

Introduction

“He wrought out of Russia a real metamorphosis, a transformation.” These words of Piotr Shafirov, the vice-chancellor of Petrine times, from his 1717 treatise *Considerations on the Causes of the Swedish War*, suggest that Peter I’s contemporaries already understood clearly the significance of the transformation of Russia going on before their eyes. The upheaval was especially violent because underlying this “metamorphosis” was the will of a single person, like an ancient titan lifting an overwhelming burden. This is beyond doubt, whatever we may say about the role played by his supporters, by “productive forces,” and so forth.

The grandiose, all-encompassing nature of the Petrine transformations was such that even after a century and more they had not become merely history but continued to be something real and vital that affected everyday life. Historian Mikhail Pogodin, a contemporary of Pushkin, wrote in his essay “Peter the Great”:

We wake up. What day is it? 1 January 1841—Peter the Great ordered that years be counted from the birth of Christ and months of the year from January. It’s time to get dressed—our clothing is sewn in the fashion given by Peter the First, a uniform by his pattern. The cloth is woven at a factory that he established, the wool is shorn from sheep that he introduced in Russia. A book catches your eye—Peter the Great put the script into use and himself cut out the letters. You start reading—this is the language that under Peter was made into a bookish and literary one, forcing out the previous church idiom. Newspapers are delivered—Peter the Great launched them. You need to purchase various things—all of them, from the silk neckerchief to the sole of the boot, will remind you of Peter the Great. . . . At dinner, from the salted herring to the potatoes that he ordered sown to the wine that he introduced, all the dishes remind you of Peter the Great. After dinner you go out for a visit—this is Peter the Great’s assemblies, public social functions. You meet ladies there who were permitted into men’s company at the demand of Peter the Great.

If it were only a matter of neckerchiefs, salted herring, and assemblies! Pogodin continues:

A place in the system of European states, the administration and its subdivisions, court procedures, the rights of the estate groups, the Table of Ranks, the army, navy, taxes, censuses, recruiting levies, manufactories, mills, ports, canals, highways, postal service, agriculture, forestry, cattle raising, mining, gardening, viticulture, domestic and foreign trade, clothing, external appearance, pharmacies, hospitals, drugs, chronology, language, the press, printing, military schools, academies—these are essentially monuments to his indefatigable activity and his genius.¹

Time showed the astonishing viability of many of the institutions Peter created. The colleges lasted until 1802, that is, eighty years; the soul-tax system of assessment introduced in 1724 was not abolished until 163 years later, in 1887. The last recruiting levy took place in 1874—almost 170 years after the first. The synodal administration of the Russian Orthodox church remained unchanged almost 200 years, from 1721 to 1918. Finally, the Governing Senate, created by Peter in 1711, was liquidated only in December 1917, some 206 years after its formation.

It is hard to find examples in Russian history of other institutions known for their longevity and created by the conscious will of one person. One can understand the admiration that the great reformer of Russia evoked and still evokes.

Peter has always been particularly celebrated on the banks of the Neva, where he founded a great city with an amazing destiny, the city in which everything is linked to its founder's name. "It was born to become an imperial capital," and here began, flourished, and declined the "Petersburg" period of Russian history, filled with names, dates, and events without which world history is unthinkable. At the beginning of this memorable period stands the gigantic figure of Peter, whose life in history proved to be extraordinarily vivid and durable.

As Alexander the Great has remained a historical figure equally celebrated and respected in the West and the East for three millennia, so too is Peter perhaps the single figure in Russian history who almost painlessly crossed over the divide of 1917, so fatal for the old regime, to remain in public awareness as a reformer of genius who converted Russia into a great power.

Around Peter's name many legends and stereotypes have taken shape and become imprinted on public consciousness. These stereo-

types are so alive that both for those who write about Peter and for those who read about him it is sometimes hard to resist the inertia of the ready-made clichés—"the tsar-carpenter, the worker on the throne," who "made a window to Europe," who was "harsh, but just and democratic, far beyond his successors," and so forth—which have persisted and long since become axioms of judgments and definitions. These positive stereotypes are usually accompanied by current ideological innovations to the effect that in instituting reforms necessary for Russia, Peter "expressed the interests of the ruling class" and skinned the laboring peasantry three times over. Further, as a rule there follows the all-reconciling notion that in history results are what is important in the final analysis, whatever the directions and the means used to attain them, whether we speak about a ruler who created an empire or one who built what he himself and his apologists called "socialism."

In our day historians and commentators are trying hard to resolve the problematic relationship between ends and means. It is no accident that the theme of Peter and the theme of Stalin have proved to be closely related, and no accident that some commentators and historians have subtly turned to Peter's epoch in search of the first causes and sources of the "Stalinshchina."

Disputes about the significance in Russian history of Peter's personality and his reforms have not subsided for three centuries, and it is doubtful that they will ever end. The historiography of the Petrine transformations is exceptionally broad and many-sided. Its sources extend back to the end of his reign when Peter started to write "The History of the Swedish War." This unfinished book was supposed to sum up his rule, to immortalize both the glorious victories of Russian arms on the battlefield and the achievements in the sphere of reforms. And although "The History" never saw the light, its purpose was attained via other means—the next generation of historians began to celebrate the significance of the reforms and the majesty of the genius-reformer. From the moment of his death Peter entered into Russian national consciousness as one of the greatest geniuses of Russian history, an outstanding personality who struck everyone by the scale and profundity of what he had accomplished. How this actually came about after his death has been well delineated by Xenia Gasiorowska and Nicholas Riasanovsky.²

In the historical scholarship of the eighteenth century, apologetics predominated in evaluating the tsar's personality and his aims. The works of Vasily Tatishchev, Mikhail Lomonosov, belles lettres and poetry lauded all the aims and deeds of Peter the Great. The apogee of this kind of literature was *The Feats of Peter the Great, the Wise Transformer*

of *Russia*, issued by Ivan Golikov in twelve volumes that were later supplemented by eighteen more volumes (1788–97). The very same purpose, to celebrate the great monarch, was also served by the popular historical anecdotes that flowed from the pen of Peter's turner Andrei Nartov, academician Yakov Stählin, and Ivan Golikov. Concurrently, in the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the historiography of the Petrine era started to sound some critical notes. The celebrated aristocratic critic of Catherine II's reign, Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov, in his *On the Corruption of Manners in Russia*, and then also Nicholas Karamzin, in the "Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia," saw in Peter's reign not only victories and outstanding achievements, but also "horrors of despotism" that led to the damage of the "good" patriarchal manners of old, to the destruction of the significance of the hereditary estate of the nobility, and to the dominance of luxury and corruption at court and in the higher echelons of Russian society.³

The great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) occupies a special place in the historiography on Peter. In the last years of his life he collected material for a book on "The History of Peter the Great." In this as in Pushkin's other works there are many valuable observations and comments about the role of Peter's personality and the meaning of his reforms. Pushkin's ruminations proceed partly in the doubting vein of Shcherbatov and Karamzin, yet Pushkin does not stop there: he incisively grasped the most profound internal contradiction of the Petrine epoch and of the very personality of the tsar-reformer, the combination of rationality and irrationality in his actions, the necessary firmness in implementing the reforms, and, at the same time, the exceptional brutality in their implementation on Russian soil.

The post-Pushkin period (1830s–50s) is notable for the unfolding battle of "Westernizers" and "Slavophiles" over Russia's past and the paths of its movement forward. "Westernizers" such as Alexander Herzen, Timofei Granovsky, Konstantin Kavelin, and others, and "Slavophiles" such as Ivan Kireevsky, Aleksei Khomiakov, Yuri Samarin, and the Aksakov brothers made Peter the Great the very center of their disputes. If the "Westernizers" saw in Peter the tsar-revolutionary who with the aid of strong central authority managed to make Russia into a great power, then the "Slavophiles" vehemently denounced Peter for introducing into Russia alien Western principles of life, institutions, and mores that were harmful for the Russian individual and the society as a whole. As a consequence, in their view, the internal harmony of Russian life was destroyed, and there was a split between the authorities and the people, the state and "the land." One should note that for the most part

both sides disputed without new facts in hand, but the centrality of their dispute was manifest, and it did not subside even later.

The Petrine epoch of reforms was reflected most fully in *The History of Russia from Earliest Times* by Sergei Solov'ev, who had access to previously closed state archives. Three volumes of his multivolume *History* were published in the 1860s and 1870s and were dedicated entirely to the Petrine epoch of reforms.⁴ A plethora of historical facts combined in these volumes with Solov'ev's unambiguous concept of the sense and significance of the Petrine reforms. In concentrated form Solov'ev's views were reflected in his *Public Lectures about Peter the Great*, which appeared in 1872, the bicentennial of Peter's birth. Solov'ev saw in Peter not only the great reformer who accomplished the great feat of converting Russia from a backward and uncultured country into a great and enlightened power, but the personification of the spirit of the Russian people whose genius he represented.

Solov'ev's tremendous labor became the genuine fount of a historiographical river: from it flowed all of Russian historiography about Peter. Here and in Vasily Kliuchevsky's brilliant lectures, which gave much fresh evaluation of the reforms, were also specific historical works on law, the economy, social relations, and the system of authority at the center and at the local level.⁵

Paul Miliukov's book, *The State Economy of Russia in the First Quarter of the Eighteenth Century and the Reforms of Peter the Great* (second edition, St. Petersburg, 1905), occupies a special place in the historiography. The book addressed the sociofinancial aspect of Peter's reforms. This work, as well as Miliukov's later writings on the history of Russian culture, developed the notion of the accidental nature, chaos, and senselessness of many of the reforms of Peter, who in Miliukov's opinion lacked the ability to think and to act consistently and logically. Miliukov's "destructive" point of view later became the subject of a long-term scholarly debate. In the 1880s and 1890s scholarship on Peter was enriched by the first volumes of *The Letters and Papers of Peter the Great*, edited by academician A.F. Bychkov on a high scholarly level, which still constitute the documentary basis of research on the Petrine epoch.⁶

After 1917 the historiographical traditions about Peter and his reforms were broken in many respects. At first a crudely sociological view predominated in treating the reforms of the Petrine epoch: all the efforts of Mikhail Pokrovsky and his school were aimed at seeking out "class essence" and "commercial-industrial capitalism" in the Petrine epoch. The rebirth of imperial designs in the politics of the 1930s and 1940s led to the exaggeration of Peter's personality and concerns, even though he was deprived of the title "Great" and was indicted by Josef

Stalin for “skinning the peasant three times over.” Nevertheless, Peter was evaluated as a great statesman who, while surrounded by enemies, gave the example of a decisive, brutal but necessary break with the old. A special place in the historiography about Peter is occupied by the talented novel of Aleksei Tolstói, *Peter I*, which elaborates the apologetic idea of the powerful personality, the boss, among his subjects. In Peter’s features contemporaries palpably perceived Stalin.

At the same time, the definite rehabilitation of Peter accomplished under Stalin facilitated the reactivation of scholarly research on the Petrine epoch. Publication of *The Letters and Papers of Peter the Great* was resumed, a valuable collection of documents prepared in 1945 by N.A. Voskresensky, *Legislative Documents of Peter I*, appeared, and the first five volumes of Mikhail Bogoslovsky’s biographical chronology of the Peter’s life, *Peter I: Materials for a Biography* (Moscow, 1940–48), were released, as were other books and articles.

Among contemporary historians in the Commonwealth of Independent States Nikolai Pavlenko’s writings must be singled out. His works address the problems of the socioeconomic policies of the Petrine era as well as the problems of Peter’s domestic policies, with special attention devoted to the personality of the tsar-reformer himself and his entourage.

Peter’s vivid personality has constantly attracted the attention of historians in the West, where the number of books about Peter published in the past twenty years manifestly exceeds the number published in the USSR during the entire seventy years of the Soviet era. These books are not of equal value; many of them are superficial and devoid of deep analysis. The most valuable of these appear to be studies of a general nature: those written by the German historian Reinhard Wittram, the English historian M.S. Anderson, and the American Marc Raeff, the last of whom has long studied the Petrine epoch in the context of Russian history in general and the history of the intelligentsia in Russia in particular. Especially important is the research on specific subjects: James Cracraft on Peter’s church reforms, Claes Peterson on the administrative reforms, Robert Crummey and others cited in the bibliography of the present book on the social structure of Petrine society.

To be sure, I have not set out to reconsider all aspects of the enormous theme of the Petrine reforms, and have striven to avoid the traditional exposition of the great reformer “from birth to death.” The book comprises four basic parts. The first is devoted to Peter’s personality and analyzing its makeup, for therein lay the essence of all that later took place in Russia. How Peter implemented his ideals and ideas, what goals he pursued in the different spheres of life, and what it all

amounted to make up the following parts of the book.

One should not forget that the reforms were only part of the life of society. People are born, live, work, fall ill, and die in times of acceleration and stagnation alike. In this indivisibility, the variegated mix of the exalted and the banal, the extraordinary and the traditional, are found the color and particularity of history, just as in life in general. In the book presented here many aspects of the life of the society of the Petrine epoch are reconsidered, but its main theme is the history of the Petrine reforms. Besides, as a researcher it seemed to me not so important merely to recount to readers the results of the reforms as to try to understand how, when, and why the idea developed under Peter—that social utopian and peculiar “Petersburg dreamer”—of saddling his own people with a grandiose, forcible experiment in creating a “regulated” police state where, for the sake of an abstract idea of the “common good,” the private interests of the individual were sacrificed.

The Personality of the Reformer

In considering the early years of the life of this extraordinary tsar, one unwittingly seeks to find on the banks of the notorious river of time early testimony to Peter's exceptional qualities, and therefore one reviews his copybooks, first letters, and notes with special care.

But nothing alerts us to the coming genius. The boy born on the day of Saint Isaac of Dalmatia, 30 May 1672, was not distinguished from his numerous brothers and sisters by anything special. Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich's marriage to Natalia Kirillovna Naryshkina on 22 January 1671 had been the second for the forty-year-old tsar. From the previous marriage with Maria Il'ichna Miloslavskaja had been born thirteen children, among whom were Fedor, Ivan, and Sophia. In 1676 Aleksei Mikhailovich died, leaving the throne to the oldest of his sons, Fedor Alekseevich, a sickly and feeble young man. Fedor ruled only briefly and died at the end of April 1682. A council of high-ranking dignitaries decided to offer the throne not to the next eldest son, sixteen-year-old Ivan, but to nine-year-old Peter. This unexpected decision was taken through the intrigues of the Naryshkins, relatives of Peter's mother who had followed the young tsaritsa into the palace, but there was also the circumstance that the lively, healthy young man greatly outshone his older brother Ivan, who seemed to bear signs of degeneration. Possibly awareness of this fact, and not only the political struggle, had influenced the dutiful decision of the Boyar Council, the highest governmental body, to violate the tradition of transmitting the throne via the direct male line of descent from older (Fedor) to younger (Ivan).

Yet the Naryshkin faction underestimated the foe. Headed by the imperious, ambitious Sophia, the Miloslavskys contrived to arouse the discontent of the strel'tsy (the palace guards) and with their aid to stage a bloody coup d'état on 15 May 1682. On the throne a triumvirate was

instituted: Peter was joined by Ivan as co-tsars while Sophia was declared co-ruler with the rights of regent. For Peter the situation was a political dead end. The widowed tsaritsa Natalia Kirillovna left the Kremlin palace with her household retainers and settled in Preobrazhenskoe—one of the suburban residences that then ringed Moscow.

All these events, which took place independently of Peter's will and wishes, became as it were the backdrop to the beginning years of the future reformer of Russia, and they also determined many of the unusual qualities that later constituted his genius. The main thing was that he abandoned the Kremlin. The Moscow Kremlin of the seventeenth century was not just buildings and churches, it was a world of ceremonies and conditions, of stereotyped conduct shaped by the centuries, and a closed system hallowed by tradition that as a whole hardly facilitated the development of individuality. Not one public enterprise with the tsar's participation occurred without the observance of rather severe ceremonial procedures. The sovereign's progresses beyond the bounds of the Kremlin—as a rule these were pilgrimages to surrounding monasteries or churches—were treated as events of state significance. Even the tsar's coming to "the Jordan," out onto the ice of the Moscow River on 6 January for the ritual cutting of ice holes in the traditional festival of blessing the waters, was organized as an important event and called a "march," while in the Kremlin—"Above" in the terminology of the time—there remained a commission of boyars and other council ranks appointed by the tsar so that during his absence the state "would not be at loss and would not have losses."

By force of political circumstance Peter had apparently been ejected from this system. To be sure, he appeared in the Kremlin on official holidays and for audiences, but all this was alien to him and even, knowing the hostility of relatives on his father's side, threatening. Preobrazhenskoe, as the tsar's summer residence surrounded by fields and forests, gave him that which abruptly eased the development of his abilities—freedom to pass the time with a minimum of obligatory duties and a maximum of games, which, as always happens with little boys, bore a military character and with the years became complicated because their participants were not dolls but live persons. The training and developmental significance of these games was huge. The native endowments typical of Peter already appeared here: lively impressionability, turbulent and indefatigable energy, the passion and self-absorbed enthusiasm for play that imperceptibly turned into serious business. Thanks to this the "play" soldiers and the English boat found in a barn did not remain mere toys, but became the foundation of the future grandiose cause of transforming Russia.

One other circumstance is important. Near Preobrazhenskoe was the so-called Foreign Settlement—Kokui, the settlement of foreigners who had come to Russia from various European countries. By the tradition of that time this settlement of merchants, diplomats, and mercenaries was separated from the city by a barrier. Kokui was a peculiar model of Europe where side by side and just as closely as in Europe lived Catholics and Protestants, Germans and French, English and Scots. This strange world of Kokui, so different from Moscow, captured Peter's curiosity and attention, probably because it was so unlike the world of the Kremlin and Preobrazhenskoe. Acquaintance with foreigners—interesting, educated people like Franz Lefort and Patrick Gordon—unusual things, customs, multiple languages, and later also intimate impressions in the house of the wine merchant Mons where his beautiful daughter Anna lived all made it easy for Peter (whose ancestors had washed their hands from a silver bowl after the ceremony of “offering the hand to” a foreign envoy) to surmount the invisible but solid psychological barrier separating two alien worlds from one another—Orthodox Rus' and “ungodly” Europe—a barrier that even now is not so easy to surmount.

Peter's assumption of power in the summer of 1689 served to resolve the long-simmering political crisis stirred by the unnatural status of a dual-power in practice. But, just as in May 1682, so in August 1689 Peter had largely been swept away by the course of events without governing them. Propitious circumstances facilitated Sophia's overthrow and the practically bloodless transfer of the sovereign's authority to him.

At the time Peter did not need this authority as a lever for reforms, because they had not yet matured in his consciousness. Thus Russia's “real” seventeenth century lasted ten more years, coinciding exactly with the calendar century. But this decade did not pass in vain for Peter; it ripened his genius so that at the end of the decade, at the turn of two centuries, a whole flood of ideas poured over the country, transforming it.

One should single out three important events of these years that influenced the formation of Peter the Reformer. First, there are the trips to Arkhangel'sk in 1693–94. An ordinary “play” journey to the town on the White Sea became, undoubtedly, a great event in the life of the young tsar. For the first time he saw a real sea and real ships and made his first voyage on the restless and dangerous element so unlike the quiet ponds of the Moscow hinterland. This gave a powerful impetus to the imagination, the dream of the sea appeared for Russia, and a genuine cult of the ship and the sea arose. From this Arkhangel'sk experience, as the Russian historian Mikhail Bogoslovsky wrote, “the roar of the waves, the sea air, the watery elements drew him in and with the years made themselves an urgent