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A. Introduction

Western civilization almost excludes Russia. Because Russia is in a transitional zone between East and West, both culturally and geographically, she does offer special insight into history. The course goal for this topic is to evaluate the rise of common people in Russia during modern times.¹

B. Domestic Policy

To what extent Russia became truly European is open to question for the following reasons. Russia accepted the Greek Orthodox understanding of Christianity and was influenced by Constantinople, rather than Rome. Again, the Mongol domination from 1240 until 1480 kept Russia obligated to the East, rather than to the West. Finally, Russian geography, especially the lack of warm water seaports, made commerce and communication with the West difficult. Changes, including capitalist ones that took place in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, constituted Europeanization, or at least a wholesale borrowing, of the apparatus of civilization from the West. Seventeenth Century changes in Russia constituted a vital step in the expansion of Europe and in the formation of the modern world as known in the last 300 years.

Absolute monarchy in Russia was more closely related to the contemporary national monarchies of the West than to the despotism of the Far East. Far Eastern despotism and Russian despotism rested on different socioeconomic bases. Similarly, the monarchies of Western and Eastern Europe also rested on different socioeconomic bases. "The West," as in "Western civilization," includes both Eastern and Western Europe. "The East" refers to Asia, extending from the Red Sea to Constantinople, to the Ural Mountains, to the Pacific Ocean. For purposes of gross oversimplification, Paris represents Western Europe; Moscow, Eastern Europe; Peking,² the East.

In Western Europe, by the Sixteenth Century, the rising power of the middle class, not as yet expressed in the acquisition of a major share of revenues, could do away with the services of a landed nobility. This was not possible in either Eastern Europe or the Far East. In Russia, the Tsar rested his power on the landed nobility, which in turn depended on the peasant. In the Far East, the Emperor relied on a highly dependent, sophisticated bureaucracy to work his will.

In Russia, features of geography--a huge, almost level plain knitted together by an East-West mesh of natural river-roads--had been a principle factor permitting political unification in the hands of a single prince. Because there was little need to invest in a road system, the economy could and did remain at a sustenance level. Some three or four centuries earlier, at the corresponding state of Western economic history, the West had witnessed the successful struggle of its principal kings to beat down political independence of the most powerful feudal lords. In Western Europe, the kings controlled the powerful nobles through an unwritten alliance with the lesser nobility and with the Church. It was essentially this earlier Western European process which, in Russia, culminated in the reign of Ivan the Terrible and continued to play an important role through the era of Peter the Great (fl. 1714).

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What happened was that between 1600 and 1800 there developed a well-ordered police state in Russia, resulting from a structured productive society which had put everybody into an institutional³ setting. Both Peter the Great and Catherine the Great (fl. 1789) tried to imitate the West, all the while missing the point. Both monarchs actually reversed the Western model by making private activities dependent on state needs and service.⁴

C. Foreign Policy

From 1725 until 1825, the Russian army was the major force in Eastern Europe, fighting its way to Berlin in 1760 and to Paris in 1814. In the beginning, the Russian army was an elite Muscovite cavalry corps assisted by a few infantrymen. After 1825, a bureaucratized parade-ground mentality led to the debacle of the 1848 Crimean War. Topic 19 The Crimean War offers the broader European ramifications for this war. The imperial army consisted of elite officers commanding a cast of brutalized near-slaves, mostly former serfs serving for life. In 1874, reforms moved the Russian military into the modern world of a lessened distance between officers and men.⁵

While the relationship between the social status of officers and men and the success of the army is unclear, the Crimean War and other failures were partly due to difficult internal social relations. Wives of the soldiers were essentially widows in a regime which did not allow most soldiers to marry at all. The reforms of 1874, however, were not enough to avert the losses to the Japanese in 1905 and to the Germans in 1917. The basic problems for the military included an inadequate industrial base, excessive bureaucratization, insufficiently professional officers, inadequate reserves, and a lack of faith that the Tsarist regime was worth a fight.

Russian foreign policy involved trying to get a warm water port and this quest continued right up until about 1961, when she gained access from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean as a trade-off during the time of the Cuban missile crisis. A warm-water port is ice-free, all year. Consult the "Map 17.4 The Expansion of Russia and the Partition of Poland" on page 604 in the seventh edition.⁶ Note: Warsaw, Cracow, St. Petersburg; the Russian gains of 1783.

D. Conclusion

In this lesson, the student has seen how the middle class was ground out of consideration in Russia during modern times. The readings do treat Russia in a total context, whereas the lecture isolates Russia and treats it as a separate entity. By studying the Introduction to Russia; Domestic Policy; and Foreign Policy, the student is better able to evaluate the rise of common people in Russia during modern times. Students are reminded to read, study, think, and prepare a comment.

Supplement

E. Introduction

Your professor is determined to limit the formal lectures to not more than two sides of a sheet of paper. Section G., Rulers, used to come just before D. Foreign Policy. Section I., Subjects, used to be part of Section B. domestic Policy.

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F. Rulers (continued)

What happened between 1600 and 1800 was that just as the Russian state intruded upon the social order, so did the social order interpenetrate the state. A dynamic was involved tempering what has frequently been portrayed as too rigid.⁷ There was a remaining problem, however, in that the professions were left out of the state-established order.⁸ Intellectuals began to claim the right to articulate the interests of all social groups. In this way the intellectual, Lenin, used both Marx and the Russian working class⁹ to foster the Communist Revolution. In this case misguided truths overcame Russian politics.

H. Subjects

The mass of the military people in western Europe were knights; in Russia the knight-equivalent was the boyar. Boyars were obligated to spend so much of their time in the military service of the grand prince that their ability to govern their feudal holdings was undermined. Boyars were neither true aristocrats nor mere servitors.¹⁰

Unlike the nobles of Western Europe, Russian boyars married for station, rather than property. With station did come wealth. Throughout the Seventeenth Century, the boyar class increased, mainly from civilian, rather than Sixteenth Century aristocratic ranks. In 1613 there were twenty-nine boyars in Muscovy, in 1690 one hundred fifty. Gradually the rank of boyar was granted for neither service nor birth, but for a bribe. That explains why Peter the Great had so little use for the boyars.¹¹

Many of the boyars, in defiance of any law, could carry off peasants by force from the lands of a weaker or absent neighbor. This struggle over the labor force (not in any capitalist sense) became very intertwined with the sharpened conflict between the old feudal aristocratic principle which was the key to understanding the critical reign of Ivan IV (d. 1584), "The Terrible," and of much subsequent Russian history.

Research indicates that between 1450 and 1725 about ten percent of the population was in slavery. These slaves were divided into two categories, contract and hereditary. The former was limited, the latter was unlimited, continuing from generation to generation. Muscovite slavery was mild, the slaves ranging in social status from lowly household slaves up to high state officials. The main pool of slaves came from natives selling themselves, "the only kind of welfare relief that early modern Russia offered."¹²

By 1823, agricultural and household slavery were eliminated and serfdom became increasingly oppressive. The serfs began doing what the slaves had been doing. All of this means that slavery in Russia was milder than serfdom in early Eighteenth Century Western Europe. Russian slaves, prior to the Eighteenth Century, probably outnumbered other categories in the army, including as many as a third of combat troops. Few slaves were engaged in production. Most worked in households. Such slavery differed markedly from the plantation slavery known in the United States.

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While Russian slavery did exist, it is Russian serfdom which scholars compare with United States slavery. Neo-Marxists like to note that slavery was but one of several forms of unfree labor used by merchant capitalists. The intellectual issue for neo-Marxists was freedom, not race.¹³

Both the United States Afro-American indentured servitude and Russian serfdom changed in the direction of slavery. Legal restrictions reduced both Russian serfs and United States Afro-Americans to the status of chattels. Both Russian lords and United States plantation owners developed a non-capitalist culture of aristocracy.¹⁴

The slave community did not develop in the same historical circumstances as the serf villages. Serfs could not be bought and sold like slaves. Both serfs and slaves, nonetheless, were able to force the issue of freedom. At the time of the Civil War both serfs and slaves made it clear that social order required emancipation. Much more work on the development of free from unfree labor is anticipated from historians.¹⁵

H. Architecture

Saint Petersburg compares with the Constantinople of Constantine the Great and Versailles of Louis XIV as an architectural accomplishment. Peter the Great (1682-1725) saw the need to Westernize Russia and took the opportunity to rebuild Saint Petersburg as the symbol of satisfying that need.¹⁶

As the first emperor of Russia, Peter the Great deserved credit for his major architectural creation. What was happening was that Peter recognized the need for improved technology in order to improve military sophistication. Architectural skills had military applications. Years later, Catherine the Great (1762-1796) extended what Peter had accomplished in architecture throughout the Russian empire.¹⁷

Before the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, no historical figure received more careful reevaluation than Catherine the Great. In the past, historians frequently underplayed the significance of Catherine. Contrary to those historians, Catherine understood what she was doing as an instrument of the nobility who increased their hold on power during her reign. Many Russians feel that they would rather have lived at the time of Catherine than at any other. One of the noted accomplishments of her reign was the publication of the first Russian dictionary in 1789, the year of the French Revolution.¹⁸

I. Conclusion

In studying the formal lecture, the student has garnered an overview of Russian history from 1600 to 1900. The supplement has related that history to the broader sweep of what was going on in the rest of Europe at the time. From this study, the student is better able to evaluate the rise of common people in Russia during modern times. Students are again reminded to read, study, think, and prepare a comment.

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Comments on the Seventh Edition of Chambers, pages 598-623

In the opinion of the professor, Chambers is the most scholarly textbook on the market. Chambers well represents mainstream thinking in the history profession. The professor, however, disagrees in many significant ways with mainstream thinking. Some of these disagreements are set forth above and others in the following comments.

Page Column

Paragraph

Line

0603 2 2 11 "Naturally ..."

An apparent recognition of the natural law.

0610 2 1 1 "... the Bank of England in 1694." and

0633 1 1 18-19 "...close ties between money and power facilitated economic investment."

The roots of banking in England were mercantile rather than aristocratic. The civil wars of 1642-1660 disrupted the former credit arrangements among royalist landowners, forcing the landowners to use the goldsmiths and scriveners of London. Scriveners are notary publics. Eric Kerridge wrote that the Bank of England was "a scaled-up version of the goldsmith-banks.... its foundations were set on the rock of commerce, a discounting bills of exchange, and above all inland bills."¹⁹ His reviewer, Frank Melton, disagreed, preferring the explanation "that it was the sophisticated arrangements merchants made among themselves that delayed the union of trade and banking for so long."²⁰

0612 1 2 13 "...the South Sea Bubble ..."

The not-indexed Dutch tulip craze of 1634-37, the South Sea Bubble of 1720, and the Great Crash of 1929 are all of a kind, unrestrained speculation receiving widespread support. The tulip craze involved speculating on tulip bulbs; the Great Crash speculating on stocks.²¹

Endnotes

¹ This lecture draws heavily from Jesse D. Clarkson, History of Russia, (New York: Random House, 1961) available as a gift from me to the Thomas Nelson Community College Library.

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² Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1986) mentions, but does not alphabetize, "Beijing." "Formerly Peiping" is also noted.

³ See Gregory L. Freeze, "The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History," The American Historical Review, Vol. 91, No. 1 (February 1986), p. 24. Freeze, on page 24, states: "The first half of the nineteenth century represented . . . a peculiar modernization . . . into more specialized occupational status groups. This process was doubtless less dynamic than a class society, but was also far less rigid and inflexible than has been assumed by mainstream historians." For this reason, "rigid" was removed as a modifier of "institutional" on June 17, 1987. Observe how Chambers handles the matter.

⁴ Robert Anchor, review of Marc Raeff, The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change through Laws in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800, in The American Historical Review, Vol. 89, Vol. 2 (April 1984), pp. 404-405.

⁵ This and the following paragraph utilize Richard Hellie, review of John L. H. Keep, Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia, 1462-1874, The American Historical Review, Vol. 92, No. 3 (June 1987), p. 709.

⁶ "Expansion of Russia and the Partition of Poland" on page 710 in the fifth edition; on page 559 in the sixth; and page 604 in the seventh.

⁷ Freeze, "The Soslovie," p. 25.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁰ Daniel H. Kaiser, review of Robert O. Crummey, Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia, 1613-1689 in The American Historical Review, Vol. 89, No. 3 (June 1984), pages 808-809.

¹¹ Daniel H. Kaiser, review of Robert O. Crummey, Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia, 1613-1689 in The American Historical Review, Vol. 89, No. 3 (June 1984), pages 808-809.

¹² R. E. F. Smith, review of Richard Hellie, Slavery in Russia, 1450-1725, The American Historical Review, Vol. 88, No. 4 (October 1983), pp. 1023-1024, citing page 716 in Hellie.

¹³ Joseph P. Reidy, review of Peter Kolchin, Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom, in The Journal of American History, Vol. 75, No. 1 (June 1988), pages 255-256.

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¹⁴ Joseph P. Reidy, review of Peter Kolchin, Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom, in The Journal of American History, Vol. 75, No. 1 (June 1988), pages 255-256.

¹⁵ Joseph P. Reidy, review of Peter Kolchin, Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom, in The Journal of American History, Vol. 75, No. 1 (June 1988), pages 255-256.

¹⁶ Slobodan Curcic, review of James Cracraft, The Petrine Revolution in Russian Architecture, in The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3 (June 1990), pages 868-869.

¹⁷ Slobodan Curcic, review of James Cracraft, The Petrine Revolution in Russian Architecture, in The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3 (June 1990), pages 868-869.

¹⁸ George E. Munro, review of Isabel De Madariaga, Catherine the Great: A Short History, in The American Historical Review, Vol. 97, No. 1 (February 1992), pages 251-252.

¹⁹ Eric Kerridge, *Trade and Banking in Early Modern England*, page 81 as cited in the review by Frank Melton in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 5 (December 1995), page 1530.

²⁰ Frank Melton, review of Eric Kerridge, *Trade and Banking in Early Modern England* in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 5 (December 1995), page 1531.

²¹ ??, "Bancroft and Hogate Take Over," ??, page 183.