts of order. Yet this is the very reason why its validity is never uncontested and depends on different places, situations, interests and social groups. The guiding idea of empire, of papalism,83 of French, English or German monarchy was always contested and, at the same time, from the perspectives of divergent needs was claimed as being unified, secured from the authentic sources and therefore irrefutable.84 Institutional analysis contributes to the study of pre-modern communication since it allows for the expression of divergent needs within the limits of a shared institution, for example the sovereign’s word and affair, or service.85

The latter argument is important for the history of the Muscovite empire. Recent studies concentrating on Muscovy’s regions and local politics have revealed that the centre often found it hard to influence them, and was forced to make significant concessions. Even after the final defeat of the Solovki monastery revolt in 1676 monks in this and other great northern monasteries pursued politics independent of the ecclesiastical authorities. Schismatic monasteries and congregations in other regions and in particular in Karelia were often inspired by particularistic leanings.86 Extensive Moscow carters’ settlements were left off the hook of police control.87 The chancelleries supported northern peasants in their struggles with landlords encroaching on their rights and lands.88 Far from being the all-controlling central power, Moscow even had to compromise with the southern frontier garrisons which were the instruments of its authority.89 As late as the early 1680s, responsiveness to southern needs was an important element to the success of military reform since southerners enjoyed the opportunity to renegotiate their relationship by temporarily putting themselves out of reach. Regarding food supplies, Moscow made far-reaching concessions,
Despite the negative implications for such essential issues as military reform, for the central Russian provinces, Kivelson stresses the lack of personnel in voevoda offices, therefore decrees disapproved by local strongmen and their rivals often could not be carried out. Patronage networks, including locals and central chancellery staff, formed parallel structures of power. Already to contemporaries, the seventeenth century was known as the ‘rebellious century’, a condition constraining the tsar’s rule. Perhaps the only area under Moscow’s unrestricted sway was the western provinces suffering from the burdens of war, which the tsar could discipline through the military. In what amounts to a significant shift of focus on a new basis of evidence, the question has therefore been raised what the centre could contribute to regional politics, and how far and by what means it could control the regions.

How central control was possible at all under early modern conditions which did not provide most of the means of communication we are used to, in an adverse climate, an impoverished countryside and with enormous distances to be covered, is a question historiography has long answered along conventional lines. Concerning Muscovy as a whole, with too great an emphasis on the perhaps untypical reign of Ivan IV, historians have pointed out that autocracy served as a kind of Procrustean bed, cutting off locally assertive communities militarily and by resettling them. Local elected officials and the voevodas, Moscow’s representatives in the provinces, who frequently asked for detailed orders to guide their actions, were taken at face value to prove that local initiative was curtailed in favour of centralized control. Yet this policy ended in disarray, plunging the nascent empire into a period of internal troubles at the turn of the sixteenth century. Andreas Kappeler has provided a more subtle explanation noting that the Muscovite political system included different modes of integration and various kinds of social groups, often without changing them, cultivating and co-opting local elites. Yet while it is part of the explanation that local nobles became part of the governing elites, this still does not completely explain how Moscow could exert any influence on the increasing number of regions it governed. Kivelson has pointed out that even the pomest’e, long considered the main tool in a conscious effort at uprooting and homogenizing the nobility and gentry, did not guarantee that state orders were obeyed in the regions. Apart from curbing attempts at separation, this instrument did not much improve the state’s authority over these territories. Resettled gentry developed a new sense of local community and tended to concentrate their lands within one or a few rather circumscribed provinces. Contributing to our understanding of centre-periphery relations, Kivelson envisions relations between Moscow and the central provinces through the prism of noble patronage networks, forming a parallel power structure to the official bureaucracy. At the apex of these competing networks stood the high and middling nobility in the Moscow chancelleries, related to local figureheads who could mobilize sufficient support among neighbours and among their own peasants. Clients of particular officials at the centre, these men from among the provincial gentry provided pressure groups drawn from the latter and their peasants to defend their more circumscribed local interests.
Bushkovitch has shown that, even under Peter I, noble networks continued to influence high politics.97 Historians of Siberia have tended to portray patronage networks as proof of an authoritarian society, unfolding throughout the seventeenth century, which pushed aside earlier, more participative modes of social life. Yet in terms of domination, patronage had more ambivalent effects than is often thought, particularly in the Siberian trading frontier. Where significant trade and dangerous steppe frontier conditions combined to create regional bottlenecks, the Cossack group, the Personenverband, wielded important powers. Perhaps surprisingly, in distant Siberia patronage was available closer to the local level than in central Muscovy due to the peculiar administrative structure.98 Moscow aimed to overcome early modern conditions of undergovernment and the potential threat of separation, exacerbated by Siberian distances and bad communications, by establishing the razriad-system; yet this move could be made effective only by conceding significant political influence to local power brokers. Thus, the Cossack group often balanced the terms of an unequal relationship implied by patronage toward its own advantage.99

Nancy Kollmann has chosen another approach, demonstrating that, in Muscovy, the defence of personal honour of increasing parts of the population by the tsar and his courts was one of the means employed by the centre to integrate the empire.100 In Siberia, too, this was an important means of projecting one’s acclaim among the Cossacks, not least since honour was a precondition for being elected to the more responsible positions. Although the tsar and his courts in theory protected honour, it depended on the Cossack group, since election documents had to be signed by Cossacks.101

In his influential account of Siberia’s administration in the seventeenth century, Lantzeff overlooked patronage issues. He claimed that Siberia’s administration was akin to a huge business enterprise on the part of the Muscovite government. The ‘modern’ bureaucratic features he noted in the administration rested on several assumptions that recent researchers have rejected.102 They no longer perceive the great princely clans and the non-titled families of royal servants as constant rivals in a struggle for power at court, but rather as interwoven strands in the fabric of a single elite. Contrary to earlier interpretations positing that Muscovite politics can be understood as the struggle of a declining court aristocracy to defend its power against the challenge of a rising provincial gentry, high-ranking clans and the tsar shared a common interest in the effectiveness of the government and the well-being of the realm.103 The secretaries, whom Lantzeff considered the harbingers of bureaucracy, accompanied voevodas only during the initial decades of the seventeenth century to some of the more important destinations in Siberia.104 Later, the role of secretaries, who were raised from the lower ranks of Muscovite society to become heads of chancelleries, diminished, as nobles noticed the increasing power of the administration. Brown has questioned their independence from court factions. In Brown’s reading, all chancellery personnel, from the loftiest boyar to the humblest scribe, sought their niche where they could make a living. They could rely on their own chancellery
staff to defend their interests, but not on the staff of other chancelleries. Collegiate arrangements had only limited relevance to restricting arbitrary rule, not least since only bigger, administratively more significant towns were held by two voevodas.

Customs administration was another field in which the Siberian chancellery tried to introduce as much accountability as possible. The Siberian chancellery tried to further this aim by employing skilfully selected personnel from different social groups and by introducing controls. Merchants from larger towns in Siberia and European Russia staffed the customs houses in the main towns. This was a profitable office since Siberian Russians petitioned for the honour of being allowed to select customs officials among their own as soon as local communities became solvent enough to guarantee the exact and profitable performance of this office. However, voevodas often infringed on the business of the customs officer. Both were instructed to supervise and report each other’s illegal trading activities, but only the customs officer, chosen in a different town, enjoyed independence – he was exempt from the voevoda’s jurisdiction, but without autonomous powers of command. In some rebellions, the customs officer provided the seals needed to safeguard the passage of petitioners to the tsar. They sometimes shared a common interest since voevodas allied with the great Moscow merchants and their representatives, to smooth their illegal business and for mutual assistance with credit, safeguarding and intercession at the Siberian chancellery. In smaller settlements sworn men were chosen to supervise tax collection. Where local merchants were absent but trade was strong, Cossacks could be chosen. The guards patrolling roads between Siberia and European Russia to prevent smuggling were also recruited from Cossacks and sworn men. At the official border post of Verkhotur’e, voevodas were controlled on entering and leaving Siberia. Fixed amounts of specified wares and moneys were assigned to every position, which voevodas could not exceed in theory; in practice, however, a more flexible attitude prevailed. Even so, to prevent excessive smuggling, voevodas’ wares were sealed and listed at the local customs house. Similar controls applied to merchants and trappers, who were controlled at each customs station, where they were to pay the tithe.

Consequently, Siberian administration cannot be regarded as a ‘modern bureaucracy’, or at least as bureaucratic only in a more restricted sense, as Chapter 4 will show in detail. Ultimately, the Siberian chancellery could not rely exclusively on established procedure to extract revenues from Siberia. Lantzeff noted that the feeding practices of earlier times marred orderly administration. Nevertheless, he did not reconcile his wider assertion that the evident effectiveness of Siberian administrative practices represented ‘a step toward the bureaucratic administration of more modern times’. It also remains unclear how the Siberian chancellery managed to contribute, according to conservative estimates, on average about 10 per cent of the state’s budget; moreover, it was rare convertible revenue. As elsewhere in the early modern era, the tsars had to rely on established local communities or elites to pursue their aim of increasing returns; in the case of Siberia, these were mainly the Cossacks. What, then, were the incentives for loyal service to the tsar?
Answers to the problem of integration provided for Siberia rely on the military preponderance of the musket when combined with fortifications and other military innovations. Providing an advantage in defensive situations, they nevertheless did not help much when collecting *tasak*. In the forests, unwieldy muskets were often less useful than quick loading and silent bows. Another explanation concentrates on the waterway system allowing rapid movement across the subcontinent.\(^{114}\) Nevertheless, the rivers still forced Muscovite traders, Cossacks and couriers to travel huge distances, across burdensome portages. Natural networks of transportation and technical innovations do not explain how such an enterprise was organized. One of the earliest historians of Siberia, Gerhard Müller, stressed the role of the state to explain the apparent success of Muscovite colonization of Siberia, but did not address many of the problems of such an approach.\(^{115}\) Early modern princely states could find it difficult to effectively govern even a town like Leonberg, close by the residency in southwest Germany.\(^{116}\) An oft-repeated saying goes ‘the sky is high and the tsar is far away’. While the latter presumption cannot be denied, treating distance as a given parameter misses the main point. Over the centuries, Russians have shown often enough that they disregarded distance to a degree difficult to imagine in most European environments. This disregard of distance depended on the institutional environment. What counted was that the focal points of the trading network, the central markets, the trading posts and fortresses were organized by common institutions. On their way to or from Moscow, Siberian Cossacks did not ask for the ‘essence’ of institutions, or which social structure deserved the name institution. They were interested in institutional mechanisms that could stabilize social relations so overstretched in Siberian conditions. It was an accomplishment to transform the contingent into something ‘necessary’ which ‘lasted’, even if on closer inspection the actual change was visible. This aspect of coercing and restraining regulations, which nevertheless simultaneously empowered individuals and local communities, is treated by institutional analysis. Institutional attainments can relieve, restrict, or function as a resource for producing something new and improve potentials of knowledge and interaction. In these capacities, they always have to be related to power potentialities, to privilege and overt as well as covert inequality.\(^{117}\) As long as Cossacks could rely on these institutional structures and standards, even for recently recruited and often impoverished Cossacks, the dangers of a journey through the steppe frontier lasting up to nearly a year in one direction could become calculable. Institutions such as the sovereign’s affair, salary, partial tax-exemptions, material support for travelling to Moscow, elections and the right to give advice to the commander or voevoda also amounted to privilege. It rendered Cossack status in Siberia attractive to vagrants, natives, peasants and even merchants or their relatives.

Since authority in the steppe had collapsed due to the disintegration of the successors of the Mongol Empire, in the resulting power vacuum, organization was the most sought after resource. In its absence, the southern borderlands depopulated due to frequent raids from nomad groups, which had an inclination to split and, despite autochthonous forms of obedience, engaged in a ‘search for central
authority’ which could be extended to outside forces. Once such an organization was established, many merchants from Bukhara established permanent representatives or themselves in Tobol’sk – the first step towards direct Russo-Chinese trade. While organizations rely on institutional mechanisms, these cannot be set up quickly. Establishing institutions entails huge ‘hidden’ costs, since they depend on acceptance by a wide array of social organizations and professional fields. It is this wide applicability of an institution and the expected behaviour that makes it attractive and provides tangible benefits to agents. Consequently, it is also very expensive to change institutions – the more broadly they are disseminated, the more agents have to change their habits and their acquired behaviour.

It was therefore a momentous decision of the Moscow grand princes to adopt the title of tsar, resounding in the nomad societies in the form of the ‘White tsar/khan’. The purported Chinggisid descent was of particular use to the Cossacks, drawing their name from outcasts of the Tatar/Mongol army. Throughout the Siberian steppe frontier, adoption of the title by the grand princes meant that anyone who accepted the suzerainty of the Moscow tsar enjoyed tangible benefits in interaction and trade with those nomads that sought loose alliance and trade opportunities in Muscovy rather than with its enemies. As shown in Chapter 1, Siberian Cossacks grasped this reality. It is these co-ordinating services the tsars provided that historians have underestimated. They were also substantial in the organization of frontier defences and the redemption of slaves captured by nomad bands throughout the southern frontier.

Institutional co-ordination and a chance of obtaining a favourable outcome kept a stream of petitions flowing – 70 per cent of personal petitions were confirmed and signed by the tsar or the chancellery; reiteration was prohibited only if the tsar had signed a definite decree. Power was generated from a torrent of information collected, documented and compared in the chancelleries. Yet, unlike the stern and brutal reactions to Cossack and peasant rebellions on the western side of the Urals, town rebellions in Siberia were much more difficult to suppress. Any concentration of troops was too expensive to supply, and of necessity would have depleted the fur resources, which were paramount in any consideration of Siberian politics. In Siberia, investigations and trials, good leadership, concessions and trade opportunities to a large degree took the place of centrally organized, naked force in the pacification of Cossack rebellions.

**Empire and expansion**

Muscovy’s expansion is a phenomenon of a peripheral, largely medieval Christian princely state transforming itself into a European great power within 150 years. It did so by supplementing and backing up increasingly up-to-date technologies and forms of organization with medieval and steppe politics and culture, building in the process, that was fraught with setbacks and sudden, unexpected leaps, a Eurasian empire.
Since the fourteenth century, Muscovy collected the lands of Rus’, which it considered its legitimate inheritance, although they were mostly under Lithuanian rule, forging a unitary state. Following the conquest of Kazan’ 1552 and Astrakhan 1556, it became a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious empire gathering the lands of the Golden Horde and controlling the commercial arteries of Northern Eurasia.

Muscovy employed different means of integration during the collection of the lands of Rus’; most of them were variants of those employed by other princely states surviving the early modern processes of concentration and integration. These methods were designed to increase the level of taxation craved by the developing fiscal-military state to finance the growing needs of warfare in an age in which new military techniques cropped up permanently and were constantly spread by mercenaries. They ranged from co-opting local elites, mobilizing localism to enhance the state’s local presence, establishing a complex chancery system, to the forced mass relocations used in dealing with important border provinces like Novgorod, Smolensk, Pskov, Kazan’ or the soon lost Polotsk, where bonds between local communities were especially strong after the long wars and frequent changing of sides in the conflicts in which Muscovy engaged its western neighbours. By contrast, in eastern and southern Orthodox provinces sporting strong local communities, like Ryazan, forced relocations were a very limited phenomenon, planned in advance, which allowed affected servitors a degree of manoeuvre even during the Oprichnina. In these areas, as anywhere in the settled parts of the realm, the centralizing state profited from its increasing administrative leverage slowly developing throughout the sixteenth century, combining centrally appointed and locally elected officials, while locals benefited from formalized practices making informal patronage more efficient and providing a degree of security and order.

Heavy reliance on the middle and lower service cavalrymen in a bellicose period, however, meant that peasants increasingly lost their rights and were excluded from participation in the system of integrated local and central administration and its benefits. Often fleeing from exploitation and oppression, they sought wealthy boyars who could afford to manage estates more leniently, while others swelled the numbers of those who used criminal means to earn their meagre livelihood. They left behind impoverished cavalrymen on their service estates, frequently joining the ubiquitous bandits. Those who managed to make their peasants stay encroached on members of other service clans using dependent peasants. In this way, building an effective and expansive military-fiscal state in an area at the margin of agricultural viability provided important services to local cavalrymen and traders, but overstretched the resources and fed into the streams of increasing mobility of land and people that eventually brought about the break-down of the Time of Troubles; as R.I. Frost posits, a crisis of the very principle of service in the eastern Slavic world. Nevertheless, the groundwork for the Russian state had been laid and the local administration of guba elders continued to operate throughout the disruptive civil war; before besieging Polish-
occupied Moscow the second levy set up chancelleries, trusting ingrained Muscovite structures.\textsuperscript{132}

Although Orthodox Christianity was the official religion vigorously defended against real or imagined ‘heretics’, whether they were Old Believers, Protestants, Catholics or ‘Jews’, and at the same time aimed at proselytizing among Animists, Jews and Muslims, power relations on the steppe to some degree impelled Muscovy to give preference to pragmatic considerations shared with surrounding empires, such as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Ottoman or the successors to the Mongol Empire.\textsuperscript{133} It also shared a common strategy with medieval Lithuania, the originally pagan rival that had come to dominate Rus’ from the thirteenth century onwards: during a confrontation with Western powers they both assimilated vast eastern areas that had arrived at a relative power vacuum, to increase revenues.\textsuperscript{134} Muscovy relied on elements that had been common to Middle Eastern cultures in Antiquity and, to some degree, still united Christianity and Islam, such as the cult and literature of Wisdom that had been enshrined in the early Kiev, Novgorod and Polotsk cathedrals, and was revived in the 1550s in the Moscow Golden Palace murals, in Kremlin icons, and later, in consecrations of cathedrals in Vologda and Tobolsk. It had been transferred in advice literature in both the Persian and the Russian traditions.\textsuperscript{135} Thus, inviting conquered and client elites even when they were forcibly resettled and their religion was temporarily vigorously suppressed, Muscovy drained Tatar nobles by co-optation and conversion.\textsuperscript{136} Despite sixteenth century resettlements of regional elites, Muscovite scribes preserved the origin of merchants and Tatar servitors, but not for servitors of less prestigious Orthodox root who often intermarried with Tatars.\textsuperscript{137}

Muscovy followed its own, Christian, though not necessarily missionary, imperial mission of redemption from captivity and slavery. Eastern Europe had been for many centuries the main source for slaves, eventually to be overshadowed by sub-Saharan Africa.\textsuperscript{138} Unlike early-modern Southern Europe, where territorially fragmented states could not lead redemption efforts effectively for which monastic orders were best suited,\textsuperscript{139} in seventeenth century Muscovy the state took over from the patriarch, introducing a new hearth-tax after a special census raising at least 5,000–150,000 roubles per annum, devoting in the first half of the century some 5 million roubles to ransoming Orthodox slaves.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, Muscovy shouldered – limited – tasks beyond the scope of ordinary early modern military-fiscal states, in which expenses for the military and the court were identical with overall expenses. Muscovy yielded many fruits from these huge payments: its main integrative ideology, which had helped to propagate the conquest of Kazan’, central to the ‘traditional’ epithet of the ‘pious’ tsar, codified as the only religious doctrine in the 1649 Ulozhenie, ransoming helped to spread the fame of the Muscovite tsar in Orthodox lands. Redemption business created client societies, such as the Don Cossacks acting as intermediaries, depending on the ‘pious’ tsar financially, and, in case of captivity, placing their hopes on him.\textsuperscript{141} Along with tributes and inducements paid to nomadic leaders, this trade connected friends and foes on the steppe frontier, transcending seemingly insur-
mountable differences. Its outcomes were ambivalent: it tied disintegrating successors of the Mongol Empire to Muscovy, helping to divide re-integrating confederations of nomadic tribes through clientage, but it also drained the Muscovite settled core of resources never returned, delaying economic development. However, facing frequently-disintegrating nomadic confederations and with porous steppe frontiers, the choice was whether resources were siphoned off in the form of manpower or money; those who fled from increasing tax burdens still contributed to the empire’s might by colonizing the fecund soils of the wooded steppe frontier.

At least as important as ideology, ransom, tribute and client societies was the military. Confrontation with Western powers and a slow process of adaptation to changes in technology and society that advanced in Europe ever since the Italian city-states embraced it in the fourteenth century, fomented in Russia a military capable of deep strikes and at the same time manning steppe frontier fortifications that impaired a modicum of security on an area almost void of natural defences. The Military Revolution proceeded in Russia, despite massive efforts, nearly imperceptibly with setbacks from the second half of the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century. In Poland-Lithuania, a peculiar adaptation of this process to Eastern European conditions, necessitating quick and far-reaching movements of troops, had already succeeded in introducing the towarzysz-system of recruitment and the new light cavalry capable of breaking through infantry lines in full gallop with their long and slight lances, which formed the backbone of the szlachta and translated into political privileges for the nobles. Yet the cultural and economic underpinning of Polish nobiliary might, grain export to the naval powers, did not exist in Muscovy, where Orthodox nobles still not travelling in Europe left initiative for transferring new techniques to the state and to costly foreign mercenaries and advisors. This shaped the character of cultural reception: exposure was uneven throughout the population, a Russia of several speeds resulted.

Nobles gained from access to the tsar and the imperial capital that was at the same time a bustling trade hub, and from their temporary deployment as military commanders and administrators to the imperial emporia and provincial backwaters. Diversification of their income minimized risk in a region that was threatened in many ways: it was subject to invasion as well as pin-prick raids from almost all sides and suffered from widespread banditry and from its position at the very edge of agricultural feasibility, resulting in huge losses whenever weather conditions vacillated even minimally. The tsars obliged service nobles high and low impoverished by equal inheritance by distributing conquered, unoccupied and confiscated territories on the basis of service. Tracking nobles, their service records, and searching escaped peasants were essential in such a system, contributing to the growth of central administration. Stakes in different parts of the empire and in more than one economic activity, or at least potential access to them, increased the security of a Moscow noble, and the source of these riches was the tsar and expansion.

Absence of natural borders and, in the sixteenth century, mounting insecurity in the region meant incessant wars, in which Muscovy was often enough the
aggressor, as in the first Northern War (1558–83), fought for the inheritance of the Teutonic Order. No longer able to shoulder increasing costs of defence, the Order’s territory suffered invasion by the Muscovites in search of peasants to populate their estates, who, after defeat by Polish–Swedish armies, ceded the Livonian conquests to Poland. The conflict first assembled the parties, including Brandenburg and Denmark, who met in numerous battles over access to and hegemony in the Baltic Sea area.

During the devastating Time of Troubles 1598/1605–13, territories in the West were lost to Sweden and Poland-Lithuania. Early seventeenth century mercantilism and state monopolies aimed at overcoming Muscovy’s weaknesses, but it took time to form a sufficient economic base. The late-seventeenth century Russian supply response to Western demand, an increasingly open economy, and commercial expansion not least towards Stockholm, provided some of the underpinnings of the Petrine military expansion. Building up up-to-date manufactures for military supply, growing professionalization of the Russian officer corps from the Thirteen-Years War (1654–67) onwards, and the artel’ as a group of soldiers supplying and accounting for themselves, highly motivated due to their dependency on and access to booty, distinguished late Muscovite and especially Petrine armies. These internal structures of the fiscal-military state had already overcome the greatest obstacles to reform before Peter acquired his momentous in-depth personal knowledge of the latest techniques, such as mathematical foundations of shipbuilding and navigation, his roots in Muscovite Orthodox culture, the myth of the new beginning and opening to the West, as well as a down-to-earth attitude striking a chord in many of his subjects, shared by a significant part of the elite. His creation of a regular, permanent professional army commanded by a largely Russian officer corps and manned by peasant conscripts, the navy allowing for the first time to take Reval and Riga and the new conditions of service, most importantly the Table of Ranks 1722 that provided a clear framework of status and allowed the possibility of promotion through merit without threatening the existing social hierarchy based on birth, was overwhelmingly accepted by the service elite. These changes made Peter’s empire capable of overcoming Europe’s most advanced military machine, the Swedish army. Terminating the important period of the Northern Wars in Northeastern European history, the Great Northern War (1700–21) culminated in Peter I’s victories at Poltava 1709 and Hangö after a thorough adaptation to the Military Revolution à la russe, and added Estonia, Livonia, Ingria, with the new capital of St Petersburg, and parts of Karelia to the empire.

While military might was important in projecting the tsar’s image as a powerful ruler, and in fact sealed acceptance as a European power under Peter, it is symptomatic that by far the most momentous and lasting step in westward expansion during the seventeenth century was won without a single Muscovite bullet but triggered a major war: Khmel’nyts’kyi’s 1648 revolt against Polish magnates was fuelled by the social repercussions of the Commonwealth’s unwillingness to establish a permanent military force perceived as a threat to the Republic. The subsequent hesitant steps towards the agreement of an anti-Polish alliance at

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Pereiaslav in 1654 finally won Muscovy the left bank of the Dnepr and access to new strategic outposts such as Kiev. By no means, though, had elite Cossack officers lost their taste for Polish culture and status of a noble citizen in what was perceived as the Renaissance ideal of a citizen army, or ordinary, especially young Cossacks orientation at short-term aims rather than stable social structures. While Poland had attempted – and to some degree succeeded – in disciplining Cossacks and modelling some of them into more reliable infantry, it suffered the drawback of early modern states trying to introduce regular armies but unable to pay wages regularly: the disciplined fought back with even more skill and without hesitating accepted the crucial help of the Crimean Tatars. Poland’s eastern rival, using a slowly changing mixture of medieval, steppe, and early modern policies, offended Cossacks by its high-handed, authoritarian attitude and constant inroads against their autonomy, but offered service and failed to discipline in particular the Don Cossacks until the strategically important southern steppe was won by the time of the conquest of the Crimean Khanate in the mid-eighteenth century and the former rival in the west incapacitated. Despite all Cossack vagaries, Muscovy at least continued to enjoy support from a substantial group among the Cossack hosts, led in the Left Bank by Ivan Briukhovetsky, in the 1660s and beyond. In Lithuania, however, where support and resistance initially balanced after the invasion in 1654, its position quickly eroded when troops behaved in a manner far from tsar Alexis’ promise to respect local privileges, especially concerning the heterodox parts of the population, while the glut of captives on the market drove down their price. Muscovy was still unable to sustain more than three campaigns in consecutive years. Lithuania was lost again, while Muscovy retained Smolensk, Chernihiv, the Left Bank, and Kiev in the Truce of Andrusovo 1667.

For Muscovy, it sufficed to divide Cossack groups or nomadic tribes and integrate many of them as loose clients displaying financial generosity. Moscow hosted an aristocratic diaspora, from Crimeans to Nogais, who might prove useful as potential claimants to future positions of power in their former realms or in administrative positions in the expanding, increasingly complex empire. It was important, though, that the tsar maintained an overarching fiction of a subject status of these peoples and groups, even as many did not share this view. Muscovite imperial culture allowed the juggling of egalitarian local customs and hierarchical structures integrating even contradictory values – locally, socially, and temporarily valid guiding ideas allowed Moscow to maintain an image of control and the leaders of steppe tribes to maintain an image of equality, for example, on issues such as whether iasak was tribute or trade, or a shert’ a peace treaty or a far more binding oath of allegiance. For a Cossack or a nomad it was essential to be considered not a deserter or robber but legitimate subject of a Chinggisid ruler – or one merely accepted as such by nomad leaders. Moreover, the institutional mechanism of the sovereign’s word and affair helped to make sure that the locally and temporarily most powerful group gained access to the governor, the chancellery, and the tsar, as long as it claimed to serve the latter. The myth of the benevolent tsar gave Muscovy an advantage in the steppe power competition over
systems like the Rzeczpospolita that abhorred strong central power and nomad confederations or Cossack societies perpetually in search of strong leadership.

Evidently that form of pacification did not mean that all was well, it rather gradually stopped the cycles of nomadic confederations and their subsequent break-ups, creating smaller and smaller units that could ever more easily be integrated into the empire. Pacification was reinforced by building costly fortification lines that put an end to deep incursions by large Tatar armies. At first they consisted of wooden forts and felled trees, heads directed to the steppe, criss-crossing the frontier and, in the eighteenth century, the open steppe. They divided and encircled nomad grazing grounds and provided preconditions for further peasant settlement, increasingly forcing the militarily enfeebled tribes into settling and acceptance of Russian law and hierarchies to defend their land or, as in the Razin and Bashkir cases, into the bloodletting of raids, revolt and suppression.\(^\text{161}\) During expansion, the frontier was not just porous and hard to defend, it also rolled, constantly altering local institutional relations: fugitives settling, the building of fortifications, distribution of privileges to settlers, and charging them with defence led to subsequent further expansion with its corollary loss of privileges to new groups of settlers closer to the next fortifications line who offered to do the job for less. Local granaries originally established to deal with frontier emergencies were subsequently diverted to supply local army detachments by then fighting far-away wars.\(^\text{162}\) This powerful process crossed the frontier and steppe like a slow wave, producing unstable social and institutional boundaries and widespread discontent, especially when combined with attempts at increasing discipline or reducing payments. Muscovy managed its frontier and steppe relations well, providing opportunities for service for the newly integrated nomads and settlers, engaging them in far-away battles, booty, and captives, instead of abandoning them after the initial conquest, when fortification proceeded at the next line, even if that meant inefficient warfare on the western border and a troublesome image in Novgorod or Poland.\(^\text{163}\) Shared religious elements, such as the already mentioned ‘Wisdom of God’, which highlighted commitment to harsh justice and law facilitating trans-steppe trade essential to nomad confederations,\(^\text{164}\) or Tatar reprisals in Ivan IV’s service clad in ‘God’s Wrath’ provided a common ideology and ritual in addition to strategic orientation at a new great power, helping to create a conquest movement out of disparate tribal units and facilitating state-building processes.\(^\text{165}\)

To estimate the influence of expansion, a contrast of sorts is instructive: in the demographic revolution of the prosperous and rebellious late-sixteenth century Netherlands, the Military Revolution proceeded under the vigorous control of wealthy burghers and merchants, whose aim to contain and discipline the Landsknecht-mercenaries at low costs was achieved following increasing proletarianization of a part of the population that had nowhere else to go except for becoming a sailor in gruesome conditions on the ships leaving for the colonies.\(^\text{166}\) In Russia, due to expansion in a continuous territory, a cash-starved economy and low population density, the Military Revolution failed to discipline surplus populations, produced a well-developed chancellery system and a powerful military
while gradually abandoning the vestiges of formal political participation, increas-
ingly promulgating monologous law without societal participation and finding it
difficult to penetrate internal lawless spaces. Thus, Russia became a country
that colonized itself in several senses: it was unable to externalize social costs of
seventeenth century economic and cultural modernizing efforts in a continuous
territory and it extended the middle ground of confluence of several cultures to
its very heart, personified in the co-opted native elites travelling to and living in
its capital, which was yet unheard of in the metropoles of the maritime empires.
In Northern America, too, the middle ground of inclusive cultural, economic and
diplomatic relations was produced by competition of colonial empires over fron-
tier areas, placing native middle men in an advantageous position for negotiation,
but the decolonizing nation states drew upon established metropolitan institu-
tional culture. Furthermore, Muscovy colonized itself by selling monopolies on
export commodities to foreign merchants and joint-stock companies while man-
aging to derive the benefits as it established an effective fiscal-military state. Its
flexible imperial culture that was early modern, medieval, Asian, and European
to changing degrees, was difficult to penetrate and merchants serving as offi-
cials used it to blunt the purposes of the maritime colonial powers which could
gain a foothold only if merchants or joint-stock companies applied for privi-
leges and monopolies to the tsar. The tangled processes of Asianization and
Europeanization are perhaps best exemplified in the foundation of two colonies
in the medieval or antique sense: St Petersburg was meant to be the
‘Europeanized’ capital soon peopled by a cosmopolitan elite while Azov, Peter’s
first military success but lost again in 1711, was set up in the same crude Petrine
way of early modern social engineering using massive amounts of forced labour
and epitomized colonial failure and the continuing inability of the new-fangled
Petrine elite to make true its ambitions and promises of a new, ‘scientific’ way of
charting and reorganizing the southern steppe.

The Petrine revolution from above topped existing tendencies of modernizing
and of abandoning formal political participation disregarding Muscovite sensitiv-
ities, proving victorious due to the force of personality of one man who prevailed
over his many adversaries. His attempts to introduce efficient local institutions
to stabilize recruitment and taxation, however, failed, mainly because in Russia,
unlike in Peter’s model Sweden, consent of the peasants was not essential since
the service elites reliably crushed their resistance. Peter recognized the ineffi-
ciency of serfdom, but realized that it was the fundamental basis of the Russian
service system. As the twentieth century proves, modern military technology
enables a small, militarized social elite to secure and maintain great power status
on the basis of a backward and undeveloped rural economy; Russia paid the price
only in 1917.

Sources

Though copious, the nature of Muscovite bureaucratic record-keeping, held
largely in the Siberian Chancery and in local archives, means that there are
substantial problems in using these materials, not least in the one-sidedness and formulaic nature of the welter of frequently repetitive official documentation, revealing some of the most valuable information only between the lines. Petitions written or ordered by local Cossacks provide a valuable different perspective, although even these are written in an official, formulaic style.

To a restricted extent, published document collections provide remedies to this situation. There are some surviving private letters by Siberian Cossacks, which are revealing for the way Cossacks articulated themselves in non-official documents, although rather sparse in expression and few, compared to the kind of sources that historians of Western Europe find; there are no known Cossack diaries. Cossacks could express themselves in writing in the manifold reports on their travels abroad, but these do not contain the kind of information needed for this study. Descriptions by foreign travellers, German ambassadors and an officer in the tsar’s service add some colour to the dry chancellery style. Some valuable materials on the church, on annals and on towns have been edited in the 1980s–90s.

In describing Cossack and chancellery organization, and the elements of the institutional culture, I have used a multitude of sources both published and unpublished. Particularly revealing cases that have, to my knowledge, not been used are sometimes found between other papers of the Irkutsk prikaznaia izba; existing descriptions of the files can be misleading or incomplete. The recent publications of sources related to towns and the copy-book of the Tobol’sk archbishopric have proven helpful. In the absence of published materials I have used Rezun’s chapter on the Tukhachevskii campaign. Compared to the well-observed and extensively cited detail in the descriptive part, the interpretation is unassuming and does not follow established models; the author often expresses bewilderment about contradictory evidence. A 1720s investigation helped to establish the inclusion of peasants, traders and migrants in Cossack service. On the years after the Time of Troubles, I have used publications of diplomatic materials and the materials collected by Müller. For the material life of Cossacks I have drawn on the edited description by a German officer, on the map of Irkutsk in the Remezov atlas (1701), and on aforementioned publications. Most decrees, reports and receipts on salary are archival materials.

Processes of institutionalization, bribery, and generalized exchange are traceable in these publications, in the copybook of the archbishopric, in published annals, in archival materials such as reports and receipts for salary, in petitions found in the archives, in a recent synopsis of the Russian Orthodox bible, in the materials published in Müller’s Istoriia, and in the description by a member of the Polish szlachta.

This study answers recent, justified criticism of studies of the sovereign’s word and affair that concentrate exclusively on rebellions, since they tend to eschew social relations in more peaceful times. However, in Siberia rebellions were a frequent experience. The approach chosen in this study re-embeds participants in their social networks and institutional culture to understand the significance of their actions, not only against the background of general assumptions.
about the relative socio-economic position of estates, but on that of their every-
day experience and the options available to them in the institutional culture in
which they lived. Institutional analysis attempts to uncover the significance of
institutions in political and social interactions. Institutions would not be viable if
they were only efficient on a higher level of abstraction, guaranteeing that the
empire remained intact. Their pragmatic efficiency in everyday situations gained
acceptance or lost it, and we know this world of interaction only to a modest
degree on the level of events considered important by historians – such as the
large-scale, spectacular rebellions – but need clarification about seemingly
insignificant day-to-day local administration, litigation, and other forms of social
interaction. In order to understand the impact of a petition, for example, it is nec-
essary to know the personal background of the signatories, which reveals more
fully only in the petty local documentation of their daily existence. The Siberian
chancellery in Moscow, despite the great pains taken at collecting materials,
could only partially reconstruct events of a rebellion. Investigators were not nec-
essarily interested in the reasons for a rebellion, and their investigations stopped
at the point when it broke down. Information was more aggregated when it
reached Moscow, and therefore lost some detail. Less ‘relevant’ information from
everyday chancellery business was left behind in the local archives, where it
sometimes survived. The same happened to many records of business transac-
tions, which appeared in abbreviated form only in the customs protocols, and to
minor, but very revealing investigations. Elections, kabaly, petty law-suits among
Cossacks, minutiae of the larger investigations and the payment of salary to indi-
vidual Cossacks, instructions for prikazchiks and investigators who received
them from the local voevoda, lists of godovalshchiki who evaded their duty by
paying money to substitutes or exchanging appointments, are all found among the
documents of the local voevoda’s office, allowing some insight into the lives of
the protagonists of rebellions. This information is not available for every person
due to the incompleteness of the archives and some materials lost by decay, but
most of the Cossacks who took part in the rebellions have left some other traces.
Computer-based evaluation of the material allows more effective processing and
re-contextualizing of personal data, and the reconstruction of links between par-
ticipants that were ostensibly unrelated.

The database contains 1,668 entries on Irkutsk Cossacks, giving information
about name; rank; function; careers; kinship and clientage links; length of serv-
vice; other observations on their role in society; former rank; locality; date of
record; a special label allowing the tracing of personal connections; literacy; and
hyperlinks to relevant notes from sources. It allows the tracing of connections
between Cossacks according to terms occurring in one label and makes calculat-
ing proportions, for instance, of literate men among different ranks, localities and
years easier. Where names were garbled, incomplete, or there was more than one
person of the same name, comparison of entries helped to establish the identity
of the person.

The Selenga rebellion has been chosen since previous researchers have cov-
ered it inadequately, and the archive of the Irkutsk voevoda’s office is the most
extensive and complete on the Siberian steppe frontier, containing much of the wealth of local detail needed in this study. The only other surviving extensive local Siberian archive, that of Iakutsk, is much more monotonous, possibly because of the different social and economic structures in the north, and because of its distance from the steppe frontier and from major trade routes. The 791 files of the Irkutsk archive, each containing up to 250 folios perused for this study concentrate on the period from the end of the 1680s to the early 1700s. They contain a welter of sources of a primarily local nature that have, if at all, only been used in a statistical way in a narrow social historical approach, the results of which – except for a few brief articles – are unavailable in most libraries, in particular outside Russia. It may have contributed to the wealth of documentation that Irkutsk was quickly growing at this time. On the other hand, archives in the wooden towns often burned, and many files perished as late as during the revolution and the confusion of the 1990s. Even the Irkutsk archive suffered – much of the regular statistical data often available for Russian towns are lost. Regrettably, in 1917 the archive of the Selenginsk Trinity monastery was piled in a salt store on the shore of Lake Baikal and destroyed by flooding. Archives from other monasteries of the region contain insufficient material on the period. Little has survived on Irkutsk and its district at Eniseisk and Tobol’sk, where the archive was inaccessible. For documents denied to me from RGADA, I have relied on the typewritten description of documents. Despite the substantial gaps in the primary sources, there is rich material available which does allow the drawing of new conclusions about the nature of Muscovite rule in Siberia.
References

Abbreviations

AI Akty istoricheskie
AHR American Historical Review
CASS Canadian-American Slavic Studies
ChIOIDR Chtenia v imperatorskom obschestve istorii i drevnostei Rossiiskikh
FzOG Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte
IZ Istoricheskie zapiski
JBG0 Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas
JEMH Journal of Early Modern History
OI Otechestvennāia istoriia
PSRL Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei
RGADA Rossiiskii arkhiv drevnikh aktov
RH Russian History
RIB Russkaia Istoricheskaia Biblioteka
RR Russian Review
SEER Slavonic and Eastern European Review
SR Slavic Review
SRla Slovan’ russkogo iazyka XI–XVII vv.
VI Voprosy Istorii
ZfG Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft
ZhMNP Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia

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