

ANTHONY CROSS

PETER THE GREAT  
THROUGH BRITISH EYES

*Perceptions and Representations of  
the Tsar since 1698*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK [www.cup.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk)  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA [www.cup.org](http://www.cup.org)  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

© Cambridge University Press 2000

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Scala 10.5/14 pt *System* QuarkXPress™ [SE]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

ISBN 0 521 78298 8 hardback

# Contents

<i>List of plates</i>	page viii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Prologue to a visit	1
2 Peter in England, January–April 1698	16
3 British reactions to the reigning Peter, 1698–1725	40
4 Consolidation of a myth, 1725–61	60
5 The shadow of the bronze horseman, 1762–1801	79
6 The ‘Testament’ of Peter the Great and British views of the tsar in the nineteenth century	103
7 Peter on the British stage	126
8 The British contribution to Petrine iconography	141
Epilogue	159
<i>Index</i>	168

## Plates

*Between pages 142 and 143*

- 1 Sir Godfrey Kneller, *Peter the Great* (1698). Royal Collection Enterprises © Her Majesty the Queen
- 2 Engraving by John Smith (1698), from the portrait by Kneller. Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 3 Engraving by William Faithorne (1698). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 4 Engraving by R. White (1698). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 5 Unsigned engraving by an unknown artist from the portrait by Kneller via Smith, for *The Northern Worthies* (London, 1728/30). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 6 Christopher Clarke MA. Engraving by John Faber Jr (1740), from the portrait by Johan van Diest. By permission of the Master and Fellows, Christ's College, Cambridge
- 7 'The Memorable Speech of Peter the Great'. Hand-coloured engraving by J. Halfhide (1757)
- 8–9 Tavern sign for the 'Czar of Muscovy' by an unknown artist (?second half of the eighteenth century)
- 10 Engraving in the *Universal Magazine* (1751), by Anthony Walker, from the engraving by P. Soubeyran of the portrait by L. Caravaque. Photo: British Library
- 11 Engraving by Thomas Major (1753), of the painting by Jacopo Amiconi, for Jonas Hanway, *Historical Account of British Trade* (London, 1753). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 12 'Peter the Great Emperor of Russia, "from an original painting in the possession of Alex<sup>r</sup> Gordon of Dorlathers"'. From Alexander Gordon, *History of Peter the Great* (Aberdeen, 1755), artist and engraver unknown. Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 13 Engraving by Theodor Spendlowe, from the portrait by Jan Kupetsky (?), in John Mottley, *History of the Life of Peter* (London, 1739). Photo: Cambridge University Library

- 14 Engraving by George Bickham Jr in John Banks, *History of the Life and Reign of the Czar Peter the Great* (London, 1740). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 15 Engraving by James Hulett, 1740s (?). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 16 'Peter the Great presents Truth, Religion and the Arts to ancient Russia'. Unsigned engraving from an original by F. Ottens (1725), in John Mottley, *History of the Life and Reign of the Empress Catherine* (London, 1744). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 17–19 Copper-plate engravings, unsigned, in W. H. Dilworth, *The Father of His Country . . .* (London, 1758)
- 20 'Peter the Great overcomes his Weakness'. Engraving by Gompertz in [Selina Bunbury], *Anecdotes of Peter the Great* (London, [1843]). Photo: British Library
- 21 Unsigned illustration in M. E. Benson, *Story of Russia* (London, 1885). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 22 Illustration by W. H. Stacey, in William Russell, *Extraordinary Men* (London, 1853). Photo: Cambridge University Library
- 23 Illustration by W. H. Stacey, in Fred Whishaw, *Boris the Bear-Hunter* (London, 1894)
- 24 Drawing by P. Falconet, engraved by James Basire, in *Gentleman's Magazine* (1783)
- 25 Drawing by A. Swinton, in his *Travels into Norway, Denmark, and Russia* (London, 1792). Photo: British Library
- 26 Unsigned engraving from the engraving by Boutrois in P. Chantreau, *Philosophical, Political and Literary Travels in Russia* (Perth, 1794). Photo: British Library
- 27 Caricature of the Bronze Horseman, unknown artist (?late eighteenth century)
- 28 Engraving by T. Smith from a drawing by W. M. Craig (1816)
- 29 Engraving by J. Clark, from a watercolour by J. T. James in his *Journal of a Tour* (London, 1816)
- 30 Robert Ker Porter, *The Battle of Hangö* (?1806)
- 31 Daniel Maclise, *Peter I in Deptford, 1698* (1857). By permission of Royal Holloway, University of London
- 32 Illustration by Morris Meredith Williams, in Alice Birkhead, *Peter the Great* (London, 1915)

## *Prologue to a visit*

Many were the British visitors to Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who, deploring what they saw, consoled themselves with the thought: *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, Britannos!* It was a view that had found perhaps its first and most colourful expression already in the sixteenth century, less than two decades after the unexpected British 'discovery' of Russia. George Turbervile, secretary to Sir Thomas Randolph's diplomatic mission to Muscovy in 1568, penned three verse epistles to friends in London, in the last of which he suggested:

Wild Irish are as civil as the Russies in their kind;  
 Hard choice which is the best of both, each bloody, rude, and blind.  
 If thou be wise, as wise thou art, and wilt be rul'd by me,  
 Live still at home and covet not those barbarous coasts to see.

Turbervile had much else to say about Russians, 'a people passing rude to vices vile inclin'd', which he did not hesitate to detail. 'Drink is their whole desire, the pot is all their guile', he assured Edward Dancie; and that, in consequence, 'the monster more desires a boy within his bed/Than any wench, such filthy sin ensues a drunken head'. 'Spencer', addressee of the second poem and possibly the poet Edmund Spenser, is regaled with a more restrained and perceptive account of the peasants' hard lot and of certain of their more acceptable customs and practices. This is continued in the third and last poem to Parker, containing a Breughel-like evocation of the Russian male (following a far from flattering portrayal of painted wives in the first epistle): 'The Russie men are round of bodies, fully fac'd,/The greatest part with bellies big that overhang the waist,/Flat-headed for the most, with faces nothing fair/But brown by reason of the stove and closeness of the air.' But before acknowledging that, 'if I would describe the whole, I fear my pen would faint', he had highlighted the tyranny of the system 'In such a savage soil where laws do bear no sway,/But all is at the king his will to save or else to slay,/And that sans cause, God wot, if so his mind be such.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quotations are here taken from Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey (eds.), *Rude & Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers* (Madison, Milwaukee and London, 1968), pp. 75–84.

Turberville's poems, published for the first time in 1587, became relatively widely known by the end of the sixteenth century, following their inclusion in Richard Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589 and 1598–1600). Despite the more sober descriptions of the early navigators which accompanied the poems in Hakluyt's collection and which were to form the basis of John Milton's *Brief History of Muscovia* (1682), the negative impressions of Turberville, notwithstanding Hakluyt's removal of the lines on sodomy, were inevitably to become persuasive elements in the early image of what was perceived as a 'rude and barbarous kingdom'. Similar prudence, rather than prudery, brought similar and more extensive surgery to Giles Fletcher's renowned *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, which Hakluyt added to the second edition of his collection. The first edition of Fletcher's book, appearing in 1591, had been suppressed after the intervention of the Muscovy Company, fearful of possible Russian reaction and reduction of trade. Interventions and excisions were not able, however, to change or even to modify attitudes that were content to feed on the quaint and the exotic, the dark and the dreadful.

Fletcher was a scholar whose analysis of the Russian system of government was unparalleled, but it was to be his observations on Russian life which were to make the greatest impact on both contemporary readers and subsequent commentators. Fletcher's Muscovy is essentially one in which tyranny, ignorance and debauchery reign at all levels of society. He insistently links a despotic ruler with a despotic church. He is particularly hostile to the practices and practitioners of the Orthodox Church, believing that 'all this mischief [from doctrinal errors] cometh from the clergy, who, being ignorant and godless themselves, are very wary to keep the people likewise in their ignorance and blindness, for their living and bellies' sake, partly also from the manner of government settled among them, which the emperors (whom it specially behooveth) list not to have changed by any innovation but to retain that religion that best agreeth with it'.<sup>2</sup> It was Fletcher who also was the first British author to provide a pen picture of a reigning tsar, in this case, of Fedor Ivanovich, who reigned between 1584 and 1598. Worthy of quotation in its own right, it also forms a striking beginning to a gallery which would be dominated by images of the great Peter:

The emperor that now is (called Fedor Ivanovich) is for his person of a mean stature, somewhat low and gross, of a sallow complexion, and inclining to the dropsy, hawk-nosed, unsteady in his pace by reason of some weakness of his limbs, heavy and inactive, yet commonly smiling almost to a laughter. For quality otherwise

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

simple and slow witted but very gentle and of an easy nature, quiet, merciful, of no martial disposition nor greatly apt for matter of policy, very superstitious and infinite that way.<sup>3</sup>

Fletcher wrote at a time when British curiosity about Russia was intense and was reflected in the numerous, frequently amusing references to the country, its inhabitants, their mores and their weather that appeared in the plays and poems of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. It was a curiosity that was not sustained and nourished during the seventeenth century by the information provided in the few new works to appear.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, during much of the century Anglo-Russian relations were at a low ebb: 'the excessive love of Gain and Traffick' that Milton rightly believed had animated British interest in Russia was thwarted by successful Dutch competition, and the Civil War and the execution of Charles I put an end to meaningful diplomatic contacts until long after the Restoration. *Of the Russe Commonwealth* was to appear in several editions down the seventeenth century and those who were to write of Muscovy from afar, such as Milton, and from within, such as Dr Samuel Collins, physician to Aleksei Mikhailovich, father of Peter the Great, essentially echoed Fletcher's (and Turbervile's) prejudices.

Russian wilful ignorance and obscurantism became a leitmotif in every account. Milton literally followed Fletcher in protesting that 'they have no learning, nor will suffer it to be among them', whereas Collins in his posthumously published *Present State of Russia* (1671) colourfully depicted the Russians as 'wholly devoted to their own Ignorance . . . look[ing] upon Learning as a Monster, and fear[ing] it no less than a Ship of Wildfire'.<sup>5</sup> Collins, who had intended to write a biography of Ivan IV, the Terrible, 'a stout Prince, but had many strange humours', also vies with Fletcher with a memorable portrait of Aleksei Mikhailovich, the father of Peter the Great:

His Imperial Majesty is a goodly person, two months older than Charles the Second, of a sanguine complexion, light brown hair, his beard uncut, he is tall and fat, of a majestical Deportment, severe in his anger, bountiful, charitable, chastly uxorious, very kind to his Sisters and Children, of a strong memory, strict in his Devotions, and a favourer of his Religion; and had not he such a cloud of Sycophants and jealous Nobility about him, who blind his good intentions, no doubt he might be numbred amongst the best

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British views of Russia, see M. S. Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia, 1553–1815* (London, 1958), chaps. 1–2.

<sup>5</sup> John Milton, *A Brief History of Muscovia: and of other less-known Countries lying eastward of Russia as far as Cathay* (London, 1682), p. 21; [Samuel Collins], *The Present State of Russia in a Letter to a Friend at London* (London, 1671), p. 2.



and wisest of Princes: His Father [Mikhail, the first of the Romanovs] was a good lover of English men, and a man of peace; but this Emperour is of a warlike spirit, engaged against the Crim, Polacka and Swedes, with what success let time declare.<sup>6</sup>

In a compilation he made from various earlier sources, English as well as Adam Olearius's highly influential *Voyages and Travels of the Ambassadors sent by Frederick Duke of Holstein, to the Grand Duke of Muscovy* (English editions of 1662, 1666 and 1669), Jodocus Crull, Cambridge MD and miscellaneous author, wrote of 'the Discouragement of Learning and Sciences, their Knowledge, even of the Priests themselves, not reaching beyond Reading and Writing their own Language. The reason of it is obvious; for as much as Ignorance makes people supple, and conduces much to the easie Conservation of what by a long Custom and Education has been implanted in them; whereas Knowledge is merely without Ambition.'<sup>7</sup> Crull, however, was writing on the eve of the momentous visit to England of Peter I at the beginning of 1698. The picture of a barbaric Russia would continue to be drawn with gusto but the context was changing to allow a study in chiaroscuro. Russia was to be led from its Dark Ages into the light by 'a most Genuine and Active Prince', who 'by his Travels into these parts being convinced of the incomparable benefits both Prince and People enjoy under such Governments as are founded on the Basis of their own Laws, and not the Arbitrary Will of their Princes, should be so generous as to make his Subjects partakers of so great a Bliss'.<sup>8</sup> The British would not be slow to emphasize the crucial nature of their own contribution.

What did the British know of Peter before he arrived in London? The answer is, not unexpectedly, very little. Peter (b. 1672) had ruled Russia as sole tsar only since 1696. During the preceding fourteen years he had shared the throne with his mentally retarded half-brother, Ivan (b. 1666) but, from 1682 to 1689, they were tsars in name only during the regency of Ivan's sister, the tsarevna Sophia (b. 1657).<sup>9</sup> In distant England, Charles II was duly informed by courier of the accession of the young tsars and sent his congratulations on 24 November 1682.<sup>10</sup> Four years later, in April 1686, Charles's brother and

<sup>6</sup> [Collins], *The Present State of Russia*, pp. 44–5. Cf. further descriptions of Aleksei on pp. 110–11, 125.

<sup>7</sup> [Jodocus] Crull, *The Antient and Present State of Muscovy, containing a Geographical, Historical and Political Account of all those Nations and Territories under the Jurisdiction of the Present Czar*, 1 (London, 1698), 171.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, iv.

<sup>9</sup> See Lindsey Hughes, *Sophia Regent of Russia 1657–1704* (New Haven and London, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> N. N. Bantysh-Kamenskii, *Obzor vneshnikh otnoshenii Rossii (po 1800 god)*, 1 (Moscow, 1894), 122.

successor, James II, received Lieutenant-General Patrick Gordon, a Scot desperate to quit Russian service but who had obtained permission to visit England and Scotland only after agreeing to leave his wife and children behind in Moscow as 'hostages', and the king 'asked many questions concerning the Tzars, the countrey, the state of affaires, the militia and government, as of my journey and many other particulars'.<sup>11</sup> It had been Gordon, incidentally, who over the previous twenty years had supplied information on Russian affairs for the *London Gazette*, founded in 1666 by Charles II.<sup>12</sup> In the following year, 1687, an envoy, Vasilii Postnikov, was sent to the English court to announce the signing of the Treaty of Eternal Peace between Russia and Poland in April 1686 and to solicit assistance in a campaign against the Turks, but the king, more interested in restoring English trading privileges, contented himself with commending 'that firme alliance made with those great Christian Powers against their Implacable Adversaryes the Infidells', while regretting that 'We be so farr remote that we cannot have our desyred share in the honor of those laudable Expeditions.'<sup>13</sup> The Russian reaction that 'we could agree well enough with your Kings father and brother, but we cannot come to right with this; he is proud beyond all measure' was subsequently recorded in his diary by Gordon, who was a staunch supporter of the king and who was to be appalled by his flight to France and the accession to the throne of William and Mary.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that the Catholic Gordon became increasingly a close and trusted associate (and admirer) of the young tsar during these years, Peter's sympathies were distinctly for the Protestants and for their champion against the French, King William. When the tsar was informed of William's victories over the Irish and the French, he 'jumped to his feet with joy and jubilated', then 'gave orders that on his newly constructed five ships they should fire merrily at full blast'.<sup>15</sup> Other events in the late 1680s conspired to consolidate these sympathies.

In April 1686 Gordon had crossed to England on a ship crowded with passengers, 'most wherof French, fleeing as they said, for their religion'.<sup>16</sup> Six

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, *Passages from the Diary of General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries in the Years 1635-1699* (London, 1968), p. 127.

<sup>12</sup> See Graham Herd, 'The *London Gazette* as a Source for Russian History, 1666-1700', *Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia Newsletter*, no. 22 (1994), 9-12.

<sup>13</sup> Letter of 4 December 1687 from James to Ivan and Peter, quoted in L. A. J. Hughes, 'V. T. Postnikov's 1687 Mission to London', *Slavonic and East European Studies*, 68 (1990), 459.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon, *Passages from the Diary of General Patrick Gordon*, p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Eekman, 'Muscovy's International Relations in the Late Seventeenth Century: Johan van Keller's Observations', *California Slavic Studies*, 14 (1992), 50.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon, *Passages from the Diary of General Patrick Gordon*, pp. 125-6.

months previously the French king, Louis XIV, had revoked the Edict of Nantes, inviting an inevitable backlash in those countries where Catholicism was already virtually a term of abuse. In Russia, where the Orthodox Church was alert to all foreign contamination, particularly from the Jesuits, an uneasy balance was nevertheless struck with the exigencies of foreign policy. Thus in the last months of Sophia's regency, on 16 January 1689, two French Jesuits, hoping to proceed through Russia to China, were expelled, in seeming Russian retaliation for the treatment accorded to their embassy in France in 1687, while, a few days later, there was issued under the names of Ivan and Peter a decree offering asylum in Russia to the French Huguenots. Instrumental in securing both the banishment of the Jesuits and the formulation of the decree was the Brandenburg envoy then in Moscow, Czaplitz. Within three months, this decree was published in English translation in London, where there was now a substantial and significant Huguenot community and where it had added important resonance in the wake of William and Mary's recent accession. *A Declaration of the Czaars of Muscovy against the French King in Favour of the poor Protestants Distress in this present Persecution* makes clear the intercession of Protestant Brandenburg in the granting of extensive privileges: 'our will and pleasure is, That all our Frontiers should lay open and free for them to come in. Moreover they shall be favourably entertained in the Service of our Majesties the Czaars, and shall every one of them obtain a reasonable Sallery, according to their Extraction, Condition, and Dignity. And in case any of the said Protestants should desire to return into their Country after they have served our Majesties the Czaars, they that desire to do so, shall no ways be hindered, but shall have free liberty to go.'<sup>17</sup>

The French Jesuits' account of their unhappy experiences in Russia was published in English translation in 1693<sup>18</sup> and reminded the British public of the anti-French stance of the Russians, already evident in the 1689 decree. In the interim the Russian tsar Peter and the English king William were beginning to come closer than any of their predecessors had been or immediate successors would be. The process was aided by the startling improvement in Anglo-Dutch relations and Holland became a bridge, rather than a barrier, between Russia and England. Johan van Keller, who had been the Dutch representative in Moscow since 1677 and frequently intrigued against the English, even reported in July 1692 that 'Here at the court it is mentioned *hautement* that it would not be inexpedient if His Majesty the King of Great Britain would honour me with some qualification with the sole purpose of

<sup>17</sup> Licensed 13 April 1689 and printed in London for E. Maret and C. Lucas, *A Declaration* is unknown, as far as I am aware, to scholars of Anglo-Russian relations at this period. The copy I have used is in the Cambridge University Library.

<sup>18</sup> Philippe Avril, *Travels into Divers Parts of Europe and Asia, Undertaken by the French King's Order to Discover a New Way by Land into China* (London, 1693).

maintaining a courteous contact in both directions. I could report on the noteworthy things happening in this country as well as in Poland, Tartary, and on the Turkish borders; and I could spread the word in these parts about the feats and triumphs of His Majesty King William.<sup>19</sup> Van Keller – it was he who had informed Peter about William’s victories – also added that ‘the young hero often expressed the desire to be in His Majesty King William’s army and take action against the French or to assist in a sea battle against them’.<sup>20</sup> It was to be Dutch newssheets which were to be the main source of information for Peter and his Russians about European affairs, not least about William’s feats of arms, and it was from Dutch newssheets that the *London Gazette* now seemed to draw its news about Russia. Gordon had ceased to be a supplier of news after 1687 and the quality of information declined to the extent that many of the interesting events of the 1690s, such as the creation of the Russian navy and the military events in the south, were not reported.<sup>21</sup> In 1697, however, it was Dutch sources that carried the most reliable and full information on the progress of the Great Embassy which had left Moscow in March of that year.

In December 1696, less than a year after the death of Tsar Ivan, Peter’s half-brother, an imperial decree was issued about the preparations for a Great Embassy, which would be headed by three ambassadors, Franz Lefort, Fedor Golovin and Prokopii Voznitsyn, and would visit Vienna, England, Holland, Brandenburg, Rome and Venice. In its meticulous preparation and detailed instructions about all aspects of diplomatic protocol it in no way differed from earlier embassies sent to foreign courts.<sup>22</sup> Above all, it was to be ever vigilant that the honour and status – and titles – of the tsar were no way besmirched or belittled. It was, however, an embassy that was truly extraordinary in having with it the tsar himself, and not as its head but travelling as Petr Mikhailov, the officer or *desiatnik* (decurion) of one of the three ten-man detachments of ‘volunteers’ accompanying the embassy. It is as the *desiatnik* that he is always described in the semi-official *Journal (Iurnal)* of the embassy, while in its official memoranda (*stateinyi spisok*), when his presence is not concealed, he is referred to as ‘the captain of the Preobrazhenskii regiment’ (*Preobrazhenskogo polku nachal’nyi chelovek*). It was a stratagem which fooled no one but was devised to allow Peter a degree of freedom of behaviour and movement which he could not otherwise have enjoyed. The ambassadors, headed by Lefort, were the official representatives, pursuing their diplomatic objectives of creating a coalition of states against Turkey, and it was for them

<sup>19</sup> Eekman, ‘Muscovy’s International Relations’, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66, n. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Herd, ‘*The London Gazette* as a Source for Russian History’, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> The relevant documents are to be found in *Pamiatniki diplomaticheskikh snoshenii drevnei Rossii s derzhavami inostrannymi*, VIII (St Petersburg, 1867).

that the receptions and dinners and entertainments were arranged by the host countries and cities. Many of these functions were attended by Peter, always incognito, but others he would forgo to pursue what really mattered to him.

The embassy journeyed via Riga, Mittau, Königsberg, Danzig and Berlin and on 10 August crossed into Holland.<sup>23</sup> It had earlier taken the decision not to proceed to Vienna, as was originally planned, on hearing of the congress at Ryswick, gathered to elaborate conditions for a peace with France. On reaching the Rhine, Peter had decided to part company with the main embassy and, accompanied by some twenty attendants, had made his way by river and canals to Amsterdam, where he arrived on 6 August and immediately proceeded to Zaandam. He knew of Zaandam from his acquaintances in the Foreign Quarter in Moscow and he was to find there people who had been in Russia. It was in the home of one of them, the smith Herrit Kist, that he was to live for the week he spent there, working in the shipyards, before being forced by the unwanted attention he inevitably attracted to retreat to Amsterdam to rejoin the main body of the embassy. This was one of the items duly registered in the London *Post Boy* under the dateline 'Hague 23 August [ns]': 'The Czar of Muscovy is to go to Amsterdam to pass 8 or 10 days, which has occasioned the King to put off his departure from Loo, to come hither. The Czar has been for some days at Sordam to see the Building of Ships, where he was ill treated by the Boys, who threw Stones at him; since which it has been forbid, upon pain of death, to do any harm to the Muscovites. The Prince is said to be 7 foot high.'<sup>24</sup>

The *Post Boy* and the *London Gazette* were over the next few months to provide their readers with reasonably detailed and accurate information about the activities of the Russians in Holland, particularly when they concerned William III and English interests. In such a context the first meeting between William and Peter naturally was a significant moment.

The Great Embassy entered Amsterdam on 16 August and over the next weeks Peter was frequently present, always incognito, when his ambassadors visited the theatre and institutions of social welfare, such as the homes for orphans and for the aged, were received at the town hall, and witnessed a great firework display and a mock sea battle, in which the tsar took part. They visited the East Indies wharf, where Peter himself was soon to work on a new ship, named 'Peter and Paul'. A few days later, the ambassadors travelled to Utrecht, where their formal audience with William III took place on Wednesday

<sup>23</sup> For detailed accounts of the embassy's activities in Holland, see M. A. Venevitinov, *Russkie v Gollandii. Velikoe posol'stvo 1697–1698 g.* (Moscow, 1897); M. M. Bogoslovskii, *Petr I. Materialy dlia biografii*, 11 (Leningrad, 1941), 141–290; Iozin Drissen, *Tsar' Petr i ego gollandskie druz'ia* (St Petersburg, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> *Post Boy*, no. 358 (Thursday 19 August–Saturday 21 August 1697).

1 September and was followed by the celebrated ‘secret’ meeting between the king and Peter. The *London Gazette* gave details of both meetings a few days later:

The King went on Wednesday last from Soetsdyke to Utrecht, where His Majesty gave Audience to the Russian Ambassadors and afterwards had an Interview with the Czar; which was at first intended to have been in the House belonging to the Teutonic Order, but the Czar desiring that it might be at a place to which he could come privately by Water, a convenient House was chosen for that purpose. The Audience being over, His Majesty and the Czar met in a small Gallery, into which they entred both at a time out of 2 adjoining Rooms and had a long Conference together, after which His Majesty returned to Soetsdyke, and the Czar and the Ambassadors to Amsterdam.<sup>25</sup>

It is the actual content of Peter’s conversation with William which was, and has remained, a subject of much speculation and ultimately inconclusive detective work. Soon after their meeting, versions of the speech of greeting which allegedly the tsar made on that occasion reached England. It seems most probable that Peter delivered the speech in Dutch, the foreign language he knew best, but no Dutch text was published in Holland or elsewhere at that period. However, a French version, entitled ‘Compliment du Grand CZAR de Moscovie, au ROI de la Grand’ Bretagne, a Utrecht’, was soon offered for sale by C. Lucas, the very bookseller for whom the English translation of Peter and Ivan’s edict on refuge for the Huguenots had been printed eight years previously.<sup>26</sup> A contemporary manuscript English text, virtually identical with the French version, was discovered in recent years among the Sutherland Papers in the National Library of Scotland,<sup>27</sup> but the existence of a printed English version from the mid-eighteenth century has hitherto been overlooked. Both English texts, identical apart from a few differences in spelling and punctuation, point to a single source, very possibly a lost printed version, also sold by Lucas. The later version, which is a hand-coloured single sheet and was published in 1748 and again in 1757, differs in its introduction with its reference to Peter *the Great* (a title only bestowed in 1721) and with the telling detail of

<sup>25</sup> *London Gazette*, no. 3321 (Monday 6 September–Thursday 9 September 1697).

<sup>26</sup> Very little is known about Lucas. He seems to be the Centurion Lucas, mentioned by Plomer as active in London in 1686–7, but he was obviously much more than ‘only a workman and not a master printer’: Henry R. Plomer, *Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1668 to 1725* (Oxford, 1922), p. 192.

<sup>27</sup> George Barany, *The Anglo-Russian Entente Cordiale of 1697–1698: Peter I and William III at Utrecht* (Boulder and New York, 1986).

the meeting having taken place ‘in a small Gallery’ (cf. the *London Gazette*).<sup>28</sup> Contemporary Russian sources made no mention of the speech (nor, indeed, of Peter’s meeting with William) and subsequent Russian historians have doubted its authenticity. Despite the fulsome nature of much of the wording, the basic sentiments expressed in the speech nonetheless correspond to what we know of the tsar’s attitude to the British monarch:<sup>29</sup>

Most Renowned Emperor,

It was not the desire of seeing the celebrated Cities of the German Empire or the most potent Republic of the universe that made me leave my Throne in a distant Country and my victorious Armies: but the vehemental passion alone of seeing the most brave and most generous Hero of the Age.

I have my wish & am sufficiently recompenced for my travel in being admitted into your presence your kind Embraces have given me more Satisfaction than the taking of Azoph & triumphing over the Tartars, but the conquest is yours your martial Genius directed my sword and the generous emulation of your exploits instill’d into my breast the first thoughts I had of enlarging my dominions.

I cannot express in words the veneration I have for your sacred person my unparall’d journey is one proof of it.

The season is so far advanced & I hope the peace too that I shall not have the opportunity wch Maximilian had of fighting under the banner of England against France the common destroyer of the liberties of Europe.

<sup>28</sup> This version presents a mystery which is still to be satisfactorily explained. A photograph of the 1757 printed sheet appeared for the first time in M. P. Alekseev, *Russko-angliiskie literaturnye sviazi (XVIII vek–pervaia polovina XIX veka) (Literaturnoe nasledstvo, xci)* (Moscow, 1982), p. 72, wrongly dated as London, 1698. Its provenance was given as the British Museum, but despite my searches in the Departments of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Drawings and Engravings, it has proved impossible to locate it. I have thus worked with magnifying glass from the photograph and I have been able to establish most of the text. More recently, I discovered a reference to the 1748 version in the guide to the exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1967, *Great Britain–USSR: An Historical Exhibition* (London, 1967), p. 16, item 37. The item is neither described nor illustrated, but the engraver is given as J. Halfhide and the provenance as the London Borough of Lewisham. Despite the best efforts of the Lord Mayor’s Secretary and the Borough Archivist, this engraving also could not be found.

<sup>29</sup> The discoverer of the French text of 1697 and the decisive advocate of the view that ‘a scrutiny of the entire material leaves little room for doubt that in spite of its fictitious literary make-up the speech was based on utterances made by Peter’ was Leo Loewenson, ‘The first Interviews Between Peter I and William III in 1697: Some Neglected English Material’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 36 (1958), 308–16. This view was supported by Jake V. Th. Knoppers, ‘Tsar Peter and Utrecht’, *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*, 1 (1979), 18, and by Barany, *The Anglo-Russian Entente*.

If the war continues I and my armies will readily observe your orders & if either in peace or war your industrious Subjects will trade to the most northern parts of the world the ports of Russia shall be free for them I will grant them greater Immunities than ever they yet have & have them enrolled among the most precious records of my empire to be a perpetual memorial of the esteem I have for the worthiest of Kings.<sup>30</sup>

It appears that both rulers were highly satisfied with their encounter. A little-known contemporary source, which reveals the name of the inn where they met, asserts that ‘il a abbouché environ une heure avec le Roy Guillaume dans l’auberge apellé le Toelast. En partant d’icy i’ay vu le dernier, qui paroît fort gré et content de cette conference, ou ces deux Potentats, selon i’ay entendu ont traité des affaires très importants.’<sup>31</sup>

Further evidence that detailed information about the meeting was not slow to reach London is contained in two other sources. In a sermon of thanksgiving for the Peace of Ryswick, which he delivered before the king on 2 December 1697, Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, seemed to incorporate clear echoes of Peter’s speech, when he alluded to ‘a much greater King, lying at a vaster Distance, leaves his Throne and Dominions in the midst of War, struck with the Fame, and amaz’d at the Actions of this Prince. Instead of a little Southern Queen [the Queen of Sheba, visiting Solomon], a mighty Northern Emperor, cover’d with Lawrels, and us’d to Victories, resolving to raise his Nation, and enlarge his Empire, comes to learn the best Methods of doing it, and goes away full of Wonder, possessed with truer Notions of Government.’<sup>32</sup> Somewhat earlier, under the dateline 14/24 October, ‘an abstract of the czars speech to his majestie’, but nonetheless detailed and accurate, had appeared in the diary of Narcissus Luttrell (1657–1732), a scholarly recluse who scrupulously culled his information from newspapers and similar sources.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> There is a third version, also unremarked but also published in the eighteenth century, which shows a few minor variations in wording and punctuation from the text reproduced here: [John Thane], *British Autography: A Collection of Fac-Similes of the Hand Writing of Royal and Illustrious Personages, with Their Authentic Portraits*, 111 (London, [1793]), 37–8.

<sup>31</sup> Jan Van Damin in a letter of 13/23 September 1697 from Utrecht to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, quoted in Anna Maria Crinò, ‘La visita di Pietro il Grande in Inghilterra dalle lettere di Thomas Platt ad Apollonio Bassetti’, *Nuova rivista storica*, 37 (1953), 442.

<sup>32</sup> Gilbert, Lord Bishop of Sarum, *A Sermon Preach’d before the King, at Whitehall, on the Second of December, 1697, being the Day of Thanksgiving for the Peace* (2nd edn, London, 1698), p. 12. Burnet, however, had been informed by Leibniz in a letter of 24 August 1697 about the tsar’s journey and his intentions (Bogoslovskii, *Petr I*, 11, 324–5).

<sup>33</sup> Narcissus Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714*, 1v (Oxford, 1857), 291.



Luttrell, incidentally, had described the historic encounter between the two monarchs in an entry for 7 September and added that, ‘at parting, his majestie [William III] invited him to dine with him next day, but which he accepted, but afterwards excused it, by reason of the great crowds that came from all parts of Holland, which made him uneasy; and returning with his ambassadors by water to Amsterdam, sent a compliment to the king offering to meet at dinner any other time and place his majestie should appoint’.<sup>34</sup> The opportunity was not long in coming and on 7 September the monarchs dined at Zuylesteyn near Utrecht. As the *Post Boy* informed its readers, ‘tis said that the Czar of Muscovy was so highly pleased with the magnificent Dinner the King of Great Britain entertained him with, and our manner of Eating, that he merrily Invited himself again’.<sup>35</sup>

There were a number of events and developments at this period which conspired to bring the two monarchs closer together. In the same entry (12 October) in which he registered the successful negotiations for the Peace of Ryswick, as well as the troubles in Poland, where the supporters of the French-sponsored Prince Conti were in conflict with the newly elected king, Augustus II, Luttrell noted that William ‘has presented the czar of Muscovy with the Royal Transport yacht, being the best sailer we had’, and added that ‘tis now said again he will accompany his majestie for England some time next month’.<sup>36</sup> Francophobia provided a solid plank of mutual understanding, but both rulers pursued their own agendas in which commercial interests typically loomed large on the British side and Peter looked for support in the struggle against the Turks and was intent on his own and his country’s technological advancement. News of Russian victories over the Turks arrived in Holland at approximately the same time and the *Post Boy* was soon informing its readers that ‘tis said that His Majesty will permit some of His Officers to take Service under the Czar of Muscovy at the Request of his Czarish Majesty, to be employed against the Turks and Tartars’.<sup>37</sup> William for his part was anxious to promote the cause of the Russia Company and achieve the restoration of all trading privileges that had been suspended in 1648. In particular, the British were concerned to secure the importation of tobacco into Russia. A broadsheet entitled *Heads of some of those Advantages this Nation might enjoy, by encouraging the Tobacco Trade to Russia, and the Loss it suffers by fetching our Naval Stores from the Suede’s Dominions* was published in London and the British plenipotentiaries at Ryswick were instructed to introduce questions of trade into their earliest negotiations with the tsar or

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>35</sup> *Post Boy*, no. 371 (Saturday 18 September–Tuesday 21 September 1697).

<sup>36</sup> Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation*, 1 v, 290. For the best analysis of the political background, see Barany, *The Anglo-Russian Entente*, pp. 15ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Post Boy*, no. 372 (Tuesday 21 September–Thursday 23 September 1697).

his ambassadors. It was a letter from the British delegation's secretary, Matthew Prior, written shortly after the Utrecht meeting at the beginning of September, that brings together many of the various strands that were at play:

The King has seen the Czar of Muscovy *incognito* at Utrecht. The immediate use we endeavour to make of him is that he would allow tobacco to be imported into his dominions, which has been forbid since the year '48. His own inclinations oblige him to carry on a war with the Turk, and for that purpose to get a fleet ready for the Black Sea. He is absolutely against the French, and that aversion may contribute a good deal towards settling the crown of Poland upon the Elector of Saxony.<sup>38</sup>

In this general context William's gift of a state-of-the-art yacht proved a masterstroke of timing and diplomacy, appealing both to Peter's ambitions to create a navy and to his personal passion for the sea and for messing about in boats, and, totally unexpectedly, leading to the acquisition of the tobacco monopoly.

The *Royal Transport's* designer was Peregrine Osborne, Marquis of Carmarthen and Admiral of the Fleet, who was to become a major player in Peter's activities in London. He learnt in early October of William's 'intention to gratify the Czar of Muscovy with the *Royall Transport* as soon as she is fitted up, and therefore, desiring, having been the contriver of that vessell, he may be permitted to put her in a better sailing condition than he supposes her to be at present, by the alteration of her foremast and otherwise'.<sup>39</sup> On 9 November he wrote to Peter, whom he hailed as 'most serene Potentate and Defender of the Christian Faith, who had pursued his noble intent and deeds against the general enemy, the Turk and the Crimean Khan', not only to introduce himself as the designer of the yacht and to highlight its unique features, but also strongly to recommend William Ripley as uniquely qualified to be its captain, for 'he is the only one who has studied completely the details of my design and who knows how to rig and operate its sails'.<sup>40</sup> Peter's curiosity was instantly aroused and he sent a special emissary, Adam Weide, to London, officially in the name of the first ambassador Lefort, to inform William about

<sup>38</sup> Historical Manuscripts Commission, LVIII, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath*, III (London, 1908), 151–2.

<sup>39</sup> Public Record Office, Adm 1/4086, f. 35, quoted in W. F. Ryan, 'Peter the Great's English Yacht, Admiral Lord Carmarthen and the Russian Tobacco Monopoly', *Mariner's Mirror*, 69 (1983), 66. Ryan's article is essential reading for everything concerning the yacht and its designer.

<sup>40</sup> The English original of Carmarthen's letter is not extant; a contemporary Russian version was printed in N. Ustrialov, *Istoriia tsarstvovaniia Petra Velikogo*, III (St Petersburg, 1858), prilozhenie no. 3, 466–7.

recent Russian victories over the Turks, but also to inspect the craft and find out when it would be ready.<sup>41</sup>

There was growing excitement in London that a visit from the tsar was imminent. Luttrell's diary entries for November–December indicate that rumours were rife that indeed he had already arrived, incognito. On 6 November, for instance, he recorded that 'Some dayes since 5 foreigners of note were at the Tower to see the rarities there, haveing an order from court for that purpose; and withal the officers had instructions not to take any money of them: some will have that they were Russians, and the czar among them', while on 18 November he wrote that 'Most people are of opinion that the czar of Moscovy is here incognito, and the rather, for that sir John Wolfe, one of the last sherifs, who was acquainted with him at Moscow, and understands the language, was absent at the cavalcade on Tuesday', and finally on 14 December that same Sir John was said to have taken three Muscovites to Parliament, 'one of them in a green vest, richly lined with furr, supposed to be the czar'.<sup>42</sup>

During these weeks, however, Peter was busy in the shipyards; in his own subsequent version of events it was because of a dissatisfaction not so much with the end product but with the science or 'art' of achieving it that decided him finally to visit England:

he made a Tour to Holland himself, and at Amsterdam, in the Wood-yard call'd the Ostend-Wharf, he wrought with other Voluntiers in the Ships, and in a little Time made that Proficiency as to pass for a good Carpenter. After this, he desir'd John Pool, Master of the Yard, to instruct him in the Proportions of a Ship, which he learn'd in four Days. But because in Holland, this Art was not taught perfectly, in the Mathematical Way, but only some Principles of it, and the rest must be acquir'd by long Practice and Experience; and the abovesaid Master told him, that they could not demonstrate this in Lines: It gave him a great Uneasiness, that he had undertaken so long a Journey for that Purpose, and had fail'd of his End, so much desir'd . . . An English Man in the Company who heard this, told him, that with us in England, this kind of Structure was in the same Perfection as other Arts and Sciences, and might be learn'd in a short Time. His Majesty was glad to hear this, and hereupon went in all haste to England, and there, in four Months Time, finish'd his Learning.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Bogoslovskii, *Petr I*, 11, 271.

<sup>42</sup> Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation*, 1v, 302, 307, 318.

<sup>43</sup> Contemporary translation by Thomas Consett from the 'Introduction' to Peter's *Naval Regulation (Morskoi reglament)* in James Cracraft (ed.), *For God and Peter the Great: The Works of Thomas Consett, 1723–1729* (Boulder, 1982), pp. 214–15.

The embassy was to remain in Amsterdam for exactly nine months, until 15 May 1698, but by November its essential business had been completed and the ambassadors and their suite were to mark time while Peter, incognito to be sure, and fifteen further 'volunteers' made their 'private' visit to England. Suitable 'German' clothing was ordered for the group; English money to the tune of 157 guineas was acquired and handed over to Aleksandr Menshikov, Peter's favourite, who was to act as treasurer; precious sables were selected as gifts. On 26 December 1697, Weide, Peter's emissary, returned with a flotilla, under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir David Mitchell, sent by King William to convey the tsar to London. On 7 January 1698 the Russian party left Amsterdam and made its way to Helvoetsluis, where Peter boarded Mitchell's flagship, the *Yorke*, and set sail for England on 9 January.