

Peter

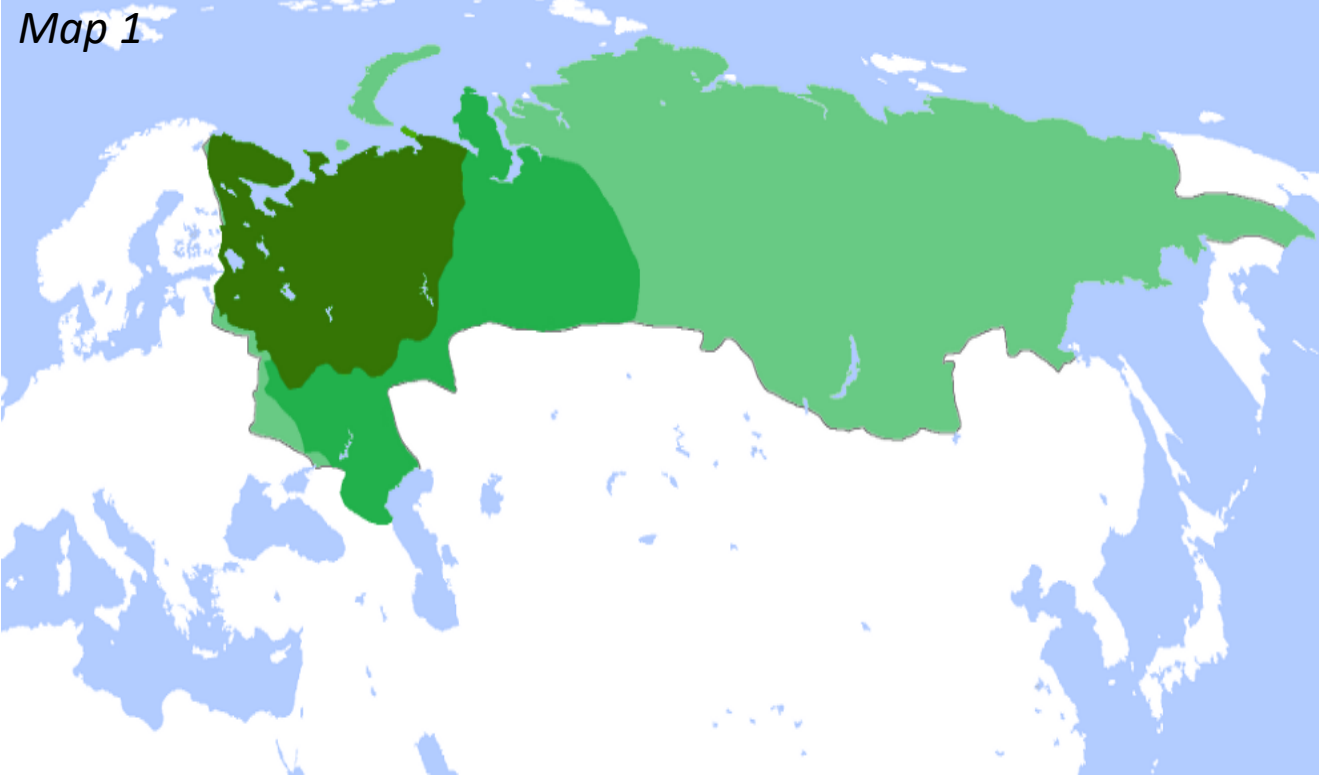
Peter the Great transforms Russia - Introduction

Just a few points to highlight the relevance of maps and diagrams.

Russia in the 17th and 18th century was a product (inheritor) of 3 major influences that underpinned (and challenged) Peter the Great's legitimacy.

1. Mongol vassalage of the 13th and 14th century, during which Moscow learnt economic, military and administrative lessons that helped create it as a centralised, militaristic and expansionist entity. This contributed to its dominant position vis a vis other Rus city states from the 14th century onwards. The prolonged and ongoing Asiatic encounters also shaped its social and cultural outlook. "The Muscovy that emerged from the Mongol yoke had become closed and inward-looking." (Martin Sixsmith 'Russia' 2012)
2. Moscow had a claim to ethnic and historical legitimacy through the Norse/Slavic medieval Kievan kingdom. This meant it inherited the credentials of the Rurikid dynasty along with origin stories/myths of the need for an authoritarian/strongman ruler to maintain order and justice (*pravda*). This is echoed in Peter's use of the Hobbesian 17th century philosophical justification for absolutism, whereby the social contract with a 'Leviathan' ruler protects the populous from their 'short and brutish' existence in nature (see quotes slide 4). Once, by the 16th century, Moscow had established its dominance over the eastern area of the former Kievan state it had claim to the hegemony of the 'Rus' population; 'Tsar of All the Rus' was included in official titles from Ivan III onwards. However, as shown by map 2 the western part was, in the 17th century, under the political control of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth where the Rus population was referred to by the Latin name Ruthenians. These conflicting hegemonic claims were a major source of warfare on Russia's western border.
3. Moscow claimed inheritance of the Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire (a 'Third Rome') and guardianship of Greek Christian Orthodoxy after the fall of Constantinople (1453). Greek orthodoxy was translated into 'Old Church Slavonic' in the 9th century and in 988AD the Kievan ruler Prince Vladimir (later Saint) was baptised and the state became officially Christian. Byzantine/Orthodox rituals and ideology dominated the Russian court in the 17th century as summed up by Martin Sixsmith's quote (slide 3).

Peter's upbringing away from the Moscow Court and its religious indoctrination, along with his familiarity with European advisors, mercenaries and merchants gave him a vision of Westernising Russia. This was reinforced during his diplomatic mission to western European countries (the 'Embassy') in 1687/8.



Territory of the Tsardom of Russia in AD 1500, 1600 and 1700

The **Tsardom of Russia** or **Tsardom of Rus** also called the **Tsardom of Muscovy**, was the centralized Russian state from the assumption of the title of Tsar by Ivan IV in 1547 until the foundation of the Russian Empire by Peter the Great in 1721.

From 1551 to 1700, Russia grew by 35,000 km² per year. The period includes many wars with the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Sweden and the Ottoman Empire as well as the Russian conquest of Siberia.



In the 17th century the name Russia co-existed with the old name Rus'. In 1547, Ivan IV assumed the title of "Tsar and Grand Duke of all Rus'" The state was still referred to as Moscovia (English: Muscovy) throughout Europe. **The term Moscovia was a result of the need to distinguish between the Muscovite and the Lithuanian part of the Rus'**, as well as of the political interests of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which competed with Moscow for the western regions of the Rus'/Ruthenians (Latin).

17th Century AUTOCRACY

Historical Influences

Mongol Vassalage

Militarised

Centralised

Expansionist

“the Tartars left a profound trace on boyar customs and habits.”
(Natasha’s Dance by Orlando Figes)

“Russia was a frontier society par excellence, an invitation to continuous expansion.”
(Russia’s Steppe Frontier by Michael Khodarkovsky 2002)

Tsardom of Muscovy and All The Rus
(The title ‘Tsar’ represents the Slavic adaptation of the Roman Imperial title/name Caesar)

Nobility (Boyars)

Hereditary/Service (10% Pop)
(*Pomestria – land for service*)
(*Kormlenie – lit. fed in return for protection*)
“unfettered licence to rip off the people”
(M Sixsmith)

Russian Orthodox Church

Vernacular liturgy
(*Old Church Slavonic*)
“life was regulated by the archaic rituals of the church” (O Figes)

Peasantry

(90% Pop)

mir (harmony) assemblies

veche (urban assemblies)

Serfdom

(Imposed and increasingly supported by State)

Population approx. 14 mil in late 17th century (66,000 in Siberia)

Ideological Underpinning (Legitimacy)

Monarchs Titles

Origin Myth (Rurik – Strong Overlord)

Ethnic Inheritance (Kievan Rus)

Cultural Inheritance (Byzantine, 3rd Rome)

Religious Inheritance
(Greek Orthodoxy)



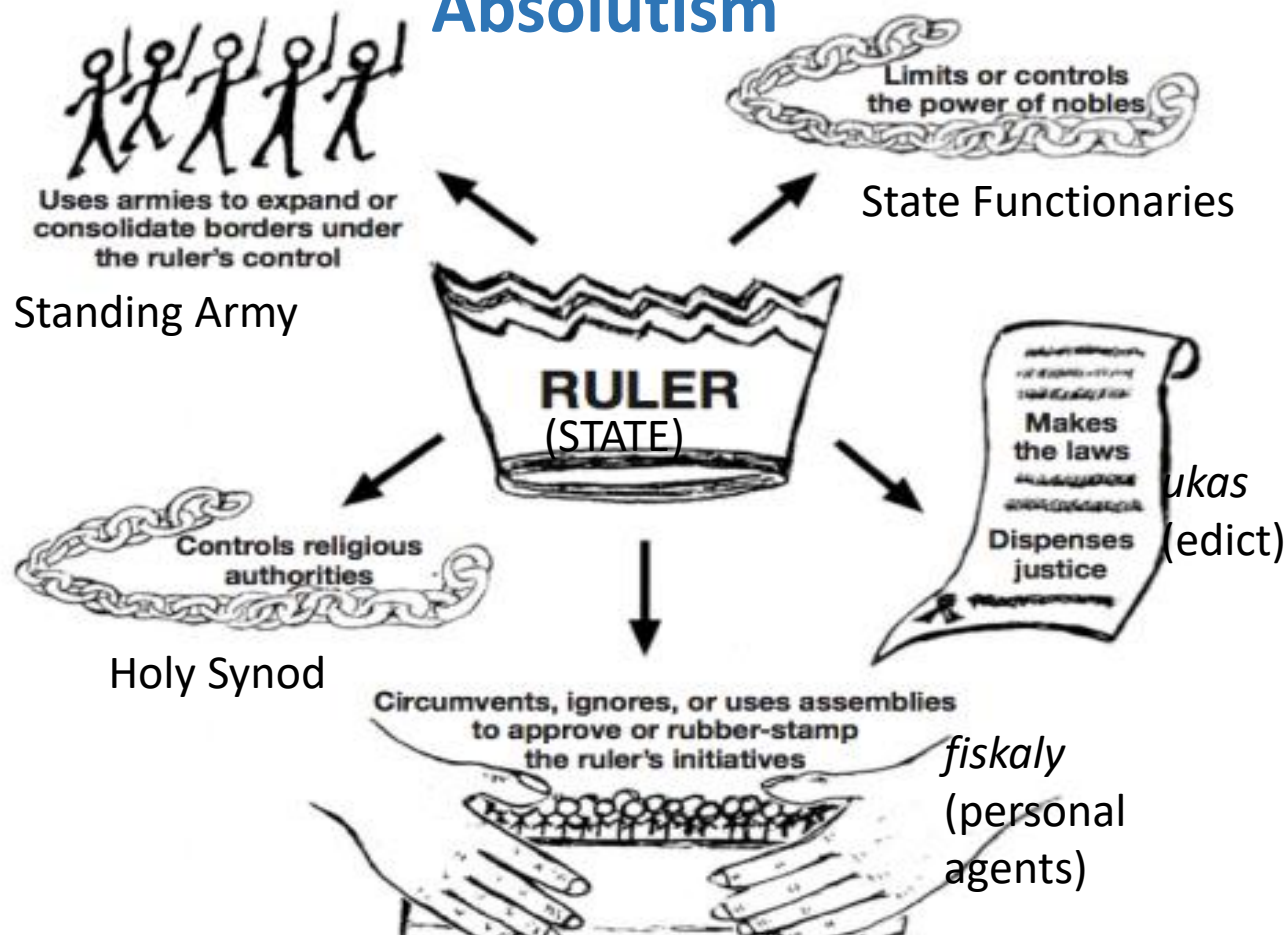
The three-barred cross of the Russian Orthodox Church



1667: Coat of arms of the Tsardom of Russia with the double headed eagle of the Byzantine Empire

In Russia the Orthodox Christian Church had bequeathed to Moscow the trappings of the now defunct Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine) – a ‘Third Rome’ ruled by a divinely anointed autocrat (Russia – M Sixsmith 2012)

Absolutism



Peter gradually transformed his power base from Autocracy (dependent on support of Nobility and Church) to Absolutism. His political legitimacy was based on four major ideological concepts:

Monarchy: Head of state hereditary. Not only political-administrative organisation but also a “court society” (nobility linked to the dynasty through personal bonds). Believed to have a sacred right to rule.

Patrimonialism: The Ruler treats his realm as his property rather than a society. "a regime where the rights of sovereignty and those of ownership blend to the point of being indistinguishable." *Richard Pipes, Russia under the Old Regime*

Absolutism: The Ruler had absolute power over his realm.
Statism: Repudiates individualism and exalts the nation as an organic body headed by a supreme leader and nurtured by unity, force and discipline, individuals have a moral obligation to serve the state.

Scepticism towards statism rooted in Enlightenment philosophy. John Locke 1689, i.e. that people's rights existed before government.

“where there are huge territories, open frontiers, and most of all, an illiterate and unenlightened public ruled more by fear than its own interests (absolute) monarchy is required.” (Vassilly Tatishchev 18th Century statesman/historian and supporter of Peter the Great)

Peter's " Jesuit-trained ecclesiastical adviser, argued that the Byzantine 'symphony' of Tsar and Patriarch had misled believers into imagining that Russia had two equal rulers. He advanced the view ... that the ruler's will was not limited by God's law since it was itself an expression of God's law." (Russian History by Geoffrey Hosking)

Peter created a "well-ordered police state" that further legitimized and strengthened authoritarian rule in Russia". (Cracraft, James. The Revolution of Peter the Great. 2003)

Peter The Great's Transformation Of Russia

(Some changes had been underway since the mid 17th century under Alexis and Feodor)

"Russia's Westernising policies became increasingly evident from the 1650s" (Russia's Empires. Philip Longworth 2005)

Reforms were extensive in pursuit of an efficient 'normal State' and reflect foreign influences of advisers and 'The Embassy'.

Shipbuilding (*Netherlands*) – Created Russian Navy (85 ships of the line +800 smaller vessels by 1725).

Modern Army (*Austria*) – Conscript (365,000 peasants drafted - chosen by landlord or village assembly) standing army (200,000 in 1725)

Manufacture (*England*) – military priorities produced: expanded woolen cloth and arms industry, and an expansion of iron production

City Planning (*France/Italy*) – St Petersburg (New Capital). 'a great leap from darkness into light'. Nobles were commanded to move to the new capital en masse.

Revenue (*England*) – Mercantilism, Import/Export, Military consumed 80%, (Poll Tax on peasantry), "Between 1710-1725 the States revenue increased threefold". (P Longworth, Russia's Empires, 2005)

Monarch as head of Church (*England*) – Abolished Patriarch, Church administered by 'Absolutist State', Monarchy by 'Divine Right'.

Orthodox Church – Established 'Holy Synod' (Swedish protestant model), Monasteries as agents of social security (help for poor, sick and army veterans), Parish priests (trained & appointed on merit), political duty to report anti-state activity (overrode pastoral duty).

Culture (*France*) – Fashion, clothing/language/etiquette, Gender roles, Beard Tax "the attack on beards symbolised a change in mindset"

Calendar (*European*) – adopted Julian (Catholic) not Gregorian (7207 became 1700), Changed start of New Year (1st Sept – 1st Jan).

Administration (*Sweden/Denmark/France*) – Efficient 'Statist' Bureaucracy e.g. Regional Governors/Ministries 'colleges'/Table of Ranks (theoretically open to all classes of the society, in place of the nobility-only 'mestnichestvo' which Feodor III had abolished in 1682).

Education (*France*) – Nobles to train in a skill useful to State (civilian or military), Foreign excursions. Compulsory maths and geometry.

Political Structure (*France*) – Statism/Absolutism ('The Age of Absolutism'), Russian Empire (1721), Creates 'Governing Senate' 1711 (10 members all appointed by Tsar)

Ideology (*European*) – Divine Right, Hobbes's 'Leviathan', 'Spiritual Regulations', adopted the Latin title 'Russorum Imperator'

Social Structure (*Russian*) - Reinforced 'Serfdom' on peasantry, Increased social division (Europeanisation of Elite), Nobles benefitted from 'modified meritocracy' (didn't endanger their domination of political & social life)

PETER THE GREAT'S MODERNISING & 'WESTERNISING'

"opening a 'window on Europe' has become the defining metaphor of his reign" (M Sixsmith 'Russia' 2002)

Most of Peter's widespread changes were borrowed and adapted from those of other European states. "*Mimicking the powerful allows a weak country to share vicariously in the enormous stature and prestige of an authentic Versailles*" (Ken Jowitt, - *Communism, Democracy and Golf 2001*, quoted in '*The Light that Failed*', Krastev/Holmes 2019)

Peter wanted a 'modern' efficient state in order to strengthen his own position." Peter was changing things so things could stay the same. His aim was to strengthen and ensure the survival of the autocratic tsarist system". (Martin Sixsmith 'Russia' 2012)

Peter's 'modernising' certainly had a deep and lasting effect on the elite, with its imitative European culture. "The aristocracy of eighteenth-century Russia was aware of acting out its life as if upon a stage. The Russian nobleman was not born a 'European' and European manners were not natural to him....Peter the Great began it all – reinventing himself and his aristocracy in the European mould." ('Natasha's Dance' Orlando Figes 2002) It, however, also brought about a deepening of the rift with both the traditionalists and the peasantry.

Peter saw the need for Russia to be accepted by the European 'club of nations'. "An important reason why cosmetically imitative behaviour is so common in political life is that it helps the weak appear stronger than they are – a useful form of mimicry for surviving in hostile environments. It also makes the imitator seem legible to those who might otherwise help, hurt or marginalise them" (Ken Jowitt, - *Communism, Democracy and Golf 2001*, quoted in '*The Light that Failed*', Krastev/Holmes)

Over a hundred years later Russia's imitation of a 'modern' Western society was recognised by the Marquis de Custine a French historian and traveller who wrote scathingly of the Russians in 1839. "they confuse splendour with elegance, luxury with refinement, policing and fear with the foundations of society"

This quote refers to late 19th century Japan but seems equally applicable to Russia in the 18th century "the Japanese had borrowed 'the industrial arts' of the West but not the West's 'spiritual outlook' or its principles of conduct and ethical values" (Thornstein Veblen 'The Opportunity of Japan' 1915)

Conclusion

It appears that Peter the Great was trying to achieve 3 things.

1. The construction of an efficient 'normal state'. "the old ways of corruption and abuse had brought the state to the point of crisis" (M Sixsmith. 'Russia' 2012) This was to be modelled on aspects of western European nations who had themselves only recently emerged, with a fledgling 'modern' outlook, from the cauldron of the 17th century.
2. For Russia to be accepted into the 'club of civilised nations'. From his sojourn in western Europe during 'The Embassy' of 1687/8 Peter recognised that Russia was considered an outsider, its culture seen as 'Asiatic' and uncivilised and its social habits the butt of jokes in the 'Courts' of Western European states. His constant need for both expansion and security, particularly on his southern border with the Ottomans, meant he needed these states as allies.
3. To develop his personal power base while freeing himself from the traditional constraints of both Church and Nobility. In this 'Age of Absolutism' examples such as Louis XIV of France was a model to be emulated. "It is true that Peter had much of the despot about him" (Martin Sixsmith 'Russia' 2012)

These three attainments were dependent on the implementation of a raft of policies. However, Peter had noted examples throughout Europe that would serve his visionary transformation of Russia. (see slide 5). His ability to undertake this was, however, reliant on military success. "His project had the support of most of the elite, not least because it was successful in military terms." (Russian History by Geoffrey Hosking). Although not universally successful his development of a standing army and a navy gave him victory over Sweden and territorial gains with the Treaty of Nystad that concluded 'The Great Northern War' in 1721. This established Russia's military credentials

While Peter used his newly built Western style 'centrepiece' capital of St Petersburg as a shop window model for the 'new Russia' he wished to create, much of the underpinning was still the old traditionalist society. This chimeric construction involved the death of thousands of 'slave labour' serfs and conscripts. Peter "put the interests of the state above the interests of its people. What clearer image could there be of the survival of the old despotism even as it purported to introduce the new 'modern' civilised Russia." (Martin Sixsmith 'Russia' 2012)

The psycho-political theory, of Peter the Great's use of mimicry to maintain, and enhance, his power while attempting to launch Russia as an equal in the European arena, (see slide 6) was 'pinched' from 'The Light that Failed' by I Krastev & S Holmes 2019. Here it is used to explain Russia's behaviour since 1989 and although the application of the theory to 18th century Russia is not a standard approach it's sympathetic to many of the points made by historians such as Figes, Sixsmith, Hosking etc.