

1 Succession to the Throne, Autocracy, and Absolutism

Succession to the throne was essential to the survival of the state in Russia as well as the rest of Europe in the early modern era, for all but a few states were monarchies. For all of these states, the practices of succession existed alongside conceptions about the rules of succession, a combination of custom and in some cases written law.

Succession in Western Europe

European historians have assumed that hereditary succession by primogeniture was the normal Western practice, laid down in the Middle Ages and by the early modern era, in most cases, no longer a contentious issue. The discussion of European absolutism has revolved around the relationships of kings to the various countries' elites and to institutions such as law courts and assemblies of estates.¹ Yet there obviously was also a relationship between royal power and succession practices.

Hereditary monarchy was not universal.² The most important of Europe's elective monarchies was the Holy Roman Empire. Elections of the kings of the Romans and emperors went back deep into the Middle Ages, but in the early modern era the basis was the Golden Bull of 1356. The imperial system placed the election in the hands of seven electors, all prelates

¹ Roland Mousnier, *Les institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue*, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1974–80); Bernard Barbiche, *Institutions de la monarchie française à l'époque moderne, XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001); Jean Barbey, *Être roi: Le roi et son* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 34, 59–61, 64–65. One exception to the rule is Johannes Kunisch and Helmut Neuhäus, eds., *Der dynastische Fürstenstaat: Zur Bedeutung von Sukzessionsordnungen für die Entstehung des frühmodernen Staates*. *Historische Forschungen* 21 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1982).

² The pioneering work on heredity and elective monarchy in the Middle Ages was Fritz Kern, *Gottesgnadentum und Widerstandsrecht im früheren Mittelalter*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: R. F. Roehler, 1914; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), esp. 13–45. See more recently Frédérique Lachaud and Michael Penman, eds., *Making and Breaking the Rules: Succession in Medieval Europe c. 1000–c. 1600* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); Corinne Péneau, ed., *Elections et pouvoirs politiques du VI^e au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions Bière, 2008).

and territorial princes. The number of electors increased later, but the overall system remained until the demise of the Empire in 1806. The imperial electoral system differed from that of most other European elective monarchies in that only the electors had a voice, not the members of the Imperial Diet. The other large elective monarchy was Poland-Lithuania. The evolution of succession was somewhat different in the two parts of the kingdom, but after the death of Sigismund Augustus in 1572 the joint monarchy was fully elective and not necessarily tied to the election of the previous king's eldest son. The two elective monarchies of early modern Europe, Poland and the Holy Roman Empire, both had rulers weaker than those of their neighbors, if not powerless. The third important elective monarchy was Denmark, and it was that kingdom's weakened international position that led to the establishment of absolutism in Denmark in 1660–5. It replaced an elective monarchy with a hereditary one, in this case even using the terminology of absolutism.³ That term was unusual. In Swedish history, the event known as the proclamation of absolutism by Charles XI in 1680 passed without the word: in the official statement the Estates (Riksdag) spoke only of the king's "sovereignty" (*överhed*).⁴

Whether primogeniture or designation, usually by testament, was more helpful to the furtherance of royal power in the West is an open question since historians have not devoted much attention to the issue. That testamentary succession existed, however, is well known: the proximate cause of the War of the Spanish Succession was the testament of King Charles II of Spain, leaving his throne to Philip, grandson of Louis XIV, rather than to any of his Habsburg relatives. Further, the king's testament was not necessarily an exercise in royal power, since the king's testament was not necessarily observed after his death. In France, the Parlement of Paris overrode the testament of Louis XIII, who was trying to set up a regency for his young son. The Parlement eliminated the aristocratic regency council in favor of the complete power of Queen Anne.⁵ In 1715, the Parlement again decided to cancel the will of the deceased monarch, as the testament made Philippe, Duke of Orleans, merely the president of

³ Knud J. V. Jespersen, *Danmarks historie*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1989), 174–211; Adolf Ditlev Jørgensen, ed., *Kongeloven og dens forhistorie* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1886).

⁴ A. F. Upton, *Charles XI and Swedish Absolutism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31–40; *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels Riksdags-Protokoll* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt, 1896), vols. 13 (1680), 374–377 and 14 (1682–3), 231. The new arrangement also included a ratification by the Estates of the king's views of succession and his testament: Upton, *Charles XI*, 49–50.

⁵ The testament of Louis XIII in 1643 named a council to assist his widow Anne of Austria in the regency for the four-year-old Louis XIV. The Parlement rejected the testament, giving Anne discretionary power to rule, which she used to support Mazarin: François Bluche, *Louis XIV* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), 39–40.

a council. The Parlement gave full power to Philippe, as with Anne before. In both cases the king wished to restrain the power of a regent, but the Paris judiciary preferred a single ruler with royal powers.

The notion of hereditary monarchy in Western Europe is not as clear-cut as it seems. In Tudor England, for example, succession to the throne was based at one time on the testament of Henry VIII and later (de facto) on the decisions of Parliament, which ratified the accession of Elizabeth I and the enthronement of the Stuart dynasty in 1604. The statutes also specified the order, starting with the eldest male child of the king and, in cases in which sons were not available, the eldest daughter.⁶ This was long before the 1688 revolution and the ensuing dynastic settlements. Election or heredity, however, was not the whole story. Even hereditary kingdoms had public ceremonies to underline the succession and the person of the heir to the court and the world. The English kings, or at least some of them, did not let matters rest with parliamentary confirmation or the simple assertion of heredity. James displayed the heir to the world initially by the installation of Prince Henry as Prince of Wales in 1610, and then, after Prince Henry's death, by the installation of Charles, the future Charles I, in 1616.⁷ The patents for the two installations made clear that the purpose of the installation was to avoid strife in the future.⁸ There were no obvious alternatives to the sons of James, but in each case he made it clear who was the heir. In England, heredity, royal designation, and parliamentary statute all contributed to the legal foundation of succession to the throne.

Even in the classic land of hereditary monarchy, France, succession involved other elements than simply the consultation of the genealogy of

⁶ Henry: *Statutes of the Realm* (London: Record Commission, 1817), vol. 3, 471 ff. (25 H VIII, cap. 22), 955–958 (35 H VIII cap. 1); Elizabeth: *Statutes of the Realm* (London: Record Commission, 1819), vol. 4, 358–359 (1 Eliz cap. 3); James: *Statutes of the Realm* (London, Record Commission, 1819), vol. 4, 1017–1018 (1 Jac I. cap. 1); Howard Nenner, *The Right to Be King: The Succession in the Crown of England 1603–1714* (Houndsmill and London: Macmillan Press, 1995), 1–25.

⁷ Roy Strong, *Henry Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 151–160; Pauline Croft, "The Parliamentary Installation of Henry, Prince of Wales," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 65, 157 (1992), 177–193; D. M. Loades, *Princes of Wales: Royal Heirs in Waiting* (Richmond: National Archives, 2008).

⁸ The patent for Prince Henry asserted that the king honored his son with the title of Prince of Wales out of the natural love of parents for children but also "because the church and state are made firm by the undoubted, of best hope, succession of princes, the flames of rivalry and conspiracies are restrained and all anxious fears about subsequent ages are entirely shattered." (ex indubitata, optima spei, Principum Successione, tum Ecclesia tum Respublica constabitur, Competitionis Conjuratumque Flammae restringuntur, omnesque anxii subsequentium Aetatum Metus omnino discountiuntur): Thomas Rymer, *Foedera*, 2nd ed. (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1727), vol. 16, 688–690, 792–794 (quotation 689).

the royal family. To be sure, the French kings and their lawyers had worked out elaborate ideas and rituals that demonstrated hereditary monarchy, not least the notion of the king's two bodies.⁹ Nevertheless, the existence of a tradition of hereditary monarchy did not mean that all cases of succession would be undisputed. When Henri III was assassinated in 1589, in the middle of the wars of religion, the heir by heredity was Henry of Navarre, but he was a Protestant. The leaders of the Catholic Ligue called a meeting of the Estates General in Paris in 1593 with the purpose of electing a king. The assembled delegates did not dispute the idea of electing a king. Instead, they objected to the particular candidates, especially the daughter of the king of Spain, adducing the Salic Law that prohibited women from ruling in France. The meeting came to nothing, for the news was rapidly spreading that Henry of Navarre planned to convert to Catholicism.¹⁰ When he had completed the process, he was crowned king of France. The ceremony, like those for the recent Valois kings, placed the princes of the blood around the king, replacing the medieval practice where the great vassals surrounded the king along with the princes of the church. The family element was at the forefront. Henry IV quickly defeated his opponents, ruling until his own assassination in 1610.¹¹ From then on, it would seem that hereditary succession was ensured.

Yet Henry IV made a considerable public show to demonstrate to all in France and abroad just who was the heir to his throne. This was the purpose of the ceremony of baptism of the dauphin, in this case the future Louis XIII (born 1601), on September 14, 1606. Normally a Catholic child was baptized as soon as possible after birth, but in the French royal house the custom was for the presiding priest (normally a bishop) to perform only an ablution (*ondoisement*), not a full baptism, at the time of birth. The king's son thus had no name until he received the full baptism in a very public and grand ceremony. Henry IV did not invent this custom, though the delay between the birth and baptism of his son was much greater than had been the case before. Francis I had let a month elapse between the birth of his first dauphin (Francis, died 1536) and his

⁹ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

¹⁰ Richard A. Jackson, *Vive le Roi! A History of the French Coronation from Charles V to Charles X* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 115–129; 1594: *Le sacre d'Henri IV à Chartres* (Chartres: Le musée, 1994); Jean-Pierre Babelon, *Henri IV* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), 533–600; Georges Picot, *Histoire des États généraux*, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1888), vol. 4, 62–108; Auguste Bernard, ed., *Procès-Verbaux des États Généraux de 1593*. Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1842).

¹¹ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 155–171; 1594, 198, 219.

baptism, and that order of delay was typical of the last Valois.¹² After Henry IV's precedent, the long delays were normal. Louis XIV, born in 1638, was baptized only in 1643, shortly before his father's death. Louis XIV followed the same precedent with his son Louis, the "Grand Dauphin" in 1668.¹³ Pierre Dan, the superior of the monastery of the Holy Spirit at Fontainebleau, explained the practice in the house of France, saying, "they reserve the ceremonies [of Baptism] for another time in order to provide the pomp worthy of their grandeur and to have the time to invite the godfathers and godmothers, who are usually some foreign princes, to be present, either in person or by their ambassadors."¹⁴ The ceremony was, in other words, a demonstration of royal power. It was also a demonstration of the royal family, as Pierre Dan's description of the 1606 baptism shows: leading the procession and carrying the necessary accoutrements were the princes of the blood, with the young prince de Condé carrying the infant. Following them were hundreds of men and women from the royal household, the government, the orders of nobility, indeed much of the French elite. A grand banquet ensued, with fireworks and other entertainments.¹⁵ In later years, there were other even more public means to spread the message. Louis XIV's official *Gazette* recorded both the birth and the baptism of his heir for all to read.¹⁶ With rebellious Huguenots, nobles, and occasionally parlements, even the kings of France made sure everyone knew who was the rightful heir and how important was his undisputed succession to the throne. The public display of the heir was a form of designation, in this case to strengthen heredity and primogeniture, not to replace them.

¹² The future Henri II, the second son of Francis I, had to wait four and a half months while the English envoy made its way to France to stand for Henry VIII, the boy's godfather. Henry's oldest son, later Francis II, received baptism a few weeks after his birth in 1544, while the future Charles IX was baptized the day of his birth in 1550. Henry II's third living son, the future Henri III, also had to wait for an English envoy to represent his king in 1551. See Didier Le Fur, *Henri II* (Paris: Talandier, 2009), 23–24, 33–34, 137–138; Michel Simonin, *Charles IX* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 15; Jean-François Solnon, *Henri III: Un désir de majesté* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), 19–20.

¹³ Babelon, *Henri IV*, 880–881; Matthieu Lahaye, *Le fils de Louis XIV: Monseigneur le Grand Dauphin (1661–1711)* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2013), 166–187.

¹⁴ Pierre Dan, *Le trésor des merveilles de la maison royale de Fontainebleau* (Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy, 1642), 268, 275–284: "on reserve les ceremonies pour un autre temps, afin d'y apporter l'appareil digne de leur grandeur, et avoir loisir d'inviter les Parrains et les Marrains, qui sont d'ordinaire quelques Princes Estrangers, pour s'y trouver, ou en personne ou par leurs Ambassadeurs" (277). The ceremony in 1606 took place on September 14, the festival of the Elevation of the Cross, which Dan thought appropriate as Louis XIII later showed his piety in opposing the Huguenots and returning them to their duty of obedience after a series of revolts.

¹⁵ Dan, *Le trésor*, 280–283.

¹⁶ *Gazette [de France]*, 1661, no. 132, 1179; 1668, no. 39, 311.

Autocracy and Absolutism in Russia

In Russia, the assumption of historians seems to be that Peter's 1722 law strengthened the power of the monarch by introducing something new into the system that gave him greater control over the future of the state.¹⁷ That assumption rests on a further assumption that Russia had a clearly defined system of primogeniture before 1722. Historians have assumed that the election of tsars in 1598, 1607, and 1613 (and de facto 1682) was merely an aberration caused by the extinction of the Riurikovich dynasty at the death of Tsar Fyodor and the ensuing chaos. My contention is that this assumption is wrong. The procedure of succession in the ruling family of the Moscow principality and the Russian state, from at least 1450, relied on the public designation of the successor, not on automatic primogeniture. Peter was not introducing anything new in practice. The change that he did make was to convert a custom into a written law and to extend it to include heirs not from the imperial family: in theory, though never in practice. The real innovation was Emperor Paul's 1797 succession law, which established automatic primogeniture and thus rendered the specific designation of the heir by the ruler unnecessary. In the centuries before Peter, formal designation was necessary because the succession was not fully defined even in custom, hence, when the ruler died without children in 1598, the only possibility was an election. These are conclusions that arise from the survey of succession practices in the ensuing chapters, but first a brief account of conceptions of the state and succession in modern times is in order.

In 1832, M. M. Speranskii finished the task assigned him by Tsar Nicholas I, the production of a digest of the laws of the Russian Empire, the *Svod zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*. His task was not to compile a code, which Speranskii and Nicholas understood to mean a creation of new law such as the French Code Napoléon. Instead, it was to represent the traditional law of Russia, but now systematized and readily accessible for the first time. As historians of law pointed out long ago, Speranskii did not merely systematize existing law, for that law had many gaps. There were areas covered inadequately or not at all. He had already produced a chronological record of all laws known to him in the *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* in 145 volumes running from 1649 to his own time, so he knew what the legislation had been over the years. To fill the gaps, Nicholas and he produced new laws while claiming that they were merely putting the old ones in order.¹⁸

¹⁷ V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia*, 8 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1956–9), vol. 4, 256–258; Reinhard Wittram, *Peter I Czar und Kaiser*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1964), vol. 2, 119–120.

¹⁸ *Svod zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* (St. Petersburg: Tipografia Vtorogo otdeleniia sobstvennoi E.I.V. Kantseliarii, 1857), vol. 1, 1. On the Digest, see Marc Raëff, *Michael Speransky, Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772–1839*, 2nd rev. ed. (The Hague: Martinus

In discussing Speranskii's innovation, the sparse literature has concentrated on civil law, but in fact the first innovation was in the first line of the entire digest. The first section of volume 1 was "laws of state" and the first article read: "The Emperor of all Russia is an autocratic and unlimited monarch" (*Imperator Vserossiiskii est' Monarkh samoderzhavnyi i neogranichennyi*). The same paragraph cites as the sources of that principle a whole series of enactments of Peter's time¹⁹ and Empress Anna's proclamation of autocracy of February 28, 1730.²⁰ None of these laws used the word "unlimited" or any equivalent. The closest was Peter's formulation in the Naval Statute that the ruler answers to no one but God, which is not the same as unlimited power.²¹ It means that after the tsar does something that turns out to be harmful or wrong, he answers to God; it does not say that he is not bound to consult someone before acting.²² This first section of the Digest then went on immediately (article 3) to repeat Paul I's law of succession. Unlimited power and primogeniture were the foundations of autocracy, at least in the minds of Speranskii and Nicholas I.

The 1832 formulations came at the end of a generation and a half of upheaval in Europe which sharply polarized the issues of state power, its sources, and its extent. The monarchist conservatives, just as much as the liberals, had to define exactly what they meant, as the vaguer traditional rules of Ancien Régime monarchies, with their complicated legal and administrative hierarchies and multiple informal networks of power, had been swept away. The monarchies that remained had to redefine their status, and the ultra-monarchist camp now began to espouse "absolutism," a word that had only then come into general

Nijhoff, 1969), 320–346; Richard S. Wortman, "The 'Fundamental State Laws' of 1832 as Symbolic Act," in *Miscellanea Slavica: Sbornik statei k 70-letiiu Borisa Andreevicha Uspenskogo* (Moscow: Indrik, 2008), 398–408; Tamara Borisova, "Russian National Legal Tradition: Svod versus Ulozhenie in Nineteenth Century Russia," *Review of Central and East European Law* 33 (2008), 295–341; Tamara Borisova, "Bor'ba za russkoe 'natsional'noe' pravo v pervoi chetverti 19 veka: Izobrenenie novykh smyslov starykh slov," in *Istoricheskie poniatia i politicheskie idei v Rossii*, ed. Nikolai Kopusov (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge Aletea, 2006), 123–151.

¹⁹ Peter the Great's *Voinskii ustav* (Military Statute) of 1716 (*PSZ* 5, no. 3006, 203–453), his *Morskoi ustav* (Naval Statute) (*PSZ* 6, no. 3485, 2–116, esp. 59), the law establishing the *Dukhovnia kollegiia* (Spiritual College) in 1721 (*PSZ* 6, no. 3718, ch. 1, par. 2, 316–317).

²⁰ *PSZ* 7, no. 5509, 253. ²¹ *PSZ* 6, no. 3485, book 5, ch. 1, art. 2, *tolkovanie* 1, 59.

²² It should also be noted that those of Peter's laws which Speranskii cited were translations or compilations of Western (mainly Swedish) law and that in none of these enactments was the definition of the power of the monarch a central issue. The passages in question were buried in the middle of other issues. In Anna's manifesto, the assertion of autocracy was the point of the document, but it remained undefined.

usage.²³ Their opponent was constitutional liberalism, so the crucial point to the Russian state, and to the supporters of “absolutism” in the West, was the unlimited power of the ruler. The Russian tsar did not share power with a legislature. What Speranskii and Nicholas did was to take this new, post-1789 conception of monarchy and combine it with the older Russian term *samoderzhavie* (autocracy) to create the appearance of continuity and tradition.

This process is interesting in itself, but for the historian of early modern Russia the problem is that the later generations of historians projected this “absolutist” formulation of autocracy back into the early modern era.²⁴ The point is not that the tsars before the end of the eighteenth century were not powerful, but that the anti-constitutionalism of the Digest placed the discussion in a pseudo-constitutional framework which is anachronistic. To the historians who worked from the middle of the nineteenth century onward, autocracy was supposed to have meant the unlimited power of the tsar (grand prince before 1547) over all of his subjects, including the elite. This meant the absence of a legislature or other consultative bodies. Yet historians have known for some time that in the sixteenth century Russians did not use the word *samoderzhets* (autocrat) to mean unlimited power, rather they meant a ruler independent of foreign overlordship or even just “pious ruler.”²⁵ In spite of that discovery, it has continued to be assumed that unlimited power was the core of autocracy. Conceptions of the state that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century added new elements – the bureaucratic state – to the older concept, but unlimited power remained at the center. Even when historians, at first American Slavists, began to abandon the older conception that the tsars dominated a helpless and abject elite, they did not move on to investigate all the complex mechanics of the state. One of the basic parts of these mechanics was succession, as it was for any monarchy.

²³ The most detailed account of the rise of the political term absolutism is by Horst Dreitzel, *Monarchiebegriffe in der Fürstengesellschaft: Semantik und Theoretik der Einherrschaft in Deutschland von der Reformation bis zum Vormärz*, 2 vols. (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 1991), vol. 1, 268–315; vol. 2, 732–785.

²⁴ See the pre-revolutionary classics M. D'iakonov, *Vlast' Moskovskikh gosudarei: Ocherki iz istorii politicheskikh idei drevnei Rusi do kontsa XVI veka* (St. Petersburg: I. N. Skorokhodov, 1889) and Vladimir Val'denberg, *Drevnerusskie ucheniia o predelakh tsarskoi vlasti* (Petrograd: n.p., 1916).

²⁵ Marc Szeftel, “The Title of the Muscovite Monarch,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 13, 1–2 (1979): 59–81; A. I. Filiushkin, *Tituly russkikh gosudarei* (Moscow and St. Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2006), 55–63; Charles J. Halperin, “Ivan IV as Autocrat (Samoderzhets),” *Cahiers du monde russe* 55, 3–4 (2014): 1–18.

A further complication was the notion of absolutism in West European historiography. Starting in the 1950s, the conception of absolutism propounded by Roland Mousnier and others for Western Europe began to have an impact on Russian historiography.²⁶ This conception went beyond the traditional legal-constitutional idea to include the notion of the bureaucratic state as the foundation of absolutism, a form of state that allegedly emerged in the early modern era.²⁷ Many of the Western historians of eighteenth-century Russia began to use the term for Russian history, and Soviet historians in the 1960s adopted the same term, if with somewhat different content.²⁸ In the final Soviet schema, the sixteenth century saw the unification of the Russian state and the seventeenth century the preparation for European-style absolutism finally introduced by Peter the Great.

What both the Soviet and the Western conceptions of absolutism shared was the assumption inherited from the older literature that the core of the state was unlimited power of the ruler and the new notion that the basis of the state was bureaucratic administration. Originally the relations of the state and the ruling elite attracted much less attention than the evolution of administration. For the eighteenth century, that has remained the case to the present with a few exceptions, mostly Western (Ransel, LeDonne, Bushkovitch), who have described the tsar's relations with the elite.²⁹ Much larger changes came in the history of the sixteenth century. The main Russian historians of sixteenth-century Russia in the

²⁶ From the middle of the nineteenth century until the 1950s very few historians of Western Europe used the term "absolutism" or any variant to describe the states of early modern Europe. The dominant organizing principle was the rise of national states (France, Britain, Spain). Historians of law did use the term, though not universally.

²⁷ Roland Mousnier, *Les XVI^e et XVII^e siècles: Les progrès de la civilisation européenne et le déclin de l'orient (1492–1715)*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1956); Fritz Hartung and Roland Mousnier, "Quelques problèmes concernant la monarchie absolue," in *Relazioni del X Congresso Internazionale de Scienze Storiche: Storia moderna* (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1955), vol. IV, 3–55. Mousnier's view of absolutism covered much more than the growth of bureaucracy, but his insistence on situating administration in the surrounding society came at the time of great interest in bureaucracy among sociologists, a coincidence that reinforced that aspect of his work.

²⁸ Soviet historians of Western Europe had begun to use the term earlier: S. V. Kondrat'ev and T. N. Kondrat'eva, "*Nauka ubezhdat*" ili *Spory sovetskikh istorikov o frantsuzskom absolutizme i klassovoi bor'be: 20-e nachalo 50-kh godov* (Tiumen': Mandriko., 2003).

²⁹ David Ransel, *The Politics of Catherine's Russia: The Panin Party* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1975); John LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order 1700–1825* (New York, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Paul Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power 1671–1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Some Russian historians have begun to investigate the gentry elite and its politics: I. V. Kurukin, *Epokha "dvortsovykh bur"*: *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii poslepetrovskoi Rossii* (Riazan': NRIID, 2003); I. V. Babich and M. V. Babich, *Oblastnye praviteli Rossii 1719–1739 gg.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008).

Soviet era, A. A. Zimin and R. G. Skrynnikov, insisted that the final stage of state unification, which they called centralization, was the main issue. Concretely this meant, especially for Zimin, concentrating on the alleged extinction of the appanage (*udel*) system, a traditional concern of Russian historians. The course of the century was the victory of the autocratic tsar, the incarnation of centralization. At the same time they were also interested in the role of the ruling elite, essentially the boyars, and their narrative brought that elite into the limelight. Skrynnikov emphasized Ivan the Terrible's relations with that elite as a whole, and saw his reign as an attempt, not entirely successful, to increase his power over the boyar aristocracy.³⁰ In practice, most of their narrative was taken up with the competition between boyar clans and the personal relations of those clans and individuals within them to the tsar. Much the same story provided material for different conclusions. Nancy Kollmann demonstrated that the Russian state and its politics were really about those boyar clans, and the tsar did not have the power or resources to dominate them. Robert Crumme drew the same conclusion for the seventeenth century, as did Paul Bushkovitch for the reign of Peter the Great. Recent work by M. M. Krom and P. S. Sedov in Russia reveals the same picture. The tsar ruled by balancing boyar factions among each other and balancing all the boyars with his personal favorites.³¹ The tsar was certainly the ruler, but to label him "unlimited" in the constitutional sense is anachronistic and fails to capture the mutual dependencies and varied lines of power. The "bureaucracy," if that is really the right word, was not absent but developed rather late. Still largely the grand prince's household at the end of the fifteenth century, the state's administration had become quite sophisticated by the late seventeenth. Nevertheless, it was still quite small by West European standards and remained under the command of aristocratic office holders.

The situation is complicated by the decline of the notion of absolutism among historians of Western Europe. Though there are some exceptions among historians (Joel Cornette in France) and historians of law, most

³⁰ A. A. Zimin, *Reformy Ivana Groznogo* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1960); A. A. Zimin, *Oprichnina Ivana Groznogo* (Moscow: Mysl', 1964), 2nd ed. as *Oprichnina* (Moscow: Territoria, 2001); R. G. Skrynnikov, *Tsarstvo terrora* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1992), and other works by the same authors.

³¹ Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System 1345–1547* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987); Robert O. Crumme, *Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia 1613–1689* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983); Paul Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great, M. M. Krom, "Vdovstvuiushchee tsarstvo": Politicheskii krizis v Rossii 30–40-kh godakh XVI veka* (St. Petersburg: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010); P. V. Sedov, *Zakat moskovskogo tsarstva: Tsarskii dvor kontsa XVII veka* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2007).

historians of the early modern era have come either to drop the term entirely or to redefine it to the point that it is really something else.³² Yves-Marie Bercé has recently returned to the original meaning from the early modern era: a state not dependent on pope or emperor, and notes that the king of France ruled, on the whole, with the parlements and the local estates.³³ The basic insight has been the importance of non-bureaucratic elements in the state: the court, aristocratic clans, networks of patrons and clients inside the various elites, central and local, the importance of material rewards and bribery. The nascent Weberian bureaucrats have not disappeared but have come to occupy a much more modest place in the work of historians. No European state of the period, even France, looks like the proto-modern structure familiar from historical writings of the 1950s and 1960s.

Trying to reconstruct the operations of the early modern state in Europe, East or West, requires the historian to confront monarchy as it actually worked in the period. Was it an institution? Or is it better to see it as a family ruling the state? Institution or not, it was certainly a family as well, and the historian is obliged to investigate areas that have largely been ignored or left to the antiquarian and the historical novelist. To start with, the personal details of the family and its life history are important. It is not trivial that the descendants of Michael Romanov to 1762 consisted of a large number of healthy women and a smaller number of males, most of whom were quite unhealthy (Peter was an exception) and died young. The women of any ruling family, even if their political role was small (which it usually was not), are essential to any analysis. They did more than give birth to children. The births of children also imply their upbringing, so the practices of the ruling family in educating their children and preparing them to take over the reins of power form a crucial part of the story.

³² Fanny Cosandey and Robert Descimon, *L'absolutisme en France: Histoire et historiographie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002); William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern Monarchy* (London: Longman, 1992); James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Roland G. Asch and Heinz Duchhardt, eds., *Der Absolutismus – ein Mythos? Strukturwandel monarchischer Herrschaft in West- und Mitteleuropa (ca. 1550–1700)*. Münstersche historische Forschungen 9 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 1996); Lothar Schilling, ed., *Absolutismus, ein unersetzliches Forschungskonzept? Eine deutsch-französische Bilanz/L'absolutisme, un concept irremplaçable? Une mise au point franco-allemande* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008).

³³ Yves-Marie Bercé, *Le roi absolu: Idées reçues sur Louis XIV* (Paris: Cavalier bleu, 2013), 93–100. Bercé also notes that the normal modern conception of absolutism has its roots in the nineteenth century, not the early modern era. For a similar argument about Germany, see Dreitzel, *Monarchiebegriffe*.

Russian Ideas of the Monarch and the State to 1700

The story of succession in Russia, as we begin to see, is complicated by the radical difference between ideas of the state in Russia and in Western Europe before the time of Peter the Great. Until that time, there was no political theory or even political thought in the Western sense in Russia. There was a literature about the ruler, primarily about the question whether or not he was a good Christian. That sort of literature existed in the West, but alongside a philosophical heritage from Aristotle (including scholastic ideas of the state) and a legal tradition inherited from Roman law and its commentators. Both of the latter were lacking in Russia, which inherited only the religious side of Byzantine culture. Peter's reign introduced a fundamental cultural revolution in Russia, visible toward the end of his life in various published writings that incorporated Western political thought of the seventeenth century to varying degrees. These were only a beginning, for the assimilation and interpretation of the Western political tradition took most of the eighteenth century. It was not a simple process. To understand the centuries before Peter, some sense of the ideas and values of the Russian elite of that time is essential.

As Russia came into being out of the various medieval Rus' principalities at the end of the fifteenth century, it had three sources of tradition on matters of state. None of these included written law. First, the new Russian state certainly had inherited and further developed earlier criminal law and the law of property, as well as rules of judicial procedure, but for the structure and practices of state it relied on customs established since the beginning of the state that the scholars call Kiev Rus' in the ninth century. These customs were recorded in the many historical chronicles, and probably in oral traditions known to us only in fragments contained in those chronicles or other works. Second, the Russians had examples of Orthodox kingdoms. The most important of these was ancient Israel, known from the Old Testament, from the summary of the Old Testament called *Paleia* (discussed later in this chapter), and from the compilation of world history called the *Khronograf* and its predecessors. Of course, Israel was not Orthodox, but in the Christian interpretation of sacred history not only was it the divinely appointed and guided kingdom that preceded the appearance of Christ, but also its existence was necessary to the history of salvation. Moses, David, Solomon, and other Old Testament leaders and rulers were examples for Christians, as were the priests and prophets for the Orthodox clergy. Third, the truly Orthodox monarchy was Rome from Constantine onward, including what modern scholars call Byzantium.³⁴

³⁴ On Rus' and Byzantium see, among others, Simon Franklin, "The Empire of the Rhomaioi as Viewed from Kievan Russia: Aspects of Byzantino-Russian Cultural

Knowledge of Byzantium, in medieval Rus' and early modern Russia, however, was limited. For medieval Rus' and later Russia, the only significant source for Roman–Byzantine history was the *Khronograf*, the principal story of world history for medieval Rus'. It summarized the story of the Bible, the four monarchies, Babylon, Persia, Alexander the Great, and Rome, continuing the last through Byzantium to 1453. The *Khronograf*'s coverage of Byzantine history, however, was extremely uneven. Quite full for the later Roman period and early Byzantium, it became more and more abbreviated for the centuries after the ninth. For the last centuries of the Greek empire the *Khronograf* often provided little more than the emperor's name and the statement that he was Orthodox.³⁵ Finally, the acceptance of Orthodoxy from Byzantium did not imply the reception of Byzantine secular culture, which preserved the heritage of antiquity as a culture continuously studied and commented upon. Russia thus had no acquaintance with the classical tradition of political thought beginning with Plato and Aristotle. Of the Byzantine tracts on political matters, the Russians knew only the treatise of the sixth-century deacon Agapetus. Its reception is a warning that modern historians may not read these texts the same way the Russians of the early modern era did: Agapetus seems to some modern historians a spokesman for the glory and power of the Byzantine emperor, but the main Russian text to use him extensively, the *Life of St. Fillip the Metropolitan*, quoted him to denounce tsar Ivan the Terrible. In this conception, Ivan had failed to be the powerful but virtuous ruler.³⁶

Relations," *Byzantion* 53, 2 (1983): 507–537; Francis Thomson, *The Reception of Byzantine Culture in Medieval Russia* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1999). Probably the first attempt to assess the knowledge of Byzantium in medieval Rus' was Filipp Ternovskii, *Izuchenie vizantiiskoi istorii i ee tendentsioznoe prilozhenie v drevnei Rusi*, 2 vols. (Kiev: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1875–6).

³⁵ O. V. Tvorogov, *Drevnerusskie khronografy* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1975). Text: PSRL 22.

³⁶ Paul Bushkovitch, "The *Life of Saint Filipp*: Tsar and Metropolitan in the Late Sixteenth Century," in *Medieval Russian Culture*, ed. Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland. California Slavic Studies XIX (Berkeley, California, Los Angeles, California, and London: University of California Press, 1994), vol. 2, 29–46; I. A. Lobakova, *Zhitiie mitropolita Filippa* (St. Petersburg, Dmitrii Bulanin, 2006), 47–50, 55–61, 285–296. An interpretation of Agapetus that makes the Russian use of the text more understandable is that of Peter N. Bell, ed. and trans., *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian*. Translated Texts for the Historian 52 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009): 27–49. On the Byzantines, see Otto Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Hermann Gentner Verlag, 1956) (originally Jena: W. Biedermann, 1938); Herbert Hunger, ed., *Das byzantinische Herrscherbild* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975); Dimitar Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium 1204–1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Konstantinos D. S. Paidas, *Ta Vizantina "Katoptra hegemonos" tes hysteres periodou (1251–1403)* (Athens: Ekdoseis Gregore, 2006); and a revisionist view: Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

In the absence of philosophical or theoretical underpinning to ideas of the state, the principal form of reflection on statehood came in the texts that provided examples of good and bad monarchs. Besides the chronicles and the *Khronograf*, there were also lives of Russian saintly princes beginning with Boris and Gleb and including Alexander Nevsky, Dmitrii Donskoi, and others up to the end of the fifteenth century. The examples were not only positive, for wicked princes figured in the *Paterikon* of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves as well as in numerous chronicle stories. The reigns of Ivan III and Vasiliï III formed a period of almost continuous contention in the church over matters of faith and practice, and some of these controversies had political dimensions. Out of these controversies, and independently of them, a number of writers of the time touched on the nature of princely power. Iosif Volotskii used the works of the Byzantine deacon Agapetus to express the traditional notions of the just ruler.³⁷ The monk Filofei of Pskov reproved the shortcomings of Vasiliï III in a famous epistle that called Russia the Third Rome. Filofei asserted that Vasiliï had neglected his duty as a pious Orthodox ruler by failing to allow the seat of the Archbishop of Novgorod to be filled and by tolerating homosexuality at the prince's court. God would therefore smite Russia, in Filofei's view the Third Rome, a notion that earned fame at the end of the nineteenth century. (In reality, Russian writers after 1453 understood their country as the New Israel.³⁸) The few writings on rulers and rulership by Maksim Grek (Michael Trivolis), the Greek monk who came to Russia in 1518 and remained until his death in 1556, were no different. The good tsar was to be just and generous to his subjects, and the bad ruler allowed greed and avarice to flourish.³⁹ The occasional apocalyptic extravagance aside, all these different notions revolved around the piety and faith of the monarch and indeed of the whole Russian people, their place in the history of salvation. They said nothing about concrete forms of government, the power of the ruler, or particular practices such as primogeniture or the designation of an heir.

In addition, the Russian elites of the sixteenth century were adept at creating historical legends, the most famous being the "Tale of the

³⁷ Ia. S. Lur'e, *Ideologicheskaia bor'ba v russkoi publitsistike kontsa XV–nachala XVI veka* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk, 1960), 474–480.

³⁸ Daniel Rowland, "Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Israel," *Russian Review* 55 (1996): 591–614; Joel Raba, "Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Jerusalem," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 50 (1995): 297–308; N. V. Sinitsyna, *Tre'tii Rim: Istoki i evoliutsiia russkoi srednevekovoi kontseptsii, XV–XVII vv.* (Moscow: Indrik, 1998).

³⁹ Maksim Grek, *Sochineniia* (Kazan': Tipografia gubernskogo pravleniia, 1860), vol. II, 319–337, 425–431 (epistle to Ivan IV). See V. S. Ikonnikov, *Maksim Grek i ego vremena* (Kiev: Tipografia Imperatorskogo universiteta Sv. Vladimira, 1915); and N. V. Sinitsyna, *Maksim Grek v Rossii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), among many other works.

Vladimir Princes” (*Skazanie o kniaz’iakh vladimirskikh*), which is the story of Riurik’s descent from Caesar and the Cap of Monomakh, the tsars’ crown. The “Tale of the Vladimir Princes” is about the Riurikovich clan and the regalia of monarchy, not about constitutional structures or royal power, and it only touched on the issue of succession. It vested legitimate rule in the Riurikovich clan. Finally, there were also other conceptions that were expressed in the ruler’s title, in the rituals of church and state, and in the decorative schemes of the Kremlin palace, such as the notion that Russia was the new Israel, the only remaining state with the correct religion and faithful to God’s commands. All of this reading provided much material for thought about princely behavior, but little about the larger issues of state structure and power, including the matter of succession to the throne.

The same was true of the account of Rome and Byzantium in the *Khronograf*. Its basis was the world chronicle of Georgios Amartolos, or Georgios the Monk, from the ninth century.⁴⁰ Georgios had told the story of the world from creation to his own time, summarizing the Bible, the story of Alexander the Great, and Roman history. He ended with the death of the emperor Theophilos in 842 and the subsequent defeat of iconoclasm. The translation of Amartolos was made into Slavic most likely in Bulgaria in the tenth or eleventh centuries and exists in several variants, but not in many copies.⁴¹ The text of Amartolos was reworked with many additions and subtractions in the *Letopisets ellinskii i rimskii* of the later fourteenth or early fifteenth century.⁴² The *Khronograf* of 1512 used the *Letopisets* but also added, among other texts, more material from Amartolos and from a Bulgarian prose translation of the twelfth-century verse chronicle of Konstantinos Manasses. That text concluded with 1081, providing an account of Byzantium from where Amartolos left off up to that year. Starting with the twelfth century, the information in the *Khronograf* became more and more laconic.⁴³ The resulting text did not present a very positive picture of Byzantium. Naturally the Roman

⁴⁰ Carolus de Boor, ed., *Georgii monachi chronicon*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904); Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 114–119.

⁴¹ V. M. Istrin, *Knigi vremennye i obraznye Georgiia Mnikha*, 3 vols. (Petrograd–Leningrad: Izdanie Otdeleniia Russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk, 1920–30); T. V. Anisimova, *Khronika Georgiia Amartola v drevnerusskikh spiskakh* (Moscow: Indrik, 2009).

⁴² O. V. Tvorogov, ed., *Letopisets ellinskii i rimskii*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999–2001); O. V. Tvorogov, ed., “Letopisets ellinskii i rimskii,” *SKKDR* 2, pt. 2, 18–20.

⁴³ O. V. Tvorogov, *Drevnerusskie khronografy*; E. G. Vodolazkin, *Vsemirnaia istoriia v literature drevnei Rusi*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii dom, 2008); Treadgold, *Byzantine Historians*, 399–403.

Empire came across as rather ambiguous, a great state but sunk in idolatry. After the conversion of Constantine, however, the story that Amartolos presented was scarcely one of rosy optimism, and the Russian compilers followed his lead. In this story, many of the emperors were sympathetic to heretics, and persecuted the fathers (John Chrysostom), and the Amartolos section concluded with the nearly 200-year reign of the iconoclastic emperors, wicked and depraved despots in his account, which was faithfully reproduced in the *Khronograf*. The Iconoclastic emperors were impious and personally depraved, persecuting faithful Orthodox Christians. Constantine Copronym was a “hateful blood-drinking wolf.” Good non-Christian rulers, such as Alexander the Great, were intelligent, just, generous with gifts, and patient with those who do wrong.⁴⁴ Good Christian rulers were clearly even better, but there are not many of them in the *Khronograf*. Constantine the Great was saintly and blessed (*sviatoi blazhennyi*), a good ruler who protected the poor. The version of his life in the *Khronograf* stressed his conversion and presented him as a faithful support to the clergy against heresy as well as a victorious general.⁴⁵ The later sections from Manasses were not such unrelieved gloom, but soon came the story of the Fourth Crusade, and the very brief account of later Byzantium followed by the fall of Constantinople. The *Khronograf* for the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries devoted far more space to Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Russian principalities (mainly Moscow) than to Byzantium.

In the *Khronograf*, the historical and pseudo-historical examples of monarchs revolved around the moral character of the ruler, not his “constitutional” position. The sixteenth-century *Book of Degrees* presented the whole series of saintly Russian princes and princesses starting with Princess Ol’ga, Vladimir Sviatoslavich, and his sons Boris and Gleb. Saints Boris and Gleb, of course, were never rulers, as they were slain by their evil brother as potential rivals to the throne. A number of other princely saints were recognized as such mainly on the basis of martyrdom (Michael of Chernigov and Michael of Tver’) or posthumous miracles (Fyodor of Iaroslavl’ and his sons).⁴⁶ The most important ruler-saints, about whom lives were composed and widely copied, were Alexander Nevskii and Dmitrii Donskoi. The life of Alexander in the earliest version

⁴⁴ PSRL XX 191, 318. ⁴⁵ PSRL XX 261–273, quotation 273.

⁴⁶ Gail Lenhoff and N. N. Pokrovskii, eds., *Stepennaia kniga tsarskogo rodoslovia po drevneishim spiskam*, vols. 1–3 (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul’tur, 2007–12). For the earlier stories of Boris and Gleb, see D. I. Abramovich, *Zhitiia sviatykh muchennikov Borisa i Gleba i sluzhby im* (Petrograd: Otdeleniia russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1916); Gail Lenhoff, *The Martyred Princes Boris and Gleb: A Socio-cultural Study of the Cult and Its Texts*. UCLA Slavic Studies 19 (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1989); Giorgetta Revelli, *Monumenti letterari su Boris e Gleb* (Genoa: La Quercia, 1993).

certainly presented him as a faithful Orthodox Christian, defending Novgorod against the Catholic Swedes and Livonian Order. He was handsome, strong-voiced, brave, wise like Solomon, and unconquerable in battle. He trusted in God for his victories, and in peacetime he built churches and towns, was not tempted by wealth and judged justly. He was also merciful, good to his servants, and generous to all. The only sense of other relations with his subjects was the brief statement that he consulted the wise when he received a letter from the Pope; presumably this meant the clergy.⁴⁷ Otherwise, he simply made decisions and gave orders, a portrait that did not coincide with the story that emerges from the chronicles. In reality, Alexander had repeated conflicts with the Novgorod boyars, whose views he had to take into consideration.⁴⁸ The princes were not always saintly: the life of St. Feodosii, hegumen of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves, records the saint's reproof to Prince Sviatoslav Iaroslavich, who had usurped his brother's throne in 1073; he refused to attend the prince's banquet, "the banquet of Beelzebub, and to take part in a meal filled with blood and murder."⁴⁹

Alexander Nevskii was widely known, and officially proclaimed a saint in 1547, while the story with Dmitrii Donskoi is more complicated. The Orthodox Church proclaimed him a saint only in 1988, but as early as the fifteenth century (probably in the 1440s) there appeared a panegyric that found its way into several chronicles, which placed Dmitrii's sainthood under the year of his death, 1389. Less popular with scholars than the other historical tales about Dmitrii's great victory over the Horde at Kulikovo in 1380, the panegyric presented more detail than any other medieval Russian text about the relations of the ruler to his people. Dmitrii was certainly brave in battle against Mamai's Tatars, but he also loved the innocent and forgave the guilty, slept little and arose at night for prayer, and lived with his wife Evdokiia in purity (*tselomudrie*, which means purity but not complete chastity: they produced twelve children). "With a human body he lived the life of the angels (*bestelesnye*)," that is, he lived like a monk. In describing Dmitrii's death, the author of the panegyric goes into more detail. On his deathbed, Dmitrii called his wife,

⁴⁷ V. Mansikka, *Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo: Razbor redaktsii i tekst*. Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti i iskusstva 180 (St. Petersburg: OLDP, 1913).

⁴⁸ The literature on Alexander Nevskii is extensive. See Iu. K. Begunov and A. N. Kirpichnikova, eds., *Aleksandr Nevskii i ego epokha: Issledovaniia i materialy* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Dmitrii Bulanin, 1995); Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, *Aleksandr Nevskij, Heiliger, Fürst, Nationalheld: Eine Erinnerungsfigur im russischen kulturellen Gedächtnis* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004); Mari Isoaho, *The Image of Alexander Nevskiy in Medieval Russia* (Leiden and Boston, Massachusetts: Brill, 2006).

⁴⁹ D. Abramovich, *Das Paterikon des Kiever Höhlenklosters*, ed. Dmitrii Tschizewskij (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1964), 66.

sons, and boyars to him, and told his wife to guide his sons by the commands of the Lord, and his sons he ordered to obey their mother. To the boyars he said, “You know my customs and manner, I was born with you, I grew up before your eyes and with you I ruled and held the Russian land for twenty-seven years. With you I warded against many lands . . . and with God’s help crushed the infidels . . . strengthened the principedom and established peace and quiet in the land. With you I preserved my inheritance [*otchina*], which God and my parents gave me; toward you I had love and honor, I kept towns and districts under you. And I loved your children, I did evil to no one, I took nothing by force, I did not annoy, or reproach, or rob anyone nor did I any misdeed, but I loved everyone and held them in honor, and was joyous with you and mourned with you. You were called not boyars, but the princes of my land.” Now after his death they were to serve his widow and children with all their heart, in joy and in sorrow. Then Dmitrii called his eldest son Vasilii (aged eighteen) and gave him the Grand Principedom, the throne of his fathers, and the Russian land.⁵⁰ In reality, the succession was not quite so simple, as we shall see. The testament of Dmitrii did give the Grand Principality to his son Vasilii and put his widow in overall charge of the family and hence of the state. However, by 1389 Khan Tokhtamysh had restored the power of the Horde, and Vasilii only took the throne with his sanction.⁵¹

The various examples of good and bad rulers that the Russians knew from their own history as well as Byzantine history and the world history known to them did not provide them with any specific idea of the political relations between ruler and ruled, even between the monarch and the aristocracy. Instead, they had a series of portraits of pious, just, generous, and courageous rulers and the opposite. Even the panegyric of Dmitrii Donskoi, the fullest of such texts on the relations of ruler to subject, provided only a picture of moral and emotional unity, the faithful service of the boyars to the just ruler. There was neither autocracy (or absolutism) nor the opposite. The issue of succession was also left at such a general level that the tradition mandated no specific rules.

In 1547, at his coronation Ivan IV received the title tsar, the first Russian ruler to bear the title officially and permanently. In the course

⁵⁰ M. A. Salmina, ed., “Slovo o zhitii i o prestavlennii velikogo kniazia Dmitriia Ivanovicha, tsaria russkogo,” *Biblioteka literatury Drevnei Rusi* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1999), vol. 6, 268–286, 387–388; M. A. Salmina, “Slovo o zhitii i prestavlennii velikogo kniazia Dmitriia Ivanovicha, tsaria Rus’skogo,” *TODRL* 25 (1970): 81–104; *SKKDR* II, pt. 2, 403–405, II, pt. 3, 385–387; Charles J. Halperin, *The Tatar Yoke: The Image of the Mongols in Medieval Russia*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2009), 138–142.

⁵¹ *DDG* 33–37; Charles J. Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Russian History* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985), 56–57; V. V. Trepavlov, *Zolotaia Orda v XIV stoletii* (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2010).

of the sixteenth century, the official title increasingly included the term *samoderzhets*, normally translated into other languages as “autocrat,” in part as the Russian word is presumably a translation of the Greek *autokratōr*. As these titles were unique to Russia, much ink has been spilled in analyzing their history and meaning. The consensus of scholars has gradually emerged that in the early modern era neither of them had anything to do with absolute power, a meaning attached to *samoderzhets*/autocrat only in the nineteenth century. The term *samoderzhets* itself had become a constant part of the title only in the 1570s, perhaps even in the reign of Tsar Fyodor, and the reasons for this change are a matter of dispute. In the fifteenth century it meant only that the ruler was independent of others; by the later 1560s it may have meant no more than that the tsar was a powerful ruler or even just a pious ruler. The English merchants and diplomats translated it as “self-upholder.” The title “tsar” had nothing to do with the power of the tsar; it concerned rather his status among rulers. The basis of the title was biblical, for in the Slavic Bible all the kings of Israel were called “tsar,” a usage that derived from the Septuagint, which rendered their title as “basileus.” The Greek usage did not distinguish king from emperor, so that “basileus” was the Greek title of Roman emperors as well as of petty Greek or barbarian kings. St. Jerome rendered the Hebrew title as “rex,” so that in the Catholic world the Old Testament rulers are kings, whereas in the Orthodox Slavic world they are tsars. Similarly the Roman and Byzantine emperors in Russia were tsars, while the Holy Roman Emperor was *kesar* or later “imperator.” In addition, the Ottoman Sultan and the Chingisid Tatar Khans were tsars in Russian usage. The title tsar gave the ruler of Russia equality in Russian eyes with all these monarchs, ancient and modern. It had nothing to do with his position in relationship to his subjects.⁵² Needless to say, neither title, neither tsar nor *samoderzhets*, implied anything about succession to the throne.

The new title also did not change the image of the ideal ruler found in Russian historical narratives and texts in praise of the prince. The *Stepennaia kniga* of the 1560s rewrote Russian history by recasting the

⁵² Filiushkin, *Tituly russkikh gosudarei*, 55–152; Halperin, “Ivan IV as Autocrat”; M. B. Pliukhanova, *Siuzhety i simvolny Moskovskogo tsarstva* (St. Petersburg: Akropol, 1995). For earlier contributions, see Michael Cherniavsky, “Khan or Basileus: An Aspect of Russian Medieval Political Theory,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 3–28; Szeftel, “The Title of the Muscovite Monarch”; Helmut Neubauer, *Car und Selbstherrscher: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Autokratie in Rußland. Veröffentlichungen der Osteuropa-Institut München* 22 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964); Vladimir Vodoff, “Remarques sur la valeur du terme ‘tsar’ appliqué aux princes russes avant le milieu du XV^e siècle,” *Oxford Slavonic Papers* XI (1978): 1–41; Gustave Alef, “The Adoption of the Muscovite Two-Headed Eagle: A Discordant View,” *Speculum* 41 (1966): 1–21.

annalistic form of the chronicles into a series of biographies of the princes and metropolitans. It had many opportunities to praise the grand princes and their ancestors, sometimes by simply incorporating earlier texts. It did not expand the notion of the ideal ruler, however, beyond what was in the older stories of Dmitrii Donskoi. In the *Stepennaia kniga*, the death of Ivan IV's father, Grand Prince Vasiliu, was quite elaborate and included a section praising the prince. In this account, God had established the prince's power and was always on his side. The author quoted (apparently) Agapetus to the effect that the prince's power on earth was like God's in heaven. He was to look after men on earth, and restrain his passions. Not surprisingly, Vasiliu's chief virtue was piety. He was certainly wise and clever, but he was also strong in prayer, purity, chastity, and patience. He was kind both to the laity and to the clergy, and was "humble in heart, high in his life, meek in his glance, shining with self-restraint." The portrait was close to the earlier story of Dmitrii Donskoi, which the text explicitly quoted.⁵³ Other compositions besides the *Stepennaia kniga* had similar themes. The famous exchange of epistles between Ivan the Terrible and Prince Andrei Kurbskii, though a different genre of composition, did not add anything new to the conception of the monarch. Kurbskii reproached Ivan that he destroyed the "mighty in Israel," presumably the boyars. Ivan's response was that his actions were just and reflected his piety, the attributes of a good Orthodox tsar. It was Kurbskii who violated justice and the commands of God.⁵⁴ Perhaps the only hint of something more specific was Ivan's claim that in Russia the autocrats rule (*vladeiut*), not the boyars and dignitaries.⁵⁵ Kurbskii, of course, did not claim that the boyars did rule or that they ought to, but this was a polemic. Maybe he thought that privately, but he did not say so. Fundamentally the framework for both Ivan and Kurbskii was the traditional Russian view of the ruler as a pious and faithful Orthodox Christian, more like a Western medieval king, not a Renaissance monarch.

The other ways in which Russian culture conveyed the essence of the monarchy included rituals, both church festivals, such as Epiphany and Palm Sunday, and coronations and other rituals in the life cycle of the

⁵³ Pokrovskii and Lenhoff, eds., *Stepennaia kniga*, vol. II, 321–323; vol. III, 386, 388; N. N. Rozov, "Pokhval'noe slovo velikomu kniazii Vasiliuu III," in *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1964 god* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii, 1965), 278–289; D'iakonov, *Vlast' Moskovskikh gosudarei*, 105–107. Here the praise frames a longer story about the death of Vasiliu III, which has been the object of much scholarly discussion. See Krom, *Vdovstuiushchee tsarstvo*, 34–55.

⁵⁴ Ia. S. Lur'e and Iu D. Rykov, eds., *Perepiska Ivana Groznogo s Andreev Kurbskim* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

ruler. Both the Epiphany and Palm Sunday rituals depicted the deference paid by the tsar to the church, or more properly the metropolitan, later patriarch, of Moscow. Indeed, the ritual deference may have been greater than the reality, but the point of the ceremony was to convey an ideal, not necessarily to reflect actual relations. The nature of the monarchy also manifested itself in its visual symbols, the double-headed eagle (borrowed from the Holy Roman Empire, not Byzantium), the crowns, the tsar's "pew" in the Kremlin's Dormition cathedral, and the decoration on the walls of the Kremlin palace. Most of these in one or another way demonstrated to the viewer the notion that the tsar inherited the mantle of the ancient kings of Israel, going along with the conception voiced also in written works that Russia was the New Israel and Moscow the New Jerusalem. Russia was thus the one kingdom with the true faith, chosen by God like the people of Israel.⁵⁶ All these rituals, symbols, and historical notions said nothing specific about the power of the tsar, and none touched on succession.

Russian Ideas of Succession to 1700

The ruling dynasty of Kiev Rus' was the house of the legendary Riurik, and all princes came from that house.⁵⁷ The traditions of succession to the ruling house of Riurik were one of the mainsprings of Kievan politics and engendered repeated episodes of conflict and violence from the ninth century to the Mongol invasion. Historians are still not agreed exactly

⁵⁶ Paul Bushkovitch, "The Epiphany Ceremony of the Russian Court in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Russian Review* 49, 1 (1990): 1–17; Robert Crummey, "Court Spectacles in Seventeenth Century Russia: Illusion and Reality," in *Essays in Honor of A. A. Zimin*, ed. Daniel Clarke Waugh (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1985), 130–158; Michael S. Flier, "Court Ceremony in an Age of Reform: Patriarch Nikon and the Palm Sunday Ritual," in *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Samuel H. Baron and Nancy Shields Kollmann (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 73–95; Daniel Rowland, "The Problem of Advice in Muscovite Tales about the Time of Troubles," *Russian History* 6, 2 (1979): 259–283; Daniel Rowland, "Did Muscovite Literary Ideology Place Limits on the Power of the Tsar (1540s–1660s)?" *Russian Review* 49 (1990): 125–155; Daniel Rowland, "Moscow – the Third Rome"; Raba, "Moscow – the Third Rome"; O. I. Podobedova, *Moskovskaia shkola zhivopisi pri Ivane IV: Rabota v moskovskoi Kremle 40kh–70kh godov XVI veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972); Sergei Bogatyrev, "The Battle for Divine Wisdom: The Rhetoric of Ivan IV's Campaign against Polotsk," in *The Military and Society in Russia 1450–1917*, ed. Eric Lohr and Marshall Poe (Leiden and Boston, Massachusetts: Brill, 2002), 325–363; Pliukhanova, *Siuzhety i simvol'y*; B. A. Uspenskii, *Tsar' i patriarkh: Kharizma vlasti v Rossii* (Moscow: Shkola iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1998).

⁵⁷ Kiev Rus' had one of the several ruling dynasties of the early Middle Ages in Europe with the exclusive right to rule, analogous to the Merovingians and later Carolingians of the Frankish realm, the Piasts of Poland, or the Přemyslovci of Bohemia: Kern, *Gottesgnadentum und Widerstandsrecht*, 15–25.

how to characterize those rules of succession, which combined partible inheritance – the provision that all sons of a ruler should receive some territory during his lifetime or on his death – and the differences over who was the “eldest,” the eldest son or the eldest brother.⁵⁸ With the passage of time, the Kiev center became less important, and local centers in southwestern Galich and northeastern Vladimir began to battle over Kiev as well as regional power. The emergence of Novgorod with its elected princes and boyar oligarchy provided a different model, but one that was not widely imitated. The Mongol invasion that began in 1238 changed the system in fundamental ways. The destruction of Kiev removed the traditional center of the state and a main object of rivalry. The local principalities of the western parts of the Kievan state gradually fell under the rule of the Lithuanian dynasty of Gediminas, while the northeast continued to owe obedience to the Grand Prince of Vladimir and, through him, to the Khan of the Horde in Sarai. The overlordship of the Horde produced a bifurcated system of succession. The Vladimir throne was in the gift of the Khan, who bestowed it on the princes of Tver’ or Moscow according to his perception of the Horde’s advantage. Below that level, the various principalities of the northeast maintained the old Kievan system, with its ambiguity about the roles of eldest brother and eldest son of the ruling prince. That was the system that the Moscow princes followed from the time of Ivan I Danilovich Kalita (“Moneybag,” ruled 1325–40), with the addition that they were largely successful in keeping the succession in the hands of their eldest sons. How they did that is again the subject of much historical debate. Peter Nitsche was convinced that the policy of the Moscow princes was a continuous and ultimately successful attempt to establish primogeniture.⁵⁹ Aside from Nitsche’s work, however, the debate on the rise of the Moscow dynasty

⁵⁸ A. E. Presniakov, *Kniazhoe pravo v drevnei Rusi* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1909); B. D. Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus’* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel’stvo, 1949); M. B. Sverdlov, *Domongol’skaia Rus’* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2003); A. A. Gorskii, V. A. Kuchkin, P. V. Lukin, and P. S. Stefanovich, *Drevniaia Rus’: Ocherki politicheskogo i sotsial’nogo stroia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2008); T. L. Vilkul, *Liudi i kniaz’ v drevnerusskikh letopisiakh serediny XI–XIII vv.* (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2009); Christian Raffensperger, *Ties of Kinship: Genealogy and Dynastic Marriage in Kyivan Rus’* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Yulia Mikhailova, *Property, Power, and Authority in Rus and Latin Europe, ca. 1000–1236* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2018).

⁵⁹ On the Mongols, see B. D. Grekov and A. Iu. Iakubovskii, *Zolotaia Orda i ee padenie* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1950); George Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia*. A History of Russia, vol. 3 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1953); Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde*; Iu V. Seleznev, “*A peremenii Bog Ordu*”: *Russko-ordynskie otnosheniia v kontse XIV–pervoi treti XV vv.* (Voronezh: Voronezhskii gosudarstvennii universitet, 2006). On the Moscow principality, see A. E. Presniakov, *Obrazovanie velikoruskogo gosudarstva* (Petrograd: Tipografiia

has focused less on the character of the rules and manner of succession than on the contingent events of each moment of transition from one ruler to another or on internal conflicts in the dynasty and among the regional princes.

Since the Russian legal tradition did not include anything on princely succession, the Russian elites necessarily learned the rules either by oral transmission lost to us or through the historical records in the Russian chronicles and other historical texts.⁶⁰ The chronicles are a complicated source, produced mainly by compilation and redaction of earlier chronicle texts. They did not rely on Byzantine models. Byzantine historians produced long and complex texts with considerable literary art derived from classical Greek models, Thucydides, Polybius, and others. Russian chronicles were not as artless as they seem at first, but they were annals more like those of early medieval Western Europe than any Byzantine sources. For the northeast principalities around medieval Vladimir the Lavrentii Chronicle was the main text. It began with the earliest Russian chronicle, the so-called Primary Chronicle (*Povest' vremennykh let*) and continued the story up to 1305. Around 1400 a new compilation appeared, the Trinity Chronicle, which was lost during the French occupation of Moscow in 1812, but parts of it were incorporated into later chronicles of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These chronicles were not just the products of an individual's fancy or personal memory and reading. Some of them were more or less official statements of the history of Russia as seen at the court of the Moscow princes, though others reflected local perspectives or seem to show more the point of view of the metropolitans of Moscow. The process of compilation continued in the first half of the sixteenth century, culminating in the Nikon Chronicle of the 1560s, probably the product of the metropolitan's scriptorium.⁶¹ In form all these chronicles were annals. In the 1550s–60s, the same metropolitan's scriptorium also produced a history of Russia rewritten as the

Ia Bashmakov i ko., 1918); L. V. Cherepnin, *Obrazovanie russkogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva v XIV–XV vv.: Ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi i politicheskoi istorii Rusi* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1960); Iu. G. Alekseev, *U Kormila Rossiiskogo gosudarstva: Ocherk razvitiia apparata upravleniia v XIV–XV vv.* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1998).

⁶⁰ On law, see the classic M. F. Vladimirkii-Budanov, *Obzor istorii russkogo prava* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo N. Ia. Obolgina, 1905); Ferdinand Feldbrugge, *A History of Russian Law: From Ancient Times to the Council Code (Ulozhenie) of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich of 1649* (Leiden and Boston, Massachusetts: Brill, 2017).

⁶¹ A. A. Shakhmatov, *Razyskaniia o drevneishikh russkikh letopisnykh svodov* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. A. Aleksandrova, 1908); D. S. Likhachev, *Russkie letopisi i ikh kul'turno-istoricheskoe znachenie* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1947); Ia. S. Lur'e, *Obshcherusskie letopisi XIV–XV vv.* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976); B. M. Kloss, *Nikonovskii svod i russkie letopisi XVI–XVII vekov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980).

story of the dynasty, a series of biographies from Princess Ol'ga to Ivan IV (the Terrible), known as the *Book of Degrees* (*Stepennaia kniga*). The *Book of Degrees* drew on earlier texts of lives of the few Russian princely saints, but for most of the lives it simply recast the chronicle stories in the form of biography. The whole gave an aura of sanctity to the Riurikovich dynasty, though in fact only a handful of the princes were actually recognized as saints in the Orthodox Church. All these historical narratives preserved the record of succession to the throne in medieval Rus' and at the same time provided some idea of the way the events of succession were understood and justified. They provided examples, good and bad, to be imitated or avoided.

The only other potential sources of examples of succession in history were the stories of ancient Israel in the Bible and the history of the Byzantine Empire. As we have seen, the *Khronograf* was one of the main sources of Old Testament history and the unique source of Byzantine history for the Russians through the sixteenth century. However brief the accounts of the Byzantine emperors may have been, they were enough to describe the mode of succession. In fact, the mode of succession to the throne of Byzantium was not simple, and a great many cases were the object of contestation.⁶² One thing was clear, however: succession to the throne was not hereditary, even if sons often succeeded fathers. "Roman and later on Byzantine imperial ideology is characterized by a refusal to accept the imperial function as hereditary."⁶³ The Byzantine emperors also practiced succession by designation, even in the case of eldest sons.⁶⁴ The *Khronograf* described many of these conflicts, producing a portrait of Byzantine succession that was scarcely flattering. In addition, Byzantium lacked the saintly rulers of Western Europe and Russia who provided a point of reference: of all the Byzantine emperors, only Constantine the Great attained sainthood. The result of his sainthood was a rather sanitized portrait in the *Khronograf*, but the text also made clear that even after the saint's death the succession was messy. After Constantine's death, his son Constantine "rose against his brother Constans, who was in Rome. And there were battles, and Constantine, the elder, was killed: he desired another's share and lost his own. And

⁶² Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought*, 116–133; Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1990).

⁶³ Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le "césaropapisme" byzantin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 64; see also Peter Schreiner, *Byzanz 565–1453*, 4th ed. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011), 75–76.

⁶⁴ Aikaterini Christophilopoulou, *Ekloge, anagoreusis kai stepsis tou Byzantinou autokratoros. Pragmateiai tes akademias Athenon 22/2* (Athens: Akademia Athenon, 1956), 140; Nicolas Svoronos, "Le serment de fidélité à l'empereur byzantin et sa signification constitutionnelle," *Revue des études byzantines* 9 (1951): 106–142, esp. 116–125.

Constans took his territory and ruled the whole western part [of the empire] sixteen years alone.”⁶⁵ For the Russian reader the Byzantine succession struggles must have seemed even worse than those of his native country, and to have no clear rules of choice among brothers, uncles, and cousins. These were the cases of succession that the Russians recorded in the *Khronograf*.

That narrative provided nothing of the reality of late Byzantine succession practices. From the recapture of Constantinople in 1261 to the end, the ruling family was the Palaiologoi, who were challenged only briefly in the middle of the fourteenth century. The late Byzantine emperors continued to practice, or tried to practice, succession by designation. The reigning emperor had his preferred heir, usually his eldest son, crowned as a co-emperor. Thus the first of the Palaiologoi, Michael VIII (1259–82), made his son Andronicus II co-emperor in 1272, when he was only fourteen years old. Andronicus II (1282–1328) in turn had his son Michael IX crowned co-emperor in 1294, at age seventeen. Michael’s oldest son Andronicus III became a third co-emperor in 1316 at nineteen years of age. Thus Andronicus II attempted to secure the succession for two generations after his own reign. In the event Michael IX died before his father, and Andronicus III overthrew his grandfather in 1328, ruling until his death in 1341.⁶⁶ In turn, the death of Andronicus III set off a civil war that lasted on and off for decades, for he had not designated an heir, and his son John was only nine. The result of the war was the victory of John VI Kantakuzenos (reigned 1347–54), the cousin of Andronicus III and his principal favorite. The treaty made John VI and John V Palaiologos co-emperors in 1347. As John V grew to manhood, he was not happy with the agreement and conflict soon arose. John VI had tried to guarantee succession by marrying his daughter Elena to John V and then designating his son Matthew co-emperor. This latter move was a failure, and John V deposed Kantakuzenos and eventually Matthew. The designation of heirs had not prevented civil war, and it did not in the future: Andronicus IV, the son of John V, attempted to overthrow his father during the years 1376–9, but ultimately failed. John proclaimed his second son Manuel as his heir, who succeeded to the throne on his father’s death in 1391, albeit not without opposition. Manuel was able to name his son John VIII as successor before his own death in 1425.⁶⁷ John VIII (reigned 1425–48) did not name a successor, though he favored his brother Constantine IX, who was, as it happened, the last emperor of Byzantium. Constantine came to the throne largely through the efforts of Helena, the

⁶⁵ *PSRL* 22, 273.

⁶⁶ Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261–1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93, 151–162.

⁶⁷ Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium*, 185–251, 275–284, 330.

widow of Manuel II.⁶⁸ It is by no means clear how much of all this the Russians knew. The *Khronograf* says virtually nothing about Byzantium in those years beyond the names of the emperors.⁶⁹ The Russians must have known more than that in practice, for Manuel II's first wife was Anna Vasil'evna, the daughter of Vasili I of Moscow; they married in 1414. Some of the Russian travelers to Constantinople, though their main interest was in relics and shrines, also show some knowledge of the Byzantine scene, but are mostly vague on these succession problems.⁷⁰ There is no evidence that Byzantium provided a precedent that the Russians knew well enough to use.

The Byzantine precedent was not necessary, since the Bible offered the Russians a much more authoritative example, the Old Testament Kingdom of Israel sanctioned and directed by God himself. The Orthodox Slavs, and in particular the Russians, were less familiar with the full text of the Old Testament, in contrast to the New, which was widely copied both for liturgy and for reading.⁷¹ In medieval Rus', apart from the Psalms, the Old Testament was known mainly in summaries. The oldest versions seem to be the versions in the Slavonic translation of Georgios Amartolos and the *Tolkovaia Paleia* (roughly, the Interpreted Old Testament) of the thirteenth century. This text was an abridgement of the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and Kings I–IV with commentary to demonstrate the truth of Christianity over Judaism.⁷² In the fifteenth century, there appeared a new version of the *Paleia* with the commentary removed; it is known to scholars as the *Kratkaia khronograficheskaia Paleia* (Short Chronographical Paleia).⁷³ Complete versions of

⁶⁸ Donald M. Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor: The Life and Legend of Constantine Palaiologos, Last Emperor of the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35–36.

⁶⁹ *PSRL* XXII, 401 (Michael VIII, described as a “Latin”), 402 (Andronicus II), 409–410 (Andronicus III, John V Palaiologos, John VI Kantakuzenos, Andronicus IV “ne po vole ottsa”), 419, 422 (Manuel II), 429–430 (John VIII), 435 (Constantine XI). These entries are only a few lines, with a bit more for Manuel II and John VIII. The story of Byzantium concludes with a longer account of the fall of Constantinople in 1453 (437–440). The description of the later Byzantine emperors in the *Letopisets ellinskii i rimskii* had been even briefer, just a list of names. Tvorogov, ed., *Letopisets ellinskii i rimskii*, vol. I, 506–511.

⁷⁰ George P. Majeska, *Russian Travellers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. *Dumbarton Oaks Studies XIX* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984), 100–113 (Ignatii of Smolensk, 1389–90), 190–191 (Zosima the Deacon, noting that Manuel II had his son John crowned).

⁷¹ A. A. Alekseev, *Tekstologiya slavianskoi Biblii* (Moscow: Dmitrii Bulanin; Cologne: Böhlau, 1999).

⁷² O. V. Tvorogov, “Paleia tolkovaia,” *SKKDR* I, 285–288; O. V. Tvorogov, *Paleia tolkovaia po spisku sdellanomu v g. Kolomne v 1406 g., trud uchenikov N. S. Tikhonravova*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Tipografiia i slovolitnia O. Gerbska, 1892–6); Aleksandr Kamchatnov, ed., *Paleia tolkovaia* (Moscow: Soglasie, 2002).

⁷³ E. G. Vodolazkin, “Redaktsii kratkoi khronograficheskoi Palei,” *TODRL* 56 (2004): 164–180; E. G. Vodolazkin, “Kratkaia khronograficheskaia Paleia (tekst), vypusk I,”

most of the books of the Old Testament and the *Paleia* came to be more frequently copied in the fifteenth century and afterward in Russia, about the same time as the final form of the *Khronograf* came into being. Thus by 1500 the Old Testament history of ancient Israel was known to the literate in some form.

The Old Testament provided the most extensive treatment of succession to the throne in the story of King David. That story begins with the election of Saul as king to replace the judges, his failure and death, and the election of David, all in accord with God's will and the prophecy of Samuel. The succession to David is one of the classic passages of the Hebrew Bible, the subject of considerable scholarly discussion. It is found in the books of Kings (2 and 3 Kings = 2 Samuel and 1 Kings), but there is also another version found in 1 Chronicles (Paralipomenon). The latter version omits the colorful details and frames the succession in David's instructions to Solomon to build the Temple in Jerusalem.⁷⁴ In the books of Kings, it is the people of Israel who desired a king from their prophet Samuel, who prayed to the Lord for instructions. His answer was that "they [the people] have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (I Kings 8:7). The Lord then pointed out Saul to him and Samuel anointed him king of Israel (I Kings 9:17; 10:1). David was simply the son of a shepherd who won fame with his defeat of Goliath. Saul's troubled relationship with David takes up much of the story of his reign, and on the king's death in battle the Bible relates that the Lord told David to go to Hebron in Judah, where the "men of Judah" came and anointed him king of Judah (II Kings 2:1, 4). Later it was the "elders of Israel" who came to him, who made a league with them, and "they anointed David king over Israel" (II Kings 5:3). Struggles over succession again take up much of the history of King David, beginning with his marriage to Bathsheba and the revolt of Absalom. At the end of David's life, his eldest son Adonijah wanted to be his successor. Adonijah was "a goodly man," but the "mighty men which belonged to David" did not support him. Then the prophet Nathan successfully urged Bathsheba to persuade David to designate Solomon, who was anointed while his father still lived (III Kings I, 5–29). David said to Bathsheba: "Even as

TODRL 57 (2006): 891–915; E. G. Vodolazkin, "Kratkaia khronograficheskaia Paleia (tekst), vypusk II," *TODRL* 58 (2008): 534–556; E. G. Vodolazkin, "Kratkaia khronograficheskaia Paleia (tekst), vypusk III," *TODRL* 61 (2010): 345–374.

⁷⁴ Rebecca S. Hancock, "1 and 2 Samuel," Mordecai Cogan, "1 and 2 Kings," and Isaac Kalimi, "1 and 2 Chronicles," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Rolf Rendtorff, *Das alte Testament: Eine Einführung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), 30–44, 180–199, 297–303; Leonhart Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1926).

I swear unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead.” (III Kings 1, 30). On Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam succeeded him (no designation or command from the Lord was necessary), but the kingdom of Israel then split into two, leaving Rehoboam with Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah and a separate kingdom of Israel to the north under Jeroboam (III Kings 12). Such was the story in the books of Kings, but there was another version, contained in I Chronicles, which omitted the complexities of the succession to David and merely noted that David placed his son Solomon on the throne (1 Chronicles 23, 1). Thus the Old Testament in the lives of its most authoritative monarchs provided examples of kings appointed by God, kings designated by the reigning king, kings elected by the “elders,” and kings who simply succeeded to the father’s throne.

The *Paleia*, though it abridged and interpreted the Biblical text in other ways, preserved these stories of succession. In the version of the establishment of kingship the choosing of Saul and David was simplified. God’s reproach to the Israelites did not appear and the text merely said that “the Israelites asked for a king [*tsar*’] from the prophet Samuel” and then Samuel anointed Saul.⁷⁵ For the installation of David as king in Jerusalem, the *Paleia* followed the Bible: the “elders (*starsi*) of Israel took him to the kingdom (*tsarstvo*) in Jerusalem.” Later on it quotes God’s voice to the prophet Nathan saying that he, God, had placed David to rule over Israel.⁷⁶ From the succession narrative, the *Paleia tolkovaia* took the story of Bathsheba, the revolt of Absalom, and the Kings version of Solomon’s succession though without mentioning Adonijah.⁷⁷ Later on the *Paleia* text inserted the version in 1 Chronicles 22, 1, 23, 1, and 29, 2–4 of the succession to David that revolved around David’s command to Solomon to build the Temple. On the actual succession, 1 Chronicles stated merely: “So when David was old and full of years, he made Solomon his son king over Israel.” (1 Chronicles 23, 1). The *Paleia* translated literally: “David was old, full of days, and he placed as tsar his son Solomon.”⁷⁸ Then followed David’s exhortation to his son, mixing the texts of 3 Kings 2, 2–4 and 1 Chronicles 2, 2–4. The result was a picture of succession uncomplicated by the attempt of Adonijah to inherit the kingdom. After the accession of Solomon, the *Paleia tolkovaia*

⁷⁵ *Paleia tolkovaia*, vol. 2, 1896, 373 (col. 745); Kamchatnov, *Paleia*, 472.

⁷⁶ *Paleia*, vol. 2, 380 (col. 759); Kamchatnov, *Paleia*, 480, 482.

⁷⁷ *Paleia*, vol 2, 381–387 (col. 762–774); Kamchatnov, *Paleia*, 482–488.

⁷⁸ “Давидъ бывъ старъ, исполнь дни, и постави царемъ сына своего Соломона,” *Paleia*, vol. 2, 405–407 (cols. 809–814); Kamchatnov, *Paleia*, 513–515; quotation: 406 (col. 811); Kamchatnov, *Paleia*, 513.

went on to list his virtues and quote his wise sayings (often apocryphal) rather than to provide a narrative of the reign, and the text ends there, with no account of the succession to Solomon. In the *Paleia tolkovaia* version, succession was the result of God's designation of David and David's designation of Solomon. The *Kratkaia khronograficheskaia Paleia* simplified the story even more, combining the Kings and Chronicles versions for the succession to David. It briefly mentioned the story of Bathsheba, omitted the stories of Absalom and Adonijah, and repeated the statement from Chronicles that David placed his son on the throne.⁷⁹

The versions of the *Paleia* were also sources for the *Khronograf*, though not necessarily for the story of the succession to David. The *Letopisets ellinskii i rimskii* had only listed the names of the Old Testament kings without comment or detail.⁸⁰ Tvorogov believed that the main source for the corresponding part of the *Khronograf* was the Bible itself, not the chronicle of Amartolos, but the stories were certainly redacted and simplified.⁸¹ The *Khronograf* version reproduced the Old Testament: God's words are "they [the Israelites] humiliated not you but me, I am not to rule over them." Samuel then anointed Saul as in the Bible.⁸² The installation of David as king in Jerusalem followed the Bible.⁸³ The *Khronograf* presented the Biblical version, somewhat abridged but with the crucial details about Adonijah, Nathan, and Bathsheba. David designated Solomon as his successor: "And David said to Bathsheba that your son Solomon will sit on my throne." The succeeding exhortation to Solomon follows not 1 Chronicles but 3 Kings 2, 3 in very abridged form.⁸⁴ After Solomon's death, in the *Khronograf* Rehoboam simply came to rule in Solomon's place, as in the Bible.⁸⁵ The available accounts of Old Testament kingship confirmed for the Russians the Biblical variety of forms of accession to the throne. Just like the history of the Byzantine Empire, the Bible did not offer a single method of succession vested with divine authority.

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⁷⁹ Vodolazkin, "Kratkaia vypusk III," 365–367.

⁸⁰ Tvorogov, ed., *Letopisets ellinskii i rimskii* I, 15.

⁸¹ Tvorogov, *Drevnerusskie khronografy*, 180. The stories of Saul, David, and Solomon in the chronicle of Amartolos were fairly detailed on the reigns but not on the appointment of Saul and David or Solomon's succession to the throne: de Boor, ed., *Georgii monachi chronicon* I, 187–188; Istrin, *Knigi vremennye* I, 137–138. Tvorogov was correct in seeing the source of the 1512 *Khronograf*'s account of these events in the Bible, not in Amartolos.

⁸² *PSRL* 22, 106. ⁸³ *PSRL* 22, 114–115.

⁸⁴ "И рече Давид Вирсавиа яко Соломон сын твой сядет на престоле мом," *PSRL* 22, 123–124.

⁸⁵ *PSRL* 22, 130.

The account of succession in Russian chronicles forms a large part of the next chapter, as they were records of recent experience of the writers, not historical tradition. The only sixteenth-century text to touch on the issue of succession was the “Tale of the Vladimir Princes.”⁸⁶ As a text its importance derives not so much from its contents, interesting as they are, but rather from its use in the coronation order of Ivan IV and subsequent rulers and its role as an explanation of the history of the principal crown of the tsars, the Cap of Monomakh. In this way, the story remained part of the tradition of the Russian tsars for centuries after its appearance. Its textual history has a number of mysteries. The oldest version may be the Epistle of Spiridon-Savva, briefly metropolitan of Kiev in the 1470s, who was imprisoned in Lithuania, in Russia sent to a monastery, and nowhere recognized as metropolitan. Apparently he lived into the early years of the sixteenth century.⁸⁷ There are also two versions of the text as a tale without Spiridon’s name. In brief, the account begins with the division of the earth among the sons of Noah, the story of Alexander the Great, and the Roman Empire. Emperor Augustus then placed his relatives in charge of various parts of the world, including Prus in “Marborok” (Marienburg/Małbork) and “Gdanesk” (Danzig/Gdańsk), and other lands around the Niemen River. That is, he ruled Prussia in the geographical understanding of 1500, given with the normal Polish names of places. In the tale it is here, in the lands of Prus, that the Novgorodians found Riurik, a relative of Prus and the first of the Riurikovich dynasty. The Riurikovichi were thus descendants of Caesar Augustus, or at least of his clan.

This story contradicted the genealogy of Riurik found in Russian chronicles, where he was invited to rule Novgorod from somewhere across the sea, which modern historians usually identify with Scandinavia. The story in the *Tale* after Riurik switches direction, recounting briefly the story of the conversion of Vladimir. Subsequently his descendant Prince Vladimir Vsevolodich of Kiev (ruled 1113–25) warred against the Byzantines, taking many prisoners. After that event, the reader learns that the Westerners in the time of Pope Formosus (891–6) had fallen from the true faith. Emperor Constantine Monomachos (1042–55) called a council that condemned Formosus and henceforth the Orthodox did not recognize the Pope. Then Constantine sent a variety of relics to Vladimir Vsevolodich, including a crown (*venets*). From then onward, Vladimir was called tsar with the

⁸⁶ R. P. Dmitrieva, *Skazanie o kniaziakh vladimirskikh* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1955). Cherie Woodworth, “The Tsar’s Descent from Caesar.” PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2001.

⁸⁷ V. I. Ulianovs'kyi, *Mytropolyt Kyivs'kyi Spyridon: Obraz kriz' epokhu, epokha kriz' obraz* (Kyiv: Lybid, 2004).

name Monomakh. The legend, as is clear, is not only untrue but chronologically impossible. The text concludes with the genealogy of the Lithuanian princes.⁸⁸ The other versions of the story made it a bit more logical by putting the story about Pope Formosus at the end, after Vladimir receives the cap, but all of the versions tell the same story with occasional differences in detail.

The whole story was copied many times in various sorts of miscellanies and inserted into or combined with chronicle manuscripts, but the 1547 Order of coronation only took the part about the Cap of Monomakh as the regalia of a tsar. The rest of the story about Prus and the Riurikovich dynasty was omitted. The result was that the official ceremony presented the dignity of tsar as having a precedent in the story of Vladimir Monomakh and a surviving symbol in the cap, but said nothing about inheritance or succession. The implication of the story, that Russia's ruling family was part of an imperial dynasty descended from Augustus, did not appear as part of the official ideology of the monarchy as revealed in the coronation. The story did appear, however, in the *Book of Degrees*.⁸⁹ To make matters more complicated, however, the same text appeared in the Voskresenie Chronicle (1542–4), a compilation normally understood to reflect the views of the boyar clique (or at least the Shuiskii faction) of the years of Ivan IV's minority.⁹⁰ In contrast, the more "official" Nikon Chronicle omits the story and gives a more traditional version of the calling of Riurik, who simply comes "from the Germans" (*iz Nemets*). Since the final version of the Nikon Chronicle as it comes down to us is the product of the metropolitan's scriptorium, with later input perhaps from the tsar's scribes as well, this is a bit surprising, since the same milieu produced the *Book of Degrees* at about the same time.⁹¹ As far as we know,

⁸⁸ Dmitrieva, *Skazanie*, 159–170.

⁸⁹ Lenhoff and Pokrovskii, *Stepennaia kniga*, vol. 1, 151, 221–223; vol. 3, 32. The oldest manuscripts of the *Book of Degrees* come from the scriptorium of the Kremlin Chudov Monastery and date from 1560–5: Lenhoff and Pokrovskii, *Stepennaia kniga*, vol. 1, 6–7. See also David B. Miller, "The Velikie Minei Chet'i and the Stepennaia Kniga of Metropolitan Makarii and the Origins of Russian National Consciousness," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 26 (1979): 263–382; A. V. Sirenov, *Stepennaia kniga: Istoriiia teksta* (Moscow: Iazyki Slavianskikh kul'tur, 2007); A. S. Usachev, *Stepennaia kniga i drevnerusskaia knizhmost' vremeni mitropolita Makarii* (Moscow and St. Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2009); and Gail Lenhoff and Ann Kleimola, eds., *The Book of Royal Degrees and the Genesis of Russian Historical Consciousness* (Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2011).

⁹⁰ PSRL VII, 268; SKKDR II, pt. 2, 39–42.

⁹¹ PSRL IX, 9; Kloss, *Nikonovskii svod*. In the *Primary Chronicle*, Riurik comes "from the Varangians" (*iz Variag*): V. P. Adrianova-Peretts and D. S. Likhachev, eds., *Povest' vremennykh let*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1999), 12. The text is not always clear about geography, but the only mention of "Prussy" places them with the Poles and seemingly in a different place around the Baltic Sea than the Varangians: Likhachev

Ivan liked the story and used it in his 1577 letter to the Lithuanian commander Prince Aleksandr Polubenskii.⁹²

The story of Riurik's descent from Augustus was the only text that addressed in any way the issue of succession, and it had limits. It was essentially a genealogical legend about the Riurikovich clan that certainly glorified that clan and underscored its legitimacy but did not offer clues about the succession within that clan. The same may be said of the *Book of Degrees*. Needless to say, neither text had any implications about the nature of the monarch's power in relations to the boyar elite or society in general.⁹³

The literature available to Russians about the nature of monarchy and its history recorded many examples but did not give an unambiguous ideal or pattern to follow. There was no written law on this matter, and the only guide was custom. That story of succession was also one of the evolving power of the ruler, but it was not a simple story of growing power. The ruler's power was real, but it maintained itself by a combination of personal ability and charisma, the ability to negotiate the realities of governance, and the ability to charm, persuade, and threaten the elite and occasionally the people into cooperation and obedience. As we shall see, there were moments of weakness and moments of strength. As political realities evolved, practices and ideas also evolved, and that evolution is the story of the throne in Russia from the fifteenth century onward.

and Adrianova-Peretts, *Povest'*, 8. Until the middle of the sixteenth century, the *Primary Chronicle* is the source of Russian chronicle texts about Riurik. On the milieu of the compilers of both texts, see especially Charles J. Halperin, "What is an 'Official' Muscovite Source for the Reign of Ivan IV?" in *The Book of Royal Degrees and the Genesis of Russian Historical Consciousness*, ed. Gail Lenhoff and Ann Kleimola (Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2011), 81–93.

⁹² Adrianova-Peretts, V. P., D. S. Likhachev, and Ia. S. Lur'e, eds., *Poslaniia Ivana Groznogo* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1951), 200–201.

⁹³ Usachev, *Stepennaia*, 563–687. Usachev seems surprised to discover that portraits of good and bad rulers exhaust the political aspects of the text, presenting the resultant ideas as *razmyto* (perhaps "nebulous" would be the best translation), but that is exactly what Orthodox Christian ideas of rulership were. They were not political in the modern sense.