Chapter 16

Eighteenth-Century Economic and Social Life

The century of Peter I and Catherine II was one of significant expansion not only in territory, but also in population, economic development, and noble privileges. There were also smaller-scale advances in urban development, the status of women and children, social services, fighting famine, and humanizing the law. The century, however, was not one of advancement for Russia's largest group—the serfs.

POPULATION AND TOWNS

Russia's population more than doubled during the eighteenth century, going from about 15 to 16 million inhabitants in 1719 to a little over 37 million by 1796. Although Russia began the century with a smaller population than France, by 1789 it outnumbered France by about 10 million people. Thus, despite its low population density, Russia had become the largest country in Europe.

As colonization and conquests increased, the population spread out over the entire empire, from former Polish lands to the Pacific Ocean. Although population rose in the center of the empire, it grew even faster in southern areas, such as Left-Bank Ukraine, New Russia, and the lower Volga valley.

Although many new towns came into existence—Catherine II alone claimed credit for 216 new ones in the first twenty-three years of her reign— the percentage of urban dwellers at the end of the century was probably not much higher than at the time of the first tax census in 1719. Boris Mironov even believes that between 1742 and 1783 the urban percentage of European Russia's population actually declined and continued to do so into the early nineteenth century. Although some of his demographic data has been challenged by Hoch and others, we can reasonably conclude from his figures and others that by 1799 approximately one-tenth of European Russia's population lived in towns and their suburbs. Mironov cites colonization of new lands, certain restrictions on mobility, and unhealthy urban conditions as some of the reasons for the failure of urban population to increase as rapidly as that of rural areas.

By the end of the eighteenth century, St. Petersburg, less than a century old, had become the largest city in the empire. Moscow was a close second. These "two capitals" together possessed about 400,000 inhabitants. According to Kahan's estimates, no other city of the empire had more than 50,000 people. Astrakhan, Kazan, Tula, and Vilna each had between 30,000 and 50,000; Yaroslavl, Kaluga, Kiev, Kursk, Orel, Riga, and Saratov each had between 20,000 and 30,000. Fourteen other cities had between 10,000 and 20,000. Some large cities were sea or river port towns benefiting from international or domestic trade. Examples of seaport towns were Astrakhan and Riga; river port towns included Yaroslavl and Saratov.

Towns were marked by their walls; their concentrated population; and at least some stone or brick construction, including their churches. Most towns were trading and cultural centers, serving the surrounding countryside, and some also produced goods; some towns of less than 1,000 people were little more than district government centers. Many cities fulfilled several functions. For example, Yaroslavl was not only a Volga port city, but also a provincial capital and a center of textile production.

St. Petersburg and Moscow, both much smaller than London, Paris, or Naples and larger (by 1783) than Berlin, presented an interesting contrast. The first was a planned city of canals and straight roads, reflecting the rationalism of Peter the Great and the eighteenth century. By the end of the century, numerous baroque and neoclassical palaces and other buildings graced the city. Other rich palaces and

FIGURE 16.1. The Tsar Cannon in Moscow's Kremlin, cast in 1586 but never fired. In 1700, the Swedes captured numerous Russian cannon at Narva, and a desperate Peter I had many church bells pulled down and recast as cannon. Already important to Tsar Alexei, weapons production became a major focus of Peter I and remained important to his eighteenth-century successors.

royal estates surrounded the new capital. By contrast, Moscow had grown more spontaneously, and its many large gardens and old churches made it seem more rural, religious, and "Russian" than the new capital.

Like Peter I, Catherine II preferred St. Petersburg to Moscow. The inhabitants of the first she found more commercial, docile, polite, and open to foreign ideas; those of the second, more slothful and superstitious. She also complained of Moscow's thieves and brigands and its heavy concentration of manufactories.

Also like Peter I, creator of St. Petersburg, Catherine II was a believer in urban planning. In both new and rebuilt cities (such as Tver, devastated by fire in 1763), her planners attempted to reduce the constant threat of fire by building wider streets and more stone buildings. They also tried to improve sanitation by such measures as locating factories where their pollution would do the least damage and, at least in St. Petersburg, moving the slaughterhouses away from the city's center. In Dmitrov, which lay north of Moscow, some homes were destroyed to fulfill a new plan, which also apportioned selected streets just for members of the nobility.

Catherine II thought that towns had three chief functions. They should be centers of government, public welfare, and trade and industry. But even by the end of Catherine's reign, institutions such as hospitals, schools, and orphanages employed and served relatively few.

Legally classified townspeople, working in such areas as crafts, trade, and manufacturing (the earlier *posad* people), were still the single largest urban category. But they were outnumbered by the combined total of other urban dwellers. Among the latter were officials and clerks, nobles, soldiers, clergy, and especially peasants, both serfs and state peasants. Many peasants did not consider themselves permanent city residents, some only staying for part of a year. Munro estimates that during Catherine II's reign up to 50 thousand peasants per year migrated to St. Petersburg for summer construction work. Many left their families in the countryside—a partial explanation for why by 1800 the combined male population in St. Petersburg and Moscow was more than double the female. The peasants, if not serfs belonging to city nobles, took whatever jobs they could find, for example, as manual labors, water carriers, servants, peddlers, porters, and horsecarriage drivers. And not only some peasants, but also other urban residents, sometimes engaged in agrarian occupations or activities within the towns.

MANUFACTURING AND TRADE

From Peter I's death in 1725 until 1800, the number of manufactories rose from perhaps a little more than 200 to about six to ten times that figure. They produced or processed chiefly iron and weapons, precious metals, copper, ships, salt, linen and wool cloth, silk-wares, cotton textiles, bricks, glass, and paper.

Pig iron was especially important. By 1800, the empire was producing about twelve times what it had in 1725. It briefly became the largest pig iron producer in the world, surpassing England, to whom it exported large quantities of this basic metal. By the 1760s, Russia was also in the forefront of European silver and copper production and beginning to accelerate significantly its output of gold. The increase in precious metals and copper stimulated other industries and trade.

As the century proceeded, a larger percentage of industrial production was carried on by private enterprise. For example, although the state produced a little more than one-third of the total pig iron in 1725, in 1800 it produced only a little more than one-tenth. In most other areas of production, the government was even less involved. It still played a major industrial role, however, by being the chief buyer of many products; by controlling vast natural resources; by granting licenses, monopolies, and subsidies; and by various other policies that affected the availability of labor and resources.

Despite encouraging some private enterprise both in manufacturing and commerce, the tsarist government remained ambivalent at best regarding any large--scale independent business activity. This caution was indicated in various ways including the government's failure to develop adequate corporate laws. As Thomas Owen has noted, between 1700 and 1820 the government allowed only 33 corporations to come into existence, and most of them did not last long.

Even after 1762, when the government prohibited nonnobles henceforth to buy serfs, most factory laborers continued to be either assigned state peasants or serfs owned by the factory owners. In some industries, however, owners gradually came to rely more on hired labor, mainly peasants. Ironically, many of these peasants were privately owned serfs whose noble owners either compelled or allowed them to enter into factory labor contracts. Either way, the serfowners were paid for the loss of their serfs' services.

Russia also made use of many women and children in the factories. After 1725, the government continued to sentence women it considered vagrants, for example, prostitutes and criminals' wives, to factory service. Two decrees of 1762 targeted vagrant wives of soldiers. Children under the age of fifteen, often even younger than eleven, were also employed. Their families needed the money, and the owners could pay them less than adults.

As in most countries' early industrialization, working conditions were often appalling, at least by modern standards. Only Sundays and holidays (together numbering almost 100 days per year) gave much respite. Workers worked twelve hours a day and more and faced unsanitary working and living conditions and harsh factory discipline, including beatings. Only unrest and rebellion, for example, among many Ural workers who joined Pugachev, stimulated the government to take steps (such as pay raises) to appease workers. Such measures, however, had little effect on long-term trends.

Domestic and foreign trade grew rapidly, especially in the second half of the century. The government's abolition of internal customs duties in the early 1750s helped domestic trade. So too did decrees of Peter III and Catherine II ending most merchant privileges in manufacturing and trade, thus opening these spheres up more to other estates and stimulating economic growth in the countryside. Finally, increased industrial and agricultural production fostered trade both between towns and villages and between different regions.

Urban and rural fairs and bazaars were the primary arteries for distributing goods. According to Mironov's figures (cited in Kahan), the number of fairs increased from 627 in the 1750s to 3,447 within about the same territory in the 1790s.

Fairs lasted several days or longer and varied considerably in size and in the products traded. Although their drawing power varied, the largest fairs attracted

people from various regions and even foreign buyers and sellers. Bazaars operated on specific days of the week, and food and craft products dominated the trade. Larger city bazaars offered greater variety, including more manufactured domestic and imported goods.

In foreign trade, Russia continued to export more than it imported. Chief exports were flax, grain, hemp, iron, livestock products, pitch, tar, tallow, timber, and cheap textiles. The opening up of Black Sea ports under Catherine the Great stimulated wheat production and its export from southern regions. Many imports were either for use in Russian industry, such as dyes, lead, raw silk, and tin, or for upper-class use, such as certain clothing, beverages, and food. Only a few imported goods, such as nails and needles, found many buyers among the lower classes.

Russia's chief trading partner throughout the last two-thirds of the eighteenth century was Great Britain, with Russia's exports far exceeding imports. The British bought hemp, flax, pitch, tar, tallow, masts, linen textiles, and iron—such imports helping them fuel Europe's first industrial revolution.

VILLAGES AND HOUSING

Most Russian peasants, whether serfs or not, lived in villages containing anywhere from several to hundreds of households. Most peasant huts were made of wood except in southern areas, where they were built of materials such as clay and

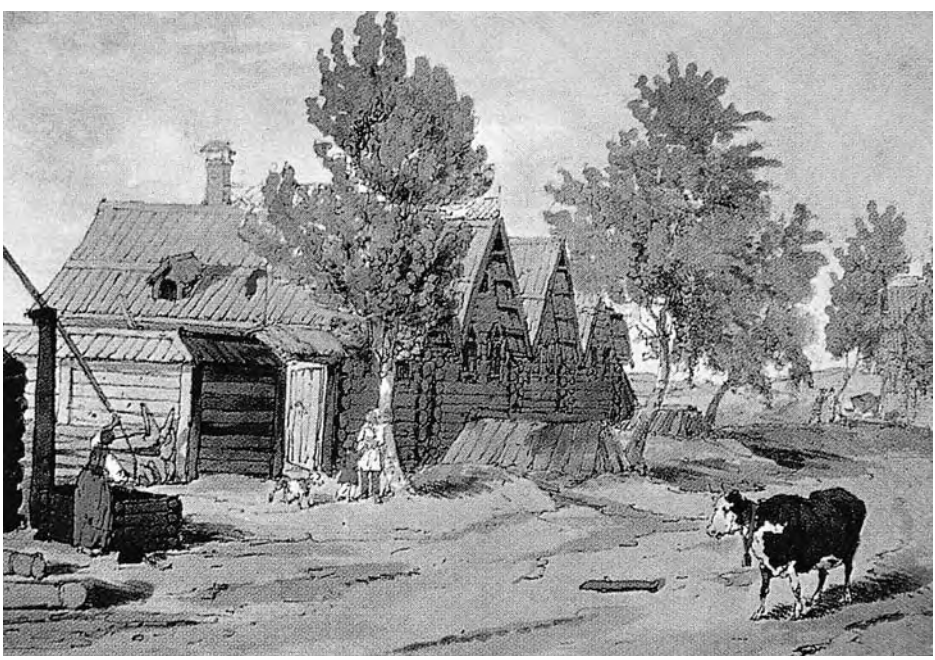

FIGURE 16.2. A northern peasant village, around 1800.
(From Robert Wallace and the Editors of Time-Life Books, *Rise of Russia*. Time Inc., New York, 1967, p. 146, Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Rare Book Department.)

Villages and Housing: A Foreign Observation

One of the best observers of eighteenth-century Russian life was the Englishman William Tooke (1744–1820). The following selection is taken from his *View of the Russian Empire during the Reign of Catherine the Second, and to the Close of the Eighteenth Century* 2d ed. (London, 1800), Vol. II, pp. 40–44. I have modernized spellings and punctuation, and bracketed material and ellipses are mine.

Villages of extremely various dimensions . . . are situated on the margin of rivers, brooks, lakes, and sometimes on mere morasses and springs. . . . Large villages are frequently called slobodes; but many slobodes are less than church villages [the largest of which might contain a thousand or more households]. . . .

The proper Russian architecture is alike in towns and villages. A message consists of a dwelling-house, with a few little store-rooms, stables, and a stew, or hotbath. . . . All these structures are built of bauks, unhewn, placed on one another and notched into each other at the four corners, sometimes, though but rarely, on a brick foundation; these houses are covered with boards, and when the owner can afford it, with oak shingles. The meanest dwellinghouses consist solely of one little room. . . .

In it is an oven, taking up almost one-fourth part of the whole space; adjoining to it, of equal height with the oven, is a broad shelf of board. The top of the oven and this shelf are the sleeping places of the family. The light is admitted into these houses through two or three holes in the walls furnished with shutters, or through a little window of muscovy-glass, or only of bladder, oiled linen or paper. The smoke finds its way out as well as it can through these apertures in the wall. These rooms, as may well be supposed, are as black as a chimney. . . .

The household-furniture, both in town and country, even among people of opulence, is very simple. In the room, which, with very few exceptions, is at the same time the kitchen, are a table, benches, the shelf, which serves for the dormitory, and in the corner one or more holy figures [icons]. . . . Splinters, like laths, of fir or very dry birchwood are much more commonly used for giving light in the room after dark than tallow-candles. . . .

The interior houses are much pestered with domestic vermin; besides the common house-rat and mouse, they swarm with water-rats, bats, large beetles very frequent, crickets, bugs, fleas in abundance, various kinds of very troublesome flies, gnats, moths, bullmoths, [and] wood-lice.

stone because of the scarcity of trees. The houses of nobles and townsmen were also often wooden and in the old Russian styles. By the end of the century, however, brick and stone were becoming more common for those who could afford them and so too were Western architectural styles. Both in cities and on noble estates, neoclassical columned buildings especially reflected the new foreign influence.

Besides Tooke's observations, others noted the crowded conditions in the huts, especially in the long winters, when some animals were brought in. Conversely, in the summers, some members of the household, like a young married couple, normally slept in unheated sheds or other areas outside the crowded hut.

AGRICULTURE, NOBLES, AND PEASANTS

Agriculture

Although by 1800 many peasants and some nobles earned supplemental income through crafts, industry, and trade, agriculture still dominated Russia's economy. Even some merchants joined nobles and peasants in obtaining new farmlands opened up by Catherine II's conquests. During the eighteenth century, available plow land more than doubled. This growth, plus the stimulus of growing trade, significantly boosted agricultural production, especially under Catherine II.

Activities in the countryside continued to be largely determined by custom and nature. The three-field system of crop rotation and the use of the light *sokha* plow still predominated. From spring to fall, there was primarily plowing, planting, pasturing, mowing, and harvesting. Late fall and winter were chiefly devoted to threshing, repairing, craft production, and what other labor the cold weather would permit.

The Nobles

By 1795, the nobles of the empire made up slightly more than 2 percent of the population. In the previous half-century, they had grown at better than double the rate

FIGURE 16.3. Inside a peasant cabin, around 1800. Note the big oven and the suspended infant cradle.
(From Robert Wallace and the Editors of Time-Life Books, *Rise of Russia*. Time lnc., New York, 1967, p. 147, Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Rare Book Department.)

of the remaining population. This rapid expansion was due primarily to Catherine's partitions of Poland, for in these newly conquered territories nobles were more densely concentrated, consisting of about 8 percent of the population before Russian annexation.

The empire's nobles measured their wealth primarily by the number of male serfs they owned. For those in military or civilian service, their rank also helped determine their wealth and status. LeDonne has divided the noble ruling class into three categories. In the top group, the ruling elite, he places about 8,500 individuals in the 1770s, about 8,000 of whom owned more than 100 male serfs. The second group held lesser ranks or fewer serfs (20 to 100); the third group held still lower ranks or the fewest serfs (less than 20). In the 1770s, about three-fifths of the noble landowners in European Russia possessed fewer than 20 male serfs each, and only about one-sixth of the noble landowners owned more than 100 each, but these wealthier nobles possessed about four-fifths of all serfs.

Most young nobles were forced by economic need to serve in the military or civil bureaucracy, at least until they came into their inheritance. Ironically, however, some complained of being too poor to possess the boots or clothes necessary to enter service. After receiving their inheritance, some nobles resigned from service as soon as possible; at the beginning of Catherine's reign, only about 20 to 25 percent of noblemen served in civil or military service.

Upon a father's death, his sons would normally divide up his property and serfs except for one-seventh, which went to their mother, and an even smaller share to any sisters. Thus, with each generation, noble estates and the number of serfs that went with them tended to decline. (The law in effect from 1714 to 1731 requiring property to be passed on to only one son was often evaded and hardly affected this long-term trend.) Only the purchase or grant of new lands prevented this gradual diminution of landholding, but many nobles were too poor or insignificant to benefit from such remedies.

Some poor nobles lived lives hardly distinguishable from their serfs, often working the fields along with them and sometimes even living together with them in small, crowded huts. Many could not afford to educate their sons, even if they wanted to. S. T. Aksakov in his novel *The Family Chronicle* exaggerates only slightly when he says of his eighteenth-century hero, Stepan Bagrov, "like all his contemporaries of the Russian landed gentry, [he] had little or no education; he could scarcely read or write Russian."[1]

Wealthier nobles, however, increasingly prized education. Some sent their boys away to school, whereas others had them tutored at home. Some also invested in manufacturing. At the top of the noble class, a small number of families, such as the Sheremetevs, the Voronstovs, and the Yusupovs, each owned serfs numbering in the tens of thousands and scattered over numerous provinces. Among such families, visitors might enjoy sumptuous meals in rich surroundings and be entertained by a serf orchestra, ballet, or theater performers.

Because of their many extravagancies, some of the biggest magnates also owed the biggest debts. Count N. P. Sheremetev, the noble with the most serfs (some 186,000 male and female) and land (over 2.5 million acres) owed more than 2

[1]*The Family Chronicle* (New York, 1961), p. 6.

million rubles in 1800. Frugality was not a virtue to many Russian aristocrats. During the late eighteenth century, their profligate ways led the government to set up banks where nobles could borrow money at rates more reasonable than the earlier usurious rates they had paid various moneylenders.

The Peasants

If the wealthy nobles were at the top of the social pyramid, the peasants were at its broad-based bottom, composing about nine-tenths of the population. Throughout the century, most peasants remained the serfs of noble masters. Before 1762–3, there were three other principal types of peasants: state (a category created by Peter the Great), church, and court, with the first outnumbering the combined total of the other two. Some church holdings rivaled those of the wealthiest landowners; for example, in the middle of the century, Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery possessed more than 100,000 male peasants.

After the secularization of church property in the early 1760s, approximately 1 million male church peasants were transferred to state-peasant status. By 1796, this state-peasant category, which by then contained numerous subgroups, made up close to two-fifths of all peasants and included those earlier referred to as "black peasants" (see Chapter 11). State peasants lived mostly outside the heart of old Muscovy, especially in the north, the Ural regions, the transitional forest-steppe area, and Siberia. Besides serfs and state peasants, smaller peasant groups still remained, the largest of which were the court peasants, who worked on imperial properties.

By 1796, most peasants, including serfs, worked in repartitional communes that periodically redistributed strips of land in different fields to each peasant household. How many strips were assigned to each household depended on various criteria, for example, its size, its labor strength, or its number of adult males. However it was done, peasants generally did not farm consolidated plots but harvested their crops from scattered strips. The origins of the repartitional commune have been extensively debated, but it seems to have spread rapidly in the eighteenth century. It received noble and governmental backing because both elements wished to insure that all peasants produced at least enough to meet their obligations, whether to the nobles, the state, or both. Despite the egalitarian aspects of the commune, however, ample evidence exists that some peasants were much better off than others.

In exchange for the right to farm some estate strips for themselves, serfs continued to pay their landowners in primarily one of two ways, *barshchina* or *obrok*. Although Emperor Paul's manifesto of 1797 suggested limiting work for the master on land from which he received the produce to three days per week, *barshchina* practices, as well as other relations between serfs and masters, continued to vary widely.[2] Some landowners demanded as much as six days' labor, leaving serfs only nights, Sundays, and holidays to farm the strips they were

[2]This wide variation has led Steven L. Hoch, "The Serf Economy, the Peasant Family and the Social Order," IR, p. 206, to go so far as to say that "serfdom was not a system, but a widely varying set of practices."

allotted for their own use. Because *obrok* payments in crops or money did not involve tilling under the supervision of the master or his steward, peasants preferred it to *barshchina*.

Which system any serfowner decided upon—and sometimes a combination of both was required—depended on several variables. Soil quality was always important. Where it was good, as in the southern black-earth region, *barshchina* predominated, whereas to the north, where the soil was less fertile, *obrok* was more dominant. Thus, the better the soil, the more likely the landowner was to set some land aside to be tilled under his or his steward's supervision and from which he received the produce.

One curious aspect of the *obrok* system was that it enabled serfs, if they obtained their master's permission, to leave his estate and work somewhere else—as long as they kept sending back their *obrok* payments. This explains the high percentage of *obrok*-paying serfs in some Russian cities by 1800.

Occasionally a serf even prospered while working in trade or industry, but if he did, his master usually demanded more *obrok*. Because a serf had no legal claim to any property, any or all of it, including his money, could be seized by his landowner. Reluctant to lose a good source of income, serfowners also sometimes demanded exorbitant fees from prosperous serfs who wished to buy their freedom. One of Count Sheremetev's serfs, who had become a rich textile manufacturer, was required to pay more than 130,000 rubles to become a free man.

Besides serfs under *barshchina* or *obrok*, there was still another category— house serfs. They took over many of the jobs earlier performed by slaves; they served as butlers, carpenters, cooks, nannies, seamstresses, scribes, shepherds, and stablemen. Because of their closer proximity to their master and his family—and its whims—the lot of these serf domestics was unenviable, and most peasants dreaded the thought of themselves or their children becoming house serfs.

Peter Kolchin, who has done a thorough comparison of American slavery and Russian serfdom, states that already by the mid-eighteenth century the power of the Russian serfowner over his serfs was comparable to that of an American slaveowner over his slaves. Such a situation helps explain why many serfs continued to flee their masters when opportunities presented themselves. Hartley has estimated that more than a half million did so between 1719 and 1742.

By 1796, serfowners could not only beat their serfs, but also have them exiled to Siberia and hard labor or sent to the army for the standard twenty-five years' service. They could force them into marriages and into having sex, and they could sell them, even separate from their families or the land they tilled. (By the late 1780s, 100 rubles was about the average price for a serf, although Potemkin paid 40,000 rubles for a fifty-serf orchestra.) By a 1767 law, serfs were no longer allowed to petition the government about serfowner injustices.

Many historians traditionally believed that serfdom reached its apex under Catherine II. As Jerome Blum stated: "The trade in peasants reached its peak—as did so many of the cruelest aspects of Russian serfdom—during the reign of Catherine II."[3]

Taxes and *obrok* payments demanded by the state and landowners increased

[3]*Lord and Peasant in Russia, from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1969), p. 424.

during the century, but it is difficult to assess how much, if at all, the economic burden on the serfs (and other peasants) increased. Some historians have even argued that if one factors in inflation, the peasants were probably paying less in real economic terms in the 1790s than they had in the early 1770s. David Moon has written that the "average material living standards of many Russian peasants" probably improved during the late eighteenth century.[4]

Isabel de Madariaga has also insisted peasant conditions under Catherine II were generally better than usually depicted. She has cited figures, for example, which indicate that about one-fifth of peasant households in the Kursk province possessed substantial numbers of such animals as cows, horses, pigs, and sheep. Her writings as well as some others suggest that Russian peasants were not as impoverished or left as alone and defenseless in hard times as were many poor people in France and some other European countries. Along similar lines, Hoch has written that "being tied to the land is a much underrated notion; in Russia, from the mid-seventeenth century being a peasant (with few exceptions) implied an entitlement to land, which is not a bad deal, if you are subsistence-oriented."[5]

Madariaga has also defended Catherine against charges that she turned over an exorbitant number of state peasants to her favorites, former favorites, and other nobles, thus extending serfdom to hundreds of thousands of previously "free" peasants. According to Madariaga, most of those handed over were already unfree, the chief source being confiscated estates, especially from partitioned Poland.

Catherine did take some minor steps to limit serfdom and alleviate the sufferings of serfs. In 1775, for example, she prohibited re-enserfing any freed serf and allowed provincial governors to seize estates in circumstances in which landowners were treating their serfs cruelly. Fear of upsetting the social equilibrium, however, especially after the Pugachev rebellion, scared her away from any major changes.

Finally, in assessing the life of eighteenth-century serfs, the possible must be distinguished from the probable. Because nobles could confiscate the property of their serfs or have them sent to Siberia does not mean that most serfowners did so. Even Radishchev, a most severe critic of serfowners, recognized that some were noble in behavior as well as title. In his *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, he mentioned, for example, a master who educated one of his serfs just as he did his own son. Moreover, some aristocrats during Catherine II's reign established peasant schools that educated a small percentage of their serfs. Finally, in contrast to American slaves, most serfs were of the same race and nationality as their masters, and their ancestors had usually tilled the same soil for many generations. Thus, they were not subject to the racism and degree of alienation suffered by many American slaves.

EATING AND DRINKING; FAMINES AND OTHER CALAMITIES

Although the eating habits of common people changed little in the eighteenth century, those of an increasingly westernized gentry began to reflect growing

[4]*The Russian Peasantry, 1600–1930: The World the Peasants Made* (London, 1999), p. 293.
[5]Hoch, p. 200.

Western influence. Toward the end of the century, the Englishman Tooke observed that "persons of distinction keep their tables supplied with meats and drinks entirely in the foreign taste, hire French cooks, etc." Indeed by then few Russian aristocrats were without a foreign cook.

Under Catherine the Great, food items were plentiful in St. Petersburg's markets, and most inhabitants could afford at least basic items such as flour (for bread and other foods), beets, cabbage, garlic, and onions. A head of cabbage, for example, cost less than one kopeck and some unskilled workers earned 15–25 kopecks a day in the 1760s. Meat and fish were readily available and although more costly than flour and vegetables, were not terribly expensive and were affordable to many at least some of the time. Munro suggests that even in times of Russian shortages or high prices, the people of St. Petersburg ate better than many others. Although many of the capital's workers had their meals in their own dwellings, others ate at inexpensive eateries (*kharchevye*). These eateries were often run by enterprising peasants (according to legal classification) who rented ground-floor or basement space for the purpose. Food could also be eaten at taverns, but they were primarily drinking establishments.

Sugar, Tea, and Vodka

One product that became increasingly popular among the nobles was sugar, which gradually replaced honey as their principal sweetener. By the end of Catherine II's reign, its imported value easily exceeded the combined total of coffee and wines, the next two most imported food or drink items. By then, sugar made up about one-fifth the value of all imports. This growth, in turn, stimulated the establishment of additional sugar refineries after the first was begun in 1723.

One new use for sugar was in tea. Although brief references to tea were made in late seventeenth-century sources, it was only after Peter I's death, and especially during the last third of the eighteenth century, that Russian tea imports from China increased significantly. They came primarily through the border town of Kiakhta. When the Kiakhta trade was occasionally suspended, Russia obtained its tea secondhand from Western Europe.

Under Catherine II, tea drinking, at least in European Russia, was mainly associated with the nobles, some of whom developed the custom of taking afternoon tea. Just as sugar imports stimulated the establishment of sugar refineries, so tea imports encouraged the beginnings of the production of samovars to heat water for tea.

If nobles were the leading tea drinkers, vodka had a more common appeal—and one that continued to grow. Smith and Christian have estimated that spirits consumption went from averaging about four pints per year for every man in the country under Peter I to more than ten pints by the end of Catherine II's reign and that state alcohol revenue went from 11.4 percent of total budget revenue in 1724 to about 30 percent by 1795. The revenue figures explain why the state continued to encourage drinking.

Not only did the government profit from increased vodka consumption, but so too did some merchants and many nobles. Early in the century, both groups, plus the government, operated distilleries, but by the mid-1750s, only the government

FIGURE 16.4. Village tavern, around 1800.
(From Robert Wallace and the Editors of Time-Life Books, *Rise of Russia*. Time Inc., New York, 1967, p. 146, Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Rare Book Department.)

and nobles could produce spirits. During the last decades of Catherine II's reign, nobles and even their serfs (with noble permission) increasingly joined merchants in the business of leasing from the government the right to sell liquor. Not surprisingly, some of the biggest profits were earned by wealthy noble landowners, including some who helped shape government alcohol policies.

Hunger, Famine, and Plague

The availability of grains for bread and gruel (*kasha*) chiefly determined whether Russia's vast mass of peasants and urban poor suffered from hunger and famine. In normal years, grain was sufficient. But when bad weather was severe and long-lasting, the masses suffered, in some places more than others. Russia's low grain yields per acre—less than half that of Western Europe at the end of the eighteenth century—left too little surplus. Grain exports, the use of large quantities of grain for distilling alcohol, and the lack of adequate reserve storage facilities, despite improvements made by Catherine II, further exacerbated the problem. Early frosts, severe winters, excessive rainfall, and drought all endangered the basic food supply.

Although eighteenth-century famines were not as bad as the most severe ones of the past—for example, that of 1601–1603—bad weather still made them a periodic reoccurrence. This was especially true in the first half of the century, when cold weather was the main wrongdoer. Improved weather and expansion into

more fertile southern lands helped produce less severe conditions in the second half of the century. Only in the last fifteen years of Catherine II's reign did a substantial number of poor suffer sporadically from famine or near-famine conditions. In this period, drought, the main threat in southern steppe lands, was the chief culprit. Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov reported that in the mid-1780s some poor people were eating hay, leaves, and moss to help sustain themselves.

Although no accurate estimates for famine deaths exist, plague figures are more plentiful. They indicate a heavy toll. Different estimates suggest that plague (primarily bubonic) struck one part of the country or another about one-fifth to one-fourth of the years of the century. It killed tens of thousands in Riga in 1710; struck about half the people in Astrakhan in 1727–1728; and, after killing tens of thousands further south, cut down about one-fifth of Moscow's population in 1771. Moon has estimated that it killed about 120,000 people in the country as a whole from 1770 to 1772.

The chief disseminators of plague remained rats and the fleas who bit them and then humans. These unknown deadly enemies traveled especially on ships to Russian ports and in the baggage and supplies of moving armies. They proliferated in warm, crowded conditions. Thus, plague struck more in Russia's southern areas and in cities than in the north and in the countryside.

Although the government, especially under Catherine II, often took vigorous measures to avoid the spread of plague, success was greatly limited by ignorance about its source. Isolating and quarantining the affected regions was the most usual method. Once the epidemic hit a city, however, there was little that could be done for the afflicted besides prayer and folk remedies. Even if medical knowledge would have been more advanced, Moscow's fourteen doctors and one fifty-bed public hospital would have still been woefully inadequate to deal with the dreaded disease when it struck there.

Besides plague, the empire also suffered from occasional influenza and smallpox epidemics. The former struck most areas of the country in the late 1750s, in several years of the 1760s, and again in 1781 and 1798. The latter is known to have killed many Siberian natives (less immune to smallpox than European Russians), especially in 1768–1769, and to have killed, and even more frequently left scarred for life, many European Russians. It struck the future Peter III soon after he came to Russia, and it was so common in the eighteenth century that John Alexander has written that Catherine II "was quite exceptional in having attained adulthood without contracting 'the pocks.'"[6]

Largely as a result of Catherine's efforts, some headway was finally made against smallpox. After she set the example by being inoculated against it herself in 1768, clinics were set up in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and several other cities. By 1800, it was reported that about 2 million people had been inoculated.

Hunger, famine, the plague and other epidemics combined with warfare and other diseases to prevent more rapid population growth. Kahan has estimated that 679,000 persons died in the eighteenth century from combat and diseases while on military campaigns. And it was not only among soldiers and urban residents that death rates were high. Foreign observers and Catherine II herself noted that in the

[6]*Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (New York, 1989), p. 144.

villages, most children died before they reached adulthood. "What a loss for the State!" lamented Catherine.

WOMEN AND FAMILY LIFE

Peter the Great abolished the *terem* and encouraged social mixing of the sexes and the adoption of Western clothing. Following his death, empresses ruled Russia for most of the next seventy years. The capabilities, attitudes, and policies of Catherine the Great were especially notable. Along with her friend Catherine Dashkova (see Chapter 17), she bore striking testimony that women could be as well-read and cultured as men. Other cultured women of their time also graced high society.

Indeed, new attitudes were evident that challenged the older ideas dispensed in that still well-known medieval book of household advice, the *Domostroi*. Kelly has documented how new more secular "advice literature" about household management and other topics increased during the century. This literature reflected the influence of both Western ideas and the policies of Russian rulers such as Peter I and Catherine II. Although the many different works of this type sometimes gave conflicting advice about how men, women, and children should behave and be brought up, Catherine herself believed that elite women could play an important civilizing role.

Earlier, in 1753, the government considerably strengthened married women's control over their own property. This seems to have affected mainly noblewomen and the dowry property they brought into marriage. Although the government's decision was not taken primarily because of a concern with women's rights, it did give Russian women more rights in this regard than English or French women.

In many ways, however, the lives of women and children remained as they had for centuries, especially outside of St. Petersburg and Moscow and among the lower classes. Even a majority of the noblewomen of the empire remained illiterate. And foreigners repeated many of the same observations earlier made about Russian women. The Englishman William Tooke noted that they "painted" their faces more commonly than women in other countries and that their bodies were more ample than European fashion dictated.

A French abbé traveling in Russia in 1760 found that outside the two capitals most women were not seen in public with their husbands, who treated them more like slaves than loved ones. Although Tooke agreed that wives often suffered from their husbands' "tyrannical treatment," he also stated that in larger towns "many a kind husband sometimes gets a rap of the [wife's] slipper." Despite commenting that many husbands kept their wives isolated, the abbé agreed with Tooke that at least unmarried youngsters mixed quite freely. Tooke noted this especially in the countryside, and both men emphasized that despite the mixing, marriage customs placed great importance on a bride's virginity.

The abbé also believed that this emphasis on virginity helped explain why so many Russians married young, a phenomenon he noted in Nizhnii Novgorod. In 1796, Count Vladimir Orlov argued that early marriage would help prevent the vices to which single people were prone. Based on this rationale, he fined serf women who did not marry by the age of twenty and serf men by age twenty-five.

Many other landowners of this time also imposed such fines, some even fining females beginning at fifteen and widows who did not remarry in their childbearing years.

Both serfs and other peasants married younger than contemporary Western European peasants, who generally did not marry until their mid to late twenties. The average Russian peasant woman married in her late teens to a husband who was a few years older. Despite the type of moral reasons Count Orlov cited for early marriages, more practical considerations were often paramount. Although some serfowners were anxious to have their serfs begin procreating more serfs as soon as possible, Hoch believes the peasant male heads of household (the patriarchs) were more responsible for their sons marrying early. This was because it was common for a peasant family's newlywed son to bring his wife back to his parents' hut and live there in a multi-generational household—the practice was less common among the nobility and in urban areas. The patriarch of the household thereby gained control over another worker (the new daughter-in-law). Hoch maintains that in many ways the exploitation of the peasant patriarch over younger members of the household was more significant than the exploitation of masters over serfs. The only consistent peasant opposition to early marriage seems to have come from some schismatic and sectarian young women, whose parents sometimes supported their daughter's resistance to it.

In noble households, a daughter was considered marriageable at about sixteen or seventeen. Although noble parents still sometimes arranged loveless marriages, by the late eighteenth century, marriage without love was becoming less common. By then, even Orthodox Church leaders were placing more emphasis on marriage as a union freely entered into by loving spouses for their mutual betterment. Only these clergymen talked of Christian, not romantic, love. Although they still thought a husband should guide and correct his wife, they encouraged less severe "guidance" than had been advocated in the *Domostroi*.

For these prelates, marriage was a permanent sacrament. Despite being weakened in many ways, the eighteenth-century Orthodox Church hierarchy gradually increased its control over marriage and divorce. As a result, it became more difficult to dissolve a marriage in Russia, either through divorce or annulment, than in any of the Protestant or Catholic countries of Western Europe.

The everyday life of most women revolved around work. Only aristocratic women had much leisure. Tooke noted that most women "see to the cleanliness of the house, spin, weave linen and coarse cloth on frames . . . make felt, bake bread every day, etc." Peasant women cooked and made clothing, tended vegetable gardens, gathered mushrooms and berries, looked after poultry and other animals, and worked in the fields, especially during harvesting times, when they cut some crops such as rye with sickles, while the men harvested other crops with heavier scythes. Although a well-off noblewoman generally had many servants to do most of the physical labor, she was still responsible for overseeing the household staff.

Of course, Russian women were often pregnant and responsible for caring for their children. Kolchin has estimated that the average serf family probably had more than seven births, although many children did not survive until adulthood. Besides the peasant patriarch's desire for more family workers, the Orthodox religion's teaching that it was wrong to try to limit births helped keep families large.

In addition, parents wanted to insure that at least one son would be around to care for them in their old age. Considering the high death rate—about half died before reaching maturity—and the fact that a son might be drafted into the army for life, it was necessary to give birth to at least three sons in order to have a good chance that one might be around to provide old-age support. That such support was necessary is indicated by Kaiser's study of early eighteenth-century urban census data that indicates the aged, along with widows and orphans, were among the most impoverished.

Although peasant children had to work hard from a young age and were often harshly disciplined, eighteenth-century noble children had it considerably better. Noble daughters were brought up primarily by their mother, who was to prepare them for marriage. Until about age seven, noble boys were also mainly the mother's responsibility, after which it shifted to the father. Of course, wealthier noble parents often had governesses, servants, and tutors to help them carry out their child-rearing responsibilities and often spent little time with their children.

Yet despite such infrequent contact, many young noblemen were spoiled. With the father often away from the family estate in government or military service, neither the mother nor the household staff (often composed mainly or exclusively of serfs) provided much discipline for the "young master." Most of his playmates were serfs, whom he could dominate. If he was sent to a parish school for the rudiments of education and misbehaved there, a serf child was often beaten instead of him. Only later, if sent to a boarding school, often of a military character, did his undisciplined days come to an end.

An aspect of parent-child relationships worthy of attention is that of child abandonment. Thanks largely to the work of David Ransel, Western scholars and students now have easy access to a plethora of information about this practice during the Imperial period.

In 1712, Peter I criticized the practice of infanticide and mandated the establishment in all provinces of hospitals where illegitimate children could be left. Like some of Peter's other decrees, however, this one does not seem to have energized provincial officials to beehivelike activity. It was left to Catherine II, a half-century later, to take more forceful steps.

She oversaw the establishment of a Foundling Home in Moscow in 1764 and in St. Petersburg in 1771. By the mid-1700s, more than 1500 children a year were being deposited in each of the two institutions, with more girls being abandoned than boys.

Because a child could be left without the mother being asked anything but whether her child was baptized and, if so, with what name, it is difficult to know all the causes of abandonment. But illegitimacy and poverty were certainly two. The first grew during the century, as more men were separated from their wives (often left back in villages) to serve in the growing military or civil service or work in towns.

Catherine's establishment of the two foundling homes, plus some smaller provincial foundling shelters, was not just due to growing need, but also to the influence of Enlightenment ideas. Both Catherine and Ivan Betskoi, her chief official in charge of the foundling project, were well aware of Enlightenment thinking about unwed mothers and the importance of children, including their economic

value to the state. Catherine attached schools to the two major foundling homes, hoping to educate the children to be model urban citizens.

Although the two homes remained showpieces to illustrate Catherine's enlightened ideas, the reality inside, as was often true in Western European foundling homes, was much more grim. Epidemics and the difficulty of attracting sufficient wet nurses to breast-feed all the infants contributed greatly to high mortality rates. According to Ransel's estimates, about 82 percent of the more than 3,000 children admitted to the Moscow home between 1764 and 1768 died before reaching adulthood. After many of the children started being "farmed out" to villages beginning in late 1768, the appallingly high death rate still continued at close to the same level.[7]

RUSSIAN LAW: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Western Enlightenment thinking also affected Russian concepts of law. Peter the Great thought that his attempt to base Russia's government more on law—as opposed to the earlier Byzantine-Muscovite autocratic ideology—was compatible with the German natural law theories of Leibniz, Pufendorf, and Christian Wolff. Empress Elizabeth brought a few Western jurists to Russia to teach law. And Peter III attempted to emulate his hero, the free-thinking and "enlightened" Frederick II of Prussia, who began his reign by curbing censorship, torture, and military cruelty. In his half-year of rule, Peter III not only abolished the Secret Chancellery and prohibited torture in most cases, but also eliminated some forms of corporal punishment in the army and decreed more tolerant measures toward the Old Believers.

But it was Catherine the Great who was most influenced by the humane spirit of the Enlightenment. Her ideas about law were strongly affected by Western thinkers such as Montesquieu, Beccaria (whose *Crime and Punishment* was the most influential work of its kind in Europe), and the English jurist William Blackstone. Isabel de Madariaga credits Catherine with widening recourse to courts and fostering more respect for all, almost eliminating the use of torture, reducing corporal punishment, and generally humanizing penal practices.

Under Catherine, the making of individuals noseless, earless, or tongueless—or all three, like the old Bashkir described in Pushkin's *Captain's Daughter*—became less common. The clergy, nobles, and upper level merchants, all eventually won immunity from beatings—not before, however, Catherine had several noblewomen whipped for making caricatures of Potemkin. For many lesser crimes, fines were now imposed instead of beatings. During the last half of her reign, foreign observers found Russian prisons no worse than those of many other European countries—not that that was much of a compliment in an age when all sorts of prisoners (male and female, young and old, and suspects and convicted hardened criminals) were often thrown together in crowded and unsanitary conditions.

Even Madariaga acknowledges, however, that Catherine's policies failed to give legal protection to Russia's numerous serfs and that respect for law was

[7]For examples of Western European eighteenth-century foundling homes where rates were just as bad, see John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1990), p. 421–2, n. 83.

hampered by a poor understanding of its significance. When Catherine thought her government seriously threatened, she could still respond with harsh measures—as Pugachev and his followers, Novikov, and Radishchev all discovered.

By the end of her reign, Russian police methods and legal attitudes still reflected many older traditions. The job of maintaining law and order was left to a variety of administrative, judicial, police, and military agencies and forces.[8] Functions were not as delineated as in more modern times. Even after Catherine II's governmental reforms, the judiciary remained part of the country's administrative system, and few "judges" had any legal training. Army troops and townsmen assisted with policing functions, which included not only dealing with crime, but also such other tasks as fire-fighting, disease control, and repairing public buildings. Although Peter III abolished the Secret Chancellery, Catherine II instituted in the Senate a new Secret Expedition in 1763. It performed some of the same political investigative functions as the previous chancellery.

Private rights continued to receive little attention. By the mid-eighteenth century, individuals had to carry printed passports with them if they traveled beyond certain distances—for a peasant, for example, it was required for travel beyond thirty-two kilometers from his village.

Under Catherine II, police duties included insuring that the Orthodox population attended church services on Sundays and holy days and confessed to a priest and received communion at least once a year. The law forbade public assembly or announcements without police approval, and in towns people were supposed to inform the police if guests came to stay in their houses. In the capitals, the government opened private mail whenever it wished. It also engaged in censorship, imposed restrictions on clothing and appearance, and prohibited swearing, drunkenness, and gambling. Such sweeping police powers, even if unevenly enforced, reflected not only Catherine's desire to maintain order, but also to discourage what she considered uncivilized behavior. Yet, despite the various bodies which were supposed to oversee the maintenance of order, Russia's administration, as Hartley and others have observed, proved inadequate in dealing with a lawlessness that continued to trouble both urban and rural areas.

There were many reasons why Russian legal attitudes and practices evolved more slowly than in the West. Despite all the words of Peter I and Catherine II about being first servants of the state, working for the "general good," and ruling according to law and fundamental principles, Russian monarchs still found it easier than in the West to act in an arbitrary manner. They viewed themselves more as sources of the law than as rulers bound by legal traditions. Their view of law was certainly not that of John Locke, who thought of it as emanating ultimately from the people and as a necessary tool to limit arbitrary monarchical behavior contrary to the common good. Thus, a ruler like Catherine's son Paul could violate with impunity (at least until murdered) rights his mother had bestowed upon the nobility.

[8]For much of this section, I am indebted to John R. LeDonne's excellent treatment of the police and judiciary in *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762–1796* (Princeton, 1984). His *Absolutism and Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700–1825* (New York, 1991) also contains extensive treatment of these subjects.

Not only did the Russian emperors and empresses fail to appreciate Locke's approach to law, but so too did educated society. As Marc Raeff has pointed out, Russia's eighteenth-century intellectual elites largely ignored the law as a basis for individual rights. The nobles disdained legal institutions and procedures. Because most educated society—and political critics such as Panin, Radishchev, and Novikov—came from the nobility, this is especially significant.

Russia's hierarchical structure and the nobility's dominant social position reduced Russia's need for some of the more complex laws required in more differentiated and freer Western societies such as England. In the latter, law was a more frequent arbitrator between individuals and between groups— even if the scales of justice sometimes tipped toward the rich and powerful. In Russia, rank and power often proved more decisive than the law.

Church-state relations slowed secular legal advances in Russia more so than in the West, where governments generally now displayed more restraint in trying to control their citizen's private beliefs. In Russia, not only did state laws mandate that Orthodox citizens fulfill certain basic church obligations and that priests report criminal intent discovered in confession, but also concepts of punishment continued to be strongly affected by religious ideas.

It had probably been religious more than Enlightenment ideas that led Empress Elizabeth to end capital punishment for almost all crimes. The head of Catherine's Secret Expedition, Stepan Sheshkovsky, after daily receiving communion, sometimes personally tortured and beat prisoners and apparently thought of himself as sort of a grand inquisitor defending the moral order. Within a year of coming to power, Catherine II emphasized the importance of suspects confessing to a priest—and thus indirectly to the state. According to new decrees, only if they refused to so confess could they be tortured. Confession was not only the "queen of proofs," enabling courts and officials to be more confident in their judgments, but also it signified acceptance of guilt and repentance. Repentance, in turn, furthered the chances of rehabilitation, a goal of punishment, even if not as important as retribution and deterrence.

Crime and punishment were also viewed in moral terms as involving pride and humility. The criminal was someone who had overstepped his or her humble bounds and violated the political-moral order (as Dostoevsky portrayed a century later with Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*). The chief forms of punishment—knouting or whipping and banishment, including hard labor for life—were often combined and served to humiliate criminals and remove them from the community whose order they had disrupted.

Finally, Russian legal development was hampered by the lack of professional training and the absence of any substantial body of private law—that which regulated dealings between private citizens or organizations. Although in the West law had been studied and practiced by private citizens for centuries, in Russia before the opening of Moscow University in 1755, formal law studies did not exist. The failure to update the Law Code of 1649 meant that even educated Russians and officials often did not know exactly what the law was. By Catherine's reign, thousands of new laws had been decreed, sometimes contradicting each other or those already in existence in 1649. Not until 1833 was a new codification completed.

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