

Russia

By the eighteenth century, the map of Europe, as well as people's mental understanding of "Europe," included a large space for Russia. Ivan IV ("the Terrible"), who ruled for fifty years in the middle of the sixteenth century, used special black-clad troops to arrest and kill hundreds of high nobles (called "boyars") and their families and servants. He confiscated their estates and gave about half the land to lower-level "service nobility" who had shown their loyalty to him; the rest he reserved as his personal domain, called the *oprichnina*. These new nobles, and Ivan himself, increased the demands on the serfs bound to their estates, which drove many to flee to the thinly populated areas on the borders of Ivan's ever-expanding state, where they joined Cossack groups. Ivan's autocracy extended to trade and industry, as he and subsequent rulers turned mines, commercial activities, and production into royal monopolies, which kept cities small and prevented the type of commercial expansion that was enriching urban residents in London and Istanbul.

Ivan's death was followed by a period of social unrest the Russians called the "Time of Troubles," which saw various factions fighting and murdering to gain the throne, a series of pretenders claiming to be one or other of the murdered princes, the Polish occupation of Moscow, and revolts by Cossacks and peasants. Boyars and service nobility met together in a national assembly (*zemski sobor*) and elected a grandnephew of Ivan, Michael Romanov (ruled 1613–45), as tsar, establishing a dynasty that would rule until the Russian Revolution in the early twentieth century. The *zemski sobor* did not use this opportunity to limit royal power, however, the way the Polish *sejm* did when electing kings, or as the English Parliament would do later in the century when it brought in William and Mary. Michael was not especially capable, but his advisors were very skillful at winning the allegiance of the nobles by granting them still further privileges at the expense of the peasants and townspeople. In 1649, the nobles agreed to a new code of law that completely bound the serfs to the land. Through diplomacy and annual payments, Michael's advisors were even able to make an alliance with the Ukrainian Cossacks, who became loyal troops in the tsar's army and played an important role in expanding the authority of the tsar, especially in Siberia. In 1670–1, nobles and Cossacks aided the tsar in defeating a major peasant rebellion, though this was led by poorer Cossacks who had not benefited from the tsar's arrangements. After this, the tsars felt strong enough not to bother calling the *zemski sobor* again.

Disputes between heirs to the throne might have plunged Russia into a second time of troubles in the 1680s, but an unusual arrangement of two young half-brothers sharing the throne, guided by their older sister, averted this. The youngest of those brothers was Peter I, who in 1689, at age seventeen, dismissed his sister and half-brother and took over personal rule. Peter determined to make Russia even larger and stronger than it was, and decided the best way to do this was through war; Russia was at war on one or more of its borders every

year of Peter's reign except one. As a boy, Peter studied western technology and warfare, and as a young man – after he had already fought major battles against Ottoman holdings on the Black Sea – he traveled to European cities to gain a better understanding of production processes and to make allies. The story told later was that he traveled incognito, but it is difficult to imagine how a six foot seven Russian accompanied by 250 officials could have blended into the streets of London or Amsterdam. He did travel without the normal ceremonies that would have interfered with his actually learning anything, however, and he returned home full of plans.

Seeking to gain a port on the Baltic, in 1700 Peter ordered an attack on Sweden, also ruled by a teenaged king, Charles XII. The well-disciplined Swedish army quickly defeated Russian troops, and Peter immediately began a drastic program to reorganize and modernize the army. He promoted anything that would enhance military effectiveness. Following the Swedish model, he introduced conscription, but on a huge scale. All nobles, whether *boyar* or service nobility, would be required to serve for life in the army or the government bureaucracy. Hundreds of thousands of peasants were also drafted for life, to serve as the footsoldiers who would be the core of this huge army. Thousands of other peasants were drafted to work in mines and factories, producing cannon, uniforms, muskets, wagons, and anything else the army needed. On the land, peasants were required to plant new crops that could feed soldiers and themselves, especially potatoes. War requires money, so Peter tripled taxation, spending, as Louis XIV had, at least three-quarters of all revenues on war. Effective war requires technically competent troops and well-trained leaders, so Peter opened schools and universities. He brought in Dutch, German, English, and French experts to provide advice on technology and tactics, and hired Western architects to design a new capital where the Neva River empties into the Baltic. This city, which he named – unsurprisingly – St. Petersburg, was also built with conscripted labor; historians estimate that it took hundreds of thousands of laborers to build its streets, canals, houses, bridges, palaces, churches and fortresses in the swamps and marshes of the Neva. Western ideas trickled into Russia with these more frequent contacts, but only to a small group of educated nobles. For the vast majority of Russians, Peter's moves only enhanced their misery.

Seen in the light of his own aims, Peter's autocratic reforms were effective. Russian troops defeated the Swedes in later battles, gaining large areas along the Baltic, and later in the eighteenth century they took the north coast of the Black Sea and much of Poland, building a large navy to defend their holdings. Peter's placement of talented foreigners in positions of authority eventually reached levels that even he had not anticipated, however. His daughter Elizabeth (ruled 1741–62) married her weak and stupid son Peter to a German princess from a tiny principality, whose mother was loosely related to the Romanovs. On converting to Russian Orthodoxy, the princess took the name Catherine, studied Russian and French, and won powerful allies at court, including her noble lover Gregory Orlov and his officer brothers. Her husband

became tsar as Peter III (ruled 1762), and his admiration for Frederick the Great led him to call off the Russian attack on Prussia. This was all the pretext Catherine and the Orlovs needed, and they had Peter arrested; the Orlovs killed him, and Catherine became ruler. A serious revolt by the Cossacks under the leadership of Emelian Pugachev in 1773-5 led Catherine to conclude that reforms were needed to strengthen the role of royal officials in the provinces, improve agriculture, and enhance civil order, and she issued a series of new laws, which later commentators dubbed "legislomania."

Catherine - later, like Peter, called "the Great" - could have read the works of Bishop Bossuet in their original French, and believed as firmly as he had a hundred years earlier in the divine, absolute, and paternal nature of royal authority. (She understood "paternal" to include female rulers who looked after their subjects as good parents cared for their children.) Her understanding of reason - Bossuet's fourth ground for supporting the rule of kings - was quite different than his, however, for the intervening century had seen writers, thinkers, and intellectuals debating the role of reason in all areas of life, not just politics. Catherine corresponded directly with many of these thinkers, invited them to her court, and sent them money. They in turn praised her as "enlightened," a word they used for themselves, and an increasingly important standard among educated Europeans for viewing and judging the world in the eighteenth century, as we will see in the next chapter.

Catherine was not the only ruler to consider herself, or be considered, "enlightened." Beginning in the 1760s, rulers in Russia, Prussia, Austria, Spain, Sweden, and some of the smaller states in Germany and Italy began programs of reform that were based in part on the desire to continue concentrating authority in their own hands and expanding the military might and economic base of their states, but also on a desire to improve the lives of their subjects. They increasingly regarded these aims as integrally related.

The reforms of "enlightened" monarchs shaped many realms of life. In government and administration, they often reorganized bureaucracies in an attempt to make them more coherent and speed up the implementation of state policy. Many of them set up an examination system for civil servants, so that at least some state offices were held by men who had obtained them through their merits and abilities rather than simply purchasing them. They tried to unify and codify the body of laws in their dominions and make the judicial process shorter and simpler. The use of judicial torture was restricted, and cruel methods of execution such as death by drowning were abolished, though penalties for crimes remained harsh; in fact, those for property crimes such as theft grew harsher, sometimes involving deportation or hard labor in a workhouse.

In economics, enlightened rulers developed protectionist policies in regard to imports and invested in some industries, with an eye to building up the manufacturing capacity of their own states. They tried to reduce the ability of independent groups such as guilds to regulate production, or of cities or

provinces to charge tolls on trade within the country. They were very concerned about agriculture, promoting projects that would increase the amount of land under cultivation or introduce new crops, such as the potato. They tried to reform the tax structure; in many places this meant taxing the clergy or taking over church lands. Occasionally they even taxed the nobility, though this generally happened only as a last resort, not as a matter of policy. They supported the establishment of schools, especially those that were oriented toward vocational and technical education, though they also supported elementary schools that taught basic reading and writing; the first legislation regarding compulsory schooling in Europe was in Prussia in 1763. Rulers also supported institutions that cared for orphans, invalids, the elderly, and military veterans, and tried to curtail the harassment of peasants by their landlords. They generally did not end serfdom as a labor system, but attempted to limit those aspects that reduced agricultural productivity or made peasants completely unfit for military service. In the 1780s Joseph II of Austria-Hungary did abolish serfdom, though the obligations of the peasants to their landlords - which were primarily paid in cash by this point, not labor services - were simply transformed into tax obligations to the state.

State-sponsored schools competed with those of the church, and rulers limited the independent powers of the church in other ways as well. In Catholic countries, rulers asserted greater control of church appointments or restricted the special privileges of the clergy, such as being tried for crimes in separate courts. In Austria, Joseph II dissolved many of the monasteries, arguing that their residents were idle parasites, and that their property would be better used to support secular schools and charitable institutions. In many countries, rulers abolished the Jesuit order. Religious minorities were accorded at least limited formal toleration, which was even extended to Jews in some places at the very end of the century. Such measures were often financially advantageous, as they boosted the economy by encouraging the immigration of skilled workers. They were also a clear sign that the church was to be simply one institution among many whose purpose was to support the state, not a separate body with powers that rivaled those of the ruler.

Late-eighteenth-century absolutist rulers were better able to achieve their aims than those a century earlier, though their plans still far exceeded their abilities to bring them about. In their reforms, enlightened rulers were motivated by humanitarian concerns about the welfare of their subjects, but even more by pragmatic considerations about the strength of the state as a military and economic unit and the preservation of the political integrity of monarchical absolutism. They did not see these goals as antithetical, however, but as closely linked, for healthy, prosperous, contented subjects would work more, have more children, and be able to pay more taxes. Louis XIV may have understood himself to be the state, and certainly thought that he ruled by divine right. Frederick II of Prussia declared that he was simply "the first servant of the state," whose power was justified by the well-being of his subjects. Neither Louis nor Frederick expected their subjects to disagree, but, as we

will see in the following chapter, by the last decades of the eighteenth century, some individuals in France and Prussia and other parts of Europe were not so sure that absolutism, or even limited monarchy, could ever truly be “enlightened.”

Further reading

Accounts of absolutism and its limitations include William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Valerie A. Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces: The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Many points of view of the “crisis of the seventeenth century” can be found in Trevor Ashton, ed., *Crisis in Europe, 1560–1660* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), and Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith, eds., *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1997). Theodore Rabb’s reconceptualization of the issue is *Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). A very recent collection that returns to these issues is Philip Benedict and Myron P. Gutmann, eds., *Early Modern Europe: From Crisis to Stability* (Dover: University of Delaware Press, 2006).

For discussions of the role of warfare and its funding in the rise of states, see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States A.D. 990–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Brian M. Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500–1800* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Robert I. Frost, *The Northern Wars: War, State, and Society in Northeastern Europe, 1558–1721* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2000); H. M. Scott, *The Emergence of the Eastern Powers, 1756–1775* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The standard account in English of the Thirty Years War is Geoffrey Parker, ed., *The Thirty Years War*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1997).

There are many works on various aspects of the English Civil War. Two examinations of its causes are Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution Revisited*, rev. edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), and Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 1998). David Scott, *Politics and War in the Three Stuart Kingdoms, 1637–1649* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), provides a good narrative, while Jonathan Scott, *England’s Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), examines the impact of events in England on the rest of Europe. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), remains the best analysis of all of the radical groups. For later developments, see Eveline Cruickshanks, *The Glorious Revolution* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2000), and Gerald Newman, ed., *Britain in the Hanoverian Age, 1714–1837* (New York: Garland, 1997).

On the Netherlands, Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), is a solid political history, while Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Vintage, 1997), looks more broadly at Dutch culture.

General studies of France include William Doyle, ed., *Old Regime France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Sharon Kettering, *French Society, 1589–1715* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2001). On the Fronde, the authoritative work is Orest Ranum, *The Fronde: A French Revolution, 1648–1652* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993). John B. Wolf, *Louis XIV*