

Seeing the Future in Muscovy in 1584

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On March 28, 1584, following the death of Ivan the Terrible, what would a hypothetical well-informed member of the Muscovite elite have expected to happen in Muscovy from 1584 to 1689? Which developments would have surprised our Observer, as I shall call him, and which would he have fully expected.

Fedor Ivanovich, Ivan IV's older surviving son, succeeded his father without incident. In 1584 Tsar Fedor's inability to sire sons might not yet have been suspected. Tsar Fedor had married in 1580. It was nearly twelve years later that his wife gave birth to her only child, a daughter, who died at age two. Even anticipating that Fedor would not leave a male heir would not necessarily have entailed the end of the dynasty. Ivan IV was also survived by a younger son, Tsarevich Dmitrii Ivanovich. Whether his health problems had become obvious (he was supposedly epileptic) is not clear from the sources, but regardless his perhaps unnatural death in 1591 would surely not have been predicted by our Observer. Given Ivan IV's repeated emphasis upon his actual descent from St. Volodimer of Kyiv (rather than his fictitious descent from Prus, relative of Augustus Caesar, via the equally legendary Riurik), it might very well have been assumed that if the Daniilovichi became extinct their successor would be of princely origin. Volodimerovichi had ruled Rus' for nearly six hundred years. Despite Boris Godunov's ambition and boyar status no one would have predicted that he would ascend the throne, even less that after the inglorious tenure as tsar of an eligible prince, Prince Vasili Shuiskii, that the next dynasty, albeit of boyar origin, would be the non-princely Romanovs.

Given the political role played, however briefly, by Ivan IV's widowed mother Grand Princess Elena during his minority, our Observer would not have been surprised at Tsarevna Sofia Alekseevna's political influence as regent for her younger brothers on the death of her father, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, in 1682.

Anyone who had survived Ivan IV's reign would not have been surprised that he became a negative role model for his successors. No seventeenth-century tsar emulated the *oprichnina* or the Simeon Bekbulatovich episode. It might very well not have been a surprise that when the Time of Troubles gave them the opportunity to do so, in 1606 and 1610 boyars attempted to limit the arbitrariness of the ruler.

It would not have been surprising that the post-Ivan IV Muscovite governments never invoked the theory of Moscow-the Third Rome. The piety of the ruler continued to dominate Muscovite political ideology through the seventeenth century. The appearance of the counter-

myth of Holy Rus' would have been unexpected. There had never been a counter-myth to that of the ruler in Muscovy.

Despite the presence of major social tensions in Muscovy during the sixteenth century our Observer could never have prophesied the Time of Troubles. The First False Dmitrii was the first Muscovite pretender. King Stefan Bathory had gotten no further into the Muscovite heartland than Pskov, and he had failed to take that city. That a Polish army would or could occupy Moscow was unthinkable. During Ivan IV's reign the Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks remained peripheral to Muscovite politics. That Cossacks would participate in electing a tsar would not have crossed our Observer's mind.

The increasing articulation of Court offices and status in the seventeenth century was a natural development. We know much more about the daily life of the ruler and the Court in the seventeenth century, but nothing that would contradict what we know about the sixteenth-century Court. However, the growing impersonalization of government, the distancing of the ruler from his subjects in the seventeenth century, the loss of the right to petition the tsar directly, would have struck a chord in someone used to much more intimate ruler-subject contact.

The major expansion of the number of central Muscovite bureaus and the growth in the size of their staffs would have occasioned no surprise. Not so a key development in the relationship between the boyar elite and the bureaucracy. At most during Ivan's reign one bureau, on banditry, was sometimes headed by a boyar. Beginning at the end of the sixteenth century gradually boyars took over leadership of individual bureaus from the bureaucrats who had run them, excepting the Ambassadorial Bureau and the Military Registry Bureau formally headed by the tsar. Seventeenth-century administrative paper cannot tell us if such boyars actually ran the bureaus they accumulated rather than serving as pro forma heads who derived status, influence and income from bureaucratic empire-building.

When Ivan IV summoned the first and only Assembly of the Land of his reign in 1566 to consult on foreign policy, neither he nor our Observer could have anticipated the major role it would play in choosing a ruler in 1613 or in setting policy for the first half of the seventeenth century. Ivan IV believed in hereditary monarchy. He would have been appalled at the participation of any of his subjects in royal succession. Indeed, he might have considered the Assembly of the Land, which did not even have a name at the time, an event rather than an institution.

The replacement of the 1550 Law Code by the 1649 Conciliar Law Code would not have been surprising. The 1550 code had replaced the 1497 code. However, the 1550 Law Code had only that one domestic antecedent, while the 1649 Law Code derived in part from Lithuanian, Byzantine and perhaps even Habsburg legislation. Byzantine legal influence would not have created any dismay, but why legislators in autocratic Muscovy would borrow anything from Lithuania's szlachta democracy or the elected Holy Roman Emperor would have seemed strange to our Observer.

Sixteenth-century Muscovy did experience some political violence, namely the Moscow riot of 1547. Therefore our Observer would definitely have been struck by the significant

increase of violent political unrest in the seventeenth century that derived from the model of armed popular mobilization during the Time of Troubles, including the Bolotnikov uprising. The Moscow riots in 1649, the copper coinage riots, revolts in Siberia, and the Don Cossack Razin uprising were par for the course in the violent European seventeenth century. The greatest violence in sixteenth-century Muscovy was state violence, the *oprichnina*, which, it would appear, met with relatively little and certainly no organized violent opposition. Seventeenth-century state violence on the other hand repressed actual, not fictitious, rebels and rioters.

Our Observer would have been surprised as the evolution of society during the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. The Forbidden Years during which peasants lost their freedom of movement, if they began before Ivan IV died, were explicitly temporary emergency measures. Even if our Observer were familiar with the emergence of serfdom in East Central Europe he could not have anticipated that the Forbidden Years would evolve into the Allotted Years, the statute of limitations on the recovery of runaway peasants, and then into serfdom. Turning peasants into serfs was part and parcel of a broader social transformation of the traditional society of sixteenth-century Muscovy which retained a toleration of a certain degree of upward and downward social mobility into a caste society which froze the status of peasants and artisans as serfs.

Other social changes accompanying the imposition of a caste society would also have struck our Observer as innovations. The transformation of two sixteenth-century professions into seventeenth-century hereditary classes reflected the increasing rigidity of Muscovite society. The musketeers were created in the second half of the sixteenth century, so by definition the first musketeers came from non-musketeer families. A century later musketeer status was hereditary. The same holds true for bureaucrats. Although multi-generation bureaucratic families appeared in the second half of the sixteenth century, the need to staff the expanding administrative apparatus resulted in the recruitment of many additional first-generation scribes from the gentry, clergy, merchants, and even peasants. At the time scribal families could not generate enough recruits to staff the bureaucracy. Noble-born gentry, members of a social class, outranked non-noble-born secretaries, whose social identity derived from their profession. Gentry and scribes belonging to the same family created a social anomaly in the sixteenth century exacerbated when men moved back and forth between gentry and bureaucratic statuses. Bureaucratic origin or social ties did not dishonor sixteenth-century gentry. By the seventeenth century bureaucrats intermarried with other bureaucratic families and bureaucratic origin was the social kiss of death for honor-conscious gentry just as priestly origin had become degrading to bureaucrats. Sixteenth-century priests did not come exclusively from priestly families, but by the seventeenth century the priestly caste was also overwhelmingly endogenous.

Our Observer would have taken note of the existence of sixteenth-century accused heretics, from the Judaizers at the turn of the century through the mid sixteenth-century heretics Bashkin and Kosoi, but could have derived his understanding of their views only via hostile Church sources. He would not have anticipated that in the seventeenth century “heretical” sources managed to circulate, namely Old Believer texts like Avvakum’s autobiography and epistles. Our Observer would have interpreted such toleration of heretical sources negatively.

Anti-heretical writers habitually exaggerated the numbers of heretics and the threat they posed to society. If our Observer judged the extent of a support enjoyed by a heresy from the number of its adherents punished by the church and the state, he would have concluded that sixteenth-century heresies were no more than marginal, if, occasionally, supported by influential individuals. The scope of seventeenth-century religious dissent would have struck the Observer as much more extensive and the consequences for society unprecedented. The spread of the Kapitonschina and the Old Belief far exceeded that of sixteenth-century heretics. The violent opposition of Solovetskii Monastery monks to government control was unprecedented.

The degree of popular involvement in the church might not have been new in the seventeenth century. The expulsion of priests like Avvakum by the parish laity in the seventeenth century and peasants petitioning for the construction of a church in their neighborhood testify to broader lay participation in parish life than we can find in sixteenth-century Muscovy.

Among other changes in Muscovy in ecclesiastical and religious affairs that our Observer could not have anticipated was the shift in elite religious consciousness to more personal and individualistic faith in the second half of the seventeenth century. Ivan IV could never have imagined creating the Monastery Bureau giving Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich far more control over monasteries than Ivan IV had exercised. Tsar Alexei was just as pious as Ivan IV but proved much more “secular” in his policies toward the institutional church. Our Observer realized that in the give-and-take of relations between the ruler and the head of the Russian Orthodox Church things changed. Metropolitan Makarii was a major player in Muscovy during Ivan IV’s minority through the 1550s but Ivan IV probably selected Filipp to be Metropolitan during the *oprichnina* and definitely bore responsibility for his removal and assassination. Neither the prominence of Patriarch Filaret, Tsar Mikhail Romanov’s father, nor Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich’s deposition of Patriarch Nikon in the seventeenth century would have been surprising.

Sixteenth-century Muscovy was already multi-ethnic and multi-confessional. Our Observer would not have been surprised by government policy toward non-Orthodox Christians in the seventeenth century. Sixteenth-century Muscovites tilted slightly in favor of Catholics over “heretical” Protestants, but the Polish role in the Time of Troubles changed that. Muscovy was far more anti-Catholic in the seventeenth century. Moscow did not change its goal in acquiring eastern territories of Christianizing the land but not the people. Kazan’ became Christian but no mass conversion campaign assaulted Tatar Muslims. The same applied to animists and Muslims in Siberia. The policies Moscow employed for dealing with Muslim Tatars in the sixteenth century did not require change when applied to Buddhist Kalmyks in the seventeenth century. The mechanisms of government control over steppe nomads remained the same too.

Except for the 1580s when the depression forced Ivan IV to extort donations from monasteries and contributions from foreigners, the sixteenth-century government did not suffer shortfall in revenue. Whether that continued under Tsar Fedor Ivanovich remains unclear, but the government’s ability to regain some territory from Sweden and to sponsor a building program suggests adequate income. Our Observer would not have predicted that in the seventeenth century Moscow would be chronically short of funds, as proven by the experiment

with copper coinage. Demographically Muscovy overcame the debilitating effects of the Time of Troubles, despite seventeenth-century epidemics, but revenue short-fall became a constant problem requiring frequent “extraordinary” levies. Our Observer was unlikely to have predicted the degree to which the seventeenth-century government relied on Siberian furs for income.

Economically seventeenth-century mercantilist practice - there was never any mercantilist theory in Muscovy - would not have been seen as an innovation by our Observer, because during the Livonian War Ivan IV insisted upon reciprocal free trade between Muscovy and its commercial partners. Nevertheless the establishment of a national trade statute in the seventeenth century compared to regional trading statutes of the sixteenth century suggests increased emphasis upon foreign trade. Sixteenth-century Muscovy possessed an outlet on the Baltic, Narva, only temporarily during the Livonian War, a deficiency not corrected in seventeenth-century Muscovy.

Militarily our Observer might have perceived great change. Ivan IV’s use of foreign mercenaries and sappers has been exaggerated. The number of mostly captured foreign mercenaries who entered Ivan IV’s service was small. However the creation of the new-style infantry regiments in the seventeenth century was unprecedented. Tatar, including Muslim Chingissids were often assigned to high command posts in field armies under Ivan IV, but they were relative few in numbers and those appointments may have been more symbolic than real. The use of Catholic and Protestant foreign officers in command of Orthodox Muscovite troops in the seventeenth century was far greater in scope and import, and far more disorienting to Muscovites who thought Orthodox Christianity superior to all other Christian denominations.

Our Observer appreciated that Muscovy needed all its military resources, gentry cavalry and gunpowder infantry and artillery, on both its eastern/southern and western/northern fronts, and that victory in war was neither assured nor precluded on either front. Muscovy had conquered Kazan’ and Astrakhan’ but in 1571 the Crimeans burned Moscow, only to be defeated in 1582 at Molodi. Early victories in the Livonian War were undone but Pskov defended itself against Batory. He would not have been surprised at the mixed picture in the seventeenth-century warfare. Muscovy recovered Smolensk and acquired part of Ukraine but could still suffer defeats as at Chihirin in 1678. Muscovy extended its defensive line into the steppe but its armies had just as little ability to conquer Crimea in the seventeenth century as during the sixteenth.

However, Muscovite ambition for territorial expansion became more mixed in the seventeenth than in the sixteenth century. Muscovy faced no serious opposition eastward in Siberia until it reached China. To the south, government reluctance to back the Don Cossacks in Azov against the Ottoman Empire might be seen as a continuation of sixteenth-century Muscovite apprehension at antagonizing the most powerful state in Europe. Muscovite reluctance to intrude into Ukraine to the southwest was another matter entirely. Whether this timidity resulted from a realization of the costs to the strained revenue supply cannot be determined. Muscovy willingly expanded into Belarus and Lithuania, so the problem might not have been Poland-Lithuania as an enemy, but the Ukrainian Cossacks as an ally.

Culturally our Observer could not help but be surprised and perhaps even dismayed that in the second half of the seventeenth century Muscovite culture turned increasingly to the west,

via Ukrainian and Belarusian intermediaries. However transient some aspects of this change, such as theater, or confined to the elite, nevertheless this was a major and unforeseen discontinuity with sixteenth-century Muscovy. Literary genres of Western origin unknown in sixteenth-century Muscovy rose to the fore in late seventeenth-century Muscovy. There is no surprise that the expansion of printing was dedicated mostly to religious works, although the printing of a law code and military textbook were harbingers of the future government utilization of printing for its own secular purposes. Employment of isolated foreign doctors by Muscovite grand princes and tsars in the sixteenth century became institutionalized by the establishment of the Apothecary Bureau in the seventeenth century.

If our Observer had tried to formulate an overall conclusion as to whether Muscovite history after Ivan IV's death confirmed his expectations he would probably have said "yes and no." Both continuities and discontinuities abounded in different spheres of Muscovite life after 1584 just as they had during Ivan IV's reign. Our Observer would not have expected uniformity of developments. Neither should historians.

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