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RECONSIDERING CENTRE-ETHNIC PERIPHERY RELATIONS
IN THE STATE OF PETER THE GREAT

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the transformation of centre-ethnic periphery relations during Peter the Great reforms. The literature established two positions stating that the change of title by the Russian monarch in 1721 was firstly due to the change in Russia's international status, and secondly to the evolution of ideas about the source of the tsar's power. However, these explanations contradict the very concept of the empire as a complex state, where the centre and the provinces are indirectly linked. The latter provision involved governing the national fringes through local elites through special agreements affirming the rights and privileges of subjects. The pre-Petrine Russia implemented a differentiated approach to governing the population of the former states, and legally recognized the special rights and privileges of certain peoples. The state's fiscal demands on the population of Ufa Province increased 16-fold. The literature tends to interpret Peter the Great's taxation policy in terms of Cameralism. Nevertheless, Peter the Great's fiscal policy towards the Bashkirs contradicted the foundations of this rationalist doctrine, both by design and practical implementation. The change of the titular in 1721 symbolized a new conception of the state for all subject peoples, which abolished all the rights and privileges granted by the Russian monarchs to individual nations. Thus, Peter the Great's new policy towards the ethnic fringes was essentially a rejection of imperial methods of governing the state.

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Keywords: Bashkirs, government unification, Russian Empire, Ufa Province



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1. Introduction

Today, the Russian Federation is a polyethnic state, which has adopted some traditions of governing the national fringes from its imperial experience. The study of the governance of ethnic minorities in the pre-Soviet period is of undeniable relevance for the formation of the state's national policy at the present stage.

The most complex and controversial period in the relationship between the centre and the national fringes is the era of Peter the Great. In terms of the radicality of reviewing the entire former governance structure of the non-Russian peoples, the period of Peter's transformations can only be compared with Lenin's national programme. One of the symbols of Russia's new policy towards the ethnic fringes is the adoption of a new title by the Russian monarch.

However, the literature holds that the introduction of the imperial title had nothing to do with a radical change in the internal politics of the state. In the article 'From Moscow Kingdom to All-Russian Empire' O. G. Ageyeva argues that the change of titularity was primarily due to the power's foreign policy status. At the beginning of the 18th century, Russia's international position changed, and it was necessary to clearly fix the rank of the Russian monarch in Europe (Ageyeva, 2012).

In contrast, Richard Wortman gives a different interpretation. The Roman (European) state was freer from the influence of the church than the Russian tsardom. The emperor, as triumphant, is far less dependent on a religious source of power than the Russian tsar. The triumphal sacralisation of power served the same function as the coronation (Wortman, 2002). Thus, the emperor is no longer answerable to God for the souls of his subjects but becomes a victorious leader whose authority comes from the senate representing the people.

2. Problem Statement

The article aims to prove that the change of titularity by the Russian monarch in 1721 was due, among other things, to the transformation of the centre-ethnic periphery relationship. The foreign policy factor (apart from the expansionary orientation of the state) or the source of the monarch's power (from God or from the people) have no bearing on the very understanding of empire as a complex state. Charles Tilly defines empires as 'complex polities indirectly linked to the centre' (Tilly, 1997).

3. Research Questions

The Russian Empire in the 16th and 18th centuries was not at all what Tilly means? In the 16th century the title of tsar corresponded to that of the Byzantine emperor. Ivan IV asked the Ecumenical Patriarch to confirm his tsarist title only after the conquest of the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, whose rulers were legally considered sovereign monarchs, i.e. after the Moscow state had become a compound polity. Raising his subjects to the rank of count (the emperor's prerogative) Peter I said in his diploma: "If the autocratic power is given to us by the God in our hereditary all-Russian state and in the tsardoms and states belonging to it...". The Tsar declares that he is not just the sovereign of the All-Russian Tsardom, but of other states as well.

4. Purpose of the Study

Russia's imperial status in the 16th–17th centuries is also confirmed by the practice of indirect governance of former sovereign states. The conquered khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan were not directly integrated into the administrative and legislative structure of the country. Until the end of the 17th century, there was the special department, the Prikaz of the Kazan Palace which governed them and determined the entire set of legislative acts for the administration of the ethnic minorities. This department has developed into an institution with a special profile for determining the general national policy of the government in the state. The specifics of governing the annexed states were reflected in the retention of many of the old practices and institutions of power characteristic of the Golden Horde era.

5. Research Methods

Before the reforms of Peter the Great, the Prikaz of the Kazan Palace governed the ethnic minorities of the Volga and the Urals and had its own budget, from which only 7–9 % of the money went to the Russian treasury. The administration and defence of the new territories absorbed the bulk of the taxes and duties collected. Unlike in Siberia, there was no colonial context in Russian management practices in the Volga-Ural region.

The first changes in the system of regional administration were evident as early as the period of the Azov campaigns. A decree of December 20, 1695 withdrew the lands of Trans-Ural lands in the Tobol-Irtysk basin from the Siberian Prikaz (office) and transferred them to Ufa provincial governors. Unremarkable at first glance, the administrative-territorial reform actually meant a departure from the traditional division of Russian subjects. In the practice of the Mongol Empire and Russia in the 16th-17th centuries, there was a significant difference in the status of peoples who were conquered and those who voluntarily became subjects. In the XVI century, unlike the Ufa Bashkirs, the Bashkirs of the Tobolsk district were considered 'people of Kuchum Khan'. Their patrimonial lands were declared state property, and the tribute exceeded the yasak paid by the Bashkirs of Ufa district by an order of magnitude. Nevertheless, in 1695 the state equalized all Bashkirs in rights and privileges regardless of the nature of accepting citizenship.

In 1701, the administration of patrimonial and financial affairs transferred from the Prikaz of the Kazan Palace to Kazan. Already at the beginning of the 18th century this institution was transformed into a province, and the transfer of administration only finally formalized this process (Aznabaev, 2019). How did this affect the governance of local non-Russian peoples?

Before the reforms of Peter the Great, Bashkirs were the most privileged people of south-eastern Russia. From the Horde times, they have retained a patrimonial right to land, legally forbidding any form of alienation of Bashkir lands. Until the middle of 18th century there were 28 million 484 thousands dessiatinas owned by Bashkirs (Akmanov, 2000). At the same time the yasak paid by the Bashkirs from this land amounted to just 5.217 roubles. The Bashkirs themselves paid only 1508 roubles, the rest was paid by the Bashkir pripushchenniks (people who were resettled on the land of the indigenous owners). For comparison, in 1667 the ethnic minorities of Yakutsk uyezd alone contributed 1.4 million roubles to the treasury.

6. Findings

The Bashkirs retained the right to address the head of state directly. In her article devoted to the history of Bashkir embassies to Moscow N.F. Demidova pointed out that delegations of Bashkir representatives in Moscow in the 17th century stayed for confirming and making concrete the privileges of the Bashkirs established during their voluntary joining in the middle of the 16th century (Demidova, 2003).

The Bashkirs, unlike the Muslim peoples of the Volga region, have secured the right to practice Islam freely. They built mosques and madrassas unlimitedly. Benefiting from the lack of control from the Orthodox Church, Bashkir imams turned not only the pagans Mari and Udmurts to Islam, but also the Orthodox peasants who had fled to their lands.

Between 1704 and 1708 the Russian authorities abolished virtually all Bashkir privileges. Charles Steinwedel drew attention to the fact that Peter's government undertook actions in the province of Ufa that were not directly related to a change in tax policy. Thus, in 1704 the Bashkirs were deprived of the right to directly address the Tsar (Steinwedel, 2016). They had to settle all their affairs in Kazan. From 1704 all fiscal requirements were completely revised, even though according to the terms of accepting allegiance the state pledged not to change the *yasak* paid without the consent of the Bashkirs. In 1705, the Kazan authorities announced a levy of 5,000 horses from the Bashkirs. At the prices of the early 18th century, this was 16 times higher than the *yasak* paid and all previous Bashkir taxes. At the same time, the Bashkirs are being deprived of their most profitable fisheries for transferring them to the tax-farmers. The authorities impose restrictions on the Muslim religion, ordering the Orthodox Church to control Muslim ceremonies (weddings and funerals). Modeled on orthodox traditions, the Bashkirs were told to have cemeteries next to mosques.

All these hasty and provocative actions clearly show the main aim of the reformer was to level out all differences in the position of the subjects, to equalize their rights and obligations.

The authors of *A New Imperial History of Northern Eurasia* believe that the ideological justification for Peter the Great's fiscal reforms lies in the politics of Cameralism (Gerasimov, Mogilner and Glebov, 2017). This doctrine originated in the German principalities after the 30-year war and saw the role of the state as a unifier of economically divided citizens. The integrating function of state power is to create as much equity and fairness in taxes and taxation as possible. One of the main followers of Cameralism in Russia, Heinrich von Fick, wrote in the draft regulations of the Chamber Collegium: "...if it is true, if equality and dignity in taxes and expenditures are examined, that there should be proper equality in examination between the rich and the poor according to proportion, and no one should be more dismissed or burdened from the proper, because if this is done, then the poor households and the arable land should be left destitute, and the royal income will decrease greatly in time".

I. Gerasimov, M. Mogilner and S. Glebov argue that almost all of Peter the Great's actions fit into the logic of Cameralist thinking (Gerasimov, Mogilner and Glebov, 2017). Nevertheless, in southeastern outskirts of Russia, the actions of the authorities did not conform, even at the level of conception, to the Cameralist theory. For example, cameralism envisages a strict functional principle, whereby each institution would be responsible for its own specific area of management. The central element was the

financial institutions, which were clearly divided into bodies collecting funds, bodies that collected them and disbursed them, and finally bodies that maintained independent accounting and control of finances. All institutions had uniform principles for the form of various types of documents, and established rules for the movement of papers, their accounting and circulation within the bounds of the chancellery.

In 1704 the tax collectors of the Ingermanlandian chancellery started to operate in the province of Ufa. This institution, which effectively governed the Volga region, obtained the right to establish new objects of taxation without the approval of any government body. Peter the Great saw these new levies as free sums at his disposal outside the general budget, not subject to general supervision and allocation in the usual manner. The chancellery did not, as it were, exist for the state budget. The Ingermanland Chancellery did not give any reports to the Blizny Chancellery. It is this circumstance that prevents us from clearly monitoring the financial activities of the chancellery as we can do in relation to other prikazes (Aznabaev, 2019).

The Ingermanland chancellery was not limited to a passive role as a collector, but managed this part of the revenue as freely as it managed its own sums. Thus, Peter the Great's fiscal policy in the Middle Volga and Urals was not, either in spirit or in implementation, consistent with the Cameralist theory. One can hardly even call it an occupation, since the contribution of the defeated country is still subject to centralized accounting.

Nevertheless, one must agree with the main conclusion of the authors of *The New Imperial History of Northern Eurasia* that Chamberlism compromised the prospects of the Russian 'empire' in the sense of a complex political space (Gerasimov, Mogilner and Glebov, 2017).

J. Burbank and F. Cooper suggest that the policy of unification and homogenization of the population as essentially pursued by Peter the Great in the province of Ufa does not lead to the collapse of the empire, but marks a transition to a different imperial project. They suggest that imperial evolution has two possible variants - Eurasian and Roman (Burbank and Cooper, 2011). According to their conception, there are empires that prefer heterogeneity as the foundation of imperial rule (the Eurasian way) and empires that tend towards unification and homogeneity (the Roman way).

This concept is opposed by Ch. Tilly, who argues that history knows several examples of the first scenario, but not the second one (Tilly, 1997). Tilly notes that any empire is not just a complex polity. It is a state with an indirect connection between the centre and the ethnic periphery. The central authority exercised military and financial control in each major segment of the imperial dominion, but indirect control is acceptable in the following ways: (1) maintaining or concluding special pacts with the authorities of each segment; (2) exercising their authority through intermediaries enjoying considerable autonomy in their domains in return for loyalty, tribute collection and military cooperation with the centre. The rejection of indirect governance favouring a direct, standardized set of links between the centre and periphery inevitably leads to the collapse of empires.

But is this theory suggesting 'special pacts with the authorities of each segment' applicable to the Russian practice of governing the national fringes? The authors of *The New Imperial History of Northern Eurasia* argue that for Moscow, unlike the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the idea of contractual obligations of the tsar to the new subjects was unacceptable (Gerasimov, Mogilner and Glebov, 2017).

Indeed, Moscow had a different legal tradition, one linked to the legacy of the Horde, because the khans did not conclude any treaties with their subjects.

Nevertheless, there were bilateral acts enshrining the rights and privileges of subjects. These were public legal acts called yarliks or letters of grant. For example, in the 17th - the first half of the 18th century, after each rebellion, 'the Bashkirs of all four roads' received letters of grant from the Tsar, along with 'absolution of guilt'. The Bashkirs themselves understood these letters of grant as full-fledged contracts. The epic poetry of the Bashkir tribes of Usergan, Kypsak, Burzyan, Tamyan and Tangaur noted: "They compiled a decree (contractual) charter, in which they specifically wrote about our lands and religion, gave their word and swore that the Bashkirs and those professing Islam would never be forced into another religion and that we, the Bashkirs, would be of sincere service, agreeing to these treaty conditions between us, taking each other's signatures, our charter was written in a book in Kazan".

Formally, the letters of grant did not provide for sanctions. Nevertheless, subjects whose rights had been violated by the monarch had the right to rebel. The Yassa, the lawbook of Bashkirs, reflected this legal conflict. Ibn Battuta, who visited Central Asia in the mid-14th century, left a detailed description of this possibility: "Genghis compiled a book of his decrees, called Yasak, and they stipulated that whoever did not comply with the decrees of this book should be overthrown" (Pochekaev, 2017). The very level of linguistic dissonance displayed in the legal proceedings manifests the right to armed action against a ruler who has violated his own laws. V. Tatishchev was the first to pay attention to the fact that Bashkirs use in their documents essentially decriminalized concepts to designate their rebellions: "They call the lands given by His Imperial Majesty as their own, and riots as war, but absolution as peace for the fact that they are a steppe and wild people and their former will have also corrupted them".

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we should note that the attempt of Peter the Great's government to unify the Bashkirs actually meant the annulment of all previous letters of grant and the one-sided liquidation of the system of indirect administration. There were similar processes in Ukraine, the Don, the North Caucasus and the Lower Volga during this period. The change of the titular in 1721 symbolized a new conception of the state for all subject peoples, which abolished all the rights and privileges granted by the Russian monarchs to individual nations. In 1702, the unified form of signature for all petitions to the Emperor was introduced as 'the most humble servant' (Marasinova, 2008). Previously the Bashkirs called themselves as 'kholops' in their petitions, referring to themselves as privileged servants, and the tributaries of the Kazan uyezd referred to themselves as 'siroti'.

As a result, the government of Peter the Great led the state not to transform the empire from the Eurasian to the Roman version, but in fact to begin its collapse. After the 1704–1711 uprising, the Bashkirs de jure withdrew from Russian citizenship. The Bashkirs regained citizenship only in 1722, following the restoration of all the privileges they had received after joining Russia voluntarily in the mid-16th century.

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