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Catherine the Great and the Development of a Modern Russian Sovereignty, 1762-1796

By

Thomas Lucius Lowish

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
History
in the
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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Victoria Frede-Montemayor, Chair
Professor Jonathan Sheehan
Professor Kinch Hoekstra

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Abstract

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Professor Victoria Frede-Montemayor, Chair

Historians of Russian monarchy have avoided the concept of sovereignty, choosing instead to describe how monarchs sought power, authority, or legitimacy. This dissertation, which centers on Catherine the Great, the empress of Russia between 1762 and 1796, takes on the concept of sovereignty as the exercise of supreme and untrammelled power, considered legitimate, and shows why sovereignty was itself the major desideratum. Sovereignty expressed parity with Western rulers, but it would allow Russian monarchs to bring order to their vast domain and to meaningfully govern the lives of their multitudinous subjects. This dissertation argues that Catherine the Great was a crucial figure in this process. Perceiving the confusion and disorder in how her predecessors exercised power, she recognized that sovereignty required both strong and consistent procedures as well as substantial collaboration with the broadest possible number of stakeholders. This was a modern conception of sovereignty, designed to regulate the swelling mechanisms of the Russian state. Catherine established her system through careful management of both her own activities and the institutions and servitors that she saw as integral to the system. She used a variety of management strategies that included imposing laws, issuing instructions, and routinizing interactions with administrators. While Catherine's system, which was noble oriented, had limited purchase in the vast Russian countryside, it established clear expectations about the legitimate exercise of power. After her death, the system would not tolerate lightly any violation of its principles. Catherine's successors, Alexander I and Nicholas I, largely adhered to these arrangements, allowing the Russian monarchy to remain a robust and viable form of government in the first half of the nineteenth century.

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All that is good in the pages that follow, I attribute to help of these people. All its shortcomings, weaknesses, misjudgments, and errors are entirely my own.

Berkeley, CA
April 2021

Я предоставляю много власти людям, употребляемым от меня на службу.

//

I bestow much power on those who are employed in my service.

- Catherine the Great, from *Zapiski Gribovskogo*

Introduction

In 1762 the thirty-three-year-old empress consort of Russia, Catherine Alekseevna, overthrew her husband, the emperor, Peter III, after a reign of merely six months. At first, many supposed that she would act as regent for their son, Paul; yet, she quickly consolidated power for herself, ruling for thirty-four years until 1796, making her one of the longest-reigning rulers in Russian history. Catherine II, or “Catherine the Great” as she has come to be better known by posterity, aspired to be an enlightened ruler. Historians have rightly credited her with undertaking a number of reforms that modernized central and provincial government, encouraged the growth of towns and enterprise, and furthered education. The major, albeit unsuccessful, codification effort of the country’s laws has also garnered substantial attention.¹ From the outset, however, Catherine’s principal project—the only one she spoke of at length in her ascension literature—was to bring order to the exercise of political power in Russia.

Catherine justified her overthrow of Peter III by invoking his incorrect understanding of and inability to wield sovereign power. In some basic sense, all monarchs aspire to sovereignty - **the exercise of supreme and untrammelled power, and the recognition of their claims as legitimate.**² Although Catherine and Peter shared this rudimentary conception, she believed that Peter had an incorrect understanding of what legitimate, untrammelled power meant, making him the opposite of a sovereign monarch: a despot. Seizing the throne for herself, she promised to rectify Peter’s errors, which, in her mind, undermined Russia’s military and political prestige. She was not alone in this judgment: those high-ranking Russian statesmen who organized the coup that

¹ The books on Catherine’s reign are numerous. In the Anglophone literature the definitive general study continues to be Isabel de Madariaga’s *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), followed by John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Simon Dixon, *Catherine the Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009). In the post-Soviet Russian historiography, see Aleksandr Kamenskii, “Pod sen’iu Ekateriny...”: vtoraiia polovina 18v (St. Petersburg: Lenizdat, 1992) and Ol’ga I. Eliseeva, *Ekaterina velikaia* (Moscow, 2013).

² This definition of sovereignty builds on standard basic definitions of the concept. For example: “The term sovereignty originally and for a long time expressed the idea that there is a final and absolute authority in the political community,” F. H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1. And more recently: “Sovereignty, though its meanings have varied across history, also has a core meaning, *supreme authority within a territory*,” Daniel Philpott, “Sovereignty,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL=<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/sovereignty/>. I add the term ‘untrammelled’ to the more common adjective ‘supreme.’ ‘Supreme’ conveys the idea that there was no power superior to that of the monarch, but that idea was no point of contention or concern in eighteenth-century Russia. ‘Untrammelled,’ in contrast, conveys the notion of power that meets neither restriction nor resistance, and this better captures debates around legitimacy that were important to Catherine. Sovereignty is often defined in terms of ‘authority’ in order to underline legitimacy as a core component. However, I maintain that ‘power,’ understood simply as the capacity to act (above all, to carry out political acts), works better. ‘Power’ helps highlight the fact that not every monarchical decision or action was deemed legitimate. Peter III, for example, exercised power, but in a way that even senior advisors perceived as illegitimate. Eventually, the perception that his actions were illegitimate resulted in a loss of the (untrammelled) powers he claimed. The best discussion on the way in which *de jure* and *de facto* components of sovereignty are connected remains Section X: “On the Nature of Sovereignty” in James Bryce, *Studies in the History of Jurisprudence*, vol 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1901), 503-23. Finally, it is important here to acknowledge that what I refer to as the standard definition of sovereignty has been continuously contested. On the history of different conceptions, see Michael R. Fowler & Julie M. Bunck, *Law, Power, and the Sovereign State: The Evolution and Application of the Concept of Sovereignty* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Robert Jackson, *Sovereignty: The Evolution of an Idea* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Raia Prokhovnik, *Sovereignty: History and Theory* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2008). This dissertation does not claim to offer a Begriffsgeschichte of sovereignty, but analyzes the conception of sovereignty developed and put into practice by Catherine II in Russia in the second half of the eighteenth century.

brought her to power surely agreed with her overall assessment, without necessarily sharing the conception of sovereignty she was to develop and manifest.

Rule in line with Catherine's understanding of sovereignty was a complex operation. It involved observance of laws and norms, particularly those that regulated the operation of the state's institutions. But that was not all. As I argue, Catherine's more original insight was that the monarch must involve others in the exercise of power in various capacities, and that such an arrangement need not bind the ruler's will or threaten her status. In fact, if this arrangement was properly devised *and* properly managed, it would guarantee the smooth and predictable flow of power while at the same time minimizing the friction or contention that undermined its legitimacy. This was a modern conception of monarchical sovereignty, and it was new to Russia. It fundamentally structured Catherine's activities as monarch, bringing immediate order, and clarifying standards about correct rule beyond her reign.

* * *

The concept of sovereignty is largely absent in both the discussion of Catherine's reign and the larger corpus of scholarship on the Russian monarchy. Indeed, Richard Wortman has gone so far as to claim, "The Russian state never evolved a conception of self-sufficient monarchical authority, reinforced with theological and juridical defenses of sovereignty."³ Likely, such reticence has been occasioned by the view that sovereignty is an ambiguous concept and that bringing it into the mix will only sow confusion.⁴ Yet, the standard concepts that have been used in the analysis of the Russian monarchy—power, authority, and legitimacy—, useful as they are, are no more precise than sovereignty. Likewise, the term 'autocracy' (*samoderzhavie*), which is commonly used to describe the Russian monarchy, is static, suggesting that questions about the monarch's powers had been settled. Most important, historians' reticence to engage the problem of sovereignty has been counter-productive, since "a conception of self-sufficient monarchical authority" was precisely what eighteenth-century Russian monarchs—Catherine foremost among them—sought to develop. For her, the key question was precisely what constituted self-sufficient monarchical authority, and where its legal, institutional, and practical limits lay.

Catherine continually used the word 'autocracy,' but she well understood the limits of these powers and how easily they were challenged. Indeed, many of Russia's political crises of the eighteenth century are best understood as crises of sovereignty in which individuals were perceived to be exercising the throne's powers without recognized legitimacy. Peter III was only the latest in a line of contentious powerholders. Uncertain rules governing succession were partly to blame. In 1722, Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725) had issued a law asserting that the reigning monarch had

³ Richard Wortman, *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of Exploration: Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 27.

⁴ Hent Kelmo and Quentin Skinner write: "the status of sovereignty as a highly ambiguous concept is well established. Pointing out, or deploring, the ambiguity of the idea has itself become a recurring motif in the literature on sovereignty. The concept of sovereignty is often seen as a downright obstacle to fruitful conceptual analysis, carried over from its proper setting in history to 'plague and befog contemporary thought'." Hent Kelmo & Quentin Skinner "Introduction," in *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present, and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1. Although the usefulness of Sovereignty as a powerful analytical concept to help understand the modern world is increasingly questioned (see, especially, Fowler & Bunck, *Law, Power, and the Sovereign State*, 1-33), the same need not be true in the past, as Kelmo and Skinner themselves assert. Sovereignty was a crucial concept in the early modern period; therefore, appealing to its complexities should not be a reason to avoid it as an operative historical concept.

the right to choose his or her successor. Yet, this law did not create a smooth pattern of succession in eighteenth-century Russia, which came to be known as the “century of palace coups.”⁵ A more major issue, however, was the lack of clarity surrounding legitimate channels of power as well as the division of power between the monarch and the state’s political institutions, such as the Senate and the imperial Colleges. Even once monarchs were securely ensconced on the throne, scrutiny fell on their practices. For example, empresses Anna (r. 1730-1740) and Elizabeth (r. 1741-1762), were charged with neglecting their responsibilities, while allowing individual favorites or bodies such as the short-lived Cabinet of Ministers to exercise power without proper oversight or accountability. Such criticisms suggest a growing concern with the regular exercise of power by monarchs, and not merely the initial circumstances of their enthronement, legitimately or not.

The influence that Western political culture and ideas exercised on Russian elites in the early modern period makes the absence of the concept of sovereignty—and the rich conceptualization of political power that is associated with it—all the more questionable.⁶ In Western Europe from the sixteenth century onwards, sovereignty had emerged as a major topic in the writings of political thinkers, who in many cases sought to provide theoretical clarity and justifications for a process of state-building that was already occurring in practice.⁷ Jean Bodin (1530-1596) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) were two of the main contributors to this discussion. They and others argued that what characterized states and rulers was not solely power, but sovereignty—a complex attribute that combined capacity with a system of legal and moral right. Sovereignty was to be identified by its prerogatives—all understood as species of command. These prerogatives might be arranged and exercised by various means, so long as the means met general expectations and were consistent with the terms within which they were framed. To become a sovereign therefore meant not only to begin to exercise a range of considerable prerogatives, but to understand and treat these prerogatives as part of a complex system of right that presupposed corresponding duties and defined rules for activity.⁸

By the end of the seventeenth century, Western ideas of sovereignty had started to make inroads in Russia, largely through the writings of the German natural-law theorists such as Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694), Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), and Christian Wolff (1679-1754), who built on and contested the work of those earlier thinkers.⁹ For example, their writings informed the composition of a key political treatise written toward the end of Peter the Great’s reign, *The Right of the Monarch’s Will in Designating the Heir to His Realm* (*Pravda voli monarshei vo opredelenii*

⁵ Evgenii Anisimov, *Five Empresses: Court Life in Eighteenth Century Russia*, trans. by Kathleen Carroll (Westport, CT: Prager, 2004), 8.

⁶ This is a large and important topic in Russian history. For an introductory overview in Anglophone literature, see Melvin Wren, *The Western Impact on Tsarist Russia* (Huntington, NY: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1976). A specific study asserting the influence of German cameralism on Russia is Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁷ The development of the modern state was a gradual process and has also generated a large corpus of scholarship. On medieval developments, see Joseph Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

⁸ Bodin believed that the state’s powers must be understood and justified through the ordering concept of Sovereignty. He claimed that he was the first person to expound Sovereignty’s nature. At best, this claim is only partly true. On the preconditions of and precursors to Bodin’s thought, see above all Kenneth Pennington, *The Prince and the Law, 1200-1600: Sovereignty and Rights in Western Legal Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

⁹ Simon Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia, 1676-1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 189-220.

naslednika derzhavy svoei) (1722). This tract, written for Peter by the reformist churchman, Feofan Prokopovich, sought to justify the aforementioned 1722 law of succession, and it was especially important because it incorporated for the first time rationalist arguments clarifying the monarch's sovereignty.¹⁰

The French Enlightenment, which gained in cultural importance in Russia during Elizabeth's reign, introduced new conceptions of sovereignty, articulated in relation to recent political developments in France. To draw one broad brushstroke, Enlightenment thinkers imagined that sovereignty could be a device to reform society, though they were also concerned that such a great concentration of power opened the door to its abuse. For such power to be made legitimate, it must itself be made to accord with reason. Sovereignty was therefore a formidable theoretical and practical challenge. By mid-century, theories of sovereignty began seriously to challenge, in particular, the possibility of legitimate monarchical rule. They raised this challenge through the figure of the despot, who featured prominently in several major political texts of the period, notably Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). The despot was a single ruler who sought to exercise untrammelled power, but governed in a manner that failed to generate legitimacy, requiring the despot to rely on force or violence. Despotism often resulted from a ruler's unbridled desire to pursue personal interests. But it also stemmed from an absolutist ethic, according to which despots believed that they could exercise power without recognizing restraints. Such restraints included not only the dictates of natural law, but also the fundamental laws of the state as well as custom and tradition. Moreover, the despot believed that he must on all occasions exercise power directly, and that the involvement of others in any collaborative capacity was a threat to his status. Montesquieu, for example, noted that the despot insisted on arbitrating judicial cases, even though this threatened the integrity of civil law. Often, the despot enrolled the services of a first minister or *vizier*.¹¹ This was not a collaborative arrangement. In a country governed by force, the *vizier*'s principal task was to avoid punishment, which reduced him to sycophancy and craven dishonesty, rather than serving as a counselor who might help steer the ruler's decisions towards reason. Alternately, the *vizier* functioned as a cypher, shifting the locus of power rather than mitigating the inherent dangers of the absolutist ethic. Although despotism's imposition of fear imposed a

¹⁰ Prokopovich is commonly given as the author, although his authorship has been debated. See James Cracraft, "Did Feofan Prokopovich Really Write *Pravda Voli Monarshei*?" in *Slavic Review*, 40: 2 (Summer, 1981), 173-93. Lorenz Erren argues that Peter's law was not seen as a break from the past but "an attempt to preserve the Russian tradition against contemporary Western birthright ideology and its notorious demand for 'indefeasible primogeniture'" - "Feofan Prokopovich's *Pravda voli monarshei* as Fundamental Law of the Russian Empire," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 17: 2 (Spring 2016), 338.

¹¹ A high official in the Ottoman Empire. The notion that despotism was characteristic of 'oriental' polities has been a recurring theme since Antiquity. On the genealogy of the oriental theme in the early modern discussion of despotism, see above all Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte*, trans. by Arthur Denner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). However, Montesquieu also believed that European monarchies were succumbing to despotic ideas of indigenous origin. See the very important work on this by Vickie B. Sullivan, *Montesquieu and the Despotic Ideas of Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017). On where Russia figured in the geographical imagination of the Enlightenment, see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Useful discussions of despotism in relation to Russia are: Harsha Ram, "Russia and the Oriental Despot," *India International Centre Quarterly*, 21: 2/3, The Russian Enigma (Summer-Monsoon, 1994), 31-46; and Max Okenfuss, "Catherine, Montesquieu, and Empire," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. 56: 3 (2008), 322-29. For a general discussion of how the term 'despotism'—along with the related term 'tyranny'—has evolved over time, see Mario Turchetti, "'Despotism' and 'Tyranny': Unmasking a Tenacious Confusion", *European Journal of Political Theory*, 7: 2 (2008), 159-82.

modicum of peace, it failed to provide genuine security or liberty, for its actions were unpredictable and arbitrary.¹²

So severely did the figure of the despot challenge conceptions of monarchical rule that some Enlightenment writers came to reject the possibility of monarchical sovereignty altogether.¹³ Rousseau, for example, asserted that sovereignty could only exist where power was vested in a *demos* that made decisions collectively and collaboratively, representing a general will.¹⁴ Catherine, who began reading Montesquieu even before she came to power and revisited the *Spirit of the Laws* early in her reign, attempted to justify how an autocratic ruler might avoid despotism in her major political text, the *Nakaz* (1767), or “Grand Instruction.” Her arguments were dismissed by Diderot for one, who visited Catherine in St. Petersburg in the 1770s and refuted the *Nakaz* by asserting that the nation possessed sovereignty at all times: monarchs could only exist as delegates of the nation, strictly bound by laws that the latter had imposed on them.¹⁵ However, neither republicanism nor constitutional monarchy were acceptable in Russia. There, strong monarchy was considered even by its critics to be the major source of the country’s strength and the only legitimate political form.¹⁶

Like the theorists of the European Enlightenment, Catherine was concerned with the problem of despotism, and their reservations were reflected in her sovereignty project. She contended that Russian monarchs must seek to understand their powers in terms of complex prerogatives and that exercising these prerogatives must be framed by norms and expectations. It was the duty of the monarch to understand existing expectations, but also to clarify and establish procedures wherever they were still lacking. Organizing power, both by creating expectations and procedures, and by adhering to them, was by no means a limitation, but a constitutive quality of rulership. Yet, the empress envisioned adherence requiring different forms of restraint. For instance, power should not be exercised in a way that undermined the integrity of the Orthodox Church or offended Russian customs. More importantly, she believed that monarchs were best

¹² See, above all, the following chapters of the *Spirit of the Laws*: 2.5; 3.9; 4.3; 5.13; 5.14. Charles-Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. A. Cohler, B. C. Miller, and H. S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 20, 28-9, 34, 59-63.

¹³ The figure of the despot problematized the project of monarchical sovereignty. However, the French Enlightenment remained committed to monarchy on the whole. Dan Edelstein notes that the “fundamental question of sovereignty—Who has the right to rule?—was rarely raised as directly as it was in England.” See his essay “Political Thought,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Enlightenment*, ed. Daniel Brewer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 80.

¹⁴ A major study of radical thought in the Enlightenment, including the development of democratic theories of sovereignty, has most recently been undertaken by Jonathan Israel. See especially his *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Diderot, *Political Writings*, ed. John H. Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 81. For a wider discussion of the development of Diderot’s political thought at the time, see Anthony Strugnell, *Diderot’s Politics: A Study of the Evolution of Diderot’s Political Thought After the Encyclopédie* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973). The notion, advanced by Diderot above, of a separation between the monarch and the sovereign suggests a distinction between sovereignty and government. Richard Tuck has recently argued that this distinction can be found in Jean Bodin’s work on sovereignty in the sixteenth century and later became relevant to democratic theories of sovereignty during the Enlightenment. See Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁶ In the last decades, scholars have been almost unanimous on this point. See, for example, Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia*, 205-6; Cynthia H. Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003); Elena Marasina, *Vlast’ i lichnost’: ocherki russkoi istorii XVIII veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 2008).

served where they established modes of operation that involved others in the exercise of power. Specifically, she thought that political institutions must be brought into play. This was an important norm that went back to Peter the Great. By creating a constellation of civil servitors, together with formal institutions such as the Senate and the Colleges, Peter had laid the foundations for a new and effective form of modern sovereignty.¹⁷ In her view, however, the full wisdom of Peter's creation had not been realized. The ideal of sovereignty she attributed to him would only be instantiated once she had discovered the full gamut of forms through which the monarch and servitors could and should be connected. Developing these forms was all the more pressing because the number of state officials tripled during the second half of the eighteenth century.¹⁸ In establishing modern sovereignty in Russia, Catherine was not only Peter's successor, but also his competitor.

In part, Catherine's view of the means by which servitors aided the person of the monarch was conventional: by transmitting and executing the monarch's commands, and also by carrying out administrative functions according to the laws to which they were subject. Through delegation and also an internal division of responsibilities, servitors allowed the monarch's prerogatives to be exercised with regularity and with maximum scope and intensity, commensurate to her supreme status. However, she understood Peter's creation as more than a system of bureaucratic rationality, also emphasizing more lateral interactions. The monarch would rely on servitors to direct her power to urgent matters. They would supply information, experience, deliberation and review, which would help overcome the limits of the person of the monarch and help them better judge where reason and the common good might lie in any particular instance. The crucial point here is

¹⁷ An apparatus of civil servants that highlights the official and public nature of power has been seen as central to modern conceptions of sovereignty. See, for instance, the chapter "Sovereignty" in Martin Loughlin, *The Idea of Public Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 72-98. Modern conceptions of sovereignty have also tended to invoke the notion of the State, understood specifically as an entity separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and which is understood as the locus of sovereign power. On this development, see the works of Quentin Skinner: *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 284-302, 349-60; and "The State," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. T. Ball, J. Farr, and R. L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For medieval precedents, see the classic work Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). However, it is debatable to what extent *this* concept of the state as a unit distinct from the ruler is useful to understand eighteenth-century conceptions of Russian sovereignty. Peter the Great often referred to himself and his servitors as servants of the state (*gosudarstvo*). See, for example, Marc Raeff, *The Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1966), and Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People* (New York: Random House, 1961). Although the concept denoted an ethical ideal centered on the common good, it was not understood as a discrete entity. Catherine continued to employ the language of the state (*gosudarstvo*) in the first sense, but in Article 19 of her *Nakaz* she unequivocally asserted that the monarch was the sovereign, hence the "source of all civil and political power" (see discussion of this text in Chapter 2). Nonetheless, Catherine believed that monarchs must channel their power through official agents and institutions, suggesting the growing dependence of sovereignty on an apparatus that had some existence apart from the monarch.

¹⁸ The total number of officials began to greatly increase from the middle of the eighteenth century. In 1755, there were approximately 10,500 officials, including those below the fourteenth rank in all central and provincial agencies. A decade later, under Catherine II, this number had risen to 16,504. By 1800 it had reached around 38,000. See the discussion in Walter M. Pintner, "The Evolution of Civil Officialdom," in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Walter M. Pintner and Don K. Rowney (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 192. Catherine's provincial reform in 1775 led to a large increase in the number of officials employed in local administration, rising from 12,712 in 1774 to an estimated 22,000 in 1781, and 27,000 in 1796. Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 290. Under Catherine's reign, the total size of the nobility also rose, from an estimated 53,360 in 1764 to 68,320 in 1795. See John P. LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700-1825* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 22.

that she saw these forms of interaction, which amounted to a diffusion of power, as being constitutive, not limiting, of the monarch's sovereignty. Catherine's approach stood in contrast to Russians' previous assumptions about the diffusion of power: accepted as a *de facto* necessity, diffusion was nonetheless seen to contradict the pretensions of autocratic theory, which relied on power's concentration.¹⁹ We see Catherine proclaim the principle of lateral interactions in important official statements about the monarch's power, such as in her Ascension Manifesto and her *Nakaz*. Furthermore, in her communications to her servitors, she urged them to see themselves as critical to the project of sovereignty, a project she wanted them to understand as grounded in reason.

The empress' view of the monarch's powers as complex prerogatives further highlights the relevance of the concept of sovereignty. Other scholars, noticing the innovative nature of Catherine's approach to power, have highlighted the importance of legality. Oleg Omel'chenko, for example, has argued that Catherine and her collaborators were guided by ideas of legitimate power understood in terms of a 'lawfulness' that was dictated by strict juridical schemes. In his words, "lawful power, state power authorized by law were unwavering tenets in the list of demands of the whole political mentality of the age, irrespective of any specific directions in political and juridical thought;...laws were to be the cornerstone of state institutions and politics."²⁰ Omel'chenko's insights are important, and this dissertation builds on them. Yet, there are limits to his thesis. Catherine never submitted to any legal devices that would formally limit her will, suggesting she did not fully adhere to this ideology. Law might not always be the correct device for ordering power or satisfying the host of expectations that were associated with it. She feared, for example, that law might bind the monarch too tightly, and hence, in some instances, undermine the monarch's sovereignty. What is more, the focus on law and legal government threatens to obscure the more original contribution of the Enlightenment to the practice of government, specifically the one advanced by this dissertation, namely that sovereignty must involve others in power. The empress associated this idea with the Petrine institutional legacy, but it was also a strategic principle that reflected contemporary Enlightenment concerns about the possibility of single rule *protecting* the liberty of subjects.

The development of sovereignty in the early modern period as a complex system with many interdependent components was elucidated by Norbert Elias in his well-known study, *The Civilizing Process*. The centralization of government, beginning in the sixteenth century, made the monarch dependent on functionaries to wield an increasingly complex apparatus of rule, a process further necessitated by the increasing complexities in early modern society. Government activity involved both specialization—division of responsibilities—and delegation through extended chains of command. This development did not negate the ruler's sovereignty, but greater constraint was required to adhere, as he puts it, to the "necessities of the network," a demand reflected in the strict etiquette and protocols of the court.²¹ As it was in Western Europe, so it was in Catherine's Russia, that developing state structures made particular demands on the person of the monarch.

¹⁹ In Muscovite Russia, power had been diffused between Moscow and the provincial elite as well as within the city of Moscow, between the tsar and the boyars. See, Valerie A. Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces: The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Nancy Kollman: "Ritual and Social Drama at the Muscovite Court," *Slavic Review* 45:3 (1986), 486-502; idem., *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345-1547* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

²⁰ Oleg A. Omel'chenko, *Zakonnaia monarkhiia Ekateriny II: prosveshchennyi absolutizm v Rossii* (Moscow, 1993), 19. See also Cynthia H. Whittaker, "The Legal Sovereign," in *Russian Monarchy*, 91-118.

²¹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, revised edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). Especially, p.388. Elias explicitly uses the term 'sovereignty', for instance, in his discussion on p. 272.

Not only did it demand self-restraint, but constant effort to establish and maintain the proper arrangement and functioning of the throne's servitors, ensuring that their activities enhanced the monarch's sovereignty.

Entailing a range of strategic decisions and practices, this supervisory function is best understood in terms of management. Management required the imposition of laws on servitors, but it also took many other important forms. It could involve establishing a schedule of regular meetings with key servitors, or the use of written communications and instructions to clarify what was expected of them (including in some cases what laws to obey). It also meant properly delegating and overseeing tasks, and ensuring that specific individuals were involved in crucial matters. Critically, the monarch needed to secure the trust of her collaborators, thereby countering the threat of dishonesty, which was thought to characterize despotic government and made dialectical interactions fruitless wherever they occurred.²² Finally, management might entail urging administrators to work together and come to a consensus, or herself navigating opposing views in taking decisions. In this connection, the person of the monarch was to make her presence felt and to be seen to make resolutions, either on regular matters or *in extremis*, rather than being seen to allow that function to be usurped by her subordinates. Catherine saw management as the precondition of sovereignty, and it was also its quotidian reality – a fact often overlooked when we decide to understand sovereignty in terms of strict juridical schemes. This dimension is equally lost when we focus exclusively on the content of the monarch's most important reforms or their grandest ceremonies and spectacles.²³ The notion that sovereignty involved management distinguished Catherine, above all, from Peter III, who, she thought, saw sovereignty purely in terms of doing whatever he wished.

The specific activity of management also brings to mind Michel Foucault's work on the development of a new rationality of government in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which he calls 'Governmentality.'²⁴ Foucault distinguishes this new rationality from earlier political schemes, which he characterizes with reference to paradigmatic treatises, such as Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532), concerned with government primarily as the "ability to retain one's principality." The new art of government, by contrast, drew on the field of *economy* or household management and envisioned a much more intricate and intense engagement of the ruler with objects of power. In Foucault's words:

The art of government...is essentially concerned with answering the question of how to introduce economy – that is to say, the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family (which a good father is expected to do in relation to his wife, children and servants) and of making the family

²² The empress' efforts to generate the trust and loyalty of her servitors through her epistolary art has been recently explored in a major contribution by Kelsey Rubin-Detlev, *The Epistolary Art of Catherine the Great*, Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2019). This dissertation does not take up any further study of this activity, but only shows how it is connected to the specific issue of sovereignty – a question that is given less attention in that work.

²³ In this respect this dissertation differs from Richard Wortman's work *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in the Russian Court*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995-2000). His major study argues that the autocracy managed to maintain its status through elaborate myths and ceremonies that inspired and awed its subjects, creating authority and legitimacy through the ritual elevation of the monarch.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104.

fortunes prosper – how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family into the management of the state.²⁵

This meticulous concern demanded special strategies and techniques, of which law was *only* one: “With government it is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics – to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved.”²⁶ To govern well, the ruler must possess a new sort of wisdom, “as the knowledge of things, of the objectives that can and should be attained, and the disposition of things required to reach them; it is this knowledge that is to constitute the wisdom of the sovereign.”²⁷ Here, Foucault understands government as the new rationality characterizing the ruler’s activity vis-à-vis objects. His formulations represent government as a relationship that occurs exclusively between that power agent and the “things” he disposes of. Yet, this logic of government might reasonably also apply to the realm of the powerholders themselves, that is to say the interactions between the person of the ruler and the state servitors, who were integral to the exercise of monarchical power. Applying Foucault’s logic to this sphere, we might say that the ruler must know how an ensemble of servitors is to be correctly arranged and disposed of, such that power might flow in a way that brings about certain goals.

It is crucial to distinguish between this view of sovereignty from existing work, which has stressed the increasingly independent nature of Russia’s educated, and largely noble elite, or ‘public opinion.’ Cynthia Whittaker, for example, has argued that in the eighteenth century, the educated elite began to enter into ‘political dialogue’ with the monarchs over legitimacy. Educated opinion, though accepting the fundamental legitimacy and desirability of monarchy, represented an “alternative authority” on the basis of its “rational and critical judgment.” Such dialogue, therefore, was a *de facto* “limitation” on Russian monarchs.²⁸ Whittaker’s insights capture important elements of Catherine’s reign, especially when we consider the growth of periodicals.²⁹ The present dissertation in part recapitulates them by stressing her interactions with servitors as an important component of her rule. The word ‘dialogue’ should be treated cautiously, however, as it suggests a parity and a level of publicness that were not part of the empress’ understanding of sovereignty. Certainly, the empress saw gathering information from a wider public as a strategy of sovereignty. Yet, this was only a precondition of exercising legitimate power. More crucially, most of the empress’ dialogical interactions were closed and exclusive affairs, conducted face-to-face in her own apartments in the royal palaces. Alternatively, they took place within special commissions that were summoned and organized according to her wishes. These exchanges took place within an inner sanctum of power, in which the empress engaged in closely coordinated interactions that were designed to facilitate the smooth and authoritative operation of sovereignty’s prerogatives.

²⁵ Ibid., 92.

²⁶ Ibid., 95.

²⁷ Ibid., 96.

²⁸ Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, 8.

²⁹ See Chapter 4, “The Emergence of Private Printing” in Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of the Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); K. A. Papmehl, *Freedom of Expression in Eighteenth Century Russia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971); and Gareth W. Jones, *Nikolay Novikov: Enlightener of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). For a more general discussion, see James van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Further, this dissertation touches upon patronage networks, which are said to have dominated Russian politics in the eighteenth century at the expense of legal-based forms of organization. David Ransel, for instance, argues that “one of the lessons Catherine learned from Elizabeth’s reign was the degree to which the sovereign’s power depended upon the action of court parties and their subordinate hierarchies.”³⁰ While this observation is certainly correct, this dissertation will highlight ways in which Catherine differed from her predecessors, emphasizing the highly deliberative manner in which the empress arranged much of her day-to-day activity. In doing so, she managed key powerholders such that they would contribute to, and would also come to see themselves part of, her project of sovereignty. Since power could be diffused, we might go so far as to say that Catherine legitimized the presence of key powerholders (other than the monarch) in the operations of the Russian monarchy. But she did so by defining particular terms upon which those powerholders could operate, regulating the formal channels through which they were allowed to voice criticisms and concerns, and sometimes even to decide on matters. This mechanism was designed to attenuate partisan positions and required elites to set these aside once the time for deliberation had passed. In short, the dissertation argues that the line between patronage and rational order need not be overdrawn, while also showing how the transition from one to another was attempted in Russia in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Finally, this dissertation will explore the limits of Catherine’s ability to instantiate and perform her conception of sovereignty. Patronage and favoritism did in fact pose significant challenges. While Catherine was successful in bringing order to power, she did not always live up to the model of restraint she held up to her subordinates. Famously, her closeness to Grigory Potemkin in the mid-1770s and the power she granted him created enormous tensions among senior figures at court and undermined the image she cultivated of dispassionate management. Subsequently, her badly managed relationship with a string of favorites tarnished her reputation and threatened to destroy the careful balance she had created between factions at court.³¹

No less critical is the question, to what extent her system of sovereignty extended beyond Russia’s capital cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow into Russia’s vast countryside, and whether commoners in these far-flung regions understood or participated in that system. Despite the rapid growth of officialdom in the eighteenth century, Imperial Russia remained famously ‘undergoverned,’ even in the nineteenth century.³² To the south and east, government institutions remained poorly developed, with a small administrative staff. But another and perhaps more serious problem concerned the overall appeal of what was being offered to the population. Stressing the diffusion of power, the empress’ vision of sovereignty was servitor oriented. In its pursuit of regular and predictable power, moreover, it prioritized balance and consensus, which precluded radical changes in policy. The increasingly burdensome institution of serfdom was not even subject to open debate, much less to reform or abolition. To the country’s multitudinous common people—at least half found themselves in some form of bonded labor, be it to noble landowners, the church, or the monarch directly—the rewards of Catherine’s system of sovereignty were undiscernible. The limits of the empress’ imaginary hold on her population are evidenced by the large number of pretenders masquerading as her deceased husband, Peter III, one even precipitating a massive insurrection in 1773-4. Such events suggest that her system cut

³⁰ David L. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia. The Panin Party* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 100.

³¹ See, for instance, the discussion of Catherine’s favorites in John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 202-26.

³² See Frederick S. Starr, *Decentralization and Self-Government in Russia, 1830-1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 3-50.

against commoners' expectations of legitimate power, namely a monarch who would assert an unmitigated concern for the common people and even deploy force to provide them succor.

Organization

Sovereignty has very often been studied by concentrating on theoretical treatises, produced by—and largely for—philosophers and literati. By shifting attention to the writings and practices of a monarch, this dissertation offers a glimpse into how ideas about sovereignty were applied in the political sphere. In this regard, my dissertation stands previous accounts, which explain how treatises were drawn from political realities, on their head, by explaining how theoretical concerns transferred into the quotidian concerns of governance. This dissertation is divided into two large parts reflecting these two crucial dimensions of sovereignty. The first (Chapters 1 & 2) treat Catherine's ideas about sovereignty, as laid out in important official proclamations and other writings. The second part (Chapters 3, 4 & 5) is concerned with her practical activities as monarch. All chapters are arranged thematically, rather than chronologically, though Chapter 1 begins with the empress' ascension. Admittedly, the empress' understanding of sovereignty developed over the course of her reign, as she faced a variety of obstacles, including political factions as well as her own political inexperience. She also made mistakes. Overall, however, the chapters identify a consistency between her proclamations and her practices, while also showing that her theories did not always offer clear guidance and that core goals and principles remained subject to adjustment in their practical implementation. In the final analysis, the political project of being a sovereign empress remained constant: it meant bringing order to the operations of power, an aspiration to which Catherine wedded herself at the moment of her ascension.

Having seized the throne by overthrowing her husband, Catherine needed to justify her actions and the exercise of power. Chapter 1 argues that she sought to shift emphasis away from norms of succession, according to which Peter III's reign was legitimate, to the exercise of power as a central test of rightful rule. In her Ascension Manifesto, she depicted Peter as a despotic ruler by arguing that he ruled in a solipsistic and erratic manner, unable to recognize or simply failing to submit himself to moral, customary, and procedural norms that allowed power to function legitimately. Specifically, she criticized him for his defiance of Russian customs and attacks on the Orthodox Church. No less significant was his decision to avoid the political institutions of the Russian state, such as the Senate, opting instead to issue commands in whatever manner he wished. Catherine's Ascension Manifesto laid out a complex view of the monarch's power which involved strategic decisions about norms and expectations, and how these were to be met (or established). Implementing this project was the major basis for her ethics of rule and conception of sovereignty.

The empress further elaborated and officially proclaimed her most important principles in her Great Instruction—the *Nakaz*—, composed between 1765 and 1767. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, questions regarding the proper order of power dominate large swathes of this important text, particularly its opening and closing chapters. Again, Catherine presented the monarch's sovereignty as a complex system of prerogatives that involved formal channels of power and division of responsibilities. The diffusion of power was to be a source of the monarch's strength, not a limitation. Written in preparation for her Legislative Commission, however, the *Nakaz* was not designed as a lofty philosophical treatise, but as a practical document that reflected the managerial role of the monarch within this new system of sovereignty. Passages explaining how the monarch's power was to be organized were intended for the highest tiers of the state's servitor class, to whom the text was distributed. The empress also hoped her Instruction would play a critical role in managing the deputies of the Legislative Commission – a body intended to

manifest ordered power, above all the key principle of sovereignty that the empress endorsed, namely that the monarch involve others in the exercise of power.

Early modern theories of sovereignty declared the right to command, above all to make law, the highest prerogative and mark of the sovereign ruler. Catherine considered command the most difficult prerogative to exercise. Chapter 3 studies in depth her ideas and practices of command-giving. The empress was guided by Enlightenment imperatives, according to which political decisions must be founded on the study of empirical realities and, by searching for consensus, as far as possible, meet the consent or at the very least the minimum expectations of the governed. This would mitigate the need to apply force, a strategy of power that was problematized by contemporary Enlightenment thinkers and closely associated with despotic rule. These demands necessitated complex strategies of command-giving. Catherine employed a variety of strategies, soliciting advice and counsel, and establishing commissions, of which the Legislative Commission was the most significant. She coordinated much of this work by herself and with the help of a secretarial team that was continuously and variously engaged with collecting information; editing and writing commands; and sending completed commands through the correct channels to ensure their proper execution. Not all of the empress' strategies were successful. The Legislative Commission, for example, never completed its task of codifying Russia's laws, though she never abandoned its underlying principles.

Chapter 4 shows how Catherine further developed her system of sovereignty in practice by establishing strict daily routines. These established regularity and order, which facilitated the functioning of the state apparatus and of the court. Furthermore, close control of the palace's spaces and of windows of interaction reinforced the notion of a clear division of responsibilities, while at the same emphasizing the distance between the monarch and her servitors, which modulated according to hierarchies. Just as her secretaries aided her in her law-making, so did court functionaries help to maintain the configuration of the court. As the chapter demonstrates, the empress maintained these practices throughout her thirty-four-year reign. It also points out mistakes that threatened her enterprise. Catherine managed her favorites poorly, allowing them to come and go as they pleased. They disrupted cabinet meetings, intruded on the meetings of the Imperial Council, and sought to control communications between her and her servitors. Certainly, the empress made sure never to relinquish control of political decision-making to them; but their arbitrary appearances and intersecting movements increasingly tarnished the demonstration of ordered power that her otherwise fastidious quotidian practices were meant to achieve.

While Catherine brought a modicum of order to the Russian monarchy, her system of sovereignty did not extend far into the vast and undergoverned countryside. There, a string of pretenders masquerading as her deceased husband, Peter III, precipitated unrest amongst miscellaneous groups – Cossacks, serfs, factory workers as well as religious and ethnic minorities. In 1773, the most successful of these, a fugitive Don Cossack by the name of Emel'ian Pugachev, managed to instigate a massive uprising that involved hundreds of thousands of people and engulfed three provinces for more than a year. Fashioning himself as the true tsar, Pugachev reflected common expectations about sovereignty. Chapter 5 shows that while Pugachev copied aspects of the Russian state as a part of his pretense, his followers' expectations were little centered on intricate governmental mechanisms involving interactions between the monarch and servitor; instead, the main expectation was that the tsar bring succor to the common people, above all in the form of a restoration of perceived rights and privileges that were seen to have been taken from them. The chapter further shows that while Pugachev was unable to threaten the state militarily, he disturbed the empress' system of sovereignty by forcing ad hoc political arrangements that

contravened the empress' own system of governance. Catherine found herself unable to assert her will in one further way: she had to agree to the use of force to pacify the rebels. As she feared, use of violence would damage her reputation abroad as much as the complete loss of governmental control of hundreds of thousands of kilometers of territory.

The fact that Catherine's system of sovereignty—her **exercise of supreme and untrammelled power, and the recognition of her claims as legitimate**—was so brazenly upended on the outer peripheries of her empire is a crucial reminder of why she worked tirelessly to assert it in the first place. Arguably, sovereignty is inherently incomplete, as no system of rule ever goes unchallenged. Without doubt, however, Catherine weathered these storms much more effectively than her counterparts in Western Europe, notably Louis XVI. Her successors would see value in the system she had established. While her son and successor, Paul, overturned her system, he was, like his father, quickly dispatched in a palace coup. Her grandsons, Alexander I and Nicholas I, were far more careful to maintain autocracy by governing in a regular and predictable manner, through core bureaucratic and consultative institutions.

Chapter 1. Peter III: The Overthrow of a Russian Despot

1: Introduction

Catherine the Great came to power on July 9, 1762, as the result of a coup that overthrew her husband, Peter III, who had ascended the Russian throne a mere six months earlier. She was aided by a handful of important collaborators drawn from the upper echelons of the court, the administration, and the army, all of whom shared the desire to remove Peter from the throne. Crucially, they were able to engineer the support of the imperial guards – the Preobrazhensky, Izmailovsky, and Semenovskiy regiments. These were instruments of power that could ensure the *de facto* control of key institutions of St. Petersburg, the geographical locus of sovereignty in the imperial period, and to capture Peter’s person and force him to abdicate. Supporters of the coup hoped that Peter’s removal would usher in a new era of enlightened rule. Yet, despite the coup’s success, the removal of Peter held risks for its perpetrators, posing the problem central of this chapter, namely how to justify such an enterprise. Although she was crowned in September of that year, the problem of legitimacy was particularly pressing for Catherine – a German born princess without any direct hereditary claim to the Russian throne. She was criticized, especially by foreign observers, as a usurper. Some of her collaborators in the coup were equally worried about legitimacy, and although united against Peter, were uneasy about her becoming empress, wishing instead that she become regent for her eight-year-old son by Peter, Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich. Catherine—who wanted to retain the throne for herself—had not only to justify the overthrow of the monarch, but also to present herself as a credible ruler to the court, the wider elite, and the common people.

Catherine confronted these challenges in two ascension manifestos in which she advanced a number of arguments in her favor. The first of these manifestos was a short proclamation produced and disseminated by the conspirators on the day of the coup. A second was issued by both ecclesiastical and civic presses a week later.³³ Composed in a less rushed manner, this second document constituted a significantly longer and more detailed statement of her arguments. According to this manifesto, Peter III’s claim to rule had been entirely legitimate at the time he ascended the throne. However, his style of rule had undermined his legitimacy and, as a result, the ability to command that derived from it. The lesson of Peter’s reign was not only that power derived from legitimacy, but that the criteria that might have made Peter legitimate at the beginning of his reign were not of themselves sufficient to maintain his status as ruler. In Catherine’s estimation, the monarch needed to exercise power in a manner that respected Russian customs and Christian morality. Also, critically, the monarch ought to maintain the institutions and procedures of the Russian state, which had been established at the beginning of the century. Despite evidence that Peter had sought to follow an enlightened policy in his legislative projects, possibly even bringing tangible benefits to various social estates, Catherine believed that Peter had not satisfied the above expectations about how power was to be exercised. That he offended Russian customs and culture, above all the Orthodox Church, was only half of his wrongdoing. He also made decisions in a haphazard and disorderly manner, involving the wrong individuals and poorly delegating tasks to them. The outcome was power that operated in an unpredictable and arbitrary fashion. In Catherine’s opinion, Peter ruled in the manner of a despot. His manner of rule, she

³³ Cynthia H. Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 99.

argued, reflected deep flaws in his character, above all an incapacity for restraint. But more fundamentally, Peter lacked a proper understanding of his sovereignty, understood as the exercise of full and untrammelled power, considered to be legitimate.

2: Catherine's Inheritance: Her Predecessors' Practices of Rule and Peter III's Overthrow

In the eighteenth century, the Russian autocracy witnessed a series of political crises during which rulers were overthrown. The frequency of these crises has been in part attributed to an absence of 'fundamental laws' of succession.³⁴ Although dynasty remained an important criterion of legitimate claim, the Russian state did not strictly adhere to the practice of primogeniture as was widely practiced in Western Europe. Peter the Great had ruled out this practice, with the intention of avoiding any incompetent successor, through his Law of Succession of 1722, which permitted incumbent rulers to 'designate' their heirs.³⁵ Peter's law existed until 1797, when it was revoked by Paul I (r. 1796-1801), who restored primogeniture.³⁶ The Law of Succession was used by rulers and it appeared in their justification literature, but most often alongside other claims, suggesting that it did not become a sufficient criterion of succession. Some defied it outright, proving that legitimacy could in fact be constructed without it.

Elizabeth was one of the rulers to come to power in this manner. In December 1741, leading the Preobrazhensky regiment, she overthrew the infant-emperor, Ivan VI, who had been designated heir by empress Anna. Elizabeth's defiance of the 1722 law and the overt use of force arguably made her imperial Russia's first real usurper. She sought to claim legitimacy by trumpeting her direct lineage to her father, Peter the Great, who was considered responsible for Russia's emergence as a great European power, and by associating herself with his legacy. She also appealed to popular approval, framing herself as the choice of the guards and "all civil and military leaders."³⁷ Finally, in disregard of the fact that the coup was abetted by French diplomats who supplied her with money to bribe the guards, she was able to generate a 'national motif,' presenting her ascension as bringing an end to foreign interference in Russian affairs.³⁸ The invocation of foreign interference easily brought to mind the large number of Germans who had occupied, illegitimately it seemed, positions of power and influence under Anna. They included Ivan's mother, Anna Leopoldovna, who had briefly acted as his regent from 1740-1741. These arguments, Elizabeth thought, trumped the necessity of adhering to the 1722 law. Elizabeth set a precedent for Catherine's usurpation in 1762 and many of its strategies were deliberately modelled on it.

Empress Elizabeth was also directly responsible for setting up the ill-fated marriage that made Catherine's ascension possible. Almost thirty-two at the time she came to power, unmarried, and without an heir, Elizabeth needed to secure both her succession and the future stability of the throne. Peter (né Charles Peter Ulrich of Holstein-Gottorp) was a prime candidate to succeed the

³⁴ Richard Wortman, "The Representation of Dynasty and "Fundamental Laws" in the Evolution of Russian Monarchy," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 13: 2 (Spring 2012), 265.

³⁵ For the actual text, see *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii s 1649 goda: sobranie pervoe s 1649 po 12 dekabriia 1825 goda* (hereafter *PSZ*), vol. 6 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia II-ogo otdeleniia sobstvennoi ego imperatorskogo velichestva kantseliarii, 1830), no. 3,893, 1722. An English translation, accompanied by an introduction to the text, is available in *Peter the Great: His Law on the Imperial Succession. The Official Commentary*, ed. and trans. by Antony Lentin (Oxford: Headstart History, 1996).

³⁶ According to Paul's new succession law, the throne would pass to the oldest male heir. The law did not rule out female monarchs, but made them improbable.

³⁷ *PSZ*, no. 8,473.

³⁸ Aleksandr Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I do Pavla I* (Moscow, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 1999), 274-8.

empress. As the son of her older sister, he shared Elizabeth's dynastic lineage. Moreover, Peter held claim to the Swedish throne—which he renounced—granting the added benefit of allowing Russia to interfere with the dynastic politics of a country with which it was at war. Elizabeth succeeded in her designs: in 1741 she brought Peter to Russia and proclaimed him heir presumptive in time for her coronation ceremony. She did so with appeal to the 1722 law, suggesting that she thought that in the absence of the arguments that she used for herself, it could nonetheless bestow a modicum of legitimacy.

Elizabeth chose as Peter's spouse the fourteen-year-old princess, Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, a small German principality in the political orbit of Prussia. This match had been pursued by Sophie's mother, Johanna, and was supported by Frederick the Great, who calculated that it would grant him inside access to the deliberations and policies of the Russian court. On its side, the Russian government saw the match bringing influence in northern Germany. Elizabeth had once been betrothed to Johanna's brother and was partial to the house of Anhalt-Zerbst; she approved the match despite calls for a more pro-Austrian arrangement. Sophie was invited to Russia and betrothed to Peter. As was required by the customs of the Russian monarchy, the young couple were made to convert to Orthodoxy and rechristened with Russian names, Peter Fyodorovich and Catherine Alekseevna. They were married in August 1745 in St. Petersburg.

Catherine's relationship with Peter broke down over time as a result of irreconcilable differences in character and interests. Historians have tended to blame Peter for this failure. For instance, Isabel de Madariaga, an important scholar of Catherine's reign, describes the grand duke as "an immature, even childish youth, happier playing at or with soldiers than with anything else."³⁹ In contrast, she sees Catherine as precocious, attentive, and dutiful. Her divergent intellectual interests were reflected in her reading of serious texts. Voltaire, Pierre Bayle, Tacitus, and Montesquieu were just a few of the major authors that she read during her life as grand duchess.⁴⁰ This assessment closely aligns with the unflattering image that Catherine presented in memoirs which she began in 1755 and reworked in the 1790s at the end of her reign.⁴¹ In these writings she made frequent mention of Peter's childish games and pranks, as well as his bad manners, which not only humiliated her to the point of tears but also, in her estimation, did serious harm to his reputation. Whether or not these memoirs are to be believed as factual accounts of Peter's behavior is debatable.⁴² Still, they reflect Catherine's own assessment of the signal faults in her husband that led to the failure of her marriage.

A further strain on their relationship resulted from a failure to consummate their marriage. It is possible that this, too, stemmed from Peter's character. Historians have sometimes surmised that he was impotent, given the absence of children, acknowledged or otherwise, despite a number

³⁹ Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 5.

⁴⁰ For separate, though dated, discussions of Catherine's intellectual development, see Vasili Bil'basov. "The Intellectual Formation of Catherine II," in *Catherine the Great*, ed. M. Raeff (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 21-40; and Peter Petschauer, *The Education and Development of an Enlightened Absolutist: The Youth of Catherine the Great, 1729-1762*, (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1969).

⁴¹ It has been argued that historians have been overly influenced by Catherine's negative assessments of Peter's character, as well as by the writings of other opponents. In the Anglophone literature, see the works of Carol Leonard, above all "The Reputation of Peter III," *The Russian Review*, 47: 3 (July 1988), 263-92, and *Reform and Regicide: The Reign of Peter III of Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) In Russian, see the works of Aleksandr Myl'nikov, including *Petr III: povestvovanie v dokumentakh i versiiakh* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2009).

⁴² Perhaps they should not be too hastily disregarded, since they were neither intended for publication, nor did they deal with Peter's reign or overthrow – a matter that Catherine needed to justify. The most recent Russian-language study of their relationship supports this interpretation. O. A. Ivanov, *Ekaterina II i Petr III: istoriia tragicheskogo konflikta* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2007), 24-5.

of mistresses.⁴³ Even so, Catherine gave birth to a son, Paul, in October 1754, and he was proclaimed legitimate heir to the Russian throne. The birth of a son did nothing to bring the couple together, and when Peter III came to power at the end of 1761, he chose not to designate him his heir.



Grand Duke Peter Fedorovich and his wife Grand Duchess Catherine Alexeevna.
Portrait by Georg Cristoph Grooth, circa 1745.

Catherine's ideas about sovereignty were likely strongly influenced by her experience in Elizabeth's court. As was noted, Elizabeth framed her seizure of power as the restoration of Peter the Great's legacy. Following the turbulent years of Anna's reign, she reinstated the Petrine *Kabinet* (the personal secretariat of the sovereign), and restored the powers of the Senate. Elizabeth also proclaimed her government's orientation to promote the common good.⁴⁴ Elizabeth has been credited with laying the foundations of progressive economic and social policy, reflecting an expansion of Enlightenment ideas and culture.⁴⁵ Notably pious herself, she also showed deference to Russian Orthodoxy, dutifully attending religious ceremonies, possibly to the point of excess, and to the detriment to her other responsibilities (see Chapter 4). Focus on her positive legislation has not distracted historians from the fact that she did not exercise power well in all respects. Elizabeth, for example, led a notably irregular lifestyle, often sleeping during the day and disappearing from view for indeterminate periods of time, which disturbed the regular operation of power. She often left government papers and bills unattended with no indication of when she

⁴³ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 10.

⁴⁴ Richard Wortman argues that Elizabeth had emphasized the 'happiness' of subjects as the primary goal of her rule: *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol 1. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 84-109.

⁴⁵ See, for example, James F. Brennan, *Enlightened Despotism in Russia: The Reign of Elizabeth, 1741-1762* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

would address them, inevitably sowing uncertainty. In her memoirs, Catherine said of her that she would often leave these “in front of an icon...for some time [before] deciding to sign them or not “according to the inclination of the moment.”⁴⁶ Elizabeth also failed to manage the expectations of her servitors in other ways. A significant example was her decision to place a moratorium on the use of the death penalty when she came to power, one of the most widely hailed policies of her reign, though it likely originated in her religiosity, rather than adherence to humanistic Enlightenment ideals. In order to implement this policy, Elizabeth issued an *ukaz* (edict) in May 1744; however, very few individuals were made aware of it. Moreover, the *ukaz* failed to clarify new procedures, but merely instructed local offices that convictions be sent to the Senate and await further instruction. This caused procedural problems and swamped the Senate with cases.⁴⁷ Finally, Elizabeth allowed government to be increasingly run by favorites and their factions, including the Shuvalov brothers. Arguably, favorites (and factions) were a common aspect of monarchical politics of the time, not only in Russia.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, favorites undermined one of the purported advantages of monarchy, namely that one individual could make decisions unencumbered by the concerns and passions of any single group. This notion had played a role in Anna’s overthrow of the body that brought her to power in 1730, the Supreme Privy Council, important noblemen who had monopolized power during Peter II’s reign, but who lacked wide support among the wider nobility.⁴⁹

Catherine spent sixteen years in Elizabeth’s court and had to navigate its politics. It is unclear to what extent she belonged to any particular faction, although we know she was wary of the Shuvalov brothers and suspected that they had designs against her. Her correspondence suggests that in the latter part of Elizabeth’s reign, Catherine had her own ambitions to rule. For instance, in a letter to the British ambassador, Charles Hanbury-Williams, who certainly emboldened her, she stated that she was “resolved to perish or reign.”⁵⁰ Elizabeth’s foreign minister, Alexey Bestuzhev-Ryumin, with whom she had become allied, had even considered a plan to make Catherine empress or co-ruler with Peter.⁵¹ It is not clear whether Catherine was actively engaged in these machinations, but when Bestuzhev was arrested in February 1758, Elizabeth suspected her, and she was forced to humiliate herself before the empress in order to avoid her wrath. Following Bestuzhev’s fall, Catherine came under the important influence of Nikita Panin. Catherine likely became acquainted with Panin as early as 1756, at which time he was ambassador to Sweden. He soon returned permanently to St. Petersburg and in 1759 was named Paul’s tutor. Panin was well read in Enlightenment literature. He agreed with Montesquieu’s analysis that Russia was a despotism and believed that it needed to be reformed into a rational, legal order. Catherine shared many of his convictions.⁵²

⁴⁶ Catherine II, *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, trans. by M. Budberg, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), 373.

⁴⁷ The most important discussion is Elena Marasimova in “*Zakon*” i “*grazhdanin*” v Rossii vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka: ocherki istorii obshchestvennogo soznaniia (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 71-8.

⁴⁸ On politics of faction during the reigns of Elizabeth and Catherine, see David L. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia: The Panin Party* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). Ransel has argued that Russian politics of the time should be better understood in terms of a system of powerful competing patronage networks, not constitutional schemes

⁴⁹ Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I*, 209-13.

⁵⁰ Catherine II, *Correspondence of Catherine the Great, when Grand-Duchess, with Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams and Letters from Count Poniatowski*, ed. the Earl of Ilchester and Mrs. Langford Brooke (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1928), 101.

⁵¹ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 14.

⁵² Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, 49-51.

Empress Elizabeth died on December 25, 1761. On the same day, Peter published a manifesto in which he declared his succession to the throne.⁵³ In this manifesto Peter proclaimed it evident that the throne belonged to him according to existing “rights” (*pravam*), “privileges” (*preimushchestvam*), and “regulations” (*uzakoneniiam*). He emphasized above all his designation as heir by Elizabeth in 1742 and called to attention the corresponding oath of allegiance that he had made on that occasion. Thus, Peter appealed in part to the 1722 law of succession in grounding his legitimacy. The manifesto also reiterated that Elizabeth had been a rightful ruler, claiming that her seizure of power in 1741 had “rightfully restored the Russian throne,” which had been “stolen” from her. Referring obliquely to the perceived control of the Russian state by Germans at the time, Peter drew attention to his (and Elizabeth’s) rightful genealogical claim as direct descendants of Peter the Great. His decision not to name his son, Paul, as heir, might suggest that Peter himself was intending to use the 1722 right of designation. Finally, Peter bolstered his succession by promising “in everything, to follow in the footsteps” of his wise grandfather, Peter the Great. This, too, was a principle that Elizabeth used in her succession, further confirming that it had become a crucial criterion of legitimacy in the period. Catherine would later use many of Peter’s claims against him.

The prospect of Peter’s accession was a cause of uncertainty and apprehension amongst some members of the court. The grand duke’s openly pro-Prussian stance threatened an unfavorable conclusion to the country’s ongoing participation in the Seven Years War. And it was unclear what his reign would mean for the existing power blocs in court. Given the breakdown of their relationship, Catherine had most to fear. There is some evidence of attempts to overturn the succession.⁵⁴ For obvious reasons, Catherine was inclined to emphasize them in her memoirs. In addition to the Bestuzhev affair, Catherine related a conversation between Panin and the Shuvalov brothers, who, worried about their fate under the future government, were considering exiling Peter in favor of Paul. According to Catherine, they had gained the tentative support of Elizabeth, who had become increasingly worried about her nephew’s general unsuitability for rule. Elizabeth supposedly favored making Catherine regent, but this was not to the liking of the Shuvalov brothers who wanted to remove the couple entirely.⁵⁵ However, Panin rejected both possibilities and the project went no further. This episode suggests that members of the elite had come to believe it was their right to interfere with the imperial succession. Nevertheless, in Peter’s case, such maneuvering was not widespread or systematic. Despite some murmurings, there is no evidence of any serious conspiracy, and, in fact, both Catherine and Panin seem to have accepted Peter’s legitimacy. On this note, Alexandr Kamenskii correctly points out that Peter’s succession was the first for a number of decades to occur without upheaval, giving the regime a “stability and confidence in its own strength.”⁵⁶

Of course, we know that this initial strength would evaporate quickly. Peter ruled from December 25, 1761, to June 28, 1762 – barely six months. That his support evaporated so quickly has been a great challenge for historians, who have offered a variety of explanations. A major strategy in the historiography has been to look at Peter’s policies and to argue that, on aggregate,

⁵³ *PSZ*, no. 11,390.

⁵⁴ John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 46-60.

⁵⁵ Catherine II, *Sochineniia imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. A.N. Pypin, vol. 12 (St. Petersburg, 1901), 499-500.

⁵⁶ Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I*, 305.

they undermined his standing, above all amongst the elites.⁵⁷ The two sides of this argument look as follows:

Peter's legislation, it is argued, brought tangible benefits to many groups. One of his first acts was the reduction of the salt tax, reducing the tax burden on the commonality, and he lifted restrictions on Old-Believers.⁵⁸ In February 1763 he abolished the state's investigatory body, the Secret Chancery. This institution operated on the basis of denunciations—the so-called 'word and deed of the sovereign' (*slovo i delo gosudarevo*)—and frequently practiced torture on the accused and witnesses; it was greatly feared and hated.⁵⁹ Arguably, Peter's most important piece of legislation, also benefiting the elite, was a direct holdover from the legislative initiatives taken in Elizabeth's later reign: the decree of February 18 liberated the Russian nobility from compulsory state service – a system that had defined the Russian state for almost a century. Specifically, the decree overturned part of Peter the Great's policy on the life-time longevity of service.⁶⁰ This decree was an important step in the consolidation of the nobility into a corporate estate with legally defined rights and freedoms. Carol Leonard, in a major reevaluation of the period, has argued that Peter's reign was "an astonishing achievement of the pre-Catherinian Enlightenment"; led by a "rationalist vision," his government sought to mobilize the economy through liberal policies, expand the powers of the state, making it more efficient, and eliminate some of its harshest and backwards practices.⁶¹

Peter's ameliorative policies, particularly those that sought to win the approval of the nobility, may have helped bolster his legitimacy. However, these policies, as other historians have argued, need to be juxtaposed against laws that undermined his standing. For instance, he was overtly disrespectful of the Orthodox Church, and on March 21 he moved ahead with the forced secularization of church land. On June 1 Peter issued a decree forbidding the Senate from promulgating without the monarch's approval not only of any *ukazy* that introduced new legal norms, but also, in contradiction to long-standing convention, ones that confirmed existing legislation.⁶² Furthermore, the Senate lost control over petitions and promotions in the lower bureaucracy.⁶³ Peter's foreign policy was even more contentious. Although his decision to withdraw Russia from the Seven Years War was not unwelcome, given its great financial cost, he ceded to Prussia all of Russia's significant territorial gains. Finally, he planned to use the Russian military, which he had further disgruntled by reforming them along Prussian lines, to carry out a personal dynastic campaign to capture the Duchy of Holstein from Denmark.

This strategy of focusing on policies is reasonable, but it does not help make sense of Catherine's criticism of Peter, which focused less on particular policies but on the manner in which he saw and exercised power. According to her view, policies that were 'beneficial' could still appear to be carried out in a disorderly manner. They could also be seen as rash and ill-considered, or to arise from his own interests, rather than developed with an eye to the common good. There is some basis for believing that Peter did indeed govern in this manner. Take for instance the matter

⁵⁷ Peter was an active legislator. Based on the *Polnoe sobranie zakonov*, Cynthia Whittaker calculates that Peter's government issued one hundred and ninety-two decrees. She notes that this is forty-four more than what Catherine promulgated in the first six months of her reign. See her *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 94.

⁵⁸ *PSZ*, no. 11,456.

⁵⁹ *PSZ*, no. 11,445.

⁶⁰ *PSZ*, no. 11,444.

⁶¹ Leonard, *Reform and Regicide*, 1-2.

⁶² Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I*, 307.

⁶³ Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, 60.

of secularization of Church land.⁶⁴ As previously noted, this policy had originally been conceived under Elizabeth in 1757, but, with its practical effects not fully decided, it had not yet been promulgated.⁶⁵ The apparent indecisiveness of Elizabeth and her advisors suggested acknowledgment of a complex relationship between monarchy and church, and that major changes needed to be carefully negotiated. However, Peter quickly moved ahead with the policy regardless, apparently despite warnings by the Senate that arbitrary taxation of the church had in the past precipitated monastic revolts.⁶⁶ Peter's decision led to chaotic seizures of church property by the army, and the church appealed against the policy. His decision to emancipate the Russian nobility from service and his precipitous reversals in foreign policy have been described in similar terms: as producing confusion among the nobility and peasants alike.

The notion that under Peter power began to flow in an arbitrary manner seems plausible. A dispatch from the Danish envoy, Gregers von Haxthausen, as early as January 1762, before Peter's designs on Holstein became widely known, casts a highly negative light on his style of rule:

From the time of his ascension to the throne, all the Colleges have been idle. Similarly, neither the Senate, nor the *Konferentsia*, nor the cabinet carry out their functions, but do nothing. Whenever [the emperor] has an idea that he wishes to implement he calls his state secretary, Volkov, and instructs him to put down his instructions on paper; he then signs them and orders them to be sent off for the purpose intended without telling anyone anything. Behold, my highness, the manner in which all matters are now being conducted in Russia. You can judge for yourself how difficult it is to work out what is going on when even the emperor's ministers and advisers participate in state business and know about it as much as I or any other foreigner.⁶⁷

Von Haxthausen's description indicates that Peter formulated and issued commands with minimal coordination or warning. He claims that the emperor badly managed the state's political institutions and its key figures, and that he failed completely to involve them in the exercise of power. It is possible that over time Peter exacerbated this style of rule by allowing foreigners unprecedented access to his person and to policy-making reserved for Russian servitors. For instance, when Frederick the Great sent his envoy, Count von Goltz, to St. Petersburg in March, Peter insisted on personally conducting Russia's negotiations with him, sidelining Russian statemen, and ignoring their warnings about the consequences of changes in foreign policy. It is reported that Peter even allowed Goltz to draft the peace treaty with Prussia, which ceded to the Prussian king all of Russia's recent conquests against him.⁶⁸

Catherine's claim that Peter governed in an erratic manner, with minimal consultation of senior Russian administrators, is largely substantiated by primary and secondary sources. It is not

⁶⁴ *PSZ*, no. 11,481.

⁶⁵ Since the mid-seventeenth century, the Russian state had secured its predominance over the Church, but rulers continued to derive legitimacy as protectors of Orthodoxy. Acknowledgment of this complex relation and an understanding that secularization policy needed to be carefully negotiated with the church help explain the hesitation of Elizabeth's government.

⁶⁶ Simon Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia, 1696-1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 68-9.

⁶⁷ "Doneseniia datskago poslannika Gaksthauzena o tsarstvovanii Petra III i perevorote 1762 goda," *Russkaia starina*, vol. 161 (Petrograd, 1915), 534.

⁶⁸ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 24.

the goal of this chapter to prove her right, but merely to provide some reference for the arguments, to which we now turn, that Catherine made against him.

3: Despotic Tropes

Peter was overthrown on July 9, 1762, in a palace coup on Catherine's behalf. The genesis of the plot to overthrow Peter remains obscure. In a letter to her former lover, Stanisław Poniatowski, in the aftermath of the coup, Catherine stated that her ascension had been planned for at least six months.⁶⁹ However, it is unlikely that a serious conspiracy emerged until late May or early June, when it was firmly understood that Peter intended to push ahead with his campaign against Denmark.⁷⁰ It is understandable that Catherine was the person around whom the conspiracy was to be built. As mother to Paul, she would guarantee his succession. She was also seen as mature and intelligent, and she was widely liked at court. All of these factors made her seem a reliable if only temporary replacement. In theory, the former emperor, Ivan VI, who had been displaced by Elizabeth's coup in 1741, had a rival claim to the throne. Yet, he had languished in an isolated cell in Schlüsselberg Fortress since the age of one—a cruel and a highly damaging experience—and was not considered to be a credible candidate by the elites.

Amongst Catherine's closest collaborators was Nikita Panin. He objected to Peter's style of rule, seeing it as a threat to the construction of a more rational, orderly state. As tutor to Paul, he also had much to lose personally if, as rumors suggested, Peter was to divorce his wife and disown his son. Yet, Panin did not believe Catherine to have a claim to the throne outright and he favored instead her regency. It is likely that he was able to enlist a number of high-ranking statesmen in support of this project.⁷¹ Through a romantic relationship with an artillery officer, Grigorii Orlov, Catherine was also able to secure support amongst the imperial guards. Orlov, together with his four brothers—all military officers—were important organizers and executors of her coup. In contrast to Panin, the Orlovs favored Catherine becoming empress. Their fierce support for her in this matter perhaps permitted her to disregard Panin's plans. Given that her ascension manifestos proclaimed her as empress, it seems that this contest had been settled by the time of her coup.

In her procession into St. Petersburg, Catherine made a demonstration of the public's approval for her, though some have questioned whether there was great enthusiasm for the coup.⁷² Peter's decision to leave the imperial capital for his residence at Oranienbaum followed by the palace at Peterhof, both outside of the city, was a key factor, and Catherine and her collaborators took full advantage. Thereafter, Peter's feebleness played a major role. In contrast to Catherine, who led her troops on horseback dressed in military attire, Peter surrendered and abdicated after failing to marshal the resources he had in defense of his station. Catherine immediately had him arrested and held under armed guard and refused his pleas to be allowed to return to Holstein with his mistress. Just under a month later, her new government issued a statement reporting that he had died from a violent episode of hemorrhoidal colic.⁷³ In all likelihood, he was assassinated by one of the Orlov brothers with the aid of a few guardsmen.⁷⁴ Whether this happened with her consent or at her express instruction remains and will likely remain unknown.

⁶⁹ Catherine II, "Letter to Poniatowski, August 2, 1762," in *Imperial Russia: A Source Book, 1700-1917*, ed. Basil Dmytryshyn (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 74.

⁷⁰ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 27.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷² Leonard, *Reform and Regicide*, 138-49.

⁷³ Catherine II, "Manifest, 1762," in *Osmnadtsyati vek*, ed. Petr Bartenev, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1869), 224.

⁷⁴ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 32.

However much Peter's legitimacy may have eroded prior to the coup, it was problematic for Catherine precisely because she was to replace him not as regent, but as outright successor. The problem of legitimacy was reflected in her need to use the imperial guard regiments—an instrument of force—in order to carry through the coup. Her questionable legitimacy was reflected by the immediate reaction of foreign observers who tended to represent her as a usurper.⁷⁵ Early critics included luminaries of the Enlightenment like Voltaire.⁷⁶ Unlike Peter, Catherine was not able to boast 'designation' by a previous sovereign (according to the 1722 law) nor make any claim of heredity. Working in her favor was precedent, the history of palace revolutions in the century, which had shown that neither of these criteria were sufficient conditions and that claims of a different sort could also be made. Catherine drew on these precedents while also seeking to produce her own arguments, aiming to delegitimize her husband and justify herself. These she laid out in her two ascension manifestos, produced on the day of the coup and a week later, respectively.⁷⁷ The second, a longer and more substantial exposition of her ideas will be the focus of the remaining discussion, and it is referred to henceforth as 'the Ascension Manifesto.' We turn now to its contents.

Catherine's Ascension Manifesto stands aside from other such proclamations of the period in its extensive analysis of a ruler's failings. Although Catherine did not specifically use the term sovereignty, her detailed, analytic exposition of the monarch's station and power justifies invocation of this term and highlights its necessity. The same might not be said of Peter, who, she argued, both failed to identify and willfully chose to disregard how, in the Russian context, his great powers were to be legitimately exercised and maintained. Since Peter lacked a deep understanding of sovereignty, he took no strategic steps in exercising these powers. Peter understood his station in absolutist terms, namely being able to do what he wished, and in whatever manner he saw fit. Lacking any meaningful normative conceptions, he failed to show restraint or to set practical limits on his own powers. In a variety of corresponding ways, he lost his legitimacy, and hence, any claim to sovereignty.

According to Catherine, Peter thought that the power he had rightfully inherited according to established rules of the Russian monarchy was an intrinsically unlimited prerogative that had

⁷⁵ Ruth Dawson, "Perilous Royal Biography: Representations of Catherine II immediately after her Seizure of the Throne," *Biography*, 27: 3 (Summer 2004), Catherine's involvement in Peter's death was the subject of debate in foreign accounts of the coup. See M. A. Kriuchkova, *Triumf Mel'pomeny: ubiistvo Petra III v Ropshe kak politicheskii spektakl'* (Moscow: Russkii mir, 2013), 28-69.

⁷⁶ Antony Lentin, "Introduction," in [Catherine II], *Catherine the Great and Voltaire: Selected Correspondence*, ed. and trans. by Antony Lentin (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1977). Catherine began a correspondence with Voltaire after her ascension to the throne and was able to convince him that she was committed to enlightened rule.

⁷⁷ There has been a question about the authorship of these manifestos. David Ransel states that although they were scrutinized and approved by the empress personally, both manifestos were in fact penned by Grigorii Teplov, with Nikita Panin helping to draft the second. He goes on to argue that the second manifesto primarily reflected the program advocated by Panin. See Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, 71. However, in a more recent work, John Alexander has argued that the second manifesto was dictated by Catherine before being "reworded [for her] into the slightly archaic Russian used in official pronouncements," Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 13. Catherine's authorship is supported by Ruth Dawson, "Perilous Royal Biography: Representations of Catherine II immediately after her Seizure of the Throne," *Biography*, 27: 3 (Summer 2004), 525. Given Catherine's concern with her public image, it seems unlikely that she would have allowed the content of these critical proclamations to be determined by others. That neither of the manifestos presented her as a regent is evidence that she played an important role in their formulation, and, conversely, that Panin and Teplov had limited scope to determine their content. I assert that both manifestos were collaborative documents, but that they contained only views that Catherine was willing to accept. Hence, the chapter refers to them as her manifestos.

no corresponding moral limits. Peter, she claimed, had been given a “monarchical power,” which she understood as a power that was “established by God for the benefit and prosperity of his subjects.” Peter, however, had thought differently about his own position. Instead of seeing himself as an heir designated for the moral task of governing, she claimed, he treated his position as a gift of happenstance that had “fallen to him for his own personal amusement.”⁷⁸ Catherine underlined the difference between these two understandings of power with an important semantic distinction. The first—power bolstered by established rules and traditions and wedded to the well-being of the subject—she framed as *samoderzhavie*, the word used to describe the Russian autocracy. The second—an unlimited power to do as one pleased—she described as *samovlastie* [lit. self-power]. This word, which might be translated as despotism, conjured up a corrupt and illegitimate form of power. Importantly, Catherine argued that *samovlastie* was Peter’s personally chosen manner of rule and was not intrinsic to autocracy in Russia. She did so by noting that Peter had received his power from his predecessors, above all Elizabeth, but noted that Peter had willfully expanded the prerogatives extended to him. Claiming to derive his prerogatives from Elizabeth, Peter had seemingly “forgotten the principle of natural law [according to which] no-one could give to another more right than they possessed themselves.”⁷⁹

One of the worst consequences of Peter’s attitude towards power, according to Catherine’s Manifesto, was his contemptuous treatment of the Orthodox Church and its practices. This attack on Russia’s religion took two forms. It manifested itself in Peter’s physical comportment. Peter acted insolently during religious ceremonies, failing, for example, to bow his head in a show of respect to religious icons, and even swearing at members of the clergy. Moreover, Peter sought to “ruin” (*razzorit*) the Church in his legislative projects, a reference to Peter’s hasty secularization decree from March 21 as well as his attempts to remove icons from places of worship.⁸⁰ Catherine also made explicit reference to Peter’s laws prohibiting places of worship in private houses, an egregious measure that hurt those who could not pray anywhere else on account of their poor health. Catherine presented Peter’s attacks on the Orthodox Church as a failure to acknowledge or submit to important limits, not only those presented by divine and natural law—cornerstones of Christian theology—, but also to show respect for Russia’s cultural heritage. Finally, she argued that Peter’s attempts to undermine the Church would lead subjects to abandon their belief in, and hence, fear of God. Subjects cut in Peter’s own image would neither acknowledge nor obey legitimate limits to action, making life and governance impossible.

The Ascension Manifesto further asserted that Peter “despised” Russia’s civil laws (*zakony grazhdanskie*) and that he refused to observe them.⁸¹ As an example, she pointed to Peter’s failure to name Paul his lawful successor in his ascension manifesto. Secondly, and no less critically, he refused to respect the laws of government (*zakony v gosudarstve*). In particular, Peter “held in contempt the state’s judicial institutions” (*sudebnye mesta*).⁸² Above all, this was a reference to Peter’s sidelining of the Russian Senate, the highest-ranking executive body and highest court of appeal in Russia, established under Peter the Great. Because there was little distinction between the judiciary and the administration in Russia, Catherine’s term, ‘sudebnye mesta,’ also designated the larger array of executive and bureaucratic institutions that made up the Russian state. Other ‘sudebnye mesta’ included the imperial Colleges which presided over important branches of

⁷⁸ Catherine II, “Manifest, 1762,” 218.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁸⁰ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 23.

⁸¹ Catherine II, “Manifest, 1762,” 218.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 219.

governance, such as foreign affairs, the army, the judicial system, and the economy. They also included chanceries and the remaining *Prikazy* – executive institutions dating to the seventeenth century, which Peter the Great had partly replaced with the Colleges.⁸³ Peter III may not in fact have violated each of these separate offices, but it is important that Catherine identified them as part of the institutional structure of the state that the monarch must observe.

The same passage of the manifesto further cited Peter’s refusal to submit himself to a working schedule, noting that he “neglected official business to the point that he did not even want to hear about it.”⁸⁴ In essence, Catherine argued Peter’s style of rule constituted an attack on the apparatus of government, destroying the institutional legacy left by Peter the Great. By doing so, Peter III had broken the pledge he had made at his ascension, an important aspect of legitimacy in Russia in the eighteenth century. While Peter III and others may have remembered Peter the Great’s reign as marked by the implementation of radical reforms, Catherine downplayed that aspect in this part of her manifesto. Instead, she cast the latter as a paragon of wisdom and restraint, submitting to the norms and procedures of the state institutions that he had constructed. Indeed, she accused her husband of wanting to cede control of the state to foreigners (*v chuzhie ruki otdat*).⁸⁵ This was a direct criticism of Peter’s decision to give foreign statesmen at the Russian court unregulated access to his person, in some cases even permitting them to participate in government at the expense of Russian noblemen. Catherine’s message was in part a restatement of the idea that the monarch ought to recognize expectations about and understand the wisdom of limiting his activity to the formal apparatus of government. In part it was also an explicit injunction that the monarch should limit the formulation of policy to advisers drawn from the Russian state - individuals who had risen meritocratically through the Table of Ranks (also founded by Peter the Great), and who theoretically had proven both their competence and allegiance to the state and its people. However, her criticism also suggested that the sovereign ought to maintain intact the untrammled nature the monarch’s power in all circumstances.

Overall, Catherine’s criticism of Peter involved tropes of despotism that were well established in the political literature of Enlightenment Europe. Discussion of Peter’s *samovlastie*, for instance, involved the notion of caprice and decision-making in the pure self-interest of the ruler – both staple characteristics of despotic regimes.⁸⁶ In one respect, however, Catherine’s manifesto contravened the standard literature of her age. Unlike Montesquieu for example, who believed that despots continue to enjoy power in the absence of legitimacy (and who labelled Russia as a despotism), Catherine argued that Peter had forfeited both legitimacy and power as a result of his despotic practices. As Peter damaged his legitimacy, he turned his subjects against him and was forced to relinquish any remaining claim to his position.

⁸³ Panin clarified what is meant by ‘subednye mesta’ in his Imperial Council project, which he presented to Catherine in December, 1762, defining them as: “коллегиями, канцелярскими, конторами и всякими другими приказами, какова б звания ни были” (colleges, chanceries, offices, and all other prikazy, whatever they might be called), *SIRIO*, vol. 7, 202. This project will be discussed below.

⁸⁴ Catherine II, “Manifest, 1762,” 219.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁸⁶ As noted in the Introduction, the figure of the despot featured prominently in the political philosophy of the Enlightenment. The most important contemporary text that Catherine and most westernized Russian noblemen would have been familiar with was Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). In addition, Volume 4 of the *Encyclopedie*, which was published in the 1750s and was also known to the Russian elite, had a separate chapter on Despotism, written by De Jaucourt. Lastly, *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1699), by François Fénelon, was an important earlier text on good rule that influenced Montesquieu, and it enjoyed wide circulation in Russia in the eighteenth century. For discussion of this text in relation to stoicism, see below.

Catherine was careful in the way she framed Peter's downfall. On the one hand, she noted that Peter had, through his "tireless recklessness," brought his subjects to the point where they were ready to "condemn him" and even "spill his blood."⁸⁷ On the other hand, she studiously avoided language that granted subjects the right to revolt, for it might in due course come to be used against her. Correspondingly she insisted that God's commandments prescribed "respect for government power" and forbade disobedience. However, rebellion was not needed in Peter's case: Catherine argued that he had brought about his "own fall" (*sobstvennym padeniem*) and attributed this to the working of Providence.⁸⁸ The logic of Catherine's argument seemed to be that once Peter had lost his legitimacy, his subjects ceased to be bound to him. This justified the decision of Russia's elite to deprive him of power and to ask Catherine to take his place. Theoretically, Peter, who was stationed in Oranianbaum with his detachment of Holsteinian guards, continued to control means that might have allowed him to rule by force. Instead, he capitulated and signed a statement, prepared under Catherine's auspices, that confirmed that he was unfit to manage the burdens of autocratic power: only his abdication would stave off the total collapse of the Russian state, and with it, his "eternal disgrace."⁸⁹ Catherine, who made sure to include Peter's abdication statement in full in her Ascension Manifesto, allowed Peter to preserve thereby some modicum of honor.

Catherine's Manifesto sought to account for the crucial puzzle, why Peter sought to rule the way that he did? According to the Manifesto, Peter's failures were a limited understanding of his station and his powers. Yet, she also suggested his failures stemmed from his own personality, and indeed it is remarkable that she would expound on it at such length in her Manifesto.⁹⁰ Catherine did not utterly vilify Peter, as she noted that he did possess "good" and "humane qualities."⁹¹ However, these qualities were outweighed by an excess of negative, destructive emotions, which, when found in the person of a ruler, made him unfit for his station. Peter's emotions were deeply inimical to his responsibilities. Catherine's Manifesto stated that he "hated" Russia⁹² and that this led him to direct his *samovlastie* against the country's cultural and political institutions. He also hated his own family, having "in his heart" a desire to "destroy her and their son."⁹³ Supposedly, he also despised his aunt, Empress Elizabeth, resenting the filial love that she showed him, considering it a sort of "oppression," even "enslavement." During his time as Grand Duke, Peter had shown "all sorts of bitterness" toward Elizabeth, causing her anger and grief; but he supposedly hid his rancor out of fear that she might punish him. The extent of his contempt for her only became apparent when he was certain that she was going to die. Catherine claims that "before she had taken her last breath," he had "purged himself of any memory of her"; on her deathbed, "he refused to even look at her"; and, at her obsequies, an old and venerable ceremony, he "gazed at her grave...with joy," all the while making "ungrateful comments about her person."⁹⁴

Catherine's Manifesto is not entirely able to explain the source of Peter's abnormality. At one point it seems to identify his failure to recognize and submit to norms with his faithlessness, stating he possessed not a "single trace of belief of Greek Orthodoxy." Notably, she made this

⁸⁷ "Manifest, 1762," 219.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁹⁰ It is indeed strange that the manifesto, not just the memoir, would go into all the details described below (such as that Peter would not look at Elizabeth on her deathbed).

⁹¹ Catherine II, "Manifest, 1762," 217.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 217.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

accusation again later in her memoirs in even starker terms, stating that “he was attached to no creed and had no idea of the dogmas and principles of the Christian religion” and that she had “never seen a more perfect atheist in practice than [him].”⁹⁵ Given that Catherine conceded in her Manifesto that Peter had been carefully educated, his insouciance was not a product of his upbringing, suggesting that there was a deeper physiological problem that afflicted him. The notion that there was something wrong with Peter’s body seems to have been the conclusion of many commentators who wrote about his strange character and behavior. For example, the contemporary historian and critic, Mikhail Shcherbatov, claimed that Peter was “insane.”⁹⁶ After Peter’s death, Catherine had an autopsy performed on Peter’s body, and she wrote about this in her letter to Poniatowski noting they discovered he had an “inordinately small heart” that was “quite withered” - a possible physiological explanation for his behavior.⁹⁷ Ultimately, it may have been important that the sources of Peter’s unfitness for the throne remained unfathomable, for to be able to explain them might have been to suggest that he could have been rectified in some manner. But, if he could be shown to be an incorrigible delinquent, impervious to education, counsel, or any other method of improvement, there would be no choice but to remove him from the throne.

Part 4: ‘Legal monarch’ or the Self-Limiting Ruler?

Historians have long emphasized the increasing importance in Russia of the notion of legal order over the course of the eighteenth century.⁹⁸ Its rise reflected the growing influence in Russia of the European Enlightenment and its ideal of making human institutions conform with reason. Beginning in the reign of Peter I, the aspiration of building a legal order to replace confusion, inefficiency, and arbitrariness permeated reform efforts in many areas of society including central government. In order to mitigate political despotism, some thought that this legal order needed to be all-encompassing so as to include not only the servitor, but the monarch as well.

This manner of thinking about sovereignty has been associated with Catherine. Cynthia Whittaker, for instance, writes, “Catherine’s promise to establish a ‘legal monarchy’—a central motif of political dialogue during her reign—attempted to remove the threat of despotism by establishing laws that “would tie a monarch’s hands from doing evil.”⁹⁹ She traces Catherine’s promise back to a key passage of her manifesto in which she presented a positive vision for her ascension to the throne:

By our imperial word, We do most jubilantly promise to enact such state institutions by which the government of our beloved fatherland can operate with strength and within its proper boundaries, and so that each state office to be bequeathed to our descendants will have its own limits and laws for the maintenance of their proper order. Through this we hope to guarantee the integrity of the empire and of Our

⁹⁵ Catherine II, *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, 149.

⁹⁶ Mikhail Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia*, ed. and trans. by Antony Lentin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 220.

⁹⁷ Catherine II, “Letter to Poniatowski,” 62.

⁹⁸ See above all the works of Oleg A. Omel’chenko, including *Kodifikatsiia prava v Rossii v period absolutnoi monarkhii* (Moscow, 1989); “*Zakonnaia monarkhiia*” *Ekateriny II* (Moscow, 1993); and *Monarkhiia prosveshchennogo absolutizma v Rossii* (Ph.D. diss., Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi industrial’nyi universitet, Moscow, 2001).

⁹⁹ Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, 102. Whittaker draws on Oleg A. Omel’chenko’s concept of ‘legal monarchy,’ which he sees as the defining ideology of Catherine’s reign: “*Zakonnaia monarkhiia*” *Ekateriny II* (Moscow, 1993).

Autocratic power that had been subverted somewhat by misfortune, and to deliver the faithful subjects of the fatherland from their despondency and humiliation.¹⁰⁰

This statement points to a defining feature of Catherine's reign: her adherence to the philosophy of legal order and her firm commitment to pursue its construction whilst in power.¹⁰¹ She shared this aspiration with the Russian elite, and she would have calculated that it would gain their approval. Having said that, the question remains whether Catherine's pursuit of legal order would encompass the sovereign. There are ambiguities in her position that are worth exploring.

One way to set up this problem is to look at a project proposed to Catherine within a month of her ascension in July 1762 by Nikita Panin, who remained one of her key advisors in the first decade of her reign. He proposed the formation of an 'Imperial Council' in response to Catherine's request that he investigate and formulate ideas for reforming central government – a project that made sense in light of what was said in her Ascension Manifesto. In a lengthy preamble to his project, Panin laid out an extensive critique of the Russian state. He thought that the monarchy was not governing effectively because it lacked a robust or complete legal order. In a manner similar to Catherine's Ascension Manifesto, he credited Peter the Great with laying the foundations of this order. Yet, the constant "unrest and "wars" of his reign prevented him from "bringing the civil state apparatus to completion." Subsequent rulers, who noticed flaws in the functioning of government, he claimed, did not effectively resolve them, because they resorted to "temporary arrangements and rules" that had no "direct institutional basis."¹⁰²

According to the preamble, the weakness of the state's institutional structure enabled the abuse of station, or even worse, for government business to be taken over by unqualified individuals, often as a result of personal patronage and favoritism, rather than meritocratic promotion through the state structures. In some cases, Panin noted that they would even usurp the right to command, referencing the private cabinets (*kabinety*) that they had set up for themselves.¹⁰³ In a crucial sentence that aligns with the idea of modern sovereignty, he claimed that state affairs were often being run "more by the power (*сила*) of individuals, than the authority (*власть*) of state offices."¹⁰⁴ Panin thought that these tendencies had been flagrant in Elizabeth's reign. He singled out, for instance, Nikita Trubetskoi – who had served as general procurator (*general-prokuror*) from 1740 to 1760.¹⁰⁵ Panin referred to him as a "random individual" who rose to his position

¹⁰⁰ Catherine II, "Manifest, 1762," 222. The Russian reads: "[Мы] наисторжественнейше обещаем Нашим Императорским Словом узаконить такая государственныя установления, по которым бы правительство любезнаго Нашего отечества в своей силе и принадлежащих границах течение свое имело, чтоб и в потомки каждое государственное место имело свои пределы и законы к соблюдению доброго во всем порядка, и тем уповаем предохранить целость Империи и Нашей Самодержавной власти, бывших несчастьем несколько неспроверженную, а прямых верноусердствующих своему отечеству вывести из уныния и оскорбления."

¹⁰¹ On the importance of law to Catherine's image as ruler, see Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 110-47.

¹⁰² Nikita Panin, "Bumagi, kasaiushchiiasia predpolozheniia ob uchrezhdenii imperatorskogo soveta i o razdelenii senata na departamenty v pervyi god tsarstvovaniia Ekateriny II," *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* (hereafter *SIRIO*), vol. 7 (St. Petersburg, 1874), 212.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 205-6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁰⁵ This post was established by Peter the Great in 1722 with the goal of managing the operations of the Senate and its communications with the monarch. The General Procurator was one of the highest-ranking individuals in the government. Because the Senate was in charge of archiving all existing laws, and because it was also the highest judiciary instance, the General Procurator ought to have been responsible for upholding the law. *De facto*, the Senate's functions were ill-defined under Elizabeth, its prerogatives constantly infringed by other institutions, creating

through “courtly favor,” as a result of which he “observed neither laws nor good order” and “began to corrupt everything with his caprice.”¹⁰⁶ Panin also drew attention to the *Konferentsiia*, an imperial council founded in October 1756 in connection with the outbreak of the Seven Years War. Panin claimed that this institution had no robust constitutional foundation, which meant it was filled with individuals who began to rule on their own, making laws and controlling the administration. For blame, he singled out the council’s audacious secretary, Dmitry Volkov. According to Panin, Volkov assumed all sorts of powers that were totally inappropriate to his station: “he managed ministers”; “selected” government business and “composed” policy, all in accordance to his caprice. Moreover, “he forced ministers to sign off” on his schemes either by invoking the “name of the empress” or even by citing decisions as “his own will” in order “to mask” what were actually the designs of one of her favorites.¹⁰⁷ Volkov continued to play a central role in managing state affairs under Peter III¹⁰⁸ – a period that Panin described as “such times when there was not only an absence of established government, but of any written laws as well.”¹⁰⁹

Although Panin criticized these individuals, he did not blame “a few bad apples” but argued that the solution to despotic practices involved reforming the state. Specifically, he wished to use law to bind the monarch to well-defined channels and procedures, hoping to create a lock that would insulate power from distortion and usurpation by political players. The nature of this lock would inevitably have significant implications for the extent of the monarch’s prerogatives. When we look at the details of the Imperial Council proposal, we find that Panin favored a strong lock, for he proposed that all kinds of legislative commands issued by the monarch—be they *akty*, *postanovleniia*, *manifesty*, *gramoty*, *patenty*¹¹⁰—not only pass through the council, but be countersigned by the state secretary of the college department they concerned. This implied that the Council would share in legislative power and the monarch could no longer legislate the Council away if he or she desired.

Given that Catherine rejected Panin’s plan that she serve as regent, perhaps this was a method to limit her power by other means. However, it seems more likely that Panin believed a well-thought-out constitutional device would resolve the institutional defects he recognized under previous rulers. Although Panin was not a republican,¹¹¹ his plan seemed to subscribe to fundamental tenets of republican thought, namely that power should not be overly concentrated in any one place, and that all power must be counterbalanced by another institution. This is supported by the spirit of his preamble which pointed out that where individuals were not bound by law, abuse of power would inevitably follow. Panin curiously presented his constitutional scheme as a project left uncompleted by Peter the Great.

confusion and demoralization in its ranks. On the Senate under Elizabeth, see *Istoriia pravitel'stviushchago senata za dvesti let: 1711-1911*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Senatskaia tipografiia, 1911), 9-314.

¹⁰⁶ *SIRIO*, vol. 7, 204.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 207. At the Shuvalovs’ instigation, Volkov drew up a project that would have turned the *Konferentsiia*, constitutionally, into the place of decision making in 1761. However, it was not signed by Elizabeth. Catherine must have been aware of this project (and of Elizabeth’s response), particularly as it is strongly implied in Panin’s discussion above. Despite his criticism of Volkov, Panin’s Imperial Council project, too, tried to alter the operation of power, and hence the terms of sovereignty.

¹⁰⁸ Volkov was put under house arrest after Catherine’s coup, but was eventually rehabilitated.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹¹⁰ Species of commands. See Chapter 3.

¹¹¹ In the historiography there has been some discussion of whether Panin was in fact a republican. See Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, 20-1. Ransel argues his ideal was Montesquieu’s ‘balanced monarchy.’

The Imperial Council project seems to have gone through a number of drafts, to which the empress may have contributed.¹¹² Ultimately, however, Catherine did not promulgate the statute and it was thereafter deferred indefinitely. Unfortunately, no historical records provide us with Catherine's exact thoughts on Panin's project or elucidate her reasons for letting it lapse. David Ransel has plausibly suggested that Catherine was beholden to opposing political 'parties' that had supported her in the overthrow of her husband; therefore, to accept the proposal would have been to favor one party at the expense of the other.¹¹³ Similarly, Aleksandr Kamenskii has argued that Catherine decided not to push ahead with Panin's reform because she perceived it lacked broad public support.¹¹⁴ But she may also have recognized in Panin's project a device that would irrevocably limit the monarch's prerogatives and believed that to adopt it would weaken, not strengthen, sovereignty in Russia. In other words, Catherine did not subscribe to the notion of constitutional or 'legal' monarchy, at least in the form that Panin presented it to her. It is noteworthy that at no point in her reign did she enact legislation that would have bound her power in such a manner. This is further bolstered by her later writings, which contain statements of her political philosophy voicing her support for monarchy that was unlimited by such devices. The most important of these was her instruction to the Legislative Commission, or *Nakaz*, which was completed in 1767, discussed in Chapter 2. However, similar statements exist from earlier in her reign, as for example Catherine's secret instructions to her new general procurator, Alexander Vyazemsky, written in February 1764. Here Catherine stated that Russia needed to be ruled by a "single sovereign" who "has in himself all the means [or methods, *sposoby*] to counteract any type of harm." She noted that the Russian monarchy must seek to avoid any "division of its power or strength" (*razdrobieniu vlasti i sily*) and that "any other form of government" would "bring about its ruin."¹¹⁵ Statements such as this possibly point to a disagreement between Catherine and those who believed that sovereignty would be strengthened by constitutional devices. For Catherine, it was critical that protocols and procedures mediate the commands of the monarch, as well as those of state servitors, but they stemmed from the monarch's capacity for self-regulation. As she noted to Vyazemsky, it was the monarch who was best positioned to steer a correct path, understanding that the common good and their personal interest were the same; all others were mere "hirelings."

Returning now to the key passage in the Ascension Manifesto, cited above, we might ask whether it should be read as expounding a constitutionalist position. The promise to "establish new state institutions" makes this extremely tempting. However, this passage might alternatively be understood to address the activities of the monarch's servitors, and not the person of the monarch. In sum, Catherine was promising legal clarification of the protocols and procedures associated with subordinate offices. This too was clearly a Petrine project,¹¹⁶ and perhaps she wished to indicate to people like Panin that she intended to see this project completed. In addition, it is worth pointing out a certain dissonance between this passage and the thrust of the remaining document. Although Catherine resolved to establish new state structures, her argument against Peter III was largely premised, as we have seen, on the idea that such structures already existed to some degree and that he had decided to disregard them. If Catherine was advocating a constitutionalist position, one might expect to have seen an explanation partially grounded in the inadequacies of the

¹¹² An alternative text of the manifesto exists in the archives. It is not in Panin's hand. See RGADA, f. 10, op. 1, ex. 4. A copy exists in RGADA, f. 10, op. 3, ed. 492.

¹¹³ Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, 99-138.

¹¹⁴ Aleksandr Kamenskii, *The Russian Empire in the Eighteenth Century: Searching for a Place in the World*, trans. by David Griffiths (New York: Routledge, 2015), 208.

¹¹⁵ Catherine II, "Sekretnishee nastavlenie kniazii Aleksandru Viazemskomu," *SIRIO*, vol. 7, 347.

¹¹⁶ Referring to Peter the Great, not Catherine's husband.

monarchy's structure. While Catherine's passage gestures in Panin's direction, her Ascension Manifesto departs from his Imperial Council project, which portrayed the institutions of the Russian state as essentially incomplete. Her Ascension Manifesto made no such moves. Instead, it was entirely preoccupied with an extensive critique of Peter as a person utterly unfit to reign.

Overall, the Ascension Manifesto is better seen as offering an alternative view in which sovereignty was guaranteed not by law (which flowed from the monarch), but from restraint wedded to wisdom.¹¹⁷ The monarch ought to be able to discern what sort of order was in fact beneficial for the autocracy's legitimacy and power and self-limit accordingly. In Russia, such an order included obedience to divine and natural law, as well as respect for the Orthodox Church and Russian customs. Catherine also stressed that the monarch should observe civil laws and restrict the exercise of their power through the state's institutional structure. Again, Peter the Great was invoked as the individual who supposedly established this system of modern sovereignty by creating a new set of state institutions at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In contrast, the story she tells of her husband is that he was both unable to control himself, and either unwilling or incapable of understanding how restraint might help him govern well. Nonetheless, the Ascension Manifesto's schema for orderly power was only loosely formulated at this stage, especially with regard to the monarch's interactions with the state apparatus. Catherine vowed to establish ways of exercising power that involved its servitors. However, in what ways and on what terms, depended on a host of strategic decisions she had yet to take. Once in power, Catherine would seek to involve these servitors in state power in a variety of ways in order to address the dangers of despotism.

Might prudence lead the sovereign to break the law? This is a crucial question. In her Ascension Manifesto, Catherine argued that the sovereign was morally bound to rule to the interests of subjects and that in order to achieve the common good, the sovereign should obey civil laws and observe established institutions and procedures in the exercise of his or her prerogatives. However, it is quite conceivable that the interest of subjects might under certain circumstances best be served by the monarch circumnavigating these norms. Catherine was quiet about this, but it floated in the background as a distinct possibility, particularly if the monarch remained constitutionally unbound. Even so, as the Manifesto suggests, breaking the law would risk eroding the legitimate exercise of power.

¹¹⁷ The importance of restraint in generating power suggests a stoic ethic. An important neo-stoical text that we can expect Catherine and the Russian elite to have read was Fenelon's *Adventures of Telemachus* (originally published in French in 1699). Elizabeth funded the publication of a translation of this text in 1747. See, Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing and the Origins of the Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 55. Igor Fedyukin has suggested that by this time the work was already known in Russia and that it may have exerted some influence on Russian policy. See his article, "'An Infinite Variety of Inclinations and Appetites': Génie and Governance in Post-Petrine Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russia and Eurasian History*, 11: 4 (Fall 2010), 741-62. Catherine continued to be interested in stoical texts during her reign. For example, in 1768 she commissioned the translation and publication of Marmontel's *Belisaire*. Between 1768 and 1796 this text went through seven editions, with print runs totaling 4000 copies, a large number by Russian standards. Similarly, Fenelon's *Adventures of Telemachus* went through four editions between 1767 and 1797. See, Marker, *Publishing*, 206. For a discussion of stoical ideas during the empress' reign, see Walter Gleason, *Moral Idealists, Bureaucracy, and Catherine the Great* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981). For a wider discussion of stoicism in the political and moral philosophy in the early modern period, see Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Part 5: Catherine's Mandate to Rule

Catherine was crowned empress on September 22, 1762, a little over two months after she overthrew her husband. The haste with which this ceremony was performed was intended to solidify her initial legitimacy as monarch and to further distinguish her from Peter, who had never officially been crowned. The choice of Moscow for her coronation highlighted her adherence to the traditions and procedures of the Russian monarchy.

Catherine legitimized her ascension by arguing that she had been elected by God and the Russian people. This claim featured in both her ascension manifestos and it became part of the rhetoric of legitimacy adopted by her supporters, including Panin.¹¹⁸ It was also the response that she gave to those who questioned her in private, by what right she had taken the throne.¹¹⁹ Catherine played out her election by the Russian people in the theater of her coup. Scenes in this drama included her proclamation as empress at the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg by the members of the Holy Synod and the Senate, followed by an appearance to assembled troops—14,000, she claimed, in total—all of whom dutifully pledged their allegiance to her.¹²⁰ In her Ascension Manifesto Catherine spoke of the great eagerness with which “all ranks—the clergy, the military, and the civilian”—had taken their oath of loyalty.¹²¹ She noted also the bloodless nature of her ascension, citing it as further evidence that she was the people's choice. The same description of events, with striking language, appears in her letter to Poniatowski, where Catherine figured soldiers from the Ismailovsky regiment rushing up to her, “kissing [her] hands, [her] feet”, [and] the hem of [her] dress, calling [her] their savior”; likewise she described the Horse Guards as having been in a “such a frenzy of joy as [she] had never before seen, weeping and shouting that the country was free at last.”¹²² Of course, such passages had their own strategic objectives, and while they do not prove widespread support for her ascension, they at least suggest that popular backing was critical to the terms in which Catherine sought to legitimate her seizure of power.

Contrasting herself to Peter, who ostensibly coveted power to satisfy his selfish whims, Catherine's Ascension Manifesto denied that she had any personal ambition and was reluctant to reign.¹²³ Her actions, she claimed, were motivated by love for her son, Russia, and its subjects, all of whom had been threatened with power in Peter's hands. In her criticism of her husband, she sought to highlight her fidelity to the Orthodox Church, thereby demonstrating a respect for Russia's cultural heritage and indicating her belief in God. To recognize God was also to recognize moral duties, a prerequisite for legitimate rule. Finally, she displayed knowledge of Russia's political institutions and how integral they were to the monarch's power. To claim election by the people was to claim popular approval of her principles and the sovereignty project that she espoused.

Did it matter that Catherine was a woman? In the eighteenth century, Russia had had a number of female sovereigns, suggesting that women had become accepted as legitimate bearers of political power by a sufficient number of the Russian elites.¹²⁴ By the same token, women were

¹¹⁸ *SIRIO*, vol. 7, 208.

¹¹⁹ Ekaterina Dashkova, *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova*, ed. J. Gheith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 88.

¹²⁰ Catherine II, “Letter to Poniatowski,” 61.

¹²¹ Catherine II, “Manifest, 1762,” 220.

¹²² Catherine II, “Letter to Poniatowski,” 60-1.

¹²³ Catherine II, “Manifest, 1762,” 217.

¹²⁴ The historiography has tended to argue that female rule was a more serious challenge in Russia at the beginning of the century. Sophia Alekseevna, for example, who acted as regent for Ivan V and Peter I between 1682-1689, undermined her standing when she tried to accrue more power. During his reign, Peter I was responsible for bringing

often cast as weak-willed and capricious, making them susceptible to ineffective or even despotic government.¹²⁵ And if, as Catherine thought, sovereignty demanded restraint, being a woman might plausibly have been seen as a great weakness and would support arguments for constitutional government. In her Ascension Manifesto, however, it was Catherine who criticized Peter for his lack of restraint as ruler, thereby pointing out that as a woman, she was at no particular disadvantage to a male ruler. What is more, she presented Peter as an immoral man who was cruel to his wife (her) and their son,¹²⁶ which she contrasted with her own ‘motherly’ love for Paul and her subjects. This indicates that female gender could also be used to make a positive claim for legitimacy. In this case, Catherine suggested that love could help direct the female ruler to uphold the dictates of sovereignty. She, a woman, could hence continue Peter the Great’s project of state development.

6: Conclusions

In her Ascension Manifesto Catherine laid out a complex view of the monarchy’s power - one that is best understood in terms of sovereignty. Power, she claimed, must be exercised in a regular and orderly manner with reference to and through a series of norms and institutions. This line of argument helped her to shift the question of legitimacy away from initial claims to the throne and toward the monarch’s person and style of rule. This was the ground upon which she criticized her husband, Peter III, a man who she thought exercised power in an arbitrary fashion, akin to a despot. Peter may have had some conception of his great prerogatives; but his was a rudimentary, absolutist conception that in Catherine’s mind did not qualify as sovereignty. Even if Peter was merely the foil against which Catherine asserted her own qualities of rule, a comparison of their ascension manifestos shows her understanding of the sovereign’s task to have been fundamentally different.

The emphasis Catherine laid on the collaboration between the monarch and the state’s political institutions was the most innovative and modern component of her theory. Above all, it suggested that the monarch’s power could be dispersed, or at least, that involvement of the monarch’s servitors was to be critical in activating and/or exercising that power. By recasting sovereignty in such terms, Catherine imagined a new and arguably more difficult role for the Russian monarch. Whereas Peter III understood his station in terms of command according to his will (or whim), in Catherine’s system the monarch would be continuously called upon to closely

Russian women into the life of the court. He also crowned his second wife, Catherine I and sought to normalize the idea of female rule. See Gary Marker, *Imperial Saint: The Cult of St. Catherine and the Dawn of Female Rule in Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2007). Nonetheless, the issue of gender has been raised in relation to Catherine II. See, for example, Brenda Meehan-Waters, “Catherine the Great and the Problem of Female Rule,” *The Russian Review*, 34: 3 (July 1975), 294-307 and Victoria Ivleva, “Catherine II as Female Ruler: The Power of Enlightened Womanhood,” *Vivliofika: E-journal of Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies*, 3 (2015), 20-46.

¹²⁵ Mikhail Shcherbatov wrote of Catherine: “Generally speaking, women are more prone to despotism than men; and as far as [the Empress] is concerned, it can justly be averred that she is in this particular a woman among women. Nothing can irritate her more than that when making some report to her, men quote the laws in opposition to her will. Immediately the retort flies from her lips” “Can I then not do this irrespective of the laws?” Many lawsuits attest to her arbitrariness.” Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals*, 247. In this passage Shcherbatov also identifies Catherine as an opponent of constitutional monarchy. For a wider discussion on female rule, see chapter 8, in “Gender and Power,” in Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 303-36.

¹²⁶ For an exploration of gender in the Ascension Manifesto, see Ruth Dawson, “Perilous Royal Biography: Representations of Catherine II immediately after her Seizure of the Throne,” *Biography*, 27: 3 (Summer 2004), 517-34.

manage the throne's servitors while constantly surveilling her own interactions with them to maintain order and allow power to operate smoothly. In the abdication statement that Catherine had prepared, she had Peter acknowledge that he had not been able to "rule the Russian state" because his physical constitution was unable to take the "load and burden" (*tiagost' i bremia*) that such rule demanded.¹²⁷ In addition to what the Manifesto made explicit, here perhaps she also gestured at the extensive managerial activity that her understanding of sovereignty would demand in practice. Not merely to command according to one's will, but to tend to the constant and arduous task of managing the state's servitors was the great burden, the secular Passion, of the modern sovereign.

Catherine claimed that Peter the Great was the founder of modern sovereignty in Russia. Through his "tireless toil" he had built the apparatus of government and decided to exercise his power through it. This, however, was Catherine's conceit: it was her, not her predecessors, who had the concept and was able to articulate it first as official state doctrine.

¹²⁷ Catherine II, "Manifest, 1762," 222.

Chapter 2: The Empress' 'Nakaz': An Instruction in Sovereignty

1. Introduction

In 1765, three years after her ascension to the throne, Catherine began working in private on a major document. This project, which took over two years to complete, was the 'Instruction', or, as it is more commonly known by its Russian name, the *Nakaz*. This text comprised hundreds of statute-like articles arranged thematically around political institutions, criminal law and judicial procedure, and the economy, to name but a few. These articles were not all of the same type: some were descriptive; whereas others had a distinctive normative quality. As a document, produced by a reigning monarch, the *Nakaz* had no real precedent in Russia. And many of its statutes articulated ideas that were novel to Russia's political tradition. For example, it spoke at length about political liberty and advocated the equality of all before the law. It also spoke out against slavery in passages that could easily have been read as a criticism of the Russian institution of serfdom. A major use of the text was to instruct the deputies of a national legislative commission, which the empress convoked in 1767 in order to codify Russia's outdated laws. But it was also strategically disseminated throughout the offices of the civil administration, suggesting a wider significance of its content. Catherine continued to refer to the text—and also re-direct her subordinates to it—at various points of her reign, indicating her ongoing belief in the validity of its principles in guiding state action. This is enough to secure its status as one, if not the most, important work of political philosophy published in Russia in the eighteenth century.

Historians of Catherine's reign have identified the *Nakaz* as a major source for understanding her thinking on a variety of areas of state policy.¹²⁸ Some have interpreted the text as a programmatic document. Isabel de Madariaga, for example, has called it a blueprint laying down the principles of good government.¹²⁹ Others have identified it as expounding a doctrine of 'legal monarchy' according to which all actors were to be bound by law.¹³⁰ Scholars have also been interested in how the empress compiled the text from foreign sources, either underlining its derivative nature,¹³¹ or conversely, pointing out how she understood and adapted these texts to the Russian context.¹³²

This chapter builds on previous interpretations, while advancing the claim that the *Nakaz* is the single most important document that lays out the empress' views about the monarch's powers. In this connection, the chapter has three purposes. Firstly, it argues that the *Nakaz*, in a much more detailed manner than her Ascension Manifesto, articulated a complex view of monarchical power, which must to be understood in terms of sovereignty. Secondly, the chapter

¹²⁸ F.V. Taranovskii, "Politicheskaia doktrina v "Nakaze" imperatritsy Ekateriny II, in *Sbornik statei po istorii prava, posviashchennyi M.F. Vladimirovskomu-Budanovu* (Kiev, 1903), and Basil Dmytryshyn, "The Economic Content of the 1767 *Nakaz* of Catherine II," *The American Slavic and East European Review*, 19: 1 (February 1960), 1-9.

¹²⁹ Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 151. See also, Aleksandr Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I do Pavla I* (Moscow, 1999), 335-63.

¹³⁰ See, above all, Oleg A. Omel'chenko, "Zakonnaia monarkhiia" *Ekateriny II* (Moscow, 1993). This interpretation has been taken up in Anglophone literature by Cynthia H. Whittaker in *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

¹³¹ V.O. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1937), 60-85; G. Jones, "The Spirit of the "Nakaz": Catherine II's Literary Debt to Montesquieu." *The Slavonic and East European Review*. 76: 4 (1998), 658-67.

¹³² Isabel de Madariaga, "Catherine II and Montesquieu between Prince M. M. Shcherbatov and Denis Diderot," in *Politics and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Collected Essays* (London: Longman, 1998), 235-62; Paul Dukes, "Introduction," in *Catherine the Great's Instruction (Nakaz) to the Legislative Commission, 1767* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1977).

highlights the most defining and distinguishing features of this sovereignty. The monarch must ensure liberty, understood as security, produced by power that was both properly ordered and made to operate in a smooth and predictable manner. These ends were best secured by making power diffuse, an arrangement that was not a limitation of sovereignty, but its facilitator. This system would distinguish monarchy from despotism, which, in the views of Catherine and her contemporaries, was a system of power guided by an absolutist ethic, presupposing that rulers could do what they wanted. The system of sovereignty that the *Nakaz* laid out addressed two pressing contemporary problems. One was the disorderliness of governmental power, including overlapping spheres of authority, haphazard issuance of laws and decrees, and sudden alterations among the highest-ranking servitors due to a loss of favor at court. Another problem was the unclear relationship of members of the nobility to the state, specifically the ethical and legal bases of their service, which had been rendered even less clear in 1762, when Peter III canceled Peter the Great's law that made state service mandatory for all members of the nobility.¹³³

The final purpose of this chapter is to highlight the managerial role of the monarch in Catherine's system of sovereignty. The *Nakaz* was a strategic text that the empress used to manage powerholders in a way that helped realize its vision of sovereignty. It targeted not only the deputies of the Legislative Commission, but also the noble servitors of the central bureaucracy. It sought to impart to these individuals a unified understanding—grounded in reason—of the nature of the monarch's power and of their expected role within it.¹³⁴ Organizing the throne's servitors has often been seen as a task of imposing laws on them. However, the *Nakaz*, which the empress explicitly stated was not to be understood as a law, highlights the importance of other ordering strategies, while at the same time suggesting the limits of law in the empress' mind. Catherine needed to establish for its addressees a clear notion of the underlying normative and procedural principles of sovereignty. It was only on this underlying understanding that law might later be imposed and be successful. This was in fact one of the *Nakaz*'s central ideas, namely that monarch should seek to lay the grounds for new legislation.

2: The *Nakaz* as Managerial Document

In its first edition, the *Nakaz* was a formidable document that comprised five hundred and sixty-six individual articles divided over twenty chapters. It contained large tracts devoted to law, society, and the Russian political system. Two additional chapters that appeared over the course

¹³³ On the 1762 emancipation of the nobility and its place in a wider codificatory initiative begun under Elizabeth, see Marc Raeff "The Domestic Policies of Peter III and his Overthrow," *The American Historical Review*, 75: 5 (June 1970): 1289-1310; Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility, 1762-1785* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); A. V. Romanovich-Slavatinskii, *Dvorianstvo v Rossii ot nachala XVIII veka do otmeny krepostnogo prava* (St. Petersburg, 1912); N. L. Rubinshtein, "Ulozhennaia komissiiia 1754-1766 gg. i ee proekt novogo ulozheniia 'O sostoianii poddannyykh voobshche' (k istorii sotsial'noi politiki 50-kh—nachala 60-kh godov XVIII v.)" *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 38 (1951), 208-51; Elena Marasina, "Vol'nost' rossiiskogo dvorianstva" (manifest Petra III i soslavnoe zakonodatel'stvo Ekateriny II)," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 4 (2007), 21-33; Sergei Pol'skoi, "Na raznye chiny razdeliiaia svoi narod..." *Zakonodatel'noe zakreplenie soslavnogo statusa russkogo dvorianstva v sereдинe XVIII veka*," *Cahiers du monde russe*, 51, 2/3 (2010), 303-28.

¹³⁴ Richard Wortman has emphasized the role of display and representation in order to bind servitors to the state. Catherine, he argues, tried to present herself as the great 'law-giver' or 'legislatrix' and identifies the *Nakaz* and the Legislative Commission as central components of her 'scenario of power.' Both these views overlook the non-representational component of Catherine's notion of sovereignty. Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). The *Nakaz* was an attempt to ground sovereignty on reason.

of 1768 treated the police and the economy. Catherine readily admitted that she appropriated the majority of these articles from contemporary thinkers, above all, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1750).¹³⁵ Catherine had been familiar with this text before she became empress, as we know from commentaries she wrote in 1760 in response to a criticism of the work by Strube de Piermont, a one-time professor of law at the Russian Academy of Sciences.¹³⁶ She rediscovered Montesquieu's book in 1765, when she embarked on her own attempt at codifying Russian law. She said that "for two years" it became her "chief exercise" to "write out and think about [Montesquieu's] principles," and that she "tr[ie]d to understand him," often "crossing out [one day] what [she] had found very good [the previous day]."¹³⁷ In addition to Montesquieu, Catherine drew on Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishment* (1764) for the sections of criminal law. She also drew on cameralist works by Baron Bielfeld, and J. H. Gottlob von Justi, the physiocratic writings of Francois Quesnay, and the *Encyclopédie*.¹³⁸ Notwithstanding all of these influences, the *Nakaz* in its entirety was an independent and original document, converting excerpts from these texts into separate articles, subtly changing their content, or using them in a manner unintended by their authors. She also combined them, not only with one another, but with other principles that she formulated herself. It is important that the *Nakaz* be read alongside the texts that inspired it, but also, as its own text and on its own terms, that is a work in which Catherine sought to lay out principles that were specific and appropriate for Russia.

The *Nakaz* first appeared in print in Moscow in July 1767. Catherine wrote the original manuscript by hand in French. Today it lies in the library of the Russian Academy of Sciences together with various materials collected for its composition. The French edition was accompanied by a Russian translation that was produced by the empress with the help of one of her state secretaries, Grigory Kozitsky. This was followed shortly thereafter by a German edition in St. Petersburg, and an English version in London.¹³⁹ It is estimated that in total, more than 5,000 copies of the *Nakaz* in all its editions were produced in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁰ The Russian version, however,—the most important with respect to her servitors—went through eight printings over the course of the empress' reign.¹⁴¹

Before its publication, the text underwent a number of drafts. Although it began as a private project, from June 1765 Catherine began to show parts of the text to close confidants. A draft was eventually read to the Senate and in 1767 she summoned a select group of high-ranking individuals, loosely representing the military, administrative, and literary elite to criticize the work.¹⁴² Catherine claimed that they censured more than half of the work – a likely exaggeration;

¹³⁵ Catherine II, "Sobstvennoruchnoe chernovoe pis'mo Ekateriny II k d'Alembere s pohvalami sochineniiam Montes'k'e i uvereniiem, shto sochineniia d'Alambere posluzhat' na blaro chelovechestvu," *SIRIO*, vol. 10, 31.

¹³⁶ Dukes, "Introduction," 10-1. For more on Strube de Piermont, see W. E. Butler, "F. G. Strube de Piermont and the Origins of Russian Legal History," in *Russia in the Age of Enlightenment: Essays for Isabel de Madariaga*, ed. Roger Bartlett and Janet Hartley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 125-41.

¹³⁷ "Ekaterina II i Montes'k'e," *Vestnik evropy*, (May 1903), quoted in Dukes, "Introduction," 11.

¹³⁸ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 152. See N. D. Chechulin, *Nakaz Imperatritsy Ekateriny II dannyi kommissii po sochineniiu proekta novogo ulozheniia* (Moscow, 1967) for the most extensive study of the *Nakaz's* composition.

¹³⁹ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 151.

¹⁴⁰ [Catherine II], *The Nakaz of Catherine the Great: Collected Texts*, ed. William E. Butler and Vladimir A. Tomsinov, (Clark, NJ: Lawbook Exchange), 18. For more on the publication history of the *Nakaz* in Catherine's reign, see Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of the Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 166-7.

¹⁴¹ Gary Hamburg, *Russia's Path to Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 394-5.

¹⁴² "Mneniia o Nakaze," *SIRIO*, vol. 10, 75-87.

however, subsequent versions saw a number of changes, including a reduction in the early Montesquiean analysis of the Russian state, and significant cuts to the discussion of slavery in Chapter 11. There she deleted passages that proposed serfdom be limited to six years and that serfs be allowed to accumulate property so that they might buy their freedom.¹⁴³ The strategy of soliciting opinions was part of her ethic of diffusing power in decision-making (see Chapter 3). This was of special relevance to the *Nakaz*, for it concerned the shape and character of future legislation, but also the nature of the political corporation that Catherine wanted the elite to be part of and take part in.

The *Nakaz*'s widespread importance was highlighted by a decree, issued by the Senate in September of that same year, requesting that fifty-seven copies of the text to be disseminated amongst the central government institutions (*prisutstvennyye mesta*), including the Senate (one for each of its six departments), the imperial Colleges, and the Glavnyi Magistrat. A second *ukaz* in April 1768, proclaiming the addition of a twenty-second chapter, added that copies of the *Nakaz* also be sent to all provincial governors.¹⁴⁴ According to these *ukazy*, all recipient offices were to enact and adhere to those articles that were relevant to their judicial and administrative matters. Furthermore, they demanded that the *Nakaz* be read on a regular basis. The April *ukaz* specified that officials gather on Saturdays, so that the text be read by them at least three times a year. When not in use, the *Nakaz* was to be kept on the 'judicial table' (*sudeiskii stol*) next to the *zertsalo* – a three-sided prism that displayed important pieces of legislation by Peter the Great on the protection of the rights of subjects, and on the protocols and procedures of government offices.

By contrast, the propagation of the *Nakaz* was not extended for reading or copying to 'chancellery clerks' – functionaries who were not on the Table of Ranks. Thus, the empress wanted to limit the *Nakaz* to a select audience of individuals occupying the most important positions within the administrative apparatus. This policy suggested that the text contained ideas that were important to them only; and conversely, that it might cause trouble if it fell into the hands of those who were irresponsible or ignorant. Articles advocating political liberty, equality before the law, and protection of the poor against the rich might be easily misunderstood or used against the state. Likewise, Chapter 11's criticism of slavery could lead to rumors amongst the peasantry that they would be manumitted and given property – a potential cause of disturbances in the countryside. Such had been the effect of Peter III's proclamation of 1762 liberating the nobility from state service. The *Nakaz* was a managerial document targeting the administrative, noble elite that was deemed responsible and educated enough to understand its dictates. The rest of Russian society could only indirectly benefit from its effects.

The *Nakaz* sought to generate in the administrative elite an *esprit des corps* by conveying to them how their activity, which hinged on a specialized knowledge that the text laid out, was critical for governance based on reason. Correspondingly, it emphasized that these servitors were to see the fulfillment of their role in terms of virtue, but also as aligning with their personal interest, bestowing honor, nobility, and the distinctions and privileges that followed therefrom. Chapter 15, entitled "Of Nobility"—one of the chapters that was largely written by the empress herself—noted that noble dignity arose from a "Love for their country" and "Observance of its Laws and Duties" (Arts. 364 & 373).¹⁴⁵ Although she made a point of singling out military service as "essentially

¹⁴³ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 158-9.

¹⁴⁴ *PSZ*, no. 12,977 and no. 13,106.

¹⁴⁵ Taken from the English translation by Michael Tatischeff. Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions to the Commissioners Appointed to Frame a New Code of Laws for the Russian Empire*, trans. by Michael Tatischeff (London: T. Jeffery's, 1768), 163-4. All English-language excerpts are taken from this text unless otherwise indicated.

necessary” for the “Existence and Support of the State” (Art. 366), in the very next article she noted that the “administration of Justice,” that is the civil service, was “no less required in Time of Peace than in War” and that without it the “State would be destroyed” (Art. 367).¹⁴⁶ In other words, she viewed state servitors who competently exercised power in well-defined capacities as a cornerstone of the success of monarchical government. Thus, the *Nakaz* reinforced the normative bases on which the nobility was to serve the state—both militarily and administratively—which had been muddled by Peter III’s decree of 1762.

3: Catherine’s Theory of Sovereignty

The *Nakaz* is commonly discussed in relation to the empress’ Legislative Commission. However, Catherine, as we have already noted, envisioned the work to be of broader application to the state’s servitors. She disseminated the text widely amongst their upper echelons and demanded that they read it on a regular basis. Following the actual layout of the text, the two opening sections show that the *Nakaz* sought to instruct these servitors about the monarchy’s power as well as their operations as part of it. Similar to the empress’ Ascension Manifesto, we argue that the *Nakaz* laid out a complex understanding of power that ought to be seen in terms of sovereignty. In a similar manner, she elucidated important aspects of this monarch’s power, above all its normative ends and the organizational and procedural principles that help satisfy these in Russia. But, in the *Nakaz* this discussion was more rigorous and systematic. In this connection, one distinguishing feature of the text was that it laid out a theory of sovereignty in rational terms, deriving from dictates of natural law, but also observation and experience.

a. The Christian Principle

The *Nakaz* begins its theory of sovereignty in its opening article. Given its import, it should be stated in full:

La Religion Chrétienne nous enseigne de nous faire les uns aux autres tout le bien que nous pouvons.

Закон Христианский научает нас взаимно делать друг другу добро, сколько возможно.¹⁴⁷

//

The Christian Law teaches us to do mutual Good to one another, as much as possibly we can.¹⁴⁸

Thus, the *Nakaz* began by a laying out a fundamental duty to maximize the good. Catherine equated this injunction—she uses the term ‘Christian law’ in the Russian edition—with the essence of the Christian religion. In the very next article, however, she stated that she “[took] it for granted... that

The original French and Russian excerpts are drawn from the text in N. D. Chechulin’s authoritative study, *Nakaz imperatritsy Ekateriny II*.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹⁴⁷ Chechulin, *Nakaz*, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions*, 69.

this Law prescribed by Religion, [was] rooted, or ought to be rooted in the Hearts of all People” (Art. 2).¹⁴⁹ Therefore, it took on the character of a principle of natural law. Christians were at a distinct advantage in understanding this law, but as a natural law, it could be grasped, either by reason and conscience, by anyone, including religious schismatics as well as the diverse non-Christian members of the Russian empire.

The imperative to do as much good as possible is presented in Article 1 as a general, but not necessarily a political duty. Therefore, in the subsequent articles Catherine moved to show how it justified a political relationship. Having grasped the Christian precept, she insisted that “every honest Man in the Community [was] or [would] be, desirous of seeing his fatherland (*sa patrie*) at the very Summit of Happiness, Glory, Safety, and Tranquility” (Art. 2) and “that every Individual Citizen in particular, must wish to see himself protected by Laws, which should not distress him in his Circumstances, but, on the Contrary, should defend him from all Attempts of others, that are repugnant to this fundamental Rule” (Art. 3).¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, as legislator, Catherine defined her own duty as producing laws that were conducive towards the fulfillment of the Christian principle. Since this duty stemmed from both Christian law and reason, it was a divinely ordained duty. As such, it also enjoined subjects to obedience to power that operated accordingly. In this way, the *Nakaz*’s conception of the legitimate political relationship was framed by a primacy of duty over right - a hallmark of the German natural law doctrines that the Russian state had endorsed from Peter the Great onwards to train its servitors.¹⁵¹

The *Nakaz* stated that the extent to which the Christian law was fulfilled constituted an aggregate of “Happiness, Glory, Safety, and Tranquility.” Some critical functions that government needed to fulfill in this connection included to secure the property and honor of individuals (Art. 114), to protect individuals from economic oppression (Art. 35), and, in keeping with the enlightened opinion of the time, to ensure religious toleration and its corollary – to prevent religious persecution (Art. 494). In addition, Catherine thought that all individuals were entitled to a minimum of social welfare, which included a “sure Maintenance, food, proper clothing, and a way of life not detrimental to the health of man” (Art. 346).¹⁵²

Above all, however, the government must endeavor to ensure liberty. In the *Nakaz*, Catherine deployed the concept of liberty in two ways. In Articles 13 and 14 she articulated a conception of “natural liberty” as something to be protected from government intrusion, a noteworthy admission that a modicum of autonomy for ‘negative’ liberty was important. Government, she explained, must act to direct people’s conduct “in such a manner that the greatest good may be derived from all their operations, but that this must come at the least possible cost to their natural liberty.” Elsewhere, in Article 39, she advanced a second conception of liberty, which she called “civil,” or “political liberty”; such liberty she defined as “the Peace of Mind arising from the Consciousness, that every Individual enjoy[ed] his particular Safety.” Such ‘peace of mind’ required a system of law that would protect individuals from arbitrary interference from others. Understood more broadly, however, it also necessitated political power that operated in an orderly and predictable fashion. Erratic motions, such as the trampling of customs, the imposition of unexpected laws, and the irregular observance and execution of existing laws by the monarch

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 69-70.

¹⁵¹ On this topic see: J. L. Black, *Citizens for the Fatherland: Education, Educators, and Pedagogical Ideals in Eighteenth Century Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 23-70; Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1966), 148-71.

¹⁵² Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions*, 159.

or other agents of state power, were also major threats to such liberty. Fear still operated as a tool of social control, but it remained compatible with civil liberty so long as it arose solely from certainty of repercussions associated with breaking the law. Under no circumstance, however, should subjects fear the monarch or the state's officials. Adding her own addendum to the passage from Montesquieu Catherine put it as follows: individuals should fear that law, "but...all alike should fear the Laws only" (Article 39).¹⁵³

Catherine's conception of liberty was indebted to Montesquieu, and there is good reason to believe that her decision to adopt and advance this conception was deeply strategic.¹⁵⁴ There are a number of possible reasons for this. Firstly, such a conception disassociated liberty from [republican] self-governance, thereby allowing her to claim it as the aim of any well-constructed political community, including monarchical government. Secondly, liberty, so understood, suited a society in which individuals were differentiated by social groups. In such a society, while laws and hence rights differed by social group, all individuals might still be said to enjoy equal liberty. Finally, this conception addressed what Catherine and those who supported her ascension to the throne in 1762 considered to be a major issue, namely power that operated in a disorganized and arbitrary manner. Although Catherine laid out this problem in her Ascension Manifesto, the *Nakaz* clarify it further by invoking this concept and advancing it as a metric, derived from the dictates of natural law, for assessing legitimate power. This is not all, for the *Nakaz* was also a practical document that sought to order power by imparting to the state's servitors an understanding of how it was to properly flow and be exercised, in part through them (see below).

In conclusion, Article 1 was the most significant statement in the *Nakaz*.¹⁵⁵ Above all, opening the *Nakaz* with the Christian law confirmed that its fundamental concern was the task of establishing the proper structure of political right, both universally as well as in the context of Russia. Many of the subsequent principles and injunctions in the text must be seen as following from this imperative, and their fulfillment would, in Catherine's estimation, provide the best means of realizing that law in Russia. The Christian law was a necessary component of proper sovereignty, for without it, the power of the ruler would be fundamentally unstructured and hence left undirected to society's good. Proclaiming this precept as a foundational maxim of the Russian state was meant to underline its distinction from despotic government. Once again, however, Catherine failed to follow her mentor consistently. While Montesquieu had warned that

¹⁵³ Here I adopt the the George Macartney/Paul Duker translation, since it better aligns with the original French: "...mais que tous ne craignent que les Loix." See [Catherine II], *The Nakaz of Catherine the Great: Collected Texts*, ed. William E. Butler & Vladimir A. Tomsinov (Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 2009), 449.

¹⁵⁴ In Montesquieu's case, Annelien De Dijn has argued that he wanted to "wrest control over the concept liberty from the republican admirers of classical liberty." See Annelien De Dijn, "On Political Liberty: Montesquieu's Missing Manuscript." *Political Theory*. 39: 2 (2011), 181-204. In a related article she marks as noteworthy that Catherine used Montesquieu's concept in the *Nakaz*: Annelien De Dijn, "Montesquieu's Controversial Context: *The Spirit of the Laws* as a Monarchist Tract," *History of Political Thought*. 34: 1 (Spring 2013), 66-88. See also, Robin Douglas, "Montesquieu and Modern Republicanism," *Political Studies* 60 (2012), 703-19. For more on republican theories of liberty in the early modern period, see the works of Quentin Skinner, including *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵⁵ I make no claim to any new or original discovery on this point. The importance of Article 1 has been acknowledged by F.V.Taranovskii, "Politicheskaia doktrina v "Nakaze" imperatritsy Ekateriny II," in *Sbornik statei po istorii prava, posviashchennyi M.F. Vladimirovskomu-Budanovu* (Kiev, 1903), 67-109. Nonetheless, Article 1 is largely ignored in the secondary literature on the *Nakaz*.

Christianity had itself been a source of despotic ideas,¹⁵⁶ Catherine argued that the Christian religion provided a bulwark against despotic government and provided a foundation for rightful power. In this way, Catherine at once advanced a Montesquieuan conception of sovereignty, while altering other components of his theories.

b. The Arrangement of Legitimate Power

The Christian principle laid out criteria for legitimate power, including that the ruler provide liberty, understood as security, to their subjects. Hence, the Christian principle demanded an arrangement of power such that these criteria, including liberty, be met. In the chapters immediately following the Christian principle, the *Nakaz* laid out in detail what this arrangement was to be in Russia. We explore this configuration in this section.

Firstly, Catherine claimed that monarchy was the only legitimate form of government in Russia. Catherine justified this claim, not by custom, tradition, or scripture, but in terms of utility in relation to the empirical challenges posed by Russia's 'natural constitution.' In Article 9, she wrote that the "Possessions of the Russian Empire extend upon the terrestrial Globe to 32 degrees of Latitude, and to 165 of Longitude." Such a large territory, she asserted, demanded monarchical government, for "it was expedient so to be, that quick Dispatch of Affairs, sent from distant Parts, might make ample Amends for the Delay occasioned by the great Distance of the Places" (Art. 10). Other forms of rule were too inefficient for such a large land; delayed decision-making would impede any sort of governance. She stated unequivocally that this would "not only [be] prejudicial to Russia, but would ultimately bring about its entire ruin" (Art. 11).¹⁵⁷

Although 'dispatch' was a critical legitimating feature of monarchy, given Russia's natural constitution, she also claimed that monarchy's relative simplicity made it a better form of power. As she stated later in the text, in matters of government "the most simple Expedients [were] often the very best; and the most intricate the worst." In this connection, she compared monarchy to a "best constructed Machine" because it "employ[ed] the least Moment, Force, and fewest Wheels possible" (Art. 514).¹⁵⁸ By her account, monarchy also contrasted favorably to "every other Form of Government" when it came to adherence to the law. Not only in Russia, but everywhere, as she claimed in Article 12, it was "better to be subject to the Laws under one Master, than to be subservient to many" (Art. 12).¹⁵⁹ By implication, other forms of government were less likely to produce the public good, above all liberty itself. Which exact models she had in mind, however, remains unclear. Possibly, she had republican democracies in mind. But she more likely envisaged rule by a small elite, a much more plausible threat in eighteenth-century Russia, as demonstrated by the rule of the Supreme Privy Council in the reign of Catherine I, between 1726 and 1730. In this connection, Catherine may have used the *Nakaz* to underline that in Russia, the rule of the

¹⁵⁶ Vickie B. Sullivan, *Montesquieu and the Despotic Ideas of Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 81-134.

¹⁵⁷ Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions*, 71. Catherine had made a similar argument in her instructions to her new general-procurator, Aleksandr Vyamzemy, in February 1764, while at the same time stressing the importance of monarchy to balance the different passions and interests of the empire's disparate parts: "Российская империя есть столь обширна, что кроме самодержавного государя всякая другая форма правления вредна ей, ибо все прочее медлительнее в исполнениях и многое множество страстей в себе имеет, которые все к раздроблению власти и силы влекут, нежели одного государя, имеющего все способы к пресечению всякого вреда и почитая общее добро своим собственным, а другие все, по слову Евангельскому, наемники есть." "Sobstvennoruchное nastavlenie Ekateriny II kniaziu Viazemskomu pri vstuplenii im v dolzhnost' general-prokurora," *SIRIO*, vol, 7, 347.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

nobility, and hence any action taken to formalize its political power through discrete institutions, was illegitimate.

Secondly, the *Nakaz* explained how the monarch's power was to be internally configured. The main discussion occurs in Chapters 3 and 4 and is modeled on Montesquieu's analysis of the nature of monarchy in Part I of the *Spirit of the Laws*:

Article 18: The intermediate Powers, subordinate to, and depending upon the supreme Power, form the essential Part of monarchical Government. Intermediate, subordinate, and dependent powers constitute the nature of monarchical government.

Article 19: I have said, that intermediate Powers, subordinate and depending, proceed from the supreme Power; as in the very Nature of the Thing the Sovereign is the Source of all imperial and civil Power.¹⁶⁰

Article 20: The laws, designed to be accepted as fundamental laws, necessarily require Tribunals, which are as intermediary channels through which monarchical power flows.¹⁶¹

Catherine made clear that there was to be a single, indivisible, and ultimate source of political power in the state, which originated in her person. Yet, at the same time she explained that this power could be exercised in a dispersed manner without diminishing it or fragmenting its underlying unity. Building on the claims of her ascension manifestos, Catherine again asserted that the Russian state already possessed 'intermediary bodies' and that the monarch's power was to 'flow' through them. Enhancing this configuration would help order and regularize the movements of the state, thereby reducing arbitrariness and poor decisions. Ultimately, the proper channeling of the monarch's power would maximize liberty, the crucial metric by which the state's performance was to be measured. Importantly, these intermediary bodies needed to be properly designed and managed in order to resolve a tension that existed between them and the empress' earlier justification of monarchy as the only legitimate form of government in Russia. Remember that as Catherine stated, the country's size necessitated efficient government with as few 'movements, forces, and wheels as possible,' therefore the 'intermediate powers,' if they were too elaborate, might multiply and complicate these movements. The intermediate structures of the Russian monarchy must remain simple. Any innovation that unnecessarily complicated the flow of the monarch's power beyond what was required for the production of liberty could be cast, according to Catherine's criteria, as illegitimate.

Adopting the idea of intermediary powers, the *Nakaz* detailed their unique characteristics in Russia. In contrast to Montesquieu, for whom the noble estate, together with its corporate freedoms and privileges, constituted the main intermediary power, the *Nakaz* spoke of the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 73.

¹⁶¹ My translation. Catherine's original French reads: [Article 18:] Les pouvoirs intermédiaires, subordonnés et dépendans constituent la nature du gouvernement. [Article 19:] J'ai dit: les pouvoirs intermédiaires, subordonnés et dépendans: en effet, le Souverain est la source de tout pouvoir politique et civil. [Article 20:] Des Loix fondamentales d'un Etat supposent nécessairement des canaux môiens, c'est à dire des Tribunaux, par où se communique la puissance souveraine." Catherine II, *The Nakaz of Catherine the Great*, 115.

governmental organs of the Russian state.¹⁶² This stance underlined the dependence of the nobility on the state. At the same time, by asserting that power would flow through intermediary bodies, the *Nakaz* highlighted that they would be involved in the exercise of power and that they should understand this involvement as being critical to the monarchy's sovereignty.

While the *Nakaz* laid out a system of proper sovereignty, it did not lay out a detailed account of how all its component channels of power would be configured. The principal exception to this was its discussion of the Russian Senate, which it proclaimed a critical body. In Chapter 4, Catherine identified the Senate as the “Dépôt des Loix” (Art. 22), another term that she borrowed from Montesquieu. The Senate should form a permanent political body that would communicate and oversee the execution of the existing laws. Following Montesquieu, she stated that the Senate had the responsibility of reviewing legislative bills originating from the monarch and “examin[ing]” them, determining how they might be executed, and whether they contained any potential defects (Art. 24). If the Senate deemed that new laws were “unconstitutional,”¹⁶³ or if they were either “obscure” or “impossible to be carried into Execution,” it was expected to “remonstrate” (Fr: *représentation*) to the monarch (Arts 21 & 24). If, however, “[it found] nothing in them of that Nature,” the Senate “entered them in the Code of Laws” and “published them to the whole Body of the People” (Art. 25).¹⁶⁴ Although the Senate was the principal body in this process, Catherine stated in Article 27 that subordinate intermediary bodies also had the right and the duty to scrutinize legislation and to make representations, either to the Senate or even to the monarch directly. The *Nakaz* left the precise nature of this process obscure, but a possible justification for this may have been that these subordinate bodies, which were tasked with carrying out particular decrees, might identify difficulties unforeseen by the Senate, thereby adding a further safeguard to the legislative procedure. Here Catherine likely had in mind the Russian Colleges, which were divided according to area of government activity and possessed specialized knowledge.¹⁶⁵ In another point of contrast, remonstrations were not public formalities, unlike French *parlements*, which Montesquieu had in mind, but procedures internal to the apparatus of the state.¹⁶⁶ Perhaps this vagueness was the outcome of the specific way in which Catherine defined these bodies. It might also have been a deliberate attempt to maintain the infallibility of the monarch's commands once, at the end of this process, they were officially promulgated.

By highlighting intermediary bodies, the *Nakaz* admitted that for the monarch to govern well, she could not govern entirely by herself. In sum, they fulfilled three roles. Firstly, they added a dialogical component to legislative commands that helped refine their content, ensuring that they were both implementable and appropriate. Secondly, they were a mechanism by which the monarch's will, once finalized, could in fact be accurately executed. Thirdly, since these bodies operated on a procedural basis, the implementation of commands would become orderly and regularized. All three of these points were crucial for the production of liberty, as defined by Catherine. She made this point explicitly in Articles 98-99, where she identified the Senate, the

¹⁶² As discussed by Isabel de Madariaga, especially in, “Catherine II and Montesquieu between Prince M. M. Shcherbatov and Denis Diderot,” in *Politics and Culture*, 235-62.

¹⁶³ Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions*, 73.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶⁵ The Russian edition indicates “government bodies” (*pravitel'stva*), while the French text indicates “other law courts” (autres Cours de Justice), which were in the eighteenth century located within the framework of the various Colleges. Notably, in article 99, the French “un Sénat, avec des Chambres et des Tribunaux Subalternes” (a Senate, with its chambers and subordinate courts) is rendered as “Senat, kollegii i nizhnie pravitel'stva,” (a Senate, Colleges, and lower [government institutions]).

¹⁶⁶ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 153.

Colleges, and lower courts as guarantors of the “liberty and security of citizens.”¹⁶⁷ Hence, these intermediary bodies directly served to legitimate the functioning of state power. Building on her Ascension Manifesto (Chapter 1), Catherine also pointed to the wisdom of Peter the Great in having created them (Art. 99), thereby again identifying him as the founder of modern sovereignty in Russia.

Further, the *Nakaz* claimed that sovereign power must see the monarch uphold a strict division between the legislative, which ought to remain the exclusive domain of the monarch, and the executive branches. Catherine was adamant that the monarch should not personally administer the law, but must rely on an independent system of judges and courts (Art. 149), who would carry out judgments in the monarch’s name in accordance with laws as they formally decreed. Involvement by the monarch in judicial decisions could only be a matter of last resort, issuing decisions in individual cases to which there was no possibility of appeal. Any extemporaneous decisions by the monarch necessarily constituted immediate changes to the law; but, as the *Nakaz* had already made clear in Chapters 3 and 4, the procedure for making new laws in Russia involved specific institutions and protocols. Ordinarily, therefore, monarchical intervention in judicial cases was a violation of ordered power, which existed for the sake of good government. In addition, such interference constituted an unexpected outcome, contravening the order that was to produce “Peace of Mind,” and this alone would make it illegitimate. As with the formulation of the monarch’s will, the administration of justice must involve clear procedures and protocols. Catherine accepted that the “Formalities of the Law” were complicated, and that they frequently caused expense and delay. Yet, she insisted that their existence was a necessary consequence of the government’s Christian duty to protect the liberty and security of citizens. In her words, they were the “Price, which every Citizen pa[id] for his Liberty” (Art. 112).¹⁶⁸ In contrast, justice without formalities was associated with despotic power. Following Montesquieu, Catherine referenced the Turkish sultan who supposedly personally presided over judicial cases and meted out punishments according to his caprice (Art. 113). Although the exercise of power in such fashion might end dispute, it did not satisfy the Christian imperative to maximize the good, which she proclaimed as the fundamental principle of the Russian state.

The *Nakaz* theorized the monarchy’s power as a complex right that involved underlying norms, and in practice, division and diffusion. This is reflected in one further precept, which is often also considered to be a central tenet of modern theories of sovereignty, namely the separation between the monarch as a private individual and as a person who exercised public power.¹⁶⁹ Catherine made this distinction in the context of a supplementary chapter on expenses, revenues, and state administration, distinguishing between the royal estate and the property of the ruler as a private person or landlord. In Article 625, for instance, she noted that the ruler might possess estates as a private landlord in his own right and could dispose of them as he wished. However, those held in the capacity of monarch must not be used according to private interest, but according to the principles of legitimate political power. The monarch’s estate included the right to both revenues of state property and impositions on the property of others (Art. 631). In neither case, however, could the monarch impose burdens that would “*exceed the Measure of [Citizens’] Abilities*” to pay them.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, although the monarch depended on public lands for revenues, without which the state could not effectively function, the *Nakaz* emphasized that the power of the

¹⁶⁷ Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions*, 90.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁶⁹ See footnote 171 below.

¹⁷⁰ Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions*, 217.

monarch was not to be conflated with the private, (economic) power of a *dominus*. This distinction is further supported by Catherine's call to avoid reducing subjects to slaves. Not only would this be detrimental to political liberty, but it would risk turning the state into the household and the sovereign into a master.¹⁷¹

Underlying the *Nakaz*'s discussion of monarchical power was the figure of the despot, a major preoccupation of the political literature of the period. In this debate, Montesquieu was the major authority of the age. Despotism, he argued, was a system of power, not a system of sovereignty,¹⁷² and its defining characteristics were the absence of fundamental laws and the presence of a ruler who "governed alone according to his will and caprice." While the *Nakaz* failed to satisfy all of Montesquieu's concerns (for example, it did not lay out a law of succession),¹⁷³ it

¹⁷¹ For more on the public and official nature of the modern sovereignty, see Martin Loughlin, *The Idea of Public Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 72-98. Blandine Kriegel, *The State and the Rule of Law*, trans. by Marc A. LePain and Jeffrey C. Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 15-32; Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-105. Also, Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 284-302, 349-60. Daniel Lee, "'Office is a Thing Borrowed': Jean Bodin on Offices and Seigneurial Government," *Political Theory*, 41: 3 (2013) 409-40. See Introduction for a detailed discussion of these and other sources.

¹⁷² Charles-Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. A. Cohler, B. C. Miller, and H. S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21. In this passage Montesquieu states that only republics and monarchs, but not despotic states, wield "sovereign power." In other words, despotism constituted a system of power, but was not a system of sovereignty. This distinction is not an accidental feature of this passage, but runs through the entirety of the *Spirit of the Laws*, thus it reflects something critical about Montesquieu's classification. De Jaucourt's entry in the *Encyclopédie*, entitled "Despotism," was heavily influenced by Montesquieu and it adopted the above-mentioned distinction, characterizing despotism as a wielding an "autorité despotique", and limiting sovereignty to monarchies, aristocracies, and democracies. "Despotisme" in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. The University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Autumn 2017 Edition), Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe (eds), <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>. 4: 888. In the *Nakaz* Catherine adopted Montesquieu's taxonomy in order to describe the Russian monarchy. If one consults Chapter 2 in the original French, one immediately sees that Catherine defined the Russian monarchy as 'Souveraineté' (Art. 13), the Russian monarch as a 'Souverain' (Art. 9), and the power that the state possessed as a 'une autorité souveraine' (Art. 10). For a discussion of Montesquieu's despotism as a system of power, see Sharon Krause, "Despotism in *The Spirit of Laws*," in *Montesquieu's Science of Politics: Essays on the Spirit of the Laws*, ed. D. Carrithers, M. Mosher, and P. Rahe (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 231-71.

¹⁷³ Catherine intended to promulgate a clear law of succession when the Legislative Commission had completed its work on a new law code. See Aleksandr Kamenskii, *The Russian Empire in the Eighteenth Century: Searching for a Place in the World*, trans. by David Griffiths (New York: Routledge, 2015), 214-5. Although the *Nakaz* made no specific mention of a law of succession, it laid out the ground upon which one might be designed. Take for instance, Chapter 18, entitled "Of Inheritances." Speaking of the inheritance of private patrimony (*nepodvizhnee nasledie*), she asserted that inheritance required "fixed inviolable law(s)," so that the "right Heir might be easily known," and "no Disputes or Complaints arise about it" (Art. 412). She also noted that the order of inheritance was not defined by the law of nature, but according to "political and civil laws." Although the chapter remained firmly focused on the issue of the property of subjects, there is an implicit suggestion that the transferal of the monarch's power also required some equivalent fundamental law. Catherine worked on a new law of succession, which we know from a number of political blueprints. One of these, written in the late 1760s, asserted that a law of a succession was demanded by the "first article" of the *Nakaz*—the Christian law—, "from which all legislation should flow." History demonstrated that states lacking such a law saw power "falter" leading to the "division of the state" and its invasion or even "complete destruction" by "barbarian hordes." In this connection, she explicitly mentioned the fall of the eastern Roman empire, though Russian readers would undoubtedly have recalled comparable moments in Russia's own history, above all the period of Mongol invasion, and more recently, the Time of Troubles in the seventeenth century. The document proposed a new law, entitled "the Imperial Statue of Catherine II," whereby the throne would pass to the monarch's oldest son, beginning upon her death with the succession of her son, Paul. Interestingly, she rejected regency, saying

addressed the threat of despotism in Russia by seeking to rectify the proper exercise of power by a sitting monarch. The text addressed this problem by asserting that the exercise of power be a complex operation that involved the monarch in close coordination with her servitors. Catherine believed that this view of power would be recognized by the Enlightenment *philosophes*, as well as the Russian elites, as a legitimate system of sovereignty. It stood in stark contrast to the rule of the despot, embodied most forcibly in the person of Peter III, who had exercised power alone and in whatever manner he had found fit.

5. Managing the Legislative Commission

Although law-making will be treated at great length in the following chapter, it would be remiss not to mention here the Legislative Commission of 1767, for it was the primary target of the empress' *Nakaz*. Critically, the Legislative Commission showcased the system of diffused power that Catherine laid out in this text. Furthermore, the *Nakaz* directed the operations of the commission, highlighting the managerial role that the monarch was to play in this new system.

When Catherine decided to move forward with her project to produce a new law code, she made no claim to original discovery, but presented it as a culmination of a project once initiated by Peter the Great at the start of the century. In her *ukaz* to the Senate from December 14, 1766, she wrote, “[Peter] himself had noticed the insufficiencies and discrepancies of laws; and already in 1700 it was decreed that the *Ulozhenie* be done again.” After Peter’s death, “in various years..., particularly during the reign of Our Dearest Aunt Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, effort was made to correct the civil laws.”¹⁷⁴ For this purpose, Elizabeth had set up a special codification commission alongside thirty-five sub-commissions in 1754. Manned by high-ranking servitors, this commission produced draft codes of civil and criminal law as well as a charter on the status of subjects. The latter project sought to clarify a society of estates, although it was largely focused on the privileges of the nobility, which arguably reflected the social composition of its framers. However, none of these drafts were ever passed into law, possibly because of the outbreak of the Seven Years War, but also possibly Elizabeth began to devote less and less time to governmental affairs – a fact of which Catherine would have been very much aware.¹⁷⁵

Catherine, too, favored the use of a special commission and modeled her own codification effort at least in part on previous attempts. However, in contrast to the numerous small, private,

that in the case of the son’s minority, the mother would be “crowned.” However, the text abruptly stopped thereafter and it was never promulgated in any form. See *Russkaia starina*, 12 (1875), 384-5. In the late 1780s, Catherine worked on a further piece of legislation aimed at reforming the Senate, which included a section about succession. There she seemed to reaffirm Peter the Great’s policy, stating that the “autocratic and legislative power of the Imperial Majesty designates the heir to the throne.” See her “*Nakaz senatu*,” in [Catherine II], *Ekaterina II: izbrannoe*, ed. G. O. Babkova (Moscow: Rosspen, 2010), 620. We know from her writings to her secretary, Aleksandr Khrapovitsky, that she had during this time been reading Feofan Prokovich’s *Pravda voli monarshei*—the justification text for Peter’s law—and this may have prompted her to change her mind. However, in the manifesto, she ascribed to the Senate an important role in facilitating this process, and even gave it the right to choose an heir in the case that the monarch had failed to do so. This suggested that the law of 1722 needed to be better thought out, but that it could be an appropriate structure of sovereignty in Russia – a sharp divergence from Montesquieu’s philosophy. Nonetheless, this, too, remained unpublished, leaving Peter’s law in its original form and the question of the empress’ own successor still unclear. See Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 307. Overall, given Catherine’s emphasis on predictability and security as governmental priorities, one would have expected her to resolve the issue of succession definitively, yet she hesitated. This was arguably a signal inconsistency.

¹⁷⁴ PSZ, no. 12,801. The Sobornoe Ulozhenie was the great law code of 1649, drafted under tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1645-1676) by the Zemsky Sobor, a representative body drawn from the feudal estates.

¹⁷⁵ See the discussion in Kamenskii, *The Russian Empire in the Eighteenth Century*, 186-8.

and exclusively noble-run committees that had been commissioned at various moments, she favored a large, national body composed of deputies elected from various estates of the empire. These, she envisioned, would play a major role in preparing the new law code. It has been suggested that the Legislative Commission's convocation might best be seen as a strategic political move aimed at achieving a "public and resounding endorsement of the legitimacy of her rule."¹⁷⁶ This might be partially true, but the need for a national body was also dictated by Catherine's belief that legislation needed to take into account local particularities, as Montesquieu famously advocated.¹⁷⁷ Expressions of provincial needs were to take the form of instructions (also '*nakazy*') produced by inhabitants in the localities, which would be transported to the Legislative Commission by their respective deputies.

Deputies for her Commission were determined by local elections, ensuring that only the most sensible, well-informed, and upright individuals would qualify to participate. Their number was determined by territorial units and favored the election of noblemen, who were overrepresented in the resultant assembly. Nobles selected a single deputy for each district or *uezd*. In contrast, categories such as *odnodvortsy* (free peasant farmers) and state peasants were permitted a single deputy for each province, a much larger unit. Important government institutions—the Senate, the Holy Synod (which represented the clerical estate), the imperial Colleges, and select chanceries—each sent a single deputy, who were also noblemen. In its final composition, the Commission consisted of 564 deputies, of which the most populous categories were nobles (205) and merchants (167), whereas only 29 were peasants.¹⁷⁸

Catherine sought to bind these deputies to their task in two ways. Firstly, she granted the deputies a number of privileges, including: a salary; immunity from capital and corporal punishment, and torture; the protection of their property from confiscation; and badges signaling their special status, which could be worn for the duration of their life, and in the case of noble families, could be added to their family heraldry.¹⁷⁹ The bestowal of rewards suggest she was influenced by Montesquieu's idea that harnessing personal interest through a carefully constructed system of honor was a reliable method of directing individuals to useful activity and one that was excellently suited to monarchy.¹⁸⁰ At the same time, she wanted to instill a new sense of duty in civil service. The deputies were sworn into their new positions in a grand ceremony in Moscow. Catherine first directed them to the Uspensky Cathedral where they took a special oath that reflected the importance of their station. In the oath the deputies pledged to the empress their "unflagging faithfulness" and promised to complete the work of the commission according to the rules that she had laid out. They also vowed not to be misled by "personal gain, friendships, feuds, and hateful grudges," but to be guided by "love for their country and fellow citizens." Upon taking the oath, the deputies were summoned to the palace where the empress gave them her "approbation" and then "presented them with the *Nakaz*," which they were now qualified to receive.¹⁸¹

The *Nakaz* was a critical element that Catherine hoped would allow the Legislative Commission to succeed. Therefore, it was also a sort of indictment of previous monarchs, who had failed to manage their codification commissions and their servitors properly. The empress

¹⁷⁶ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 162.

¹⁷⁷ This view is explained at greater length below.

¹⁷⁸ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 150.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁸⁰ See chapter 3.7 in Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 27.

¹⁸¹ *PSZ*, no. 12,948.

trumpeted the uniqueness of the text, noting that while previous instructions “remained without the desired success,” the *Nakaz* would “introduce unity into the principles and into the deliberations” of the Legislation Commission, “unmatched by anything that had come before.” In the empress’ mind then, it contained a system or a philosophy for the correct constitution of Russia’s laws. Once the deputies had internalized this philosophy, becoming enlightened, they would understand how to go about their legislative task in the proper way; as she herself put it in her memoir, they would “begin to judge colors by their proper colors and not as a bunch of blind men.”¹⁸²

As with other sections, the legal philosophy of the *Nakaz* was greatly influenced by Montesquieu, in particular his notion that legislation must take into account the ‘spirit of the laws’ of a particular setting. This ‘spirit’ comprised a constellation of empirical factors: customs, manners, religions, as well as the ‘natural state’—the geography and climate—of the country. While the mandate of the Legislative Commission was to further explore what these factors might be in various localities, the *Nakaz* anticipated their task by setting out what Catherine held to be key elements of Russia’s ‘natural state,’ which was defined by its Christianity, geographical position, and history. While Article 1 proclaimed Russia’s Christian mores, Article 6 famously stipulated that by nature Russia was a “European State,” and that it required according laws and political forms. In Article 7, she pointed to the difficulty which this project had been realized in Russian history, noting that Russia’s manners and customs had been corrupted by foreign conquests – a possible reference to the country’s subjection to Mongol rule between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, she credited Peter the Great with beginning again the process of reintroducing European mores, citing the ease with which he was able to do so as evidence of her correct assessment of Russia’s natural state. In contrast to Montesquieu, who had used Peter to highlight despotic political practices, Catherine identified him here as the founder of a new form of sovereignty that not only involved an apparatus of servitors, but also a consensual approach to rule, rooted in shared beliefs.

This new system of sovereignty was put on grand display by the empress’ Legislative Commission. The monarch would formulate a new code of laws with the aid of a body of servitors that operated according to proper principles of legislation. Such an arrangement necessitated a new managerial role for the monarch. In the case of the Legislative Commission, the empress conducted this managerial activity by means of a philosophical text, the *Nakaz*, which laid out the nature of the monarchy’s sovereignty and stated clearly the meta-principles of Russian laws. To ensure the Commission’s smooth operation, the empress ordered that the *Nakaz* be integrated into its day-to-day operation. The deputies were obliged to keep a copy of the text on their working table and refer to it during their work. Furthermore, drafts of completed laws would be checked by the Commission’s Directional Committee to ensure that they were “compatible” with its precepts. Lastly, in their final iteration, all the articles drafted by the Commission were to begin with reference to the chapter and article of the *Nakaz* to which they conformed. Once this work was complete, the code would be sent to the Senate for approval, and then finally to the empress for confirmation.¹⁸³ Though the task was never completed, the process envisioned underscored Catherine’s ambition to rule by regular and predictable procedures, with power diffused across multiple institutions.

¹⁸² Catherine II, “Razkaz imperatritsy Ekateriny II-I o pervykh piati godakh ee tsarstvovaniia,” *Russkii arkhiv*, 1865, 479.

¹⁸³ *PSZ*, no. 12,948.

Conclusion:

The subject of this chapter has been the empress' Grand Instruction, the *Nakaz*. The chapter argued that this tract was philosophically significant because it articulated a substantial theory of political power that is best understood in terms of modern notions of sovereignty. In developing this theory, Catherine was greatly influenced by Montesquieu. Yet, she also made her own modifications. One argument for the originality of her specific formulation is that she conceptualized intermediary powers as specifically official, bureaucratic channels. Moreover, the empress framed the existence of intermediary bodies as a dictate of Christian law, both in deference to God's will, and because the Christian faith was the religion of the majority of Russia's population. Therefore, Russian sovereignty continued to be framed as religious. Nonetheless, the form of this order had less in common with specific scriptural dictates than with contemporary ideas of how the natural world operated, that is through regular, predictable movements based on divinely-ordained laws.

In contrast to the predominant focus of existing scholarship, this chapter has gone beyond reconstructing a philosophical scheme for power. It has argued that both the *Nakaz* and the philosophy that it espoused was itself a strategy of governing the monarch's servitors. In this respect, sovereignty in practice was the result of system management. This practical requirement was also ultimately dictated by the abstract view of sovereignty that the empress wanted the Russian elite to internalize through these strategies, namely that the exercise of sovereignty's prerogatives was a collaborative enterprise in which they were implicated.

The *Nakaz* distinguished Catherine from her deceased husband, Peter III, and not only because he wrote no comparable document. He had failed to properly manage his relationship with the throne's servitors. In Catherine's estimation, this was because he lacked self-control and prudence, but also because he entertained incorrect and despotic ideas about his powers. Effective sovereignty was more than commanding or making one's will known in whatever manner one saw fit; it was a complex psychological construct that demanded the careful and continuous attention of the monarch. It involved ways of binding political actors to a certain way of doing things: this entailed servitors' awareness of self-interest and appeals to duty, but it also involved a reasoned understanding of the order of power.

Chapter 3: Sovereignty and the Art of Command-Giving

1. Introduction

Catherine understood the practice of making decisions and issuing official commands, both particular resolutions as well as law, as an art through which she could attain sovereignty. This chapter contends that Catherine's method of rule was motivated by specific ideas about how command—central to the notion of sovereignty and governance more generally—should be organized and carried out. To bring order to this activity was integral to her strategy of transforming the eighteenth-century Russian monarch into a sovereign ruler.

Early modern theories of sovereignty accentuated the ruler's right to issue commands, but the empress approached this activity as more than a matter of merely issuing her own will. Commanding in such a manner was to play the despot according to contemporary Enlightenment literature. The sovereign monarch conducted command as part of an arrangement or mechanism that involved the state's servitors. This challenge was difficult and fraught with dangers: the prior history of Russia in the eighteenth century had shown that granting others too much involvement in the exercise of the monarch's prerogatives could cause major contention, for it threatened the unity of autocratic rule. Yet, careful management and engagement of this mechanism could improve the regularity and dependability of government, strengthen the authority of commands, and ultimately augment the monarch's overall status in a way that enhanced sovereignty itself.

The empress made sure that she remained directly involved in the major reforms of her reign. True, a large number of commands were formulated and composed by servitors on her behalf, only to be briefly inspected and signed off by her. Her aides also edited and put all of her commands into final official form before making sure that they were disseminated through the proper institutional channels. Critical in this regard was her team of secretaries, which she greatly expanded during her reign. Only by closely managing her servitors did the empress think she could exercise the full extent of her prerogatives in a regular and ordered fashion. Working by herself, she could achieve a mere parochial and incomplete force – the realm of mere power, but not sovereignty. To operate this mechanism most effectively, the empress relied on legal structures, which governed the work of the Colleges and the Senate. She even imposed a regimented structure on her all-important secretaries. But law was only one form of management that she employed. The apparatus of sovereignty required the monarch to develop and maintain working relationships with her servitors, and to assert herself by making regular, final inputs.

2. Sovereignty, Command, and the Empress' Theory of Legislation

Catherine's notion of sovereignty sought to strengthen and widen the sphere of activity of secular authority. Whereas medieval rulers of Central and Western Europe were often checked by a patchwork of jurisdictions and subject to the laws of their kingdom, early modern theorists (and practitioners) of sovereignty advanced claims about the supreme status of royal power and emphasized the ruler's unlimited right to command.¹⁸⁴ In Jean Bodin's *Six Bookes of the Commonweale* (1576), we see sovereignty defined in precisely these terms. Bodin noted that the right to command was a complex right, comprising a number of prerogatives: appointing and dismissing officers of the state; making war and peace; hearing final appeals; and deciding on the value and weight of coinage. In the first instance, however, to command was the sovereign's power

¹⁸⁴ Tamar Herzog, *A Short History of European Law: The Last Two and a Half Millenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 119-20. For a more detailed discussion of literature on sovereignty, see the Introduction to this dissertation.

to “give laws to all his subjects...without the consent of any other greater, equall, or lesser than himselfe.”¹⁸⁵ At times, Bodin used the term ‘law’ loosely to designate any ‘right command’ of the sovereign. Strictly speaking, however, the “*law [was] a command of a Sovereigne concerning his subjects in generall; or els concerning general things.*”¹⁸⁶ Bodin, like others after him, offered the idea of sovereignty as a rational solution to societal, above all, religious strife. During the Enlightenment, sovereignty—the exercise of supreme and untrammelled power, considered to be legitimate—was further seen as a potential tool for rational management and societal development, predicated on the *philosophes*’ heightened confidence in humans’ capacity to understand and harness nature. Rulers were gratified by sovereignty’s promise to magnify their status, yet implementing sovereignty was a practical challenge: it required them to take on work, that is to say to govern—to command—in a way that was commensurate in scope and vigor with the supremacy that they wished to claim.

Peter the Great was the first of Russia’s rulers to embody these new ideas about power and law in the Russian context. Peter asserted himself as an unlimited and active monarch, grounding new political institutions and issuing commands that often went against national customs and traditions as well as the Orthodox Church. Although his laws sometimes seem haphazard and erratic, it has been suggested that Peter sought to put into practice German ‘cameralist’ theories of governance. By issuing various ordinances, the monarch sought to establish a ‘well-ordered state’ that could harness in regular fashion the resources of society and nature and direct them towards the ‘common good.’¹⁸⁷ According to Richard Wortman, Peter’s idea of the active legislator subordinated an older notion of the tsar as the “righteous judge” and defender of divine justice.¹⁸⁸ Henceforth, the monarch’s command, understood as “an exercise of personal will,” would “itself define the divine principle of *pravda*, justice, which could not stand apart from his person, or his utterances.”¹⁸⁹ Peter also developed a system of written commands to transmit his will.¹⁹⁰ These included *reglamenti* (regulations), *ustavy* (articles), *nastavleniia* (admonitions), *nakazy* (instructions), [*zhalovannyye*] *gramoty* (certificates or patents), and *manifesty* (manifestos). Then and later, manifestos designated official declarations on matters of the utmost importance, such as the ascension of a new ruler to the throne, declarations of war and peace, and, famously, in the nineteenth century, the abolition of serfdom. The most common type of command, however, was the *ukaz*, often translated as decree or edict. *Ukazy* were issued by the monarch—*immenyi* or *vysochaishii ukaz*—, but they could also be issued by political institutions, notably the Senate. For the most part, *ukazy* contained particular commands and resolutions on important matters and were commonly used for governmental business. Despite the variety of these proclamations, Peter

¹⁸⁵ Jean Bodin, *The Six Bookes of a Commonweale*, trans. by Richard Knolles (1606), ed. Kenneth D. McRae (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 159.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁸⁷ Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State and Institutional Change Through Law in Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 25-55. In the Russian-language historiography, see B. I. Syromiatnikov, ‘*Regularnoe*’ *gosudarstvo Petra pervogo i ego ideologiya. Chast’ pervaiia* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1943).

¹⁸⁸ Richard Wortman, *The Power of Language and Rhetoric in Russian Political History: Charismatic Words from the 18th to the 21st Centuries* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2017), 134-5.

¹⁸⁹ M. A. Kiselev, “*Pravda i zakon vo vtoroi polovine XVII – pervoi chetverti XVIII veka*” in *Poniatiia o Rossii*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), quoted in Wortman, *The Power of Language*, 134-5.

¹⁹⁰ See Oleg A. Omel’chenko, *Kodifikatsiia prava v Rossii v period absolutnoi monarkhii (vtoraia polovina XVIII veka)* (Moscow: PUB, 1989) 4-6. Also, Elena Marasina, “*Zakon*” i “*grazhdanin*” v *Rossii vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka: ocherki istorii obshchestvennogo soznaniia* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017) 207-11.

observed no clear hierarchy of command forms, nor did he follow a distinct template for what might strictly be called ‘law’ (*zakon*).¹⁹¹ Each of the above command forms had the potential to convey normative matter of varying degrees of significance. By contrast, Catherine emphatically believed that commands should be arranged hierarchically according to their level of generality and permanence, from particular *ukazy*, ranking lowest, to laws or *zakony*, ranking highest.¹⁹² Laws, delineated as a particular category of command, were particularly important to her and she believed that she must be especially vigilant in personally overseeing these.

According to the nineteenth-century Russian law digest, which contains many but not all pieces of legislation, 5,798 directives were produced by the empress and governmental bodies over the course of her thirty-four-year reign.¹⁹³ Heir to early modern ideas of sovereignty, she was influenced by the Enlightenment’s call for monarchs to use their powers to activate society’s untapped potential and to improve the morals of the population. She undertook the task of codifying Russia’s laws in addition to reform projects in the political, economic, and social life of the country. References to her law-making agenda in French Enlightenment writings, by Voltaire and also in the *Encyclopédie*, show that she became a central figure in the eighteenth century’s ‘cult of the legislator.’ Her image as a great law-giver—in Russia of all places—was used by the *philosophes* to encourage, partly by embarrassing it, the French monarchy into undertaking its own legislative agenda. In France, as David Wisner has argued, the appearance of this ‘cult of the legislator’ gained momentum mid-century during a period of growing struggle between the French monarchy and the *parlements*.¹⁹⁴ Catherine had no small role to play in propagating her reputation as the Enlightened legislator, and it was central to her scenario of power to a much greater extent than any of her predecessors.¹⁹⁵ Admittedly, she was not the only one of Peter’s successors to adopt the new understanding of the monarch as an active legislator. Notably, Elizabeth had undertaken a major (if failed) codification effort. Yet, Catherine wanted to be seen as Peter’s principal follower in taking up this role, and she was quite successful in convincing others this was the case.

Enlightenment *philosophes* saw in sovereignty a tool that could bring all parts of society under one a single authority that would govern them in a comprehensive, stable, and orderly manner, by issuing commands, especially laws. In this connection, sovereignty might realize the dream of early modern natural law, whereby people would be governed by laws that derived from

¹⁹¹ Nikolai Korkunov, *Ukaz i zakon* (St. Petersburg: M.M. Stasiulevich, 1894), 309.

¹⁹² Catherine did not equate all utterances of the monarch with law (*zakon*), but thought of it in terms of a hierarchy of legislative devices arranged according to their permanence and strength. In Chapter 19 of the *Nakaz*, she explained that, strictly speaking, “The whole Body of Laws was to be divided into three Parts.” At the bottom of the hierarchy were ‘injunctions’ or *ukazy*. These implied “whatever [was] made upon some Emergency, and what is only occasional, or relate[d] to some particular Person, and may be altered at any Time” (Art. 446). Above injunctions she placed ‘temporary institutions’ (*vremennye uchrezhdeniia*). These referred to “that Order by which all Affairs are to be carried into Execution, and the different Instructions and Institutions which relate to them” (Art. 445). At the top were laws (*zakony*). These were all ‘fundamental Institutions, which ought never to be altered, and the Number of such can never be large’ (Art. 444).

¹⁹³ Aleksandr Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I do Pavla I* (Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2001), 330.

¹⁹⁴ David A. Wisner, *The Cult of the Legislator in France, 1750-1830: A Study in the Political Theology of the French Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1997), especially 39-63.

¹⁹⁵ Richard Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25; also, Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 110-47.

the commonalities in human nature.¹⁹⁶ In Catherine's estimation, Russia was the ideal site to test this proposition, precisely because of its vast size and diverse population. At the same time, the *philosophes* were critical of contemporary secular authority, which failed to properly understand and complete the project of sovereignty.¹⁹⁷ The figure of the despot in their writings bear this out. The despot erroneously believed that sovereignty entailed that they could act as they wished, and they exercised their purported prerogatives either by themselves or via a rudimentary mechanism that did nothing to bolster their commands or magnify their status. Whether or not they deliberately governed in their personal interest (rather than the common good), the failure to establish proper arrangements of command-giving resulted in arbitrary legislation that violated natural law, common sense, and local customs and traditions.¹⁹⁸ Such rulers might impose laws and cow their subjects, but they could not govern the latter in a way that was commensurate with the ideal of sovereignty.

Montesquieu famously singled out Peter the Great as a figure who displayed such despotic tendencies in his actions, and it is possible that Catherine shared his critical assessment of him (see below). However, a more clear-cut Russian example was Catherine's deceased husband, Peter III, whom she accused of violating proper procedures for formulating and issuing commands, and, more generally, of believing that his station gave him the right to do whatever he wished. Even the empress' critics agreed with her on this point. Mikhail Shcherbatov, for example, tells the story that Peter, needing an alibi for spending the night with his mistress, had his secretary, Count Volkov, locked up in an empty room and instructed him, without any specific guidance, to produce a major piece of legislation for the very next day. When Volkov was released the following morning, he gave the emperor the law that he had produced (the manifesto on the emancipation of the nobility!), and the latter approved it immediately and ordered it to be promulgated.¹⁹⁹ This episode was meant to represent the 'corruption of morals' that had inflicted the Russian state and its rulers over the course of the eighteenth century.

Heeding the warnings of *philosophes*, Catherine believed that law was a crucial tool of government and enlightenment, while law-making was an activity that was intimately connected with the status of public authority and that was fraught with a myriad of dangers and limitations that could easily lead to negative outcomes. Amongst these were confusion, the paralysis of the state's institutions, and even widespread disobedience and rebellion. To make good laws, the

¹⁹⁶ For an overview of the continued importance of natural law in the eighteenth century, see Knud Haakonssen, "German Natural Law," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, M. Goldie, and R. Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 249-90.

¹⁹⁷ Especially relevant here is Vickie Sullivan, *Montesquieu and the Despotic Ideas of Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Voltaire's entry "Lois" in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764). It is likely that Catherine, an avid reader of (and correspondent with) Voltaire, would have been familiar with this text. For more on the science of legislation in the eighteenth century, see: Knud Haakonssen: *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Donald Wince, "Science and the Legislator: Adam Smith and After," *The Economic Journal*, 94: 371 (September 1983), 501-20; David Lieberman, "Blackstone's Science of Legislation," *Journal of British Studies*, 27: 2 (April 1988), 117-49; John W. Cairns "Ethics and the Science of Legislation: Legislators, Philosophers, and Courts in Eighteenth-Scotland," *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik*, 8 (2000), 159-80. Ryan P. Hanley, "Enlightened Nation Building: The "Science of the Legislator" in Adam Smith and Rousseau," *American Journal of Political Science*, 52: 2 (April 2008), 218-34. For a more general overview, see the entry, "Law," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*, ed. John W. Yolton, Roy Porter, Pat Rogers, and Barbara Maria Stafford (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 275-7.

¹⁹⁹ Mikhail Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia*, ed. and trans. by Antony Lentin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 229-32.

monarch needed to ensure that legislation was appropriate and authoritative – a complicated undertaking. In the empress’ words, there was “no matter fraught with more difficulty than the compilation of a new law,” and “it was impossible to apply enough deliberation and prudence [to this task].²⁰⁰ Deliberation meant in part allowing individuals other than the monarch to participate in this process. Not only would this present the monarch with more information for determining the content of the law, but subjects would know in advance that a new law was being prepared and reassure them that they had to some degree been consulted and allowed to have their say. That every legislative act was a trial of authority we see from the following self-summary of Catherine’s legislative philosophy, which comes from an exchange with state-secretary Vasili Popov:

I investigate the circumstances, ask for advice, elicit the opinions of the enlightened segment of society, and, on this basis, determine, what in advance I can be confident will receive general approval. Then I issue my command (*povelenie*) and enjoy what you call blind obedience. This, precisely, is the foundation of unlimited power. But know well, that people do not blindly obey when your command is not adjusted to customs, public opinion, and when, in issuing my command, I have simply followed my own will, not thinking about its effects.²⁰¹

This statement is highly detailed and very significant. Amongst other things, Catherine explicitly tied the status of the monarch’s authority to the extent to which others are consulted in some capacity. To involve others and even to delegate—a form of restraint on the part of the monarch—helped ensure that commands, when they were issued, were likely to meet with approval and hence be obeyed.

Admittedly, Russia’s noble elites—the country’s ‘enlightened opinion’—were disproportionately involved in this process. This reflected an aristocratic mindset, but also perhaps a belief in the utility of collegial thinking—represented above all in the Senate and the Colleges—which asserted that the common good could be achieved through the deliberation of small groups of elites in dialogue with the monarch.²⁰² Nonetheless, she conceded that the monarch must consult popular as well as elite opinion. The Legislative Commission notably included amongst its 564 deputies, 208 townsmen, 54 Cossacks, 79 peasants, and 34 representatives from non-Orthodox groups. In further guidelines to law-making she also contemplated a slightly different strategy of consultation, noting that in order “to find out about the good and bad side of what one wanted to enact,” it might be prudent to first have a “rumor spread about it in the marketplace” and then to have someone report back on “what people ha[d] to say about it.”²⁰³

However, once laws had been made, it was advisable not to annul them, for that “demonstrated a lack of common sense (*nerassuditel’nost’*) and weakness, and would cause one to “lose the trust of the people,” presumably as much as would a bad law. Catherine noted that the only exception to this rule concerned the promulgation of ‘temporary regulations.’ Here, important precautions were to be taken: these measures must be declared as such in advance, specifying how

²⁰⁰ Catherine II, *Zapiski imperatritsy Ekateriny vtoroi* (St. Petersburg: A. S. Suvorin, 1907), 629.

²⁰¹ N. K. Shil’der, *Imperator Aleksandr pervyi*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1904), 279-80, quoted in Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I*, 347-8.

²⁰² For an account on collective decision-making and Peter I’s reforms, see Simon Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia, 1696-1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 128-9.

²⁰³ Catherine II, *Zapiski*, 629.

long they would be in force and whether and when they might be renewed.”²⁰⁴ Again, to do otherwise would threaten to undermine the government’s regular and predictable operation.

Aligning herself with Montesquieu, Catherine believed that laws must accord with circumstances.²⁰⁵ In her *Nakaz* she stressed that the legislator must make laws that were “appropriate for the people for whom they were made,” citing the importance of particularities like climate, way of life, religion, wealth, demographics, commerce, mores and manners. The legislator therefore needed to be well informed. Everywhere, the emphasis on empirical knowledge of domain and people brought the limitations of a single agent into stark relief.²⁰⁶ But in larger states, the ruler’s knowledge-deficit and the difficulty of overcoming it alone were much greater. This deficit further necessitated prudent arrangements and practices that would help the monarch to formulate reasonable commands.

One area where the legislator must exercise special caution pertained to the relationship between law and custom. This was by no means a trivial matter. Peter the Great had brought this issue to the fore through his westernization campaign at the beginning of the eighteenth century, using laws to forcibly change Russian mores and manners. Catherine, who presented herself as continuing Peter’s legacy, was also a westernizer, yet she understood the pitfalls this might create. As she was aware, Montesquieu had treated this problem in Chapter 14, Book 19 of *The Spirit of the Laws*, entitled “On the natural Means of changing the Manners and Customs of a Nation,” where he referred to Peter’s decision to oblige the Muscovites to cut off their beards and shorten their clothes. This, he believed, was an example of the intrusion of despotic ideas into European political culture. In particular, he criticized Peter’s legislation for the rigor and violent penalties he employed in enforcing it, undermining his subjects’ “sense of liberty” and “render[ing] them unhappy.” Indeed, Montesquieu went so far as to suggest that Peter ruled his subjects as if they were “beasts” not men.²⁰⁷ Catherine was very interested in this chapter and drew upon it at least five times in the *Nakaz*.²⁰⁸ Without emphasizing it as a point of disagreement with Peter, whom she did not mention, she proclaimed that laws could correct only what had been instituted by laws, while customs must be corrected by custom. To do otherwise, to “alter by Law, which ought to be altered by Custom...[was] extreme bad Policy.” (Art. 60).²⁰⁹ Cultural and moral influence might equally be necessary in paving the way for better laws, “to prepare the Minds of the People for their Reception” (Art. 58).²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 629.

²⁰⁵ Montesquieu’s philosophy of law was anti-voluntarist. In the early chapters of *The Spirit of the Laws*, he argued that laws were the “necessary relations arising from the nature of things” and that not even God could create the world in a purely “arbitrary act” but only on the basis of what was possible. By analogy, the human law-maker was equally limited – by human nature and the possible relations of justice that could exist between them. In this connection, he made a pointed reference to the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, noting that “to say that there was nothing just or unjust, but what was commanded or forbidden by positive laws, is the same as saying that before the describing of a circle all the radii were not equal.” Charles-Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. A. Cohler, B. C. Miller, and H. S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3-4.

²⁰⁶ On the importance of empiricism to the eighteenth-century ideal of ‘philosophical’ kingship, see Derek Beales, *The Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005). For the classic work on the general move away from metaphysics in eighteenth-century philosophy, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

²⁰⁷ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 316.

²⁰⁸ Articles 7, 59, 60, 61 & 63.

²⁰⁹ Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions to the Commissioners Appointed to Frame a New Code of Laws for the Russian Empire*, trans. by Michael Tatischeff (London: T. Jeffery’s, 1768), 81.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 80.

The legislator needed to ensure that laws were not only predictable and aligned with circumstances, but that they also met crucial structural criteria – a task that required many hands. Catherine was greatly preoccupied with this topic in the early years of her reign. As is well known, she began reading Cesare Beccaria’s book, *On Crimes and Punishments*, in French translation in 1766,²¹¹ and in the *Nakaz*, she openly subscribed to many of its ideas about the concept of law and criminal law. In particular legislation needed to be clear, purged of internal and collective contradictions, and publicly promulgated. Without meeting these criteria, the effectiveness of law as a tool of government would be canceled or greatly impaired, and the citizen, as the empress put it, “[would] be exposed to strange Accidents” (Art. 155).²¹²

Catherine invited her deputies of the Legislative Commission to participate in this project, but her instructions were strict. Laws were to be “written in the *common vernacular Tongue*” (Art. 158).²¹³ Moreover, they must use a “*plain direct Expression*” instead of a “*studied one*,” “avoid indeterminate Expression,” and “must not be filled with subtle Distinction” (Arts. 452, 454, 456).²¹⁴ Like her contemporaries, she believed that if law was stated clearly and simply, judges would not have to interpret the law – the exclusive reserve of the monarch (Art. 151).²¹⁵ In addition, laws must be “made for People of *moderate Capacities*, as well as for those of *Genius*” (Art. 452). Composing them was not a “*Logical Art*,” but “the simple and plain Reasoning of a Father, who takes Care of his Children and Family” (Art. 452).²¹⁶ Accordingly, all laws were to be publicly available for common use in the format of a book that could be “purchased at as *small* a Price as the Catechism.” The contents were to be taught in all schools alongside ecclesiastical texts (Art. 158).²¹⁷

In addition to meeting stylistic standards, Catherine set new standards for administering the law, namely in a manner that maintained its autonomy and integrity. The empress was adamant that monarchs observe moral constraints against breaking the law and should not administer the law themselves. Instead, they must rely on an independent system of judges and courts, adhering to Montesquieu’s conception of the division of powers (Arts. 100 & 149). Such a division between the formulation of law and its administration would minimize arbitrary decisions. Catherine saw the judge’s task in straightforward syllogistic terms: the “Duty of a Judge consists only in examining closely, whether a Man has, or has not committed such a Fact, contrary to the Law” (Art. 151).²¹⁸ In the following article, she explained that judgment involved one syllogism consisting of two propositions: it must state the general law, the above-mentioned determination of an action’s legality, followed by a “Conclusion consist[ing] either in the Acquittal, or Punishment of the Party accused” (Art. 152).²¹⁹ Final rulings—commands issued in the monarch’s name—were to contain the exact wording of the law as a further guard against the private opinion of judges (Art. 130). Here we see another instance of the notion that the monarch’s sovereignty, which demanded a demonstration of the normativity and regularity of state operations, was best secured through the involvement of servitors and the delegation of particular tasks and responsibilities to them.

²¹¹ See T. Cizova “Beccaria in Russia,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 40: 95 (June 1962), 389-90

²¹² Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions...*, 105.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 106.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

The machine of sovereignty was not a perfect device. Receiving counsel and expertise, Catherine thought that the role of the monarch was to make, and be seen to make, a decision about the common good, and this inevitably involved a choice in favor of some positions at the expense of others. Nonetheless, sovereign power could hope to see its commands meet with ‘general approval.’ This was an important metric for the empress. Taking power in 1762, she had asserted, for example, that her legitimacy was telegraphed by the public approval she received. Equally, she believed, laws that were appropriate for their setting that were more likely to meet with the same response. Although Catherine continued to assert that her authority was divinely ordained, that is to say it did not depend on the consent of subjects, empirical markers, such as approval and disobedience, became increasingly important as measures of the integrity of the monarch’s sovereign status.²²⁰ Signs of disapproval or open disobedience directly challenged Catherine’s narrative of legitimacy in the 1762 coup, and she understood these more generally to signal inappropriate laws and poor governance. Disapproval, furthermore, necessitated resort to coercion, which further challenged the claim to legitimacy and indicated that the monarch’s power was trammled.

The use of fear as a *modus operandi* to impose commands was the signal characteristic of despotic government. Such a perverted and primitive form of power was incapable of fostering the moral development of subjects (a core mission of sovereignty in the Enlightenment). In fact, just as poor parenting produced bad children, it habituated subjects to vice and accustomed them to violence. Furthermore, lacking moral force, power was unable to generate a sense of right as obedience became a matter of prudence, rather than duty or virtue. In this connection, Catherine believed that the monarch should always seek to harness human aspects of the psyche, such as “love of country” as well as “shame, and the dread of publick Censure,” which, in the *Nakaz*, she contended could be powerful devices to “restrain... and deter Mankind from the Commission of a Number of Crimes” (Art. 81).²²¹

3. The Apparatus of Command

The notion that the monarch’s power ‘flowed’ through official ‘channels’ and institutions of the state was critical to the empress’ understanding of sovereignty (see Chapter 2). Any such apparatus, which entailed the involvement of state servitors, multiplied the number of individuals who participated in the monarch’s power in some capacity. Yet, it was through this expansion of power beyond the monarch’s person that the scope and strength of its authority could be augmented. Such a sovereign, no longer merely a single person, but a larger human machine, would bring about regular and predictable movements. Catherine also envisioned such an apparatus—through the back-and-forth between herself and its agents—as helping to ensure the proper form and content of her commands, as described in the previous section. Catherine had her own views on how this machine was to be designed and maintained.

As noted in Chapter 1, one of her principal allies, Nikita Panin, had put forward a project for an ‘Imperial Council’ at the start of her reign. This Council would comprise between six and eight individuals and process all legislative commands issued by the empress—be they *akty*, *postanovleniya*, *ukazy*, *manifesty*, *gramoty*, *patenty*. Passing through the Council they would be

²²⁰ According to Igor Fedyukin, the prevailing theory at the beginning of the century had stressed that disapproval and disobedience were expected responses to power, reflecting man’s unruly passions that needed to be forcibly suppressed. Fedyukin, “‘An Infinite Variety of Inclinations and Appetites’: Génie and Governance in Post-Petrine Russia.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russia and Eurasian History*. 11: 4 (Fall 2010), 741-62

²²¹ Catherine II, *The Grand Instructions to the Commissioners...*, 85-6.

countersigned by the state secretary of the department concerned. Panin argued that such a body would lay out formal channels for the empress' power, secure from interference of third parties, through which the monarch would be able 'embrace all parts of the state (...) for the common benefit' (Article 6).²²² Although Catherine did not enact this project, she nonetheless remained sympathetic to the idea of conciliary bodies, and she did establish a new council—the *Sovet pri vysochaishem dvore*—in connection with the war against the Ottoman empire in 1767. It operated largely independently of her, meeting on a weekly basis.²²³ From the start of her reign, however Catherine favored existing institutions in formulating and issuing her commands. She made extensive use of a personal chancery and emphasized the importance of the Senate.

One noteworthy feature of the empress' system was its extensive use of written documents. Within the Russian state in the eighteenth century, commands continued to be transmitted verbally, but there was an attempt to curtail this practice in favor of written documents. Under Elizabeth in 1743, for example, the Senate was forbidden to carry out any of its proposals without written decrees signed by the empress.²²⁴ Elizabeth, however, continued to issue verbal commands through her cabinet secretaries, who had the right to announce them on her behalf. Elizabeth's practice of command-giving was remembered by Catherine, who noted that "[the Empress] wrote and signed nothing," but issued verbal commands through third parties. Catherine did not approve of this, pointing out that such commands were an inherently bad medium for managing the state's operations. As a tool of governance, for they were "badly understood," and "badly transferred," and there was a constant danger of their distortion or even manipulation.²²⁵ During her reign, she did not entirely eliminate the legal force of verbal commands. In a decree from July 3, 1762, for example, she confirmed the authority of senators, the general procurator, and the presidents of the first three Colleges (foreign affairs, army, and navy) to convey verbal commands of the monarch, and noted that commands conveyed by authorized individuals demanded "immediate execution" as if they had been given by the empress herself. However, she declared that this authority did not extend to "deprivation of life, honor, and property; determining forms of punishment; issuing of monetary sums valued over 10,000 rubles; or granting of villages or ranks above that of lieutenant-general (*podpolkovnik*)."²²⁶ These prerogatives could only be carried out by a written *ukaz*. Importantly, authorized persons could not convey verbal commands that contravened confirmations and decrees that were written and signed by the monarch, suggesting that these constituted a higher form of command. Furthermore, the Senate was instructed to make "exact copies" of all verbal commands made by the sovereign. These would be presented back to the

²²² *SIRIO*, vol. 7, 209-14.

²²³ Catherine's attendance of the council's sittings is not thoroughly recorded, but the handful of mentions. Following a random sample from the court journal for 1775, it appears patchy. This matter, however, requires further investigation. See for example, the three entries: 1) February 11, 1775, "по утру был Совет, в котором ЕЯ ИМПЕРТАРСКОЕ ВЕЛИЧЕСТВО присутствовать соизволила (*KFZ*, 1775, p. 116); 2) February 19, 1775, "по утру, был Совет, в котором ЕЯ ИМПЕРАТОРСКОЕ ВЕЛИЧЕСТВО быть не соизволила (*KFZ*, 1775, 140); On this third occasion, Catherine appeared only towards the end of a sitting before heading straight to lunch: see February 9, 1775, "по утру был Совет в комнатах, подле комнат дежурных господ Генерал-Адъютантов. Пред полуднем в 12-м часу, соизволила шествовать ЕЯ ИМПЕРАТОРСКОЕ ВЕЛИЧЕСТВО в Совет; по выходе из Совета, обеденное кушанье ЕЯ ВЕЛИЧЕСТВО соизволила кушать в столовой комнате... на 14-ти кувертах. (*KFZ*, 1775, 113-4). The council did not necessarily overlap with the empress' lunch guests. On this day, of her 13 guests, only two had been at the council: Mikhail N. Volkonsky and Grigory Potemkin (her favorite).

²²⁴ *PSZ*, no. 8,695.

²²⁵ Catherine II, *Sochineniia*, ed. O. N. Mihaylov (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1990), 218-9.

²²⁶ *PSZ*, no. 11,592.

monarch on a weekly basis with indication of what had been executed, what not, and for what reason.²²⁷

The empress' decision to uphold the legitimacy of verbal commands suggests that they remained necessary to the functioning of autocracy and were not merely the result of the laziness on the part of the monarch or of state officials.²²⁸ Nonetheless, there was a clear preference for written documents as an attempt to narrow how commands were meant to flow. Measuring the exact extent to which verbal commands were employed in the empress' reign presents a challenging research agenda. However, the problem can be approached from the other end, since we know that the empress' government left an unprecedented written legacy. The documents available range from senatorial reports and personal correspondence between officials to copious instructions and commands written by the empress either personally or by her secretaries. The very scale of these records indicates the centrality of written documents. For Catherine, the act of writing meant larger participation in eighteenth-century intellectual life, but also her self-fashioning as an Enlightenment monarch, as Kelsey Rubin-Detlev has shown in a major recent work.²²⁹ Most importantly, however, written documents represented the empress' attempt to construct sovereignty. Firstly, they helped protect the integrity of communications as they passed down or up the state's channels. Secondly, believed to be able to convey with greater clarity, written commands could prevent disagreement and provide certainty about what actions were required by whom, thus making them an effective tool of management. Often formulaic in nature, they also emphasized the regularity and normativity of the state's power. Where commands were handwritten rather than printed—for example, in the state's internal communications—legible uniform cursive, such as that produced by the empress, could further help manifest orderliness.²³⁰

a. The Empress' Secretaries

From the moment of her ascension to the throne, Catherine began to conduct her activity through, and with the help of, a team of personal secretaries that grew out of the imperial *Kabinet* (see below). Catherine continued to develop her secretarial team, clarifying their procedures and adding to its personnel. The team was a constant feature of her operation, even retaining its importance in the second half of her reign – a period when she supposedly had consolidated her position as Russia's autocratic ruler. This body was not, therefore, a temporary concession born of an initially insecure hold on power, but rather a critical component of her project of bringing order to the state. The significance of her secretariat has not been fully appreciated in Anglophone literature.²³¹ The Russian historiography has given its history greater attention, most recently in the thorough work of Mikhail Pereshkin, who has studied the group's composition, functions, and main periods of development during the empress' reign.²³² However, these works fail to draw strong enough

²²⁷ PSZ, no. 11,590.

²²⁸ For a discussion of Elizabeth's use of verbal commands see M. B. Krichevtsev, *Kabinet Elizavety i Petra III: istoricheskii ocherk o lichnoi kantseliarii monarkhov* (Novosibirsk: Novosibirskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1993), 38-40.

²²⁹ K. Rubin-Detlev, *The Epistolary Art of Catherine the Great* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2019).

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

²³¹ Isabel de Madariaga makes mention of a number of the empress' secretaries at various points in her major work, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), but does not treat them collectively in a separate section. More recently, Kelsey Rubin-Detlev has emphasized the importance of the empress' secretaries in Catherine's correspondence and the composition of her literary works, but does not emphasize their significance with regard to sovereignty.

²³² Mikhail Pereshkin, *Institut stats-sekretarei pri Ekaterine II (1762-1796)* (Ph.D. diss., Rossiiskaia akademiia gosudarstvennoi sluzhby pri prezidente rossiiskoi federatsii. Moscow, 2004). See also L. G. Kisliagina, "Kantseliaria

conclusions about how the empress herself saw the role of her secretaries in her system of sovereign power. For example, Pereshkin's main conclusion is that the empress' secretaries acted as a 'connection' (*sviayz'*) between her and the state's officials.²³³ The contention of this section is that through their regularized and closely coordinated activity on the empress' behalf, they in fact magnified the empress' sovereignty. The notion that the secretariat was intended to extend the monarch's person and routinize its (her) activity leads us to question the conclusion, made elsewhere, that its growth during the empress' reign represented the culmination of Russian absolutism, concentrating all decision-making in the empress' hands.²³⁴ Although Catherine saw herself as the final decision-maker, the body manifested a contrary impulse - to exercise a concentrated power in a delegated fashion.

Conducting one's activities via a personal chancery had precedents in Russian history. Early in his reign, Peter the Great had notably created the *Kabinet* to help conduct personal as well as governmental matters. From 1704, Alexei Makarov served as its first secretary. Peter's *Kabinet* functioned as a node for correspondence with the constellation of institutions that he established – the Colleges, the Senate, the Synod, in addition to Russia's provincial governors. There is evidence that it was also responsible for writing a number of legislative acts.²³⁵ Peter's secretariat fell by the wayside after his death, but was restored by Elizabeth who wanted to return to the institutional arrangements of her father. At least initially, Elizabeth treated it as an important body by seeking to conduct all her affairs through it. Yet, it is questionable to what extent she was committed or had a clear vision of its role. Over the course of her reign, she was seen to increasingly delegate the conduct of her affairs to favorites, drawing the ire of people like Nikita Panin, who, as we have seen, proposed a new device for the transmission of the monarch's commands. Catherine, instead committed herself to conducting her administrative affairs through a new secretarial chancery—the 'institute of state-secretaries' (*stats-sekretarei*)—that grew out of the old *Kabinet*, which was reassigned to carry out financial matters.²³⁶

No doubt aware of Panin's criticism, Catherine selected secretaries carefully. She chose well-educated, enlightened personalities who had distinguished themselves in state service, often under the auspices of important individuals through whom they became personally known to her. Her most important secretary in the middle part of her reign, Alexander Bezborodko (1775-1796), for example, had come to the empress' attention as the head of the personal chancery of a highly lauded military commander, Petr Rumiantsev. In contrast, Grigory Kozitsky (1768-1775) had been

stats-sekretarei pri Ekaterine II," in *Gosudarstvennye uchrezhdeniia Rossii XVI-XVIII vv.*, ed. N. B. Golikova (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo moskovskogo universiteta, 1991), and Iu. V. Got'e, "Proiskhozhdenie sobstvennoi e. i. v. kantseliarii," in *Sbornik statei po russkoi istorii posviashchennykh S. F. Platonovu* (Peterburg: Tipografiia im. Gutenberga, 1922), 346-55.

²³³ Pereshkin, *Institut stats-sekretarei*, 44.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-6.

²³⁶ The extent to which this secretarial chancery was a separate body is debated. John LeDonne, for example, states that the "term as such did not exist." However, he acknowledges a division of function between administrative and financial affairs. John LeDonne, *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762-1796* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 27. Russian-language historiography has more confidently written about the empress' 'stats-sekretarei' as an innovation and a body that demands separate treatment. See the above-mentioned works by Mikhail Pereshkin, L. G. Kisiagina, and Iu. V. Got'e. This literature contrasts with specific scholarship on the *Kabinet*, above all V. B. Frederiks, ed., *200-letie kabineta imperatorskogo velichestva, 1704-1904: istoricheskoe issledovanie* (St. Petersburg: Golike i Vil'borg, 1911). A separate chapter on the *Kabinet* in Catherine's reign can be found there. See also O. G. Ageeva, *Imperatorskii dvor Rossii, 1700-1796 gody* (Moscow: Nauka, 2008) 155-66.

one of Lomonosov's personal assistants. Regardless of their origin, they all possessed a single qualification, literary ability, in particular experience and training for conducting correspondence, and drafting political, above all legal documents. The majority of Catherine's secretaries were between the third and fourth rank of the civil ladder of the Table of Ranks. With the exception of Petr Zavadovsky, who held the position briefly, none of the sixteen secretaries who served her for varying lengths of time during her reign became favorites.



Grigory Nikolaevich Teplov. Print by D. Levitzky, 1772.

The empress' ambitions for her secretariat as a device of sovereignty grew over time. Initially, she used her first three state-secretaries, Adam Olsuf'ev, Grigory Teplov, and Ivan Elagin to process petitions (*chelobitnye*), though the number of petitioners was so considerable that she accepted and answered many of them personally.²³⁷ However, she came to understand this arrangement as a mistake, for it took up too much of her time and introduced the possibility that she might make irregular ad hoc resolutions. Moreover, as the Senate supposedly made known to her, it violated a previous rule that plaintiffs not be able to directly submit petitions to her person.²³⁸ In order to provide greater order and efficiency to petitions, she decided to compartmentalize her personal chancery in a manner similar to Panin's proposed reform of the Senate. This reform dates

²³⁷ Catherine II, "Razkaz imperatritsy Ekateriny II o pervykh piati godakh ee tsarstvovaniia," *Russkii arkhiv*, 1865, 4, 472. See also Erik Amburger, *Geschichte der Behördenorganisation Russlands von Peter dem Grossen bis 1917* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966) 83; *PSZ*, no. 11,868.

²³⁸ Mikhail Pereshkin, *Institut stats-sekretarei...*, 83. Catherine did not want petitioners circumventing the Senate by appealing to her. See *PSZ*, no. 11,867.

to a decree from June 11, 1763, in which the empress ordered that all petitions would be submitted to three ‘state-secretaries,’ Adam Olsuf’ev, Grigory Teplov, and Ivan Elagin.²³⁹ This reform lay the basis of the ‘kantslerskii poriadok’²⁴⁰ or ‘chancery order’ that would operate throughout the empress’ reign, where one part of the chancery was permanently dedicated to petitions, whilst another was occupied with other matters. As the chancery expanded, the empress would assign new secretaries to handle petitions before promoting them to other matters. The reform clarified an official channel and provided rules for how petitions were to be processed. Catherine gave her secretaries the authority to make critical decisions on petitions, including whether they needed to be delegated to a different part of the state (such as a specific college) or whether they warranted the attention of empress herself. The empress served as an invigilator, regularly inspecting the registers (*reestry*) of petitions sent to her.²⁴¹ Still, her secretaries resolved many of the petitions by themselves, with the empress merely signing off on their resolutions.

The secretaries also played a critical role as a point of communication with the most important individuals and offices in the state apparatus. Catherine relied on them, not only to transmit her own communications, but as an information node that would enable her to better understand pressing tasks and how they might best be resolved. She also charged them with reading miscellaneous communications and summarize their most relevant contents. Additionally, the empress regularly called on them to collect information for her (*zaprosy*) from specific institutions, above all the Senate, the Synod, the Chief Magistracy (*Glavnyi magistrat*), and provincial offices.²⁴² Catherine charged her secretaries with researching, writing, and editing different forms of commands beyond their work on petitions. It is possible that Grigory Teplov, who did not officially receive the secretarial title until 1763, helped define in her mind the secretariat’s potential role. During his first eighteen months, he recorded himself involved in the composition of over one-hundred and twenty documents, including amongst others, eight manifestos, four instructions, as well as fifty-eight *ukazy* to the Senate, seventeen to the colleges and eight to provincial governors and town councils.²⁴³ We know he was the author of a number of important proclamations connected with the empress’ coup, above all her Ascension Manifesto (June 28), Peter III’s abdication proclamation, and the announcement of the latter’s death.²⁴⁴

Catherine closely supervised her secretaries’ work on commands. Even minor *ukazy* sometimes went through a draft stage (*chernovik*) that the empress inspected and annotated in red pencil.²⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that many commands would in fact be initiated and wholly written by her secretaries before being shown to her. In the final years of her reign, Adrian Gribovsky noted in his diary that fellow secretary, Dmitrii Troshchinsky, “examined all of the Senate’s criminal and litigatory (*tiazhebnye*) cases that depended on a decision by the monarch, and wrote for them *ukazy* that Bezborodko would take to [the empress] for signing only.”²⁴⁶ This points to a significant delegation of authority. Addressing her final years on the throne, Khrapovitsky’s journal provides

²³⁹ Ibid., 62-97. *PSZ*, no. 11,858.

²⁴⁰ Adrian M. Gribovskii, *Zapiski o imperatritse Ekaterine velikoi polkovnika, sostoiashago pri ee osobe stats-sekretarem* (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1864), 26.

²⁴¹ Pereshkin, *Institut stats-sekretarei*, 127.

²⁴² Ibid., 148-9.

²⁴³ Ibid., 76.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 75-8. For secondary literature on Teplov, see Wallace Daniel, *Grigorii Teplov: A Statesman at the Court of Catherine the Great* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1991).

²⁴⁵ Rubin-Detlev, *The Epistolary Art of Catherine the Great*, 193.

²⁴⁶ Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 22.

firm evidence that the empress maintained her strategy of allowing secretaries to play a central role in penning commands.

Of course, the empress was not prepared to merely play the role of invigilator. She poked fun at herself, noting she suffered from bouts of ‘legislomania’ and that she couldn’t go a day without writing something.²⁴⁷ More importantly, she needed to be seen, as autocrat, to exercise power in person on important matters. Especially in the second half of her reign she worked on a number of projects in the field of public law. Even here, however, she continued to rely heavily on her secretaries, whom she involved in her legislative projects as researchers, advisors, and editors. Again, Khrapovitsky speaks of her involvement in these projects, including her work on a further reform of the Senate in the 1780s, which she did not complete. Working on these later public law projects, Catherine tried to incorporate ideas of the English jurist, William Blackstone, whose *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1770) she had begun studying.²⁴⁸ She involved Khrapovitsky to help her in this task, as we see from the following instruction that she sent to him:

Read all [my] notes on Blackstone with a pen in your hand and make a note of all those parts that would be appropriate to incorporate into the laws. Then read my regulations in its parts along with the notes to various parts presented by the general procurator [of the Senate], and, again with pen in your hand, make a note what should be added to the new legislation, and what should be left out.²⁴⁹

Here again, we see Catherine as the initiator of a legislative project. She chose and commented on Blackstone’s *Commentaries* of her own accord, but nevertheless delegated significant authority to Khrapovitsky in overseeing their application. Equally significant is her mention of the general procurator’s report: her active involvement of the principal members of her government, in this case the Senate, in the formulation of commands, soliciting their opinion. As the instruction indicates, much of this dialogue took place via written correspondence that flowed through her secretaries. Gribovsky, however, reminds us that such exchanges also took place in her daily meetings with her secretaries and principle state servitors (see Chapter 4).²⁵⁰ She would discuss with them matters on all fronts, from “measures” pertaining to the “security and prosperity of the state,” “military actions,” “solving deficits in the state’s expenditures,” and “how to correct the faults of major state and judicial offices.” They would also listen to and discuss the “Senate’s reports,” and debate whether to “confirm” or overturn a sentence passed on a particular member of the nobility.²⁵¹

Even so, Catherine also often interacted with her secretaries in writing, which we know from the vast number of personal written instructions that have survived. These notes were short informal, often unsigned, and sometimes in French. She would write them on small pieces of paper and hand them to her secretaries personally during her mandatory daily morning meetings with them, or have them sent to them depending on her location. These instructions represented a preliminary step in the activation of sovereign power. She stamped many of these instructions, not with the official state seal, which was reserved for promulgation, but with her personal, didactic

²⁴⁷ Catherine II, “Pis’ma Ekateriny vtoroi k baronu Grimmu,” *Russkii arkhiv*, vol. 2 (1878), 61.

²⁴⁸ See Marc Raeff, “The Empress and the Vinerian Professor: Catherine II’s Projects of Government Reform and Blackstone’s Commentaries,” *OSP*, 7 (1974), 18-41.

²⁴⁹ A. V. Khrapovitsky, *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskago, 1782-1793* (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1901), 61-2.

²⁵⁰ Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 52.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

one. As she explained in a letter to Voltaire, her seal depicted a bucolic scene, with the superscript, ‘The Useful’ (*poleznoe*), in which a “bee flies from plant to plant collecting honey to carry to her hive.”²⁵² Catherine was the queen bee, but the seal also features two other bees at work: she wanted to remind her servitors that *they* were integral to the success of the sovereign’s mission to bring about a bustling, prosperous, and happy hive/state.



Photograph of the empress’ personal seal on an instruction to her secretaries.
Russian State Library, f. 323, o. 1347, d. 5.

In some cases, Catherine had drafts of commands sent to specific departments for special editing. For example, in a message to Adam Ol’sufev from August 23, 1763, she instructed him to “have the attached *ukaz* sent to the College of Foreign Affairs to be rewritten and then sent back to me for signing.”²⁵³ For the most part, however, she relied on her secretaries to be final editors and to put these drafts into appropriate ‘decree form’ (*ukaznuiu formu*).²⁵⁴ In addition to incorporating corrections, this meant checking for consistency, clarity, and orthographic mistakes, since Catherine was not confident of her written Russian. It was also necessary to adjust the style of the decree to match the official Russian used in formal proclamations. Through this activity the secretaries ensured a certain uniformity to the monarch’s commands. Finally, the secretaries were charged with transmitting these commands through the appropriate channels of government. In most cases, this meant the Senate, which was responsible for the registration and promulgation of new laws.

²⁵² Catherine II, *Documents of Catherine the Great*, ed. W. Reddaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

²⁵³ Catherine II, *Pis'ma Ekateriny II k Adamu Vasil'evichu Olsuf'evu 1762-1783* (Moscow, 1863), 41.

²⁵⁴ Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 11.

b. The Senate

Peter the Great founded the Senate in 1711 as the supreme political institution of the Russian state apparatus. After his death the Senate's position fluctuated, including most recently under Peter III who curbed its powers.²⁵⁵ In contrast, Catherine understood it as an integral part of sovereign power. She envisioned a division of responsibilities between herself and the Senate whereby she carried out legislative prerogatives, and the Senate would play the role of the executive power. The Senate was therefore a crucial intermediary channel that converted her instructions into legitimate, official proclamations. In one place in her *Zapiski*, she described the Senate as “giv[ing] life to commands through its edicts for [their] execution and registration.” Part of this process involved the right to make ‘representations’ concerning the content of legislative projects, in theory opening a further dialogical step in the command process. In addition, she ascribed to the Senate three other powers, those of: “giving magistrates their civil jurisdiction”; of “receiving appellations from all courts”; and of having “some oversight of [state] finances.”²⁵⁶ The empress therefore expected the Senate to issue on its own accord commands in relation to these three jurisdictions. As Catherine noted in the *Nakaz*, these commands represented her power, but it was crucial that they did not emanate from her actual person.

Catherine scrutinized the Senate's operations when she came to the throne and concluded that it was not entirely fit for its important role. The Senate was inefficient, threatening the regularity of state operations. She also believed the people who served in it to be ignorant, not only concerning the laws,²⁵⁷ but also with regard to the basic geographic and demographic aspects of the country. During one of her first visits in 1762 she was famously astounded and angered that the senators did not even have a map of the empire. Ignorance, above all of basic empirical data relevant to Russia severely compromised its role as editor of her legal projects and as an autonomous command-giver that operated in her name. There were other serious problems concerning the Senate's function. Some criticisms are revealed in her secret instruction of 1764 to Aleksandr Vyazemsky, detailing his responsibilities as her new general procurator following the dismissal of his predecessor, Aleksandr Glebov, for corruption. In a tone reminiscent of Panin's Imperial Council proposal, she told Vyazemsky that “all [state] offices and the very Senate itself have on many occasions overstepped their boundaries.” She reminded him that although the Senate had been “established for the execution of laws,” it frequently promulgated “its own legislation, and of its own accord awarded ranks, privileges, and villages.” Catherine went on to say that it even “oppress[ed] (*gonenie*) lower offices” and had “brought them into a dire state.” These she described as have been “cowed into indescribable servility.” Commoners had completely forgotten the “regulations” (*reglament*) which in fact “command[ed]” them to make appeals to the Senate and ultimately to the monarch “against Senatorial decrees, [that were] not lawful.”²⁵⁸ Catherine thereby accused the Senate of abusing its station. More fundamentally, perhaps, her criticism pointed to an ignorance of sovereignty and how it was organized.

²⁵⁵ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 25. For a longer account of the Senate in Peter III's reign, see *Istoriia pravitel'stviushchago Senata za dvesti let, 1711 – 1911*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Senatskaia tipografiia, 1911), 315-25.

²⁵⁶ Catherine II, *Zapiski*, 645.

²⁵⁷ In the *Nakaz* Catherine called the Senate the “dépôt des loix”, emphasizing Senators' responsibility to know what the law was, or at the very least, how to find it.

²⁵⁸ *SIRIO*, vol. 7, 347.

Catherine issued legislation so as to bring order to the Senate. A weighty manifesto in December 1763, reformed the Senate together with almost all central government institutions.²⁵⁹ Adopting Panin's proposal from the previous year, the reform divided the Senate into six departments in order to improve its efficiency (four in Saint Petersburg; two in Moscow) through an internal delegation of authority. Each department would operate under the auspices of a chief procurator (*ober-prokuror*), with the exception of the first. This remained under the general procurator and handled domestic and political affairs. All incoming matters to the Senate were to be sent to corresponding departments where they would be resolved "according to the law." Resolutions required unanimous approval, but only of the senators within the department concerned. Any resolution made by an individual department was to "regarded as if it had been made by the entire Senate." When departments could not reach agreement, the case would be forwarded to the general procurator, who would assemble all available senators to deliberate. If this failed to resolve a matter—because there was no corresponding law or the law was unclear—it would be conveyed to the empress for resolution. Often, she would resolve the case by reformulating the relevant passage. Otherwise, the original decision of the Senate department would remain in place.²⁶⁰

Catherine expected the Senate to be able to carry out its assigned duties without her continuous intervention, and she sometimes expressed extreme frustration when it failed, scolding the senators in no uncertain terms. For example, in one well-known case involving the rights of "little-Russians" (Ukraine) she reprimanded the Senate for "wasting her entire morning" by sending her a matter in which the laws concerned were "hardly nebulous."²⁶¹ As this case demonstrates, Catherine needed her senators to make sure that they knew (on her behalf) the existing law. Catherine's anger at having to make a final decision in these matters might seem to amount to a renunciation of sovereignty; however, it indicates clearly how she came to think about sovereignty as dependent on a multi-person mechanism in which authority and the exercise power were delegated and each constituent part knew what role it was to play.

The empress also employed other strategies to manage her Senate servitors. At the beginning of her reign, she undertook frequent visits to the Senate - a total of eighteen times at regular intervals in 1763. But she discontinued these in subsequent years.²⁶² It is possible that the empress came to view such visits as detrimental to the mechanism she envisioned, composed of discrete if interlocking parts. Her visits would symbolically disturb this division. Given that Senate sessions occupied the whole morning, she may also have believed such visits would interfere with her responsibilities. Over time, Catherine came to rely on the general procurator to help her invigilate and manage the Senate in order to ensure it carried out its delegated authority, albeit within its bounds. As we have seen, she could display frustration; however, her admonishment tended to appeal to her subordinates' better selves. In a letter to Vyazemsky of 1778, for example, she urged him to remind them of their "not-to-be-forgotten duty...of safeguarding the wealth, integrity, and well-being of society" and that "the more one [was] given power in such matters, the more, in conscience, one [was] accountable to God, [her], and the Fatherland." Vyazemsky was to encourage them to apply "their zeal and skill", and to "endeavor to fulfill the importance of their station, to set a good example and offer encouragement to their subordinates." Finally, she wished him to caution his underlings that transgression of the Senate's institutional boundaries would

²⁵⁹ *PSZ*, no. 11,989.

²⁶⁰ *SIRIO*, vol. 2, 90, quoted in Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I*, 292.

²⁶¹ *PSZ*, no. 13,555.

²⁶² Taken from the entries of the court journal (*Kamer-furersky tseremonial'nyi zhurnal*) for 1763-1765.

cause “the public...to lose faith in proper order,” seeing that it had “broken down at its very foundation.”²⁶³

During Catherine’s reign, the Senate did not initiate or formulate new legislative projects, suggesting she was successful in managing its designated role. In the few instances when its commands created new normative content, such as in the case of land surveys (*mezhevaniia*), or in the making of certain judicial decisions, it submitted them to the empress for approval.²⁶⁴ It is possible that the empress solicited the Senate’s opinion through her correspondence and meetings with the general procurator and her secretaries, however further research is required on this point. The same can be said of the Senate making ‘representations’ to the sovereign. Unlike the French *parlements’* issuances, which were formal public acts, Catherine envisioned these as internal dynamics in the Russian system, which make them more difficult to locate in archives. In one point in his diary Gribovsky states that “material for *ukazy* were normally substantially reworked in the Senate...or in other departments” – work that involved “considering both laws relevant to the matter and [current] circumstance.”²⁶⁵ Unfortunately, Gribovsky uses the past tense, suggesting thereby that this practice had ceased to be a feature of Catherine’s arrangement and had been replaced by the work of secretaries who specialized in orthography, such as Bezborodko, whom he mentions in the preceding sentence.

Above all, the Senate was charged with the registration and promulgation of new laws. For this it maintained its own print-house. Depending on the nature of the command, newly printed proclamations would be sent to particular institutions, but in most cases, they would be sent to all public offices (*prisutstvennye mesta*), the Moscow department[s] of the Senate, the Holy Synod, provinces and individual towns. At a local level, new legislation that needed to be promulgated was displayed and read out by officials in public spaces. They also continued to be read out in churches by parish clergy after Sunday mass.²⁶⁶ Continuing another practice that dated back to Peter the Great’s reign, the *St. Petersburg Chronicle*, which came out on a bi-weekly basis and was closely managed by the state, reported the promulgation of very important decrees; however, its role in detailing new legislation, broadly understood, is easily overstated.²⁶⁷ Finally, the Senate also printed a small number (no more than a few hundred in total) for general distribution in St. Petersburg and Moscow.²⁶⁸ Official copies could be requested by readers at police quarters that were responsible for their dissemination.²⁶⁹

Overall, Catherine’s government went to great lengths to disseminate its decrees to the greatest possible extent. This project had been begun in earnest by Peter the Great, and she continued the use the same machinery that the latter had deployed for this purpose, even if they may have conceived of this project in different terms, a question requiring further research. For example, as some scholars have suggested, Peter saw sovereignty and its commands in more coercive terms, whereas, Catherine, as I have argued, emphasized knowledge of the law as an important precondition for liberty. Another important question that requires further research is

²⁶³ *SIRIO*, vol. 13, 460-1.

²⁶⁴ See discussion in *Istoriia pravitel'stviushchago Senata*, vol. 2, 505-6.

²⁶⁵ Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 10.

²⁶⁶ Peter the Great had regularized this practice: Gregory L. Freeze, *The Russian Levites: Parish Clergy in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 31.

²⁶⁷ Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of the Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 23-4.

²⁶⁸ *Istoriia pravitel'stviushchago Senata*, 505-6.

²⁶⁹ For example, see the description of the dissemination of the empress’ manifesto on the convocation of her legislative commission, *St. Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, no. 6, 1767.

whether Catherine intensified the state's strategies of promulgating the monarch's commands. There is good reason to think that this was the case. For example, the empress' reorganization of provincial government of 1775 saw the establishment of additional printing presses in provincial administrative centers to produce more official communications.²⁷⁰ We know also that Catherine sought to make many of her decrees available through book publishers.²⁷¹ This was matched by a greater interest in law and official notices by the population, above all by Russia's political servitors who were motivated to inform themselves of laws relevant to administrative functions and their privileges. This no doubt reflected their self-interest, but it was possibly also a sign of a new commitment, encouraged by the empress, to understand law and themselves as integral to the state's operations.²⁷² Some of these officials were graduates of the first Russian law faculty at Moscow University in 1755 and would have had the requisite knowledge to appreciate finer nuances.

The Senate dealt frequently with the problem of fake proclamations by jokesters or malcontents. In March 1765, the Senate, in response to one such incident, was ordered by Catherine to issue a statement declaring that "henceforth no *ukazy* or manifestos intended for public promulgation and execution, issued from the sovereign's name, or from the Senate, were to be considered valid unless they were printed and marked (*pechatnye*)."²⁷³ The statement further delineated the official channels for the monarch's powers. The peasant rebel, Emel'ian Pugachev, produced elaborate printed manifestos that imitated the form and style of official documents, suggesting that the state had in fact been successful at disseminating its commands in the countryside, and that such forms of communication had become accepted and were authoritative. Pugachev used these documents as a useful medium to communicate his commands, but also as a visual artifact of power, indicating the law's source, and hence its legitimacy (see Chapter 5).

4. The Empress' Law-Making

Historians have identified and underlined different periods in Catherine's activity as a law-maker (for example, the very beginning of her reign; or the decade following the Pugachev rebellion, which saw her provincial reform and major legislation on the nobility and Russian towns).²⁷⁴ Yet, law-making remained a constant and consistent element of the empress' reign. In accordance with her beliefs about legislation, many of the empress' reforms, particularly her largest, were protracted projects, going through a number of stages of research, writing, and editing, which took months or years to complete, often involving contributions by miscellaneous individuals and commissions. The empress herself remained closely involved in these legislative projects: she initiated them, she appointed and coordinated their collaborators, she wrote and edited drafts, and she made the final decision on when laws were ready for issue. Not all laws, however, made it to this final stage. Catherine died with a number of significant legislative projects unpublished, either because they were unfinished, or possibly because, after close consideration, they were deemed inappropriate.²⁷⁵ The 1770s and 1780s saw drafts of a charter to the state peasantry,²⁷⁶ as well as a

²⁷⁰ Marker, *Publishing*, 139.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 199-200.

²⁷³ *PSZ*, no. 12,090.

²⁷⁴ See for example, part VI of Isabel de Madariaga's history of the Catherinian period, entitled "The Reforming Decade," in *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 277-324.

²⁷⁵ *Ekaterina II: izbrannoe*, 301-737.

²⁷⁶ Catherine II, "Proekt imperatritsy Ekateriny II ob ustroistve svobodnykh sel'skikh obyvatel'i. Soobshcheno V. I. Veshniakovym," *SIRIO*, vol. 10, 447-98.

comprehensive criminal code (*ugolovnoe ulozhenie*).²⁷⁷ Towards the end of her reign, we know of plans for the further reform of high government. These included a plan for a new Imperial Council, a High Chamber of Justice (*Glavnaia Raspravnaia palata*),²⁷⁸ and a second reform of the Senate that her secretary, Khrapovitsky, started working on in the spring of 1787.²⁷⁹ Other work in the field of public law included an attempt at a law of succession as well as further statements on the character of the monarch's prerogatives – further evidence of her ongoing interest in the development of sovereignty.²⁸⁰

As we have argued, Catherine believed that the involvement of state servitors in the formulation and promulgation of commands enhanced their force. Accordingly, the empress solicited different forms of counsel. In addition to her secretaries, she established a large number of special commissions with the goal of studying and offering solutions to important issues. These included the commissions on land-surveying (1765), commerce (1766), and roads (1785). The most notable, however, was the Legislative Commission of 1767, which she tasked with compiling a new code of Russian laws in accordance with the guidelines that she laid out in her *Nakaz* (see Chapter 2). Consistently, the monarch operated through state servitors who carried out functions in her name. Through the multiplication of bodies, the monarch was no longer strictly a single individual, but an aggregate person who could carry out more work than any single ruler could achieve by herself. This aggregate person had internal dynamics that allowed it, if it operated properly, to enhance the force of commands and widen the scope of her activity. Catherine believed that the Legislative Commission, following the *Nakaz* as an operating manual, could maintain her voice within this machine while at the same time achieve the immense task of codifying Russia's laws.

Over the course of her reign, however, Catherine modified her role in this legislative process. Aleksandr Kamenskii has noted that although the empress' participation in law-making was always decisive, her immediate involvement in legislative projects became greater as her reign progressed.²⁸¹ One important moment that marked this transition was the abandonment of the above-mentioned Legislative Commission, beginning in December 1768, when she prorogued the Commission's main assembly as a result of the outbreak of war with the Porte. Although there are suggestions from her correspondence with Vyazemsky, the General procurator, that the empress intended to recall the main assembly after the war's conclusion, she never did.²⁸² It is unclear from the available sources, why Catherine allowed the Commission to lapse and shifted towards a different legislative practice.

On the surface, it would seem that the empress' decision to prorogue the Commission signaled a rejection of the ideas about legislation and sovereignty outlined above. With its long, heated debates, and its failure to complete a draft of even a single section of code, the Commission was clearly ponderous, and Catherine may have seen these delays as compromising the

²⁷⁷ Catherine II, "Ugolovnoe ulozhenie," in *Ekaterina II: izbrannoe*, 370-449.

²⁷⁸ Catherine II, "O zakoneniakh vobshche." *ibid.*, 634-59.

²⁷⁹ Catherine II, "O Senate," *ibid.*, 556-600.

²⁸⁰ In addition to "O uzakoneniakh" (mentioned above), see "Nakaz senatu" in Oleg A. Omel'chenko, "K probleme pravovykh form rossiiskogo absolutizma vtoroi poloviny XVIII v." in *Problemy istorii absolutizma: sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznyi iuridicheskii zaochnyi institut, 1983) 25-62. Also, Catherine II, "Pravila samodержavii" in *Ekaterina II: izbrannoe*, 603-5; "O vlasti i prerogativakh imperatorskogo velichstva" in *Ekaterina II: izbrannoe*, 605-8; "Sobstvennyi chernovoi proekt manifesta imperatritsy Ekateriny II", RGADA, f. 10, op. 1, d. 12.

²⁸¹ Kamenskii, *Ot Petra I*, 330.

²⁸² Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 167-8.

monarchy's supposed efficiency, which she proclaimed as one of that system's principle advantages. Experience with the Commission in no way shook the empress' conviction that law-making should be interactive, but prompted a change of strategy, by which she created a smaller, tighter process, in which she would be more closely involved.

The empress' commitment to law-making as a dialogical activity is exemplified in the approach she took to the major reforms of the subsequent decades. Take, for example, Catherine's provincial reform of November 1775, which transformed the governing apparatus of the Russian countryside and defined it for the next one-hundred years. Between 1774 and 1775, she wrote over six-hundred pages of material, comprising several of the six drafts that the project went through.²⁸³ Although Catherine was the sole initiator of the statute, and she drafted much of the wording of the legislation, there was nothing precipitous about her plans, which were based on a decade of careful consultation. The reform originated in October 1764, when the empress requested governors to collect geographical and demographic information on their provinces and submit proposals for a new territorial division. Some governors showed initiative, such as Yakov Sievers, of Novgorod, who was especially influential.²⁸⁴ She also drew heavily on the work of one sub-commission of the Legislative Commission, which provided a wealth of documents, such as extracts from laws, maps, and population statistics. Instructions (*nakazy*) submitted by the Commission's elected deputies further informed her thinking, later supplemented by further proposals from the governors of Kazan and Moscow. Last, but not least, the first partition of Poland in 1772 had given her room to experiment, observing the results of new administrative arrangements in the two new guberniias of Mogilev and Pskov. Along the way, she continued to consult with Sievers, as well as the commander-in-chief of Moscow, Michael Volkonsky, and the legal scholar, Semen Desnitskii. Her secretaries, Petr Zavadovsky and Aleksandr Bezborodko, were also heavily involved in providing the empress with necessary documents and preparing the final document. Catherine did not involve the Senate, though she did confer with her general procurator, Viazemsky, and she charged it with the implementation of the new statute after its promulgation.²⁸⁵

Conclusion

Active legislation, developed in Russia since the reign of Peter the Great, was essential to the modern concept of sovereignty as Catherine understood it. In Catherine's understanding, sovereignty, understood as the exercise of supreme and untrammelled power, considered legitimate, was by no means synonymous with despotism, or tyranny, nor did it preclude consultation and delegation of power. Despotism was embodied in her deceased husband, who, she thought, mistakenly understood his absolute station purely in terms of commanding. Such a system might impose laws on subjects, but it could not produce the comprehensive, systematic, and authoritative rule that was commensurate with sovereignty. The empress chose to exercise her prerogatives in an arrangement carefully designed and maintained with the help of others. This mechanism was designed to overcome the intellectual or physical limitations of any single

²⁸³ The statute involved a new territorial division of provinces into gubernias and *uezdy*. A substantial component of the reform was the introduction of a hierarchy of separate judicial apparatuses for each estate. See Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 277-91.

²⁸⁴ For a detailed account, see Robert E. Jones, *Provincial Development in Russia: Catherine II and Jakob Sievers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984).

individual. Knowledge was the deficit that most concerned the empress. The Enlightenment's emphasis on empirical observation necessitated manpower for its collection and processing, which required a group of collaborators. Knowledge was required for the monarch's decisions to embody reason, and reason alone could justify the extraordinary concentration of power and authority in the monarch. Only through consultation could monarchical decisions manifest the necessary qualities of rule - its normativity, regularity, and its public and official nature. This system inevitably placed unique burdens on the person of the monarch: the empress needed to manage her servitors and make continual inputs into the process of legislation. At the same time, delegation to others also unburdened the ruler, enabling her to do more by doing less. Enlightened ideas, the principles of prudence, and an awareness of the difficulty of her own position dictated a mechanism of sovereignty that sought to realize sovereign government by diffusing power from the empress across a wider body of institutional power-sharers.

Chapter 4: The Empress' Body: The Routines and Geography of Power

1. Introduction

This chapter is about the monarch's body, understood not as a metaphysical or legal category,²⁸⁶ but as a physical person who occupies specific spaces and who is engaged in a range of daily activities and interactions on a recurring basis. The organization of daily routines and rituals at monarchical courts, such as Versailles, has been widely discussed as part of royal strategy to structure and convey the monarch's sovereign status.²⁸⁷ The Russian court in the eighteenth century was no exception. Catherine, like her predecessors, used such activities to demonstrate the monarchy's greatness and its cultural parity with the West.²⁸⁸ Moreover, Russian rulers (Catherine included) used ceremonies, both large and small, to create a theater of distinction that elevated the monarch and their highest-ranking servitors, endowing their power with an aura of majesty.²⁸⁹

At the same time, Catherine had argued in *Nakaz* that the glory of the monarch was also dependent on their ordered power. Both administrative and courtly functions and ceremonies, this chapter argues, served to manifest this ordered power through their regularity and careful organization, and these activities functioned as an important regulating mechanism. Catherine meticulously ordered her life, meeting with state servitors and upholding a strict timetable of court functions, ceremonies, and rituals. These interactions were carefully managed and ran according to procedures and protocols that she enforced. Through these operations the empress manifested her belief that power, properly ordered, was to be measured by the regularity and predictability of its operations. Catherine understood her activity in these terms. In a private meeting with Count Ségur, the French ambassador, she noted, “[I have] laid down certain principles, a pattern of conduct and government from which I never swerve...here everything is constant; every day resembles those that have gone before it. As everyone knows what he can rely on, no one feels anxiety.”²⁹⁰ The statement succinctly captures not only the manner in which Catherine managed the expectations of her servitors, through predictable and routinized patterns of interaction with her, but also the management of their interactions with and expectations of one another.

²⁸⁶ Above all: Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2016). For a similar discussion in the Russian case, see Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths* (New York: Random House, 1969).

²⁸⁷ See Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Writing of Louis XIV, Burke notes that magnificence was meant to give the king ‘*éclat*’: “*Eclat* was another keyword of the time, with meanings ranging from a ‘flash’ of lightning to a ‘clap’ of thunder, but always referring to something unexpected and impressive. Magnificence was considered to be impressive, in the literal sense of leaving an ‘impression’ on the viewers like a stamp on a piece of wax.” Magnificence added to the glory of the monarch (p. 5). For a broader discussion of courtly representational culture in the eighteenth century, see T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe, 1660-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁸⁸ On the modernization of the Russian court in the eighteenth century, see Ol’ga G. Ageeva, *Imperatorskii dvor Rossii, 1700-1796* (Moscow: Nauka, 2008); P. Keenan, *St. Petersburg and the Russian Court 1703-1761* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Simon Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia, 1696-1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 118-26.

²⁸⁹ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). See also Stephen L. Baehr, “‘Fortuna Redux’: The Courtly Spectacle in Eighteenth-Century Russia,” in *Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteenth Century: Contacts and Comparisons*, ed. Anthony G. Cross (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1979), 109-22.

²⁹⁰ Count Ségur, *Memoirs and Recollections of Count Ségur, Ambassador from France to the Courts of Russia and Prussia*, vol. 2 (London, 1826), 284.

The main primary sources used in this chapter are the understudied ceremonial court journals (*kamer-furerskie zhurnaly*), published for most years of the empress' reign.²⁹¹ Compiled by court officials, these document much of the monarch's daily activity. Catherine evidently valued the journals, as she steadily expanded the amount of detail they provided as to her location at certain times of the day, listing the persons present at audiences and other meetings, including luncheons and dinners.²⁹² In addition, she regularly had entries published in the *St. Petersburg Chronicle*, communicating her movements to a broader public. The journals also cover celebratory events at court that the empress attended such as religious holidays, state ceremonies, and other public events. Having researched all of the available journals between 1762 and 1796, this chapter can make many general observations about the empress' routines across the broad span of her reign. Where offered, examples have been drawn from entries that are exceptionally detailed.

As useful as the court journals are, however, they do not cover all aspects of the empress' daily life; nor do they provide first-person accounts of what it was like to witness the events that they registered. As a result, this chapter also draws on a range of journals and memoirs produced by various individuals who spent time at the Russian court and were in a position to observe or directly interact with the empress. The memoirs of foreign visitors and diplomats such as William Coxe and Count Ségur, as well as the diary of her last secretary, Adrian Gribovsky, are amongst the most useful texts in this regard.

2. The Routines and Geography of Power

a. Administrative Routines

Immediately after her ascension to the throne, Catherine began to carefully manage her daily activity and establish daily routines governing her interactions with particular individuals in specific locations during the day. These activities included regular meetings in private rooms with the servitors through whom she conducted state affairs. She also made regular public appearances in court - to have meals with selected members of the royal family and nobility, and to observe a variety of religious and state holidays. Her regular attendance was also integral to a variety of functions in the palace, such as weddings and baptisms, 'court days' (*kurtagi*), balls and masquerades, musical and theatrical performances, to which a wider cross-section of St. Petersburg's elites were invited.²⁹³ Catherine frequently travelled between palaces, above all to Tsarskoe Selo and Oranienbaum outside of St. Petersburg. But, as diaries and the entries of the court journals attest, these changes of location had no noticeable impact on her daily routines. As the upper echelons of state administration tended to accompany her—they had their own houses nearby her summer palaces—changes of location did not alter the overall routine or compromise state business. Catherine adhered to a strict regimen, rarely taking days off; although she did work in moments of respite and leisure into her daily life. Regular movements and carefully controlled interactions and appearances managed the administrative and courtly elite and to keep them aligned in the correct relationship to the monarch and to one another.²⁹⁴ They also helped construct

²⁹¹ *Kamer-fur'erskii tseremonial'nyi zhurnal* (henceforth *KFZ*), 177 volumes, (St. Petersburg, 1853-1917).

²⁹² L. V. Tychina and N. V. Bessarabova, *Kniagina Dashkova i imperatorskii dvor* (Moscow: MGI im. E. R. Dashkovoï, 2006), 14.

²⁹³ On the differing publics attending such events, see Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999), 53-90.

²⁹⁴ In this respect, Catherine's court functioned in a manner similar to Louis XIV's Versailles. See Blanning, *The Power of Culture*, 29-52.

sovereignty by telegraphing the supposed normativity of power's operation. In this section we lay out what these daily routines were.



Catherine II during a walk in the Tsarskosel'skii Park. Painting by Vladimir L. Borovikovskiy, 1794. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

With the exception of some important religious and state holidays, as well as most Sundays, the empress' day was divided between administration and the court. One source that helps us reconstruct her daily routine is the diary of Adrian Gribovsky, one of her last state secretaries, who worked for her between 1795 and 1796. As he observed, the empress would rise around eight o'clock in the morning, after which she spent an hour in her personal cabinet writing correspondence or working on legislation and decrees. Thereafter she drank a cup of coffee (she rarely had breakfast) and went to her bedroom where she took a seat at one of two small tables adjacent to the entrance of the waiting room. When she was ready, she rang a bell to call the valet-de-chambre on duty, and he in turn summoned whoever she had requested from those already assembled. They would enter her bedroom, bow their heads and kiss her hand if she offered it, then take a seat at the table opposite to work with her on official business. The empress, Gribovsky noted, met with individuals on a one-to-one basis, normally beginning with the chief of police (*ober-politseimeister*), followed by her secretaries. Additionally, she would meet with specific ranks on different days. From his diary, we know that in 1796 she met with the vice chancellor as well as the governor and the procurator (*gubernskii-prokuror*) of St. Petersburg on Saturdays; the chief procurator (*ober-prokuror*) of the Holy Synod and the master of requests (*general-*

reketmeister) on Wednesdays; the general procurator of the Senate on Mondays; and on Thursdays along with the commander-in-chief of St. Petersburg (*glavnokmandiushii*).²⁹⁵

The empress' morning interactions took place in private apartments with highly-ranking individuals she saw often and knew well, including her secretaries and senior servitors. Though governed by etiquette, these meetings had an air of cordiality and relaxed formality, dispensing with extensive formalities or representational displays intended to 'elevate' their participants.²⁹⁶ Indeed, throughout administrative meetings, she regularly remained dressed in her sleeping gown and her white gauze night cap. Such a scenario suggests that these meetings must be interpreted in other terms. Certainly, Catherine's administrative meetings were intended to demonstrate her industry or commitment to governance.²⁹⁷ But even more so, they were crucial components of the empress' system of modern sovereignty. The absence of formalities signified that these meetings were spaces of dialogue, not of hierarchical command. Meeting with specific servitors on an individual basis, Catherine facilitated the transmission of the monarch's power through official 'intermediary' channels that lay at the core of her system. And their regular and recurring nature made the flow of power orderly and predictable. Finally, these interactions demonstrate that the locus of government affairs was not so much the court as a whole, but was specifically localizable within certain rooms in Catherine's palaces, which served as the inner sanctum of power. Their hidden operations, as, too, their restricted access—people of lesser rank and foreign diplomats were not allowed to see her at these times—added a certain mystery to power and represented the proper hierarchical order of sovereignty respectively.²⁹⁸

Admittedly, there were inevitable variations to this routine over time. For example, writing about the organization of her day in 1778, Coxe stated that the empress rose as early as six, and would be "engaged in public business" with her secretary until eight or nine, followed by her ministers of state, and aid-de-camps at ten. This is a much earlier start to the day than what Gribovsky described in 1796 but this is a change that one might reasonably be expected as the empress became older. Nonetheless, these routines maintained their integrity throughout her reign and applied independent of her location. The French Ambassador, Count Ségur, who accompanied the court during Catherine's journey to the Crimea in 1787, commented that "the regular system of passing her days, to which the Empress had accustomed herself, varied as little as possible when she was travelling...at six o'clock she got up and transacted business with her ministers, and then she breakfasted and received [members of the court]."²⁹⁹

b. Lunch

Catherine would be occupied with state matters in her private rooms until midday. Thereafter she returned to her dressing room where her ladies-in-waiting would prepare her attire for her entrance to court. Her hairdresser, Kozlov, prepared her hair (low, old-fashioned style with backward facing frisette over the ears). As with her austere hairstyle, on regular days Catherine preferred simple unadorned silk dresses in a combination of lilac and white, signifying that her daily appearance in

²⁹⁵ A. Gribovskii, *Zapiski o imperatritse Ekaterine velikoi polkovnika, sostoiashago pri ee osobe stats-sekretarem* (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1864), 27. For a history and discussion of court ranks, see Ageeva, *Imperatorskii dvor*, 198-352.

²⁹⁶ Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 28.

²⁹⁷ Isabel de Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 131-44.

²⁹⁸ On exclusion as key to the representation of power, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 8-9.

²⁹⁹ Ségur, *Memoirs*, vol. 3, 10-1. See also vol. 2, 260-1.

court were not about ceremonial display. Still, public appearances were integral to the life of the palace, and the functioning of the court required continuous input from the monarch, who needed not only to organize events and invite individuals to them, but also to attend them in person. At the same time, leaving her private rooms in the palace did not automatically give all of the palace's visitors access to her. The empress' surrounding social spaces remained highly ordered, meaning it would be more accurate to speak of levels of accessibility where various ranks of individuals were able to see and/or interact with her at different times.

Lunch was arguably the most important moment in the daily regimen of the court. Besides feeding hungry courtiers, it occupied three functions: it maintained a predictable pattern of visibility by the empress to the highest-ranking state officials; it obligated those officials to maintain the daily routines of the court; and, through seating arrangements, it maintained hierarchies of power between them. On many days, lunch was the only appearance the empress made outside her private domain. The guest list was highly repetitive and highly selective, ranging across court and civil functionaries as well as military commanders, reflecting both rank and degree of influence at court. Typically, the empress dined in the dining room or less commonly when in Winter Palace, in the gallery or the Hermitage, depending on the size of her company. Guests had to be personally invited by the empress, with the exception of her favorites who were able to attend at their pleasure. Even on days when she did not leave her apartments, she was joined by two or three other people. When she dined in court, she was accompanied by around a dozen intimates, though the court journals do not consistently record the composition of her entourage. In addition to favorites, who were steady attendees, Catherine's company consisted of senior servitors, drawn from the top two or three military, civilian, and court tiers of the Table of Ranks. Two top court functionaries, Chief Equerry (*ober-stallmeister*)³⁰⁰ Lev Naryskin (from 1762), and Marshal of the Court (*gof-marshall*) Fedor Bariatinsky (from 1778), both of whom were responsible for organizing court activities, and were therefore particularly important in maintaining court routines in consultation with the empress. We might also mention the vice chancellors, Aleksandr Golitsyn (1762-1778) and Ivan Osterman (1775-1796), as well as General-in-Chief (*general-anshef*) Iakov Bruce, one of the most regular attendees through to his death in 1791. In his diary of 1792, Gribovsky noted that towards the end of her reign, Catherine regularly invited Hofmarschall Fyodor Bariatinsky, General-in-Chief Petr Passek, as well as the senator, head-chamberlain (*ober-kamenger*), and privy councillor (*tainyi-sovetnik*), Aleksandr Stroganov. Anna Protasova (*freilein* and *kamer-freilein* from 1785) was one of the empress' closest female confidants and was regularly present at lunch.³⁰¹ So, too, were Iakov Bruce's wife, Praskov'ia Bruce, and, after the latter's fall from grace in 1779, Aleksandra Branitskaia, - another individual mentioned by Gribovsky.³⁰² As this list suggests, Catherine used her luncheons to interact with a select cadre of individuals, each representing various aspects and channels of power. Their regular presence reinforced power's orderliness by underscoring that there was a specific time and place for select individuals to interact with her, as well as nipping in the bud confusion or disappointment as to who would receive the coveted invitation.

One's position in the Table of Ranks did not automatically qualify individuals to attend luncheon, nor was it a requirement. Notably, some of the highest-ranking civil officials, such as the head of the College of Foreign Affairs, Nikita Panin, first rank on the Table of Ranks, and his

³⁰⁰ Catherine raised the chief equerry from the 3rd to 2nd rank in 1766.

³⁰¹ In addition to establishing the Table of Ranks, Peter the Great had introduced a new system of rank for women at the imperial court. It was drawn from French and German models. See Ageeva, *Imperatorskii dvor*, 235-60.

³⁰² A. Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 30

successor Alexander Bezborodko, were rarely present, as was also true of the General Procurator, Alexander Vyazemsky. By contrast, some of the empress' secretaries—Sergei Kozmin, Ivan Elagin, and Adam Olsuf'ev—of far lower in rank, made occasional appearances, but were not regular guests. The grand duke, Paul, who was only nine years old at the beginning of his mother's reign, tended to eat in full court on feast days. He had his own apartments and his own schedule, which only partly overlapped with those of the empress, above on all Sundays, when he attended liturgy and spent time in her company.³⁰³ Foreign dignitaries and ministers were rarely seen at lunch. They were able to see the empress on Sundays, during large court evens, at special audiences, but as a rule were not able to see or interact with her at any other time.

Lunch lasted for no more than an hour, and when it was over the guests would immediately depart and Catherine would return to her quarters. There she often hosted private audiences. Diderot, for example, who was one of her guests of honor in late 1774 and 1775, was granted private meetings with the empress between three and six o'clock about three days a week.³⁰⁴ At other times, she undertook light exercise and other short excursions. Gribovsky, however, noted that towards the end of her reign she was less active and replaced walks and outings with indoor rest. She would read a book or listen to the foreign post, which arrived twice weekly, whilst making paper models. The foreign post would be read out to her by her favorite from 1791 to 1796, Platon Zubov, or in his absence, Arkadii Morkov. As a last resort she turned to her secretary Popov, who was always on duty in the adjacent room. In the summers, she frequently napped alone.³⁰⁵

c. Evening Entertainment

From about six o'clock, a group of notables would again assemble in the palace to spend the evening with the empress. These intimates constituted a small company of highly ranked Russian servitors, personally invited by Catherine, and there was general overlap with her lunchtime guests. On most days of the week, the empress would invite these guests to spend time with her, either in one of the courtly rooms, or in her private apartments, listening to music or playing cards or chess. About once a week she would invite them to the Hermitage for theatrical performances or a masquerade. Evening events marked yet another occasion for the organization and ordering of St. Petersburg's elites, both local and diplomatic. Inviting a wide group of spectators into her palaces, required them to submit themselves to courtly protocols, while the same events placed hierarchies between them on visible display.

Private events, limited to a closed circle, made the empress' preferences even more publicly notable. Visiting the Winter Palace in 1778, William Coxe, noted that in the winter, these private functions would take place on Thursday evenings. Admittedly not an eye-witness, he commented on the character of these private events. He noted that servants were "excluded" and "supper and various refreshments [were] presented on small tables, which [rose] and [fell] through trap-doors." Furthermore, as with the ordinary evening gatherings in her private apartments,³⁰⁶ "all ceremony [was banished], as far as was consistent with the respect due to a great sovereign." Throughout the rooms, there were "many directions" outlining the proper comportment in this select space. The "general tendency" of these was to "encourage freedom, banish etiquette, and invite the most

³⁰³ Paul's routines were described by the memoirs of his tutor, S. A. Poroshin, *Zapiski, sluzhashchie k istorii ego imperatorskago vysochestva blagovernago gosudaria tsesarevicha i velikago kniazia Pavla Petrovicha, naslednika prestolu rossiiskago* (St. Petersburg, 1844).

³⁰⁴ A useful discussion of their meetings can be found in: Inna Gorbatov, *Catherine the Great and French Philosophers of the Enlightenment*. (Bethesda, MD: Academica Press, 2006), 168-71.

³⁰⁵ Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 31.

³⁰⁶ Ségur, *Memoirs*, vol. 3 (London, 1826), 59.

unrestrained ease.”³⁰⁷ Such instructions did more than demonstrate that there were strict standards of etiquette at other times: they underlined more generally that sovereignty was about ordered spaces governed by specific expectations of comportment, and that the creation and maintenance of this order was the task of the monarch. This order was maintained by the monarch through various strategies: controlling access, either personally or through court functionaries; being present in those spaces at predictable moments for such gatherings to occur; and, as Coxe’s story indicates, using in the final instance written instructions in a manner very much comparable to law to communicate and instill comportment, be it strict etiquette, or more relaxed interaction.

While Catherine mostly limited her daily interactions to a small number of individuals drawn from the higher echelons of the political elite, she also hosted masquerades and theatrical performances open to a wider public, who had to get tickets through written requests to the court booking-office, the *pridvornaia kontora*. Theater, in particular, was a major attraction during Catherine’s reign. Originally commissioned by Elizabeth, the first theater in the Winter Palace opened in 1763. This was followed by a second in Tsarskoe Selo in 1765,³⁰⁸ and a third in the Hermitage in 1776.³⁰⁹ The theater has been widely discussed as a means of imposing mores on the elites.³¹⁰ While it permitted entry to people not in state service, the theater reaffirmed the Table of Ranks, since individuals were assigned to specific spaces in the parterre or loges depending on their rank. Individuals who took their place conceded their status, although this was most complicated for foreigners, who lacked a position in the Table of Ranks.³¹¹

But while it reaffirmed hierarchy, the theater was for many a rare opportunity to see and be in the monarch’s presence.³¹² Catherine’s loge would be located either straight across from the stage, or immediately to the side of the stage. The former position allowed her to be seen by privileged guests in other loges. In contrast, the empress’ positioning to the side made her more widely visible. It also allowed visitors to watch the stage and to see simultaneously the empress’ reaction to the performance.³¹³ Catherine often switched loges during a performance, as did Paul, who usually joined her in the second act. Apart from Sunday liturgy, this was one of the few places where Catherine and Paul encountered one another in public.³¹⁴ Alexander—his son—began to be taken to her loge in 1779, when he was only 1½ years old. Catherine thereby advertised the stability and longevity of the dynasty.³¹⁵

Catherine also held masquerades that were open to the broader public. During his visit, Coxe mentions that there were two or three of these events at court in the winters and that “persons of all rank were admitted.” The attendance was large, on one occasion in the Hermitage reaching as many as eight-thousand people. For this event a “magnificent suite of twenty apartments, handsomely illuminated, were opened.” Coxe relates how these spaces corresponded to social

³⁰⁷ William Coxe, *Travels in Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark*, vol. 2 (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1802), 141.

³⁰⁸ Alexeï Estratov, *Les Spectacles Francophones à la Cour de la Russie (1743-1796). L’Invention d’une Société* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016), 188.

³⁰⁹ The first performance at the Hermitage is recorded in *KFZ*, 1776, 210-1.

³¹⁰ Evstratov, *Les Spectacles Francophones*; Elise Wirtschafter, *The Play of Ideas in the Russian Enlightenment Theater* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2003). On the numerous plays that Catherine wrote herself, see Lurana D. O’Malley, *The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great: Theatre and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017).

³¹¹ Evstratov, *Les Spectacles Francophones*, 193-5, 197-8.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 193-5.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 198-9.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

status, hence were carefully ordered. The most important of these was a large oblong room - also used for “common balls.” In the middle of this chamber was a space “enclosed with a low railing, appropriated to the nobility who danced.” The dances of “the burghers, and other persons who had not been presented [to the empress]” took place in another hall. The other rooms of the event were used for tea and refreshments as well as cards, for which many tables had been set out. Guests were not only separated by rooms, but also more conspicuously by their dress. The nobility, for example, “generally wore dominos,” whereas those of inferior rank “appeared in their own provincial clothes, perhaps embellished with occasional ornaments.”³¹⁶ Catherine would make a much-anticipated appearance at such events. Accompanied by a small entourage of high-ranking intimates, she would walk “in great state through the several rooms.” Sometimes, she would sit down to play cards (probably Macau) in one of the salons, inevitably drawing large crowds that were held at a distance; however, she preferred to retire to her private rooms after a short period time, and only those who had been presented to her at a private audience would be allowed to accompany her.

Even from these few examples it is possible to see that these celebrations were highly organized events involving protocols and procedures that all present were to some extent responsible for upholding. In this regard, it is important that corresponding entries in the court journals are of great length and detail. Such events, held with scrupulous regularity, were again opportunities to manifest ordered power. However, since ordered power involved assignment of individuals to their proper places, celebrations also needed to bring into greater resolution to a broader public the unequal proximity of different groups to the monarch.

d. ‘Kurtagi’

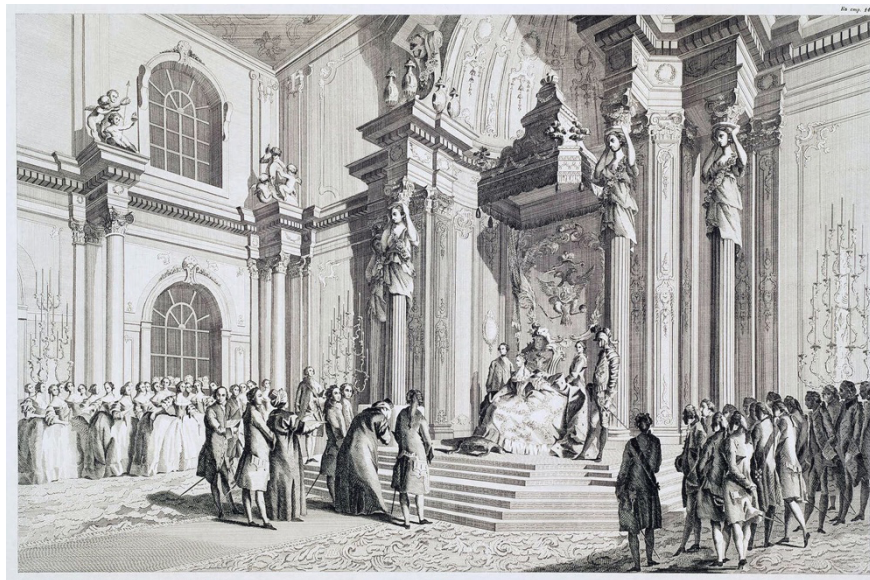
Catherine regularly held so-called *kurtagi* on Sundays, either at noon after liturgy (but before lunch) or in the evenings. Translated as ‘court-days,’ these were formal receptions held in one of the state rooms, to which high-ranking Russian nobles and foreign guests would be invited. For foreign dignitaries either visiting or stationed in St. Petersburg, such functions were one of the few occasions on which they would be able to spend time with the empress. The court journals were fairly reliable in recording *kurtagi*. Take, for instance, an early entry from January 12, 1763, when the empress was in Moscow: “In the evening, at seven o’clock, foreign ministers and Russian notables assembled in the gallery and there began a *kurtag* which the empress attended; it ended at ten o’clock.”³¹⁷ Interactions with the empress were carefully managed at *kurtagi*. For example, Russian notables and foreign ministers would greet the empress in separate rooms. Making her rounds, the empress would be accompanied by the chief chamberlain (*ober-kamerger*) and the equerry (*shtalmeister*) who would formally present each guest to her. Upon being presented, Russian guests had to bend their knee, whereas foreigners were expected to kiss her hand. After making an initial round, she would proceed to the throne room where she received further greetings and conversed with her guests for about half an hour. During this audience strict etiquette was required. According to Gribovsky, the empress normally stood alone, about four steps in front of the collected company. She would approach those with whom she wished to talk, but this remained entirely at her discretion, for none of her guests had the right to begin a conversation with her. In general Catherine would speak with many of her guests, but there “were some she never spoke to.”³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Coxe, *Travels*, 139-40.

³¹⁷ *KFZ*, 1763, 8.

³¹⁸ Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 33.

More rarely, foreign dignitaries were given special audiences with the empress.³¹⁹ These audiences, too, followed strict protocol, which are detailed in the court journals. On these days dignitaries would be first asked to wait in a separate waiting room until called when the empress was ready. When the time came, they would be collected by a master of ceremonies and first led through a series of state rooms and down the main palace staircase. There they were met by the vice chancellor who led them through a further set of halls to the audience chamber, where they were presented to the empress.³²⁰ Such a passage through the grandest spaces of the palace was calculated to produce a strong visual impression. More importantly, however, we see how it also manifested specific aspects of power that the empress thought important. Strict procedure exhibited the normativity of that power, whereas the actual passage of the envoy to the empress through physical spaces of the palace, guided by high-ranking state servitors, at once displayed and manifested the monarchy's intermediary channels. Only via the latter could foreign dignitaries obtain access to the monarch. Certainly, the body of the empress was important in maintaining these ritual hierarchies. However, particular palace functionaries, in this instance the master of ceremonies and the vice chancellor, also had a critical role to play. In other words, sovereignty involved tactics for ordering individuals, requiring the collaboration of multiple persons, including the empress, her courtiers, bureaucrats, regular guests, and one-time visitors.



Receiving the Turkish Embassy in the Winter Palace. Engraving after a drawing by J. L. de Veilly and M. Makhyev, 1796.

That Catherine tightly controlled the accessibility of her person in relation to foreign diplomats is particularly significant and deserves comment. Ensuring that they held minimal physical proximity, especially vis-à-vis her Russian servitors who took precedence over them in her schedule, she advertised their lack of influence and forced them to conduct state business in a

³¹⁹ For a detailed history of diplomatic ceremony in Russia in the eighteenth century, see Ol'ga G. Ageeva, *Diplomaticheskii tseremonial imperatorskoi Rossii: XVIII vek* (Moscow: Novyi kronograf, 2013).

³²⁰ See, for instance, the entry for May 4, 1791: *KFZ*, 1791, 289-96.

distant and mediated manner. As she did with her daily routines, she established this form of interaction early, allowing her to distinguish herself from her husband, Peter III, who was seen to have allowed foreign diplomats to usurp political power. This new order was commented on by the English ambassador, the Earl of Buckinghamshire, who, wishing to meet with the new empress in 1762 was told that, “though the late Emperor had sometimes received papers himself, her present Majesty chose rather to have them conveyed through the channel of her ministers.”³²¹

e. Religious and State Ceremonies

The empress also maintained a regular schedule of religious and state ceremonies. The observation of religious rites formed one of the most demanding parts of the empress’ weekly schedule. These ceremonies were essential to display her adherence to the traditions of the Russian state and her status as a Christian monarch, and Catherine adhered to them rigorously. They also helped her bind high-ranking state officials, regardless of their personal piety, to Christian principles, which she had argued were the foundations of properly ordered power.

These ceremonies were part of cultural inheritance of the Russian monarchy and here, Empress Elizabeth was a crucial point of cultural orientation.³²² The court journals from Elizabeth’s reign, admittedly less detailed than those of Catherine, outline a calendar of religious and state festivals that is similar to the one presented below. Elizabeth celebrated all of the most important Orthodox feasts, the name days of the members of the Russian royal family, and the celebrations of chivalric orders, including the Order of St. Catherine, which the future empress, (then still Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst), was inducted into shortly after her arrival. The tradition of inviting officers of important Russian military regiments to dine with the empress on assigned days was also firmly in place. So, too, were a host of lesser court events, such as *kurtagi*, weekly operas, comedies, balls, and masquerades (some of which were private, others open to a wider public). Empress Elizabeth invited and expected Catherine to take part in important, particularly religious functions, from weekly mass to fasting at Lent and the extensive devotions of Holy Week. These involved early-morning matins beginning at 3am, followed a few hours later by mass. The young princess, eager to win the empress’ favor and to raise her prestige in court made a concerted effort to attend these, even though she found them completely exhausting. Her husband, in contrast, tended to feign illness.

The vast majority of feast days that Catherine observed during her own reign were Orthodox holidays, organized around the Twelve Feasts of the Eastern Orthodox Church, beginning with the Nativity of Mary on September 8 and ending with Dormition on August 15.³²³ Despite the greater Marian focus of the Eastern Church, the most important period nevertheless remained the beginning of Lent, through Easter until Pentecost. In addition to the Twelve Feasts, the empress marked a number of supporting Christian festivals, including the celebration of the birth and death of John the Baptist, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and the Intercession of Theotokos, a feast that had added importance because of the central role played by the tenth-century Slavic fool-in-Christ, the blessed Andrew (*Andrei Iurodivyi*). Furthermore, two religious holidays involved celebration and veneration of the most important icons of Russian Orthodoxy –

³²¹ October 25, 1762, *Despatches and Correspondence of John, Second Earl of Buckinghamshire, Ambassador to the Court of Catherine II of Russia, 1762-1765*, ed. A. Collyer, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1900), 81.

³²² Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 1-21.

³²³ For a study of religious ceremony in the Russian court, see Simon Dixon, “Religious Ritual at the Eighteenth-Century Russian Court,” in *Monarchy and Religion: The Transformation of Royal Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. M. Shaich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217-48.

the Theotokos of Vladimir and the Theotokos of Kazan. Russian state holidays were tied to Christian Saints' days. These included, above all, the days of the Russian chivalric orders. At the beginning of the empress' reign, these were three: the Orders of St. Andrew, St. Catherine, and St. Alexander Nevsky.³²⁴ Catherine added a further two during her reign that were closely modeled on the latter. In 1769, following the outbreak of war with Turkey, she founded the Order of St. George, honoring valiance in battle; in 1782, on the year of her twentieth-year jubilee, she established the Order of Vladimir the Great which was awarded for outstanding military as well as civil service. Finally, we might add name-days of the empress and the grand duke; Catherine's coronation; and New Year's Day.

Though it is difficult to generalize about feast days, as a rule, they were hosted by the empress in the imperial palace. Invariably, all were marked by special church services which she attended. Some consisted of little more than this.³²⁵ Generally, however, they involved celebratory lunches accompanied by various entertainments to which she invited the upper segments of the Russian nobility, the clergy, and foreign guests. At the same time, many of these often served to celebrate the distinction of a handful of Russian military and civil servitors, above all the Russian chivalric orders. Coxe, for instance, recalls that he was invited to be a spectator at the celebratory lunch for the knights of the Order of St. Andrew in 1778, which was hosted by the empress. The lunch itself was a highly ritualized event attended by court officials in ceremonial attire (two hofmarschalls and the chief master of ceremonies). The strict organization of space was equally on display on New Year's Day when Catherine would invite members of the local merchantry to the palace, but not to the day's celebratory lunch – an honor extended to only a few hundred people drawn exclusively from the “clergy (*dukhovnye chiny*) and notables...of the first four ranks.”³²⁶

A few of the feast days involved departures from the palace, opening the possibility for moments of public pageantry and, perhaps, a chance for common people to see the empress, albeit at distance. For example, on the Feast of the Transfiguration in 1771 (August 6), the court entry states that Catherine, accompanied by her ‘court staff (*pridvornyi shtab*) and the *Generalitet*’ (the first four military ranks) journeyed in carriages from the Winter Palace to the Church of the Transfiguration for a special service with members of the Preobrazhenskii guards regiment.³²⁷ On August 30, 1769, celebrating Alexander Nevsky and the eponymous chivalric order, the empress, accompanied by the grand duke and her courtly staff, went from the Summer Palace to the monastery, the Alexander Nevsky Lavra. This time the collected company journeyed by foot, and the empress, who was dressed in the full regalia of the chivalric order, was assisted by several chamberlains who carried the train of her robe. At the monastery's gates, the empress was greeted with a sacred cross by the high-ranking clergymen (*znatnoe dukhovenstvo*). Thereafter she followed a procession of crosses into the church, herself trailed by the knights of the chivalric order, arranged by seniority and in rows of two.³²⁸ Finally, one of the most public celebrations was the anniversary of the empress' ascension to the Russian throne (June 28). For example, on

³²⁴ For a history of these orders, see Gary Marker, *Imperial Saint: The Cult of St. Catherine and the Dawn of Female Rule in Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007). See also, Helju A. Bennett, “*Chiny, Ordena, and Officialdom*,” in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Walter M. Pintner and Don K. Rowney (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 162-89.

³²⁵ The Nativity of Mary, held on September 8, is an example, despite its status as one of the ‘great feasts’ of the Orthodox Church.

³²⁶ *KFZ*, 1762, 2.

³²⁷ *KFZ*, 1771, 277.

³²⁸ *KFZ*, 1769, 74-5.

this day in 1763, Catherine undertook a trip around St. Petersburg, beginning from Tsarksoe Selo and ending at the Summer Palace. After an intermediate service in the Kazan Cathedral, the final segment of the trip involved a public procession down Nevsky Prospect where she was met at stages by various groups: first the Russian and foreign merchantry, followed by the commanders and senior officers of the first Cadet, then the Engineering and Artillery, and finally Naval Corps. When she arrived at the Summer Palace, she was awaited by Russian notables of the first five ranks in addition to foreign ministers, who subsequently congratulated her.³²⁹

In conclusion, Catherine's fastidious and careful observance of state celebrations were as important to manifesting her operating principles. In addition to demonstrating her Russianness, they manifested the regularity, predictability, and organized nature of power. Moreover, they were ordering tools that, through the arrangement of the bodies around the sovereign's physical person, allocated individuals to their proper place and represented the proper 'channels' of interaction with the monarch. Certainly, my interpretation does not claim to exhaust the purposes of the court. Catherine, like her predecessors, used the court for entertainment and for telegraphing Russia's wealth and greatness.³³⁰ What we are speaking about is a crucial addition to how her court should be seen – as a tool for building modern sovereignty.

4. The Empress' Favorites

Favorites cannot be overlooked in dealing with the empress as a physical person who interacted with select individuals in specific locations and at certain moments during the day. What was their place within these regularities of the empress' life? Did they bolster or undermine the above system of power that she sought to construct? Historians have treated Catherine's favorites as if they were a critical aspect of her reign and granted them considerable attention, arguably more than those of her predecessors. Some have suggested that favoritism was qualitatively different during her reign. John Alexander, for example, has argued that favoritism progressed during Catherine's reign to the point that it became 'institutionalized.'³³¹ Similarly, Aleksandr Kamenskii argues that in the decades following the Pugachev uprising, favoritism spiraled out of control as a string of temporary lovers came and left.³³² Leaving this and other specific interpretations aside for the moment, it is important to note that favoritism was a permanent feature of the empress' reign. It is also a fact that Catherine had a large number of favorites, at least twelve (excluding those before her ascension). The majority of these were short-lived, or 'ephemeral men' (*vremenshchiki*), as they were labelled by contemporaries. Only three—Grigory Orlov, Grigory Potemkin, and Platon Zubov—occupied their position for a number of years. Both the number and permanent presence of favorites suggest that there was something systemic about the phenomenon under the empress' reign, an important consideration for our purposes.

Understandably, the empress' favorites attracted much attention and were of great interest to her contemporaries, who commented on their personalities and on their relationship with her. Although it has been suggested that favoritism had become an accepted practice by Catherine's reign, the harsh nature of some contemporary commentary indicates that favorites posed a general problem for empresses, especially male favorites. Whereas the taking of mistresses by emperors

³²⁹ *KFZ*, 1763, 139-142.

³³⁰ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 327-43.

³³¹ John T. Alexander, "Favourites, Favouritism, and Female Rule in Russia, 1725-1796," in *Russia in the Age of Enlightenment: Essays for Isabel de Madariaga*, ed. R. Bartlett and J. Hartley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 117.

³³² Kamenskii, "Catherine the Great," 55.

was unlikely to precipitate trenchant criticism—there is even the suggestion that it was a way of representing potency³³³—female rulers who took male companions ran into accusations of sexual waywardness and of allowing intimates to illegitimately influence political power.³³⁴ Prejudice against female rulers is very noticeable in the writings of critics such as Mikhail Shcherbatov. It is also noticeable in the commentaries of foreigners at court. Take, for example, the memoirs of Charles Masson, who, despite praising the “regular life” and the “exterior decorum” Catherine maintained in public³³⁵—a noteworthy acknowledgment—had this to say about the Russian empresses of the eighteenth century:

The reigns of these women afford a strong argument in favor of those nations who have never suffered the scepter to be placed in the hands that were formed for the distaff; for it would be difficult to find six reigns more prolific in wars, revolutions, crimes, disorders, and calamities of every kind. That the manners of the Court were softened I am ready to admit; but then they were corrupted, and wretchedness increased in equal proportion with luxury, and disorder. Abuses of every kind, tyranny and licentiousness became the very essence of government... When women reign their lovers tyrannize over the people, and all in power plunder them.³³⁶

Masson singled out Catherine, arguing she went further than her female predecessors. In fact, she “availed herself of her power to exhibit to the world an example of which there is there is to be found no model... making the office of favorite a place at Court, with an apartment, salary, honors, prerogatives, and, above all, its peculiar functions.”³³⁷ In some measure, modern historians have repeated Masson’s claims.

There is no doubt that Catherine was deeply attached to many of her favorites, above all Potemkin.³³⁸ And she was hurt by their rejection, such as by Mamonov, who left her for Princess Shcherbatova, and by their infidelities, such as Ivan Rimsky-Korsakov’s affair with Praskovia Bruce.³³⁹ Without going into precarious psychological analyses, relationships with favorites may have provided her with certain emotional balance that her life as monarch denied to her, including the long hours of official interactions that she needed to observe. At the same time Catherine’s many liaisons made possible accusations of licentiousness.³⁴⁰ Certain decisions she made likely enabled further criticism in this regard. It is true, for example, that she allowed her favorites to reside in the palace in adjoining rooms with private access to hers. In some cases, she may have also shown poor judgment in selecting them (Mamonov and Rimsky-Korsakov), though pure bad

³³³ Blanning, *The Power of Culture*, 70.

³³⁴ Ruth Dawson, “Eighteenth-Century Libertinism in a Time of Change: Representations of Catherine the Great.” *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture*. 18 (summer 2002), 67-88.

³³⁵ Charles François Philibert Masson, *Secret Memoirs of the Court of St. Petersburg during her Reign and that of Paul I., by one of her Courtiers* (New York: Merrill & Baker, 1904), 69.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

³³⁸ See Catherine II and Grigory Potemkin, *Love & Conquest: Personal Correspondence of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin*, ed. and trans. by Douglas Smith (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004). For a discussion of their correspondence, see also Kelsey Rubin-Detlev, *The Epistolary Art of Catherine the Great* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2019), 60-3.

³³⁹ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*, 210.

³⁴⁰ Although Catherine’s string of lovers could count as licentiousness, accusations of debauchery are not supported by the source base. See Rubin-Detlev, *The Epistolary Art*, 125. For a broader account of these accusations, see the epilogue in John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

luck may also have been a factor. That her favorites became increasingly younger men over time (Zubov, her final favorite, was 40 years her junior), certainly also raised objections, again reflecting poor judgment on her part.

When it comes to the issue of sovereignty, however, the official roles and special prerogatives Catherine granted favorites at celebrations and within her daily routine require special scrutiny. The court journals, which we have used extensively, show a mixed picture. During state celebrations, the entries indicate that they neither played distinct roles nor occupied any special place. And, while they were present at ceremonial lunches, she did not always allow them to sit in close proximity to her.³⁴¹ All this indicates that Catherine sought to carefully manage how her favorites were seen in more public settings. That both Coxe and Gribovsky fail to comment on their presence or involvement during *kurtagi* further corroborates this view. At the same time, the court journals point to their perennial presence at the empress' daily lunches and in her smaller entourage. Finally, on the days when she decided to have lunch or dinner in her private rooms, her favorites would be one of only a handful of guests.³⁴² That the composition of these small gatherings is recorded by the court journals suggests that the company she kept was a matter of common knowledge in the palace: indeed, it was advertised as such. While Catherine undoubtedly kept order rigorously at state functions, these more quotidian manifestations of favor may have disrupted the appearance of ordered power, even if they did not overturn her schedule.

In weighing all the evidence, it is important to note that Catherine's favorites were not, objectively, more powerful than her predecessors'. Even Orlov, Potemkin, and Zubov never enjoyed the influence of Ivan Shuvalov, who at the end of Elizabeth's reign effectively ran the government in her name.³⁴³ However, given Catherine's own theory of sovereignty, including her emphasis on properly ordered power, favorites posed an objective problem, an arbitrary element in this order. They were free to see the empress when they pleased. Gribovsky, for example, noted that Zubov "always dined with the empress without invitation,"³⁴⁴ and he would also appear spontaneously during her morning meetings with ministers, disrupting official business.³⁴⁵ He thereby undermined the integrity of intermediary channels. Furthermore, while Catherine continued to directly oversee affairs, relying in her legislative activities on the same institutions as before, in her later years she allowed her favorites to function as intermediaries. As a result, they garnered considerable influence. Isabel de Madariaga argues that Zubov was particularly nefarious in this regard, since in her final years he was able to usurp control of foreign policy away from the Imperial Council.³⁴⁶ This was one of the reasons why he caused more damage to her reputation than Potemkin, who, despite his great influence, was willing and able to work with other key powerholders in Catherine's system.³⁴⁷

³⁴¹ See, for example, the celebratory meals held on the following occasions: New Year's Day, January 1, *KFZ*, 1771, 25; the Commemoration of Catherine's Ascension, June, 28, *KFZ*, 1776, 381; and Catherine's Name Day, November 24, *KFZ*, 1783, 586. However, there were times when this order was also broken, and Catherine allowed her favorites to sit next to her. Catherine sat at a separate table with Potemkin at the New Year's celebration in 1778, *KFZ*, 1778, 6; Potemkin also sat one seat removed from her at the meal held for Annunciation on March 25, 1791: *KFZ*, 1791, 205.

³⁴² For instance, *KFZ*, 1769, 8; and *KFZ*, 1774, 15.

³⁴³ Alexander, "Favourites," 115.

³⁴⁴ Gribovskii, *Zapiski*, 30.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁴⁶ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 566.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 564-5.

Nonetheless, even before Zubov, some of Catherine's favorites were able to intersect the channels of her system. A rare insight into their unwelcome presence at the Imperial Council is provided by a private letter from Nikita Panin to his brother detailing a critical meeting with the empress following the destruction of Kazan by the rebel, Pugachev, in July 1774. He noted the presence of two favorites—the outgoing Vasil'chikov and the person who was then in the process of replacing him, Potemkin—in addition to the general procurator, the vice chancellor, the president of the College of War, the general-in-chief, the Russian field marshal, the empress, and Panin himself. Panin had disparaging things to say about all of those present, but he was most critical of Catherine's favorites. Vasil'chikov he depicted as a superfluous individual who sat, listened with "insolent indifference," and said nothing, having "absolutely no ideas" to contribute. In contrast, presaging the continued conflict Panin would have with him in subsequent years, he depicted Potemkin as a menace – entitled, impertinent, and of a "brazenness of thought" that was utterly unjustified by his "age or practical experience." Worst of all, Potemkin had managed to talk the empress into what Panin considered to be a foolish plan of action and had deliberately "greatly predisposed" her against Panin. Fearing the "destruction of the empire," Panin was forced to confront the empress afterwards in her private rooms to change her mind.³⁴⁸ Panin's disparaging remarks might have arisen at least in response to the direct and personal threat that Potemkin posed toward him. He may also have held Potemkin and Vasil'chikov in personal disdain. But, he also disliked the favorites' presence on principle, as we know from his earlier Imperial Council project.³⁴⁹ Still, the very fact that Panin was irked by the presence of favorites during a key policy meeting indicates a flaw in Catherine's system of managing her favorites. These infringed on the ideal of ordered power she constructed, and this may be one reason why her contemporaries so heavily criticized them—and her for them. Overall, however, they were neither fatal to her reign, nor did they entirely negate the efforts that she made in building her system of sovereignty.

4. Conclusion

The subject of this chapter has been the monarch as a physical person and the variety of daily activities she conducted to manifest characteristics sovereign power. Close scrutiny of the empress' routine indicates that she deliberately led a highly organized and ordered life, divided between state affairs and courtly functions. These patterns underwent few changes over the course of her reign. The empress' activities fulfilled a multiplicity of purposes. For example, meetings with secretaries and servitors were essential to the transmission of commands via 'intermediary channels.' Orthodox religious rituals upheld her commitment to rule as a Christian monarch, as promised in the *Nakaz*. Feast days of the Russian chivalric orders bound military and civil servitors into ceremonial routines while upholding and displaying gradations of power between them. Meals and entertainment not only allowed the empress to cultivate the personal fidelity of the upper echelons of the Russian elite, but created a system of access that displayed her person to the individuals who served her at regular intervals, once again delineating their place in an elaborate hierarchy. Above all, however, it was the overall structured nature of the empress' activity—its predictable rhythms and carefully managed interactions with others—that manifested the normative structure of sovereignty. Again, law was not the only tool of constructing normativity, but strategies of managing bodies – the monarch's own and those in her orbit. In so doing, Catherine again sought to distinguish herself from her husband, Peter III, who had failed to demonstrate ordered power either at court or in his exercise of executive functions. So too, did she

³⁴⁸ "Pis'mo grafa Nikity I. Panina grafu Petru Paninu," July 22, 1774. *SIRIO*, vol. 6, 75.

³⁴⁹ *SIRIO*, vol. 7, 200-17.

distinguish herself from Elizabeth, who had been more successful in her public setting, but led a disorganized life in other ways: “without regular hours for going to bed or getting up, nor for meals or dressing.”³⁵⁰ Elizabeth was famously pious and we know that her piety influenced her activities as monarch, from her devoted observation of religious ceremonies to her decision to place a moratorium on the death penalty.³⁵¹ In the *Nakaz*, however, one sees a different conception of what it means to be a Christian ruler: to ensure the regular and predictable operation of power via its proper channels. In this sense, Catherine’s meticulous observation of religious and state ceremonies, and her carrying out of state affairs in the manner that she did on a daily basis, may themselves be viewed as acts of Christian discipline.

This chapter has contributed to our understanding of ceremonies and rituals in the Russian court by pointing out significance of their regularity and predictability in Catherine’s reign. Moreover, it has shown how such events did not necessarily elevate all equally but through careful management served to put individuals in their proper places, as demanded by the dictates of sovereignty. One of the most important uses the empress made of functions was to place foreign diplomats at an acceptable distance, thereby again distinguishing herself from her husband who had given them excessive access to his person and hence to political power. While adding a crucial dimension to these practices, the chapter also suggests that Catherine accorded rituals and ceremonies diminished importance in the development of sovereignty, which was grounded in her particular manner of carrying out executive, administrative, and judicial matters. As we have seen, many of the empress’ routines were directed at ordering *these* activities. Furthermore, they occurred away from the public gaze, in an inner sanctum of power governed by its own regularities and procedures.

³⁵⁰ Catherine II, *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, trans. by M. Budberg, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), 226.

³⁵¹ Elena Marasina, “Zakon” i “grazhdanin” v Rossii vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka: ocherki istorii obshchestsvennogo soznaniia (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 67-120.

Chapter 5: Emel'ian Pugachev and the Limits of the Empress' Sovereignty

1. Introduction

From the beginning of her reign, Catherine encountered a number of opponents to her rule. Amongst the elites, some chose to challenge her at least in part on her own proposed terms. For example, a series of conspiracies within the imperial guard regiments in the first decade of her rule were partially motivated by a concern that she had allowed the Orlovs to gain undue political power.³⁵² Some wished to remove her in favor of her son Paul, suggesting also a continued concern over her legitimate claim to rule outright. In 1773, Paul, who had turned eighteen the previous year, allegedly agreed to one of these schemes concocted by the Holstein diplomat, Caspar von Saldern.³⁵³ Given the history of palace coups in the eighteenth century, Catherine knew to take such conspiracies very seriously. She appointed secret commissions to investigate them, and she punished their participants with loss of noble status and exile to the Far East.³⁵⁴ Nonetheless, not one of these plots found any significant support, especially at the highest echelons of power, and this suggested that she was able on the whole to maintain the support of the elite, both in her and in her sovereignty project.

Catherine, however, also had to deal with various forms of popular discontent. While persistent peasant unrest and violent clashes between the state and peripheral groups in the first decade of her rule were not unique to her reign, the regular appearance of pretenders who assumed the identity of the deceased emperor, Peter III, was a disconcerting development.³⁵⁵ Although pretenders were no new phenomenon in Russia, their large number—there was a least twenty-four over the course of her reign—as well as their popularity pointed to the empress' lack of legitimacy in the countryside. These pretenders were invariably commoners but also outsiders, such as Cossacks or religious schismatics, particularly ones who had fallen afoul of the authorities. Assuming the identity of Peter III, they claimed to be legitimate monarchs, thereby overtly challenging the empress' sovereignty. They attracted followers by addressing local grievances and, more generally, by promising to defend the common people from the oppression of the elites, who, the pretenders claimed, had engineered their (the monarch's) overthrow and were the principal architects of the common people's oppression.

The most significant of these disturbances was begun by a Don Cossack, Emel'ian Pugachev, in the south-eastern borderlands in September 1773. After 'revealing' himself as the deceased Peter III to the Yaik Cossacks, he was able to garner widespread support by actively disseminating decrees in the countryside, and very quickly he and his followers constituted a significant military threat of several thousand individuals. They began to capture towns and routed government troops that were sent to pacify the area. Pugachev also laid siege to the town of Orenburg and set up a base nearby in Berda from which he oversaw operations. Despite regular setbacks, Pugachev was frequently able to reinvigorate his base and eventually to mount a major assault on the Russian heartlands. In July 1774 his forces razed the city of Kazan to the ground

³⁵² John T. Alexander gives the best concise account of all of these conspiracies in *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 162-67, & *Autocratic Politics in a National Crisis: The Imperial Government and Pugachev's Revolt, 1773-1775* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 11-43.

³⁵³ Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 166-7.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-7.

³⁵⁵ See Philip Longworth, "The Pretender Phenomenon in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *Past and Present*, 66 (February 1975), 70.

and even threatened Moscow province. However, he eventually faltered in the face of an escalated military response and was ultimately detained, tried, and finally executed alongside a handful of accomplices in January 1775.

It is significant that Pugachev managed to appeal to a wide variety of groups. Although the rebellion began amongst Cossacks, the pretender came to stand at the head of a large and diverse force that also comprised serfs, factory workers, *odnodvortsy* (single-homesteaders), Old Believers, Bashkirs, and Tatars. Furthermore, the scale of his rampage had few precedents. The rebellion managed to draw in hundreds of thousands of people over large swathes of territory between the Volga river and the Urals, leading to the breakdown of government control. It also wrought considerable violence and destruction. Exact figures are difficult to establish, but it is frequently stated that the rebels killed 1,572 nobles (including wives and children), 237 clerics, 1,037 officers and officials, and 600 government troops.³⁵⁶ Additionally, there was widespread looting and destruction of property, particularly of factories and government buildings. The rebels themselves also suffered severe casualties: as many as 20,000 were killed in battle; over three hundred were executed; and several thousand were sentenced to corporal punishment in widespread punitive measures.³⁵⁷

The Pugachev rebellion was one of the largest uprisings in the history of the Russian monarchy, and, for this reason, it has garnered considerable scholarly attention. This body of literature has analyzed many aspects of the rebellion, amongst them its preconditions and causes, the miscellaneous groups that were involved, including their views and the specific nature of their participation, and the course of military events.³⁵⁸ Soviet studies emphasized most forcibly its 'anti-feudal' elements, particularly the violence of serfs against their landlords, which predominated during the final stages of the rebellion as Pugachev moved south along the Volga.³⁵⁹ However, others have emphasized the Cossack component of the revolt, or have questioned the overall revolutionary character of the rebellion,³⁶⁰ citing the absence of any clearly stated and unifying agenda.³⁶¹

³⁵⁶ These figures are given by Isabel de Madariaga in *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 269, & Alexander, *Autocratic Politics*, 211-2.

³⁵⁷ See Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 266-7.

³⁵⁸ The first major Russian study, arguably still the authoritative study is N. Dubrovin, *Pugachev i ego soobshchniki*, 3 vols (St. Petersburg, 1884). In the Anglophone literature, see especially the works of John T. Alexander, above all *Emperor of the Cossacks: Pugachev and the Frontier Jacquerie of 1773-1775* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1973), which provides a general synthesis as well as a close chronological account of the rebellion. Also, Philip Longworth, "The Last Great Cossack-Peasant Rising," *Journal of European Studies*, 3 (1973), 1-35. On its causes as well as an attempt to situate the rebellion within a broader European context, see above all Marc Raeff, "Pugachev's Rebellion," in *Preconditions of Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, ed. R. A. Forster & J. P. Green (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 161-202. The rebellion understandably features in major studies of Catherine's reign. For example, Isabel de Madariaga dedicates the large part of two chapters to the rebellion in her authoritative work, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 239-73.

³⁵⁹ V. V. Mavrodin (ed.), *Krest'ianskaia voina v Rossii*, 3 vols (Leningrad: 1961, 1966, 1970) and the works of A. I. Andrushchenko, especially *Krest'ianskaia voina* (Moscow, 1969). A review of this and other Soviet works can be found in the Anglophone literature: John T. Alexander, "Soviet Historiography on the Pugachev Revolt: A Review Article," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, IV (Fall 1970), 602-17. This interpretation has been adopted to some extent in Anglophone literature. See, for example, Paul Avrich, *Russian Rebels 1600-1800* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

³⁶⁰ Philip Longworth calls it a Cossack-peasant movement. See, "The Last Great Cossack-Peasant Rising," *Journal of European Studies*, 3 (1973), 1-35.

³⁶¹ For example, Dorothea Peters, *Politische und gesellschaftliche Vorstellungen in der Aufstandsbewegung unter Pugačev, 1773-1775*. Wiesbaden: O. Harrowitz, 1973.

The purpose of this chapter is to add another perspective to the aforementioned literature by arguing that the rebellion demonstrated a significant limit to the empress' sovereignty project. Through his pretension, Pugachev sought to advance a particular conception of monarchical sovereignty, one that reflected popular expectations about the exercise of power. These were sharply at odds with the empress' ideals. Certainly, many of Pugachev's followers would have needed to suspend disbelief as they hailed a thirty-five-year-old Cossack as the German-born emperor of all Russia. This chapter focuses on the expectations and motivations that encouraged rebels to accept his assumed identity. Believers require reasons to believe and non-believers require motives to suspend their disbelief. By what means Pugachev appealed to their expectations about legitimate power, or sovereignty is the organizing question of this chapter, which thereby sheds light on the limits of Catherine's own sovereignty.³⁶²

2. The Anatomy of a True Monarch

Emel'ian Pugachev, born 1742, was a Don Cossack from Zimoveiskaia province. He had been a military conscript, participating in the Seven Years War and again in the Russo-Turkish War up until 1771, when he fell ill. Shortly thereafter he deserted and became a fugitive, spending time in Polish Ukraine and escaping multiple detentions, until he adopted a new guise, revealing himself as Peter III to the Yaik Cossacks two years later. Why Pugachev decided to become a pretender is not fully elucidated by his depositions. He mentions the encouragement he supposedly received from Old Believers who had provided him with refuge from the authorities. It is probable he was also inspired by the example of another recent pretender in the area, Fedot Bogomolov (a runaway serf), who had generated much commotion amongst the Don Cossacks. Nonetheless, his readiness to take on the role of pretender must have emanated from a strong sense of purpose, for the risks involved were high. In December 1772, Bogomolov was publicly lashed, his nostrils slit, his face branded, and was exiled to Siberia, dying on his way there. One historian has suggested that Pugachev was motivated by anger at his endless military service and by the state's refusal to allow him to retire when he was ill.³⁶³ In the intervening period, it is plausible that he also came to imagine himself as a champion of the common people.

Pugachev was abetted by a large number of Yaik Cossacks, a group that had long-standing grievances against the Russian state, which had curtailed their traditional autonomy and privileges over the course of the eighteenth century.³⁶⁴ Catherine's reign saw these advances continue. In 1765 the War College mandated military service and abolished the Cossacks' right to elect their own officers. And with the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War in 1768, the state began to conscript Yaik Cossacks into the regular military, which was seen as a further affront to their Cossack liberties. Many Yaik Cossacks were Old Believers and they also resented having to shave their beards – a requirement of regular military service. Although the empress eventually responded to their numerous petitions by establishing a commission to investigate their grievances, that body's operations further stoked the flames, eventually leading to a violent insurrection in January 1771. Severe punitive measures, including extensive corporal punishment and exile to Siberia, as well

³⁶² The chapter builds off Isabel de Madariaga's suggestion that the followers of pretenders "lived in a world of simultaneous belief and disbelief – believing in order to justify themselves, in order not to sin against the divinely appointed tsar from whom alone an improvement in their lot could be expected; and disbelieving the moment they came up against the harsh reality of arrest and brutal punishment," *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 240.

³⁶³ Longworth, "The Last Great Cossack-Peasant Rising," 16.

³⁶⁴ For a good account of this, see Avruch, *Russian Rebels*, 180-3.

as the decision to replace the Yaik *ataman* with a military functionary, left lasting resentment and a large number of Cossacks looking for a way to instigate further unrest.

It was a small group of these disaffected Cossacks—Denis Karavaev, Maksim Shigaev, Ivan Zarubin (nicknamed ‘Chika’), and Timofei Miasnikov—whom Pugachev first approached. What exactly they discussed is unclear, but according to his depositions, he sought to convince them of his identity or at least his readiness to play the part of pretender. He showed them his ‘sovereign marks’ - supposed bayonet wounds from the palace coup of 1762, but actually scars left by peptic ulcers from an earlier illness. He also told them of his miraculous escape and how at his burial, another body was substituted for his own. Finally, he accounted for his whereabouts in the intervening time, asserting that he had wandered the Russian borderlands before journeying to Egypt and then to Jerusalem. Providence had led him back to the Yaik in order to “stand up for and appease” the Cossacks and the “whole common people” (*chern*), who, he had learnt, were oppressed.³⁶⁵ The same group of four Cossacks then helped to fashion him as a presentable monarch, providing him with official banners and what they believed to be fitting attire: a *besmet* (quilted coat), a green *kaftan* (tunic), a hat (in lieu of a crown), a pair of boots, and various other leather items. Finally, they sought out a ‘scribe’—a literate Yaik Cossack named Ivan Pochitalin—who penned the pretender’s first official declarations and decrees that broadcast news of his appearance into the surrounding countryside.³⁶⁶



Authentic depiction of the rebel and imposter Emel'ian Pugachev. Painted by an unknown artist at the request of the Russian government during Pugachev's detention in Simbirsk, October 1774. Rostov Kremlin State Museum.

³⁶⁵ September 16, 1775, “Protokol pokazanii E. I. Pugacheva na doprose v iaitskoi sekretnoi komissii,” in *Emel'ian Pugachev na sledstvii. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, eds. R. V. Ovchinnikov & A. S. Svetenko (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury), 74.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 76-7.

The use of pretension was a distinctive and important feature of the rebellion. Pugachev and the Cossacks who abetted him thought this was an appropriate device to draw followers. Catherine's own reign notwithstanding, pretension had numerous other precedents in Russian history. The first major period to see large number of pretenders followed the death of Ivan IV in 1584, known as the Time of Troubles. During this period a number of claimants to the Russian throne masqueraded as royal princes, above all the youngest son of Ivan IV, Tsarevitch Dmitry. The latter had died under mysterious circumstances in 1591 after being exiled with his mother to Uglich by Boris Godunov, a Russian boyar who served as regent for Dmitry's older brother, and who had—illegitimately, as many felt—consolidated power for himself after the latter's death. One of the pretenders managed to take Moscow in 1605 and install himself as monarch, only later to be denounced as a 'false' tsar and killed by a group of boyars. After 1613 the new Romanov dynasty was able to acquire legitimacy and this coincided with a decline in the number of pretenders.³⁶⁷ However, they continued to appear periodically in similar scenarios of uncertainty about rightful succession. In the eighteenth century, there were pretenders who claimed to be Tsarevich Alexei, who had died after being detained for participating in an alleged conspiracy against his father, Peter the Great.³⁶⁸

As we see, the appearance of pretenders often coincided with periods of uncertainty around succession and they often took on the identity of individuals who were seen to have been illegitimately denied power. A large body of scholarship has developed around pretenders and has shown how these individuals drew on existing norms of authority. For instance, during the early modern period, the self-stylization of pretenders reflected the sacralization of the Russian monarchy, which imparted divine attributes to the monarch and posited their selection via predestination.³⁶⁹ By advancing themselves as legitimate replacements, however, pretenders sought to underline their unique qualities to match expectations about what a true monarch was. Since many pretenders came from and sought to appeal to the commonality, they often reflected popular expectations concerning the duties of monarchs and how they were to exercise power. In this connection, another important interpretation argues that pretenders were influenced by popular legends, which incorporated millenarian Christian visions of deliverance, of a monarch who would bring succor and justice to the common people.³⁷⁰ The origins of such popular legends, however, remain debated.³⁷¹ Bearing in mind the many long traditions that may have informed popular expectations, the burden remained on the pretender to express what true monarchy might mean in a particular time and place.

In Pugachev's case, it is noteworthy that he, just as a number of pretenders before him, chose the figure of Peter III, suggesting thereby that the latter was a highly credible model for pretension. At first glance, this is intriguing. Born Karl Peter Ulrich, Peter was a German prince,

³⁶⁷ On early modern Russian pretenders, see Boris A. Uspenskij, "Tsar and Pretender; *samozvančestvo* or Royal Imposture in Russia as a Cultural-Historical Phenomenon," in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), 259-92; K. V. Chistov, *Russkie narodnye sotsial'no-utopicheskie legendy, XVII-XIXvv* (Moscow, 1967); and the works of Maureen Perrie, including "'Popular Socio-Utopian Legends' in the Time of Troubles," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 60: 2 (April 1982), 221-43; *Pretenders and Popular Monarchism in Early Modern Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and "Popular Revolts," in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, ed. Maureen Perrie, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 600-17.

³⁶⁸ Perrie, *Pretenders and Popular Monarchism*, 238.

³⁶⁹ Uspenskij, "Tsar and Pretender."

³⁷⁰ Chistov, *Russkie narodnye sotsial'no-utopicheskie legendy*.

³⁷¹ See, especially Perrie, *Pretenders and Popular Monarchism*.

a scion of the House of Holstein-Gottorp, with a protestant upbringing and a weak grasp of the Russian language. He was militantly pro-Prussian while contemptuous of the Orthodox Church and Russian traditions. He had also emancipated the nobility, but not the peasants, from mandatory state service, allowing them to return and live on their country estates, which some did. However, the large number of imposters that appeared after his overthrow suggest that he was perceived differently. A positive image of Peter III may have drawn strength from ameliorative policies such as the reduction of the salt tax, the transfer of ecclesiastic peasants to state serfs, and the curtailing of restrictions on religious schismatics. His quick and sudden removal by palace elites, and perhaps even the empress' subsequent attempts to discredit him and the way he exercised power, may have worked to confirm a positive popular narrative about him. According to this narrative, Peter had been intent on improving the lot of Russia's common people, but was removed by rapacious elites who wanted to bar this agenda.

In seizing on the identity of Peter III, Pugachev needed to capitalize on the rumors and narratives that circulated around him in order to articulate and carry out an agenda that could draw followers. Yet Pugachev and his accomplices also tailored their appeals to older traditions whereby the pretender as true monarch offered succor and justice to the common people. The promises they made to attract various groups to join him and his rebellion contained common themes centering on the restoration of ancient laws, rights, and privileges. For example, in his first proclamation, addressed to the Yaik Cossacks, Pugachev promised to grant them the "rivers from the mountains to the [Caspian] sea, and lands and pastures, as well as monetary payment, the regular supply of lead, and powder, and grain."³⁷² This promise referred to the restoration of traditional fishing and grazing rights as well as traditional compensation for state service. According to Yaik legends, this arrangement dated back to a supposed charter that had been granted to them by tsar Michael I (r. 1614-1645).³⁷³ Similarly, Pugachev's *ukaz* to the Bashkirs in Orenburg province from October 1, 1773, promised to return the arrangement that supposedly prevailed during the time of Peter the Great: "as your ancestors, fathers and grandfathers had served the blessed hero and sovereign Peter Alekseevich [Peter the Great], and had been rewarded by him, so will I now and henceforth reward you...with lands, waters, salt, faith and prayer, pastures, and monetary payments."³⁷⁴ A manifesto aimed at the peasantry from July 1774 declared, "all serfs who were in bondage to landowners, are now to be loyal subjects of his crown and ..[and that they] would be grant[ed] liberty and freedom (*vol'nost'*) and to be forever Cossacks, without demands of military conscription, the poll tax or any other monetary levees." He also promised to grant them "possession of land, forests, grasslands, fisheries and salt lakes without redemption payments or feudal dues."³⁷⁵

While it is tempting to see Peter III's emancipation of the Russian nobility as a model of freedom, or *volia* or *vol'nost'*, this final example suggests that Pugachev and his followers had a different conception in mind, namely the freedom of the Cossacks to live in autonomous communities, a right granted to previous generations in return for loyalty to the tsar.³⁷⁶ Pugachev,

³⁷² September 17, 1773, "Immenoi ukaz kazakam iaitskogo voiska," in [E. I. Pugachev], *Dokumenty stavki E. I. Pugacheva povstancheskikh vlastei i uchrezhdenii*, ed. A. I. Aksenov, R. V. Ovchinnikov, and M. F. Prokhorov (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 23.

³⁷³ See the discussion in *ibid.*, 371.

³⁷⁴ October 1, 1773, "Immenoi ukaz bashkiram nogaiskoi i sibirskoi dorog orenburgskoi gubernii," *ibid.*, 28.

³⁷⁵ July 28, 1774, "Manifest, ob' iavlennyi vo vsenarodnoe izvestie zhiteliam goroda Saranska i ego okrug," *ibid.*, 46-7.

³⁷⁶ Pugachev's military forces were led by *starshiny* and *atamany*, indicating that they were structured along traditional Cossack lines. See Philip Longworth, "Peasant Leadership and the Pugachev Revolt," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 2: 2 (1975), 192. Peter III's idea of *vol'nost'* for the nobility is discussed by Sergei Pol'skoi in "Konstitutsiia i

however, extended freedom to other groups of the commonality, understanding that it would have wide appeal. This was particularly the case for the Russian peasantry, which imagined its own similar form of *vol'nost'* or *volia* – to be subjects of the tsar, but to live in self-governing peasant communities that possessed their own land and had their own customs and laws, and not to be subject to the arbitrary powers of landlords and government officials.³⁷⁷ In both the Cossack and peasant conceptions of *vol'nost'*, in so far as *vol'nost'* had been taken away from them by the monarch, only the monarch—a true monarch—could return it to them.³⁷⁸

A true monarch would also hold to account those individuals who had perverted these previous arrangements. Pugachev directed much of his vitriol and violence at the Russian nobility, which he referred to in some of his decrees as the *dvoriantsvo* (the post-Petrine elite), in others using the antiquated term *boyar*. He levelled a number of charges against this group: of oppressing the common people by imposing taxes and feudal dues,³⁷⁹ of violating the common peace, and opposing the emperor's will.³⁸⁰ Pugachev mainly identified these individuals as landowners (*pomeshchiki*, and sometimes *votchinniki* – another antiquated term). But he also had in mind the powerholders he thought controlled St. Petersburg (one *ukaz* specifically mentions the “main senators”), the generals and officers who led the army, and the state's officials (not all of whom were technically noblemen).³⁸¹ All of these, he claimed, had illegitimately captured power and had installed themselves as something akin to a ruling class, although this is not a term he used. Motivated by self-interest, they no longer served the monarch, only themselves, exercising a “tyranny” over Russia's people and preventing plans for *vol'nost'*.³⁸²

Rebel decrees presented the Russian nobility as having become morally wicked. Their greatest sin was arguably greed, which had led them to usurp power and oppress the common people with taxes and labor dues. But they were also wicked because they punished commoners without mercy. Pugachev accounted for their depravity by citing their abandonment of Christian law, which taught obedience to the monarch and the kind and compassionate treatment of others. In places, the decrees tied the abandonment of Christianity to the penetration of Western culture. This was an idea that had long been asserted by the Orthodox Church, but in the eighteenth century was voiced by Old-Believers, to whom Pugachev also appealed. In this connection, the decrees sometimes mention the nobility's adoption of insidious, foreign (particularly German) customs, and new laws requiring “beard-shaving” and “other various practices” contrary to Russian ways and the Christian faith.³⁸³ This reinforced the notion of the true Russian monarch as a defender of Russian customs and of Orthodox belief (understood broadly). One way in which Pugachev tried to further embody these ideals was to be publicly greeted by offerings of bread and salt, and by attending church service when he arrived in new localities.³⁸⁴

fundamentalnye zakony v russkom politicheskom diskurse XVIII veka,” in *Poniatiiia o Rossii*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), 130-1. On the Cossack idea of ‘*vol'nost'*,’ see Haruki Wada, “The Inner World of Russian Peasants,” *Annals of the Institute of Science*, University of Tokyo, 20 (1979), 65-6.

³⁷⁷ Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 6-7, 31-3; Haruki Wada, “The Inner World of Russian Peasants,” 62-7.

³⁷⁸ Field, *Rebels*, 7.

³⁷⁹ June 19, 1774, “Immenoi ukaz bashkirskomu starshine Adylu Ashmenevu i sotniku Mukashu Suteevu,” in *Dokumenty stavki*, 44-5.

³⁸⁰ December 1, 1773, “Manifest, ob’’iavlennyi vo vsenarodnoe izvestie,” *ibid.*, 36.

³⁸¹ August 15, 1774. “Immenoi ukaz atamanu i kazakam berezovskoi stanitsy i vsemu donskomu voisku,” *ibid.*, 50.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 50-1.

³⁸⁴ *Emel'ian Pugachev na sledstvii*, 82.

To underline his moral excellence, Pugachev trumpeted his mercy, promising to pardon all who acknowledged their wrongdoings and submitted to him, including the wretched ‘boyars’. More often, however, he stressed his ‘righteous anger’ and the ‘terrible punishment’ that would befall all who failed to recognize him as monarch. Pugachev issued decrees that authorized his followers to identify these wrongdoers according to his criteria and to bring them to him or even punish them in his stead. For instance, his manifesto of December 29, 1773, which was full of explicit imperatives, read as follows:

Whoever refuses to submit and resists – whoever they may be: boyar, general, mayor, captain or others ...cut off their heads, and if they have property, bring it to the tsar; bring their carts, horses, and weapons, and distribute their provisions to our soldiers. At one time, these people stuffed themselves at your expense, deprived my servants [he uses here the antiquated term *rab*] of their freedom and liberty; but now you will strike them down if they do not yield. Whoever recognizes me, whoever has taken a direct path to me, let them join and carry out military service. Those who follow me will not be harmed.³⁸⁵

Many of his followers refrained from immediate murder, as if acknowledging that the monarch, not they, must be the arbiter of life and death, giving him a chance to enact mercy. They rounded up their victims and brought them to Pugachev, who would listen to their complaints and decide on and preside over punishment. Pugachev offered a few accounts of this violence in his deposition. In Alatyr in July 1774, for example, he executed twelve landlords brought to him by peasants from the surrounding countryside. Another fifteen executions took place in Saransk, and a further five in Penza. In a possible attempt to highlight his merciful nature, he spared a noblewoman, whom he took with him to Tsaritsyn.³⁸⁶

Many popular uprisings in Russian history, sometimes involving pretenders, directed themselves against the monarch’s evil agents, rather than the monarch.³⁸⁷ Pugachev, however, did not like Catherine, though he claimed on some occasions to wish to reunite with her in St. Petersburg. On other occasions, he represented her as a usurper who had wrongfully denied power to their son, Paul, whom he defended as ostensibly the rightful heir, and whom he made a point of speaking affectionately about in front of others. For instance, during a church service in Ilek, he ordered the clergy to make specific reference to his ‘son,’ Pavel Petrovich, in the litanies, but to exclude the empress. He also announced that when he arrived in St. Petersburg he would “send [the empress] packing to a monastery,” where she could “pray forgiveness to God for her sins.”³⁸⁸ Pugachev only mentioned this once in his depositions, but it is reasonable to assume that such denunciations of the empress were regular parts of his act.

In denouncing the empress and defending his son, it seems that he was defending some notion of primogeniture in succession. Alternatively, his denunciations of her reflected the

³⁸⁵ December 29, 1773, “Manifest, ob’iavlennyi vo vsenarodnoe izvestie,” in *Dokumenty stavki*, 37.

³⁸⁶ “Protokol pokazanii E. I. Pugacheva na doprose v moskovskom otdelenii tainoi ekspeditsii Senata”, in *Emel’ian Pugachev na sledstvii*, 202-3.

³⁸⁷ See the discussion in Maureen Perrie, “Popular Monarchism: The Myth of the Ruler from Ivan the Terrible to Stalin,” in *Reinterpreting Russia*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service, (London: Arnold, 1999), 170-82. See also Michael Khodarkovsky, “The Stepan Razin Uprising: Was It a “Peasant War”?” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 42: 1 (1994), 1-19.

³⁸⁸ “Protokol pokazanii E. I. Pugacheva na doprose v iaitskoi sekretnoi komissii,” in *Emel’ian Pugachev na sledstvii*, 82.

patriarchal sentiments of the commonality. Women were not excluded from pretension, as shown by the case, in 1774, of ‘Elizaveta Vladimirskaia’—a female pretender who claimed to be the daughter of Empress Elizabeth and her favorite, Alexei Razumovsky. However, the latter never gained the following that many other pretenders were able to elicit. The issue of succession aside, it is possible that Pugachev saw the empress more generally as an illegitimate ruler for the way in which she had chosen to exercise power, namely in favor of elites, not the common people. There is some basis for this supposition. Her reign saw the extension of the nobility’s local power and their privileges over serfs.³⁸⁹ Her decree of 1767 also prohibited direct petitions to the monarch from the peasantry – a policy which has been seen as destroying the traditional concept of the monarch held by the people.³⁹⁰ Ultimately, Pugachev’s denunciations of the empress suggest he saw her as more than a victim of noble machinations, and he believed that such denunciations would be popular with Russia’s common people.

Pugachev made extensive use of written commands and decrees, drafted with the help of a few literate ‘scribes’ or ‘secretaries’ (he used both terms). These written commands, which were only circulated in manuscript form, were important in establishing and maintaining a functioning and credible governing apparatus. They also conveyed—in an established and recognized manifestation of power—news of his appearance and his policies into the countryside. Pugachev’s scribes sought to replicate the documentary hierarchy of the imperial state, from manifestos and *ukazy* through to more minor commands such as *nastavleniia*, which were also written by his lieutenants. The scribes further sought to replicate the unique style and lexicon of imperial proclamations on the basis of existing decrees, likely found during the looting of government offices, from which they copied words, phrases, and sometimes longer passages. They used as models actual decrees from Peter III’s reign as well as some dating back to the reign of Elizabeth.³⁹¹ When Catherine’s government started disseminating its own decrees in the countryside in an attempt to counter Pugachev’s propaganda effort, they began to use his proclamations, too, for they were likely easily obtained.³⁹²

By drawing on earlier decrees as their models, Pugachev’s aides presented him above all as an ‘autocratic emperor’ (*samoderzhavnyi imperator*) – the standard address of eighteenth-century Russian monarchs. Overall, there was considerable continuity between Pugachev’s decrees and earlier ones, as the content of older promulgations was recycled for practical purposes. Nonetheless, there is evidence that Pugachev’s scribes departed from imperial models. For instance, one manifesto from December 29, 1773, presented Pugachev in martial terms, naming him as the “soderzhatel’ voisk” (keeper of armed forces) and “velikii voitel” (great warrior), phrases not otherwise used in previous decrees.³⁹³ Other addresses underlined his divine status by evoking comparisons with Christ or God: for instance, he was, the “king of kings” (*nad tsari tsar*),³⁹⁴ and elsewhere, the “shining sovereign of two worlds” and “lord of all creatures” (*nado vseimi tvar’mi*).³⁹⁵

³⁸⁹ See the section “Pravovoe polozhenie krest’ianstva,” in M. N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur’mi*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1960), 64-79.

³⁹⁰ This argument is made by Raëff in “Pugachev’s Rebellion,” 172. For the actual decree, see *PSZ*, no. 12,633.

³⁹¹ For instance, December 1, 1773, “Manifest, ob’iavlennyi vo vsenarodnoe izvestie,” in *Dokumenty stavki E. I. Pugacheva*, 35. See especially footnote 22 about this proclamation on p. 379 of *Dokumenty stavki*.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 376-7.

³⁹³ December 29, 1773. “Manifest, ob’iavlennyi vo vsenarodnoe izvestie,” *ibid.*, 37

³⁹⁴ October 1, 1773, “Immenoi ukaz bashkiram nogaiskoi i sibirskoi dorog orenburgskoi gubernii,” *ibid.*, 28.

³⁹⁵ December, 1773, “Immenoi ukaz atamanu V. I. Tornovu,” *ibid.*, 41.

Another distinctive feature of the Pugachev's attempts to be a monarch was the 'College of War'—a governing organ named after the imperial War College—which the pretender established at his base at Berda on November 6, 1773, and later repeatedly tried to reestablish after a string of military defeats.³⁹⁶ The College, which consisted of several individuals, some of whom were literate, carried out a large range of important operations of government: it managed the organization, movements, and provisions of troops, issuing instructions and edicts to Pugachev's lieutenants, and it oversaw a treasury (*kazna*). Further, it issued money to troops, as Pugachev paid his soldiers according to Cossack tradition, and purchased needed provisions from peasants.³⁹⁷ Crucially, the College administered justice through a number 'judges' (*sudi*). Soon after the College was established, Pugachev ordered that all capital cases, mainly the trial of captured landowners and government officials, were to be administered by the College and he forbade that death sentences be issued by commanders away from Berda.³⁹⁸ Importantly, the College also sought to settle disputes that arose between the rebels. Although the College prepared decrees for Pugachev, as testified by one of its secretaries, Maksim Gorshkov, it dealt with no other written business. All the aforementioned cases brought to the College were "reviewed and decided by [its] judges orally."³⁹⁹

One these 'judges', Ivan Tvorogov, claimed that Pugachev had established the War College because "he had gotten bored of having to issue *ukazy* himself" on a multitude of pressing concerns, such as the "levying of troops, the pillaging of estates and the killing of the landowners." In addition, as Tvorogov testified, Pugachev needed to address the "many complaints" that were being made against the Cossacks and Bashkirs in his following for the "devastation that they were causing to the common people."⁴⁰⁰ Tvorogov's account of Pugachev's boredom may be true (Gorshkov offers a similar account),⁴⁰¹ yet, significantly, Pugachev did not abdicate from this work, instead seeking a manner in which that work could be carried out more efficiently. The War College therefore represented an attempt to establish a credible governing agency that would address the concerns and expectations of his followers.

Still, the College was based on very superficial knowledge of the actual institution that it was named after, and it seems unlikely that it embodied any deep ideological tenets about how the monarch's power was to be organized or to flow. Whereas the actual organs of the imperial government, such as the Senate and the Colleges, allowed for a diffusion of power along a variety of legislative, executive, and judicial functions, Pugachev's College combined them indiscriminately. Furthermore, there was no attempt to codify the activity of the college's officials in any way. No strict procedure here is discernible, as shown by Tvorogov, who explained that when various people were brought to the College, they were sometimes interrogated by the judges and sometimes by Pugachev himself.⁴⁰² Ultimately, the organization of power was less important than the College's ability to provide a mechanism for carrying out the pretender's policies. Like Pugachev's decrees, the operations of his 'War College' stood in contrast to the official institutions of the Russian state that blocked ameliorative policies, or conversely, acted as an instrument of oppression.

³⁹⁶ The most exhaustive account of this body is by V. A. Spirkov, "Gosudarstvennaia voennaia kollegiia vosstavshikh," in *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 2, 444-63.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 460.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 461.

³⁹⁹ *Pugachevshchina*, ed. S. A. Golubtsov, vol. 2 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe isdatel'stvo, 1929), 113.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 143-4.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 143-4.

It is important that Pugachev sought to address conflicts between his followers. According to Ivan Pochitalin's testimony, Pugachev had strong feelings about this obligation, noting that he "disliked the robbery of innocent people" and "mercilessly punished" many of his own followers if they were found guilty of such crimes.⁴⁰³ Pugachev's willingness to punish his followers extended beyond the rank-and-file. For example, in March 1774, Pugachev executed one of his lieutenants, the Yaik Cossack, Dmitry Lysov, after receiving complaints that he and a group of Cossacks had attacked a number of local villages, robbing the peasants, and murdering the landlords against the peasants' wishes.⁴⁰⁴ It is possible that such actions helped Pugachev maintain his credibility as a merciful monarch in the eyes of common supporters and helped reconcile them to the preeminent position that he gave the Yaik Cossacks.⁴⁰⁵

Ultimately, however, it is probably incorrect to see Pugachev as a 'true monarch,' much less as a sovereign who fulfilled any standard criteria applied to this designation. What many commoners experienced was the arbitrary distribution of spoils and wanton killing by Pugachev's confederates. Widespread looting and wanton violence point to considerable disobedience and limited control by the pretender over many of his followers, particularly over the Cossack warriors who acted as his *de facto* officer class.⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, his reliance on promises of *vol'nost'* and the goods that littered his announcements substantially weakens the case that he had significant power: these were promises made against future delivery, which he could not possibly extend at the time they were offered, and Pugachev was likely aware of this.⁴⁰⁷ Pugachev saw himself under constant pressure to carry out his promises. Tellingly, he often acquiesced to the punishment of those brought to him by his followers. Frequently, he preferred to delegate when making decisions about executions, announcing that "if they thought [their quarry] such a bad person, then they should hang [them]."⁴⁰⁸ There are also instances when he was openly challenged. For example, the

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁰⁴ *Emel'ian Pugachev na sledstvii*, 188.

⁴⁰⁵ Ivan Zarubin claimed in his deposition that the execution of Lysov demonstrated how Pugachev had "multiplied his power over them" and how he "acted severely toward [his subjects] and punished [them] according to his will." See *Pugachevshchina*, vol. 2, 136.

⁴⁰⁶ Take, for example, the testimony of the peasant Leontei Nazarov, a serf from Orenburg *uezd*, who described the arrival of a small party of four Cossacks in December 1773. When the Cossacks arrived, they approached Nazarov and his fellow serfs with sabers drawn and threateningly told them that Peter III had given them their freedom and ordered them to stop working the lord's land. Thereafter they took the peasants to the manor, where, finding only his wife and their three daughters, took their money, fur coats, and dresses. Taking Nazarov with them, they then returned to the house of the mayor of the village where they drank beer and wine and spent the night. The next day the Cossacks set off for two other neighboring villages. There again they read out *ukazy* from Peter III to the serfs, declaring their freedom from dues and forbade them, under pain of death to further serve their landlords. They then pillaged the estates and shot one of the landlords, who had decided to resist them. Returning to Nazarov's estate the next day and learning that the noblewoman had hidden in the forest, they ordered the serfs to seek her out and bring her to them. They first coerced her to hand over the rest of her money and possessions, then shot and speared her to death. They ordered the peasants (Nazarov included) to participate in the murder by beating her with wooden clubs, and then told them to hide her corpse. Thereafter, they instructed the serfs to distribute the woman's juvenile daughters for adoption amongst themselves. Finally, they departed, having collected the estate's possessions and livestock, leaving for the villagers only five sheep and one calf. *Pugachevshchina*, vol. 3, 11-3.

⁴⁰⁷ In his deposition, Ivan Tvorogov, commander and judge in Pugachev's 'War College', attributed much of Pugachev's success to his enticing decrees. He noted that from the beginning of his enterprise Pugachev had disseminated decrees with the express purpose of "seducing (*obol'shchat*) the population with promises of liberty, freedom from feudal dues (*podatei*), the cross and beard, as well as all sorts of other benefits." These attracted great numbers in short time, who came to join his company "with great enthusiasm from all sides." *Pugachevshchina*, vol. 2, 142.

⁴⁰⁸ *Emel'ian Pugachev na sledstvii*, 168.

noblewoman spared by Pugachev on the road to Penza was subsequently whipped to death at the hands of one of his most senior lieutenants, Andrei Ovchinnikov, who had a vendetta against her husband. When Pugachev reprimanded him for acting without instruction, Ovchinnikov warned him that “[they] didn’t want to live in a world, where [Pugachev] was going to bring along the very evildoers that had plundered them” and that they “would no longer serve him under such circumstances”, a rebuke which supposedly left him in silence.⁴⁰⁹

Nonetheless, while Pugachev did not enjoy the supreme and untrammelled power that he claimed over his followers, his pretense was not unimportant. Indeed, it was through his pretension that he articulated a series of promises that appealed to his followers’ beliefs and expectations about sovereignty and through which he attracted followers. These expectations were at odds with those of the empress. Overall, Pugachev had a weak notion of the monarch’s power flowing through state servitors or any governmental apparatus, which the monarch was meant to maintain. Rather, he was guided by the opposite sentiment, namely that sovereignty was guaranteed by the clear absence of any mediation of his will. A weak notion of the state meant no notion of ‘fundamental laws’; instead, legitimacy largely originated in the monarch’s righteousness and goodness that indicated his divine predestination to rule. Accordingly, a true monarch would act to bring succor to Russia’s common people, restoring to them a host of goods, above all freedom—*vol’nost’*—and its accompanying customary laws, rights, and privileges. These goods had supposedly been enjoyed by their ancestors under previous rulers under a prior arrangement, but they been taken away from them by elites and an empress who had managed gain control of power. The granting of *vol’nost’* could have been framed as a form of natural justice, but it was framed as, and arguably drew its legitimacy from, the return of a lost past.⁴¹⁰ Civil law played little to no role in Pugachev’s conception. Wrongdoers were punished for their transgression of Christian morality, and in so far as they deliberately deprived the commonality of *vol’nost’*, they had violated no civil law, but a fundamental arrangement of justice.

Throughout his rebellion, many of Pugachev followers, above all his Cossack collaborators, exercised power by situating themselves within the pretender’s fantasy without necessarily following or needing any strict directive from him. In the end, while Pugachev, the pretender, was indispensable as a figure who tried to realize certain ideals, it was this vision of power that had persuasive force. It did so because it reflected the expectations of Russia’s miscellaneous common people beyond the imperial capitals. The size of Pugachev’s following and the great unrest that he precipitated, suggest that his was a better vision than the one advanced by St. Petersburg and the empress.

3. Trammelled Sovereignty

As the rebellion spread and became a major threat to the Russian state, Catherine made efforts to learn as much as possible about it. At the end of November 1773, she set up the first of two secret commissions (initially in Kazan, then in Orenburg). Operating first under the auspices of General Bibikov, and later under Petr Panin, but still directly subordinated to her personally, these commissions were tasked with investigating Pugachev, identifying the origins of his destructive enterprise, and establishing why the rebellion had been able to take root. The commission garnered information from the pretender’s decrees and by interrogating captured rebels, including Pugachev

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 204.

⁴¹⁰ Philip Longworth sees Pugachev as representing a form of natural justice. See “The Last Great Cossack-Peasant Rising,” 23.

himself. Perplexed by the problem of how a lone Cossack vagabond, without education or possessions, had been able to mount such a serious challenge to the state, the empress at first suspected that he was part of some larger conspiracy (perhaps by Old-Believers), or an agent of foreign powers who wished to destabilize her rule.⁴¹¹ However, the investigations consistently failed to bear out any of these suspicions and the matter was conclusively ended by the final interrogations of the rebel leaders in Moscow at the end of 1774.

In her official proclamations and correspondence with her servitors, we find Catherine describing Pugachev in a variety of ways: she called him *'samozvanets'* (a pretender), *'vor'* (a thief), *'razboinik'* (a brigand), *'ubiitsa'* (a murderer), and more generally, *'zlodei'* (an evildoer). Another term that often appears, and one that is also used by her servitors in their addresses to her, was that of *'izverg'* – a 'monster' or 'abomination'. An *izverg* was a person who rejected their human nature or humanity, treating others cruelly without empathy or remorse.⁴¹² The figure of the *izverg* takes on added significance in the context of Enlightenment thinking, which pinned hopes on the potential of nature to direct individuals—either through their natural sentiment or reason—towards the good. More specifically, it directed individuals towards faith in God, and to obedience to morals and laws, both natural, and human.

Still more reprehensible was that Pugachev had decided to direct his malice, not towards isolated individuals, but to destroying the larger political community. In this connection, Catherine also called him a *'vrag gosudarstvennyi'* – literally 'state enemy', but best understood in the context of her usage as someone who deliberately attacked and tried to dismantle the state's sovereignty. The empress articulated her views in her public proclamations about the rebellion. In her manifesto of December 1773, she stated that Pugachev had "seduce[d] and coerce[d]" the inhabitants of Orenburg province into committing egregious crimes against their fellow citizens. Drawing on past precedents, she asserted that he was following the example of the "traitor" and "state enemy," Grishka Rasstriga (the first 'false-Dmitry'), who had plunged Russia into a period of political instability and civil strife—The Time of Troubles—at the end of the sixteenth century. The manifesto concluded by calling Pugachev a "destroyer of the Sacred Union of Civil Society," and thus "an offender against Divine laws and the Christian Church."⁴¹³

A second proclamation penned by Nikita Panin under the empress' auspices, while recapitulating these arguments, further noted that Pugachev had promised to "extricate [people] from obedience to any type of power" by tricking them into thinking that "the creator...had established human society [such that it could exist] without intermediate powers between the monarch and the people."⁴¹⁴ The specific reference to 'intermediate powers' as a fundamental component of the monarchy's sovereignty has been greatly discussed in previous chapters and should not come as a surprise. Still, it is significant that Panin would include a relatively novel phrase in addresses to the commonality as a whole. Such arguments, however, were vulnerable to criticism. The promised benefit of intermediary powers, namely liberty understood as security, though rhetorically alluring, was not immediately and tangibly measurable, especially to the common people who were to be governed through these new intermediaries. Additionally, previous justifications for the nobility's privileged status had not openly presented the nobility as

⁴¹¹ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 248-9.

⁴¹² See the entry "Izverg" in *Slovar' russkogo iazyka XVIII veka*, vol. 9 (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1997), 14.

⁴¹³ *Zapiski o zhizni i sluzhbe Aleksandra Il'icha Bibikova* (St. Petersburg: Morskaia tipografiia, 1817), prilozheniia, XV-XVIII.

⁴¹⁴ See manifesto "B" in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii A. S. Pushkina*, ed. G. N. Gennadi, vol 6 (St. Petersburg, 1871), prilozheniia, 194-6.

power-agents. Instead, their right to land and serfs was justified by their duty to serve the state on the battlefield, which exposed their bodies to the danger of death or considerable physical harm.

Catherine and her senior advisors showed no awareness that their arguments for the necessity of ‘intermediary powers’ might prove weak in the eyes of commoners. Instead, in a manner typical of the mentality of the Enlightenment, Catherine emphasized their general benightedness, which made the common people susceptible to ‘seduction.’ In the aforementioned decree of October 15, Catherine wrote: “any reasonable person may judge that the blinding and corruption of such common people and by such a largescale lie, could not have had such a disastrous and tragic effect, had it not been aided by the deep ignorance in which the [people of Orenburg] province were, as a result of their comparative isolation, more greatly steeped than others.”⁴¹⁵

From Catherine’s perspective, what was needed to garner support for the kind of system of sovereignty she sought to construct was Enlightenment - the development of man’s intellectual and moral faculties. It would do so by imparting correct expectations of power, of its legitimate purposes, and, how, accordingly, that power ought to properly flow (including through intermediary powers). Enlightenment could not prevent ‘evildoers’ such as Pugachev from stepping forward to threaten the stability of governance. Yet, the dissemination among the wider populace of a more critical, empirically-minded understanding and awareness of the world would lessen the purchase of their fraudulent decrees and political conspiracy theories. Even from Catherine’s own perspective, however, Pugachev’s rebellion pointed to specific difficulties that her project of sovereignty faced in Russia; it could only succeed in the long term. As her statement of October 15 further suggested, the country’s vast dimensions were a problem in their own right. It left isolated pockets underexposed to the edifying effects of properly-ordered governance and social intercourse. In her view, Russia’s large size was undoubted also a factor in its long history of “imposters, fraudsters, and traitors,” who continued to inspire others to commit similar crimes.⁴¹⁶

Appealing to her subjects’ reason, the empress even commissioned Mikhail Shcherbatov in April 1774 to author a history of imposters to further expose such individuals and substantiate her own claims about them.⁴¹⁷ Catherine, who saw the monarch as the principal agent responsible for ensuring ordered power and advancing Enlightenment, hoped that such counter-propaganda would help unmask Pugachev and end his hold over the minds of the common people. Another strategy of Enlightenment that she employed was to order Pugachev’s declarations to be publicly burnt by an executioner.⁴¹⁸ She believed enough in the efficacy of proclamations to have some reissued, but the act also showed her awareness that the efficacy of these strategies was limited.⁴¹⁹

Much more than the circulation of information was required to master this rebellion, which very quickly overwhelmed the capacities of provincial government in Orenburg and Kazan to maintain order. Shortly thereafter, in early November 1773, the insurgents routed a division of irregulars, sent to pacify the province. From this point on, the rebellion became a major problem for Catherine and began to force her to make irregular decisions and resort to measures that she found distasteful. In late November, she tasked General Aleksandr Bibikov—a distinguished

⁴¹⁵ *Zapiski o zhizni i sluzhbe Aleksandra II'icha Bibikova*, VIII.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, X.

⁴¹⁷ See the discussion in Alexander, *Autocratic Politics in a National Crisis*, 120-2.

⁴¹⁸ August, 1774, “Sobstvennoruchnaia zapiska Ekateriny II k kn. Viazemskomu o publikovanii ot Senata, shtoby pugachevskie ukazy byli sozhigaemy chrez palacha,” in *SIRIO*, vol. 13, 441.

⁴¹⁹ See, for example, “Sobstvennyi chernovoi manifest Ekateriny II s predosterzheniem naroda protiv prisodineniia k Pugachevu” from March 15, 1774, *ibid.*, 397.

military officer and former president of her Legislative Commission—with mounting an escalated military response to the crisis. What is more, she planned to give him extended jurisdictional powers in the afflicted provinces. On November 28, 1773, she attended the Imperial Council in person (a rare occurrence) in order to discuss with its members her proposed measures. The minutes of the meeting suggest that the empress was uncertain whether the management of civil matters should be subordinated to a newly appointed governor, or to the newly appointed general, and she voiced the concern that granting two individuals with overlapping prerogatives might lead to conflict, thereby nudging the Council to consider a new set of executive powers. The Council agreed on this step, arguing that the areas in question were already in such a state of open rebellion or uncertainty, that they could not be reliably governed without military power - in other words, they had experienced the complete disintegration of sovereignty.⁴²⁰

Although there was a number of precedents for endowing offices with considerable prerogatives,⁴²¹ the appointment of an individual with supreme jurisdictional power over more than one province was a highly unusual step that reflected the challenge the rebellion was seen to pose. According to Catherine's instructions of November 29, 1773, Bibikov was charged with reimposing order in the countryside, and he was given full discretion regarding the resources and measures needed to achieve this goal. In addition to complete jurisdiction over the afflicted areas, an accompanying *ukaz* prepared by the empress instructed that all “ecclesiastical, military, and civil powers”—such as the Holy Synod, the College of War, and the Senate—to carry out all of his demands quickly and accurately. Bibikov was also granted the right to produce “in his own name any type of written or printed publications,” so long as he considered them necessary to his assignment.⁴²² This, too, was unusual given the rigorous procedures Catherine established for issuing her proclamations.

Catherine saw the campaign against the rebellion not solely in terms of overcoming Pugachev's military threat, but of reestablishing sovereignty in the countryside. To do so, she had to reinstall governmental order and respect for the law and institutions of the state, not merely reimpose obedience through force. But since the provinces were in outright disarray, the rebellion posed a serious dilemma. Although she gave Bibikov full discretion, her rescript of November 29, indicated a hope that he might find a way to balance between these two demands. For example, she instructed Bibikov to disseminate her own counter-manifestos, and her bestowal on him of the authority to produce printed publications suggests she hoped he would continue to employ a strategy of persuasion. Furthermore, she also offered guidelines as to how force could be employed. Consider this passage, in which she ordered Bibikov the following:

...to observe with great detail all the movements and maneuvers of the troublemakers, to understand directly their strengths, how they are connected, their available provisions, and their internal organization structure – in a word the physical and moral state of all their parts. [Having gained] greater advantage in this way, take up arms against them and proceed with dominance and superiority—the likes of which is borne of a strength that is governed by enlightenment and skill—

⁴²⁰ *Arkhiv Gosudarstvennogo soveta*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia vtorago otdeleniia sobstvennoi E. I. V. kantseliarii, 1869), 443.

⁴²¹ Notable examples included that of the general procurator who managed the monarch's interactions with the Senate. Provincial governors also had historically wielded considerable prerogatives.

⁴²² November 9, 1773, “Spisok s reskripta, s sobstvennoruchnoi pripiskoiu Ekateriny II Bibikovu o predstavlennoi emu vlasti i merakh k ukroshcheniiu pugachevskogo bunta,” in *SIRIO*, vol. 13, 370.

that one must always have in dealing with the common rabble that is moved solely by wild agitation and benightedness of religious or political fanaticism.⁴²³

As this passage suggests, the empress wanted Bibikov to employ force with extreme precision and appropriate pressure. Such use of force would do enough damage to disrupt the internal dynamics of the rebellion, and yet still manifest the orderliness and controlled nature of the state's power, calculated to awe both combatants and bystanders.

Under Bibikov's command, the Russian state was able to apply offensive pressure on the rebellion, routing them in a number of engagements, and retaking several towns, including Ufa, Chelyabinsk, Ekaterinburg, and Orenburg, which had been under siege for six months. These advances seemingly reassured the empress to such an extent that when Bibikov suddenly died of cholera on April 20, she seemed urgent to return to normal operations by allowing his position to lapse. She then appointed Fyodor Shcherbatov, a lesser-known figure, to oversee the continued military operations against the rebellion, but without the same jurisdictional prerogatives that Bibikov had enjoyed.⁴²⁴ In her rescript of May 1, 1774, she ordered Shcherbatov to capture Pugachev and provide military support to provincial governors where needed, but that he should leave the "reestablishment of internal peace and civil order" to those governors. As she reasoned, *they* were the "rightful masters of these territories" and they "better knew the condition and disposition of the people [there]."⁴²⁵ Apparently, she wished to mark Shcherbatov's appointment as a transition away from a mode of power that she believed had been temporarily necessary, but was ultimately incompatible, indeed damaging to, sovereignty.

This decision proved premature. Pugachev managed to rebuild his forces after fleeing north into Bashkiria, and he attacked and sacked the city of Kazan on July 12. Although Pugachev was not able to take the fortified kremlin (and the secret commission located there), or to maintain control of the city, the event broadcast the rebellion's immediate threat to the Russian heartlands, and signaled the pretender's enduring strength as well as the inadequacy of the government's response. On July 21 Catherine attended another session of the Imperial Council to address the pressing crisis and decide on new extraordinary measures. She was sufficiently dismayed that she considered going to Moscow in order to reassure its inhabitants through her presence. However, Nikita Panin and Zakhar Chernyshev dissuaded her, fearing the gesture would only escalate the sense of danger and encourage further rebels. It would also invite foreign threats by suggesting a state of internal disarray. Instead, Catherine and the council concluded it was again necessary to appoint another individual with supreme jurisdictional powers.⁴²⁶

With the destruction of Kazan and the rebellion entering its eleventh consecutive month, Catherine likely felt growing pressure to display decisive command. Her capacity to select a replacement was limited by the ongoing prosecution of the First Russo-Turkish war, and Nikita Panin, her foreign minister, was able to take advantage of her quandary. He hectoring her into

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 369. The original Russian reads, "...наблюдать бдительным оком все движения и предначинания возмутителей, дабы познав прямо их силы, их связь в земле, их ресурсы в пропитании, их внутреннее между собою физическое и моральное их положение во всех частях онаго, после с тем большими выгодами поднять на них оружие и действовать с тою поверхностью, каковую мужество, просвещением и искусством руководствуемое, долженствует всегда иметь предъ толпою черни, движущуюся одним бурным фанатизма духовнаго или политическаго вдохновением и помрачением."

⁴²⁴ See *Arkhiv Gosudarstvennogo soveta*, vol. 1, 443.

⁴²⁵ "Sobstvennoruchnyi chernovoi rescript Ekateriny II k kn. F. F. Shcherbatovu o priniatii im glavnago nachal'stva nad voiskom po sluchaiu konchiny A. Bibikova", May 1, 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 13, 404.

⁴²⁶ *Arkhiv gosudarstvennogo soveta*, vol. 1, 454.

appointing his brother, Petr Panin, to Bibikov's position - a move she greatly resented because she saw it as a power-grab that suggested her weakness.⁴²⁷ Catherine also personally disliked Petr Panin. She had disapproved of his siege of Bender in 1770, believing it to have come at too large a cost of Russian blood. And since his retirement to his Moscow estate shortly thereafter, he had irritated her by frequently criticizing government policy, including her handling of the rebellion.⁴²⁸ Once appointed, Petr Panin further annoyed her by making an extensive list of demands that included not only complete power over military units, inhabitants, towns, and government officials in the affected areas, but also the right, which Bibikov did not have, to choose his own military staff.⁴²⁹ In the end, however, Catherine's reluctant acceptance of Panin was probably an astute move, likely to appease her critics and bring decisive military leadership that would finally pacify the rebellion. But the cost was to permit extensive oppressive measures that were both inimical to her project of sovereignty and threatening to her reputation abroad.

With its emphasis on liberty and on political power based on consent, the Enlightenment had expressed heightened concern about the use of force in governance. Force enjoined obedience through fear and had no edifying or moral effect. It was a signal characteristic of illegitimate and despotic government: not only did despots use force as a *modus operandi*, they also resorted to arbitrary and disproportionately severe methods, from the routine use of torture to gruesome forms of corporal (mostly capital) punishment. Catherine was not categorically opposed to capital punishment, but she believed that it was only to be applied to exceptional threats to the monarch's sovereignty. In 1764, for example, she had sanctioned the use of the death penalty in the punishment of Vasily Mirovich, a Ukrainian officer who had broken into Schlüsselberg Fortress in an attempt to release the ex-emperor, Ivan VI. And in 1771, four people were executed for the murder of Archbishop Ambrosius during the infamous plague riot in Moscow. On the whole, however, she had continued Elizabeth's policy to commute death sentences.⁴³⁰

Moderation in the application of violent force was a key feature of Catherine's self-representation as a monarch. In her *Nakaz*, written only six years previously, she had made a number of statements declaring her commitment to Cesare Beccaria's philosophy of criminal procedure and punishment. This entailed more than the simple adage that the punishment be commensurate to the crime. Beccaria had modeled his theory of punishment on gravity – a mild force, yet one that managed to hold reliably the planets in orbit. What mattered was not the severity of punishment, but that punishment was predictable and regular, which he believed would lead to a confluence of notions of crime and punishment (i.e., cause and effect) in the mind of the would-be criminal. Furthermore, like gravity, punishment was calculated according to a precise law of

⁴²⁷ Catherine revealed these concerns in a letter to Potemkin in July: "Darling, as you see from the attached items, Count Panin deigns to have his brother made into a lord (*vlastitel'*) with unlimited power in the better part of the empire, that is, in Moscow, Nizhegorod, Kazan, and Orenburg provinces, another others are *sous-entendu*; and if I sign, then not only will prince Volkonsky be upset and embarrassed, but I will be no better protected, for I, fearing Pugachev, will be praising and elevating this first-class liar and man who has personally offended me in front of everyone..." "Sobstvennoruchnaia zapiska Ekateriny II k G. A. Potemkinu po povodu predostavleniia gr. P. Paninu iskliuchitel'noi vlasti dlia usmireniia pugachevskago bunta", July 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 13, 421.

⁴²⁸ John T. Alexander, *Autocratic Politics...*, 167.

⁴²⁹ In the end, Catherine did not permit Panin to appoint the general of his choice, or to control the secret commission, which remained under her control. Her rescript to him from July 29 was largely recycled from the one she had sent to Bibikov eight months earlier and granted him the same extensive command over military and civil apparatus. The only major difference was it now applied to three, not two provinces.

⁴³⁰ The most authoritative discussion on the death penalty in Russia in the eighteenth century is in Elena Marasinaova, "*Zakon*" i "grazhdanin" v Rossii vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka: ocherki istorii obshchestvennogo soznaniia (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 67-119.

proportionality: the pain of punishment need only marginally outweigh the pleasure of the crime (a view Catherine endorsed in Article 32 of her *Nakaz*). This doctrine of proportionality sought to solve the problem of how punishment could retain some edifying content, for it demonstrated which crimes were worse than others. In contrast, universal severity confused this hierarchy in the mind of the subject and underlined the depravity and arbitrariness of power.⁴³¹

Although Bibikov had carried out harsh punitive measures of its own, Panin had been critical of the state's response to the crisis, seeing it as tepid and unsuited to pacifying the rebels. Writing to his brother on July 22, 1774, he noted that only a "rapid change of direction" could now save the teetering Russian heartlands and secure the well-being of the Russian nobility, which he understood to have been the primary targets of Pugachev's wrath.⁴³² Signally, Petr Panin thought that defeating Pugachev's army and capturing the pretender would not be enough, for the common rabble—the *chern'*—had become too impassioned and emboldened to respond to a moderate exercise of force. The state needed to reassert its authority over the *chern'* and put it on a "correctional path,"⁴³³ and this could only be achieved by threatening and carrying out widescale and highly visible punishment of the rebellion's participants. Panin was upfront about his intentions to use force and instill fear. This being the only language he thought commoners understood, it was the only way in which the "rabble" could be "bridled."⁴³⁴

Panin issued public declarations promising mass punishment of offenders. Those who had actively joined the rebels, having taken direct part in violence as well as those who had facilitated and abetted this activity, were to have their head and feet cut off prior to execution, their dismembered bodies displayed on public roads. Where individual perpetrators could not be found, the inhabitants of villages where crimes had occurred would be induced to hand over whichever persons they thought guilty or else face systematic punishment determined by lots: first, every third man would be hanged; second, one in hundred would be hanged by the rib; finally, all remaining adults would be flogged.⁴³⁵ Panin also announced that in the case of renewed unrest in a village, he would sentence all male adults without exception "to the most horrible execution" and "give their wives, children and lands to others."⁴³⁶ While he assured the empress that this last measure was merely a threat, Panin acted on many of his other threats, hanging rebels from gallows or the rib and even having them broken on the wheel. Corpses were also displayed on roads and along rivers for people to see and left to rot for weeks. Several thousand also suffered other forms of corporal punishment – they were knouted, beaten, and even had their ears cut off.⁴³⁷ Indicative of his general approach, when Panin finally got his hands on Pugachev in Simbirsk in October 1774, he struck him several times in the face, tore his beard out, and forced him to kneel before the assembled people to confess his evildoings.⁴³⁸ While Panin understood that his measures

⁴³¹ Michel Foucault famously argues that brutal executions that involved the mutilation of the criminal's body were previously meant to demonstrate state's absolute power. See Part I of his influential work, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

⁴³² 26 July, 1774, "Pis'mo grafa P. I. Panina grafu N. I. Paninu," *SIRIO*, vol. 6, 77. John Alexander argues that Panin saw himself as the "gentry's angel of vengeance and retribution." (185)

⁴³³ For example: August 3, 1774, "Donesenie P. I. Panina imperatritse Ekaterine II," *SIRIO*, vol. 6, 92.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴³⁵ In *Sochineniia Derzhavina*, vol. 5, 288, quoted in Alexander, *Autocratic Politics*, 185.

⁴³⁶ August 30, 1774, "Donesenie grafa P. I. Panina Imperatritse Ekaterine II," *SIRIO*, vol. 6, 129.

⁴³⁷ P. A. Geisman and A. N. Dubovskoi, *Graf Petr Ivanovich Panin, 1721-1789* (St. Petersburg: N. V. Vasil'evna, 1897), 77-80.

⁴³⁸ October 1, 1773, "Iz pis'ma komanduiushchego karatel'nymi voiskami pravitel'stva general-anshefa grafa P. I. Panina svoemu bratu – kantsleru grafu N. I. Paninu o izbienii E. I. Pugachva pri predvaritel'nom publichnom doprose na gorodskoi ploshchadi Simbirsk," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 7 (1966), 108.

offended the empress' sensibilities, he claimed he was unleashing the law to its full extent.⁴³⁹ And he may even have thought that harsh punishments helped accentuate the monarch's mercy and compassion when rebels were in fact spared. At any rate, Panin believed his methods were an important demonstration—not only to Russian commoners, but to Catherine herself—of what the Russian monarch needed do to maintain order in the countryside.⁴⁴⁰

Pugachev was brought to Moscow and tried in December 1774. The empress decided not to arrive in the city until Pugachev's trial and punishment had taken place, thereby asserting the independence of the judicial branch. Yet, she also assigned the trial to a large, ad hoc court made up of governmental elites. It consisted of the members of the Senate, the Holy Synod, the presidents of the Colleges and all other individuals of the first three ranks. While the special court reflected the gravity of Pugachev's crimes, it ensured that the pretender and his main accomplices would be judged by those classes of individuals who had been major targets of his rebellion. This was a concession that the empress felt she needed to make. Still, she worried about the vindictiveness of the court and she tasked Viazemsky, her general procurator, to oversee the trial and attempt as best he could to moderate the court's sentences.

Although Catherine knew that Pugachev would be subjected to the death penalty,⁴⁴¹ she wanted to avoid any "painful executions" and to limit the total number of death sentences to three or four people.⁴⁴² However, Viazemsky had difficulty carrying out her will. On December 28, he wrote to her stating that many of the Moscow nobility wanted "no small number" of executions and were in favor of great severity - a position that Petr Panin strongly advocated for after his arrival in Moscow.⁴⁴³ In the end, Viazemsky managed to commute three of a possible nine death sentences to corporal punishment. And in Pugachev's case, he was able to persuade the court to leave out his breaking on the wheel. Still, Pugachev was to be to be quartered alive, his head and his limbs to be put on public display in the four corners of the city.⁴⁴⁴ Viazemsky was certain that the empress would be displeased by this outcome. Although he knew Catherine would accept the necessity of multiple death sentences, and even, begrudgingly, the public display of Pugachev's "lifeless body", which, as he explained, was deemed "necessary to produce a strong impression on the unruly mob (*chern*)," she would disapprove of the inhumanity of such a punishment. Unable to change the decision of the court, Viazemsky's only available solution was to arrange for the

⁴³⁹ August 5, 1774, "Donesenie grafa P. I. Panina Imperatritse Ekaterine II," *SIRIO*, vol. 6, 117.

⁴⁴⁰ Panin boasted to the empress that he had accomplished everything that she had charged him with in a report to her on January 25, 1775. See, "Donesenie grafa P. I. Panina Imperatritse Ekateriny II," *SIRIO*, vol. 6, 199-200.

⁴⁴¹ For example, Catherine wrote in a letter to Grimm on November 4 that Pugachev was being taken to Moscow "to be hanged." November 4, 1774, "Catherine II à Grimm" Catherine II & Friedrich Melchior Grimm, *Une correspondance privée, artistique et politique au siècle des Lumières*, Edited by Sergueï Karp, Tome 1 (Moscow: Centre Internationale d'Étude du XVIII Siècle Ferney-Voltaire, 2016), 17. It seems probable that she knew that Pugachev would be sentenced to a more severe form of execution, but was doing her best to influence public opinion abroad.

⁴⁴² "Doklad general-prokurora Senata kniazia A. A. Viazemskogo imperatritse Ekaterine II ob obriade suda nad E. I. Pugachevym i ego soratnikami," *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 9 (1966), 140.

⁴⁴³ December 28, 1774 "Donesenie general-prokurora Senata kniazia A. A. Viazemskogo Ekaterine II o slozhnosti predstoiashchei raboty suda po delu E. I. Pugacheva i ego soratnikov v sviazi s vystupleniiami moskovskogo dvorianstva s trebovaniiami zhestokikh kaznei dlia bol'shinstva obviniemykh po moskovskomu protsessu," *ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁴⁴ December 31, 1774 "Donesenie general-prokurora Senata kniazia A. A. Viazemskogo Ekaterine II o resul'tatakh obsuzhdeniia na zasedanii Senata voprosa of kazni E. I. Pugacheva i ego soratnikov i o merakh nakazaniia drugikh obviniaemykh po moskovskomu protsessu," *ibid.*, 145.

executioner to decapitate Pugachev first. Such a move, he argued to the empress, might be interpreted as a “mistake” and was more likely to “be excused.”⁴⁴⁵

Pugachev was executed on January 10, 1775. The execution took place on Bolotnaya Square not far from the Kremlin and was attended by a large crowd of people, both nobles and commoners from Moscow and the surrounding villages.⁴⁴⁶ Pugachev did not try to provoke the crowd, but was contrite, accepting the priest’s final blessings before crossing himself profusely and praying for forgiveness from the people. However he acted, he must have known that a last-minute reprieve was unlikely. Yet, Viazemsky succeeded in saving him from the full-extent of his sentence, the executioner reversing the order of punishment at the last moment. As carried out, Pugachev’s brutal execution represented a compromise, one that was highly visible to all onlookers. Far from a display of sovereignty, the untrammelled power of the monarch to dispense justice as she saw fit, Pugachev’s death demonstrated the empress’ trammelled sovereignty both in the countryside and St. Petersburg. To all those who had read her *Nakaz*, the incompatibility between the execution and her own principles was evident. While she did her best to justify the extensive punishment of the rebels by asserting their depravity, it was clear to all that not her will, but the wishes of the nobility had produced the harshest possible response, and had, ultimately, sentenced their monarch to endorse a medieval form of punishment.⁴⁴⁷ Although sovereignty is never complete, Pugachev’s rebellion was a reminder that her particular project had far to go and much work was yet needed.

Conclusion

For Pugachev and his followers, the extension of the state into the Russian countryside was not consonant with sovereignty. It brought taxes, landowners, government officials, bonded labor, and the disruption of traditional arrangements. Far from upholding those arrangements, as the rebels believed was the empress’ duty, she had actively undermined the traditional equivalence between obligations and rights that had bound provincials in service to the state. The violent end to the rebellion likely accelerated the state’s control over the periphery, while also forcing the empress to reassert her support for the noble estate and its right to own serfs. This was a major problem. At the heart of Catherine’s sovereignty project lay the ideal of an orderly and reasonable (monarchical) power that provided liberty—understood as the security of person and possessions—to its subjects. So long as the monarch upheld the nobleman’s right to untrammelled and arbitrary power over serfs’ bonded labor, the liberty of the nobleman would continue to depend on the pacification of the serf. The court that sentenced Pugachev made considerable reference to the “plight” of the nobility. Its sentence of January 10, 1775, claimed the legitimacy of precedent by appealing in part to the penalties in the Law Code, or *Ulozhenie*, of 1649 for transgressions against nobles and government officials.⁴⁴⁸ This emphasis was deliberate. As Viazemsky wrote in a missive to the empress the day before, the court believed it necessary for its sentence “to demonstrate to the nobility that her Imperial Majesty firmly intended to guarantee the well-earned

⁴⁴⁵ January 2, 1774, “Donesenie general-prokurora Senata kniazia A. A. Viazemskogo Ekaterine II ob otravlennii na ee odobrenie prigovora po delu E. I. Pugacheva i ego soratnikov, o sekretnykh raspriazheniakh otnositel’no obriada kazni E. I. Pugacheva”, *ibid.*, 146

⁴⁴⁶ For an eye-witness account, see *Zapiski Andreia Timofeevicha Bolotova, 1773-1795*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia V. S. Balasheva, 1873), 486-91.

⁴⁴⁷ Over the course of the early modern period it became more common for judges, who were invariably noblemen, to intervene to diminish horrific penalties. See the chapter, “Justice,” in Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 73-116. See also, Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 3-31.

⁴⁴⁸ January 10, 1775, *PSZ*, no. 14,233.

rights and privileges of the nobility,” and to demonstrate “to the peasantry, that she intended to ensure their obedience and keep them to their duties.”⁴⁴⁹ The major problem for Catherine was that, in provinces at a great distance from the capital, the very relations between noble landholders and their serfs were far from the control of the empress. Thus, the very promise to guarantee peace and security to all of her subjects, nobility and serfs alike, was proven empty by the Pugachev revolt and its aftermath, demonstrating how hollow the empress’ project of sovereignty proved on the margins.

⁴⁴⁹ 9 January, 1775, “Iz doneseniia general-prokurora Senata kniazia A. A. Viazemskogo Ekaterine II o poluchenii odobrennogo eiu prigovora po delu E. I. Pugacheva i ego soratnikov o podpisanii sententsii na sudebnom zasedanii Senata 9 ianvaria 1775g,” *Voprosy istorii*, no. 9 (1966), 147.

Conclusion

Historians, Marc Bloch reminds us, must always be “testing [their] classifications in order to justify their existence, and, if it seems advisable, to revise them.”⁴⁵⁰ Acting on this imperative, this dissertation claims that the study of the Russian monarchy should reconsider its analytical arsenal and to add to its investigations the concept of sovereignty - **the exercise of supreme and untrammelled power, considered legitimate**. Russian monarchs, it claims, were not interested in mere power, authority, or legitimacy, but *sovereignty*: they wanted to wield supreme and untrammelled power like their Western counterparts. Constructing sovereignty was no easy task, but this also added to its appeal, for success in this project would add to Russia’s glory and underline its parity with the West. Sovereignty was also desirable in its own right, for to wield supreme and untrammelled power would allow Russia’s monarchs to bring order and progress to their great territory and the lives of their multitudinous subjects.

This dissertation has argued that Catherine the Great, the Russian empress between 1762 and 1796, was a crucial figure in this process. It argues that across the duration of her reign she formulated and put into practice a new system of monarchical sovereignty. Catherine’s major insight had been that the exercise of supreme and untrammelled power, and the recognition of monarchs’ claims as legitimate required substantial collaboration with the broadest possible number of stakeholders within the nobility. As such, it required consultation and careful delegation of power. The product was the first modern system of autocratic sovereignty in Russia. This system equated liberty with security and was centered on strong procedures and institutions that assisted the monarch as well as on rule through consultation and consensus. Catherine believed that operating principles such as these were compatible with Russian autocracy and that they were integral to its strength and continued viability. To establish such a new system of sovereignty was the principal, indeed the legitimating project of her reign, and she worked hard to implement it into her later years through fastidious practices, routines, and legislative initiatives. Her long reign—one of the longest in Russian history—demonstrates that she was successful at doing so.

The empress’ system established clear expectations about the proper exercise of power, and after her death this system would not tolerate rulers that violated its principles. When her son Paul succeeded her in 1796, he was seen to subvert her arrangements through erratic policies and behavior, much like his father, Peter III. By continually appointing and firing senior servitors, taking sharp and unexpected turns in foreign and military policy, and governing from his hard-to-reach palace of Gatchina, Peter III failed to create patterns of predictability in the high administration.⁴⁵¹ Like his father, he was soon deposed, murdered by a group of noblemen in March 1801. In contrast, Paul’s successors—his sons—were more careful to conduct their activities within the spirit of the system that she had established. Of these, Alexander I (b. 1777), was most directly influenced by the empress herself. Catherine, had paid close attention to his education, appointing for him an enlightened tutor, César de la Harpe, and even compiling for him a comprehensive syllabus that notably included her *Nakaz*.

Before coming to power in 1801, Alexander had spoken privately of broad and ambitious changes to Russian society and the state, including the emancipation of the serfs and the creation of a constitution. In the early years of his reign, he continued to discuss these with an unofficial committee (known to historians as the Unofficial Committee). Yet, he soon backed away from his two boldest designs, precisely because he knew they would never find agreement in the Senate or

⁴⁵⁰ Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2017), 147.

⁴⁵¹ Cynthia H. Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2003), 181-83.

within the bureaucracy. If anything, the most influential reforms he did pursue were attuned to Catherine's state-building enterprise. For example, in 1802 he replaced the Petrine Colleges with Ministries—each under a minister responsible to the monarch—, which further clarified the intermediary channels between the throne and the state's administrative organs. And, in 1810, he also established an advisory legislative body, the State Council. Alexander's successors, Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855) and Alexander II (r. 1855-1861) both continued to see government institutions and cooperation with enlightened servitors as integral to the monarchy's sovereignty. Admittedly, Nicholas frequently used a personal chancery and special emissaries—mainly military men—to bypass regular state channels. Yet, the very fact that these actions damaged his reputation shows monarchs were judged by the high standards that Catherine's system had established.



Alexander I. Portrait by Vladimir L. Borovikovsky, 1802-3. The Russian State Museum.

Adherence to the empress' system allowed the Russian monarchy in the nineteenth century to be not only a viable, but also a dynamic political machine, able to undertake an ambitious modernizing agenda in government, the economy, and society at crucial moments. Its signal success was arguably the 'Great Reforms' of Alexander II's reign, which, amongst other things, abolished serfdom, introduced a modern judicial system, and established new forms of local government. The abolition of serfdom was preceded by years of in-depth and often painful consultation with the nobility. Committees were appointed; noble assemblies were consulted;

ministries were tasked with data-gathering and drafting proposals.⁴⁵² In this sense, the most important landmark of Alexander II's reign reflected very little of his opinions as to its terms, rather reflecting consultation and compromise with hundreds if not thousands of interested parties (arguably, all but the serfs).

One advantage of Catherine's system was that it was neither rigid nor complete. The empress herself had seen her system in such terms, leaving behind a number of unfinished reforms, including, as we have seen, schemes to further clarify the prerogatives of the monarch. The notion that the monarch's sovereignty could permit a diffusion of power allowed the monarchy to envision greater political participation in local administration. This was particularly important after 1861, for the monarchy needed to maintain the support of the peasantry which had been made free, but not in the way that it had long awaited. Alexander II's introduction of the *zemstvos*, which included elected peasant delegates, was the first decisive step in this direction. Equally important was that the Russian monarchy could consider constitutional devices that strengthened procedures regulating the exercise of power and broadened participation in central decision-making in St. Petersburg. In 1881, for instance, Alexander II approved a plan by his minister of internal affairs, Loris Melikov, to create a consultative commission of officials and private individuals, including *zemstvo* representatives, to help prepare legislation. However, Alexander's sudden assassination by revolutionaries meant that the reform was never enacted.

Catherine's system, however, began to be challenged after Alexander II's death. His son, Alexander III (r. 1881-1894), abandoned his father's plans to establish consultative commissions and he weakened the powers of the *zemstvos*. This was the beginning of an exclusionary ethic that weakened the participation of both elites and commoners in power. Alexander III thought that the monarchy's authority would be strengthened by emphasizing what he considered to be traditional autocratic rule in addition to Russian nationalism and a commitment to Orthodoxy.⁴⁵³ Coming to power in 1894, his son, Nicholas II, immediately aligned himself with these autocratic principles in a famous address at Tver', where he described aspirations for representatives of the *zemstvos* to play a consultative role in domestic administration as "senseless dreams." Nicholas' autocratic ethic was bolstered by his piety and a belief that sovereign power must solely reflect *his* verdicts, for they were God's will and were therefore not to be disputed. This ethic led Nicholas to stubbornly resist calls for more extensive forms of political participation and constitutional reforms, and this put him increasingly at odds not only with the commonality, but also the Russian elites. This was one cause of the Revolution of 1905, which forced him to establish a Russian parliament—the Duma—and to concede that laws could not be passed without its approval. However, the monarch retained absolute *veto* powers as well as the right to dismiss the Duma at any time. Nicholas was never reconciled with this new arrangement, and, seeing the Duma as trammeling rather than bolstering his supreme powers, was often in conflict with that institution, dismissing it four times between 1906 and his abdication in 1917.

The notion of autocracy that guided the final two Russian monarchs claimed ancient lineage. Yet, the history of the Russian monarchy since 1762, or, as Catherine would have us believe, since the reign of Peter the Great, saw moves to develop a modern form of sovereignty, according to which the monarch's ability to exercise supreme and untrammled power, considered

⁴⁵² David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom, 1762-1907* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 56-69. See also Bruce W. Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982).

⁴⁵³ See, above all, Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 159-523.

legitimate, was dependent on strong procedures and institutions that involved others. To abandon this project, above all at a time of accelerating industrialization, with the complexities that such a process unleashed, was likely to be a significant decision. The collapse of the monarchy in 1917 suggests that the system that Alexander III and Nicholas II adopted was unable to meet these challenges and that adopting such a system was a mistaken path.

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