

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 Neuhaus, 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., *Élections et pouvoirs politiques du VII^e au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions Bière, 2008).

2 Succession to the Throne in Early Modern Russia

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 Conjuratioque Flammae restringuntur, omnesque anxii subsequentium Aetatum Metus omnino discutiuntur): Thomas Rymer, *Foedera*, 2nd ed. (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1727), vol. 16, 688–690, 792–794 (quotation 689).

4 Succession to the Throne in Early Modern Russia

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 (*ondolement*), 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: Tipografiia Vtorogo otdeleniia sobstvennoi E.I.V. Kantseliarii, 1857), vol. 1, 1. On the Digest, see Marc Raeff, *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 Andreievicha 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: Izobretenie novykh smyslov starykh slov," in *Istoricheskie poniatiia i politicheskie idei v Rossii*, ed. Nikolai Koposov (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.

8 Succession to the Throne in Early Modern Russia

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 absoliutizme i klassovoi bor’be: 20-e–nachalo 50-kh godov* (Tiumen’: Mandr i ko., 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 Crummey 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 terora* (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. Crummey, *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, "Vdovstvuushchee 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).