Tobacco in Russian History and Culture

From the Seventeenth Century to the Present

Edited by
Matthew P. Romaniello
and Tricia Starks

Routledge Studies in Cultural History
Tobacco in Russian History and Culture
Routledge Studies in Cultural History

1. The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe
   Edited by Brendan Dooley and Sabrina Baron

2. The Insanity of Place / The Place of Insanity
   Essays on the History of Psychiatry
   Andrew Scull

3. Film, History, and Cultural Citizenship
   Sites of Production
   Edited by Tina Mai Chen and David S. Churchill

4. Genre and Cinema
   Ireland and Transnationalism
   Edited by Brian McIlroy

5. Histories of Postmodernism
   Edited by Mark Bevir, Jill Hargis, and Sara Rushing

6. Africa after Modernism
   Transitions in Literature, Media, and Philosophy
   Michael Janis

7. Rethinking Race, Politics, and Poetics
   C.L.R. James’ Critique of Modernity
   Brett St Louis

8. Making British Culture
   English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740–1830
   David Allan

9. Empires and Boundaries
   Rethinking Race, Class, and Gender in Colonial Settings
   Edited by Harald Fischer-Tiné and Susanne Gehrmann

10. Tobacco in Russian History and Culture
   From the Seventeenth Century to the Present
    Edited by Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks
Contents

List of Figures vii
Acknowledgments ix

1 Tabak: An Introduction 1
MATTHEW P. ROMANIELLO AND TRICIA STARKS

2 Muscovy’s Extraordinary Ban on Tobacco 9
MATTHEW P. ROMANIELLO

3 Sex, Drink, and Drugs: Tobacco in Seventeenth-Century Russia 26
NIKOLAOS A. CHRISSSIDIS

4 Tobacco and Health in Early Modern Russia 44
EVE LEVIN

5 Regulating Virtue and Vice: Controlling Commodities in Early Modern Siberia 61
ERIKA MONAHAHAN

6 “I Smoke, Therefore I Think”: Tobacco as Liberation in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 83
KONSTANTINE KLIOUCHKINE

7 Smokescreens: Tobacco Manufacturers’ Projections of Class and Gender in Late Imperial Russian Advertising 102
SALLY WEST

8 Tobacco Prohibitions as Ritual Language 120
ROY R. ROBSON
Contents

9 Papirosy, Smoking, and the Anti-Cigarette Movement 132
TRICIA STARKS

10 Tobacco Production in Russia: The Transition to Communism 148
IU. P. BOKAREV

11 “The lads indulged themselves, they used to smoke. . .”: Tobacco and Children’s Culture in Twentieth-Century Russia 158
CATRIONA KELLY

12 “Tobacco Is Poison!”: Soviet-Era Anti-Smoking Posters 183
KAREN F. A. FOX

13 The Iava Tobacco Factory from the 1960s to the early 1990s: An Interview with the Former Director, Leonid Iakovlevich Sinel’nikov 203
ELIZAVETA GORCHAKOVA, EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY TRICIA STARKS

14 Smokes for Big Brother: Bulgaria, the USSR, and the Politics of Tobacco in the Cold War 225
MARY NEUBURGER

15 Tobacco and Transition: The Advent of Transnational Tobacco Companies 244
ANNA GILMORE

16 Up in Smoke? The Politics and Health Impact of Tobacco in Today’s Russia 267
JUDYTH L. TWIGG

Contributors 283
Index 285
Figures

3.1 Greek merchants’ signatures: “I [so and so] neither drink tobacco, nor sell it.” 31
3.2 A monk smoking his pipe from a wall in the Gregoriou Monastery. 33
6.1 Snuffbox with a portrait of Field Marshal Zakhar Chernyshev, 1773 (St. Petersburg, Russia). 86
6.2 Portrait of Denis Davydov. 90
7.1 Advertisement for Mechta (Dream). 104
7.2 Advertisement for Eva cigarettes. 105
7.3 Advertisement for the Shaposhnikov factory. 108
7.4 Advertisement for A. G. Rutenberg’s factory. 108
7.5 Advertisement for Kapriz cigarettes. 110
7.6 Poster for Zolotyia cigarettes. 113
7.7 Advertisement for Rua. 116
10.1 Tobacco and papirosy production, 1900–1908. 150
10.2 Tobacco production, 1908–1913. 150
10.3 Output of tobacco products, 1913–1917. 151
10.4 Tobacco production, 1913–1920. 151
10.5 Tobacco production before and after the Revolution. 153
10.6 Sown areas of tobacco and makhorka by category of management, in thousands of hectares, 1928–1934. 154
11.1 “Pioneer, Do Not Smoke or Drink,” 1931. 159
12.1 “Stop smoking!” (1920). 189
Figures

12.2 Anti-smoking poster with quotation from the writings of Lenin. 190
12.3 Poster, “Our Ultimatum to Adults!” (1930). 191
12.4 Poster, “Smoking seriously affects the normal functioning of the organs of the body” (1930). 192
12.5 Poster, “To the smoker” (1968). 195
12.6 Poster, “Which do you want to be?” (1967). 196
12.7 Poster, “Tobacco is poison!” (1970s). 197
13.1 Leonid Sinel’nikov explains the technology of filter cigarette production at the Iava factory to Mikhail Gorbachev (1990). 218
15.1 Cigarette production in the USSR/FSU, 1960–2001. 251
15.3 Tobacco leaf imports, USSR/FSU 1960–1999, in metric tons. 252
15.4 Cigarette consumption per capita in the USSR/FSU, all ages, 1960–2001. 257
15.5 Odds (and 99% confidence interval) of smoking in women, adjusted for age, area of residence, marital status, religion, education, economic situation, and level of social support. 259
15.6 Current female smoking prevalence, by age group. 259
16.1 Smoking prevalence in selected countries, 2008. 267
16.3 Global tobacco consumption, 2005, in millions of tons, by country. 270
Acknowledgments

The two of us had been colleagues for years, so when we each found out the other had been gathering material for a project on tobacco, it was an easy decision to combine forces. As we realized how little had been written on the subject, we gathered others working on aspects of tobacco’s influence in Russian history and culture to fill in some of the enormous gaps in the literature while pointing to areas warranting further research. This resulting volume represents far more than we hoped to achieve and is far richer for the insightful contributions of our fellow scholars.

In preparing the volume, we have accrued many debts, which might never be fully repaid. To each, we can only offer our thanks. Rex Wade and Wendy Walker of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies must be acknowledged for accommodating three panels on tobacco at the annual meeting in New Orleans in November 2007. The conference allowed the contributors an opportunity to share and discuss each other’s work, greatly enriching the final product. The enthusiasm for the project of Harley Balzer, Carol Benedict, and Cynthia Buckley reinforced our decision to broaden the scope and pursue publishing this large volume of essays, which was a choice our kind publisher shared. Finally, our colleagues at the University of Arkansas, George Mason University, and the University of Hawai‘i must be acknowledged for long-term support.

Financial and other support from several organizations created opportunities for the editors to conduct their own research on tobacco. The Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Center and the University of Illinois’ Russian and East European Center provided short-term grants for research opportunities. Tricia Starks received a National Council for Eurasian and East European Research Collaborative Research Fellowship in 2005 that supported both her research and the work of Iurii Bokarev that is published in this volume. The librarians of the Russian State Library in Moscow, the Library of Congress’ European Reading Room, the National Institute of Medicine in Washington, DC, the University of Arkansas, and George Mason University aided in research. In the final stages of the process, Pat Polansky of the University of Hawai‘i provided assistance with double-checking the citations of the older materials cited throughout the volume.
Finally, the illustrations that appear throughout the volume would not have been possible without the kind permission of the following institutions. The Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts in Moscow gave permission for the manuscript page in Chapter 3, and the Gregoriou Monastery of Mount Athos in Greece kindly supported the republication of the smoking monk in that chapter. The Hillwood Estate, Museum, and Gardens in Washington, DC, granted permission for the snuffbox that appears in Chapter 6. Figures 2, 3, and 4 in Chapter 12 were reproduced from the collection of the Hoover Archives of Stanford University. Every effort has been made to locate the original copyright owner but in most cases, the artist is deceased and the copyright ownership is unclear. The Russian State Library’s poster collection provided Figures 7.1, 7.6, 12.1, 12.5, 12.6, and 12.7; the Russian National Library provided Figure 11.1. When necessary, permission has been granted for these reproductions. Leonid Sinelnikov provided us the photograph of himself included in Chapter 13. We thank him for his permission to reproduce it here. Finally, Figure 15.1 and 15.3 were originally published in A. Gilmore and M. McKee, “Exploring the Impact of Foreign Direct Investment on Tobacco Consumption in the Former Soviet Union,” *Tobacco Control*, 14 (2005): 13–21, and Figure 15.6 was published in A. Gilmore et. al. “Prevalence of Smoking in Eight Countries of the Former Soviet Union: Results from the Living Conditions, Lifestyles and Health Study,” *American Journal of Public Health*, 94 (2004): 2177–84. We thank the publishers for their permission to reprint those tables here.
During his 1698–1699 tenure as the Hapsburg secretary to Peter the Great’s court, Johann Georg Korb detailed the outrageous activities of the Russian court. In a highly sensationalistic account, he claimed to be privy to one of the tsar’s infamous, carnivalesque, religious ceremonies. Dedicated to Bacchus instead of the Christian God, the ceremony began with a procession of vice rather than virtue. Korb rapturously detailed the spectacle of servants parading forward with:

... great bowls full of wine, others mead, others again beer and brandy, that last joy of heated Bacchus. . . . they carried great dishes of dried tobacco leaves, with which, when ignited, they went to the remotest corners of the palace, exhaling those most delectable odors and most pleasant incense to Bacchus from their smutty jaws. Two of those pipes through which some people are pleased to puff smoke—a most empty fancy—being set crosswise, served the scenic bishop to confirm the rites of consecration.¹

Peter’s ceremony turned the conventional Russian Orthodox service on its head. Instead of the sacrificial host and sanctified wine, Peter ended his bacchanal with the use of tobacco smoke to consecrate the unholy rite. The smoke—like the ceremony it enhanced—was an attack upon the past and religious tradition. In the church, the smoke of incense wafted prayer up to the heavens on its wisps; in Petrine parody, tobacco smoke sinuously embraced the onlookers, penetrated them, and made them party to the sin and blasphemy of the host. Peter forced all those who came in contact with his smoke to experience for themselves a little taste of his grand, and aggressive, cultural mission.

Tobacco was far more than a simple accompaniment to Peter the Great’s amusements. With the embrace of tobacco, he toppled a ban that had been in place from tobacco’s first appearance inside Russia’s borders early in the seventeenth century. The Russian prohibition lasted almost the entire seventeenth century, staying in place for seventy years, longer than anywhere else in the world. Under the ban Muscovite authorities called for arguably
the most severe penalties of any society, with increasingly harsh punishments—from beatings with the knout, to slitting of the nostrils, and even, most severely, the death penalty—for tobacco trade or use.2

Russia’s reaction to tobacco was unique. While most countries banned tobacco upon its arrival, they legalized it shortly thereafter, generally less than ten years after the initial prohibition. For example, the English East India Company began curing tobacco in its Indian factories in 1612, which inspired Emperor Jahangir to ban smoking in 1617. Profits from potential taxes, however, led the emperor to reverse the ban by the early 1620s, as the Indians adopted local tobacco production to reap the rewards of this new commodity.3 As detailed in Chapter 2, the Indian response was hardly unusual, which makes Russia’s seventy-year-long ban surprising. Cultural anxieties explain this difference in part. Tobacco, symbolizing both Russia’s newly-expanding presence in the emerging early modern global economy and the increasing foreign presence in Muscovy, was not a welcome guest. Muscovite Russia held a conflicted view of foreigners and their customs. When tobacco came to Russia, it only confirmed authorities’ worst suspicions rather than allaying them. Public disorder ensued, including the 1609 burning of a house in Iaroslavl’ from smoking.4 Reports soon reached Moscow of pervasive tobacco use in Siberia, resulting in large debts among the tsar’s military servitors. State authorities put forward their ban in 1627.5

Russia’s early opposition to tobacco was more than a worry over societal disorder. When Peter the Great overturned this longstanding ban, used tobacco in his private ceremonies, and strode through town puffing upon tobacco, spreading his rancor at the Church in the acrid clouds that followed him, he triumphed over the very things that had made others in Russian society wary. Peter saw in tobacco use the modern and the Western, but in his ceremonies it became something even more hazardous. Tobacco symbolized the transgressive and dangerous. By the 1640s, the Orthodox faithful reported visions of the Mother of God including warnings against the temptations and corruption of smoking.6 By the 1680s, the Russian Orthodox Church preached sermons against the evil intoxication produced by tobacco consumption.7 By the eighteenth century, Old Believers, who claimed to hew more closely to the Church’s traditions, depicted tobacco as an attack on Russian morals from outside forces. According to their legends, tobacco came from sin, an evil plant that had sprung up from the unhallowed ground of the grave of Jezebel’s daughter. They alleged that the Greeks then sent the weed to pervert the true Church.8 Russian Orthodoxy, the religion of state, did not hold a similar origin story for tobacco, though many of its officials criticized the Petrine regime’s embrace of Western culture, including the prominent role of tobacco.9

Peter used tobacco in his mocking ceremonies to offend Church ritual and taint onlookers, and while it is tempting to paint Peter the Great as a maverick and cultural crusader, he removed the ban with other interests in mind than a cultural campaign. Economic incentives figured heavily in
both the longstanding prohibition of tobacco in Russia and also Peter’s overturning of the ban. During the seventeenth century, when Russia shunned tobacco, even though there was much resistance from the Church and society towards the weed, the action itself was largely for economic reasons. Tobacco was not performing well as a commodity. When Peter began allowing the tobacco trade in 1697, he did so in pursuit of profit, even though he certainly must have enjoyed the addition of tobacco to his revelries. By opening up the Russian tobacco market, Peter, and many others, held high hopes for massive earnings even as they took on a culture filled with opprobrium for tobacco use.10

Peter the Great’s ceremony, its meanings, and its origins, highlight the major issues for tobacco in Russia not just in his time, but for the centuries to come. Tensions between economic and cultural missions continued to weave through the later history of tobacco in Russia. Tobacco use rose slowly through the eighteenth century and nineteenth centuries, with a precipitous increase in the late nineteenth century as a new form of tobacco delivery emerged with the *papirosa*—a Russian variation of the cigarette. Just as tobacco use developed, so too did the cultural opposition to tobacco. Religious opponents of tobacco were joined by new bourgeois authorities and anti-tobacco activists who brought medical, gendered, social, generational, and nationalist agendas to their arsenals in the cultural fight against tobacco. Over the course of the nineteenth, and then twentieth, centuries the economic boon of tobacco became more evident, but cultural, especially medical, critiques became more developed and sophisticated as well.

The essays in this volume follow the course of these multiple, conflicting agendas from the introduction of tobacco to the present day. The first four essays investigate the circumstances surrounding Russia’s singular, seventy-year-long prohibition of tobacco. The ban on tobacco importation emerged from the state’s realization that tobacco created only debt and no profit for anyone inside Russia’s borders. Cultural opposition played into the case against tobacco, as xenophobia, traditionalism, and distrust of foreign merchants energized the ban as well. As Matthew Romaniello argues, the tremendous reversal of Russia’s treatment of the tobacco trade under Peter the Great was a result of a transformation of Russia’s economic policies, not a decision about tobacco itself as a product or its moral danger. This transformation becomes only more noticeable when comparing the treatment of tobacco to that of another new, foreign commodity in the seventeenth century—rhubarb. Erika Monahan reveals, by contrasting the treatment of the two medicinally suspect and potentially profitable products, how truly exceptional the long-lasting prohibition against tobacco was.

Economic reasons for the tobacco taboo are reinforced with an examination of religious and medicinal materials from the period. In his essay, Nikolaos Chrissidis argues that even though Orthodox authorities outside of the country had already called for a condemnation of the product on moral
grounds, the Russian Orthodox Church did not become actively involved in the debate over tobacco until the late seventeenth century. Chrissidis’s work suggests that as long as the state’s economic decision remained in force, the Church itself did not need to become involved. When the economic decision was reversed, so was the position of the Church. This transformation of the Church’s activities is paralleled in the medicinal issues raised by Eve Levin. Though tobacco began its life in Russia as a concern of the economic chancelleries, once it was officially adopted as a legal product, it became an anxiety for medical authorities. While there was no official consensus about tobacco in Russia, the debate over tobacco’s medicinal properties parallels this issue worldwide, even if occurring more than a century later than it began elsewhere. With each of these cases, cultural issues were merely ancillary to the economic decision of the state, even though the public was more likely aware of the moral and medicinal fears than the tsar’s economic concerns.

As Peter the Great’s ceremony makes clear, the morality of tobacco use—as well as its Western associations—were already in play by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. As the next set of essays reveals, the cultural and political associations of tobacco were becoming more articulated and were now joined by inferences regarding class, order, and societal problems. Konstantin Klioutchkine examines Russian literature and the attitudes therein towards tobacco, social rank, and the transformation of society during the era of Alexander II (1855–1881) and his Great Reforms. Snuff symbolized the “old” social elites; cigarettes reflected changing attitudes of the new “modern” society. The more tobacco became associated with change, the more the traditionalists in Russia condemned its use. Roy R. Robson argues that the Russian Orthodox Old Believers focused on tobacco as a symbol of pollution and corruption, which both continued a religious debate more than two centuries old, and provided new reasons for supporting a fundamental rejection of modern society. Others embraced tobacco as an element of the modern. Playing with the concept of a social divide created by tobacco use, Sally West shows that tobacco manufacturers and advertisers exploited the association of tobacco and modern society to encourage sales to late imperial society. Advertisements end up revealing as much about Russian social values and class distinctions as they do about marketing. While in Robson’s essay rejection of tobacco serves to mark inclusion in a closed community, in both Klioutchkine and West’s essays, tobacco consumption serves as a marker of gender and status. Some eschewed tobacco, but many more would use tobacco consumption to show their inclusion in an even greater community—the modern, the forward-thinking, the revolutionary, and the young.

Against the background of rising consumption and a booming market for tobacco products, more and more important for both the state and business interests, Tricia Starks details both the rise, and the ineffectiveness, of anti-smoking initiatives at the turn of the twentieth century.
The joint opinions of religious and medical authorities made few inroads against consumers, producers, and advertisers, and were not effective in convincing the state to work against its short-term economic interests. With the Bolshevik takeover, tobacco’s dangers received serious attention, but their proposed, national tobacco initiative, so neatly in accordance with Soviet concerns about the health of the new Soviet citizen, was resoundingly rejected by the economic authorities of the Soviet Union. Even a Communist economy was not free from market pressures. As Robson, West, and Starks uncover the persistence of cultural and medical concerns, Iurii Bokarev’s statistical study examines a transitioning economy struggling to meet Russia’s soaring demands. Bokarev details the increasing centralization of tobacco production to satisfy the growing demands of a modern, industrial society. Nearly three centuries after tobacco’s arrival, these essays demonstrate that no one had yet presented an argument that could settle the debate as to whether tobacco represented a drain or a boon to the state.

If even a Communist state hostile to tobacco could not overcome its lure, it is not surprising to see widespread smoking among all members of Soviet society, including its children. As Catriona Kelly uncovers in her essay on childhood smoking, Soviet authorities primarily looked the other way while society encouraged smoking by boys as an essential aspect of their maturation into full-fledged members of society. It was obviously a long way from the century-long prohibition of the seventeenth century. While anti-smoking advocates had difficulty, Karen F.A. Fox shows that such efforts did continue throughout the Soviet period. These further campaigns, however, were largely limited and never assessed for success or reception. Examination of the major waves of propaganda from the early 1920s and 1930s, and later in the 1970s, reveals a public health campaign that used consistent imagery to educate Russians on the dangers of tobacco, yet these were health marketing campaigns that never succumbed to innovation or even research on effectiveness.

The tension between halfhearted tobacco prohibitions and increasing consumption reflects the long, uneven history of tobacco’s place in Soviet society. In fact, much of the twentieth century was defined by a Soviet and a post-Soviet scramble to keep society amply supplied for its tobacco habits. Elizaveta Gorchakova relates the view of Soviet-era tobacco producers through the experiences of the head of Russia’s largest tobacco firm, Iava. His experience reveals the tremendous political and cultural pressures for tobacco production to be increased rather than a push against tobacco consumption. Even as the rest of the world turned against smoking, the director of Iava struggled to meet larger and larger state quotas. Soviet anti-smoking efforts were weak in comparison to the all-out push for increased yield that the state demanded of tobacco producers. These pressures on tobacco companies to perform continued well after the state began counter-initiatives against its own products by flirting with warning labels in the late 1970s.
As Mary Neuburger reveals, international research and warning labels did little to staunch demand, and supplies would continually be a problem. During the Cold War, Eastern European ally Bulgaria supplied the Russian tobacco market with products produced with Western technology and following international tastes. This Western influence occurred with the tacit approval of Soviet authorities. Tobacco consumption, apparently, trumped Cold War tensions.

In the post-Soviet era the overwhelming presence of foreign tobacco producers and Western-style marketing, has complicated the scene, as has the increasing evidence of a demographic crisis in Russia. Anna Gilmore looks at one of the major suppliers of tobacco in post-Soviet Russia, the British American Tobacco Company. While it has been increasingly common for public health officials in Russia to blame the current incidence of smoking on foreign advertisers, the history of tobacco clearly demonstrates that this is not a new problem, regardless of the companies involved. Gilmore’s data clearly demonstrates tobacco consumption was and is on a continuous rise in Russia.

Today, Russia has become the third highest per capita smoking country in the world and tobacco use is a deadly claimant to Russia’s current demographic crisis. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 70% of men and 30% of women in Russia smoke, and the WHO estimated that at the close of the twentieth century 280,000 Russians died every year from smoking-related illnesses—a rate over three times higher than the global average. When Michael Bloomberg and Bill Gates announced their joint initiative “to combat [the] global tobacco epidemic” on July 23, 2008, Russia was singled out alongside of India, China, Indonesia, and Bangladesh as a targeted country for new tobacco control efforts. In the final essay for the volume, Judyth Twygg assays the increasingly dire health situation, the escalating demographic crisis in Russia, and the potential consequences for the future.

While the primary purpose of this volume is to illuminate the history of tobacco use in Russia, there is little doubt that this narrative is distinctive in comparison to experiences in other countries. To go from the country that prohibited tobacco for the greatest length of time, to one of its foremost consumers, is a striking evolution. This turnaround is all the more amazing given the fact that Russian society attempted to stamp out the habit as culturally, morally, and medically reprehensible many times over the centuries. But throughout the history of tobacco in Russia, these other issues have taken a back seat as economic imperatives determined the state’s actions. The seventeenth-century ban, followed by Petrine acceptance, was a sign of the transformation of Russia’s economic system, not a symbol of “Westernization,” even if religious authorities tended to conflate the issues. Later, Soviet health authorities sacrificed worker health for the vigor of the economy in their pursuit of a profitable commodity. This pattern continues in post-Soviet society—taxes created
by tobacco sales are far too valuable to the state’s interest to allow any
weight to medical concerns about tobacco’s dangers or any teeth to the
multiple anti-advertiser laws that have been proposed since the 1980s.
While contemporary authorities in Russia struggle to place the blame for
tobacco’s ills on a foreign doorstep, there can be little doubt that this is a
crisis of their own making.

NOTES

1. F. L. Glaser, ed., Scenes from the Court of Peter the Great: Based on the
a critique of this episode, see Ernest A. Zitser, The Transfigured Kingdom:
Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great,
2. Richard Hellie, trans. and ed., The Muscovite Law Code (Ulozhenie) of
chap. 25, article 11, 228.
3. B. G. Gokhale, “Tobacco in Seventeenth-Century India,” Asian Agri-His-
4. Isaac Massa, A Short History of the Beginnings and Origins of these Present
Wars in Moscow under the Reign of Various Sovereigns down to the Year
1610, trans. and ed. G. Edward Orchard, (Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 1982), 190.
5. See Monahan, this volume.
6. See Levin, this volume.
7. See Chrissidis, this volume.
Tradition in Modern Russia, ed. William B. Husband, (Wilmington, DE:
9. For a discussion of the Church’s relationship with Peter and his reforms, see
Lindsey Hughes, Russia in the Age of Peter the Great, (New Haven, CT: Yale
10. Matthew P. Romaniello, “Through the Filter of Tobacco: The Limits of
Global Trade in the Early Modern World,” Comparative Studies in Society
Expectancy in Russia and Eastern Europe: A Lifestyle Explanation,” Journal
of Health and Social Behavior, 38 (June 1997): 117–30. Murray Feshbach,
Ecological Disaster: Cleaning up the Hidden Legacy of the Soviet Regime,
12. Lawrence Holland, “The East: Marlboro Man Rides High as Smoking,
problem is the focus of A. K. Demin, ed., Kurenie ili zdorov’e v Rossii, (Mos-
cow: Zdorov’e i okruzhaiushchaia sreda, 1996).
13. The press release from the announcement is available at <http://tobaccocof-
reecenter.org/files/pdfs/en/Bloomberg-GatesReleaseFinal.pdf>, accessed on
August 30, 2008.
14. For comparison to tobacco’s history in Russia, see Sander L. Gilman and
Xhou Zun, eds., Smoke: A Cultural History of Smoking Around the World,
(London: Reaktion books, 2004), or John Goodman, Tobacco in History:
work has been presented in some forums though nothing has focused on
By the beginning of the seventeenth century, tobacco had become a global commodity. Emerging from the New World in the sixteenth century, first Spain, Portugal, and then England cultivated this productive cash crop in their colonies and sold it throughout Europe. Following tobacco’s introduction to the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia, initial resistance to the new product quickly gave way to domestic cultivation and the potential of new taxes and trade. No country in the seventeenth century was resistant to the lure of tobacco profits, with one notable exception—Muscovite Russia.

Tobacco’s arrival in the seventeenth century was ill-timed, as Muscovy recently had begun a series of reforms to develop trade and domestic production, as well as to control the foreign influence over Muscovy’s economy. The culmination of these reforms was the New Commercial Code (Novotorgovyj ustav) of 1667, which regulated all foreign trade. Tobacco, as a foreign commodity, was subject to Muscovite official control regardless of its success as a profit-maker in other European and Asian countries.

Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich first prohibited tobacco in March 1627, when he instructed the governor of Tobol’sk to prevent all future imports and sales of tobacco in Siberia. Historical explanations for this ban have varied but include some combination of pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church against foreign influences, increasing and debilitating debts among military servitors in Siberia, who spent money on tobacco rather than necessary equipment, and a series of domestic accidents. One of the earliest appearances of tobacco in Muscovy was in 1609, when the smoking of an English envoy posted in Iaroslavl’ started “a great conflagration that caused much damage,” according to one eyewitness. The result of the ban was that no tobacco product could be legally imported into Muscovy until seventy years later, when Peter the Great reversed the policy in 1697 following discussions with King William III of England. No other country in the world maintained a legal prohibition on tobacco for more than fifteen years, making Muscovy’s resistance to the new commodity a singular event in the early-modern world.

The official state resistance to tobacco was not a policy that appealed to all the tsar’s subjects or foreign merchants. The latter were tantalized with
the thoughts of limitless profits from the possibility of an exclusive monopoly to sell tobacco to an untapped market. English merchants would later refer to the potential tobacco market in Muscovy as “better to us than Mines of Silver.” The market certainly existed. Domestic consumers purchased leaf smuggled by English, Dutch, and Swedish merchants to feed a growing habit throughout the seventeenth century. The limited state control of the borders created ample opportunity for an illicit trade, calling into question the practicality of the state’s official ban. However, no trade or lobbying by foreign merchants altered the official determination to ban tobacco.

While most countries rejected tobacco upon its initial arrival, acceptance of tobacco as a new commodity generally occurred in less than ten years. Opponents of tobacco relied upon arguments based on the morally corrupting influence of foreign or new commodities, and others on the negative health impact. However, the economic benefits, either through sales or taxes, ultimately trumped cultural or medicinal fears; not so in Russia. Muscovy lacked both a climate to sustain domestic tobacco production and the possibility of selling tobacco to a neighbor, as all of its neighbors began either trading or producing tobacco earlier than the Russians. As a result, no argument could ever hope to demonstrate a potential economic benefit, as legalized tobacco sales would inevitably require importation and the resultant loss of specie to foreign powers. With no economic benefit for the state, both medicinal and cultural fears of tobacco were given greater weight in the public discourse, ultimately reinforcing the state’s decision to enforce an extraordinary seventy-year ban on tobacco.

THE EMERGENCE OF A GLOBAL ECONOMY

The global market for commodities expanded steadily in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, driven by new technologies and entrepreneurial ideas. The Portuguese and Spanish commercial empires moved raw materials and new products from Africa, Asia, and the Americas to serve the new demands of European consumers, creating and expanding new markets. Other European countries strove to compete, with the English, French, and Dutch carving out new enclaves with their own merchant navies. In some regions, this European movement displaced traditional economic exchanges, but in others European traders merely attempted to find space within developed economies.

No country declined to regulate its new trade or failed to enact policies to regulate these exchanges. National economic interest meant state regulation for its own “profit,” later described as mercantilism. It centered on one primary goal—to accumulate specie through a favorable balance of trade achieved through an export economy or at least domestic autarky. Historical discussions over the nuances of the mercantilist economy are exhaustive; there is general agreement that early-modern countries
strove to achieve a protectionist economy, using some variation of taxes on imports, regulation through trade monopolies, tariffs on sales, and expansion into new markets, either through subsidies, trade penetration, or outright colonization.9

National interest, as defined by states in this mercantilist era, dictated how new trade was received, especially if a new commodity came from a foreign power. Tobacco followed a typical pattern upon its first arrival in any country.10 Initial skepticism from state authorities, if not an outright ban, was followed quickly with legalization, as the local government discovered the revenue to be made regulating the import, production, or export of leaf or finished tobacco products. With most countries in Europe, Asia, and the Americas implementing frankly discriminatory tariff and subsidy policies designed to raise revenue from the global economy, tobacco found a role as another profitable commodity. Of course, in countries with a suitable climate for production, or at least with suitable colonies, the transformation of tobacco from suspicious foreign product to a domestic good was easiest. Spain and Portugal, for example, developed tobacco plantations in their American colonies as a potential cash crop that was easy to produce, which in turn led to large profits. Spain experimented first in its Latin American colonies with tremendous success.11 Portuguese success was similar, with the early emergence of Bahia in Brazil as one of the major centers of tobacco export from the New World.12

So much success, in fact, that England encouraged its own tobacco plantations in the Chesapeake Bay in order to stop the drain of specie to Spain for tobacco exports from the New World. Pamphleteers such as Edward Bennett, in his Treatise touching the Importation of Tobacco out of Spaine, argued that it would be in the kingdom’s best interest to develop tobacco plantations in Virginia to avoid a dependence upon imported tobacco. England’s own colonies afforded an excellent opportunity to defend the crown’s exchequer, perfectly expressing the early-modern economic orthodoxy.13 Other London merchants interested in England’s balance of trade echoed Bennett’s assessment. Thomas Mun, in his England’s Treasure by Forraign Trade, instructed his fellow merchants that England must “prevent the importations of Hemp, Flax, Cordage, Tobacco, and divers other things which now we fetch from strangers to our great impoverishing.”14 As the Virginian plantations became commercially viable by the 1620s, merchants in England and Scotland invested heavily to expand production and reap the financial benefits.15 The mercantile support for tobacco production emerged in spite of the strong condemnation of tobacco throughout England. King James I, with his famous Counterblaste to Tobacco, was the most notable, but he was powerless to defy the wishes of a mercantile Parliament. Even Oliver Cromwell failed to halt its sales.16 English trading interests could argue that as long as the money was kept within the empire, no revenue was lost. Furthermore, potential exports would in fact create revenue, enriching England’s colonial and mercantile interests.
Even countries without the ability to support domestic production at home or in their colonies accepted tobacco as a consumer product. Both the Dutch and the French experimented with tobacco production at home and abroad, but with middling success. France’s American colonies eventually produced sufficient leaf to meet domestic demand, but France never became a volume exporter.\textsuperscript{17} For the Dutch, the problem was greater. Not a colonial power on a large scale, or at least with suitable tobacco-producing land, the Dutch followed their established economic model: that of the middlemen of Europe. Dutch merchants purchased tobacco from England, Spain, and smaller producers like the French, mixed the leaf, and re-marketed it as high-quality English leaf.\textsuperscript{18} The Baltic market, in fact, was dominated by Dutch-sold leaf, much to the indignation of English traders, who saw it as another Dutch tactic to undermine English economic strength.\textsuperscript{19}

State entrepreneurship could produce sufficient tariffs to entice other reluctant tobacco countries. Sweden, for example, undoubtedly lacked a tobacco climate. However, by purchasing Dutch tobacco and then reselling the product to interior countries, Muscovy included, Swedish merchants generated revenue for the state through customs duties without any exertion on the part of Swedish merchants. A condition of the Treaty of Stolbovo (1617) stipulated that Russian merchants deal only with Swedish agents. This gave Swedish trade an exclusive position in the Russian-Baltic trade, inserting Swedish middlemen into all port cities where the Russians could purchase Baltic goods, such as Narva and Riga.\textsuperscript{20}

The producer and middleman models may be applied nearly universally. Among the Muslim empires, the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals all produced and sold tobacco soon after its introduction in the early seventeenth century. In each case, Muslim religious authorities protested tobacco’s arrival as a moral danger, which temporarily halted its consumption, much to the dismay of English and Dutch merchants.\textsuperscript{21} However, the export potential of domestically produced leaf rendered religious prohibitions against importation and consumption moot. In each country, tobacco had been prohibited upon its initial entry, but each government reversed its decision shortly thereafter.

In India, the English East India Company (EIC) began curing tobacco in its India factories as early as 1612. In response to tobacco’s arrival, Emperor Jahangir forbade smoking by decree in 1617, but revenue from Mughal taxes on tobacco was too great to ignore. By the 1620s, the Mughals allowed commercial tobacco production inside their borders, creating new opportunities for the EIC as an exporter of tobacco throughout Asia.\textsuperscript{22} The EIC charted a similar course in Iran, where Shah ‘Abbas prohibited tobacco early in the 1600s, followed by another ban in 1621, but conceded legalization while heavily taxing consumption. The taxes became a valuable source of state revenue, and tobacco remained legal; the EIC began selling tobacco by 1628–1629.\textsuperscript{23} The Ottoman Sultan Murad IV (1623–1640) attempted to ban tobacco a decade after its introduction into Turkey, but this failed to
dissuade Ottoman subjects from adopting the habit. A fatwa issued shortly after Murad’s death declared tobacco smoking permissible.\textsuperscript{24} In each country, profits from the trade overrode prohibitions. The Muslim empires quickly became tobacco exporters, not only to each other but also to the Caucasus and Central Asia, including the trade entrepôt of Bukhara.

In late Ming China, as in Europe and Muslim Asia, officials found tobacco too valuable to ban. Extensive regions in China were very suitable to tobacco cultivation, supporting tobacco cultivation as early as the sixteenth century. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, domestic production of tobacco was allowed to flourish, producing enormous amounts of leaf that prevented any interest in foreign tobacco imports. After the Qing dynasty rose to power in the middle of the seventeenth century, China became an active exporter of tobacco, selling to the Mongols and the indigenous populations of Siberia.\textsuperscript{25}

Thus, by the early decades of the seventeenth century, tobacco merchants encircled Muscovy looking for new markets for export. The English and the Dutch had established direct contact with the Russians at their shared port of Arkhangel’sk, and each also sold tobacco to the Swedish merchants in the Baltic ports, who resold it to Russian merchants. The Ottoman empire supported a trade route north through Moldova, introducing tobacco to Polish Ukraine, where its consumption and production were legal. Ukrainian farmers had established tobacco production in those regions that would become part of Muscovy after the union with left-bank Ukraine following the Thirteen Years’ War (ending in 1667). By the middle of the seventeenth century, both the Mughals and Safavids arrived in the Muscovite port of Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea with cargoes of Asian tobacco. Bukharan merchants resold tobacco throughout Central Asia, which left Moscow’s customs agents a puzzling treaty problem, as Moscow had granted the Bukharans special caravan privileges within Muscovy’s borders.\textsuperscript{26} Finally, Chinese merchants traded tobacco inside Muscovy’s borders by selling the crop in Siberia.

Without question, tobacco had arrived in Muscovy no later than 1609. However, Muscovite religious and government officials emphasized that it was a foreign product, whether Protestant, Muslim, or Chinese. Furthermore, Muscovy could not produce it, or adapt the Dutch or Swedish model easily, as it could neither be grown in Muscovite territory nor be easily resold to the ring of producers surrounding Muscovy. The profits from the regulation of the tobacco trade that flowed to other state treasuries could not be tapped so easily when Muscovy could expect to be a consuming state, not a producer or middleman. Future tobacco merchants, as well as potential customers, faced the state’s almost categorical refusal to accept the drain of precious specie for a product with no investment value and no revenue potential. There was no financial community large enough in Muscovy to support tobacco’s arrival against the entrenched resistance of state authorities. With no valid argument being offered to counteract the ban, the struggle to import tobacco to Russia was over as soon as it began.
MERCANTILIST MUSCOVY

Muscovy’s economic policies were no different than any other early-modern state—accumulate specie and develop the economy in order to maintain a favorable balance of trade, in other words, the classic mercantilist goals. However, Muscovy had a fundamental weakness from its lack of domestic sources of precious metals. Though development of domestic mining, achieved with the assistance of foreign specialists, became a driving goal for the state, the situation was not easily rectified in the seventeenth century. The lack of metal also created difficulties from the lack of ability to produce munitions, creating serious expenses incurred from Muscovy’s wars.

In a weak position, Muscovy was almost entirely dependent on foreign trade to generate specie. This fact, however, should not imply that the Muscovite authorities allowed great freedoms to foreign merchants. Rather, the Muscovite response was to regulate foreigners’ actions in the country strictly so as to be able to control their sales and potential exports. In June 1628, for example, Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich signed a new agreement with the English Muscovy Company for its operations in his kingdom. The English agreed to buy no other good in the country except those things produced by the Russians, and to have their own goods inspected closely upon arrival in Arkhangel’sk. These privileges provided the customs officials in Arkhangel’sk tremendous authority to enforce Muscovite interests, and prevent export of specie through the port. These were necessary steps, as the lack of a merchant navy in a country that conducted 80% of its foreign trade through the seas positioned Muscovy in a dependent role in almost any negotiation with its neighbors.

With its structural weaknesses, the Muscovite government enacted an increasingly restrictive set of controls over all aspects of the economy. Tariffs on imports became essential both for its ability to generate revenue for the state and also for its additional control mechanisms on foreign trade. From this perspective, tobacco potentially created an opportunity for a weak economy. A new commodity could create a new market, which in turn could produce needed revenue. However, the drain of specie created by Russian consumers could not be overcome. Though the state might benefit directly from taxes on imports, the drain of revenue from the population was too dangerous. In the 1620s, the tsar received explicit warnings of the danger of tobacco’s cost. In February 1627, the governor of Tobol’sk petitioned Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich with a request for the tsar to resolve the problem of the accumulating debts of military servitors in Siberia, incurred from their tobacco habits. The tsar’s resolution to this problem was a comprehensive blockade against tobacco’s presence. He decreed that no one would be allowed inside a Russian or Siberian city with tobacco, and that no merchant could be allowed to sell tobacco to a military servitor anywhere. Furthermore, any merchant caught with tobacco should be “exiled” from Russian lands, physically removing the tobacco and any potential of
it being purchased within Muscovy’s borders. The damage resulting from specie lost to foreign merchants and an inherent weakening of the military preparedness in the region could hardly be offset by the possibility of tariff revenue.

The formal prohibition against tobacco was only the opening salvo in a long campaign to curtail tobacco sales and use. By 1633–1634, the tsar extended his ban on tobacco to all cities in his kingdom, “on pain of the death penalty.” While there are no official accounts of the death penalty being enforced, accounts of public torture of Russian tobacco merchants do exist. Adam Olearius, a secretary in the embassy of the Duke of Holstein, observed eight men and one woman being beaten with a knout as punishment for selling tobacco and vodka on September 24, 1634. In a largely illiterate society, the exhibition of the state’s penalties imposed on tobacco was more effective than just the written word. It is hard to imagine that anyone in Muscovy was unaware of the serious consequences for selling tobacco.

Certainly foreign merchants in Muscovy did comprehend the seriousness of the state’s prohibition. The tsar received repeated complaints from English merchants throughout the 1630s about illegal searches for tobacco in Arkhangel’sk and Vologda. By 1639, the complaints had become so numerous that the tsar questioned officials in Vologda about their invasive searches, warning them to halt their actions for fear of limiting foreign trade. While it is not certain how much tobacco was arriving inside the borders, the tsar certainly was convinced that his officials had been consistently enforcing his prohibition. Of course, this instruction was not a command to stop forcing merchants to declare all of their trade goods upon entry into any Muscovite city for tax purposes, just to be more judicious in their tobacco accusations.

In light of the economic weakness and the potentially serious consequences for Muscovite military success, maintaining and enforcing the tobacco ban was essential for the state. As a result, the Ulozhenie (Law Code) of 1649 contained yet more restrictions on tobacco sales. It included eleven articles concerning tobacco, beginning with upholding the earlier death penalty for Russians and foreigners (inozemtsy) trading or possessing tobacco. Tobacco consumers would not be executed, but: “If musketeers, and wanderers, and various people are brought in for arraignment with tobacco twice, or thrice: torture those people many times, beat them with a knout on the rack. . . . For many arraignments slit the nostrils and cut off the noses of such people.” As most Russian tobacco consumers used snuff, the slit nostrils became their scarlet letter, publicly marking their crime. News of these punishments could only spread, as the tobacco criminals were exiled “after the torturings and punishment . . . so that others will learn not to do that.”

Furthermore, there was an attempt to resolve the continuing problem of tobacco smuggled into Muscovy. The most likely suspects were “Lithuanians,” who could have sold tobacco to anyone traveling from the Baltic
coast. However, if the tobacco had been purchased “from Russians, or from foreigners, those who are serving the sovereign,” they should also be arrested, interrogated, and forced into an “eye-to-eye confrontation” to uncover the truth. Torture could be used as necessary.  

The tsar continued to sign further restrictions and penalties for tobacco use, which suggests the seriousness of the state’s commitment but also its limited success in permanently curtailing tobacco, particularly on the periphery of the empire. By 1648, the Swedish envoy in Moscow gained responsibility for reporting on tobacco usage in the country as the tobacco trade through Sweden’s Baltic ports had become so profitable. Similarly, Siberia remained a concern for its continuing tobacco habits, despite any number of specific prohibitions. This continued into 1664, when Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich added another restriction for Siberia: any dealer, Russian or foreign, in tobacco would be whipped publicly and imprisoned for one week. Furthermore, all confiscated tobacco would be burned “to discourage the people.”

Adding greater weight to the consistent ban on tobacco was the state’s increasing interest in regulating all aspects of the economy, particularly foreign merchants and goods. The first attempt to provide a comprehensive restructuring of foreign trade arrived in the form of the Commercial Code of 1553, which instituted a higher tax rate on all foreign goods than Russian merchants paid, in a perfect example of mercantilist principles. Foreign merchants protested the new fines loudly, but this only confirmed the state’s decision. With the New Commercial Code of 1667, not only did the punitive tariffs remain on foreign merchants but also they were physically restricted inside the kingdom. Foreign merchants could conduct business only in Arkhangel’sk, Novgorod, Pskov, Smolensk, Putivl’, and Astrakhan, severely curtailing their presence in the Muscovite market. Complaints against the injustice were frequent, but did nothing to dissuade the state’s decision.

With tobacco having become a focus of the state’s economic restrictions on foreigners, Muscovite subjects drew upon tobacco as an example of foreigners as social and moral dangers. In a remarkable complaint from the northern city of Kholmogory in December 1663 the local townsmen (posadniki) protested the scandalous actions of the Dutch merchant Michael Meier. Whenever he received other foreigners traveling from Arkhangel’sk, “they drank and smoked tobacco, and played many games.” During Lent, Meier consumed enough “tobacco, meat, and fermented milk” that “a great stench” emanated from his house strong enough to be smelled in church. Considering the great number of legal restrictions on tobacco, it seems improbable that a foreign merchant would flaunt his smoking publicly. However, such an accusation would be an effective way of having any
Muscovy’s Extraordinary Ban on Tobacco

The persistence of the state’s prohibition and support from Russians inside the country created an opportunity for the Russian Orthodox Church to join the chorus of discontent. The Church had rejected foreign customs as a matter of doctrine since the promulgation of the Stoglav in 1551. It ruled that the “evil customs” of other countries and faiths defiled Russia with their “lawlessness.” Furthermore, though tobacco was not mentioned explicitly in the Bible, the general condemnation of everything that issued from a man’s body for its uncleanliness included tobacco smoke. While the smuggling of tobacco products that continued in the seventeenth century indicates the Church’s objections did not prevent Muscovite acceptance of a foreign custom, the Church’s rejection of tobacco offered reinforcement to the state’s ban.

By the 1660s, the decades of the tobacco prohibition, regulation of foreign merchants, and a growing public awareness of tobacco’s illegality created a formidable barrier to tobacco. No Muscovite authority supported tobacco’s legalization. Rather than recognizing Muscovy’s mercantilist regulations, foreigners seemed even more inspired to force the Muscovite market open. In particular, the pressure from the English in Moscow remained a persistent thorn in the side of Muscovite authorities. In England, the potential of the Muscovite tobacco market became something of a cause célèbre among free-trade advocates. With a decades-long ban, an untapped market loomed large in their vision of Muscovy. Josiah Child, writing in the 1660s, called for an immediate expansion of trade to Muscovy, necessary to break the growing English dependence on Dutch exports from Muscovy. In particular, he worried that currently nine-tenths of the English timber supply was purchased from Dutch middlemen; an English return to preeminence in Moscow would correct this situation. Similarly, John Pollexfen decried the diminishing returns from the Muscovy Company’s trade, which resulted in further lost revenues to the Dutch, in addition to the ongoing supply problems with limited access to timber, tar, pitch, and hemp.

In addition to the continuing interest of the English to sell tobacco to Muscovy, the global tobacco economy had transformed over the course of the seventeenth century. By the 1690s, an over-production of tobacco in North and South America had produced excessive supplies in both the Chesapeake for the English and in Bahia for the Portuguese. There is no single explanation for the overproduction. Certainly, such a large amount of land was now dedicated to tobacco production that in the Chesapeake, for example, colonial authorities took steps to force other commodities into production, as even basic staples such as wheat were not being grown in sufficient quantities in the region to keep the population fed. In addition, environmental conditions improved globally with the end of the “little ice age” of the seventeenth century, producing increasing harvests
worldwide. Even the French, not the most productive tobacco growers, suffered from oversupply by the end of the century. French attempts to control the imports of foreign tobacco through tariffs only mitigated the economic consequences, but did not produce any domestic sales increase. Globally, the excess supply also created a sharp decline in tobacco prices, which only made persuading any country of its potential value from trade revenue more difficult.

Even if tobacco consumption had continued to increase steadily, the increased tobacco supply still outpaced the slow growth of consumption in tobacco countries. As tobacco had been in common usage throughout the Americas, Europe, and Asia for decades, there was no large supply of new consumers to absorb the new leaf. Therefore, the one country that had successfully resisted legalized importation of tobacco for the entire century—Muscovy—became even more of a concern to tobacco exporters. The English, the bearers of the brunt of the overproduction, unsurprisingly became the most persistent voices to open Muscovite markets; on their side were decades of experience with tobacco sales. From a mercantilist perspective, this was an ideal model for economic exchange for England, though it was implicitly based on a rejection of any idea of Muscovy’s ability to regulate its own economy. While the English understood their own gains from tobacco sales, they failed to offer any argument that could persuade the tsar’s government to alter its policies. Foreigners remained under constant suspicion as tobacco smugglers, even in light of the draconian Muscovite restrictions. Regulation and control were the watchwords for economic development in Muscovy; open markets and lost specie were not.

OVERTURNING THE BAN

Considering the decades invested in prohibiting tobacco and punishing merchants and consumers, the legalization of tobacco sales in Muscovy was abrupt. In order to raise revenue for the Grand Embassy, Peter the Great granted Martyn Bogdanov a contract to sell tobacco in Muscovy for one year beginning on December 1, 1696. The contract required Bogdanov to pay the government directly the taxes for his sales, though the mechanism for him to acquire tobacco to sell was left to his own devising. In Peter’s explanation of the contract, the benefits to the state outweighed the losses. Direct involvement in the tobacco trade would curtail smuggling, and more control over tobacco equaled more tax revenue for the government. Therefore, tobacco’s legalization was a rethinking of Muscovite economic policy to achieve its long-term objective in controlling specie, rather than a decision influenced by outside forces or interests. There was no movement toward decentralizing economic control.

The reevaluation of tobacco’s role in the economy created other opportunities for negotiating with foreign merchants. In the same year as Bogdanov’s
contract, Peter changed tobacco policies in Astrakhan, one of the designated cities in the New Commercial Code for foreign merchants to conduct business. In Peter’s instruction to the governor of Astrakhan, tobacco would be confiscated from foreign merchants upon their arrival in Astrakhan, but returned to them upon their departure; individual merchants could carry approximately eighteen pounds for their personal use into the city. This was a concession that did not produce immediate financial results, but it was intended as a palliative to the new economic restrictions and controls placed on merchants arriving in Astrakhan. Peter required more invasive searches of foreign merchants who gained the privilege of trading in a limited region outside of Astrakhan, but these merchants were “rewarded” with the right to keep a portion of their tobacco. Once again, more control of the economy was the primary goal for the state, but easing tobacco restrictions became the solution.

Peter the Great’s formal embrace of the tobacco trade followed shortly after these decisions. In 1698, following discussions in Utrecht with King William III of England, Peter signed a formal contract for a group of English merchants to import tobacco to Moscow. The signed tobacco contract allowed a newly-formed “company” to import 3,000 hogsheads of tobacco (about one-and-a-half million pounds) in the first year (1699), and 5,000 hogsheads in the second. After the second year, the contract was renewable annually for another 5,000 hogsheads. Under the terms of the contract, tobacco could be sold anywhere in the kingdom, and the tsar agreed to ban all other tobacco imports, which was hardly a concession as no other supply of tobacco was legally allowed into Muscovy. The tsar agreed that domestic Ukrainian tobacco could only be sold in Ukraine to prevent it from cutting into English sales. With the money received from tobacco sales, English merchants had the right to buy and export any Muscovite product, keeping Muscovite specie in the country. If all the tobacco was not sold at the end of the second year of the contract, its clauses remained in effect until all the imported tobacco was sold. For this exclusive privilege, the English tobacco contractors paid £12,000 in advance for their customs duties.

Peter’s advantages with the contract far outweighed the English’s. The customs duties were the most obvious since Peter profited regardless of the success or failure of tobacco sales. Furthermore, the contract itself was granted to a group of specific Englishmen, as Peter used an economic privilege to pay off debts accrued on the Grand Embassy. In other words, legalized tobacco sales were the result of pressing economic concerns on Peter’s government, not a serious reversal of the economic policies of the past century.

Of course, there was a genuine transformation toward tobacco sales occurring. Mercantilist reforms, which had been gaining traction in the government throughout the seventeenth century, had been largely accomplished by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Therefore, regulating the economy was somewhat easier, and the possibility of controlling
tobacco through sales rather than prohibitions became enticing. With the earlier legalization under Martyn Bogdanov, Peter’s rationale suggested that public sales of tobacco could prevent the ongoing drain of specie through smuggling.

Considering tobacco’s history in Muscovy, it should not have been unexpected that tobacco sales were difficult for the English. Tobacco carried decades of suspicion with it—it had been inside the borders of the kingdom, but as a smuggled, illicit product. Though the English merchants complained to Muscovite officials that tobacco sales failed to meet their expectations, these complaints fell on deaf ears, as the Muscovite goals had already been achieved. Most of the documents generated by the Petrine government insisted on the imposition of their own privileges at the expense of English interests. For example, in April 1699, the tsar wrote to King William III with a clarification to the contract, forbidding the tobacco contractors from importing any other commodity into Muscovy and from purchasing any commodity for which other merchants held export contracts. Peter argued that allowing the contractors to export products would limit future “free trade with the usual goods.” The English believed this to be a violation of the contract, which had promised the right to purchase any good in Moscow. In order to resolve this situation, the contractors dispatched a new negotiator to Moscow, though the subsequent negotiations failed to alter the Petrine position.

In light of the longstanding prohibition of tobacco, the first official tobacco contract was a mixed success. Only 5,500 hogsheads were imported in the two years of the contract, though the contract called for imports of 8,000. Even at a lesser volume, the contractors failed to sell all of their tobacco. The English blamed Russian merchants for smuggling less expensive Ukrainian tobacco into Moscow as undercutting their sales, and the English travel in the country remained proscribed, preventing their access to the potential Siberian market.

Apparently unknown to the English were the Petrine government’s attempts to fulfill the contract’s terms. Peter’s obduracy did not doom the contract; in fact he attempted to facilitate the trade. When the English complained of domestic (Ukrainian) tobacco devaluing their imported stock, Peter instructed his own government officials to stop purchasing tobacco from any source other than the English. In 1701, Peter wrote to Andrei Vinius, a Russian official of Dutch descent, directing that tobacco imported through Siberia could no longer be purchased in Moscow because of the English contract. If the English tobacco trade diminished or produced financial losses, Peter warned that Vinius “would be questioned.” Peter also never wavered in his commitment to the importation of tobacco from Western Europe. In 1706 after the failure of the English attempt, he discussed the possible importation of tobacco with Aleksei Kurbatov, future governor of Akhangel’sk, though with the Dutch or the Swedish as the importers. Furthermore, it remained illegal to sell Ukrainian tobacco in