Nicholas V. Riasanovsky

THE IMAGE OF PETER THE GREAT IN RUSSIAN HISTORY AND THOUGHT

The Image of Peter the Great
in Russian History and Thought

Peter I, painting by V. A. Serov (Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow) Sovfoto

The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought

NICHOLAS V. RIASANOVSKY

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York Oxford

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland

and associated companies in

Berlin Ibadan

First published in 1985 by Oxford University Press, Inc.,
200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

First issued as an Oxford University Press paperback, 1992

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Riasanovsky, Nicholas Valentine, 1923–
The image of Peter the Great in Russian history and thought.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Peter I, Emperor of Russia, 1672–1725—Influence.
2. Peter I, Emperor of Russia, 1672–1725, in fiction, drama, poetry, etc. 3. Peter I, Emperor of Russia, 1672–1725—Personality. 4. Soviet Union, 1917–1984—Intellectual life.
I. Title.
DK132.R53 1984 947'.05'0924 83-25157
ISBN 0-19-503456-2
ISBN 0-19-507480-7 (pbk)

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

To my teachers

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

Every nation has its gods and its myths. One's evaluation of their importance depends closely on one's estimate of the significance of symbols, ideology, and psychology in nationalism. Although historical parallels are inexact, the central and rich Petrine theme in modern Russian history and thought has been compared to that of the Reformation in Germany; and it can be matched with the American Revolution and the French Revolution in their respective countries. I wrote this book because I have been especially interested in the Russian topic and because it has not so far received a general treatment. A study in intellectual history, in a broad sense, the work easily fell into four parts—four chapters as I eventually designated them—in accord with the four main successive intellectual climates in modern Russia. Of course, each part could readily become a book itself, or there was the possibility of writing two volumes instead of one or four, and of other compromises. I decided, however, on a single volume not only because it was in at least some obvious ways more manageable, but also and especially because I wanted to concentrate on the consecutive evolution of the image of Peter the Great through time, not on the comprehensive coverage of its presence in a given period. For the same reason of concentration and brevity, together with that of my rapidly diminishing competence in adjacent fields, I pursued, with but a few exceptions, Petrine images only in words, not in illustration, painting, sculpture, or music. Nor did I generally include images drawn by foreigners because they belonged to other milieus and were parts of other stories, although, as a student of B. H. Sumner, I am quite aware of non-Russian contributions to Petrine scholarship. An image, by definition, is not a summary, although even a book on images may have to rely heavily on summarizing. I did try to quote and to present authentic images at least in part where possible; also, to retain as much of the original Russian in my English translation as I could. Repetition was not treated as a disaster to be always avoided; and the pace of the narrative, slow at times, much faster in certain places, was related—I would like to believe—to the evolution of the Petrine image itself.

The reader should be warned about certain things this book was not intended to be. It is not a study of Peter the Great or his reign, but of their Russian images. Nor is it a historiographical essay meant to delineate the progressive development of our knowledge of the Petrine period and the present state of that knowledge. Images, to repeat, have their own

historical value, which is related imperfectly at best to their scholarly validity: in the present work the poet Derzhavin and the novelist Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi take up considerable space, and Professor Reinhard Wittram, a fine German Petrine specialist, none. But even as an investigation of images, my study represents only one approach. Others may legitimately concentrate on the psychoanalytic or comparative aspects of the problem, or they may try to elucidate, for example, the Petrine impulse to Russian cultural creativity. I can only say that I found my investigation rich and full. Besides, it is usually unwise to mix genres.

As at the end of my other books, I find myself deeply indebted to many institutions and people. First, I have to mention the University of California in Berkeley, where I am the Sidney Hellman Ehrman Professor of European History: I am grateful to the university's library, to the university sabbatical policy, to a number of advantages connected with my chair, and to much else. Next I want to express my appreciation for an I.R.E.X. grant to the Soviet Union and, in the same breath, for the way I was received and helped by my Soviet colleagues in the course of my work in Moscow, Leningrad, and the Baltic republics in the autumn and December of 1979. My hosts, the Institute of Russian History of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, the Institute of Russian Literature of the Academy of Sciences (*Pushkinskii Dom*) in Leningrad, as well as several Baltic hosts and still other institutions with which I was not formally connected, contributed enormously to my stay in the U.S.S.R. and to this book. Of the libraries, I am especially indebted to the great Lenin and Saltykov-Shchedrin collections, in particular to their rare book, that is, in my case, eighteenth-century, sections. But I profited also from many other Soviet libraries. As to people, I want to thank Dr. L. A. Nikiforov, who guided my steps in Moscow, and, together with him, numerous other Soviet Petrine scholars on whom I imposed for advice, discussion, and even argument. I shall always remember the late Academician Mikhail Pavlovich Alekseev, already gravely ill, coming to my presentation of research in *Pushkinskii Dom,* which lasted several hours.

Besides *Pushkinskii Dom,* I must thank the Canadian Association of Slavists, the Western Slavic Conference, and Southern Methodist University for arranging for me to speak on parts of the present work and must express my personal gratitude to all participants in the sessions in question. Similarly, I want to thank all the students in my seminar on "The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought" whose papers are listed in the bibliography. Very special thanks are due to my invaluable research assistant, Mr. Maciej Siekierski, and to my secretary, Mrs. Dorothy Shannon. The manuscript was read by Professors Terence Emmons of Stanford University, Ralph T. Fisher, Jr., of the University of Illinois, and Ladis K. D. Kristof of Portland State University and also by my Berkeley colleagues Professors Hugh McLean, Martin Malia, Robert Middlekauff, Wolfgang Sauer, Frederic Wakeman, and Reginald Zelnik.

Professors Gary Marker of the State University of New York in Stony Brook and Karen Rasmussen of Indiana University at South Bend read the first chapter. I am in debt to them all in more ways than one. However, and obviously, errors and weaknesses remaining after all that reading have to be results of my own obtuseness.

And I want to acknowledge the unfailing support and help—now for almost thirty years—of my wife, Arlene.

Berkeley, California N.V.R.
July, 1984

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

The Image of Peter the Great
in Russian History and Thought

This page intentionally left blank

I

The Image of Peter the Great in the Russian Enlightenment, 1700–1826

> Your amazing deeds are your trophies. Entire Russia is your statue, reshaped by your expert skill, as pictured not in vain in your emblem; and the entire world is your poet, and the preacher of your glory.
>
> Feofan Prokopovich[1]

1

Images have lives of their own, sometimes over centuries and even millennia of human history. Remembrance and praise of the hero have functioned as a secular surrogate for immortality in many societies and civilizations, including our Western civilization at least from the time of the *Iliad*. Not all images are positive. Destroyers have stayed in man's memory along with creators, scourges with saints; Attila probably left a greater resonance in the world than Louis IX. Moreover, in spite of the human preference for black and white, images have come down also in other colors; in fact, they seem to reflect the totality of human experience. I remember the shudder of recognition when introduced to a person whose last name was Pilate. Disturbingly for the historian, images do not have to correspond to reality: witness Horst Wessel as the incarnation of a regenerated Germany or the unbelievable content and career of Stalin's "cult of personality." Yet even these wayward examples were by no means merely exercises in abstract imagination. Although Horst Wessel himself apparently was not at all what Nazis wanted Germans to be, he came much nearer to representing faithfully many of the Nazis and, on the whole, was not such an inappropriate symbol for the total catastrophe of 1945. As to Stalin in life and the Stalin of the cult, the connection was a complex one indeed: direct, reverse, perhaps dialectical—appropriately for that preacher of the dialectic—and in any case in need of a special study. By contrast, most images stay closer to reality, emphasizing genuine character traits, accomplishments, and historical roles of their

[1] Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1961), 144. In this case and in general, the translation is my own. For interesting contemporary English translations of Feofan Prokopovich and other Petrine sources, see especially James Cracraft, ed., *For God and Peter the Great: The Works of Thomas Consett, 1723–1729* (New York, 1982).

heroes. Even when imagination soars and propaganda proliferates, as they so often must, there remains something of an authentic base as a point of departure. It is this strong grounding in the person and in historical reality that strikes the student eager to investigate the image of Peter the Great in Russian history and thought.

Peter I was an impressive individual. Almost seven feet tall and powerfully built, the tsar possessed astonishing physical strength and vigor. Stories spread of his ability to bend silver talers with his fingers, roll up a silver plate, or cut with a knife a piece of cloth in the air. Moreover, he appeared to be in a constant state of restless activity, taking on himself tasks normally performed by several men. Few Russians could keep up with their monarch in his many occupations. Indeed, as he walked with rapid giant strides, they had to run even to continue conversation. Handsome, in spite of a nervous twitching of his face, domineering, utterly terrifying in anger, the tsar was an overwhelming presence for his contemporaries.

In addition to his extraordinary physical attributes, Peter the Great exhibited some remarkable qualities of mind and character. The ruler had an insatiable intellectual curiosity coupled with an amazing ability to learn. He proceeded to participate personally in all kinds of state matters, technical and special as well as general, becoming deeply involved in diplomacy, administration, justice, finance, commerce, industry, education, and practically everything else besides. To this day historians keep uncovering further evidence of Peter I's direct management of Russian affairs.[2] In his reforms, the tsar invariably valued expert advice, but he remained generally independent in thought and did not hesitate to adapt projects to circumstances. Personally brave, deeply interested in the army and in love with the navy, although by no means a conventional militarist in his attitude and orientation, Peter the Great also developed into an accomplished military and naval commander. He studied the professions of soldier and sailor from the bottom up, serving first in the ranks and learning the use of each weapon before promoting himself to his first post as an officer. The monarch attained the rank of full general after the victory of Poltava and of full admiral after the successful conclusion of the Great Northern War. In addition, the sovereign found time to learn some twenty different trades and prided himself on his ability to make almost anything, from a ship to a pair of shoes. With his own hands he pulled the teeth of his courtiers and cut off their beards. Lacking a regular education and an autodidact all his life, Peter I nevertheless learned to speak Dutch and German and to manage to some extent in several other languages. He even considered introducing Dutch as the official tongue of his state! The sovereign's ungrammatical Russian

[2] As one example, see G. A. Nekrasov, *Russko-shvedskie otnosheniia i politika velikikh derzhav v 1721–1726 g. g.* (Moscow, 1964). I would like to refer here also to my conversations with Dr. Nekrasov.

had concreteness and power, and it becomes more compelling the more one reads it. Characteristically, the ruler wanted to be everywhere and see everything for himself, traveling indefatigably around his vast realm as no Muscovite monarch had ever done. In a still more unprecedented manner he went twice to the West to learn, in 1697–1698 and in 1717. Peter I's mind can best be described as active and practical, able quickly to grasp problems and devise solutions, if not to construct theories.

As to character, the tsar impressed those around him in particular by his unbending will, determination, and dedication. They observed how he recovered quickly from even the worst defeats and how he regarded every obstacle as an invitation to further exertion and achievement. Historians too noted the amazing self-confidence and directness of a man who, during decades of extremely difficult, disparate, and even desperate situations, never doubted in the main what he was doing, nor his right and obligation to do it. To be sure, this confidence related to the conscious not the subconscious level, to the external not the internal world. Internally Peter the Great was constantly at the boiling point, possibly on the verge of a breakdown or madness; all his life he struggled against his emotions, rage especially, but repeatedly lost that struggle. His cruelty, drunkenness, and a strangely dissolute style of life can probably only in part be explained by the standards of the age and adventitious circumstances (just as there is some evidence that the tsar's celebrated and historically significant love of the sea succeeded an original water phobia). But in the world of political action and historical record, very few major actors played their roles with more confidence, consistency, and clarity of purpose. Peter I's image of himself was thus the first and, as it turned out, a basic and seminal one of the remarkable ruler.

Yet in some ways it is not an easy one to reconstruct, at least not beyond the obvious. This obvious, to repeat, was constant, driving, obsessive activity in almost every field of endeavor. Above all, Peter the Great was a tremendous worker. Contemporaries as well as later commentators recognized this fully. Ivan Pososhkov, the first Russian economist and a collaborator of the tsar who acquired a fine appreciation both of the sovereign's reforms and of the obstacles in their way, expressed the matter in a famous image: "the Great Monarch" exercising every effort was pulling uphill with some ten assistants, but millions were pushing downhill.[3] Or—a century later—in the words of Pushkin known to all educated Russians:

> Now an academician, now a hero,
> Now a seafarer, now a carpenter,
> He, with an all-encompassing soul,
> Was on the throne an eternal worker.[4]

[3] Ivan Pososhkov, *Sochineniia* (Moscow, 1842), 95.

[4] A. S. Pushkin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (2 vols., Leningrad, 1961), I, 189 ("Stances," 1826). Pushkin's image of Peter the Great will be discussed in the first section of Chapter 2.

Again, several decades after Pushkin, perhaps the best and most important Russian historian, Sergei Soloviev, chose as a leitmotif of his public lectures on Peter the Great the ruler's own reference to himself in an early letter from Pereiaslavl, where he was engaged in shipbuilding, to his mother: "occupied in work" (*v rabote prebyvaiushchii*).[5]

Devoted to his work and proud of it, Peter I judged others in the same manner. The emphasis on work and achievement permeated the reforms of the reign, whether the Table of Ranks, on which state service in modern Russia was to be based; the law of succession to the throne; the law of inheritance of the gentry estates; or other legislation, including the Spiritual Regulation, which reorganized the church. By means of and beyond all specific measures, Peter the Great made a continuous, almost superhuman effort to obtain appropriate service from all his subjects, in particular from the members of the gentry, whom he wanted to start that service at the bottom (e.g., as privates in the army) and advance only according to merit. And it was the same emphasis on knowledge, ability, and work—on getting things done—that accounted for the extraordinary motley group of assistants who gathered around the ruler.[6]

Intensely practical and pragmatic, usually overwhelmed with work and frequently facing crisis, Peter the Great and his collaborators moved from one immediate task to the next with little occasion to think beyond tomorrow. The Great Northern War dominated the reign, but associated—at times catastrophic—financial and economic problems, a series of rebellions inside the country, diplomacy and war with Turkey, and even the issue of Tsarevich Alexis and the succession to the throne could be equally pressing. For many participants, "the epoch of Peter the Great" must have been one grueling ordeal, with personal and national survival possibly at stake to help supply the energy. For later generations, the character of the times is reflected in the greatest documentary collection for that age, the so-called *Letters and Papers of Emperor Peter the Great*.[7]

[5] S. M. Soloviev, *Publichnye chteniia o Petre Velikom* (Moscow, 1872), esp. p. 32. Soloviev's image of Peter the Great will be discussed in the first section of Chapter 3.

[6] As told by Kliuchevskii: "Peter collected the necessary men everywhere, without worrying about rank and origin, and they came to him from different directions and all possible conditions: one arrived as a cabin-boy on a Portuguese ship, as was the case of the chief of police of the new capital, de Vière; another had herded swine in Lithuania, as was rumored about the first Procurator-General of the Senate, Iaguzhinskii; a third had worked as a clerk in a small store, as in the instance of Vice-Chancellor Shafirov; a fourth had been a Russian house serf, as in the case of the Vice-Governor of Archangel, the inventor of stamped paper, Kurbatov; a fifth, that is, Ostermann, was the son of a Westphalian pastor. And all these men, together with Prince Menshikov, who, the story went, had once sold pies in the streets of Moscow, met in Peter's society with the remnants of the Russian boyar nobility" (V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Ocherki i rechi. Vtoroi sbornik statei* [Petrograd, 1918], 461). The study "Peter the Great Amidst His Collaborators" ("Petr Velikii sredi svoikh sotrudnikov") occupies pp. 454–495 of the volume. Kliuchevskii's image of Peter the Great will be discussed in the second section of Chapter 3.

[7] *Pisma i bumagi Imperatora Petra Velikogo* (12 vols. in 19 books, Moscow and Leningrad, 1887–1977). The publication has advanced only through the year 1712.

The first entry for the year 1709 begins: "The Narva and the Pskov garrisons must be supplied with provisions this winter, and there must always be in each garrison provisions for five thousand men for two years."[8] The second states: "This moment your judgment was brought to me and, therefore, while I consider it, do not order to proceed with the executions; order, however, to be ready for that, and you with the commanders come here."[9] One could go on and on.

Yet hectic hard work, central to the life of Peter the Great and to his image of himself—as well as to many other contemporary and subsequent images of him—did not exhaust the image. At the very least, questions would arise about the reasons for that work, about its proximate and eventual purpose, about the relationship among different activities, about the likelihood of success. And, in effect, Peter the Great had these and other such questions in mind, and they were highly relevant to his image of himself.

Most students of Peter the Great and his reign emphasize that he turned against the Muscovite past, toward the new world of the West; but they frequently underestimate the passion and the psychological power of this reaction and commitment. The past meant for the monarch ignorance, prejudice, inefficiency, and corruption—in political terms, weakness and defeat; in the West resided knowledge, reason, and salvation. Peter I's "Westernism" is all the more noteworthy because he did not admire blindly but always tried to separate, in the West as at home, the wheat from the chaff and because he remained a dedicated Russian patriot. Negative impressions of palace torpor and intrigue, an unusual boyhood spent in large part in the foreign suburb of Moscow and in independent self-discovery, and an insatiable curiosity to learn and do novel things were some of the factors that combined to make Tsar Alexis's son violently reject the old and enthusiastically grasp the new. The absolute ruler was never happier than when building a ship or learning another trade, and his favored companions were foreign specialists of all sorts. Indeed, the informal and unrestrained atmosphere of the foreign suburb, with its smoking, drinking, lovemaking, rough good humor, conglomerate of tongues, and especially its profusion and variety of technical experts, became an enduring part of the emperor's life. Later he was to say that if he were not the ruler of Russia, he would want to be an English admiral. As to Peter the Great's frightful hatreds, characteristically they were directed against the *streltsy* or against the clique surrounding the heir apparent Alexis, not against foreigners in or out of Russia, not even against the Swedes. At times his hatreds seemed to extend to all opponents of change. A legitimate, complex, and extensive

[8] *Ibid.*, IX (1950), 9.

[9] *Ibid.*, 10. The case concerned looting of the civilian population by the military. Characteristically, Peter the Great ordered severe punishment, especially of the officers involved.

debate has ensued among scholars as to whether objectively Peter the Great's reforms were radical or gradualist; but subjectively the remarkable tsar was a revolutionary.

Revolutions, however, are difficult to accomplish, all the more so when the purpose is to replace darkness with light. Peter I's entire life became an intense effort to make his country catch up with the West, to modernize it as later scholars would put it. The realities of the Great Northern War helped to underscore the ruler's repeatedly stated conviction that procrastination meant death. It is in this context that one must understand the concept of devoted service, which the sovereign believed to be fundamental to his own behavior and which he tried so hard to impose on his subjects.

Peter the Great was an absolute ruler in theory and in practice. He certainly considered himself an autocrat, and his view was supported and developed by such political writers as Feofan Prokopovich in his *Justice of the Monarch's Will.*[10] More important, he acted like one of the memorable autocrats of history. An uncompromising character and a violent temper accentuated further his decisiveness and the plenitude of his power. Still, important changes from the uncodified principles and the more tangible attitudes and mores of Muscovite tsardom emerged. Most significant was the separation of the ruler as a person from the state, in fact, a subordination of his private person to the state, and a new utilitarian rationale for the ruler's behavior. Professor Nicholas Pavlenko, a leading present-day Soviet specialist on Peter I, has emphasized that the concept of the common good, *obshchee blago,* was first advanced in 1702, in a ukase concerned with inviting foreign specialists into Russian service, and that it became increasingly prominent thereafter. Pavlenko believed that a growing stress on the interests of the country as distinct from those of the person of the ruler can be detected in the recurrent official Russian justifications of the Great Northern War.[11] And, to repeat, the monarch practiced and preached, above all, service, service to the state for the common good. Revealingly, when reorganizing the army, he crossed out "the interests of His Tsarist Maj-

[10] *Pravda Voli Monarshei.* I used the 1788 reprinting in Feodor Tumanskii, *Sobranie raznykh zapisok i sochinenii, sluzhashchikh k dostavleniiu polnogo svedeniia o zhizni i deianiiakh Gosudaria Imperatora Petra Velikogo* (Part 10, St. Petersburg, 1788), 123–243. See also esp. Feofan Prokopovich, "A Sermon on the Tsar's Power and Honor, as Established in the World by God Himself, and on How People Must Honor Tsars and Obey Them; Who Are Those Who Oppose Them and What Sin They Commit," *Sochineniia,* 76–93, 467 fns. But Feofan Prokopovich's authorship of *Justice* is by no means certain. See particularly the latest investigation, which assigns the authorship to Condoidi, a Greek archimandrite in Russia: James Cracraft, "Did Feofan Prokopovich Really Write *Pravda Voli Monarshei?*" *Slavic Review,* vol. 40, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 173–193.

[11] N. I. Pavlenko, "Petr I. (K izucheniiu sotsialno-politicheskikh vzgliadov)," in N. I. Pavlenko, responsible ed.; L. A. Nikiforov, M. Ia. Volkov, eds., *Rossiia v period reform Petra I* (Moscow, 1973), 40–102, esp. 60–62. For Pavlenko's full account of the emperor, see N. Pavlenko, *Petr Pervyi* (Moscow, 1976).

esty" as the object of military devotion and substituted "the interests of the state."[12] Or, to quote from Peter the Great's celebrated address to his troops immediately preceding the battle of Poltava:

> Let the Russian host know that that hour has come that places the fortunes of our entire Fatherland in their hands: either to perish utterly or for Russia to be reborn in a better condition. And let them not think that they were armed and put forth for Peter, but for the state entrusted to Peter, for their kin, for the Russian people. . . .
>
> As to Peter, they should know clearly that his life is not dear to him, provided only that Russia lives, Russian piety, glory, and well-being.[13]

Not surprisingly, Peter I drew a sharp distinction between his own resources, which he considered limited to the salaries he earned in his various functions, and the possessions of the state. Not surprisingly, too, he ordered his subjects not to use derogatory diminutive names when signing addresses to the sovereign, not to kneel in front of him, not to take hats off when passing the palace. "What will be the difference between God and the tsar"—he would say—"if both are paid equal honors? Less obsequiousness, more effort in the service, and a greater faithfulness to me and the state: this is the honor that belongs to the tsar."[14]

In spite of the colossal demands of his self-assigned task, Peter the Great on the whole looked confidently to the future. A part of that confidence stemmed, no doubt, from his own energetic optimism; a part reflected the affirmative and hopeful outlook of the age. The tsar expected reason to accomplish the transformation of Russia. It was reason that made the Russian sovereign prize experts, whether Leibniz or a shipwright, and utilize them as much as possible, for they usually had reason on their side. It was reason that even made him at times, defying his own temperament, listen to dissenting or contrary advice and admit his mistakes. As the monarch jotted down once on a piece of paper: "Thinking is above all virtues because without reason every virtue is empty."[15] Peter the Great's hectic, disjointed, at times desperate reordering of Russia was nevertheless also meant to be a tribute to reason and to result eventually in its triumph in the entire land.

Applied to the monarch's subjects, reliance on reason meant explanation and education. It has been noted that, in his all-pervasive, minute regulation of the lives of his people, the sovereign almost invariably supplied the reasons for his legislation. *Ponezhe* or *dlia togo,* that is, "because," became the hallmark of his edicts.[16] To be sure, he also stated appropriate punishment for each transgression, but this only added further point to the didacticism of his efforts. From the first translated book

[12] B. H. Sumner, *Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia* (London, 1950), 59–60.
[13] Pavlenko, *Petr Pervyi,* 169.
[14] Soloviev, *op. cit.,* 83.
[15] Pavlenko, *Petr Pervyi,* 315.
[16] *Ibid.,* 315–316, with some examples of these reasons.

of manners, the so-called *Mirror for Youth*,[17] the new Russian publishing industry devoted special attention to teaching its readers how to behave. More formal education was of central importance. Again, the ruler worked feverishly himself, whether simplifying the Russian alphabet, establishing the School of Mathematics and Navigation, or organizing the Academy of Sciences. "For learning is good and fundamental, and as it were the root, the seed, and first principle of all that is good and useful in church and state."[18]

Peter the Great was a man of action rather than a man of thought; a practitioner, not a theoretician. He was also something of a visionary. With grandeur and optimism, themselves typical of the age, he foresaw the image of a modern, powerful, prosperous, and educated country; and it was to the realization of that image that he dedicated his life.

2

Whereas Peter the Great's image of himself can be logically considered the first and basic image of the reforming ruler, many other such images inevitably appeared during the monarch's life. In fact, the Petrine canon was fully formed at the time of the emperor's death; and, although it was to grow and change in subsequent decades and centuries, the early formulations proved remarkably lasting, both in general and in detail, as well as strikingly influential on later appraisals.

The reformer's image of himself, although idealized and oversimplified, corresponded in certain important ways to reality—or at least to one logical interpretation of reality. On the whole, it was enthusiastically taken up, championed, and propagated by his collaborators. Without changing its basic content, they added to it extravagant praise, adulation, at times veneration—qualities absent from the monarch's own simple and pragmatic view of his activities. Yet the roles of genre (sermons are different from administrative commands), occasion, and sheer flattery aside, that glorification had, again, a firm grounding in historical reality: the admirers were, in effect, acclaiming not only their remarkable leader and his deeds, but also themselves and their own work, even their very existence as a conscious group in modernizing Russia. That fundamental link between Peter the Great on the one hand and the modern Russian government and educated public on the other was to be a dominant factor in Russian intellectual life in the eighteenth century and beyond. One understands how Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich, statesman and foremost preacher and ideologist of the reign, began his celebrated funeral sermon, "What is this? What have we lived to witness, oh Russians?

[17] *Iunosti chestnoe zertsalo ili pokazanie k zhiteiskomu obkhozhdeniiu. Sobrannoe ot raznykh Avtorov. Napechatasia poveleniem Tsarskago Velichestva, v Sanktpiterburkhe Leta Gospodnia 1717, Fevralia 4 dnia.* A facsimile edition of the *Mirror* was published in Moscow in 1976.

[18] Peter the Great as translated in Sumner, *op. cit.*, 149.

What do we see? What are we doing? We are burying Peter the Great!" and then could not continue, while he cried and the congregation howled and howled its grief.[19]

Images of Peter the Great—or at least representations if not fully developed images—abounded in the panegyrical literature and decorative architecture and art so prominent at the time. The reformer abolished most of the Muscovite ceremonial, but he delighted in huge celebrations of important events, especially military and naval victories. These frequently combined poetry, school plays (produced particularly at the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy), complex military reviews (sometimes with prisoners), fireworks, distribution of food and drink to the people, and very elaborate triumphal arches and other appropriate decor. Although the sovereign preferred to march in a parade in the uniform of the Preobrazhenskii regiment, leaving higher functions, such as receiving the review to others, notably Prince Fedor Romodanovskii, even styled "caesar," he was depicted in painting and sculpture as Jupiter, Mars, Hercules (victor over the Swedish lion), and, of course, Neptune. He was also pictured as a hero of antiquity, an Agamemnon or an Alexander the Great. Panegyrical literature used, too, such Biblical images as David killing Goliath, Moses liberating his people, Samson defeating, once more, the lion. Even old Kievan princes, St. Vladimir and Iaroslav the Wise, made their appearance. Alexander Menshikov and other associates of the ruler sometimes accompanied their monarch in his various disguises.[20]

A greater and more historically significant celebration than usual followed the final victory over Sweden and the Treaty of Nystad. On that occasion, on October 22, 1721, State Chancellor Count Gabriel Golovkin (made state chancellor in 1709 on the battlefield of Poltava) offered in the name of the Senate to Peter I the titles of "Emperor," "Great" and

[19] Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia,* 126. The sermon occupies pp. 126–129; and the editorial notes to it, pp. 472–473 of the volume.

[20] As introduction to the panegyrical literature and art of the reign, see *Panegiricheskaia literatura petrovskogo vremeni* (Moscow, 1979). The texts in the volume include detailed descriptions and explanations of two magnificent triumphal arches, "Torzhestvennaia vrata, vvodiashchaia v khram bezsmertnye slavy" (135–149), and Iosif Turoboiskii's "Preslavnoe torzhestvo svoboditelia Livonii" (150–180). Russians objected to classical mythology as pagan, thus providing further incentive for Petrine propagandists to explicate and defend what they were doing. For the tradition of festivals in imperial Russia in the eighteenth century, see, for example, the catalog of a Hermitage exhibition, *Feierverki i illiuminatsii v grafike XVIII veka* (Leningrad, 1978). Recent work in the field of decorations, medals, and military emblems, all greatly affected by the reign and relevant to its ideology, includes George Vilinbakhov's expert articles: G. V. Vilinbakhov, "K istorii uchrezhdeniia ordena Andreia Pervozvannogo i evoliutsii ego znaka," *Sbornik russkoi kultury i iskusstva petrovskogo vremeni* (Leningrad, 1977), 144–158; "Emblema na rotnom znameni Sankt-Peterburgskogo Polka 1712 goda," *Soobshcheniia Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha,* XLIV (Leningrad, 1979), 32–34. On coins, as well as medals, see esp. the bilingual publication *Medals and Coins of the Age of Peter the Great. From the Hermitage Collection / Medali i monety Petrovskogo vremeni. Iz kollektsii Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha* (Leningrad, 1974).

"Father of the Fatherland." As motivation for the offer, he spoke of the ruler's achievement as follows: "We, your faithful subjects, have been thrust from the darkness of ignorance onto the stage of glory of the entire world, promoted, so to speak from nonbeing into being, and included in the society of political peoples."[21] An attenuated form of this promotion from nonbeing into being, namely the image of Peter the Great as a sculptor shaping Russia with his tools into a statue of his own making, became quasi-official in formal rhetoric and was reflected in the emperor's seal, his flag, and even the dress of his heavily caparisoned horse as it walked in the funeral procession.[22]

Longer-lasting than fireworks, richer in material and argument than proclamations or festive poems, sermons are of special interest to a student of the early images of Peter the Great. Preached, often in the presence of the ruler, by Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich, Bishop Gabriel Buzhinskii, Metropolitan Stephen Iavorskii, in many ways the leading cleric of the reign—who, however, came to disagree with the sovereign on church matters and thus deviated from the main body of his supporters—Archimandrite Feofilakt Lopatinskii, and others, they presented a striking quasi-official view of Peter the Great and his works, justified them both in general and in particular, and taught Russians perfect obedience and support. As Feofan Prokopovich restated grandly the monarch's own vision of his reign as a move from darkness into the light, a leap from backwardness to a new prominence and parity with the West:

> Be it not remembered for shame, because it is true, the opinion we elicited from, the value we were assigned by foreign peoples formerly: by political peoples we were considered barbarians, by the proud and the majestic the despised ones, by the learned the ignorant, by the predatory a desirable catch, by all shiftless, insulted from all sides. . . . But now what is it that our most luminous monarch has accomplished by courage, wisdom, justice, by correcting and teaching the fatherland, not only for himself but also for the entire Russian people? This, that those who abhorred us as rude assiduously seek our fraternity; those who dishonored us glorify us; those who threatened us are afraid and tremble; those who despised us are not ashamed to serve us; many European crowned heads are not only willing to ally with Peter, our monarch, but do not consider it dishonorable to give him precedence: they have repealed their opinion, they have repealed their narratives about us, they have erased their antiquated little stories, they have begun both to speak and to write about us differently. Russia has raised her head, bright, beautiful, strong, loved by friends, feared by enemies.[23]

Peter the Great's own role in the transformation was all-important: "By your labors we rest, by your campaigns we stand unshakable, by your

[21] Quoted from V. Mavrodin, *Petr Pervyi* (Leningrad, 1948), 250.

[22] The funeral was described in precise detail in [Feofan Prokopovich], *Kratkaia povest o smerti Petra Velikogo Imperatora Rossiiskogo.* In the St. Petersburg 1819 edition the description occupies pp. 25–39.

[23] Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia,* 46.

(yes, this is what I mean to say) many deaths we are alive."[24] Feofan Prokopovich, as already indicated, liked especially the image of Peter I as sculptor and Russia as his statue. Another preacher, Feofilakt Lopatinskii, depicted the reforming ruler as architect.[25]

In discussing Peter the Great's achievement, orators often stressed his versatility as well as his heroic effort and personal participation in everything. As Feofan Prokopovich put it, combining historical fact, classical and Biblical learning, and his own imagination:

> It would have been amazing had one sovereign accomplished one thing and another the other: as Romans praise their first two tsars, Romulus and Numa, that one by war and the other by peace strengthened the fatherland, or as in sacred history David by arms and Solomon by politics created a blessed well-being for Israel. But in our case both this and that, and, in addition, in countless and varied circumstances, were achieved by Peter alone. For us he is Romulus, and Numa, and David, and Solomon—Peter alone.[26]

Or, as expressed in the solemn eulogy of Gabriel Buzhinskii, in a sermon marking the first anniversary of the monarch's death:

> *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* In this love *Peter* is a true imitator of Christ the Lord, not sparing his dearest life for his fatherland, for his friends in the faith in Christ, and, by the scepter God had given him, his subjects, not sparing his life in labors and deeds, in cold and in heat, in travels and in seafaring, in land journeys full of tribulations and in much heavier and more calamitous storms at sea; not sparing his life in battles, where he was in a situation when an enemy bullet pierced the hat on his most precious head; not sparing his life in seafaring, where once he was in such a storm on the Baltic Sea that all hope of salvation was gone; all this he suffered for the fatherland, laying down his life for his friends.[27]

The preachers gave their unstinting support to the ruler and the state, against every enemy and in all circumstances. Using the splendid ecclesiastical vocabulary available for such purposes, they denounced and anathematized Mazepa and other "traitors" or lamented the unbelievable "ingratitude" and evil behavior of Tsarevich Alexis. Feofan Prokopovich, to repeat, became through his various writings and orations probably the leading ideologist of the Petrine autocracy and of his reign in general. Gabriel Buzhinskii, who served for a number of years as, in effect, the head chaplain of the Russian navy, in his turn, argued as follows in a sermon pronounced aboard ship, commemorating the victory of Hangö

[24] *Ibid.*, 67.

[25] See Feofilakt Lopatinskii's sermon "Slovo o bogodarovannom mire," *Panegiricheskaia literatura petrovskogo vremeni*, 255–264.

[26] Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 137.

[27] Gavriil Buzhinskii, *Polnoe sobranie pouchitelnykh slov, skazyvannykh v vysochaishem prisutstvii gosudaria imperatora Petra Velikogo* (Moscow, [1784]), 252–253. Italics are in the original. The sermon occupies pp. 224–263. It was delivered "in the presence of Peter the Great" only in the sense that it was pronounced by his tomb.

and dealing with such topics as military service, just wars, and the soldier's or sailor's role and fate.

Contrary to the Anabaptists, the Socinians, and other assorted heretics, force and wars had their proper place in human affairs. These critics, in effect, disregarded overwhelming scriptural evidence against their claims and cited what passages they did cite out of context, in particular without distinguishing the private from the public. Thus, in the injunction to love one's enemies, they failed to realize that "these words must be understood as referring to loving one's own private and particular enemies, not the enemies of the entire society."[28] Just wars did exist, and of those wars "God Himself is both the beginner and the supporter, and He alone grants victories and triumph."[29] They were marked by certain signs: fighting not for no reason but because of great need; fighting on orders of lawful authorities, which distinguished just wars from rebellions; fighting because of a rightful claim of injury; fighting in defense and for survival. The Old Testament was full of just wars and of the divine support of them. Even in the New Testament, Christ, while ordering Peter not to use his sword and thus commit merely a private murder, never told warriors to cease being warriors, for instance, when he cured a centurion's son. "The Russian crown started a true, just, and rightful war for its vestments torn unjustly by the Swedish lion, for the numerous lands and provinces grabbed by it, and God, the highest Judge, took the crown under His righteous protection."[30] As to the Russian soldiers and sailors who went into battle:

> Rejoice, then, you too, and exult, Russian flag-officers, captains, and the entire Christian host, who for the fatherland and for your Sovereign do not protect your health and do not spare your life: for you a martyr's crown has been prepared; you, having abandoned all worldly attachments, will be rewarded a hundredfold in the heavenly kingdom and will inherit life eternal. Sweet for you is death for the fatherland, but rewards eternally sweet, which the eye can not see, the ear can not hear, and the heart can not feel, have been prepared for you. There, with those warriors, Theodore Stratilatos, which means military commander, Andrew Stratilatos, George, Dimitrios, Sebastian, and others without number, you will receive the crown of victory.[31]

Feofan Prokopovich used more down-to-earth language in justifying Peter the Great's creation of the navy:

> We shall not find a single village in the world that is located by a river or a lake and does not have boats. How is it possible then for such a glorious and mighty monarchy, which stretches around southern and northern seas, not to have ships—this would be shameful and deserving reproach even if there were no particular need for them. We stand over water and watch how merchants come to

[28] *Ibid.*, 80. The sermon covers pp. 68–106.
[29] *Ibid.*, 87.
[30] *Ibid.*, 97.
[31] *Ibid.*, 105–106.

us and leave us, but ourselves cannot do that. Word for word, as in poetic tales, a certain Tantalus is standing in water, but experiences thirst. And that is why even our sea is not ours.[32]

Moreover, without a fleet the shores themselves were not safe. A maritime enemy could strike suddenly; even when the authorities were forewarned, the point of the enemy's attack could not be foreseen; and he was free to withdraw at will without the possibility of pursuit. Gabriel Buzhinskii, on his part, referred to Cosimo de' Medici for the assertion that a state relying on land forces alone was similar to a bird trying to fly on one wing. By contrast, history was full of examples of the success of sea power. Themistocles used a navy to excellent effect; according to Polybius, Rome defeated Carthage once it had acquired navigation; distant territories could be quickly conquered by sea long before land forces reached them. Yet the naval chaplain, too, thought of trade as much as of war when he spoke of a fleet: "What an abundance of everything prevails there, where you have ports, and, just the opposite, what a shortage of everything, even the necessities, is noticeable in those settlements that are distant from the sea, or are entirely deprived of a sea connection."[33] Indeed, Feofan Prokopovich cited St. Basil the Great to insist that God had divided the fruits of the earth among different lands so they would have to cooperate economically, and He had provided water for effective communication: those objecting to the fleet were thus opposing God's plan for humanity.[34] In addition to justifying and glorifying the Great Northern War, the army, and the navy, the preachers applied their talents to many other aspects of Peter the Great's activity—witness Gabriel Buzhinskii's remarkable defense of the building of St. Petersburg, which will be presented later in this chapter.

The preachers not only taught a proper understanding of Peter the Great and of various aspects of his reign, but they also supplied significant detail. Together with the official pageantry and certain writings of the reign, they helped to establish the iconography, so to speak, of the image of the ruler, an iconography that has survived in large part to our day. Thus the hat on Peter's head shot through in the battle of Poltava—and already cited in this chapter in Gabriel Buzhinskii's eulogy on the first anniversary of the sovereign's death—became an almost indispensable symbol of that decisive engagement, of Peter the Great's heroism, and of his direct military leadership. ". . . you were not frightened by the very fires of Mars, by most obvious death, you have shown to the world such courage as has nowhere been heard, nowhere described. The very hat on the thrice-crowned head shot through by the enemy pro-

[32] Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia,* 107. "A Laudatory Sermon about the Russian Fleet and about the Victory Obtained on July 27 by Russian Galleys over Swedish Ships" occupies pp. 103–112, and 468–469 fns.

[33] Gavriil Buzhinskii, *op. cit.,* 21–22.

[34] Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia,* 107.

claims this courage louder than any trumpets and will proclaim it for ages and ages."[35] Similarly, Peter I's honorific brief appointment (after all, he was a monarch) in August 1716 as the commander of joint fleets of Russia, Holland, Denmark, and Great Britain became an abiding symbol of the new prominence and acceptance of Russia as a major power—and was included, for instance, in Professor Nicholas Pavlenko's brief list of "fundamental dates in the life and the activity of Peter the First" in a book published in 1976.[36] As Gabriel Buzhinskii expatiated on the matter of the joint command:

> . . . but what boggles the mind, what is totally unheard of, but for God Who arranges everything so wisely, is this assumption of the honor of Admiral over three ancient and glorious fleets of different states; for, having lowered their flags in front of the Russian state standard on the ship named *Ingermanland,* in front of our victorious Emperor who was present there in person and who had been honored by them with the title of *Admiral,* they rendered him proper obeisance and respect.[37]

Examples of significant Petrine details that became, in a sense, canonical while Peter I was still alive could be readily multiplied.

The sermonizers, however, differed from many later admirers of Peter the Great in laying stress on the religious nature and the Christian virtues and behavior of their hero. They ascribed to him not only a willingness to sacrifice his life for his people, but also a profound faith, a trusting reliance on God, kindness, mercy, and humility. They argued that he did not like war and had turned to it only as the last resort. Rather disingenuously they even utilized a complex diplomatic game to claim that Charles XII himself, shortly before he died, came finally to admire Peter the Great, "began to love him and, disdaining all others, with him alone wanted not only to make peace, but also to unite in a friendly alliance."[38] This conversion of his greatest enemy could well constitute a conclusive testimony to the Russian ruler's character and Christian merit.

Whereas Petrine sermons were generally permeated with this Christian emphasis, it found probably its most concentrated expression in a special brief work that Feofan Prokopovich wrote about the death of Peter the Great and that became basic to later accounts of the demise of the reforming tsar:

[35] Gavriil Buzhinskii, *op. cit.,* 11. Feofan Prokopovich declared: "Oh precious hat! Not valuable because of its material, but because of the damage done to it more valuable than all the crowns, all tsar's utensils! Historians who describe the Russian state write that on no European sovereign can one see as precious a crown as on the Russian monarch. But from now on no longer the crown but this tsar's hat you should consider and describe with amazement" (Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia,* 57).

[36] Pavlenko, *Petr Pervyi,* 382.

[37] Gavriil Buzhinskii, *op. cit.,* 24. Italics in the original. A commemorative medal was struck for the occasion with Peter the Great's bust and the inscription "Master of the four [fleets]."

[38] Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia,* 134.

And when the Sovereign was tormented by a most severe and uncomfortable illness, it was thought that he could barely respond by signs to religious consolation, but it was then that he showed a very strong and vivid feeling of piety. For when one of the consolers mentioned the death of Christ and what it obtained for us, and began to say that the time had come when for his own good he should think only of what he used formerly to tell to others (because he had spoken often enough to others about the blessed exculpation of sinners through Christ), immediately, as if excited, he made an effort to get up and, raised slightly by his assistants, he lifted his eyes and his arms, as best he could, and with a parched tongue, his speech confused, pronounced the following words: "yes, that is the only thing that quenches my thirst, the only thing that brings me joy" . . .

However, when a consoler would approach him, which would be done periodically, and would remind him of the vanity of the world, of the coming eternal blessedness and the price for which it had been purchased, the blood of the Son of God, he would force himself, as if having gained strength, to try to get up and to make with his hand the sign of the cross, or to point toward heaven, and, what was very remarkable, to change his groans into an exclamation of gladness and to look joyful in the face, and he would attempt to embrace the consoler. In the meantime the Archimandrite of the Holy Trinity Monastery arrived and addressed the Sovereign to inquire whether he would allow an additional administering of the Holy Eucharist, and, if he would allow it, he was to raise his hand so to indicate; immediately he raised his hand, and he partook additionally of the Holy Eucharist. And after that the consolers, taking turns, did not cease to console and to confirm him; and he, similarly, did not cease to indicate by signs his assent.[39]

Religion could sometimes aid politics, for instance, in enjoining obedience to the sovereign or in mobilizing support for Peter the Great's wars against Turkey. More fundamentally, the strong religious element in the sermons stemmed from the nature of the genre itself, the orators, and the occasion, as well as the general requirements in addressing an officially Orthodox ruler and government and a devoutly Orthodox people. Feofan Prokopovich's preaching in particular can be considered a study in the transition from the old Muscovite to the new modernizing Russia.[40] Nor, it should be added, was the religious element necessarily inappropriate in the creation of the image of Peter the Great.[41]

[39] Feofan Prokopovich, *Kratkaia povest* . . . , 13–16.

[40] For interesting recent comment on "the change of the type of the writer in the Petrine epoch," see A. M. Panchenko, "O smene pisatelskogo tipa v petrovskuiu epokhu," *Problemy literaturnogo razvitiia v Rossii pervoi treti XVIII veka, XVIII vek,* Sbornik 9 (Leningrad, 1974), 112–128.

For the unique background of the image of the Russian ruler, certain Western parallels, and other related matters, see especially Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People* (New Haven, 1961), and the writings of Professor Stephen L. Baehr: "From History to National Myth: *Translatio imperii* in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *The Russian Review,* vol. 37, no. 1 (January 1978), pp. 1–13; "In the Re-beginning: Rebirth, Renewal and *Renovatio* in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *Russia and the West in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. A. G. Cross (Newtonville, Mass., 1983), pp. 152–166; and "In the Image and

3

Although eighteenth-century images of Peter the Great could be affected by the Muscovite tradition and even by Christian hagiography, their basic content derived from the Age of Reason. Whatever one thinks of that major weltanschauung of our Western civilization or of its ultimate appropriateness for Russia, Peter I belonged to it by belief, word, and deed. It was the optimistic faith in reason, in the possibility and feasibility of reasonable solutions to human problems that constituted the leading inspiration of the age and also, as we have seen, of the Russian reformer. The enemies were ignorance, prejudice, stagnation, the barbaric past. Salvation could be found only in education, enlightenment, work.

Peter the Great was thus a true enlightened despot. That he has not generally been so called is to be explained by the facts that that appellation has been usually reserved for the second half of the eighteenth century, that the Russian history of the period has not been sufficiently studied in the European context, and that the crudity and cruelty of the reformer, as well as the barbarism of his surroundings, have stood in the way of a full recognition of his place among the elect of the age. Yet if Enlightenment meant bringing light, as understood at the time, into darkness, no other ruler of the period could compete in the scope, decisiveness, and irreversibility of his actions with the Russian emperor. Peter the Great not only performed impressively as an enlightened despot, but also bequeathed enlightened despotism to his successors. This legacy was expressed indelibly in his image.

The Western Enlightenment recognized Peter the Great. That recognition began during his life, marked by such events as his becoming a member of the French Academy of Science—another canonical detail in the image of Peter the Great (after the tsar corrected the academicians

Likeness: The 'Political Icon' in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Russia," which I read in manuscript and for which I particularly thank the author.

41 The Russian tsar was, apparently, a sincerely and strongly religious man, who often referred to the presence of God in his daily life, for example, in the dangers and fortunes of war. I know of no evidence contradicting Feofan Prokopovich's hagiographic depiction of his death. Also, he liked very much to attend church services, frequently singing in the choir or reading the epistle (e.g., count such activities during his three relatively brief visits to the Russian far north, in 1692, 1694, and 1702, narrated in *O Vysochaishikh prishestviiakh Velikogo Gosudaria, Tsaria i Velikogo Kniazia Petra Alekseevicha, vseia Velikiia i Malyia i Belyia Rossii Samoderzhtsa* [Moscow, 1783]). The difficulty with this assessment of Peter the Great as simply and thoroughly religious is not his struggle against the ecclesiastical establishment and his church reform—reformers can also be religious—nor even his enthusiasm for the secular world and a secularization of Russian life and culture, but his notorious blasphemous debauchery. I find explanations that the blasphemy was meant against the Catholic Church, but not the Orthodox, or against superstition, but not true religion, insufficient, but I have no solution to offer. The best treatment of the subject and its historiography can be found in Mr. Paul Hollingsworth's seminar paper listed in my bibliography and as yet unpublished.

concerning the exact geography of the Caspian shoreline). It could be considered finally achieved with the publication, at long last, in 1759–1763 of Voltaire's two-volume *History of the Russian Empire under Peter the Great.*[42] Ordered by the Russian government, which supplied historical materials, *Peter the Great* is not one of Voltaire's immortal works, although it proved to be one of the more troublesome as the philosophe's Russian patrons despaired over his ignorant and cavalier treatment of Russia and over his independence. Nevertheless, it accomplished its purpose of setting the Russian monarch firmly in the European Enlightenment.

As Voltaire put it, "Nothing is left for human attention except striking revolutions that have changed the mores and laws of great states; and it is under this rubric that the history of *Peter the Great* deserves to be known."[43] The Russian ruler was a legislator by no means inferior to Solon or Lycurgus.[44] His sweeping and many-sided reforms proved to be remarkably successful:

> The arts that he transplanted with his own hands into the lands, some of which were at the time savage, by bearing fruit gave testimony to his genius and eternalized his memory; they appear today native to the lands to which he had brought them. Law, police, politics, military discipline, the navy, commerce, manufactures, the sciences, the fine arts, all have been perfected according to his intentions. . . .[45]

The results of Peter the Great's efforts indeed justified the costs, sometimes in most striking ways. The pacifistically inclined Voltaire wrote: "Whereas there is not a single example among our modern nations of any war compensating by a little good the evil that it had caused, the day of Poltava led to happiness for the largest empire on earth."[46] The tragic condemnation and death of Tsarevich Alexis could also be vindicated by referring to a higher purpose. ". . . *Peter* was more king than father, and he sacrificed his own son to the interests of the founder and the legislator and to those of the nation, which, without this unfortunate severity, would have fallen back into the condition out of which he had pulled it."[47] And, in general, except for the author's personal style, obvious discomfort with Russia and things Russian, and explicit anticleri-

[42] *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand,* par l'Auteur de l'histoire de Charles XII, tome premier MDCCLIX, tome second MDCCLXIII. On the writing of the work, see esp. E. Shmurlo, *Volter i ego kniga o Petre Velikom* (Prague, 1929).

[43] [Voltaire], *Histoire de l'empire* . . . , I, pp. XXV–XXVI. Italics in the original.

[44] *Ibid.,* XXVIII–XXIX.

[45] [Voltaire], *op. cit.,* II, 269–270.

[46] *Ibid.,* I, 279.

[47] *Ibid.,* I, 183. Italics in the original. Voltaire had explained earlier that, in contrast to the Prince of Wales, a Russian heir to the throne was not free to travel where he pleased, and that "A criminal thought without any consequence cannot be punished in either England or France; it can in Russia (*ibid.,* 173).

calism, Voltaire's work read very much like those of the reformer's Russian apologists.[48]

Although Western images of Peter the Great are not the subject of this study, it is important for an appreciation of the Russian intellectual scene to realize that Voltaire developed what came to be, in the Age of Reason, a dominant view of Peter the Great and Russia. Of course, Western Europe produced its critics of the Russian reformer and reform, too, figures as prominent as Rousseau, Mably, Raynal, or Condillac. But perhaps the main body of the philosophes, represented by Diderot, D'Alembert and the *Encyclopédie,* joined Voltaire in extolling the Russian sovereign and in directly linking him and his work to the culminating glory of Catherine the Great's reign. In the words of a French scholar:

> With Voltaire, Europe saw that this immense land, peopled by ignorant and bruitish muzhiks, "had given birth to Peter the Great, tsar legislator and reformer," that next it placed at its head a "new Semiramis," Catherine, whose writings and codes were admired by all; the philosophes wept as they read these laws, laws so beautiful that it was the duty of all the sovereigns of the world to take them as their example. Within a few decades Russia steps out of its historical and intellectual "nonbeing," provides for itself "rational, harmonious" laws and becomes for Western intellectuals a kind of model state, which attracts the eyes of all the theoreticians in politics and philosophy. The "Muscovy" of 1700 has transformed itself into an "enlightened" empire, into a country of "Light," into an example.[49]

Voltaire had already written that "the Russians came late, and, having introduced in their country the arts already fully perfected, it transpired that they made more progress in fifty years than any nation had made by itself in five hundred."[50] Diderot and others took up this suggestion—to be repeated so often in later times—that it was the very newness of Russian participation in history and culture that augured so well for the future development of Russia. Imprisoned by its own past, the Age of Reason looked with hope at the unencumbered giant who was validating and would continue to validate its most cherished beliefs. No wonder that there occurred what its closest student called "the Russian mirage

[48] For anticlericalism, see the blaming of "the priests and the monks" for the Tsarevich Alexis tragedy ([Voltaire], *op. cit.,* II, 185–186) or the favorable comparison of the Russian monarch to Louis XIV, allegedly in Peter the Great's own words, on the point that he made his clergy obey him whereas the French king was subjugated by his (*ibid.,* 221–222). To be sure, the great bulk of Voltaire's history was a dry factual narrative rather than an ideological treatise, in which respect it again resembled Russian histories of Peter the Great and his reign produced in the eighteenth century and later, including Feofan Prokopovich's own account, Feofan Prokopovich, *Istoriia Petra Velikogo ot rozhdeniia ego do Poltavskoi batalii i vziatiia v plen ostalnykh shvedskikh voisk pri Perevolochne vkliuchitelno* (St. Petersburg, 1773).

[49] F. de Labriolle, "Le prosveščenie russe et les lumières en France (1760–1798)," *Revue des études slaves,* 45 (1966), 75–91, quoted from p. 75.

[50] [Voltaire], *op. cit.,* I, 51–52.

in France in the eighteenth century."[51] To repeat, Peter the Great's reforms and the evolution of Russia fitted well, and especially seemed to fit well, the views of the Enlightenment.

Although the Russian Enlightenment is a generally accepted concept, there is no consensus as to when the Age of Reason established itself in Russia, nor how long it lasted there. In trying to identify it, specialists have ranged from the second half of the sixteenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth and the Decembrists, not to mention what has been sometimes described as the "neo-Enlightenment" of the 1860s and the years following.

Characteristically, a symposium on "the problems of the Russian Enlightenment in eighteenth-century literature" offered different opinions.[52] In the opening presentation, the distinguished specialist P. N. Berkov provided an overelaborate scheme based on his formulation of two closely related, yet distinct, concepts referring to the Enlightenment, *prosvetitelstvo* and *Prosveshchenie*.[53] In his view, the reign of Peter the Great constituted the second period of the Russian *prosvetitelstvo,* which had begun in the seventeenth century with such intellectuals as Simeon of Polotsk and Sylvester Medvedev, as well as the first period of Russian enlightened despotism.[54] Berkov's outline reflected the general tendency in Soviet scholarship to push the Russian Enlightenment—once confined by most specialists to the reign of Catherine the Great—further back,[55] and it displayed nuance and a certain sophistication. But it lacked the directness and power of I. Z. Serman's interpretation of the Russian Enlightenment based squarely on Peter the Great and his reforms. In his

[51] A. Lortholary, *Le Mirage russe en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, n.d.).

[52] *Problemy russkogo Prosveshcheniia v literature XVIII veka* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1961).

[53] P. N. Berkov, "Osnovnye voprosy izucheniia russkogo prosvetitelstva," *ibid.,* 5–27.

[54] The concept of enlightened despotism intrinsically related to that of the Enlightenment proved to be similarly controversial in its application to Russia, particularly as far as its boundaries in time were concerned. While I fully share Berkov's view of Peter the Great as an enlightened despot, other opinions have been offered for consideration. For one of the better discussions, see N. M. Druzhinin, "Prosveshchennyi absoliutizm v Rossii," in N. M. Druzhinin, N. I. Pavlenko and L. V. Cherepnin, eds., *Absoliutizm v. Rossii (XVII–XVIII vv.)* (Moscow, 1964), 428–459. Druzhinin skillfully presents Catherine the Great's rule as part and parcel of European enlightened despotism. He is unwilling, however, to extend this concept to the reign of Peter the Great, although he is fully aware of the many enlightened ideas and measures of the reformer, essentially because, in his opinion, the Russian economy was not ready for it until the second half of the century. Druzhinin also excludes the rule of Alexander I from enlightened despotism on the ground that it went beyond it in its constitutional appeal before finally turning to reaction. For my treatment of that problem and my view of the Russian Enlightenment in general, see the first two chapters (pp. 1–100) of Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801–1855* (Oxford, 1976).

[55] Cf. Z. I. Gershkovich's contribution to the symposium, "Concerning the methodological principles of the study of the Russian Englightenment" ("O metodologicheskikh printsipakh izucheniia russkogo prosvetitelstva"), 151–157, especially p. 153.

treatment of "the Enlightenment and Russian literature in the first half of the eighteenth century," the second contribution to the symposium, Serman asserted:

> Even a minimally attentive study of the ideology and works of Kantemir, Trediakovskii, Lomonosov, Sumarokov, and other literary-public figures of the period 1730–1750 . . . convinces one that their entire activity was based on ideological foundations that had been created earlier, that is, in the Petrine epoch, and in large part by Peter I himself and by his associates. By their practical-concrete content the Petrine reforms gave birth to ideas new in Russian ideological life. Already by 1720 the concept of a break made by Peter in the history of the country, of two Russias, "the old" and "the new," captures completely the minds of the contemporaries and becomes the starting point for all Russian ideological constructions of the first half of the eighteenth century. Already in 1716 Feofan Prokopovich declared: "So, what was Russia formerly, in such a recent past, and what is it now?" Following him, Kantemir, Trediakovskii, Tatishchev, Lomonosov, Sumarokov *in their social-political reasoning invariably began with the* idea of the decisive influence exercised by the person and the activity of Peter the Great on the entire course of Russian history at the end of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century.[56]

A view of the Russian Enlightenment centered on Peter the Great is bound to be attractive to a student of the image of the reforming emperor. And it also finds its justification in the broader context of Russian history.

Glorifying Peter the Great thus became a main theme—even the main theme as the glorifiers extended it, in what was for them a natural manner, into attacks on the old Russian ignorance and prejudices, a championing of education, or an exaltation of Catherine the Great—of the intellectuals of the Russian Enlightenment. The reformer's image of himself as a dedicated warrior struggling with every ounce of energy to drag his country from darkness into the light, an image that was developed and canonized, so to speak, by such contemporaries of his as Feofan Prokopovich and Gabriel Buzhinskii and that found a marvelous applicability and resonance in the fundamental ideology of the Age of Reason, shone as the gospel of the epoch. Not surprisingly, eighteenth-century Russian historians, poets, playwrights, publicists, scholars, teachers, and other intellectuals vied with one another in affirming and extolling it. Not surprisingly too, the gravest danger for them came to be, in the words of the foremost student of the phenomenon, an endlessly repetitive "vicious circle of eulogy without content."[57]

[56] I. Z. Serman, "Prosvetitelstvo i russkaia literatura pervoi poloviny XVIII veka," *Problemy russkogo Prosveshcheniiaa* . . . , 28–44; quoted from p. 32.

[57] E. Shmurlo, *Petr Velikii v otsenke sovremennikov i potomstva* (St. Petersburg, 1912), 62. For Shmurlo's contribution to the study of the image of Peter the Great, see pp. 202–203 below.