THE *DOMOSTROI*

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RULES FOR RUSSIAN HOUSEHOLDS IN THE TIME OF IVAN THE TERRIBLE

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

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C. J. P.

THE *DOMOSTROI*

Introduction

In the heart of present-day Moscow, on Razin Street heading out from Red Square, stands the stone house in which Michael, first tsar of the Romanov line (1613–1645), was born. This house is one of the few surviving examples of the world idealized in the sixteenth-century guide to good household management known as the *Domostroi*. Its padded benches, heavy oak furniture, cramped but luxurious women's quarters, and outdoor kitchens give substance to the *Domostroi*'s descriptions of the lives of wealthy nobles.

The *Domostroi* regulates the moral and civil obligations, the family relationships, and the physical needs of a large and varied household. The Romanov house illustrates many of its precepts. For example, the original household was, as the *Domostroi* prescribes, self-sufficient, with its own orchards, gardens, and storehouses.[1] It was wealthy, too: the taffetas, brocades, and velvets listed in the *Domostroi* are in evidence throughout. The book gives instructions on trading with foreign merchants; the Romanovs' interest in foreign lands is revealed by the presence of a globe—an unusual gadget in these times. The exquisite, cluttered rooms in some measure explain the *Domostroi*'s obsession with order (the word *domostroi* means exactly that: "house order").

1. Unfortunately, several of the outbuildings and gardens were destroyed to build the Rossiia Hotel. The main house is operated as a museum and has received good care; other outbuildings still stand but have not been maintained.

In other ways, the house exhibits features that the *Domostroi* takes for granted. Particularly striking is the way the builders fortified it for defense, separating the third-floor entrance from the street by a short bridge and a heavy oak door studded with nails. The physical structure also demonstrates the need for warmth: small, almost windowless rooms with low ceilings conserve heat. Preserved too are the separate spheres occupied by men and women. Quite literally, the house is split in two, emphasizing the strictly defined bounds within which elite women lived.

The proximity of the house to the Kremlin reflects another reality of sixteenth-century life. Moscow then was very small, barely extending beyond Red Square (although fields and shacks stretched past the protective city walls). People still called the region adjoining Red Square the "New Town."[2] The Kremlin, political and administrative heart of Muscovy, housed not only the tsar but the head of the Russian Orthodox church, the metropolitan of Moscow, as well as priests and high nobles. A monastery and a convent ministered to those who had retired from the world, and government offices watched over the concerns of the laity. Petitioners, clerics, merchants, and civil servants bustled about their business, while outside, in Red Square, crowds gathered to shop in the market, witness executions, and hear royal decrees. The Romanov house, then as now, stood right in the center of the activity.

The city itself, however, looked quite different then. Stone buildings were unusual, and houses, churches, streets, and shops were made mostly of wood. Because of the vulnerability of wood to fire, rot, and other forms of destruction, the old city survives for the most part only

2. See, for example, *Akty istoricheskie* (Moscow, 1836), t. 1, No. 164. Now this region is called the Kitaigorod.

"Every Christian must know how to live according to God in the Orthodox Christian faith" (Chapter 2). Here the patriarch (in the sixteenth century it would have been the metropolitan) of Moscow blesses the tsar while the court looks on. St. Basil's Cathedral, built in the second half of the sixteenth century to commemorate Ivan the Terrible's victories over the Mongols, can be seen in the background. From Adam Olearius, *Voyages en Moscovie, Tartarie et Perse* (Amsterdam, 1727). Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

in its street plan. Beyond the familiar red brick walls and a few stone structures, even the Kremlin bears little resemblance to its sixteenth-century self. Some of the best-known landmarks—for example, St. Basil's Cathedral—either had not appeared or had not reached their present form at the time the *Domostroi* was written. The *Domostroi* opens a window on a world that—culturally, socially, even physically—has long since vanished.

Politics and Society in Muscovy

Although St. Basil's, built to commemorate emergent Moscow's victory over the Tatars (i.e., Mongols) of Kazan in 1552, was not completed until later, it nonetheless aptly symbolizes the period in which the *Domostroi* began to circulate. The colloquial Russian in which most of the text was written dates no earlier than the accession to the throne of Ivan III in 1462 and probably not much later than the death of his grandson Ivan IV in 1584. For several reasons—including terminology used, customs described, and the inclusion, in early manuscripts, of a chapter written by Sil'vestr, a priest who served in the Kremlin Cathedral of the Annunciation from 1545 to 1556 (approximately)—it most likely appeared sometime in the 1550s.[3] Overall, the years between 1462 and 1584 were prosperous and stable, the 1550s particularly so. The Muscovite government expanded and consolidated, confirmed its ascendancy over the other Russian principalities, achieved its final liberation from Mongol control, and began its reintegration into European politics. Although the 1530s and the last third of the sixteenth century were plagued by political and economic crises, as a whole the period was marked by the attainment of the goals of the early Moscow princes. Italian architects in the Kremlin, Russian diplomats in the Vatican, and English ships in the White Sea attested to Russia's renewed vitality. The parochialism of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries began to disappear as Muscovy defined its imperial mission—

3. For example, the *Domostroi* mentions people sleeping on the stove, hardly possible before the mid-sixteenth century, when flat-topped stoves replaced the older round ones. It also mentions distilling vodka (or brandy, the usage is unclear), a process introduced in the sixteenth century. Other examples appear in notes to the translation.

Moscow the Third Rome, heir of Byzantium, head of the One True Church.

The *Domostroi* thus reflects the life enjoyed by the fortunate few of a new nation at a time of relative calm and comfort. This group made up only a small part of a complex social hierarchy. The rules of the system determined both the privileges and the obligations by which they lived; these same rules in turn underlie the principles expressed in the *Domostroi*. To evaluate the *Domostroi*, therefore, we must first understand the system.

The political and social system that became Muscovy evolved under unfavorable circumstances: in response to the need to create a viable, independent state in a northern land where agriculture operated at a subsistence level, politics were fragmented, and the country was subject to a foreign overlord (the Mongols). Although it drew on Kievan, Byzantine, and even Mongol sources, Muscovy seems to have developed for the most part in isolation. The fundamental assumptions in its political culture included the absolute centralization of authority in Moscow, government by consensus among a small and select group headed by the grand prince (later tsar), a political hierarchy based on birth and personal ties, control of information about how the system operated, and intense concentration on the performance of limited goals.[4] The government was supported by a strict social hierarchy in which, with rare exceptions, a man's father's profession determined his own and a woman's status depended on her husband's. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the bases of this system were in place. Through it and a combination of luck, ruthlessness, and quick thinking, the Muscovite princes had expanded their tiny original holding to encompass most of Russia, in the process forcing or persuading each new neighbor to adhere to their system. By the 1560s, Moscow had expanded still further, into the lands of its erstwhile conquerors, absorbing the Khanates of Kazan' (1552) and Astrakhan (1556); by 1582 Siberia too had fallen, at least nominally, under Russian control. As Moscow's hold over the Eurasian landmass strengthened, however, its administrative problems increased.

4. On the genesis of the Muscovite political system, see Edward L. Keenan, "Muscovite Political Folkways," *Russian Review* 45 (1986): 115–181. For a different interpretation, placing more stress on Mongol influence, see Charles J. Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Russian Medieval History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

The linchpin of the political system was the tsar, a member of the Daniilovich clan, connected through Daniil's father, Alexander Nevsky, to Riurik, semilegendary Viking conqueror of Russia.[5] For much of the sixteenth century (1533–1584), the throne was occupied by Ivan IV, known popularly as "the Terrible"—a ruler who moved from brilliance to ineffectuality to cruelty and paranoia, then back again. Although no one has yet advanced an explanation for Ivan's behavior on which everyone can agree, it is clear that his unpredictable temperament caused a progressive disintegration in society that culminated in civil war and chaos.[6] Military success and government reform in the 1550s gave way to military defeats and internal terror in the 1560s, setting up the conditions for social unrest and dynastic instability after Ivan's death. At the same time, and despite his apparently determined efforts to destroy the Muscovite political system at its roots, Ivan offers an example of its strength, for the system survived both him and the interregnum to return stronger than ever.

The system survived because the tsar relied on the corps of elite cavalrymen known as boyars.[7] Not quite an aristocracy but certainly more than the "tsar's slaves" that contemporary Western observers often called them,[8] boyars earned their standing through hereditary

5. According to the Russian Primary Chronicle (also known as the *Tale of Years Gone By*), Riurik accepted an invitation to rule Novgorod in 862. His lieutenants and descendants extended Riurik's principality, considered the first Russian state, by uniting Novgorod and Kiev in 882. See Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, trans. and eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Edition* (Cambridge, Mass: Medieval Academy of America, 1953), pp. 59–61.

6. For biographies of Ivan IV, expressing various points of view, see Edward L. Keenan, "Vita: Ivan Vasilevich, Terrible Tsar: 1530–1584," *Harvard Magazine* 80, no. 3 (1978): 48–49; S. F. Platonov, *Ivan the Terrible*, trans. and ed. J. L. Wieczynski (Gulf Breeze, Fla.: Academic International Press, 1974); R. G. Skrynnikov, *Ivan the Terrible*, trans. and ed. Hugh Graham (Gulf Breeze, Fla.: Academic International Press, 1981).

7. For more on the boyars, see Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345–1547* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); Robert O. Crummey, *Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite of Russia, 1613–1689* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Ann M. Kleimola, "Patterns of Duma Recruitment, 1515–1550," in *Essays in Honor of A. A. Zimin* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), pp. 232–258; and Gustave Alef, *Rulers and Nobles in Fifteenth-Century Muscovy* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1983). A good overview of Muscovite social hierarchies and their interrelationships can be found in Richard Hellie, *Slavery in Russia, 1475–1725* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 4–18.

8. See, for example, Giles Fletcher, "Of the Russe Commonwealth," in Lloyd Berry and Robert O. Crummey, eds., *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the*

service to the crown. They, and only they, counseled the tsar on a regular basis and participated in royal decision making. Scions of families who, through farsightedness or luck, chose to ally themselves with the Moscow princes in the fourteenth century, or of families that once had owned independent principalities, the boyars ruled Russia when the tsar was too young, too sick, or otherwise incapable. Although most lacked any formal education, they seem to have competently fulfilled their main functions: to command the cavalry and to set government policy. Their commitment to government service was lifelong, for their careers usually began at fifteen and ended only with incurable illness, extreme old age, or death. Their numbers were small, for like most European monarchies before 1800, the Muscovite government operated on personal relationships and recognition by the sovereign. Yet without them, Muscovy would not have survived, for the accidents of succession by primogeniture left the government vulnerable for long periods. Although in theory an autocratic tsardom, in practice Muscovy functioned as an oligarchy, with the ruler apart and above, moderating the fierce competition for power among the elite.

Boyars competed, first and foremost, for the survival and advancement of their *rod* (clan, lineage group: the descendants of a common ancestor). Individual abilities and preferences played a decidedly secondary role in their lives. Marriage alliances, essential for the propagation of the clan, also served political purposes. Here, too, families expected their individual members to bow to the needs of the lineage.

Because marriage and family ties determined political alliances, the Muscovite political system in large measure depended on the seclusion of elite women to prevent personal attachments between men and women and maximize the clan's freedom to arrange politically and economically appropriate marriages. Except on special occasions, women ate and lived apart, leaving the house only to attend church or to visit other women. Women played an important role within the household, managing its numerous and varied operations, running both urban and rural estates single-handedly while the men waged

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Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 138. Fletcher echoes the views of most European visitors when he classifies the Russian government as "plain tyrannical" (p. 132). In this, he adhered to the propaganda assiduously disseminated by the Muscovite government and described by Keenan ("Muscovite Political Folkways").

war, producing new heirs for the clan, and maintaining the emotional links between families on which the political system depended, at times even venturing into the women's quarters of other families to approve or veto a prospective bride.[9] They had, however, no public role.

Social mobility within the Muscovite elite depended on a combination of talent, skillfully arranged marriage alliances, patronage networks (in part determined by marital ties), and the ability to attract favorable attention from the tsar. The ultimate political prize was marriage into the royal family. In keeping with the personal nature of Muscovite politics, the tsar's in-laws had the greatest access to the ruler and consequently benefited the most from royal patronage. The royal connection made members of their family desirable political and marriage partners and assured them high status among the elite. The sixteenth century experienced extremes of political stability and crisis. When marriage alliances were clear, the boyars could moderate their rivalries and maintain stability. When Ivan IV ascended the throne at the age of three, however, crisis ensued; power struggles among noble families waged unabated during the decade that passed before his marriage could be negotiated. Stability returned when the elite consolidated around the Romanov (also called Iur'ev or Zakhar'in) family after the tsar's marriage to Anastasia Romanovna in 1547, only to be threatened by Anastasia's death in 1560.[10] Ivan married six more times; boyar infighting preceded each wedding, leading to renewed crises that Ivan's bizarre policies only exacerbated. The century ended in social, economic, and dynastic chaos, from which the Romanovs emerged after a fifteen-year civil war to forge a new coalition, again solidified through royal marriage.

9. On women in Russia in pre-Petrine times (before 1682), see Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine D. Worobec, eds., *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 17–95 (articles by Pushkareva, Levin, Kollmann, and Kivelson); the special issue of *Russian History* 10, no. 2 (1983); and Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, eds., *Women in Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977).

10. The composition of the boyar elite did not change much after Anastasia's death, and the Romanovs continued to be an important political force. Ivan IV's various attempts to break out of the system and establish an area in which he had complete control, however, unsettled the elite and effectively canceled attempts at reform—inflicting tremendous personal and economic suffering on his subjects as well.

Although marriage alliances among the royal and noble families were perhaps the most important determinants of status, the boyars' concern for clan advancement expressed itself in other areas as well. It lay behind, for example, their preoccupation with honor, exemplified by a system of precedence called *mestnichestvo*. Only the elite participated in the system, which ranked clans in relation to one another and the male members of the clan in relation to their fathers and brothers. Because of *mestnichestvo*, a Russian nobleman could not accept a court position lower than that to which his rank entitled him, lest he and his descendants be permanently dishonored. Disputes over these and similar issues (for example, seating at court functions and attendance at royal weddings) led to endless squabbling among families and between individuals over precedence. Precedence not only affected one's "honor" in terms of reputation and position but also provided economic privileges to accompany position: ownership of land and people to cultivate it.

Less privileged and wealthy were the cavalrymen known as "boyars' sons" (*deti boiarskie*) and *dvorianstvo* (usually translated "gentry" to distinguish them from their more aristocratic colleagues), who assisted the boyars in their military duties. Scholars once saw gentry and boyars as locked in an irreconcilable competition for power, in which the boyars represented the old feudal order and the gentry the new absolutist one, but the reality seems to have been more complex.[11] The boyars had little difficulty retaining control over Muscovite politics through the end of the seventeenth century, and the gentry devoted more energy to becoming boyars than to destroying the existing political system. Whatever issues may have divided them, boyars and gentry had much in common; both served the state on which they depended.

Within the ranks of the gentry, however, social position and economic resources varied greatly. Although in general less well-off than boyar families, some had considerable means; others lived hardly better than the peasants on their lands. Their importance lay in their numbers: they provided a kind of "middle management" for the army in a period when cavalry was still crucial; by the time artillery and infantry replaced the cavalry units, the gentry's virtual monopoly on military command experience ensured that, with retraining, they con-

11. For more information, see the works listed in note 7.

tinued to provide most of the officers the new standing army required. They had by then also acquired a social role (controlling the now enserfed peasantry) and an administrative role (the state needed more people to staff its growing bureaucracy). Tsar and boyars formed the government, and together they made use of the gentry, denying them the ultimate rewards of status and a say in policy making but granting them land for subsistence and peasants to work it.[12] Whereas boyars had always been largely Moscow-oriented, the gentry became increasingly provincial during the seventeenth century. Even they, however, could not afford to separate themselves entirely from urban life, for Russians typically divided their property equally among their children, and in a few generations even vast landholdings could dwindle to nothing. Acquiring new properties depended on connections with the capital, usually obtained through service to the central government.

The gentry had their civil counterparts in those who staffed the Muscovite chancery system.[13] The chancery system began as the private administration of the royal estates, staffed by elite slaves, and expanded steadily, if in a somewhat piecemeal fashion, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As it expanded, free labor replaced slaves; the resulting demand for literate personnel severely taxed Moscow's limited educational resources. In its way, however, the chancery system represented the triumph of ingenuity over nearly impossible odds. Completely informal, it benefited from extreme flexibility: chanceries appeared and disappeared as needed, some lasting no more than a few months, others—such as the Treasury or Foreign Office—enduring for centuries. The apparent disorganization allowed the government to target specific populations and goals and to concentrate its resources on those areas that seemed most likely to yield results, a pragmatic approach that permitted Moscow to control vast territories despite the difficulties created by poor transportation and communications.

In the sixteenth century, literacy was the most important character-

12. On the gentry, their part in enserfment, and the impact on both of changes in military technology, see Richard Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

13. On the chancery system in the sixteenth century, see Peter Bowman Brown, "Early Modern Russian Bureaucracy: The Evolution of the Chancery System from Ivan III to Peter the Great, 1478–1717" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978).

istic used in selecting the career bureaucrats who organized the collection of taxes, reports of military campaigns and genealogical records.[14] Muscovy still had no formal educational system to draw on, and the demand for personnel was pressing, so a candidate's abilities loomed larger than his social origins. Former slaves, priests' sons who did not wish to take orders, and foreigners with shady pasts were all welcome in Muscovite administrative service as long as they could read and write a fair hand. In this traditional, hierarchical society, chancery service offered one of the few paths to upward mobility: with enough talent, discretion, and luck a man could begin life as an apprentice and end it as the Muscovite equivalent of secretary of state.[15] This freedom lasted only a short time: as soon as the system became firmly established, those families who had discovered chancery service first began to exclude others. Eventually, the bureaucracy too became a closed caste.

In the early years, however, it was quite fluid. The bureaucrats, as a nouveau-riche group of mongrel origins in a well-defined and vertically organized society, were placed in a curious position. Chancery officials, for example, could own populated rural lands (a privilege they shared with other state servitors), but few of them did, presumably because owning rural landholdings was closely associated in the public mind with gentry status, which they lacked. Unlike their military colleagues, therefore, chancery personnel were predominantly urban, living by preference in Moscow and visiting the provinces only for the duration of a particular post. Within their own setting, they lived luxuriously; they may even have surpassed many of their social superiors in wealth, but they could never equal the elite cavalrymen in social standing. This ambiguity appears also in their official duties: they carried out policy but did not decide it, for the power to make decisions lay with the tsar and the boyars. Yet their input must often have been influential, for they held the knowledge and the experience on which good decisions depended.

14. For more information, see Borivoj Plavsic, "Seventeenth-Century Chanceries and Their Staffs," in Walter M. Pintner and Don Karl Rowney, eds., *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 19–45.

15. See, for example, the Iudins and the Gur'evs, both of whom began as merchants in chancery service and ended as gentry. Both families owned copies of the *Domostroi*. See Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, "The *Domostroi* as a Source for Muscovite History" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1985), pp. 269–270.

In addition to those actively involved in administration, elite merchants often served the state. Merchants turned up with particular frequency in the Treasury and the Foreign Office, where their expertise clearly served state interests. Informally as well, however, wealthy merchants often operated on behalf of the state. Out of their ranks came the *gosti*, a handful of privileged servitors who controlled international trade and administered the royal monopolies on such items as vodka, salt, and copper.[16] Great fortunes were made in the international trade, for it concentrated almost entirely on luxury goods: exchanging furs and wax, for example, for rare and expensive fabrics, unusual foods, precious metals, or jewelry.

Those who traded domestically in food and handicrafts were more diverse. The vast majority of Russian merchants typically came from the peasant and artisan classes. Peasant and urban traders at times found themselves in conflict, for the peasants needed trade to supplement their subsistence income from farming, and the urban traders feared that the sheer number of peasant entrepreneurs undercut their prices and ruined the sales on which their lives depended. Occasional outbreaks of animosity, however, had no significant impact on the number of peasants trading in the cities, for without food from the countryside no city could survive. The two groups therefore had little choice but to accept each other, however grudgingly.

Contemporary accounts portray Russian merchants of all levels as illiterate but shrewd, notorious for their dishonesty (caveat emptor!) and fond of bargaining.[17] The *Domostroi* explicitly argues that merchants should be both honest and fair, although most people of the time do not seem to have considered the traditional practices to be flaws of either character or judgment. More serious to the long-term health of the merchant classes were the destabilizing effects of illiteracy, the absence of any commercial credit or banking system, and the inherent dangers of sixteenth-century life. Many a prosperous commercial house collapsed because it lacked heirs, failed to pass on in time the details of its business ventures, or suffered a series of disasters (ships lost, crops failed, and the like) which its economic resources

16. On the *gosti*, see Samuel H. Baron, *Muscovite Russia* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980).

17. On Russian trading customs, see, for example, Fletcher, "Of the Russe Commonwealth," pp. 245–246. Fletcher's attitude is more disapproving than those of Westerners who themselves engaged in commerce.

could not withstand. Even excessive government attention could prove catastrophic. When such misfortune struck, the members of a merchant family could quickly disappear among the artisans from whom they sprang.

Artisans occupied the lowest levels of the free urban population and practiced many trades. The *Domostroi* mentions, among others, carpenters, bootmakers, ironmongers, masons, icon painters, gold- and silversmiths. Women practiced dressmaking and related trades such as embroidery and weaving. Training occurred through apprenticeships, but unlike their Western counterparts, Russian artisans had no formal contracts or intricate guild structure to protect their interests.[18] They depended on their wits, their connections, their ability to attract patronage, and their trading skills to survive. Without these, they might be forced to sell themselves into slavery and practice their trade on behalf of a great lord, for slavery was the social welfare program of the day.

The rural counterparts of the artisans were the peasants. Although reliable population figures for the sixteenth century do not exist, peasants made up the overwhelming majority of the populace—easily 70 to 80 percent of the whole. (For comparison, in the eighteenth century, when the government began to take censuses, peasants were counted as more than 90 percent of the population, but by then the categories of slave and peasant had merged.) Despite their numbers, the peasants' social and economic status declined steadily between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. As Moscow consolidated its hold on the other Russian principalities, the government's demands for military recruits and money to support them increased. So did its ability to collect what it demanded. To reward its military servitors, the state offered populated land; to nobles who had no interest in agriculture, unpopulated land had little value. Peasants who had known freedom thus became subject to boyars and gentry, forced to pay both state taxes and private dues. As the century progressed, state and lords increasingly required payment in cash, severely straining the resources of peasant households in cash-poor Russia.

For most of the sixteenth century, peasants still held a legally guaranteed right to leave their landlords once a year, during the two weeks

18. The few guilds that existed were for merchants: the *gostinnaia sotnia*, *sukonnaia sotnia*, and others.

"Such irrational people [who do not pay their debts] live in slavery, in fear of rightering, and in debt" (Chapter 62). The person seen in the lower right is suffering rightering, whether for indebtedness or some other crime (graft, for example), while an indifferent crowd mills around him. Behind them, Moscow towers within its protective walls. From Adam Olearius, *Vermehrte Moscowitische und Persianische Reisebeschreibung* (Schleszwig, 1656). Courtesy of the Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.

around the autumn St. George's Day (November 25), if they had paid all their dues. For practical reasons, many peasants did not choose to leave their homes at the beginning of the Russian winter; others who might have wished to do so could not afford to pay their obligations. Many, however, apparently did take the opportunity to move to larger (or simply more congenial) estates whose owners paid the necessary sums; the most fortunate and adventurous could leave altogether to start a new life.

Gradually, however, the government curtailed the right to leave. The economic disaster that followed Ivan IV's decision to terrorize his own subjects and the costly yet ultimately futile war against Livonia (1558–1583) sent many peasants in flight to the fertile southern steppes.

Faced with a dwindling labor supply, the nobles demanded state decrees to tie the remaining peasants to the land. In 1649, the state removed the statute of limitations that had to some extent protected peasants from recovery by their landlords and effectively made all peasant movement illegal.[19] By 1700, the legal distinction separating peasants from slaves had disappeared; both were designated serfs.

In the sixteenth century, however, slavery still filled several rungs on the social ladder, for not all slaves held equal status. Slavery existed in Russia from earliest times, although the country never had a major slaveholding system comparable to that of Classical Rome or the American antebellum South.[20] Slaves made up about 10 percent of the population (in contrast, Mississippi in 1860 had a slave population of 55 percent).[21] Some of these, such as the estate stewards and highly trained military slaves, had considerable value and prestige. Most benefited to some extent from the social standing of their masters, since slavery tended to be concentrated among the Muscovite elite; all, however, also suffered from the limitations imposed by slavery, for their status could never approximate that of free men with equal responsibility or resources.

Muscovite slavery differed in several respects from the American slave system with which most of us are more familiar. Slaves in Muscovy served primarily as domestic servants, not in a productive capacity; owners saw them as dependent family members, not as chattel. Because slaves often ate more than they produced, slavery served in part, as Richard Hellie has noted, as a welfare system for Muscovites with no other means of support.[22] As well as a flexible and undemanding work force, the slave owner received psychological and social

19. Within the vast literature on enserfment, historians generally fall into two camps, one holding that peasants were enserfed by state decree beginning around 1582 and ending with the 1649 Law Code, the other arguing that enserfment resulted from a long, slow deterioration in the peasants' economic position. For an example of the "decree" school, see Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change*, introduction. For the economic argument, see Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 219–276.

20. The most extensive discussion of Russian slavery is Hellie, *Slavery*. Hellie also compares and contrasts Muscovite slavery with other slave systems. For an analysis of slavery as an institution, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

21. The estimate of Russian slaves comes from Hellie, *Slavery*, pp. 681–689; the data for Mississippi from Patterson, *Slavery*, p. 483.

22. Hellie, *Slavery*, pp. 692–695.

benefits: honor among his peers (who valued the conspicuous consumption exemplified in supporting many underemployed servants), the opportunity to exercise authority within his household, and appreciation of his own freedom from control.[23]

Muscovite slavery also differed from American slavery because it depended on people from its own culture who sold themselves into slavery to escape hard times.[24] Russian slaves shared their masters' ethnicity, religion, and culture. This similarity lessened the social distance between the two groups and seems to have ameliorated, at least to some extent, the harshness inherent in slavery.

Perhaps for this reason, Muscovite slavery was relatively mild compared to other slave systems. Slaves had certain legal rights; slave marriages were honored and their families generally kept intact; as far as we can tell, society expected masters to feed and clothe their servants adequately and not to punish them too severely (by Muscovite standards, which tolerated corporal punishment even for the elite).[25] At the same time, slaves remained subject to abuses of power. Because most slaves were domestic servants, for example, free domestic servants could be forcibly converted into slaves.[26] Certain occupations, such as estate stewardship, required that the holder become a slave. Throughout the sixteenth century, moreover, most were still full, hereditary slaves; only toward the end of the century did the more limited debt service contract, which bound the signers for the life of the lender and prohibited sale or transfer, predominate.[27]

Women's roles in Muscovite society were determined by a combination of gender and social status. Women among the gentry, chancery personnel, and elite merchants tried as far as possible to imitate the

23. Both Hellie and Patterson mention these often overlooked rewards of slavery for the master—particularly obvious in a domestic slavery system like the Muscovite one, in which slaves provided few economic benefits and, in fact, were economic burdens. See Hellie, *Slavery*, pp. 690–692; and Patterson, *Slavery*, pp. 77–101.

24. Muscovy fit Patterson's definition of an extrusive slave system (*Slavery*, pp. 38–45).

25. On the treatment of servants, see Hellie, *Slavery*, pp. 503–510.

26. The legal right to convert slaves postdates the *Domostroi*, for it was only after 1597 that a master had the legal right to convert anyone who served him for six months or longer into a limited service contract slave, even against the servant's wishes. Records, however, indicate that the practice was not new. See Hellie, *Slavery*, pp. 39–41; Patterson, *Slavery*, p. 34.

27. Hellie tracks the shift from full to contract slavery in Russia between 1450 and 1725. The shift presaged the eventual abolition of slavery or, more accurately, its merging with the institution of serfdom. See *Slavery*, passim.