

Analysis of Peter the Great's Social Reforms and the Justification of the Reactions from the

General Public

By Devan Walsh

Primary Reader: Dr. David Doellinger

Secondary Reader: Dr. Patricia Goldsworthy-Bishop

During the Reign of Peter the Great he challenged Russian culture with his reforms, the traditionalists in particular, opposed his reforms that morphed fashion because it challenged their Orthodox religious beliefs and practices. The aggressive manner with which Peter the Great implemented his oppressive social reforms across Russian Society resulted in resistance which was not only justified, but also expected. When reforms which undermine tradition, identity, religion, and even one's personal appearance are forced upon society, it is reasonable for members of that society to resist. Peter's social reforms were applied uniformly across the populace but those affected most drastically were the upper classes. The upper classes were looked upon by the lower classes as examples. With this new fashion, if the upper classes adopt it would create the trickledown effect to the rest of the population. Another reason being that they were the people the tsar spent most of his time around; naturally he wanted to surround himself with European fashion. Russian society was forced to relinquish its identity and replace it with a "modern" foreign lifestyle. Those who had the most difficulty adapting to the new changes were generally the traditionalists. Traditionalists were the large group of upper class members who valued their religious tenets above the decrees of the Tsar. On the opposite end of the spectrum, were the younger generations whose members enthusiastically embraced the new fashions in their zeal to ingratiate themselves to the tsar. Their eagerness is partly accredited to the student abroad program that Peter created, where they were introduced to Western fashion, living, and personality.

Peter the Great made a plethora of sweeping changes with his reforms in Russia and ultimately, the country profited from his unorthodox approach. He established reforms in a systematic manner, with each having a purpose: political reforms were meant to establish a stable ruling class, his reforms in tobacco and cloth would help Russia's languishing economy, and the societal reforms which could be

considered the most invasive, were intended to modernize fashion and the interactions between the sexes in public. The reasoning behind these reforms that focused on Russian fashion cannot be considered constructive but more materialistic. Clothing was not something that helped fight wars or establish politics but was affected specifically to surround Peter with the likeness of Europe, primarily French and German influences. Historians who examine Peter's decrees are exposed to an obvious agenda deep within the execution. The objective of the decrees were exemplified in a system of fees that were levied against the people in the form of taxes in order to discourage those who would choose not to follow Peter's royal decrees. Taxes gave the public an incentive to concede to the reforms while still providing an avenue for civil disobedience. The decrees that altered Russian fashion included the cutting of men's beards and the changing of their clothes to a European fashion. Reactions to the reforms were depicted in writing and other forms of art. These became their own form of resistance to the tsar's reconstruction of Russian fashion. In the eyes of the tsar, his restructuring of Russia was a benevolent act intended to create a more functional and orderly society in the likeness of the west. To the Traditionalists, he was the anti-Christ.

Peter the Great was originally named Peter Alexeyevich Romanov. Born in 1672 to the Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich and his second wife<sup>1</sup>, he was strong and healthy. Peter's family marked the beginning of their reign at the conclusion of the Time of Troubles. After the death of Ivan the Terrible there was no suitable heir to assume the throne. His sickling son, Fedor was left the throne, although he never aspired to be much of a ruler. Most of his time was spent visiting cathedrals to ring the bells while his father-in-law, Boris Godunov, ruled in his stead as regent. After Fedor's death, with no successor to take the throne, the Time of Troubles ensued. During this time period there were three attempts to find

---

<sup>1</sup> Evgenii V. Anisimov, *the Reforms of Peter the Great: Progress Through Coercion in Russia*. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 13.

a suitable ruler. In order to do so they held semi-democratic meetings referred to as zemsky sobors.

The third zemsky sobor culminated with the election of Peter's grandfather, Mikhail Feodorovich Romanov, and so began the Romanov dynasty.

Peter was born into a very large immediate family, as the third youngest child, his rise to the throne was unlikely. After his father's death Peter's eldest brother, Feodor, ascended to the Russian throne, sadly after only a few years the young ruler died. The council had great difficulty deciding who would be the next to rule Russia. Since Feodor's death was a result of his physical condition the council initially selected nine year old Peter over his older brother Ivan V, who like his older brother, had several disabilities. This brought an uprising from the family of Ivan's mother, who claimed that he had more of a right to the throne than Peter. So from 1682 to 1696, Peter ruled alongside his brother as co-tsar with their sister Sophia acting as regent. This was the most influential time of his young life.

It was in Peter's childhood that he began to develop an interest in ship building. Russia was not known for its ship building or even for having a Navy. Peter had a great fascination with water and ships which was originally sparked by a trip to the White Sea, where "for the first time he saw a real sea and real ships and made his first voyage on the restless and dangerous element so unlike the quiet ponds of the Moscow hinterland."<sup>2</sup> Upon discovering these wonders, his desire for knowledge began to grow. This was a thirst that could only be quenched by complete immersion. The largest ship manufactures in the world were located in Europe, to the west, so Peter decided to travel there to learn about ship building and all things nautical. It was during his time in Europe that Peter made the decision that Russia needed to evolve in order to be successful like the west. In comparison to the west, Russia was a barbaric country, underdeveloped and uncivilized. There were very few Western/ Russia relations but

---

<sup>2</sup> Anisimov, 15.

when Peter ventured westward he was received with gracious courtesy. From his expeditions he brought back many ideas and reforms that he implemented in order to advance Russia.

The most influential reforms established by Peter the Great can be grouped into three main categories; political, social and economic. Historians examine the details of the reforms, what they were intended to change, and how the reforms helped Russia. The works written on Peter the Great and his reforms often question if Peter was a revolutionary or a reformer. Some even question whether or not Russia would have eventually modernized without the impetus provided by Peter's vision.

Historians' references to the social reforms from Peter's reign are generally short and appear as side notes to his more prominent reforms. The majority of sources focus on changes geared towards the government and military. The reforms of Peter's reign are something that Evgenii V. Anisimov focuses on in his book, *The Reforms of Peter the Great*, the reforms were progressive but still forced upon the people. He begins by going into detail of Peter's life, how he grew up, and how his childhood experiences became the catalyst of his determination to become westernized. Anisimov also gives us insight into the travels of his youth that inspired him to discover the world of the west and how ships function.

Anisimov discusses the success which Peter experienced in making a name for himself through military advancements during his periods of aggression against smaller countries, like Turkey, and his attempts to subjugate them. This was the point when Peter first asked for western help and began hiring military officers from Europe. Anisimov makes a particular point to say that the west had a big hand in Peter's success, rather than just watching him attempt to mimic western culture and influence. Western countries, along with Peter himself needed his work to succeed. From the west's perspective,

if Russia flourished after the integration of western ideals, it would be confirmation that their society was superior.

Anisimov also addresses the various social changes that resulted from the reforms, though does not focus on this one section of reforms. When referring to social reforms, Anisimov argues that the decrees themselves had a direct influence on the people. His view on the reforms of Russian fashion shows Anisimov's view of the dominant nature referenced in Peter's title.

Marc Raeff, on the other hand, is a historian from Russia, who focuses on Russian progress before the rise of Stalin. Raeff's book focuses on the attempts of Russia to attain a westernized perspective and becoming a western power. He argues that the best way to grasp the maturation of Russia is to look to the past at the advancements brought about by previous rulers. It is clear that Raeff is trying to align Russia in history alongside other western countries. He makes the argument that Russian history is not that of an eastern nation but stands proudly among other western civilizations. In his work *Understanding Imperial Russia*, he delves into the history of progressive Russia and how it is important to understand the past in order to grasp the present. Raeff believes that the knowledge of Petrine and Post Petrine Russia is necessary in order to truly appreciate the progress that took place leading up to the creation of Stalin's Russia. He affirms that one of the most influential people to introduce western traditions into Russia was Peter the Great and refers affectionately to the tsar and his changes.

Marc Raeff resumes his examination of the social revolution brought about by decrees that were created out of Peter's ambition to change Russian society. Raeff touches on how Peter attempted to enforce his reforms by sending out representatives to levy fines in the form of taxes against those who did not comply. He also talks about the problems with Peter's governmental structure and contrasts it

against the structure that his father created. The greatest indication of the success of his system was that unlike his father's it was retained by his successors, due in no small part to the acquisition of copious amounts of revenue from taxes. Raeff continues by talking about the changes that were made by his grandson Peter II and even grand-daughter Catherine the Great. Raeff makes an effort to examine the social reforms in a constructive and positive manner. His goal through his book is to help the reader 'understand imperial Russia' and how the actions of Tsars were implemental to the current success of Russia.

Another book by Marc Raeff, consists of a compilation of works he edited together of historians weighing pivotal moments in Russia history that served to modernize their society. This collection consists entirely of works discussing the changes of Peter the Great and throughout, Raeff is answering his own question: *Peter the Great: Reformer or Revolutionary?* He arranges his works in accordance to a time line. In this collection of essays Raeff is classifying Peter as reformer or revolutionary by examining the works of other historians. Each essay focuses on different aspects of Peter's reforms. Several documents are also from individuals that were alive during Peter's reign.

The essays have a wide variety of topics ranging from political, economic, religious, educational, social reforms, the reactions to Peter's reforms, his death and burial, and even how his reforms were a 'blue print for the future'. Raeff also includes the works of a contemporary author who lived during the reign of Peter the Great, Ivan Pososhkov. Pososhkov, claims that the only way in which Peter was able to attain success was by sending students and future officials abroad for education. That without sending students to acclimate them to western traditions his reforms would have failed. Raeff, looks into another source that points a finger at the traditionalists resistance to change. Raeff wants to explore why tradition is more important than Peter's modern advancements.

Raeff claims that whenever historians write or talk about Peter the Great they focus on the military and economic aspects to his reforms. Referring to one historian, P.N. Miliukov, who talks of the social reforms in a way that highlights Peter's determination to keeping them active after his own death. Miliukov claims that the social reforms happened because of the changes in the military and political systems and not because of Peter's ambitions.

David Warnes approach on Russian history is factual information, explaining the results and advancements during the reign of each tsar in Russia. In his book, *Chronicle of the Russian Tsars: the Reign-By-Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Russia*, Warnes literally does a reign by reign description of each tsar starting with Ivan III. His work provides an interesting perspective, giving us the ability to look at the tsars before and after Peter. Warnes talks about Alexei Mikhailovich, Peter's father and his many accomplishments. From there Warnes paints a picture of Peter's succession how it came to be and how it was an issue with Alexei's first wife's family. From there he sheds light on the co-reign Peter shared with his half brother.

The section designated to Peter's life focuses solely on his reforms. Warnes talks about his young life and delves into his military escapades and aggressions. Sweden was Peter's main target to gain territory, primarily because of the inexperience of their king, Charles XII and also the weakened state of their economy. Warnes emphasizes the significance of military advances to Peter's success as a Tsar. Warnes only touches lightly on Peter's development of a diverse selection of national systems, before introducing the reader to Peter's death and the resulting complications regarding who will rule Russia after his demise.

Nicholas V. Riasanovsky's main objective in his book, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, to expound upon the image of Peter the Great rather than his reforms but in truth the reforms were focal to his image in the eyes of the people. Riasanovsky examines his image as it



evolved through various times, Russian Enlightenment, Communist Russia, and (then) current time. He dissects the view of people in the church, the upper class, and various other groups. Riasanovsky pursues the image of Peter after his reign as well. The book presents a clear view of the progression of the image of Peter the Great throughout his life and into his death.

The first period that is examined is the most beneficial to my research; it is the Russian Enlightenment, 1700-1826. This is the time when Peter's reforms were fully active and enforced, where his personal image was most influential. Riasanovsky, like Raeff, refers to Pososhkov and his adoring demeanor towards Peter. Riasanovsky even goes as far as looking into how Peter viewed his own image. Attempting to distinguish how the tsar viewed himself is somewhat dangerous, the best way that Riasanovsky can pursue this is to portray Peter as being self-centered. What I find most appealing about Riasanovsky's work is that he evaluates the manner in which each group; social, how he viewed himself, the church, foreigners, upper class and even the military viewed Peter. By the examination of the various groups of society, the image of Peter changes and a lot of that has to deal with his reforms and how they were accepted. Riasanovsky's idea was to explore all the images of Peter through time and through various groups.

James Harvey Robinson, a professor from Columbia University, compiled various European works from several different countries which are all personal accounts in history. Professor Robinson's goal is to show a progression of European countries that benefitted from German influence. He provides accounts of each of these countries: Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Russia, Prussia, and France.

Contained within this reading is the work from Jean Rousset de Missy. Missy was a French writer born 1686 and who died 1762. During his lifetime he ventured intellectually into Russian transformation, though never going to the country himself. He provides a western viewpoint into the

reign of Peter the Great. One of the things that he had the opportunity to witness was Peter's program of social reform, and the way that it directly impacted the general public. Missy was fascinated by the decrees released by Peter that changed how the Russians dressed and also how they could and could not wear their own facial hair. He gives his own personal account of the transformation of the Russian People. Missy first mentions the cutting of beards, about how they wore their beards prior to the reform and how they were proud of their facial hair. To the younger generations, facial hair was simply a fashion statement, but to many of the older generations it was a religious requirement. From his writing it is apparent that the transformation of the Russian people made him feel uncomfortable. The interesting thing about de Missy's viewpoint is the fact that he is a foreigner, a western historian, that views the modification of Russian clothing as something that is surprising for him. Missy even touches upon the concept of modern fashion being forced upon women, while in the west they strive to be the front runners of fashion. Western fashion is an ever changing industry and nothing like it existed in Russia.

The results of decrees released by Peter the Great regarding Russian fashion can still be seen today. In these proclamations, he demanded more from the people than just cooperation. The way that Peter worded his "decrees" asserted them more as a behest, a command that was hard to undermine. There was no way for the individual to disregard these decrees. In these regulations the tsar even addressed the consequences that would befall an individual who did not wish to follow these reforms. Peter released a decree while on the throne that commanded the men of Russia to break a long standing tradition involving their own facial hair. The decree gave the exact guidelines to follow to ensure that the transformation would go smoothly. Another decree gave specific regulations regarding what court officials were required to wear in terms of clothing, and what would happen if they choose to disregard the wishes of their Tsar. The significance in the examination of these exacting decrees is to

see documentation on the decrees that rattled the Traditionalists so immensely. These decrees give insight to the origin of several writings and works of art from foreigners and Russians alike, in response to the heavy demands placed on the upper classes.

Peter was adamant about including Western characteristics into Russian society. This was why he released decrees that pertained to Russian fashion. In 1705, Peter released a new decree that required men to modify their facial hair. This decree in particular from, *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917*; was focused on Moscow. It stated that all court attendants would cut their beards and for those who did not wish to comply with the decree would have to pay a yearly tax depending on their status:

Court attendants... provincial service men, military men, and government officials- 60 rubles per person; from the gosti and members guilds of the first class- 100 rubles per person; from members of the wholesale merchants' guild of the middle and lower class [and] ... from [other] merchants and townfolk- 60 rubles per person / From Moscow residents of all ranks- 30 rubles... As for the peasants, let a toll of two-half copecks per beard<sup>3</sup>.

For the peasants it wasn't that simple, they were poor and would in no way be able to afford a yearly tax. Peter came up with a solution, every time a peasant would leave and enter the city they were required to pay a tax at the gate. If an individual did not want to pay the tax the solution was simple, cut their beards. At times Peter even went beyond taxation:

Decrees were repeatedly issued threatening violators of the dress code with diverse punishments including exile to hard labor, but it was not easy for people to get used to the new dress and to the new look, which had been do radically altered in one day<sup>4</sup>.

This particular reform was hard for the traditionalists to adhere to. Traditionally Russian men took immense pride in their beards, due in no small part to the fact they were a religious symbol. In his writing Jean Rousset de Missy discusses his observation of the relationship between men and their

---

<sup>3</sup> Vernadsky, 347.

<sup>4</sup> Anisimov, 219

beards. He states that “until that time the Russians had always worn long beards, which they cherished and preserved with much care, allowing them to hang down on their bosoms, without even cutting the moustache.”<sup>5</sup> The decree was not necessarily meant as an attack on the church or the Christian faith of the people but still affected them greatly. Peter’s design was meant to create a more western environment, but for the people of Russia their beards were more of a sacred object. Missy notices that they “saved them (beards) preciously, in order to have them placed in their coffins, fearing that they would not be allowed to enter heaven without their beards.”<sup>6</sup> Traditionally men did not cut their beards after marriage and the reason that their facial hair went untouched was countless stories in the bible about beards. One of the most powerful stories for them was the story of Samson, who got his strength from his hair. The system of taxation indicated that Peter was aware that many of the citizens would refuse to comply with his demands, and that he expected to experience at least some level of resistance in the form of civil disobedience. Even Karl Marx was aware of the importance of religion in society, being quoted as saying that “Religion is the Opiate of the masses.” This can be expanded upon to make the statement that regardless of what a leader does to the people, they can be comforted by their religion. The fact that the citizenry simply had their religious beliefs/traditions ripped away from them provides a good case of justification for the resistance of the reforms.

Four years prior to the law demanding the cutting of hair (in 1701), Peter released a decree pertaining to western dress. He required that all courtiers wear western clothes of French and German fashion. The decree demanded that: “the upper dress shall be of French or Saxon but, and the lower dress and underwear- [including] waistcoat, trousers, boots, shoes, and hats- hall be of German type.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> James Harvey Robinson, *Readings in European History Vol. II.* (Boston: The Athenaeum Press, 1906), 310.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, 311

<sup>7</sup> Vernadsky, 347.

The lower classes of the population were not required to wear French fashion but on the gates of a city, such as Moscow, there was a display of what western clothing was acceptable. The style that Peter wanted to convey was not of just one culture in particular, but he made a selection from western cultures, French and German fashions, in order to create his ideal western fashion. In this decree he does not focus primarily on men but also changes clothing for women and children stating that they; “shall wear Western [“German”] dresses, hats, jackets, and underwear.”<sup>8</sup> Peter wanted every aspect of Russian clothing obsolete, even the shoes and the undergarments were reformed. Like the reforms governing facial hair, Peter enforced his regulations by again applying taxes to those who decided that they wanted to keep their traditional clothing.

The outlawing of traditional dress was an extreme example of the physical changes that Peter the Great forced upon his people. Even more so is forcing the shaving of the beards of his people. This destroyed many traditions the Russian people valued, they dressed according to guidelines set forth by the Church and for modesty and grew their beards for guaranteed ascension to heaven. And because he forced this on his people Marc Raeff depicts the nature of Peter’s demands and the effects it had on the people:

The persistent efforts of Peter and his collaborators to induce his people to shed the religious customs and prejudices that were inhibiting the development of a productive *vita active* ended in almost total failure. In fact, Peter’s persistence had the opposite of the desired effect, for it convinced the common people that the emperor and acolytes were doing the work of the devil and that the sovereign was the embodiment of the Antichrist.<sup>9</sup>

The Astrakhan rebels, citizens of the major city of Astrakhan, were perfect examples of the resistance against Peter. They discussed their situation in a letter to a Cossack host in Don, regarding the new decrees that were released about Russian clothing. Traditional Russian dress is long as a robe but because of these reforms, even the church was converted to Peter’s ideal western fashion.

---

<sup>8</sup> Vernadsky, 347

<sup>9</sup> Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 52.

Traditionally there were certain clothes that were worn to church, even after the reforms people still attempted to wear their traditional clothing. This letter tells of one Astrakhans family's attempt to get into the church and what happened to them after they were denied:

On account of our Christian faith, because of beard-shaving, German dress, and tobacco; how we, our wives, and or children were not admitted into churches in our old Russian dress; how men and women who entered the holy church had their clothes shorn and were expelled and thrown upon us<sup>10</sup>.

They were thrown out of their church, something that was cherished by the people. His family was humiliated in public for what they were wearing and ordered to do things that were foreign to them. The Astrakhans began an uprising out of the fear that they were, "in danger of losing their Christian faith."<sup>11</sup> These Astrakhan's are feeling oppressed and are asking the Cossack atamans, like the Astrakhan's, to resist. The Astrakhan's resistance was not a peaceful one, they "killed some of them and have put some others in prison."<sup>12</sup> This form of open revolt is an extreme example of the resistance encountered by Peter in his quest to modernize Russia. The feelings expressed by his people regarding their fear of losing their faith and not being able to enter into heaven serve to justify the resistance to the reforms.

In the eyes of Jean Rousset de Missy, the reforms demolished the actual image of self that belonged to the men and their beards and even with their clothing. He describes the clothing that is worn in Moscow and speaks of the retaliation of the people, "These insinuations, which came from the priests, occasioned the publication of many pamphlets in Moscow, where for that reason alone (the reforms of clothing) the tsar was regarded as a tyrant and a pagan."<sup>13</sup> His reforms attacked the usual

---

<sup>10</sup> Vernadsky, 349.

<sup>11</sup> Vernadsky, 349.

<sup>12</sup> Vernadsky, 349

<sup>13</sup> Robinson, 311.

dress and it seemed as though Peter was purposefully antagonizing the church. De Missy sees the reforms as being unnecessary, that the style was something that defined Russian culture.

In the *Diary of an Austrian Secretary of Legation at the Court of Peter the Great*, an Austrian secretary talks about the fashion of the Russian women. That they are graceful in figure, fair, and comely in feature<sup>14</sup> but because of their clothing they hide their beauty. He talks about many customs of the women in relation to banquets, husbands and society in general. From his writings, it's apparent that he adores the way Russian women's bodies look, "their shapes, imprisoned by stays, are free to grow as nature bids, and are not of so neat and trim figure as those of other Europeans."<sup>15</sup>

In a time when reading was reserved for the upper class, for they could afford to get an education, the general public needed to find a way to express their feelings. They, generally, would not be able to read any materials that might have been produced in order to share their view on the reforms of Russia. So how was it that the peasants attempted to express themselves? They expressed themselves through paintings. Though the Lubok's demographic was large, it was ironically the upper classes that enjoyed the comics most and was generally the only ones that owned a copy of the work. One example of such work is a Lubok, which is a Russian comic illustration. The Lubok originated during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a few decades before Peter the Great's birth and over time, as his reign progressed, they become more satirical and openly directed towards him. Luboks were generally painted on a canvas, woodcuts, engravings and a few had even been painted on the side of homes and businesses.

---

<sup>14</sup> Alexander V. Riasanovsky, *Readings in Russian History, Vol II*, (Iowa, Kendall/Hunt Publishing Comp, 1974), 23

<sup>15</sup> Riasanovsky, 23.

One of the most pervasive Luboks in the time of Peter the Great had the caption of “The Barber Wants to cut off a Beard of an Old Believer”(Fig. 1)<sup>16</sup>. This Lubok had been created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in reaction to the cutting of the beards with the author remaining anonymous. In this time period it was not safe for an individual to openly oppose the Tsar so many painters and authors did much of their work in private and without recognition. Another reason that many of the works remain anonymous was the laws that were formulated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Russian state wanted to regulate satirical paintings that were directed towards the tsars, so they “ordered all previously existing printing plates destroyed, the better to prevent reproduction of nonapproved old messages and to control the content of the new approved ones.”<sup>17</sup> Many of the traditional Luboks were destroyed, of course some people protected these Luboks and because of this, we have examples of resistance to the reforms of Peter the Great.

“The Barber Wants to Cut off a Beard of an Old Believer,” is a painting of a person on the right side dressed in western clothing cutting the beard of a man dressed in traditional Russian fashion. The man in Russian clothes is said to be a boyar from the upper class. In the picture the boyar is depicted as being larger than the barber. In many cases, when a painter wants something to be the main focus of the painting, they make the object stand out more than anything else in the frame, drawing the eyes to the subject. By representing the boyar as being larger than the barber it creates inferior and superior characters, the boyar being the superior figure over the European dressed barber. The artist of this painting could be saying that once the barber decided to dress in a way that was everything different from traditional clothes, he lost his integrity and was inferior to the ‘Old Believer’ who chose to maintain his traditions, and not that the Boyar is superior to the barber because of their social statuses. The

---

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Bogslawski, *Satirical Lubok*, <http://myweb.rollins.edu/abogslawski/Lubok/lubsatir.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Jos Alaniz, *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia*. (Jackson MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 23



boyar is protesting with his hand raised as if he is calling someone but there is obviously nothing that he can do to stop the barber from cutting his beard. The boyar is being forced into a transition from what he was into what the barber is. The barber stands there not only to ensure that the boyar makes the required changes but as a representation of what the boyar is going to become. The artist is attempting to foreshadow the boyar's future. These Luboks were able to convey the concerns of the people most affected by the decrees and were also used as propaganda in the resistance to Peter's reforms.



Figure 1: "The Barber Wants to Cut a Beard of an Old Believer", author anonymous.

Another Lubok that pertains to Peter the Great that is a very popular example of an artist who obviously opposed Peter. It was created in 1850 after the death of Peter the Great, this too had an anonymous author. The title of the lubok is "Burial of the Cat by the Mice" (Fig. 2)<sup>18</sup>. It is considered to

<sup>18</sup> Kevin Kinsella, *New First Unexpected*, <http://reddomino.typepad.com/newfirstunexpected/2009/04/index.html>.

contain a reference to another painting entitled 'Cat of Karzan'. The 'Cat of Karzan' was a painting that was again directed at Peter. In the painting of the 'Burial of the Cat', there are a series of different windows that each contain a diverse scene. It is said by historians that the "Burial of the Cat by the Mice," is a depiction of the burial of Peter the Great with each scene being a representation of a region in Russia.

Jos Alaniz's book, *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia*, focuses on Luboks or Russian comics that evolved through the Enlightenment period and then the revival of Lubok paintings after Stalin's control. When it comes to the painting of "The Burial of the Cat by the Mice", he makes the statement that the painting was recreated three times in the eighteenth century. This was a very popular painting in a series known as 'revenge on Peter', the people are attempting to get back at Peter for his reforms on the people. Alaniz's analysis of the Lubok is that, "these depict the funeral procession of the 'Kazan cat' by up to sixty-six mice, each named after regions of Russia, some playing musical instruments, with satirical text."<sup>19</sup> The mice are believed to be the common people of Russia, each one representing a region, and the cat representing Peter. In the eyes of the people, during his life, he terrorized them, making them do everything that he wanted in order to westernize the country. In reality the cat terrorizes mice and has the power over them. When it comes to the mice playing the instruments, Alaniz asserts that they are celebrating the new found freedom from continued Westernization. It created an actual depiction of 'while the cat is out the mice will come out to play.' This celebration of Peter's demise is representative of the dislike brought about by his reforms and his responses to resistance to those reforms.

---

<sup>19</sup> Alaniz, pp 23.

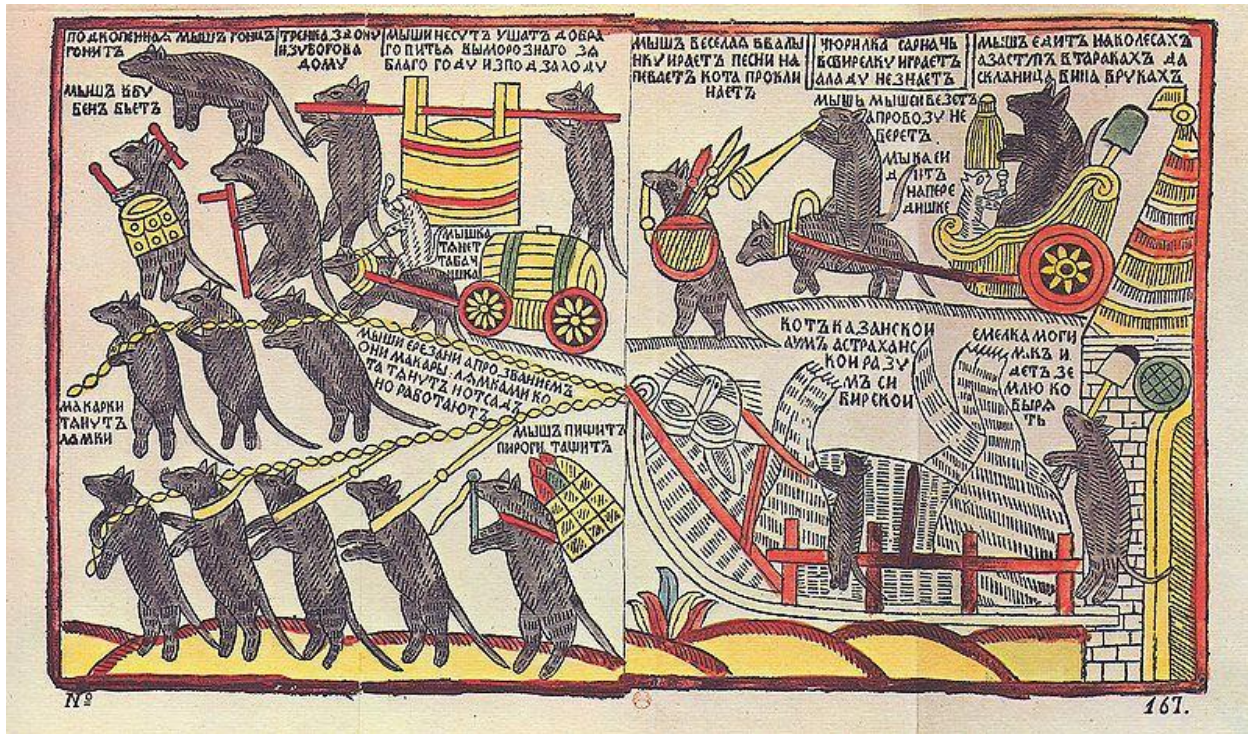


Figure 3: "Burial of the Cat by the Mice." Author anonymous.

When it comes to Peter the Great, historians generally fail to focus on one aspect of his reforms, and that is that they are directed towards society as a whole. Social reforms had a big impact on the upper and lower classes but are not the main focal point in most historical essays. The decrees released by Peter the Great in regards to the social reforms and Russian fashion it is obvious that they were not released in order to benefit Russian society. It can be seen that it is meant to pump up his ego to be surrounded by European dress. He attacked, whether it was indirect or not, the traditional values of the people and demanded that they forget them. In the eyes of some westerners it may have made a difference, making them seem more Western-like but demolished the integrity of Russian culture. Even the vision of Russian transformation is various.

By looking at the social reforms I can see the different approaches to the topic by other historians, many of whom look at military and political advancements. Some historians, such as P.N. Miliukov, claim that his social reforms produced a negative effect or even that without the military and political

reforms nothing would have happened. Other historians like Evgenii V. Anisimov, focus on the way Peter enforced his policies and put forth that he did not consciously consider the impact that these reforms had on the general public. A small segment of historians look at his decrees concerning social change, as a very positive aspect that facilitated the growth of Russia and believe that without these changes Russia would have not been able to prosper. Some of the most influential of his reforms were the cutting of facial hair and the changes to Russian fashion. Each one of these had their own goals to achieve. The decree that was released in 1705 requiring the cutting of facial hair, brought about an uproar from the Traditionalists. And the same reaction surfaced with the change of Russian dress to a most modern, western style.

Peter had a great desire for western influence to be prominent in Russia, although he still understood that the peasants, who made up the majority of the population, would be financially unable to afford Western fashion. According to the decrees the most central group in the Russian hierarchy to his reforms were the individuals who made up his council. By requiring the council to wear western clothing they set an example to the rest of society. Peter the Great desired to be prosperous like the west; it was the most powerful part of the world and his desire was to emulate countries such as Great Britain, France, and Germany. The only obstacle that he faced was the unwillingness of the traditionalists to cooperate with his designs. Peter's modern vision for Russia was not shared by the Russian Traditionalists; many individuals clung fervently to their traditions and refused to give up their beliefs. The social reforms struck a personal note for these Traditionalists, their clothing and facial hair was tied to their strict Orthodox religion. To the traditionalists this endangered their chance to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Opinions of the reforms varied between the traditionalists and the younger generations who adapted easily to the reforms in Russia. In the west opinions also diverged; the historian Jean Rousset

de Missy describes the importance of the beard to the men: how it was essential to their ascension to heaven. He also discusses their clothing, which was traditionally modest although this modesty was not reflected after the reforms. Missy, like the traditionalists, was surprised by the amount of changes that Peter forced on his people. Whereas the Austrian secretary, was relieved that the dress was changed for the women, as their traditional dress was neither flattering or revealing. I would say that Peter the Great was a reformer, reshaping the Russian way of life for profit and for his own egotistical pleasure. If one is a revolutionary they are fighting for the freedom of their country against an oppressor, as a liberator. Peter the Great was not a liberator if anything he was the oppressor. He forced the Russian people to conform to his vision of a western country and would enforce a penalty if they did not comply.

Peter's ambitions were honest, wanting to westernize and create a more modern Russian society. Nonetheless, his reforms were met with civil disobedience, political satire, and in one case open revolt. The extreme and pervasive manner in which Peter handed out his reforms and the ardor with which he enforced them certainly justified the resistance and even the revolt of his people. In truth, it would be reasonable to believe that Peter himself anticipated the resistance if not the actual rebellion.

### Bibliography

- Alaniz, Jos. *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia*. Jackson MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010
- Anisimov V, Evgenii, *The Reforms of Peter the Great: Progress Through Coercion in Russia*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993.
- Miliukov, P. N., *Peter the Great: Reformer or Revolutionary: Social and Political Reforms*. Edited by Marc Raeff. Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1963.
- Missy, Jean Rousset de, *Readings in European History Vol. II*. Edited by James Harvey Robinson. Boston: The Athenaeum Press, 1906.
- Raeff, Marc, *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Warnes, David, *Chronicle of the Russian Tsars: The Reign- By- Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Russia*. New York, Thames and Hudson, 1999.
- Riasanovsky, Nicholas V, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1985.
- A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917, Vol II*. Edited by George Vernadsky. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972.
- Riansanovsky, Alexander V, editor, *Readings in Russian History: Vol II*. Dubuque, Iowa, Kendall/Huny Publishing Company, 1992

### Web Sources

- Kevin Kinsella, *New First Unexpected*,  
<http://reddomino.typepad.com/newfirstunexpected/2009/04/index.html>.  
 Alexander Bogslawski, *Satirical Lubok*, <http://myweb.rollins.edu/aboguslawski/Lubok/lubsatir.html>.