

## Catherine II and the Image of Peter I

In 1770 Etienne Falconet notified Empress Catherine II that he preferred to carve only a brief inscription on the base of his monument to Peter the Great: Petro Primo/Catharina Secunda.<sup>1</sup> The empress did not object, and when the statue was finally unveiled in 1782 it bore the sculptor's lapidary phrase on its gigantic granite foundation. Catherine is presumed to have relished the equation which the motto implied, that Peter had been Russia's first great modern ruler while she, although not descended from him, was the second. In the context of whatever it might mean to be an enlightened autocrat, it is often assumed that Catherine both represented and understood herself as Peter's only true heir, the continuer and completer of what he had begun.

But some of Catherine's friends, writing what they knew would please her, said differently. After observing, not altogether tongue in cheek, that brevity was a virtue which inscription writers should cultivate, Melchior Grimm suggested that the motto's appeal might be further enhanced by removing the numbers and leaving just two words, "Petro/Catharina,"<sup>2</sup> a move which would also have dispensed with the pecking order which the numbers implied. And from the edge of Switzerland, Voltaire sent greetings in 1774 to his favorite Petersburg correspondent: "Meanwhile, Madam, allow me to kiss the statue of Peter the Great and the hem of the dress of Catherine the Greater."<sup>3</sup>

This paper takes up the matter of Catherine's probable response to Voltaire's whimsical chivalry. It attempts to answer these questions: What was Catherine's opinion of Peter the Great? How closely did she feel that her reign and reputation measured up to his? The analysis strongly suggests that she was not an uncritical admirer of Peter the Great, although that has at times been claimed.<sup>4</sup> Instead she found the image of Peter as a farsighted and triumphant ruler persuasive or helpful in some contexts, inadequate or uncomfortable in others.

1. "No. 89. Pis'mo Falkoneta Imperatritse Ekaterine II," August 14, 1770, in *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* (hereafter cited as *SIRIO*), 17 (1876): 119.

2. Letter from Grimm to Catherine II, January 5/16, 1783, *SIRIO*, 44 (1885): 310. Catherine replied that the numerals were needed to distinguish between Peter's widow and herself (letter 113 to Grimm, March 9, 1783, *SIRIO*, 23 [1878]: 272).

3. Letter from Voltaire to Catherine II, December 16, 1774, in *Voltaire's Correspondence*, ed. Theodore Besterman, 107 vols. (Geneva, 1953-65), 89:168-69; translation in A. Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great: Selected Correspondence* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 166.

4. Writers who have cited Catherine's identification of herself as Peter's heir include Paul Miliukov, "Catherine II," in *Hommes d'état* (Paris, 1936), p. 10; David Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia: The Panin Party* (New Haven, 1975), pp. 262-63; Hans Rogger, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth Century Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 34; J. H. Roetter, "Russian Attitudes toward Peter the Great and His Reforms between 1725 and 1910" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1951), pp. 42-45; E. F. Shmurlo, "Petr Velikii v russkoi literature," *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniia*, 264 (July 1889): 78.

The paper utilizes evidence from both Catherine's legislation and her less public remarks and correspondence. To a degree this enables her official opinions to be matched for consistency against her private ones. In terms of governmental pronouncements in particular, however, it is not always possible to know the circumstances which produced the language which appeared over Catherine's signature. As David Ransel has pointed out, the form and thrust of imperial legislation might owe as much to clientele group politics as to the empress's own design.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, particular language or imagery might be utilized by anyone involved in the legislative process for a variety of reasons, not all of them consciously perceived. It seems probable that Catherine's informal observations were shaped by a shorter list of variables, however, and paying attention to both kinds of evidence should minimize the likelihood of misinterpretation. For the balance of this paper it will be assumed that laws were unlikely to be promulgated whose language ran counter to what Catherine, who prided herself on her indefatigable attentiveness to ruling, would have preferred. In more private circumstances she kept returning to the topic of Peter the Great throughout her life. It therefore seems unlikely that she would have been indifferent to what was said officially on that subject in her name. At the end of the paper the issue of "circumstances" will be considered again, along with related questions which only further research can answer. Until its final pages the paper will also treat Catherine's reign as a whole, with discussion of evolving attitudes and chronological stages reserved until then.

At the time that Catherine began to govern it was unusual to hear criticism of Peter the Great, at least within court circles. The late Empress Elizabeth had devoted twenty years to fostering a reverent, uncritical attitude toward her father's memory. Shortly after her accession she had decreed that all laws and regulations which he had promulgated must be "unequivocally enforced and followed in all matters without exception" by the entire administrative apparatus of the realm.<sup>6</sup> Other edicts consistently identified the daughter as the fulfiller of her father's admirable but thwarted intentions.<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth commissioned monuments to remind posterity of Peter's greatness, and she participated in ceremonies which were designed to teach the same thing to her contemporaries.<sup>8</sup> There were also numerous personal links between the court of Elizabeth and that of Peter. These extended from the empress herself through Count Bestuzhev-Riumin,

5. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, "Introduction," chapters 1 and 2, and especially chapter 5.

6. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, series 1, 46 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1830–43), vol. 11, no. 8,480 (December 12, 1741) (hereafter cited as *PSZ*). Decrees which reiterated this command included *PSZ*, vol. 13, no. 9,734 (April 6, 1750), and no. 10,142 (October 13, 1753); vol. 15, no. 11,237 (April 6, 1761). Catherine made use of this blanket command once during her reign, in a decree concerning the administration of the salt tax: *PSZ*, vol. 17, no. 12,690 (July 7, 1766). And later she mentioned it once in passing: "Zapiska Imperatritsy Ekateriny II ob uchrezhdeniiakh, vvedennykh v Rossii v eia upravlenie [posle 21 maia 1779 g.]," *SIRIO*, 27 (1880): 171. For additional sources for the "Zapiska," see note 41.

7. *PSZ*, vol. 13, no. 9,872 (July 31, 1751), and no. 10,090 (April 2, 1753); vol. 14, no. 10,346 (January 24, 1755), no. 10,486 (December 1, 1755), and no. 10,777 (November 6, 1757).

8. Letter from Catherine's mother, July 30, 1744, *SIRIO*, 7 (1871): 65–66; B. Menshutina, *Russia's Lomonosov* (Westport, Conn., 1970), pp. 99–102; D. Arkin, *Mednyi vsadnik: Pamiatnik Petru I v Leningrade* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1958), p. 7.

whose career had begun under Peter, to the lady-in-waiting whom Catherine recalled as a "walking encyclopedia" of information about old times.<sup>9</sup> In this milieu the eulogistic literary tradition bequeathed by Prokopovich and others and now nurtured especially by Lomonosov found a ready audience.<sup>10</sup> From these assorted contributions there emerged an almost hagiographic portrait of Peter the Great. He was revered for his military prowess and revolutionary energy, but also, in more remarkable terms, as a benevolent monarch who had devoted himself to his subjects' welfare.

Although such adulation may have derived from a sense of personal pride or commitment, it had obvious political utility. Elizabeth had attained the throne by metaphorically clinging to her father's coattails. The repeated linking of her reign with his proclaimed that contact with a valued past had been restored, but it also enabled the daughter to benefit from the father's immense reputation. In other words, the Petrine image had acquired significance in its own right, beyond its precise historical context. It served as a legitimizing device. It had become what one applied to persons or policies in order to praise them.<sup>11</sup>

When Peter III succeeded his aunt, odes appeared which foretold his glorious reign as the first Peter's heir and namesake.<sup>12</sup> Within months analogous eulogies were being published about Catherine II.<sup>13</sup> Walter Gleason has argued that the identification of these new sovereigns with ideal greatness, as exemplified for Russia by Peter I, served as veiled criticism of Elizabethan priorities, especially of her belligerence toward Prussia.<sup>14</sup> The irony of Peter the Great's appearance in a pacifist campaign merely underscores the extent to which his image had acquired a life of its own. That fact was not overlooked by Catherine. After she had deposed her husband her subsequent explanation castigated him

9. "Mémoires [III]," *Sochineniia imperatritsy Ekateriny II na osnovanii podlinnykh rukopisei i s ob'iasnitel'nymi primechaniiami akademika A. N. Pypina* (hereafter cited as *Sochineniia*), vol. 12 (St. Petersburg, 1907), p. 161; Dominique Maroger, ed., *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great* (New York, 1961), p. 130.

10. In 1755 Lomonosov delivered a public address on Peter's greatness: "Slovo pokhval'noe blazhennyya pamiati Gosudariu Imperatoru Petru Velikommu, govorennoe apreliia 26 dnia 1755 goda," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii M. V. Lomonosova*, vol. 8 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1959), pp. 584-612. A number of his ceremonial odes had also eulogized Peter. On the eulogistic literature of the eighteenth century prior to Catherine's accession, see Roetter, "Russian Attitudes toward Peter the Great," pp. 24-37; Shmurlo, "Petr Velikii," pp. 61-76; S. L. Peshtich, *Russkaia istoriografiia XVIII veka*, 3 vols. (Leningrad, 1961-71), vols. 1 and 2; B. B. Kafengauz, "Voprosy istoriografii epokhi Petra Velikogo," *Istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1944, no. 9, pp. 24-25.

11. This is not to deny that in other circles Peter was damned as the Antichrist. But at or near the court his reputation was consistently upheld in flattering terms.

12. Walter Gleason, "Political Ideals and Loyalties of Some Russian Writers of the Early 1760s," *Slavic Review*, 34, no. 3 (September 1975): 570; Shmurlo, "Petr Velikii," pp. 72-73; J. C. T. Laveaux, *Histoire de Pierre III, Empereur de Russie*, 3 vols. (Paris, n.d.), 1:113; and M. Semevskii, "Shest' mesiatsev iz russkoi istorii: Ocherk tsarstvovaniia imperatora Petra III, 1761-1762 gg.," *Otechestvennyia zapiski*, series 3, 173 (1867): 745-46.

13. Gleason, "Political Ideals and Loyalties of Some Russian Writers," p. 570; M. Lomonosov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1965), pp. 185-87; V. Maikov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1966), pp. 185-88.

14. Gleason, "Political Ideals and Loyalties of Some Russian Writers," pp. 569-70. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, pp. 54-58, also discusses the role these journalists played in encouraging opposition to Elizabethan policies and support for the grand duchess as a preferred leader.

for having been an unworthy grandson of Peter the Great.<sup>15</sup> By rescuing the empire from so insufferable a ruler, it was said, the new empress had shown herself to be on the side of the angels, not to mention the nation, and of all the greatness associated with Peter I, "Our Most Beloved Grandfather."

There is another irony associated with the use of Peter the Great's reputation as a political device. Catherine employed the weapon against Peter III. But it was apparently during the latter's brief reign that a sense of distance or freedom from the first Peter's era and personality made its official appearance. Prior to 1762 a single Elizabethan decree had mentioned negative aspects of Peter the Great's reign.<sup>16</sup> Peter III's legislation was less deferential. Compulsory service for the nobility was abolished, for example, with the explanation that this detested and burdensome policy of Peter I had once been necessary to assure the greatness of the state, but was no longer needed.<sup>17</sup> Another decree announced the end of a second Petrine institution, the Chancellery of Secret Investigations, in similar terms. "Conditions of that era, and the people's still uncorrected ways" had made a secret police necessary then, but times had changed.<sup>18</sup> Catherine would make this sense of changing times, first articulated under the husband she despised, a hallmark of her own reign.

Catherine's accession occurred at a point in Russian history when it was both useful to claim the inheritance of Peter the Great and possible to begin its reevaluation.<sup>19</sup> But there was little in her past to indicate which attitude might predominate once she was in a position to set the tone for this kind of political behavior. Most signs suggest that she had no qualms about maintaining the more flattering one. After arriving in Russia in 1744 she had spent eighteen years near a court subservient to Elizabethan norms. Her political mentors included Bestuzhev-Riumin, the English ambassador Hanbury-Williams, and Nikita Panin, men who looked favorably on Peter the Great.<sup>20</sup> Back home her German

15. See the so-called "detailed manifesto" (*obstolate'nyi manifest*), which was promulgated July 6, 1762 but never incorporated into the law code, in P. I. Bartenev, ed., *Osmnadsatyi vek*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1868-69), 4:219.

16. *PSZ*, vol. 14, no. 10,370 (March 7, 1755): "I have concluded that our transformer Peter the Great, a monarch worthy of eternal remembrance, . . . if he had not found his fatherland in such poverty and inadequacy, while obliged to carry on an oppressive and extended war, would never have resorted to the authorization of such ingenious projects as the one concerning copper coinage" (the edict was drafted by Ivan Shuvalov).

17. *PSZ*, vol. 15, no. 11,444 (February 18, 1762).

18. *PSZ*, vol. 15, no. 11,445 (February 21, 1762). The Chancellery of Secret Investigations of Anne's reign was the functional successor to Peter's Preobrazhenskii Prikaz, which had been abolished in 1729. Peter III's decree treated the two as one institution.

19. For a survey of this shifting perception of Peter the Great, see Roetter, "Russian Attitudes toward Peter the Great," chapter 2; and Shmurlo, "Petr Velikii," pp. 76-81 ff. Both men touch briefly on Catherine's involvement in this trend (Roetter, "Russian Attitudes toward Peter the Great," pp. 122-23; and Shmurlo, "Petr Velikii," pp. 80 and 84).

20. On Catherine's relationship with Bestuzhev-Riumin, see E. Shchepkin, *Russko-Avstriiskii soiuz vo vremia semiletnei voiny 1746-1758 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1902), chapters 4 and 5; Herbert Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), pp. 102-11; and the correspondence described below between Catherine and Hanbury-Williams. See Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, pp. 11-12, for Panin's attitude toward Peter I, and chapter 3 concerning the extent of his influence over the grand duchess. For similar information about Hanbury-Williams, see S. M. Goriainov, ed., "Perepiska Velikoi Kniaginy Ekateriny Alekseevny i angliiskago posla Sera Charl'za G. Uill'iamsia 1756 i 1757 gg.," published in French and Russian, in *Chteniia v imperatorskom*

family's attitude appears to have been no less respectful.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Grand Duchess Catherine had read *De l'esprit des Lois*, in which Montesquieu worked an intriguing variation on the theme of Peter's no longer necessary harshness. He agreed with all the panegyrists that Russia had become more civilized, which was to say more like Europe, around the time of Peter the Great. But he refused to credit Peter with that transformation and instead denounced him as a tyrant.<sup>22</sup> Part of Montesquieu's analysis subsequently found its way into Catherine's *Nakaz*.<sup>23</sup> But to speculate on her initial response to what she read is risky because of the paucity of evidence. She did once observe to Hanbury-Williams that tyrants might be great men and then declared in the same breath that she would be proud to imitate so great a man as Peter.<sup>24</sup> And she mocked Elizabeth as a monarch unworthy to be her father's daughter.<sup>25</sup> But that is as close as she came before her accession to expressing an opinion of the sovereign against whom she would later measure her own accomplishments.

The most that the grand duchess's remarks and biography suggest is that, while she appreciated the political value of associating herself with the Petrine inheritance, she had also been exposed to a more critical evaluation of that inheritance than Elizabethan custom permitted. Given the shifting perception of Peter the Great which Shmurlo and Roetter have identified within the second half of the eighteenth century, Catherine's apparent ambivalence may simply have made her typical of her time and place. But the publicity which surrounded her accession identified her as potentially an ideal sovereign and a worthy successor to Peter I. It appeared during that summer of 1762 as though the Elizabethan era of deference to Peter's memory had been renewed.

Nevertheless, not long after Catherine's accession denigrating remarks about Peter the Great began to appear in both her legislation and her private correspondence. She approved the emperor's attitude toward Orthodoxy, but not his

*obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete* (hereafter cited as *Chteniia*), 1909, book 2; English translation in Earl of Ilchester and Mrs. Langford-Brooke, *Correspondence of Catherine the Great when Grand-Duchess, with Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams* (hereafter cited as *Correspondence*) (London, 1928). References to Peter the Great are found on pages 75, 88, 103, 121, and 207 of the "Perepiska."

21. Their deference may be traced at least from 1716, when Christian August served briefly as Peter's Stettin host. See P. Petschauer, "The Education and Development of an Enlightened Absolutist. The Youth of Catherine the Great, 1729–1762" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1969), pp. 52, 78, 81, and 236. Also see Maroger, *Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, pp. 37–38; and P. L. de Beauclair, *Histoire de Pierre III, Empereur de Russie* (London, 1774), pp. 5–79 passim.

22. "The ease and promptness with which that nation has been civilized demonstrates that this prince had too low an opinion of her, and that these people were not beasts as he thought. The violent means he employed were useless; he would have achieved the same results with gentleness. . . . Giving the customs and manners of Europe to a European nation, Peter I found [a responsiveness] which he had not expected. . . ." (Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des Lois*, 2 vols. [Geneva, 1748], book 19, chapter 14).

23. *Nakaz imperatritsy Ekateriny II, dannyi Kommissii o sochinenii proekta novogo ulozheniia, pod redaktsiei N. D. Chechulina* (St. Petersburg, 1907), p. 3.

24. Letter from Catherine to Hanbury-Williams, August 27, 1756, *Chteniia*, p. 88; and *Correspondence*, p. 90.

25. Letter from Catherine to Hanbury-Williams [September 6, 1756], *Chteniia*, p. 121; and *Correspondence*, p. 110.



administrative handling of church revenues.<sup>26</sup> She appreciated his importance as the founder of Russia's navy, but pointed out that only in her reign had that navy become formidable, and Mediterranean.<sup>27</sup> She disagreed with Peter's narrowly technical concept of education.<sup>28</sup> She thought it absurd of him to have built his capital in Ingria when he might have placed it along the warm and fertile Black Sea coastline.<sup>29</sup> She appreciated his efforts to supersede the *Ulozhenie* but was painfully aware of his lack of success.<sup>30</sup> Apart from a cluster of flattering references from around the time of the First Turkish War, 1768–74,

26. Concerning Catherine's appreciation of Peter's attitude toward Orthodoxy, see her letters to Voltaire of November 28/December 9, 1765, March 26/April 6, 1767, and July 14/25, 1769 (letters 12,166, 13,196, and 14,792), in Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 59:251–53, 65:112–14, and 72:178–81. Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, p. 40, has translated one of these references, and another was published in *SIRIO*, 10 (1872): 175. Also see "O sostoianii Rossii pri Ekaterine Velikoi: Voprosy Diderota i otvety Ekateriny (1773)," *Russkii arkhiv*, 1880, book 3, p. 2; and Catherine's letter of June 3, 1767 to N. Panin, *Sochineniia*, 11:505. Her attitude toward Peter's administration of the church's monastic lands will be discussed later in the paper.

27. News of the imperial navy's success against the Turks in Chesme Bay prompted celebrations during which Peter the Great was eulogized as the founder of Russia's naval strength. See letter 16,154 from Voltaire to Catherine II, May 15, 1771, and letter 16,218 from Catherine to Voltaire, June 10/21, 1771, in Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 79:73–75 and 137–39; Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, pp. 103 and 108; and *SIRIO*, 13 (1874): 121–22. See also "Sobstvennoruchnyi chernovoi ukaz Imp. Ekateriny II Admiral'teiskoi Kollegii . . .," July 7, 1776, *SIRIO*, 27 (1880): 93. Catherine's insistence that her naval achievements were at least as great as Peter's will be discussed later in the paper.

28. See *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 12,103 (March 22, 1764), in which Ivan Betskoi quoted Catherine's unflattering observations about Peter's efforts to educate the nobility. General Villebois's report on the inadequacy of Russia's officer training program, which was incorporated into the Cadet Corps Statutes of 1762, also criticized "the very narrowness of the organization" of Peter's artillery school (*ibid.*, no. 11,696 [October 25, 1762]). See also "Sobstvennoruchnaia zametka Ekateriny II o tiranakh," undated memo no. 604, *SIRIO*, 42 (1885): 456, in which Catherine criticized Russia for never having known the appropriate, enlightening kind of education; letter 15,284 to Voltaire, March 31/April 11, 1770, in Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 75:18–21; and Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, p. 79, which argued that in its attempts to Westernize Russia the government had gone about things the wrong way.

29. Catherine joked with Voltaire about St. Petersburg's unfortunate northerly latitude and unhealthy climate (see letters 12,263 and 13,097 from Voltaire to Catherine, January 24, 1766 and February 27, 1767, and letter 13,196 from Catherine to Voltaire, March 26/April 6, 1767, *SIRIO*, 10 [1872]: 175; Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 60:65–66, 64:258–59, and 65:112–14; and Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, pp. 41, 46–47).

In another letter the empress pointed out that, had Peter built his capital in the south, at Taganrog, life for those who governed would have been much nicer. Voltaire seems to have agreed (see letter 16,049 from Catherine to Voltaire, March 3/14, 1771, and letter 16,243 from Voltaire to Catherine, July 6, 1771, *SIRIO*, 13 [1874]: 72; Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 78:164–67, and 79:168–70; and Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, pp. 109–10). Grimm wrote that Peter the Great would have been dumbfounded at Catherine's development of the Black Sea coastline (letter of October 9/20, 1782, *SIRIO*, 44 [1885]: 280). There is another reference to Peter's abandonment of his southern projects in Catherine's letter of September 30, 1782 to Potemkin, *SIRIO*, 27 (1880): 217.

When the critical travelog *A Voyage to Siberia* appeared in 1769, about the only thing on which its author and the empress agreed was that life was more comfortable in Moscow than in St. Petersburg (Catherine II, "Antidot," *Sochineniia*, 7:225–26). Catherine's specific observation about desolate Ingria also comes from "Antidot" (p. 260) and was later echoed by Grimm. See *SIRIO*, 44 (1885): 607, for comments made by him in 1795.

30. *PSZ*, vol. 17, no. 12,801 (December 14, 1766).

the state-sponsored cult of Peter the Great disappeared, or at least lay low, during Catherine's reign.<sup>31</sup>

But Catherine's personal sensitivity to the magnitude of Peter's reputation never left her. And she did not confine her banter on the subject to the letters which she exchanged with Voltaire. After his death in 1788, the empress continued to share observations and anecdotes about Peter with those near her—with Grimm and Potemkin, de Ligne and Segur, and her secretary Khrapovitskii. During the Second Turkish War Catherine reflected as frequently on Peter's way of doing things as she had during the first, still seeking assurances that "her way" was at least as good as his. According to the Prince de Ligne she permitted no one to speak against Peter in her presence.<sup>32</sup> And yet her final comment about the man, written in 1796, consisted of the boast that her conquest of Baku had eclipsed his.<sup>33</sup> Clearly the image of Peter the Great remained a point of reference for Catherine to the end of her reign. And her attitude toward him was more complex than her recorded criticisms suggest.

In these criticisms the empress's assault on Peter's image came from two directions. She argued that he had not been Russia's only great sovereign, and that some before him had been "great" within the context of their times. On other occasions she insisted that Peter's innovations had had little effect and that the man had remained basically a prisoner of his Muscovite heritage. When the empress praised early Russian rulers she implicitly cut Peter's reputation down to a more manageable size. And when she criticized Russia's past she linked Peter with that past rather than its transformation. Neither version of Russian history acknowledged Peter as the standard by which other rulers should be judged.

The first of Catherine's two approaches to the Petrine yardstick may be illustrated by a series of decrees promulgated between 1762 and 1764. They were intended to dispose of the vexing problem of monastic estates and the income derived from them, and how that income might most efficiently be placed at the service of the state. Perhaps inadvertently, the decrees also suggest the empress's shifting opinion of her predecessor's accomplishments.

The first edict of the series described Peter's church lands policy as one based upon wisdom and justice, and added that Catherine intended to abide by his precedent: "We are resolved to restore the establishment of the entire spiritual estate in perfect accord with the ecclesiastical legislation promulgated by Our Most Beloved Grandfather and Sovereign, Emperor Peter the Great."<sup>34</sup>

31. See citations in note 26 plus Catherine's "Institutions for the Administration of the Provinces," *PSZ*, vol. 20, no. 14,392 (November 7, 1775). The eulogy preached in 1770 in Peter's honor was later published abroad (Metropolitan Platon, "Sermon prêché . . . sur la tombe de Pierre le Grand le lendemain du jour que l'on reçut à St. Petersburg la nouvelle de la victoire navale remportée sur la flotte turque" [London, 1771]). "Antidot," which was first published in 1770, utilized numerous defenses of Peter's reign in its argument that Russia was (already) a European, or civilized, nation. By contrast, the unveiling of Falconet's statue in 1782 was made an occasion for reminding Russians of Catherine's greatness as much as Peter's (*PSZ*, vol. 21, no. 15,488 [August 7, 1782]; and letters from Grimm to Catherine, October 1/12 and 9/20, 1782, *SIRIO*, 44 [1885]: 278 and 280).

32. *Mémoires et mélanges historiques et littéraires, par le Prince de Ligne* (hereafter cited as *Mémoires*), 4 vols. (Paris, 1827), 2:360.

33. Letter 267 to Grimm, July 19, 1796, *SIRIO*, 23 (1878): 686.

34. *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 11,643 (August 12, 1762). This referred to Peter's decision to

Issued when Catherine's reign was only weeks old, this decree fits to perfection the pattern of deference found in Elizabethan edicts: whatever is beneficial for Russia was initiated by Peter the Great; whoever associates herself with Peter's memory thereby assumes a share of that greatness. Catherine's second edict of the series was, if anything, more flattering to Peter than the first.<sup>35</sup> But her subsequent decrees were unconcerned with hero worship. They focused more precisely upon the history of the state's efforts to manage church income, and they relegated Peter I to the role of one sovereign among many who had wrestled with the problem.<sup>36</sup> He had experimented with various solutions, they said, but these had proven to be neither sufficient nor abiding. Credit for being the first to perceive the need for state authority over the church now went to Peter's father Alexis Romanov. And credit for discerning the most effective way to accomplish this—direct state administration of monastic revenue—went to Anne, during whose reign the first College of Economy had been organized, and to Elizabeth. Elizabeth even received some praise for having perceived the futility of her father's attempted solution to the problem.<sup>37</sup>

These decrees reflect one of Catherine's persistent themes: Russian history did not begin with Peter the Great. When Senac de Meilhan offered around 1790 to prepare a history of eighteenth-century Russia, Catherine replied that she would underwrite no project which might perpetuate old myths, such as the one that Russia had possessed neither laws nor administration prior to Peter's reign.<sup>38</sup> Lest the would-be historian had missed the point, she reminded him again: "I have a decided preference for everything which has preceded the reigns of the house of Peter I."<sup>39</sup> As it turns out, the empress was not being merely petulant or defensive. She did identify other Russian sovereigns to admire, and she praised them for accomplishments which she implied that Peter had not matched.

One of those to be admired was Peter's father Alexis, and his awareness of the need to regulate church income was not the only undertaking by which he had earned Catherine's praise. As she explained to the Abbé Chappe d'Auteroche, Alexis, a generation before the appearance of Peter's Holy Synod, had begun

entrust the administration of monastic lands to the Holy Synod, which was then expected to maintain adequate financial records of the income from these lands and its disbursement. The decree's full eulogy to Peter begins on page 51.

35. *Ibid.*, no. 11,716 (November 29, 1762). This decree contained Catherine's instructions to her newly appointed Commission on Church Properties. It reiterated the deferential language of the previous edict and also praised Peter for defining the church's responsibility to guide the morals of the "simple people" along proper paths.

36. *Ibid.*, no. 11,844 (June 6, 1763), and no. 12,060 (February 26, 1764). Peter III, who had also confronted the problem, went unmentioned, but see Marc Raeff, "The Domestic Policies of Peter III and His Overthrow," *American Historical Review*, 75, no. 5 (June 1970): 1296–97.

37. *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 11,844, and no. 12,060. The reference to Alexis is in *ibid.*, no. 12,060.

38. "Sobstvennoruchnoe chernovoe pis'mo Ekateriny II k A. Mordvinovu . . ." (October 4, 1790), *SIRIO*, 42 (1885): 114; letter also published in Charles de Larivière, *Catherine II et la Révolution Française d'après de nouveaux documents* (Paris, 1895), pp. 283–84. Also see "Antidot," *Sochineniia*, 7:251.

39. "Sobstvennoruchnoe pis'mo Ekateriny II k Senaku de Mel'ianu . . ." (June 16, 1791), *SIRIO*, 42 (1885): 175; and Larivière, *Catherine II*, p. 320.



the struggle to remind the Russian church of the patriarch's subordination to the tsar.<sup>40</sup> In a different vein, when the empress compiled her twentieth anniversary record of how badly off the realm had been before she seized power, she began by tracing the decline of the state's financial situation from Alexis's day, when, as she noted, the treasury had been full.<sup>41</sup> Catherine also approved of Alexis's opposition to commercial monopolies.<sup>42</sup> And she admired him for having promulgated a law code which, from her perspective, seemed to have been accepted by his subjects without demur. This was admiration not of the *Ulozhenie's* contents, and certainly not of the extent to which it had remained the law of the land since 1649, but rather admiration of its evident suitability for its time and place.

Sensitivity to time and place had been one of Montesquieu's criteria for greatness in legislators. He argued that without such sensitivity effective legislation is impossible, and it was on the basis of this criterion that he challenged Peter I's lofty reputation. Catherine's respect for the seventeenth-century code suggests that she accepted Montesquieu's analysis. Her Instructions to the Legislative Commission included a chapter "On the Composition and Style of the Laws," which praised the *Ulozhenie* for its effectiveness.

The style of the Code of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich of glorious memory is almost always clear, plain, and concise; one hears its passages quoted with pleasure; it is impossible to mistake the sense of what has been heard; its language is within the grasp of the most mediocre mind.<sup>43</sup>

Elsewhere Catherine had noted that by the time of Peter the Great the *Ulozhenie* was already obsolete.<sup>44</sup> The point was, that although attempts had been made ever since 1700, neither Peter nor anyone else had been able to carry through a new codification of the laws. As part of her effort to achieve this impossible goal via the Legislative Commission, Catherine requested that the original *Ulozhenie* be placed in a gilded silver shrine.<sup>45</sup> Presumably the Commission's subsequent inability to accomplish its task reinforced Catherine's respect for Alexis. It also meant that she, like Peter, had fallen short of one of her own apparent standards for measuring greatness in sovereigns.

During the 1780s Catherine added another name to her list of Russian sovereigns to be admired. This was Grand Prince and Saint Vladimir of Kiev. The empress's praise of this distant predecessor may have stemmed from his symbolic utility in her cat-and-mouse game with Poland. Russia's claims to Lithuania and Polotsk, she insisted, were justified by Vladimir's original jurisdiction over them.<sup>46</sup> But the grand prince was also a ruler who, like Alexis, had

40. "Antidot," *Sochineniia*, 7:201 and 139.

41. "Zapiska," *SIRIO*, 27 (1880): 170; it also appears in *Sochineniia*, 12:170.

42. "O sostoianii Rossii pri Ekaterine Velikoi," *Russkii arkhiv*, 1880, book 3, p. 11.

43. *Nakaz imperatritsy Ekateriny II . . . N. D. Chechulina*, p. 124, article 451. In *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 12,060 (February 26, 1764), Alexis was credited with "establishing justice among his subjects" in 1649. See also "Antidot," *Sochineniia*, 7:83, where Catherine defended the cultural level of Russian civilization by calling the roll of Russia's law-giving sovereigns: Iaroslav, Ivan IV, Alexis.

44. *PSZ*, vol. 17, no. 12,801 (December 14, 1766).

45. *PSZ*, vol. 18, no. 12,877 (April 20, 1767).

46. Letters 238 and 248 to Grimm, April 5 and September 16, 1795, *SIRIO*, 23 (1878): 620 and 647.

left an indelible imprint upon his own era. In 1782, as a means of rewarding outstanding service to the crown, Catherine created a new honorary knighthood, the Order of Holy Apostolic Prince Vladimir. Although she joked with Grimm about the man's meager qualifications for sainthood,<sup>47</sup> the decree which announced his Order praised him for bringing Christian enlightenment to Russia.<sup>48</sup> Three years later the empress reaffirmed Vladimir's merit in, of all things, her Charter to the Nobility. Its introductory essay identified her reign and his as unique periods of territorial and social cohesion for Russia. In between, there had been only invasion, devastation, and preliminary reconstruction,<sup>49</sup> a capsule history which granted little significance to Peter the Great.

Catherine's *Notes on Russian History*, which began to appear shortly after the Charter, lavished even greater attention on Vladimir. The empress praised him for precisely those qualities which she admired in herself: He was wise, sensible, merciful, and just; he maintained a splendid court and rewarded his servants generously; he built cities and welcomed foreign settlers and warriors and especially those persons knowledgeable in science or art.<sup>50</sup> This eulogy, superfluous to the simple chronicle-retelling format of the *Notes*, again suggests that there may have been other reasons than eighteenth-century imperialism for Catherine's endorsement of Vladimir. She identified him as a cosmopolitan sovereign who appreciated and participated in the world beyond the frontiers of Kievan Russia.<sup>51</sup> His "bringing of Christian enlightenment" was simply the most enduring illustration of that sensitivity, or statesmanship.<sup>52</sup>

Both Vladimir and Alexis seem to have attracted Catherine's attention, or envy, because of the impact which she presumed them to have had on the people whom they governed. Eight hundred years after Vladimir's baptism, for example, an enlightened, secularizing ruler, such as the empress understood herself to be, still had to contend with the lingering influence of Russian Christianity. One of the conclusions shared by Catherine and Peter the Great was that this obstinate piety needed to be brought under control. After the Legislative Commission's dismissal it began to look as if the *Ulozhenie* also might linger on indefinitely. Both of these old Russian achievements testified to the effectiveness and therefore the greatness of their sponsors. By the 1780s the empress surely perceived the limited success of her own attempts to earn this kind of reputation. I think

47. Letter from Grimm to Catherine, November 24/December 5, 1782, *SIRIO*, 44 (1885): 303-4, and Catherine's response, March 9, 1783, *SIRIO*, 23 (1878): 269 and 271.

48. *PSZ*, vol. 21, no. 15,515 (September 22, 1782).

49. *PSZ*, vol. 22, no. 16,186 (April 21, 1785).

50. *Zapiski kasatel'no rossiiskoi istorii*, vol. 1, in *Sochineniia*, 8:75.

51. Concerning Vladimir's merit as a European-oriented sovereign, see also letter 113 from Catherine to Grimm, March 9, 1783, *SIRIO*, 23 (1878): 271.

52. Catherine went on to suggest that Vladimir also deserved praise for being no more enslaved by foreign ways than by Russian ones. Tucked into the chronicle narrative of the *Zapiski*, in what one assumes to be an approving fashion, is the historian Tatishchev's observation that staying home and attending to one's subjects' welfare, as Vladimir had done, was more productive for a ruler than yearning after what could be found in distant lands (*Sochineniia*, 8:89). It is possible to read into this evaluation, as unnecessary to the chapter on Vladimir as the eulogy quoted in the body of this paper was to Catherine's *Notes on Russian History*, a rather Montesquieuan critique of the policies of Peter the Great. An analogous indirect critique may also be read into Catherine's historical drama about the reign of Oleg ("Nachal'noe upravlenie Olega: Podrazhanie Shakespeiru, bez sokhraneniia featral'nykh obyknovennykh pravil" [1786], *Sochineniia*, 2: especially pp. 268-69).

that she may also have begun to understand Peter I as a case of flawed or partial greatness, rather like herself. Notwithstanding the man's secularizing impulses, his stupendous energy had proven inadequate for wrenching Russian law and mores out of the Muscovite context in which he had found them. As Catherine wrote to de Meilhan, the would-be historian, Peter's reign had begun in the seventeenth century, not the eighteenth.<sup>53</sup>

This critical view of Peter's reign revealed itself in the course of Catherine's prolonged if less than adequate assault on old Russian justice. One of her most insistent vows after obtaining power was a promise to ameliorate the judicial system which she perceived around her, to obtain respect for the laws through mercy rather than severity, as she so frequently put it.<sup>54</sup> These statements of intent soon gave way to more explicit denunciations of, among other things, the use of physical cruelty to obtain evidence or to punish those found guilty.<sup>55</sup> Occasionally specific criminal proceedings gave Catherine small opportunities to practice what she preached. Either the empire's cumbersome appellate procedures would crank out a case which could not be settled without guidance from the throne, or the empress herself would identify a case as worthy of her personal attention. The latter cases obviously provided useful occasions for grandstanding, but the former remained relatively unpublicized affairs, except insofar as Catherine's decisions or those of her Senate became judicial precedent. As a rule her handling of both the widely publicized cases and the quieter ones established two characteristics of what might be called Catherinian justice. First, the empress worked to maintain a distinction between old and new styles of justice by repeatedly imposing penalties lighter than the law allowed or than had been recommended to her, although there were times when that distinction became more apparent than real.<sup>56</sup> Second, and more important for the purposes of this

53. "Réflexions sur le projet d'une histoire de Russie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle" (1791), Larivière, *Catherine II*, p. 313.

54. A sampling of Catherine's pledges to rely on mercy rather than severity may be found in *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 11,667 (September 22, 1762); no. 11,687 (October 19, 1762); and no. 11,759 (February 17, 1763). Bureaucratic decrees duly affirmed that compassion was one of the hallmarks of Catherine's reign: *PSZ*, vol. 17, no. 12,424 (June 26, 1765); vol. 18, no. 12,978 (September 27, 1767); vol. 19, no. 13,562 (January 31, 1771).

Other acts, issued in either the empress's name or that of the Senate, which emphasized a distinction between old and new styles of justice include: *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 11,629 (July 30, 1762); no. 11,656 (August 24, 1762); no. 11,687 (October 19, 1762), which nearly duplicates Peter III's decree of February 21, 1762 (vol. 15, no. 11,445); no. 11,750 (February 10, 1763); vol. 20, no. 14,309 (April 28, 1775); no. 14,579 (February 11, 1777); no. 14,897 (July 26, 1779).

55. These denunciations of "bloodshed" were especially numerous at the onset of her reign: *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 11,656 (August 24, 1762); no. 11,687 (October 19, 1762); no. 11,693 (October 24, 1762), with related bureaucratic instructions in Bartenev, *Osmnadsatyi vek*, 1:48; no. 11,717 (December 2, 1762); no. 11,750 (February 10, 1763); no. 11,759 (February 17, 1763). According to J. T. Alexander, *Autocratic Politics in a National Crisis* (Bloomington, Ind., 1969), p. 205, even during *Pugachevshchina* Catherine continued to express her preference for as little punitive bloodshed and harshness as possible.

56. *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 11,616 (July 18, 1762): re extortionist Renber; no. 11,656 (August 24, 1762): re Collegiate Assessor Shokurov, charged with graft; no. 11,693 (October 24, 1762): the Khrushchev-Guriev affair, which Catherine manipulated for her own political advantage; no. 11,794 (April 11, 1763): re Major General Totleben, charged with espionage; no. 11,843 (June 4, 1763): re Khitrovo's threat against Gregory Orlov; no. 11,925 (September 18, 1763): most of a group of underage offenders had their sentences lightened; no.

paper, the decrees which summarized these proceedings and pronounced sentences treated Peter the Great as little more than a footnote to his father's reign.

The judicial environment against which Catherine set her standards of merciful justice proceeded, of course, from the *Ulozhenie*, with its heavy reliance upon execution, mutilation, and the knout.<sup>57</sup> Peter's prescribed criminal penalties had modified this harsh system only slightly, chiefly by substituting a rather grim "political death" for the physical variety. His military and naval statutes continued to specify "agonizing death" for those who even contemplated opposing his reign.<sup>58</sup> Catherine on the other hand did restrict the use of both

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11,961 (November 6, 1763): re officials who had stolen goods belonging to Bestuzhev-Riumin; no. 12,233 (September 2, 1764): a *voevoda* and a clerk convicted of graft; no. 12,241 (September 15, 1764): the Mirovich affair, the outcome of which was bloody for some, but others of those convicted did receive noncorporal sentences; vol. 17, no. 12,561 (January 30, 1766): Senate official Tatishchev convicted of forgery; no. 12,600 (March 24, 1766): Zhukov and his wife convicted of killing his mother and sister; no. 12,781 (November 11, 1766): a number of Belogorod provincial officials; vol. 18, no. 13,101 (April 18, 1768): a number of Orel merchants, three of whom received full pardons; vol. 19, no. 13,695 (November 10, 1771): the aftermath of the Moscow uprising, in which over a hundred were pardoned; no. 13,890 (October 25, 1772): two counterfeiteres convicted of varying degrees of guilt; no. 13,951 (February 25, 1773): penalties for nonprivileged classes guilty of theft; no. 14,033 (September 5, 1773): Narmotskii, a forger; no. 14,171 (July 29, 1774): Shishkov, an embezzler; no. 14,140 (April 9, 1774): two boys stealing money from a church; no. 14,309 (April 28, 1775): abolition of *Ulozhenie* penalty for forgery; no. 14,313 (May 1, 1775): abolition of *Ulozhenie* penalty for resisting conversion to Orthodoxy; no. 14,539 (November 17, 1776): Captain Efimovich convicted of murdering his wife; no. 14,767 (June 25, 1778): Corporal Semichev sold a free peasant into the army; no. 15,032 (July 9, 1780): murderer Grigorev; vol. 22, no. 16,154 (February 19, 1785) and no. 16,308 (January 8, 1786): re a boy charged with incest; vol. 23, no. 16,901 (September 4, 1790): re Radishchev, another stage-managed affair; no. 17,240 (August 10, 1794): policeman Vereshchagin abusing the powers of his office; no. 17,284 (December 18, 1794): Lieutenant Captain Montague convicted of espionage; no. 17,345 (June 20, 1795): several dozen Poles convicted of treason.

There were also a series of general commutations of sentences proclaimed during the second half of Catherine's reign: *PSZ*, vol. 20, no. 14,274 (March 17, 1775): celebrating the end of the First Turkish War; vol. 21, no. 15,488 (August 7, 1782): celebrating the unveiling of Falconet's statue of Peter the Great; vol. 22, no. 16,551 (June 28, 1787): celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Catherine's accession (related decrees include no. 16,580 [September 27, 1787], and nos. 16,638 and 16,639 [March 31, 1788]); vol. 23, no. 17,149 (September 2, 1793): celebrating the end of the Second Turkish War.

57. These decrees explicitly contrast Catherinian justice with *Ulozhenie* precedent: *PSZ*, vol. 16, nos. 11,687 and 12,241; vol. 17, no. 12,561; vol. 19, nos. 13,695, 13,951, 14,033, 14,140; and vol. 20, nos. 14,309, 14,313, 14,539, 15,032.

58. These decrees contrast Catherinian justice either with Petrine precedent explicitly or with prior practice, including that of both Peter the Great and his father: *PSZ*, vol. 16, nos. 11,629, 11,656, 11,687, 11,693, 11,750, 11,961, 12,233, 12,241; vol. 17, no. 12,561; vol. 19, nos. 13,695, 13,951, 14,140, as cited in note 57, and 14,171 (July 29, 1774); vol. 20, nos. 14,313, 14,539, 15,032, as cited in note 57. Also see the decrees cited in note 54.

Toward the end of Catherine's reign the Senate began to remind her that in some instances Petrine criminal penalties were lighter, or more flexible, than those prescribed by the *Ulozhenie*: *PSZ*, vol. 20, nos. 14,539 and 15,032; vol. 21, no. 15,336 (January 28, 1782).

The "political death" devised by Peter the Great and upheld by his daughter Elizabeth consisted of forced labor for life, preceded possibly by a beating with the knout and the slitting of one's nostrils. Elizabeth's modifications of this penalty eliminated the adverb

capital punishment and its political equivalent. To replace them she devised a theatrical but unbloody version of public disgrace followed by prison or exile.<sup>59</sup> She also insisted that persons seventeen and younger could not receive punishments intended for adults,<sup>60</sup> and that several categories of "church people" were exempt from corporal punishment altogether.<sup>61</sup> The unsatisfactory outcome of her Legislative Commission's debate on the validity of torture<sup>62</sup> simply confirmed what the empress had begun to learn in her role as supreme executor of the law. All the publicity about Peter the Great's civilizing energy could not disguise the fact that Russian criminal law and therefore a substantial part of Russian culture rested on the *Ulozhenie*, and that Peter's impact upon this situation had been minimal, at best.

Thus Catherine encouraged two assaults on Peter's reputation. She took pains to admire some aspects of pre-Petrine Russia, but at the same time she criticized the limitations which that past had placed on Peter's outlook. The question arises whether or not this double-edged critique was at all intentional, the work of a fine practicing politician out to enhance her own claim to greatness by diminishing that of her major competition, as she had earlier scoffed at her husband and Elizabeth. An alternative possibility is that this business of attacking Peter's reputation from opposite directions may simply reveal the depth of Catherine's ambivalence toward that competitor. Experience with ruling may have shown her, for example, that it was easier to criticize Peter the Great than to improve upon what he had done. In either case two sets of evidence indicate that the careful distinctions which Catherine drew between her own actions and Peter's were sometimes questionable. This in turn suggests that she was never as free of the legend of his greatness as she wanted to be.

First, her criticisms of Muscovite justice notwithstanding, she too relied on that precedent when it seemed useful. She had Pugachev quartered, the penalty required for armed rebellion by both the *Ulozhenie* and Peter's military statutes.<sup>63</sup> In the Mirovich affair, the other major case of treason which she faced, she sentenced nearly fifty officers to run a thousand-man gauntlet five or ten or twelve times each.<sup>64</sup> The empress explicitly and repeatedly affirmed the *Ulozhenie's* strictures against peasant petitions.<sup>65</sup> She also relied on the

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"possibly" and added facial branding and the requirement of permanent fetters for those so sentenced (see *PSZ*, vol. 13, no. 10,087 [March 29, 1753]; no. 10,101 [May 25, 1753]; vol. 14, no. 10,036 [September 30, 1754]). Most of the relevant portions of Peter's Military Statutes, with their emphasis upon "agonizing death," are quoted or summarized in *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 12,241.

59. See *PSZ*, vol. 16, nos. 11,693 and 11,961; vol. 17, nos. 12,561 and 12,600; vol. 18, no. 13,211: the Saltykova affair; vol. 19, no. 14,171; vol. 23, no. 17,284.

60. *PSZ*, vol. 19, no. 14,140 (April 9, 1774), and vol. 22, no. 16,308 (January 8, 1786); see also vol. 16, no. 11,925 (September 18, 1763).

61. *PSZ*, vol. 18, no. 12,909 (June 7, 1767), and vol. 19, no. 13,609 (May 20, 1771).

62. See *SIRIO*, vols. 14 and 32, for the Legislative Commission's plenary session minutes of February–July 1768, when the topic under discussion was justice.

63. *PSZ*, vol. 20, no. 14,233 (January 10, 1775).

64. *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 12,241 (September 15, 1764).

65. See *PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 11,606 (July 12, 1762), which endorses Petrine precedent, and no. 11,718 (December 2, 1762); vol. 17, no. 12,316 (January 19, 1765), and vol. 18, no. 12,966 (August 22, 1767), which endorse and elaborate upon the prohibitions of the *Ulozhenie*.



*Ulozhenie* to dictate suitable penalties for assault,<sup>66</sup> and against the recommendations of her Senate she restored the knout for convicted serfs who were deemed unfit for military service.<sup>67</sup> Nor was she above imposing “political death,” complete with knouting, nostril slitting, and branding, when she deemed it appropriate.<sup>68</sup> In this context, then, she was not noticeably less constrained by Russia’s past than Peter had been. The pot must have known that it had little reason to gloat when it called the kettle black.

Second, Catherine showed herself to be a firm believer in Peter’s greatness where military matters were concerned. In the context of military victory and territorial annexation she was forever measuring the progress of her troops and the state of her wartime finances against what he had accomplished. During the First Turkish War she repeatedly described the capture of Azov and Taganrog as a reconquest of land which Peter had been forced to return to the Turks in 1711.<sup>69</sup> Using Voltaire as intermediary she advised her European critics, who were busily insisting that Russia could not afford this war, to remember that Peter the Great had fought years longer, with fewer resources at his disposal, and yet had won.<sup>70</sup> News of the imperial navy’s spectacular success against the Turks in 1774 prompted celebrations during which Peter was eulogized as the navy’s founder.<sup>71</sup> Nor did Catherine’s attention to Peter’s example end when that war did. Thirteen years after Chesme, according to the Prince de Ligne, the empress still fretted over what Peter the Great would have thought of her Turkish policy.<sup>72</sup> And when war with Sweden came in

66. *PSZ*, vol. 18, no. 13,055 (January 15, 1768).

67. *PSZ*, vol. 19, no. 13,951 (February 25, 1773).

68. *PSZ*, vol. 18, no. 13,211 (December 10, 1768), for Saltykova’s accomplices; vol. 19, no. 13,695 (November 10, 1771), and no. 13,877 (October 5, 1772); vol. 20, no. 15,032 (July 9, 1780); vol. 21, no. 15,336 (January 28, 1782); vol. 23, no. 17,262 (October 27, 1794).

69. Letters 14,792 and 15,741 from Catherine to Voltaire, July 14/25, 1769 and November 1770, in Besterman, *Voltaire’s Correspondence*, 72:178–81 and 77:91–92; the 1769 passage also appears in Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, p. 62; and *SIRIO*, 10 (1872): 346. See also letter 16,049 from Catherine to Voltaire, March 3/14, 1771, in Besterman, *Voltaire’s Correspondence*, 77:166–67; and *SIRIO*, 13 (1874): 72. And two letters from Grimm to Catherine, June 25/July 6 and July 1/12, 1796, in which he makes a similar point about Catherine’s capture of Derbent (*SIRIO*, 44 [1885]: 743 and 747). And de Ligne’s contrast between Catherine’s victories and Peter’s “shameful capitulation at Pruth” (*Mémoires*, 2:348).

70. Letters 15,587 and 16,920 from Catherine to Voltaire, and letter 16,881 from Voltaire to Catherine, August 9/20, 1770, October 17/28 and October 1, 1772, in Besterman, *Voltaire’s Correspondence*, 76:124–27, 83:96–98, 57; Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, pp. 85, 143, 144; *SIRIO*, 13 (1874): 29–30, 278.

71. See note 27. According to Segur, a Baltic victory over Sweden’s fleet in 1787 prompted celebrations which echoed those of 1774 (Count Louis Philippe de Segur, *Memoirs and Recollections of Count Louis Philippe de Segur*, vol. 3 [Arno Press reprint, 1970], p. 339). And Black Sea sailors received money in 1788 in recognition of the reestablishment of their fleet, “an enterprise of Peter the Great” (rescript of July 27, 1788 to Potemkin, *SIRIO*, 27 [1880]: 514–15). On the other hand, neither the capture of Ochakov nor the onset of war with Sweden seems to have occasioned any official observation of Peter’s victories on either front (letters 184 and 241 from Catherine to Grimm, *SIRIO*, 23 [1878]: 467–68, 627–37).

72. *Mémoires*, 2:359–60.

1788–89, she apparently lifted her spirits by reflecting on the extent to which her mobilization arrangements corresponded to what his had been.<sup>73</sup>

In this same military context Catherine also took particular pains to boast of those deeds for which no Petrine precedent could be found. As she wrote to Potemkin after Russia's naval victories in 1790:

I have always watched all the fleet's activities in general with a fond eye. Its successes have always pleased me even more than the army's, because Russia became used to those long ago, but only in my reign have her naval exploits really begun to be remarkable. . . . The Black Sea fleet is Our personal achievement, which is why it is so close to Our heart.<sup>74</sup>

In a similar vein, she pointed out that Field Marshal Rumiantsev's advance across the Danube in 1773 had not been matched since the days of Sviatoslav,<sup>75</sup> and that her Black Sea fleet's passage through the Straits into the Mediterranean was the first such event since the world began.<sup>76</sup> The very same victory at Chesme which had evoked sermons to the glory of Peter the Great was transmogrified in her correspondence to something called "Russia's chief naval victory in 900 years."<sup>77</sup> Later she must have been gratified when de Ligne reported that Sweden's king found her a tougher enemy than Peter the Great had been in the days of Charles XII,<sup>78</sup> and that, had she reigned in Peter's place, the "shameful capitulation at Pruth" would never have taken place.<sup>79</sup> But she obviously found it difficult to be complacent. For at least a part of her reign, whenever her armed forces achieved anything at all she ordered another commemorative obelisk for the grounds at Tsarskoe Selo,<sup>80</sup> as though something might be proven when all that marble finally outweighed the monument which Falconet had designed.

73. Entries for June 27 and July 2, 1788, *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskago, 1782–1793 . . . s biograficheskoiu stat'eiu i ob'iasnitel'nyim ukazatelem Nikolaiia Barsukova* (St. Petersburg, 1874), pp. 97 and 101; see also entries for November 17, 1788, January 5, March 11, and May 20, 1789, and October 20, 1792 (pp. 195–96, 228–29, 262, 284, 413).

74. "Sobstvennoruchnoe pis'mo Ekateriny II k Potemkinu" (September 16, 1790), *SIRIO*, 42 (1885): 109.

75. Letter 17,377 from Catherine to Voltaire, June 30/July 11, 1773, in Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 85:166–67; and Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, p. 151.

76. Letter 18,186 from Catherine to Voltaire, January 9/20, 1775, in Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 90:24–26; and Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, p. 167.

77. Letter 16,218 from Catherine to Voltaire, June 10/21, 1771, in Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 79:137–39; Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, p. 108; *SIRIO*, 13 (1874): 121. Also see her letter of December 2, 1788 to de Ligne, in which she boasts of having raised, practically overnight, the largest Russian army of the century (*Les lettres de Catherine II au Prince de Ligne [1780–1796], publiées avec quelques notes par la Princesse Charles de Ligne* [hereafter cited as *Les lettres*] [Brussels and Paris, 1924], p. 103); letter of November 25, 1789 to Potemkin, claiming that "the Turks fear us more than the Caesars" (*SIRIO*, 42 [1885]: 48); and letter 267 to Grimm, July 9, 1796, boasting that she had captured Baku in two months, while it had taken Peter two campaigns, and that Peter's forces had faced less resistance than hers (*SIRIO*, 23 [1878]: 686).

78. Letter 4 from de Ligne to Catherine, undated, *Mémoires*, 1:259; *Les lettres*, p. 160.

79. *Mémoires*, 2:348.

80. Letter 16,298 from Catherine to Voltaire, August 14/25, 1771, in Besterman, *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 80:22–23; Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great*, p. 117.

This recurrent if private use of Peter as a touchstone against which to measure conduct or achievement scarcely indicates disdain for the man's reputation. It seems more probably to reflect the extent to which Catherine had come to respect the virtues of even partial greatness. Reputedly, wherever she went she carried Peter's portrait as a talisman.<sup>81</sup> She even boasted that her eldest grandson looked like Peter.<sup>82</sup> She whiled away the hours during her Tauride voyage of 1787 by telling anecdotes of Peter's time.<sup>83</sup> In letters exchanged with Grimm and de Ligne she spoke familiarly of Peter, as if speaking of a good but absent friend.<sup>84</sup> But he does not seem to have been an idealized friend. Catherine acknowledged that his reign had been painful for Russia, and that as sovereign he had been more feared than loved.<sup>85</sup> She hoped, however, that old Russians could tell the difference between then and now.<sup>86</sup>

The complex relationship between Catherine and Peter's legendary greatness does not readily break down into a series of distinct chronological stages. Some evolutionary and overlapping situations may be discerned, however, although identifying them does not explain how they came to be. The initial stage of this relationship is that of Catherine's seemingly uncritical acceptance of the cult of Peter the Great while she was grand duchess. This culminated in the first year of Catherine's reign and is documented by the flattery which both her public pronouncements and her private correspondence bestowed on Peter's memory. Whether that flattery was offhand, or deeply felt, or politically motivated, is not known. The student journalists who praised the new empress as Peter I's worthy heir certainly did not want to restore the compulsion characteristic of his reign. Catherine may have shared in this highly selective idealization of Peter the Great, but the initial decrees of her reign gave no sign of that.<sup>87</sup>

Of greater interest, I think, is the diminution of the cult of Peter the Great which became apparent once Catherine's reign was underway. She rarely used his name or his precedent to justify legislation or policy. A variety of evidence illustrates that fact—the early decrees concerning monastic lands, for example; the contrast between Catherine's reactions to naval victories in the two Turkish

81. *Mémoires*, 2:359–60.

82. Letter 127 to Grimm, May 10, 1784, in *SIRIO*, 23 (1878): 313. See also entry for November 24, 1790, in *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskago*, p. 352.

83. Letter 6 from de Ligne to the Marquise de Coigny, *L'édition du centenaire des oeuvres du Prince de Ligne*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1914), pp. 73–74; and Segur, *Memoirs and Recollections*, 3:95.

84. See, for example, her letters of March 30, 1792 to de Ligne and August 28, 1794 to Grimm, *Les lettres*, p. 168; and *SIRIO*, 23 (1878): 607. Both correspondents responded in kind.

85. Segur, *Memoirs and Recollections*, 3:12 and 95; entries for November 17, 1788, January 5 and April 15, 1789, in *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskago*, pp. 195–96, 229, 275.

86. Segur, *Memoirs and Recollections*, 3:95.

87. Gleason, "Political Ideals and Loyalties of Some Russian Writers," pp. 570–74, discusses Catherine's relationship with these journalists. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherine's Russia*, pp. 54–57, indicates their relationship with Panin. As Gleason notes (pp. 572–73), Catherine was not unaware of the value of their support. Her recognition of the usefulness of their image of Peter the Great for her own political purposes may have prompted the tone of pacifism which permeated some early edicts (*PSZ*, vol. 16, no. 11,668 [September 22, 1762], addressed to troops just recalled from Prussia).

wars; and the use of the unveiling of Falconet's statue to draw attention to herself rather than Peter. In fact, during her reign a rather elaborate critique of the system which she had inherited was developed in which Tsar Alexis appeared to outrank his son. Simultaneously, however, the empress in private continued till the end of her days to take Peter's legendary reputation rather seriously. If anything, that hint of personal fondness or respect became more, not less, obvious as time passed.

A number of situations may have contributed to this complex state of affairs. At present it would be difficult to value one hypothesis above the others, but here are some possibilities:

1. After obtaining power Catherine may have felt a need to justify her coup. By insisting on her superiority to all predecessors, she eliminated any alternative standard for greatness around which potential opponents to her reign might gather. Limiting the official cult of Peter the Great would have been one useful means toward that end.

2. In the context of governing and having to cope with the actual Petrine inheritance, as distinct from the legend, it must have been evident to thoughtful persons by Catherine's time that Peter's precedent was not always helpful or even relevant to the late eighteenth-century empire. The sense of having grown beyond the confines of Petrine civilization, which is conveyed by the epigrams about Peter making men but Catherine giving them souls,<sup>88</sup> was not necessarily confined to obsequious courtiers. Even though her repeated comparisons of the two reigns suggest that Catherine did not quite dare take the epigrams to heart, she may have been but one of a number of educated Russians who had begun during her generation to rethink the legend. Just as was the case when she was grand duchess, the empress's ambivalent grappling with the Petrine mystique made her to a degree typical of her time and place.

3. Ransel's observations about Nikita Panin's respect for the Petrine legend suggest another explanation for the situation described above. For Panin, Peter the Great was a legitimizing device, a symbol of what good governance should be.<sup>89</sup> In the early 1760s the clientele group which centered on him and his brother used Peter's reputation to enhance the saleability of several of their projects: Catherine's seizure of power,<sup>90</sup> the 1762 Imperial Council proposal,<sup>91</sup> the report of the 1763 Commission on Noble Freedom.<sup>92</sup> Then the Panin party became disenchanted with Catherine's priorities and transferred its attention and hopes to her son Paul, who had been Panin's pupil since 1760. Still later came a struggle between Catherine and this party for "the mantle of Petrine tradition,"<sup>93</sup> in which selective praise of Peter the Great was used against Catherine as it had once been used against Elizabeth.<sup>94</sup> Ransel traces the evolution of this confrontation to Paul's coming of age in 1772.<sup>95</sup> It was not long

88. For examples of these epigrams, see Shmurlo, "Petr Velikii," p. 82.

89. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*, pp. 11–12.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 71. Teplov's manifesto included a section on Peter the Great which is not quoted here but which was cited above in note 15.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 154–56.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 266–70.

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 227–31.

after that date that Catherinian legislation ceased to pay homage to Peter's memory. These two events might be related. The diminishing influence of the Panin party may plausibly have been accompanied by diminishing evidence of its conceptual framework and chosen symbols in imperial decrees and projects. At the same time Catherine and her new associates from Potemkin's party would likely have become aware of the criticism implied by at least some of the contemporary references to Peter the Great. Either or both of these situations could have resulted in the legislative silence which has already been remarked.

4. But court politics do not appear to explain the frequency of Catherine's unofficial glances at the Petrine yardstick. Her implicit criticism coincided with the years of Panin's ascendancy, and her private respect survived Panin's loss of influence by a good twenty years. There may be a hidden chronological progression here which was related more to Catherine's education in governance than to her choice of advisers. I would characterize her eventual signs of respect as a mellowing, an accommodation with the Petrine image, which may have resulted from a sense of greater security in office. Once *Pugachevshchina* had run its course, and the potential crisis of Paul's majority had been coped with, the empress had less and less to fear from any legendary standard of greatness. The victories and lands which she had obtained from the First Turkish War were tangible enough accomplishments to bring pride and to diminish insecurity. Meanwhile, Catherine's original quest for greatness in her own right, symbolized by the Legislative Commission and by her search for new standards of justice, had shown her how difficult it is even for a sovereign to make change happen. Experiencing that sense of limitation should have caused her to feel more kindly disposed toward Peter the Great, if only because her identification of him as a ruler limited by heritage and environment could also be applied to herself. Some such realization may have prompted Catherine to contemplate Peter with rueful fondness: In their separate efforts to bring Russia nearer to what each believed it should be, they were not so much competitors as companions in passage.

One of the results of this analysis has been to emphasize the protean nature of the Petrine inheritance. Used as a legitimizing device the image of Peter the Great could serve, by Catherine's time, a variety of purposes. But to what extent was that image appropriated to serve the immediate purposes of the user rather than to maintain faithful contact with the policies of Peter I? The Panin party, which—broadly defined—included the student journalists of 1762, identified Peter the Great with proper reigning. By this they meant attending to the public welfare in general, but also to specific aspects of that welfare, such as peace and secularization. A different clientele group, identified with Elizabeth's later years and with Peter III, and led by the Shuvalovs, was more willing to represent Peter I as a leader whose time had come, and gone.<sup>96</sup> Did this make them less respectful of the Petrine inheritance, or more astute analysts, or simply competitors of the Panins for court influence and perquisites? Catherine's position on the subject of Peter the Great appears to have been closer

96. See scattered references to the Shuvalov party, *ibid.*, pp. 25–26, 39–40, 58–59. Villebois, who would become a critic of Petrine education, is identified with another anti-Panin party, that of the Orlovs, on page 106.



to Shuvalov than to Panin. She stressed the inadequacy of Peter's departure from Muscovite tradition, and her praise of his wartime victories was similarly tempered by the emphasis she placed on what he had not accomplished militarily. And yet, her more private expressions of respect for Peter the Great cannot be ignored. An analysis of all main clientele groups from Catherine's reign—the Orlov, Potemkin, and Zubov parties—as well as of the Panin party, might make it possible to identify with assurance the various political uses to which the Petrine image was put during the second half of the eighteenth century. Such an analysis would also clarify the role played by the empress herself in the rethinking and utilization of the Petrine inheritance that took place during this period.