

Extralegal payments to state officials in Russia, 1750s–1830s: assessing the burden of corruption[†]

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This article uses the records of expenditures from a set of estates that belonged to the Golitsyn family to assess the level of ‘routine corruption’ in Imperial Russia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The data from these books allow us to identify individual cases of unofficial facilitation payments made by the estates and by peasant communes to district-level officials; to delimit key types of payment situations; and to calculate the sums expended for payments by a given estate in a given year. The resulting numbers are compared to the overall volume of obligations borne by the serfs to the state and to their landlords. Our conclusion is that while the facilitation payments were ubiquitous and accompanied any interaction with the state, the volume of these ‘routine’ payments (as opposed to other forms of extraction) was quite low and they did not put a significant burden on the peasants, while at the same time securing hefty extra incomes for top district officials. Rather, by the last decades of the eighteenth century Russian Imperial officials at the district level might have switched from a tribute-like extortion from the population at large to acquiring vast sums by collecting unofficial payments in more targeted ways.

In recent decades, studies of corruption have turned virtually into subfields of their own in disciplines such as economics and political science, as scholars use increasingly detailed and voluminous sets of data to explore the ways in which corruption impacts on economic growth and social welfare in our modern world.¹ Yet these studies, and the conclusions to which they have given rise, tend to cover only the relatively recent past, going back as far as the 1970s at best. The reasons for this are obvious: the data required for systematically looking into the impact of corruption on, say, premodern economic growth, or on the trajectories of ‘divergence’ between the west and Asia, are absent. Scholars certainly do sometimes make broad theoretical pronouncements regarding these issues,² but they rarely ever offer ways of testing them empirically. Indeed, studies of contemporary corrupt practices are largely based on specially designed surveys. Even after all the caveats

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¹ For reviews of empirical research, see, for example, Jain, ‘Corruption’; Lambsdorff, ‘Causes and consequences’; Aidt, ‘Economic analysis’; Svensson, ‘Eight questions’. A recent summary which we found useful is Ledeneva, Bratu, and Köker, ‘Corruption studies’.

² For example, Huntington, *Political order*, pp. 59–71.

and limitations of such methods are taken into account, they still provide an important baseline for thinking about the place occupied by 'corrupt' (or perhaps 'informal') practices in the economy and politics of a given society, and for making cross-country comparisons.³

Scholars of historical corruption, on the other hand, usually have at their disposal only the records of individual investigations, as well as anecdotal evidence (such as memoirs and letters). So, the existing literature tends to fall into two categories. On the one hand, there are works that focus on studying the mechanics or anthropology of giving-and-taking on a case-study basis, as well as the language, the meanings, and the context of 'corrupt' transactions.⁴ While much research has been done lately in this vein on the diverse modes of such informal practices, scholars shy away from offering estimates of the volumes of extralegal payments and incomes, limiting themselves to an assertion of their general pervasiveness. On the other hand, there are works whose authors are interested in modelling the principal-agent interactions in premodern administrative systems,⁵ and who tend to rely, again, on anecdotal evidence. To sum up, there has not yet been any rigorous discussion of what sort of economic burden was placed on premodern societies and economies by extralegal extortion, or how exactly centralizing premodern rulers competed with their local agents for scarce resources extracted from the population.

That is not to say, of course, that quantitative studies of historical corruption are impossible. One case where such estimates are available is China in the late Qing era. Similar to Russia, it was a large agrarian empire, and, unlike Russia, it boasted a well-established and well-educated bureaucracy that in the early eighteenth century was sometimes presented by western European intellectuals as a model to be emulated. In particular, scholars of corruption in China are able to draw on the impressionistic assessments produced by the Imperial administration itself; on the fragmentary data regarding the officials' expenditures; and on such indirect indicators as the contributions made by officials of different ranks to the clan's treasury. Indeed, the Kangxi emperor himself (1654–1722) was willing to consider a magistrate who imposed a surcharge rate of no more than 10 per cent on the regular taxes an honest official. According to one of his governor generals, however, the illegal surcharges 'had reached as much as 40 or 50 per cent of the regular tax quota'.⁶ Recent studies suggest that an average district-level magistrate's extralegal earnings could range in the second half of the nineteenth century from 13 times to as much as 30 times his official income, and their aggregate extralegal income might have exceeded the annual amount of tax silver received by the treasury itself.⁷ To give another example, Latham recently offered a fine-grained study of corruption in England, a country that is taken as a prime example of early modern

³ On issues related to measuring contemporary corruption, see Sampford, Shacklock, Connors, and Galtung, eds., *Measuring corruption*; Donchev and Ujhelyi, 'Corruption indices'; Svensson, 'Eight questions', pp. 21–3.

⁴ For discussions of recent historical research on corruption, see, for example, Kreike and Jordan, eds., *Corrupt histories*; Latham, "'City'".

⁵ For example, Kiser and Tong, 'Determinants'; Sng, 'Size and dynastic decline'.

⁶ Zelin, *Magistrate's tael*, p. 73.

⁷ Chang, *Income of the Chinese gentry*, pp. 29–42; Marsh, *Mandarins*, p. 63; Ni and Van, 'High corruption income', pp. 317, 329. For broader overviews of bureaucracy, corruption, and attempts at salary reforms in Qing China, see Marsh, 'Venality of provincial office'; Zelin, *Magistrate's tael*, pp. 41–53; Hickey, 'Fee-taking'; Kiser and Tong, 'Determinants', p. 316; Will, 'Officials and money'; Sng, 'Size and dynastic decline'.

state-building, by focusing on the records of the London Bridge Corporation. He refrains, however, from extrapolating his findings to pass judgement on the overall burden of corruption.⁸

These examples help to highlight the novelty of our approach, as we seek to offer an empirically grounded way of assessing the level of ‘routine’ corruption in one of the great agrarian societies as it was transitioning into a modern bureaucracy—namely, the Russian Empire. We apply this methodology to estimate how much was actually given and taken at the district level in the Romanov realm during its ‘classical’ age, starting with the provincial reforms of Catherine II’s reign (1762–96) in the second half of the eighteenth century and continuing well into the era of Nicholas I (1825–55) in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Specifically, we use the account books left behind by the magnates’ estates and peasant communes to move beyond cataloguing individual gifts and bribes and attempt to calculate the total amount of payments made by an economic entity in a given year. We propose a methodology for working with these records and employ it to assess the relative weight of different types of payments; to find out how much an average peasant probably had to contribute to such payments per year; to compare these amounts to the tax rates; to calculate how much officials in an average district (*uezd*) could hope to collect from such payments, given the size of the population and the average per capita payment rates; and to compare this revenue to their legal salary. Our main finding is that, as far as we could tell on the basis of our sample of records, the volume of resources extracted from the population through ‘routine’ corruption appears to have been surprisingly low. In the conclusion we explore the implications of this finding for our understanding of the early modern Russian state and for future research.

I

As in many—indeed, probably most—premodern and early modern societies, Russia heavily relied on direct payments from the subject population to government officials for the maintenance of the latter. Initially, as the degree of fiscal centralization was quite low, local communities were officially expected to ‘feed’ the governors and their retinue according to the customary rates; that is, to provide them with all the necessary food, fodder, and other materials, as well as to make cash payments. This practice of *kormlenie* (‘feeding’) implied systematic and semi-institutionalized mechanisms of apportioning the burden across the entire population of a given territory in a tribute-like manner. There were also various informal mechanisms for negotiating the size of such payments and resisting demands that were widely deemed excessive.⁹ Officially, *kormlenie* was abolished in the mid-sixteenth century, and by the end of the seventeenth century the government was increasingly seeking to limit and regulate the customary practices that served as its de facto replacement. One reason for this was competition

⁸ Latham, “City”.

⁹ Shveikovskaia, *Gosudarstvo i krest'iane Rossii*, pp. 247–57; Davies, ‘Politics of give and take’; Sedov, ‘Podnosheniia v moskovskikh prikazakh’, pp. 147–8; idem, ‘Podnosheniia v sisteme voevodskogo upravleniia’; Potter, ‘Payment, gift, or bribe?’; Enin, *Voevodskoe kormlenie*; Witzentrath, *Cossacks and the Russian Empire*, pp. 122–40; Shattenberg, *Die korrupte Provinz?*. For an overview of literature on *kormlenie*, see Enin, *Voevodskoe kormlenie*, pp. 4–23.

for resources: the government claimed that extortion undermined the subjects' ability to pay taxes, or in other words, diminished the pool of resources available to the sovereign. Another was the emerging perception that accepting payments from the population diminished an official's ability to unwaveringly implement the sovereign's will. Peter I's reign (1682–1725) was a watershed in that regard: the decree of 24 December 1714 unequivocally criminalized the acceptance of any and all payments from the subject population, making no difference between 'bribes' and customary gifts and 'honours'.¹⁰ In practice, of course, considerable ambiguity remained well into the eighteenth century. Early in Peter's reign his advisors went as far as attempting to tax the 'supplementary' incomes of local officials, thereby legitimizing them; while after Peter's death his successors even abolished salaries for low-level officials altogether, expecting them to be 'fed' by the population, a situation that persisted until the reinstitution of salaries in 1763. In fact, vestiges of *kormlenie* have been found by scholars not only in Peter's era, but also as late as the 1760s.¹¹ Importantly, neither the 1714 decree nor the subsequent legislation clearly criminalized bribe-giving, and this also helps to explain the existence of such records as the ones we are using here.

Against this backdrop, much of the recent research on informal payments to officials in Russia has focused on problematizing the very notion of corruption. Scholars seek to explore the economy of giving-and-taking on its own terms, as well as going beyond the officially and/or retroactively imposed notions of 'bribery' to discover tacitly accepted categories of customary offerings, such as *posuly*, *pominki*, *pochesti*, and so on, that were distinguished by contemporaries from *vziatki*-bribes as such. Other researchers call for early modern corruption to be viewed not through the normative lenses as necessarily a societal problem and a sign of immorality, but rather through functionalist ones, as crucial for the operation of an early modern polity: it has been suggested that, perhaps, the 'unofficial exchange of favors has contributed fundamentally to the social cohesiveness and viability of political systems where the rule of law has (in)famously failed to operate?'.¹² They also point out that the boundaries between different categories of giving were fluid and imprecise, allowing the subjects ample room for manipulating them for their own benefit.¹³

Certainly, there is plenty of information in these studies regarding the size of individual bribes/gifts; the sources themselves also provide us with some indications of the overall levels of extraction. Thus, we know that according to a complaint from the taxpaying population in the Dvina region in the north of Russia, Afanasii Ivanovich Nesterov, their governor in 1670, as well as his successors, extracted

¹⁰ Most notably, the decree of 24 Dec. 1714, in *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii* (hereafter PSZ RI I), vol. 5, no. 2871, pp. 135–6; Serov, 'Protivodeistvie vziatocnichestvu v Rossii'; idem, 'Vziatkov ne imal, a davali v pochest'; idem, 'Petr I kak iskorenitel' vziatocnichestva'; Redin, 'Dolzhnostnaia prestupnost'.

¹¹ On the abolition of *aktsidentsii* (legalized fee-taking by the officials), see the two Manifestos of 15 Dec. 1763, PSZ RI, vol. 16, nos. 11988, 11989, pp. 457–68. On officials' salaries in the eighteenth century, see Troitskii, *Rossiiskii absoliutizm*. On the attempt to tax their income, see Joukovskaia, 'Peremeny v fiskal'nom statuse'. On their economic strategies, see idem, "Unsalaries and unfed". On corruption in the post-Petrine period and early decades of the nineteenth century, see Redin, *Administrativnye struktury*, pp. 527–55; idem, 'Voevodskoe kormlenie'; Pissar'kova, 'Rossiiskii chinovnik na sluzhbe'; Hartley, 'Bribery and justice'; Pissar'kova, 'K istorii vziatok v Rossii'; Kosheleva, 'Ot trudov pravednykh'; Grosul, "Lihoimstvo est' tsel' vsekh sluzhashchih".

¹² Ledeneva, Lovell, and Rogachevskii, 'Introduction', p. 1.

¹³ For example, Davies, 'Politics of give and take', pp. 39, 42–4; Volkov, 'Patrimonializm'; Redin, *Administrativnye struktury*, pp. 555–75; Korchmina, 'Do not give bribes in honor'.

from them 2,050 rubles a year—that is, close to one-third of their annual tax quota. That was, apparently, tolerable. In 1679–81, however, Governor Bogdan Ivanovich Ordin-Nashchokin extracted even more—that is, two-thirds of the tax quota—and this level of extortion was sufficiently high to produce collective protests.¹⁴ In another case, one P. Piatovo, a sub-governor in Novgorod at the end of the seventeenth century, is described as having added 10 kopeks and more of ‘processing surcharges’ to each ruble of the sovereign’s taxes (in addition to other payments he received, of course).¹⁵ Again, this was considered an outrage, and well outside the conventions of customary giving. On the other hand, in her study of district-level clerks in the provincial town of Sevsk (present-day Bryansk Region, to the south of Moscow) in the last years of the seventeenth century, Joukovskaia found that the five officials accused by the local community of graft actually extorted an amount that was less than their (unpaid) official salary for the years in question.¹⁶ However impressionistic, these estimates give an overall idea of the situation on the eve of Peter I’s reforms. How did it change in the later period, especially after Catherine II made an effort to extend and systematize provincial government?

In this study we turn to the account books produced on large estates in order to assess the level of extralegal payments in the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. Scholars have known for quite some time that in the pre-Petrine period large economic units (most notably monasteries) regularly recorded the payments they made in the course of interactions with state officials—gifts, bribes, and so on—in their accounts just as they would any other operational expenses. Such records continued to be kept well into the nineteenth century, and their very existence speaks volumes to the normalcy of giving-and-taking in the eyes of contemporaries. Most scholars working with these records cite only specific sums received by officials.¹⁷ Ours, to the best of our knowledge, is the first attempt to use these data systematically, as well as to look at such payments across a number of decades. Regrettably, we could not extend our study into the first half of the eighteenth century to assess the situation during the supposedly much ‘simpler’ and rougher Petrine and immediate post-Petrine years, to evaluate the effects of Petrine administrative dislocation, or the impact of Catherine II’s decision to resume paying salaries to lower-level officials (although we do have some data from the 1750s and early 1760s, prior to the institution of salaries).

Some caveats have to be made here. First, while we acknowledge and appreciate the important insights offered by recent studies into the cultural anthropology of giving-and-taking and the often subtle and evolving differences between different types of payments, for our purposes here we ignore the distinctions between ‘bribes’ and all sorts of gifts, legitimate or not. Rather, insofar as all of these payments implied the transfer of funds from the pockets of the population into those of officials, we lump them into a single category of ‘facilitation payments’ (a term

¹⁴ Kopanov, *Krest'iane Russkogo Severa*, pp. 201–2.

¹⁵ Sedov, ‘Podnosheniia v sisteme voevodskogo upravleniia’, pp. 161–2.

¹⁶ Joukovskaia, “‘Unsalaries and unfed’”.

¹⁷ Some of the studies using account books to explore corruption are Shveikovskaia, *Gosudarstvo i krest'iane Rossii*, pp. 247–58; Sedov, ‘Podnosheniia v sisteme voevodskogo upravleniia’; Redin, ‘Voevodskoe kormlenie v Rossii XVIII v.’; Sokolova, ‘Prikhodo-rashodnaia kniga mirskogo starosty’.

which, hopefully, also allows us to avoid making value judgements about the ethical aspects of such transactions).

Second, due to the nature of our sources (records produced by large provincial agricultural estates), the scope of our study is limited to regular, everyday payments made at the district level. Conversely, we are not able to see many payments that, as we know from other sources, did take place and could actually reach astronomical amounts. In particular, these were the bribes paid to central courts and central officials to settle high-stakes disputes; kickbacks paid to officials by government contractors, tax farmers, and so on; and payments collected from the urban population, including wealthy merchants and craftsmen. In this regard, our study covers only one dimension of the wide universe of facilitation payments—what might be called ‘routine’ corruption—and, most certainly, seriously underestimates the overall size of the economy of giving-and-taking, or rather defines the lower boundary for any such estimate. At the same time, it is precisely the type of corruption discussed here that affected the vast majority of Russia’s population, the peasantry, and accounted for the vast majority of interactions between the populace and officialdom.

II

Our study is based on a set of account books from the Golitsyn estates that cover the period from the 1750s to the 1830s and are preserved at the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts and in the Manuscripts Section of the Russian State Library. We have used all the complete books (that is, those covering an entire year) that we were able to identify in these two collections, although there are likely to be more such books stored elsewhere. The Golitsyns were one of the wealthiest aristocratic families in Russia: as of 1700, they owned nearly 8,000 male serfs, which made them the fourth-wealthiest clan in the realm. By 1762, their grand total grew to nearly 17,000 male serfs, distributed among 31 individual estates.¹⁸ The estates covered by our sample belonged to the members of one of the branches of the family, the descendants of Prince Mikhail Mikhailovich Golitsyn the younger (1685–1764), the president of the Admiralty since 1749. Among his children, one of the sons, Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Golitsyn (1723–1807), the vice-chancellor of the empire, owned over 6,000 male serfs by the early 1780s. The villages covered in our books—in particular, those of Golubei, Bariatnets, and Buintsy—made up about one-third of his landed properties in terms of their peasant population. A. M. Golitsyn never married, and most of his estates were inherited by his younger brother, Prince Mikhail Mikhailovich Golitsyn (1731–1807), a major-general and a chamberlain. M. M. Golitsyn married Anna Aleksandrovna Stroganova (1739–1814) and some of the estates discussed below, such as Vlakhernskoe, came into his possession as her dowry. His son Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich (1772–1821) resided in Italy after 1807, and his estates (as well as their parents’ estates that remained the joint property of the heirs) were managed by his brother Prince Sergei Mikhailovich (1774–1859), as later were those of Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich’s two sons, Prince Mikhail Aleksandrovich and Prince Fedor Aleksandrovich, who

¹⁸ On the estates of the Golitsyn clan in that era, see Chernikov, *Dvorianskie imeniia*, pp. 103, 110–11.

also resided abroad during the period under study.¹⁹ Put differently, we are looking at account books from the estates that belonged to a closely knit set of owners and, in fact, were often managed from the same centre. This might be expected to ensure a reasonable consistency of managerial and record-keeping practices and to make the data derived from different books comparable.

As the Golitsyns were among the largest landlords during this period, the estate economy and management practices of Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich's heirs have previously attracted some attention from scholars.²⁰ In particular, Prokhorov noted that in the later part of the eighteenth century the Golitsyns strove to maintain tight administrative control over their estates, and their managers made concerted efforts to raise the estates' productivity, for example, by monitoring the prices of agricultural goods in their districts and advising peasants where it was best to sell their produce.²¹ Besides agricultural estates, the Golitsyns also had factories of various sizes, non-agricultural lands, and so on, but these are not considered in this article.

This study is based on 21 account books from 12 different estates in six different provinces (Moscow, Iaroslavl', Smolensk, Vladimir, Orel, and Tula) that have been transcribed in their entirety and subsequently coded according to different categories of expenses (see table 1). The books were kept by the estate and communal officials according to the rules and templates set forth in special instructions issued by the landlord and his managers, although the book-keeping practices varied, naturally, over the decades under study.²² An account book could cover either one year, or a number of years. As a rule, there is a single entry for a given date; however, one entry might include several different payments listed separately. To give an example, the account book for 1759, the earliest in our sample, has 80 entries that list over 110 different payments. At the end of a given year available cash was counted to make sure that it matched the balance on the books; the books were signed by the relevant estate officials and also periodically audited by the landlords, who likewise signed them.

In the case of the Golitsyns, as a rule a number of different account books were supposed to be kept on an estate. In particular, there were separate account books for the landlord's money and those for the communal funds. The former reflected the quitrent paid by the peasants and the proceeds from the sale of agricultural and other products, as well as cash transfers to the landlord's central office (his income) and expenditures made on the estate itself (including some of the facilitation payments). Communal funds were the money collected by the peasants from among themselves on top of any obligations they bore towards the landlord: these funds were used to pay the poll tax and to cover any expenses on behalf of the commune, including facilitation payments to state officials. These communal

¹⁹ *Materialy dlia polnoi rodoslovnoi kniazei Golitsynykh*, pp. 14, 15, 19, 25; Serchevskii, *Zapiski o rode kniazei Golitsynykh*, pp. 266–73; Russian State Library, Moscow, Manuscripts Section (hereafter NIOR RGB), 'Rodosloviie kniazei Golitsynykh', f. 64, karton 2, ed. 2, ll. 47–50 ob., 70 ob.–72, 75–7 ob.; Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, Moscow (hereafter RGADA), f. 1263, op. 1, dd. 6210; 6228, l. 16; Chulkov, ed., *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, pp. 71–4.

²⁰ Drakokhrust, 'Rassloenie krepostnogo khoziaistva'; Kazarina, 'Krepostnoe khoziaistvo v Tul'skoi gubernii'; Petrochenkova, 'Polozhenie krepostnykh krest'an'; Prokhorov, 'Dokumenty rukopisnogo sobraniia GIM'.

²¹ Prokhorov, 'Dokumenty rukopisnogo sobraniia GIM', pp. 238–9.

²² For an example of such an instruction in an account book for 1780, see RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5902, [l.1].

Table 1. *Estate accounts books used in this study*

	<i>Province</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Estate</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Account type/ estate owner(s)</i>	<i>No. of serfs, 'male souls'</i>	<i>Archival reference</i>
1.	Smolensk	Roslavl'	Bariatinets	1790	Landlord (A. M. Golitsyn)	957	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6057
2.	Smolensk	Roslavl'	Bariatinets	1790	Peasant commune (A. M. Golitsyn)	957	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6057
3.	Smolensk	Roslavl'	Bariatinets	1791	Peasant commune (A. M. Golitsyn)	957	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6059
4.	Moscow	Moscow	Vlakhernskoe	1759	Landlord (M. M. Golitsyn)	152	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 32
5.	Moscow	Moscow	Vlakhernskoe	1764	Landlord (M. M. Golitsyn)	152	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 34
6.	Belgorod	Briansk	Golubei	1769	Landlord (A. M. Golitsyn)	912 ^a	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5900
7.	Orel	Briansk	Golubei	1789	Landlord (A. M. Golitsyn)	1,092	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5909
8.	Orel	Briansk	Golubei	1789	Peasant commune (A. M. Golitsyn)	1,092	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5909
9.	Orel	Briansk	Golubei	1791	Peasant commune (A. M. Golitsyn)	1,092	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5910
10.	Vladimir	Pereslavl'	Zinov'evo	1787	Peasant commune (A. M. Golitsyn)	235	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6402
11.	Tula	Epifan'	Krasnoe (Buintsy)	1794	Landlord (A. M. Golitsyn)	375	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 18, ed. 4
12.	Vladimir	Kovrov	Voskresenskoe	1804	Peasant commune (S. M. Golitsyn)	868	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 41, ed. 1
13.	Smolensk	Smolensk	Grivu	1813	Landlord (A. M. Golitsyn-son)	?	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 43, ed. 2
14.	Moscow	Bogorodsk	Grebnevo	1814	Landlord (A. A. Golitsyna)	1,099	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 41, ed. 8
15.	Moscow	Bogorodsk	Grebnevo	1814	Peasant commune (A. A. Golitsyna)	1,099	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 41, ed. 8
16.	Tula	Aleksin	Shirokonosovo	1819	Landlord (S. M. and A. M. Golitsyns)	263	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 48, ed. 6
17.	Tula	Aleksin	Shirokonosovo	1819	Landlord (S. M. and A. M. Golitsyns)	263	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 48, ed. 6
18.	Moscow	Bogorodsk	Grebnevo	1827	Landlord (S. M., M. A., and F. A. Golitsyns)	1,067	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 42, ed. 1
19.	Moscow	Bogorodsk	Grebnevo	1827	Peasant commune (S. M., M. A., and F. A. Golitsyns)	1,067	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 42, ed. 1
20.	Yaroslavl'	Rostov	Puzhbol	1834	Peasant commune (M. A. and F. A. Golitsyns)	288	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 47, ed. 2
21.	Moscow	Moscow	Kotel'niki	1834	Peasant commune (S. M. Golitsyn)	315	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 45, ed. 3

Note: ^aRGADA, f., 1263, op. 1, d. 5916.

accounts were audited by the peasants themselves: elected peasant officials reported on the payments they made at the communal gathering; the books were also signed by the landlord. We know of cases where the estate officials compiled, for whatever reason, separate lists of bribes they paid: such lists, of course, could be incomplete. So, it is important to reiterate that here we are using the complete accounts of financial transactions which had to be periodically balanced and audited. This

makes us reasonably certain that we can observe all the payments that have actually been made to the official by the relevant commune.

Naturally, dealing with estates that belonged to wealthy and powerful aristocrats has its own advantages and disadvantages for our purposes. On the one hand, it is precisely such estates that were likely to have a sufficiently sophisticated system of estate administration that would generate the sources that we need, while small estates might not have had any formal record-keeping practices at all, or their records, such as there were, tended to perish. Additionally, while only a few books typically survived from any single estate, collections such as that of the Golitsyns allow us to explore a longer period by pooling account books from different villages. They also cover a large number of districts across the European part of Russia, potentially reflecting variations in economic conditions and administrative customs and practices that existed there. On the other hand, a question might be legitimately asked as to whether estates such as those of the Golitsyns were shielded from the most blatant abuses by the status of their lords: perhaps local officials would be less likely to engage in extortion when dealing with peasants controlled by such powerful individuals, as opposed to those belonging to petty, low-ranking nobles? It is equally possible, however, that it is precisely such larger estates and wealthier landlords that were expected to contribute more, insofar as they had more resources. It might even have been the case that in this economy of gift-giving, payment to local officials was seen as a form of a patronage on the part of the magnates.

Overall, there is no evidence in the literature or in our own sources to show that the status and political connections of the leading magnates meant that their estates were off-limits for local officials, or somehow limited the amounts they were expected to pay. For example, in the mid-eighteenth century, the estates of the larger landlords were no more likely to underpay the poll tax than the smaller ones.²³ What we can be certain of, however, is that the Golitsyns knew about such payments and often explicitly authorized and even directed them. As shown by the literature, this was not necessarily the case with all estate owners. Thus, one landlord could instruct his bailiffs in 1766 that 'the soldiers and [the governor's] messengers coming [to the village] are not to be given anything, except for a meal, and even that only once; and if they try to seize anything by force, you are to expel them from the village . . . and to complain to the governor'.²⁴ In 1779 another landlord prohibited the spending of his money and grain on gifts to local officials: if the peasants and bailiffs wished to make facilitation payments, they should collect the necessary funds from among themselves. This is, arguably, not an attempt to ban the practice as such, but rather to shift the burden of it onto the peasants' shoulders. However, P. B. Sheremetyev, a leading magnate, demanded in 1764 that his serfs stop making payments and appeal to him instead in case of any difficulties with the local officials. This did not help, however, and the Sheremetyev account books for 1800 actually list the payments made by the peasants not only to Crown officials, but also to the landlord's own administrators. The landlord's attempt to root out this practice by raising his managers' salaries (so that they did not need to accept bribes) evidently did not help either.²⁵

²³ Korchmina, 'Vliiatel'nye dvoriane', pp. 209–10.

²⁴ Kuznetsov, *Iz perepiski pomeschchika s krest'ianami*, p. 6.

²⁵ Bulygin, 'Krepostnoe khoziaistvo Penzenskoi gubernii', p. 250; Dennison, *Institutional framework*, p. 227.

While Sheremetyev's attempt to combat bribery might have reflected his enlightened sensibilities, the Golitsyns were willing to accept the prevalent realities. Prince Sergei Mikhailovich and Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich, in particular, explicitly instructed their managers to make facilitation payments when necessary.²⁶ Even when no direct instructions to that effect survived, the signatures that landlords placed in the account books at the end of each period signalled acknowledgement and approval of the payments listed in them. We can also find cases where estate managers pooled their resources with those of other landlords, as, for example, in January 1759, when the Golitsyns' managers contributed 48.67 rubles to the overall amount of 118.30 rubles to be distributed on behalf of their master and of Baroness M. A. Stroganova among the officials at the Salt Office and a group of low-ranking guardsmen on the occasion of Christmas.²⁷

In other words, even if landlords such as the Golitsyns had political connections and might have been expected to enjoy privileged status in the eyes of the officials, they still could choose to play the game by the unwritten rules—that is, to let their estate managers navigate their relationships with local officials on the basis of facilitation payments. As we shall see below, that included not only small-scale gifts intended to express respect and smooth out routine interactions, but also much larger direct bribes in the higher-stakes cases of litigations over valuable assets: such cases were apparently decided by local officials not on the basis of the Golitsyns' social and political standing, but on the basis of bribes. Still, there is certainly a possibility that the very nature of our data leads us to underestimate the volumes of facilitation payments expected from an average landlord and peasant commune, and we shall keep this in mind when drawing our conclusions below.

III

The expenses incurred and payments made by the representatives sent by the estates and peasant communes to deal with state officials, including gifts, bribes, fees, and so on, as well as their travel expenses, are reflected in the account books in great detail. Sometimes the entries are extremely frank, astonishingly so to a modern reader. For example, on 8 August 1789, an account book notes that 'in the course of a trip by Aleksei Chesnakov to the town of Briansk on the occasion of presenting to the district court Moisei Galkin, a peasant of the village of Berestka, who cut off his own right index finger in order to avoid military recruitment, the following expenses have been made', and proceeds to list a dozen specific items (see table 2).²⁸ As we can see, the commune wanted to officially prosecute one of its members for self-mutilation (an act that surely made the peasants extremely unhappy, since now someone else among them had to go into the army in Galkin's stead), and this list allows us to reconstruct the interactions between Chesnakov, who was commissioned by the commune to represent its interests in this matter, and the district officials in some detail.²⁹ Chesnakov apparently began by establishing

²⁶ See Pisar'kova, 'K istorii vzjatok v Rossii'; State Historical Museum (Moscow), Department of Manuscripts (hereafter OPI GIM), f. 14, d. 53, ll. 46–7.

²⁷ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 32.

²⁸ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5909.

²⁹ Ibid.

Table 2. *Expenses recorded in the account books: an example*

	<i>Expenses, as described in the account book</i>	<i>Amount, rubles</i>
1.	'French vodka' for the secretary of the district court	1.46
2.	Stamped paper	0.24
3.	For drafting petition	0.25
4.	To the clerk, 'for conducting a <i>useful</i> interrogation' (emphasis added)	1.00
5.	To the priest, 'for exhorting the peasant [to be truthful] before the interrogation'	0.15
6.	To the soldier, for walking to fetch the priest	0.10
7.	For making copies of the minutes of interrogation and of the report to the land captain ^a regarding Galkin's detention	0.25
8.	For signing the minutes of interrogation on behalf of Galkin ^b	0.05
9.	To the guards at the court	0.04
10.	To the police sergeant who registers detainees	0.10
11.	To the police scribe, for entering the detainee into the registry	0.15
12.	For treating the clerk of the district court and his staff	0.65

Notes: *a* The land captain (*zemskii ispravnik*, *kapitan-ispravnik*) was the head of the Crown administration at the district level after Catherine II's 1775 reform, who both presided over the so-called 'Lower Land Court' in the district and directed the local police. Until 1837 the land captain was elected by the district nobility for a term of three years.

b When a person was illiterate and could not sign a document, as evidently was the case with Galkin, he could summon someone else to write 'I, so-and-so, signed this document on behalf of so-and-so'. This, apparently, also cost money.

Source: RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5909 (entry for 14 July).

rapport with the secretary of the district court: this contact accounts for what was by far the largest item on the list. Notably, rather than making a payment in cash to this important official, the peasant representative demonstrated his respect by making a gift of expensive imported liquor. Chesnakov also purchased stamped paper (the only item on the list that was actually required by law), and hired someone—perhaps one of the privately practising scribes who assisted petitioners in producing official documents according to the required style and format, or one of the district clerks themselves—to draft a petition. Every subsequent little step involved small payments to various officials to make the wheels of justice turn with the speed and in the direction desired by the supplicant. After the offender had been officially and 'usefully' interrogated and detained, and a copy of the documents had been made (probably so that the commune could keep them among its records for future reference, but also for Chesnakov to give an account of his handling of this commission), the interaction ended with a small token of gratitude—'a treatment', which could be either a gift of alcohol and/or food supplies, or a dinner party—for the court clerk and his associates.

The account books list a great variety of situations that involved expenditures related to dealing with state officials. These situations could be grouped into the following seven broad categories (see table 3).

The first category is managing the payment of the poll tax, including both facilitating the process of making regular payments and resolving various conflicts. The poll tax amount was fixed in proportion to the size of a commune's population during regular 'revisions' carried out approximately every 15 to 20 years, and Crown officials were held accountable for delivering this amount to the treasury in full. In this sense, they had much less discretion in the matter (for example, to collude with the taxpayers to under-report the taxable base, or, on the contrary, to overcharge them). Still, when peasant communes were late delivering taxes, they

Table 3. *Different categories of facilitation payment, 1759–1834, rubles*

<i>Estate</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Account type^a</i>	<i>No. of serfs</i>	<i>Military draft</i>	<i>Poll tax</i>	<i>Auxiliary services</i>	<i>'Treatment'</i>	<i>Travel and logistics</i>	<i>Ad hoc</i>	<i>Holiday gifts</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
Vlakhernskoe	1759	?	152			14.64	37.06	1.09	24.18	72.21	6.87	156.05
Vlakhernskoe	1764	?	152		0.68	55.50	23.07	0.34	55.44		10.88	145.90
Zinov'ev	1787	C	235		5.80		0.36				0.20	6.36
Primkino	1788	C	1,255	5.60	8.20	6.80	30.05	11.9	62.87	3.20		128.62
Golubei	1789	C	1,092	80.24	7.05	2.99	12.33	3.75				106.36
Bariatnits	1790	C	957	38.25	7.50	4.11	2.00	1.79				53.65
Bariatnits	1791	C	957	16.35	4.00	1.45	20.95	3.80	17.4		2.50	66.45
Golubei	1791	C	1,092		3.10	1.31	10.80	3.10	13.00		0.43	31.74
Voskresenskoe	1804	C	868	18.62	28.00	0.50	104.00	2.84	5.00			158.96
Grebnevo	1814	L	1,099			10.40			621.50			631.90
Grebnevo	1814	C	1,099	10.00	60.00	32.61	202.49	25.10	36.50			366.70
Shirokonosovo	1819	C	263	20.42	10.47		72.61		42.00			145.50
Grebnevo	1827	C	1,084	23.80	37.80	6.20	293.81		32.40			394.01
Puzhbol	1834	C	288		16.42	105.10	80.26		22.58	105.90	4.10	334.40
Kotel'niki	1834	C	315				4.10					4.10
Golubei	1769	L				13.65		2.00	13.40			29.05
Golubei	1789	L	1,092		6.30	3.30		2.05				11.65
Bariatnits	1790	L	957									
Grivy	1813	L		45.70		77.00	180.56		535.00		100.00	938.26
Shirokonosovo	1819	L	263			43.35	229.07	262.50	1,287		2.60	1,824.5

Notes: a C = communal funds; L = landlord's funds.

Sources: Authors' calculations, based on RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5900, 5909, 5910, 6057, 6059, 6402; op. 2, d. 32, 34. NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 18, ed. 4; karton 41. ed. 1, 8; karton 42, ed. 1; karton 43, ed. 2; karton 45, ed. 3; karton 47, ed. 2; karton 48, ed. 6.

sometimes paid bribes to officials to avoid punitive measures. Thus, on 2 February 1789, 'the [district] solicitor and the secretary, for purging the record of tax arrears for the estate of Bariatinets and associated villages, received a gift of 2 *shtofs* [2.5 litres] of French vodka'.³⁰

The second category is managing the drafting of peasants into the army. It was a commune's obligation to deliver a fit recruit, and the recruiting officers had significant leeway in accepting or rejecting a candidate supplied by a commune on medical grounds. This discretion, obviously, created space for negotiation and extortion, and we find the peasants making payments to military medics and to the recruiting officers to get the draftees supplied by the commune pronounced fit for service.³¹

The third is management of various ad hoc interactions, such as the payment made on 17 July 1791 'at the district court to secretary Semen Seleninov for making an inquiry in the archive whether any applications had been made [officially by the estate administrators] regarding various peasants who ran away from the Roslavl' estate since the 4th tax census, 17 of them in total'.³²

The fourth is the process of obtaining auxiliary services related to dealing with the state bureaucracy, such as paying scribes for composing petitions and making clean copies for submission.

The fifth category involves 'treating' officials in various contexts (on the estate itself, in their own office, or elsewhere), whether in connection with a specific business or not. For example, on 10 February 1759, estate representatives bought 'for Tikhon Pluzhnikov, a secretary at the Landed Estates Office, and scribe Ilia Veshniakov, upon his request, for lunch, 2 [bottles] of white wine, worth 60 kopeks; English beer, 2 bottles, worth 1 ruble; black caviar, 1 pound, worth 9 kopeks; red caviar, 1 pound, worth 12 kopeks; bread, worth 2 kopeks; live fish, worth 60 kopeks; in total 2.43 rubles'.³³

Sixthly, there are the gifts that had to be given to various officials on the occasion of state and church holidays. For example, on 1 March 1834, 'on the occasion of Shrovetide, food supplies have been bought for the district officials': for the land captain, worth 4.5 rubles; for Secretary Osipov, worth 2.5 rubles; for two clerks, worth 3.2 rubles; for scribe Nagorskii, worth 2 rubles; for the deputy from the nobility,³⁴ worth 2.5 rubles; and for the postmaster and his assistant, worth 3.4 rubles.³⁵

The final category is covering the travel expenses of estate representatives sent to the district town to deal with state officials, such as payments for horses, lodging, and food.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ When a peasant commune supplied a military recruit to the army, it was also required to provide specified items of clothing and food for his trip to his future unit. As these expenses were mandated by law, they do not fall under the category of facilitation payments and are not included here. Neither are the monies often spent by peasants chosen to be drafted on buying or hiring a substitute, as these payments were made not to the officials, but to other peasants.

³² RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6059.

³³ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 32.

³⁴ The land captain (*kapitan-ispravnik*) was the chief executive official in the district, combining the functions of a magistrate and police chief. The deputy from the nobility (*dvorianskii zasedatel'*) was a member of the district court elected by the local noble corporation (two other members were elected by state peasants).

³⁵ NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 47, ed. 2.

As we can see, some of these payments are not easy to categorize unequivocally. For example, how are we to think of the peasants' decision to hire someone to draft a petition for them? Did they really need this service because they were not sufficiently literate? Were they forced into hiring someone—perhaps a particular person with connections to the relevant officials—for their petition to be accepted? It is hard to be sure. Likewise, should the travel expenses of peasant representatives be counted as a part of the facilitation payments? Technically speaking, these moneys did not go to the officials; yet it is the need to interact with the state that forced the peasants to make such trips. For our purposes we prefer to err on the side of overestimating the volume of facilitation payments, so we include all the questionable or borderline cases in our count.

Overall, there is a broad pattern to the way in which certain types of payments were made, either from the landlord's or from the communal funds (table 3). Generally speaking, in the case of the Golitsyns, the landlord covered larger, one-off payments, especially those related to litigations over land and other assets, as well as to the land surveys—interactions that contributed to increasing (or maintaining) the value of his estate. The peasant commune, on the other hand, was responsible for smaller, but much more numerous and regular, payments related to discharging its obligations to the state and managing its routine interactions with the officialdom. For example, in 1814 the estate of Grebnevo paid 54 rubles to various officials on 18 March, 10 rubles on 14 May, and 57.4 rubles on 22 June, all in connection with a dispute with one Okorokov, a merchant, over the Shchelkovo mill. On 22 September, large payments were recorded not in connection with any specific case, but rather in order to obtain 'good disposition in affairs' in general: the district judge got pieces of different cloths worth 96 rubles, and the land captain cloths worth 72 rubles.³⁶ Earlier, on 20 May, the Grebnevo estate made a large transfer of 122.7 rubles and, on 4 July, a further 119.5 to the central office in Moscow as a reimbursement for expenses made there for securing the titles to certain Grebnevo lands. Thus, facilitation payments related to a specific estate, even if made by the central office, were to be charged to this particular estate, rather than to the landlord in general.

As for the communal funds, the peasants of Grebnevo made their largest payment in 1814 in July, when they offered a gift of fruit (cherries, watermelons, melons, peaches, and plums) worth 30.75 rubles to the local deputy from the nobility. Other payments were much smaller: the estate was visited by soldiers eight times that year, and on each occasion the visitors got anywhere from 40 kopeks to 1.5 rubles; a team of soldiers sent to the countryside, apparently to collect medicinal herbs, got as much as 10 rubles for not stopping over on the estate. In September, three rubles were spent on buying half a litre of vodka on the occasion of a visit to the estate by the local land captain. Money was also spent to ensure the 'good disposition' of local officials: Grigorii Grigorievich Telegin, the secretary of the district court, got 13 rubles' worth of cloth in April, and 15 rubles in cash in December.³⁷ Overall, throughout the decades under study the estate owners appear to have consistently put the financial burden of maintaining certain types of interactions with officials on to the shoulders of the peasant commune. On the other hand, there is no direct

³⁶ NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 41, ed. 8 (entries under the relevant dates).

³⁷ NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 41, ed. 8.

evidence that this landlord was attempting to recoup his facilitation expenditures by extracting more from peasants.

The data in table 3 also reflect the relative weight of different categories of facilitation payments made by estates and communes. While our coding of individual payments is, unavoidably, imprecise, we can still consider which types of interactions with the state appear to have been more burdensome than others. Notably, payments related to discharging the two main obligations to the state—the poll tax and the military draft—do not appear to have been the leading ones. Rather, the largest type of regular expenses seems to have been ‘treatment’ for various officials, whether in connection with a specific business or not. This is especially striking if ‘treatment’ is considered in conjunction with holiday gifts, another type of payment made not to achieve specific outcomes, but rather based on tradition and intended to establish and maintain general rapport. In fact, even in the case of payments related to the poll tax, our account books most often offer only one vague reason for making them: ‘for being well-disposed’. It seems to indicate that payments were made as a part of a conventional ritual of gift-giving, rather than for performing any specific service.

IV

How large were the facilitation payments that the peasants had to bear in their dealings with the state? Our sources allow us to calculate the overall amount of annual payments and the relative shares of individual categories of payments. We also attempt to assess how heavy the burden of informal practices actually was. While our understanding of the average annual income of a peasant during this period leaves much to be desired, we can get some notion of the weight of such payments by comparing their volume to the total volume of expenditures by the peasant communes, and to that of the official taxes which they paid. Finally, we can explore how these amounts changed over time.

Our key results are reflected in tables 4 and 5. As we can see from table 4, throughout the period under study the share of such payments in the overall annual expenditures recorded in the estate and communal accounts (taxes and obligations to the landlord included) remained roughly constant, at around 1 to 7 per cent, with one notable exception—Shirokonosovo in 1819 (see our discussion of this case below). Fluctuations appear to be driven by random factors and no pattern emerges. Thus, the sharp rise in the share of facilitation payments in 1791 on the Bariatinets estate was largely due to the lower overall volume of communal funds collected by peasants that year, not to the growth of the volume of facilitation payments themselves (compare the volume of communal expenditures for Bariatinets in 1790 and 1791).

In order to appreciate better the burden of such payments and its fluctuations over time, in table 5 we calculate the amount of facilitation payments per male peasant. In this table we use a more limited set of account books, as we only look at the cases for which we have *both* communal *and* landlord’s accounts for a given estate for a given year. Notably, the payments in 1769—that is, before Catherine II reinstated salaries for low-level local officials—are actually lower than two decades later (although, of course, we cannot make any conclusions about the impact of

Table 4. *Facilitation payments as a share of total expenditures, %*

<i>Estate</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Account type</i>	<i>No. of serfs on the estate, 'male souls'</i>	<i>Total expenditures, rubles</i>	<i>Amount of facilitation payments, rubles</i>	<i>Facilitation payments as a share of total expenditures, %</i>
Vlakhernskoe	1759	Landlord	152	14,589.60	156.05	1.07
Vlakhernskoe	1764	Landlord	152	28,066.40	145.91	0.52
Golubei	1769	Landlord		1,953.23	29.05	1.49
Zinov'evo	1787	Commune	235	347.25	26.36	7.59
Golubei	1789	Landlord	1,092	5,030.33	9.90	0.20
Golubei	1789	Commune	1,092	1,904.90	106.36	5.58
Bariatnests	1790	Landlord	957	2,769.99	0.00	0.00
Bariatnests	1790	Commune	957	1,821.83	53.65	2.94
Bariatnests	1791	Commune	957	905.74	66.45	7.34
Golubei	1791	Commune	1,092	1,388.26	31.74	2.29
Krasnoe (Buintsy)	1793	Landlord	375	986.90	11.70	1.19
Voskresenskoe	1804	Commune	868	7,895.86	158.96	2.01
Grivu	1813	Landlord		12,653.00	938.26	7.42
Grebnevo	1814	Commune	1,099	16,769.90	366.70	2.19
Grebnevo	1814	Landlord	1,099	44,126.40	631.85	1.43
Shirokonosovo	1819	Landlord	263	3,052.16	1,824.50	59.78
Shirokonosovo	1819	Commune	263	2,000.00	145.50	7.28
Grebnevo	1827	Landlord	1,084	38,557.20	0.00	0.00
Grebnevo	1827	Commune	1,084	9,298.61	394.01	4.24
Puzhbol	1834	Commune	288	7,427.53	334.40	4.50
Kotel'niki	1834	Commune	315	2,100.00	4.10	0.20

Sources: Authors' calculations, based on RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5900, 5909, 5910, 6057, 6059, 6402; op. 2, d. 32, 34. NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 18, ed. 4; karton 41. ed. 1, 8; karton 42, ed. 1; karton 43, ed. 2; karton 45, ed. 3; karton 47, ed. 2; karton 48, ed. 6.

the reintroduction of salaries on the basis of one observation). Overall, as we can see, in the eighteenth century these extra payments never exceeded 11 kopeks per 'male soul', that is, *about one-seventh of the annual poll tax rate* for that period (70 kopeks per 'male soul'), and the median was six kopeks, that is, *about 8 per cent of the tax poll rate*. This might appear a considerable amount of money—except, of course, that the real value of the poll tax revenues was rapidly declining. In fact, the government (which during the first half of the century viewed lowering the poll tax by a couple of kopeks as an important political step intended to appease the peasants) now considered it possible to raise it from 70 kopeks to one ruble per 'male soul' by 1794. Even after that, however, the government did not come close even to adjusting the tax rate adequately for inflation, for, according to Mironov, *real prices* during the eighteenth century grew by a factor of five; instead, the government preferred to rely on indirect taxation to augment its revenues. Amounts extracted by the landlords grew even faster during this period and vastly exceeded state taxes, probably by factor of two or three.³⁸

In the nineteenth century, however, nominal per capita expenditures on facilitation payments grew by a factor of 10. The most notable outlier in our sample, the case of Shirokonosovo in 1819, reflects legal disputes in which the

³⁸ Troitskii, *Finansovaia politika*, p. 143; Mironov, *Klebnye tseny*, pp. 172–3; idem, *Rossiiskaia imperiia*, vol. 2, p. 63.

Table 5. *Facilitation payments per male peasant*

<i>Estate</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of male peasants on the estate</i>	<i>Total amount collected from peasants, rubles</i>	<i>Collected from peasants, rubles per male peasant</i>	<i>Spent on facilitation payments, rubles</i>	<i>Facilitation payments per male peasant, rubles</i>	<i>Deflated by Brzhetskii,^a rubles</i>	<i>Deflated by Mironov(1),^b rubles</i>	<i>Deflated by Mironov(2),^c rubles</i>
Golubei	1769	912	4,943.36	5.42	29.05	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02
Golubei	1789	1,092	4,818.90	4.41	116.26	0.11	0.10	0.08	0.04
Bariatnits	1790	957	4,684.75	4.90	53.65	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.02
Bariatnits	1791	957	3,316.93	3.47	66.45	0.07	0.06	0.04	0.02
Golubei	1791	1,092	4,808.62	4.40	31.74	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
Grebnovo	1814	1,099	60,408.00	54.97	998.55	0.91	0.23	0.52	0.07
Shirokonosovo	1819	263	4,413.51	16.78	1,970	7.49	2.01	4.25	0.60
Grebnovo	1827	1,084	44,440.00	41.00	394.01	0.36	0.10	0.23	0.03
Puzhbol	1834	288	7,741.44	26.88	334.40	1.16	0.32	0.66	0.10

Sources: *a* Brzhetskii, *Gosudarstvennye dolgi Rossii*, pp. 4–5, tab. 14.

b and *c* Mironov, *Rossiiskaia imperiia*, 3, pp. 181–2, tab. 11.4. General price index; the baseline is 1760s prices.

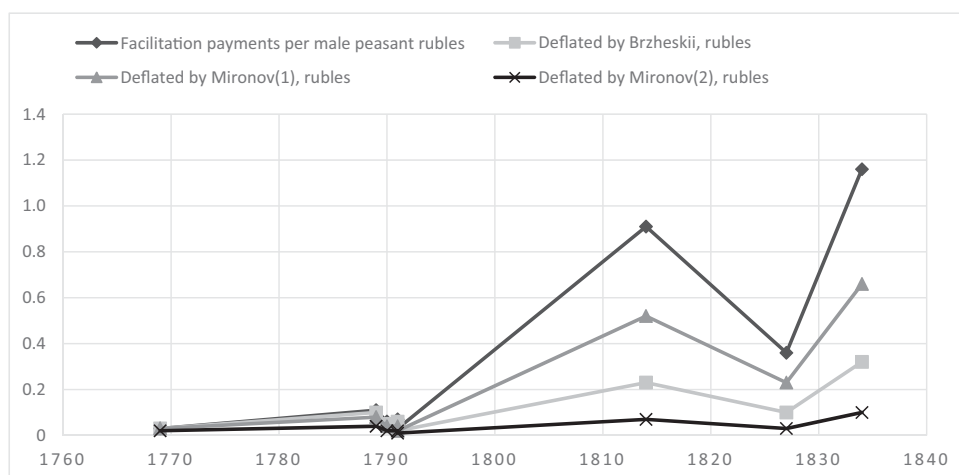


Figure 1. *Nominal vs. deflated per capita facilitation payments, 1760s–1830s*

Note: 1819 is excluded as an outlier.

Source: Based on the data in tab. 5.

estate was involved, notably two lawsuits against a certain Reinsdorf, where the estate felt obliged to spend as much as 1740 rubles on bribes; one of these cases was resolved in the Golitsyns' favour that very year.³⁹ Otherwise, the dramatic growth of average, routine facilitation expenditures in the post-Napoleonic era should not be all that surprising, as *nominal* prices in that period also increased significantly. In table 5 we adjust nominal per capita expenditures on facilitation payments using the available deflators (based on the silver-to-copper exchange rate and on the general price index). The result is a growth in per capita expenditures on facilitation payments that is significant, yet certainly much less dramatic compared to the nominal numbers (figure 1). This growth is broadly in line with the situation in the economy in general.

How heavy was this burden for an individual peasant? As we mentioned earlier, assessing an 'average' peasant's annual income is difficult, as the available data are contradictory, and their exact meaning in the context of an economy with a very low level of monetization is problematic. On the one hand, the so-called 'topographic descriptions' of individual districts in the Tver' province in the late eighteenth century claim that an 'average' peasant every year earned from 5 or 6 to 10 rubles (depending on the district) from selling his produce, both grain and other items (cattle, eggs, hemp, homespun cloth, honey, berries, and so on). On the other hand, the author of a 'typical' budget of an average peasant, composed in the 1780s by one of the local officials and quoted by Milov, claimed that a peasant needed as a minimum 26.43 rubles per year (taxes and dues to the landlord included), and that a consistently lower income led to economic degradation of the household.⁴⁰ How to reconcile these vastly diverging assessments is not clear. However, assuming two 'male souls' per household and a median burden of facilitation payments of six

³⁹ NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 48, ed. 6.

⁴⁰ Milov, *Velikorusskii pakhar*, pp. 365–7.

kopeks, we arrive at anywhere from 2.4 per cent (for the lowest annual revenue of five rubles) to 0.4 per cent (for the highest revenue of 26.43 rubles). Note that our median of six kopeks includes the money spent both by the commune and by the estate, and thus a part of it came from the quitrent payments. We might speculate as to whether the landlords factored in the need to make such payments when they set the quitrent rate. Still, it means the amounts actually collected from a peasant *in addition* to his other obligations were lower than the median of six kopeks per 'male soul'. To sum up, the amounts spent by peasants per annum on facilitation payments do appear to have been minuscule compared to the overall volume of their obligations. Whether the peasants themselves considered these payments to be a heavy and excessive burden is something that we are not able to determine at this point.

V

Finally, how important were these payments in the lives of the officials who received them; that is, how do they compare to their official salaries?

Let us take as an example one district, Briansk, that seems to have been fairly representative of agricultural regions in central Russia, and where one of the Golitsyns' estates, Golubei, was located. According to the 1786 census, the district had 31,378 male peasants of all categories.⁴¹ As we can see from table 5, peasants on the Golitsyn estates spent anywhere from three to 11 kopeks per 'male soul' per year on all types of facilitation payments at the end of the eighteenth century. If we extrapolate this rate to the entire district population, the Briansk district chancellery must have collected anywhere from 941 to 3,451 rubles a year from all local estates. On the other hand, the district administration in Briansk had 57 officials of all ranks on its rolls, not counting the lower-level personnel, such as janitors (according to Pissar'kova, the Imperial average was 60).⁴² According to our calculations, made on the basis of the existing organizational charts, their combined salaries added up to about 6,000 rubles a year.⁴³ In that case, the sum that the district officials received as facilitation payments from local estates and communes would have added anywhere from 16 to 60 per cent to their combined annual income.

To double-check these calculations, let us consider the data from a different estate, that of Priimki in the Rostov district of the Iaroslavl' province in 1788. This estate was also situated in central Russia and belonged to the Kurakins, another prominent princely clan.⁴⁴ During this period Priimki's owner was Princess Agrafena Aleksandrovna Kurakina (1734–91), and it was probably managed on her behalf by Prince Stepan Borisovich Kurakin.⁴⁵ Curiously, in the case of Priimki, unlike in the Golitsyn records, we do find a few instances of peasants interacting with the administrators not only at the district but also at the provincial level, however limited such interactions might have been. On 1 September 1788, the

⁴¹ Beskrovnyi, ed., *Perepisi naseleniia Rossii*, pp. 21–2.

⁴² RGADA, f. 1261, op. 12, d. 147, ll. 77–80 ob.; Pissar'kova, *Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie Rossii*, p. 428, tab. 39.

⁴³ Pissar'kova, *Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie*, p. 457.

⁴⁴ Titov, *Kurakovshchina*.

⁴⁵ *Materialy dlia polnoi rodoslovnoi kniazei Golitsynykh*, p. 19; Titov, *Kurakovshchina*, p. 3.

peasants met the newly appointed governor general of Iaroslavl' and Vologda, Evgenii Petrovich Kashkin, en route from Moscow, and made him a token gift of bread and apples, worth 1.2 rubles. On 29 September, the village headman was dispatched to Kashkin with a letter from the landlord (again, probably a formal congratulation on his appointment and safe arrival in his new seat) and made a gift of bread and a sugar loaf worth 4.1 rubles.⁴⁶ It is questionable whether the governor general himself really craved this bread, 20 apples, and sugar: the gift was probably symbolic in nature and was probably passed on to his domestics and low-level clerks.

What we find is that the Priimki estate, with its population of 1,255 male serfs, spent 128.62 rubles on facilitation payments that year. This translates into about 10 kopeks per male peasant, a figure that is within the range of our observations for the Golitsyn estates in the eighteenth century. As the Rostov district, where Priimki was located, had 36,295 male peasants of all categories,⁴⁷ it translates into 3,992 rubles collected from the entire district. The Rostov district cost the treasury about the same as the Briansk one, that is, about 6,000 rubles, so we arrive at a ratio of facilitation payments to official salaries of about 70 per cent, somewhat higher than our estimates for Briansk, but not much.

The Priimki records are also interesting because they cite the names of specific officials who received facilitation payments. Of 128.62 rubles spent on facilitation payments overall, 90.62 went directly to the officials (the rest was spent on logistics and so on), including about 75 rubles paid to specific individuals who are listed in the records by name. Thus, we can explore the distribution of unofficial incomes within the district's bureaucratic hierarchy. As we can see from table 6, only the top local officials were mentioned by name. The combined salaries of these 10 individuals accounted for about 2,350 rubles, or 40 per cent of all the total legal revenues of local officials—yet they pocketed over 80 per cent of payments made by Priimki to officials that year. Their receipts from this estate equal about 3 per cent of their combined annual salaries, and by extrapolating this level of payment to the entire district, we might assume that overall they collected about 2,190 rubles; in other words, they came close to something like doubling their salaries from this one source only.

On the other hand, the much more numerous—and unnamed—lower personnel (secretaries, scribes, guards, and so on) received in total only 16.67 rubles from Priimki that year. This translates into a meagre 480 rubles or so collected by them from the entire district population; that is, only about 13 per cent of their combined salaries. This sharp inequality in the distribution of extralegal revenues is striking, but of course not surprising; we should keep it in mind when thinking about the possible distribution of other extralegal proceeds the officials might have received. As we can see from table 6, the inequality was reproduced even within the top ranks of the hierarchy: the town commandant got three times as much as the judge, and the judge almost twice as much as each of his associates.⁴⁸ The town commandant thus received extralegal payments worth almost 9 per cent of his official salary from a single estate only, which means that overall he probably received bribes and gifts

⁴⁶ NIOR RGB, f. 586, karton 1, ed. 2, ll. 107 ob., 109.

⁴⁷ Beskrovnyi, ed., *Perepisi naseleniia Rossii*, pp. 15–16.

⁴⁸ Town commandant (*gorodnichii*) combined the role of the chief of the district police with that of the magistrate.

Table 6. *Officials in the Rostov district and payments they received from the Priimki estate, 1788*

<i>Office-holders in Rostov (according to adres-kalendar' for 1788)</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Grade on the Table of Ranks, to which this office corresponds</i>	<i>Salary (rubles)</i>	<i>Payments received in 1788 from Priimki estate</i>	<i>Payments from Priimki as a share of annual salary, %</i>
Ivan Mikhailovich Sukin	Town commandant (<i>gorodnichii</i>)	8	300	26.00	8.67
Fedor Nikolaevich Terpigorev	Judge (chair) of the district court	8	300	9.10	3.03
Abram Korob'in	Member of the district court	9	250	2.75	1.10
Osip Osipovich Iakovlev	Member of the district court	9	250	5.00	2.00
Gavril Vasil'evich Verein	Member of the district court	9	250	4.85	1.94
Aleksei Mikhailovich Posluzhivstev	Land captain	9	250	5.40	2.16
Petr Osipovich Iakovlev	Member of the 'lower district court' ^a	10	200	6.50	3.25
Leontii Gavrilovich Boldarev	Member of the 'lower district court'	10	200	3.00	1.50
Aleksei Grigor'evich Iumatov	Member of the 'lower district court'	10	200	3.10	1.55
Aleksandr Petrovich Sobolev	District treasurer		150	1.95	1.30
Total:			2,350	67.65	2.88
Total (including joint payments): ^b			2,350	73.95	3.10

Notes: a 'Zasedatel' nizhnego zemskogo suda'.

b Some of the payments could not be assigned to a specific individual: Petr Iakovlev and Boldyrev together got an additional 0.8 rubles, while on another occasion Osip Iakovlev, Petr Iakovlev, Korob'in, Verein, and Iumatov together received 5.5 rubles.

Sources: Authors' calculations, based on NIOR RGB, f. 586, karton 1, ed. 2. 1.

worth over 200 per cent of his salary from this source alone. We should also keep in mind that not only did low-level personnel receive a minuscule share of payments from the populace, but that even these payments came disproportionately in the form of 'treatment', that is, in kind, rather than in cash. Put differently, a low-level clerk was likely to be invited to partake of drinks bought by peasant representatives, or of small dinners, such as the one offered by Aleksei Chesnakov to the Briansk chancellery, but this did not help him to maintain his family, to buy clothes, or to educate his children. This observation fits well with the picture of the abject misery of lower-level officials, which is well established in the literature.⁴⁹

What about the overall volume of extralegal payments received by officials? We can be reasonably certain that they must have also received additional payments from the peasants who sought to engage in various types of business and came to interact with officials on an individual basis—something that is not reflected in our sources, but certainly took place—as well as from the merchants and artisans residing in the district towns. As both the enterprising peasants and

⁴⁹ Moriakova, *Sistema mestnogo upravleniia*, pp. 185–7.

the urban population were considerably wealthier than the average peasant, it is not unreasonable to suggest that, with them included, the volume of facilitation payments received by district officials at least tripled, to about 25 per cent of poll tax revenues from a given district, or about the same amount as the combined salaries of district officials. Here again, while the lower-ranking personnel received only crumbs from this corrupt table, top district officials—who, as a rule, were retired military officers of noble origin—could certainly aspire to much more. If it was feasible for the Rostov town commandant to triple his annual income thanks to facilitation payments received from the district's estates and peasant communes, what would be his income if other categories of payers and other types of payments were included? An income five times his official salary would probably be a conservative guess, and 10 times a realistic one. One's chances of receiving such income, of course, varied significantly depending on one's functional position within the bureaucracy, as well as the socio-economic profile of the district itself.

It is important to mention in this context that, as per Catherine II's provincial reform, the town commandant was not appointed by the Crown, but rather elected by local nobles from among their own number, and therefore depended on them. Note also that while the town commandants and some other top district officials were normally recruited from among the nobles (often from among the retired military officers), their scribes and clerks usually were not, coming as they did from among the priestly estate, soldiers' sons, and similar 'people of various ranks'. In that sense, while the top district officials could secure sufficient revenues for themselves even with the rate of extortion that we observe, they were unlikely to feel obliged to provide similar opportunities for lower-level personnel. All of this probably goes a long way towards explaining the relatively low burden of these routine facilitation payments (as opposed to other more targeted forms) in the late eighteenth century.

VI

Our study is the first ever attempt at systematic assessment of the burden of routine corruption—or, to choose our words more carefully, of unofficial facilitation payments—in Russia during the reigns of Catherine II and Alexander I. Drawing on data from the accounts books of a set of estates that belonged to the powerful Golitsyn family, we have demonstrated how ubiquitous such payments really were. In that sense, our findings confirm the prevalent stereotypes: every little interaction with state officials involved paying a fee to the clerks, and such fees, although technically illegal, were so common and commonly accepted as to be entered in the account books alongside other operational expenses. On the other hand, these 'routine' payments were really quite small, especially if apportioned on a per capita basis among the entire commune: for the late eighteenth century the median for our sample of estates was about six kopeks per 'male soul' per year. These sums were marginal compared to the overall obligations borne by the peasant households towards the state and the landlord. Such fees appear to have been largely customary in nature, a part of the traditional economy of gift-giving, demonstrating respect, and maintaining informal relationships ('good disposition').

Yet, even such a low level of per capita extraction would have allowed key district officials to amass significant amounts, at a very minimum tripling their salaries. Of course, this was just one type of extralegal payment collected from the populace: if other sources of revenue were taken into account, officials' income would probably be significantly higher, and the burden of corruption would be much heavier, although, perhaps, distributed very unevenly. These calculations are an important step beyond the impressionistic accounts of rampant corruption in early modern Russia, towards operating with actual numbers, however imprecise and preliminary.

Most importantly, our findings open up avenues for further research. One set of questions that follows from our study has to do with alternative sources of extralegal revenue available for officials and with the scope of extralegal extraction from other categories of population. Preliminary observations show that there were fortunes to be made by officials in dealing with litigants in important cases concerning valuable assets (as the records from the Shirokonosovo estate in 1819 indicate) and with entrepreneurs; with contractors and suppliers seeking to sell goods and services to the state; with those seeking to rent Crown properties; with the owners of distilleries seeking to minimize taxes; and so on. In other words, officials probably switched to making money in more targeted ways and on a transactional basis, charging supplicants for specific favours and benefits. As the economy grew and became more sophisticated in the nineteenth century, these sources of illegal income probably also grew in importance. At some level, this shift towards more targeted forms of extortion by officials parallels the state's own gradual shift towards relying on more targeted taxing of enterprises and wealthy individuals, rather than the population at large.⁵⁰

Another set of questions has to do with the institutional framework underlying these practices. The Golitsyns were a powerful and wealthy magnate family, so our numbers might underestimate the level of extortion faced by the estates of smaller and less influential landlords, or by the 'state peasants' who did not have high-ranking patrons to shield them from officials' greed. Was this indeed the case? The issue here is not just whether our findings regarding the scale of extraction could be extrapolated across Russia. Rather, if the magnates' serfs had to pay less, these powerful actors would emerge as an important check on the rapacity of officials. This would also have implications for our understanding of the drivers of administrative 'modernization' at the local level. Going further, our findings require a broader look at these and other institutional mechanisms that apparently suppressed the volume of 'routine' corruption in early modern Russia and brought it to a level that was acceptable for both the populace and the officials themselves.

Finally, our study paves the way for comparative analysis of extralegal extortion in premodern societies, especially in agrarian empires such as Russia and China. We hope it will stimulate scholars working on other regions to search for sources that make it possible to extend such comparisons both geographically and chronologically, and to explore systematically the ways in which such extortion affected living standards, productivity, and economic growth across the centuries.

⁵⁰ Kotsonis, *States of obligation*.

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