

Erudition and Wisdom, Insight and Delight

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These pairs of attributes sketch only the most remarkable of Paul Bushkovitch's qualities as a historian. His knowledge is deep and profound, his historical judgment is sound and penetrating, and his work is regularly peppered with nuance, irony, and wit. We are all in his debt for a wide-ranging historical opus that illuminates unsuspected corners of historical experience, that rectifies mistaken historiography, and that reshapes how we understand such fundamental aspects of Russian history as the church, the elite, and the great reforming tsar, Peter the Great. One cannot do justice to all his work in a brief essay. Let me sketch out the highlights and pause on some of my personal favorites from among his many books and articles.

One must first remark on, and marvel at, the breadth of his historical research. He has ranged from Moscow merchants to hesychast saints, from pious boyars in the 16th century to intrigues at Peter the Great's court, from 19th-century historians to 17th-century Russian envoys to London. Some may not recall, for example, that Paul's first book was a social and economic history of Muscovite merchants and trade, since he moved from that social-economic history context to more cultural and political topics in later work. But *The Merchants of Moscow, 1580–1650*, published in 1980, is a valuable book. In its seven central chapters, it sums up the conditions of trade for the Moscow merchants and the volume and commodities of trade in several key arenas—the White Sea, the Baltic, Poland, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia, domestic trade including Siberia, and salt production. For this factual material alone, the book is a great resource. But its interpretive contribution is important, and very revealing of Paul's style as a historian.

This book jumps head on into a debate that goes back to the 17th century about the dearth in Muscovy of a "middle class." Modern historians had amplified the observations of early modern Europeans to declare that the "missing bourgeoisie" doomed Russia to being backward and even, in the eyes of some, never achieving the promises of the Western heritage. One aspect of this argument involved the role of the *gosti* (the tsar's privileged merchants) of the city of Moscow. Appointed by the state to carry out key government tasks—running monopolies, managing customs, selling the tsar's goods—these merchants were said to have never had a chance to amass capital or to survive over generations. This argument had been advanced not only by Soviet scholars, but also by an American historian, Samuel H. Baron, who de-

Religion and Identity in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Festschrift for Paul Bushkovitch. Nikolaos A. Chrissidis, Cathy J. Potter, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, and Jennifer B. Spock, eds. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2011, 1–8.

voted several seminal articles to this issue in the 1970s.¹ Bushkovitch entered the fray with his typical, reasoned approach. Taking an innovative turn, he set the Moscow merchants in the context of early modern Eastern European merchants and thereby was able to show that Moscow merchants' longevity in trade and ability to prosper was not far off that of their East European counterparts, regardless of the different economies in which they functioned. Furthermore, he went on to argue that "the notion that the state only hindered the merchants excludes important evidence to the contrary" and to identify "phenomena that suggest a two-sided relationship between the merchants and the state" (151). As evidence of a less predatory relationship between merchant and state, he cited the merchants' ability to prosper in various revenue-collecting roles—tax farming, collecting customs, managing tavern monopolies—providing ample detail on an underappreciated aspect of the argument. What is remarkable here is not only the judiciousness of his judgment, but the civility of his prose; he managed to challenge a historian senior to him in a way that never precluded him from maintaining close professional ties with Sam Baron throughout his career.

From merchants Paul turned his attention to the church, resulting in some fascinating articles and a book of fundamental importance, *Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, published in 1992. This book is a *tour de force*. It represents two accomplishments. First, it surveys the evolution of the Russian Orthodox Church during the two central Muscovite centuries, focusing on practices of piety and institutional reform. This may omit some topics—esoteric theological debates and the social and economic history of monasteries come to mind—but it zeroes in on the most important issues. It stands as a fundamental reference work for the overall state of church, religion, and religiosity in Muscovy, in a brief, succinct package. Nothing like it exists in English, Russian, or other languages. Particularly valuable is the chapter on the evolution of church reform in the 17th century: here he deftly puts the Old Believer Schism into its proper context—a radical, theological response to a century of ecclesiastical reform. He makes the very complex story of the origins and early evolution of the Schism clear and comprehensible: a huge achievement in a historiography that is all too often muddled and prolix.

The second contribution of *Religion and Society* lies in other key arguments. First, he charts the rise and fall of a particular kind of monastic spirituality by tracking the overall trends in saintliness. This is not to say that he tracks how "holy" Russians were—he is wise enough to steer clear of the clichéd generalizations about "Holy Russia." What he studies here is the changing nature of the saints revered and canonized from the 15th to the 17th

¹ Samuel H. Baron, "The Weber Thesis and Failure of Capitalist Development in 'Early Modern' Russia," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 18: 3 (1970): 321–36; and "Who Were the Gosti?" *California Slavic Studies* 7 (1973): 1–40.

centuries, and the church's changing policies about saints and the miracles attributed to them. He finds that through the 15th century, the dominant motif of saint in Muscovy was an ascetic monk, which is a familiar idea, and that the kinds of miracles attributed to him were what Bushkovitch calls "public," which is a new idea. By public miracle, he has in mind the ability of a saint to save a whole community from epidemic or to turn the tide of a battle. At the same time, pietistic writings stressed the maintenance of what he might call a "public" moral code, that is, emphasizing sins of public significance, such as drunkenness, anger, or gluttony. He finds that over the 16th century, and particularly by the mid-17th century, veneration of such saints was being joined by a new type of spirituality that emphasized miracles that were "private" moments of healing, often exemplified by cults of the healing relics of a saint. He finds, similarly, a greater stress on sins and virtues of personal morality, such as cultivating charity and humility as opposed to pride and avarice. And he shows that saintliness came to be differently defined: his stellar example is Iuliana of Murom, whose *Life* describes the humble domestic affairs of a godly woman whose charity and humility were legend.

Bushkovitch links the shift to private miracles and more human-scale saints with the social stresses of the 17th century, a time of enserfment, war, and disorienting social change. His argument about the receptivity of the Orthodox public (judged by the popularity of saints such as Iuliana) sets him up for demonstrating the receptivity of the boyar elite at the court of the decidedly progressive Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich to new ethics and new political philosophies. In a chapter on sermons preached at court, Bushkovitch shows how Moscow's boyars in the 1670s and 1680s were exposed to Aristotelian and Italian Renaissance political concepts—virtue, civic duty, tyranny, the common good—through the sermons of Belorussian, Ukrainian, and Russian scholars trained in the modernized Orthodoxy of 17th-century Ukraine. This generation of men were exposed to the ideas they needed to understand what Peter the Great was talking about when he transformed the rhetoric of state from Muscovite traditionalism to Petrine transformation. Paul can be forgiven the flourish of ending his book with the declaration that all this change sets Russia up for Peter the Great—"The evolution of religious life and thought inside Russia brought the country up to the gate of Europe. Peter opened it" (179)—since he had in his concluding chapter, after all, deftly proved that point.

Not surprisingly Paul's next project took him to Peter the Great, which, also not surprisingly, marked another major shift in topic and methodology. After carrying out socio-economic studies in the *Merchants* book, and political and cultural history in his "church" book, Paul devoted *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power. 1671–1725* (2001) to court politics—the complex ins and outs of struggles among factions at Peter the Great's court. The work is a *tour de force*. It brings us to the day-to-day level of power struggles behind the scenes from the time of Peter's childhood to the turbulent years of his suc-

cession (1682–89) and through all the key stages in Peter’s reign, focusing particularly on the tragic drama of father and son when Peter had his eldest son Aleksei tried and tortured for suspected treason. Bushkovitch brings these turbulent decades to life in a way that has never before been achieved because, quite simply, he uncovered new sources. This history had been known in outline, of course, from Russian sources, but they are famously sketchy and oblique, often not revealing behind-the-scenes intrigues. Paul gives us day-to-day accounts of power struggles among the grandees at court and power struggles between the grandees and Peter based on reports of foreign diplomats in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Bushkovitch traversed Europe, tracking down archival holdings of foreign diplomats from half a dozen countries (did I mention that his curriculum vitae lists 16 foreign languages?). Not only did he read these in their original languages—he deciphered many written in code! These diplomatic reports transmitted all the gossip and news of the day from the Russian capital cities, and Paul was able to triangulate their information and combine it with existing native sources to produce a dramatic and compelling picture.

That picture is of a court political system that both continued trends from earlier centuries and developed new patterns. As in Muscovite court politics since the 14th century, the major actors were factions based on clan, kinship, marriage, and patronage; this was still a very personal political system. But, with the benefit of sources so detailed that we can identify the views and behavior of individuals, Bushkovitch can also show that quarrels concerned more than just kinship and faction. He displays struggles over foreign policy, over succession, and over Peter’s famous reforms. He also is able to show how Peter the Great navigated this turbulent world of great men on whom he depended and in most of whom he did not trust. The result is a new picture of court politics—more Muscovite in its continuities of great clans, more “Petrine” in its exposition of Peter’s manipulation of men and ideas. The work is a fundamental resource on major moments of political struggle, but also a defining statement about Russian political culture at the turn of the 18th century.

Peter ... The Struggle for Power was joined in 2001 by a brief biography of Peter the Great, which in some ways was a synthesis of the larger book. At about that time, other short biographies of Peter were also published by Lindsey Hughes and James Cracraft.² All are fascinating books, each reflecting its author’s particular stance. Bushkovitch’s book was the most original, to my mind, since, rather than tote up Peter’s contributions (as did Hughes) or argue for the revolutionary nature of his rule (as did Cracraft), which Paul could easily have done, he took his task as setting Peter in the context of the

² Lindsey Hughes, *Peter the Great: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

politics of his time. The first three chapters, constituting more than half the book, provide a solid introduction to the political and intellectual context of the late 17th century, when Peter grew up and came to power. This is perhaps the first treatment of Peter since Kliuchevskii's time to put Peter so consequentially in the sweep of the history from which he emerged.

Along the way in publishing these major monographs, each so different from the other, he published an edited translation, a collection of essays, and over 35 articles and book chapters (not to speak of book reviews). One cannot do justice to their breadth. Let me cite just a few favorites that exemplify one or another strength about his work. His 1986 essay "The Limits of Hesychasm," for example, illustrates a common characteristic of his work: he likes to take a long-assumed historical interpretation and to refine it, often not debunking it but showing its greater complexity. In this case, he asked whether Byzantine hesychasm—a turn in spiritual practice towards meditation, contemplation, and a generally more mystical spirituality—was ever adopted in spiritual practice in the Muscovite lands. Such had been the assumption, even though scholars have admitted that Byzantine hesychast theology *per se* made little impact in Russian sources. By carrying out close readings of the written lives of saints such as Cyril of Beloozero and Sergii of Radonezh, he concluded that "the complete absence of the concept of passionlessness [the hesychast concept of *apatheia*] in the lives of Sergei and Kirill suggests that Epifanii and Pakhomii [authors of their lives] had ideas of monastic spirituality that differed in important ways from those of the Greek masters whose writings they knew so well" (107). He goes on to show that aspects of hesychast practice were known and gradually integrated into practice by the 16th century, concluding that "The result was a particular brand of monastic spirituality that drew on the whole tradition of Greek spirituality but ultimately formed a local variant of that same tradition, unique in its bend and selection of traditional ideas" (109). The essay nicely complicates and enhances our understanding of the past by careful, analytical immersion in familiar sources.

Paul's commitment to intense analysis of sources is directly evidenced even more in his 1994 essay "The 'Life of Saint Filipp': Tsar and Metropolitan in the Late Sixteenth Century." The beauty of this article is in its clear-headed simplicity: he does a close reading of the "Life" of Saint Filipp, who was famously killed on Ivan IV's orders for his direct, face-to-face criticism of the "terrible" tsar, and concludes that Filipp's murder was precisely about moral criticism. In essence he argues that all the accumulated historiography that had tried to link Filipp with one or another political faction at court was misguided—Filipp was killed because he fulfilled his spiritual duty to give good advice to the tsar. Here Bushkovitch directly argues and exemplifies his belief that the historian needs to read the sources in their own context and with sensitivity to their genre and circumstances of production. He or she needs to build the story from the sources on up. Most refreshing of all in this article are his simple dicta—"some rules of reading"—that should guide the student of

Muscovite sources, starting with the most disarming, and yet the most comprehensive: "A text is about what it says it is about" (31). Judging by the title his students chose for the conference whose papers are assembled here, as well as the papers themselves, his students have learned this lesson well.

Every single one of Paul's articles bristles with unexpected discoveries among the new sources that he has unearthed. His energy and resourcefulness in ferreting out all possible angles on a topic are renowned. His 1990 article "The Epiphany Ceremony of the Russian Court" is a classic case in point for its breadth of sources. Throughout, he relies on foreign travelers' accounts of the ceremony, from Ivan the Terrible's time to that of Peter the Great, but to that base he adds Greek liturgical books (in Greek, of course), analyzing them to describe what the ceremony was originally intended to be. Then he contrasts that to the evidence of foreigners' accounts and church books from Moscow, Novgorod, and even Kholmogory. He analyzes Maksim Grek's disquisition on the ceremony, then deftly shifts to later ethnographic evidence and the records of the 1551 Stoglav (Hundred Chapters) church council to illuminate startlingly pagan elements in the ceremony (leading horses to the water to drink, for example) and to set it in its context of the folk celebrations of the Christmas-Epiphany season (*sviatki*). Finally, in a delightful interpretive step, he suggests that when Peter the Great stopped participating in the Kremlin court's official Epiphany ceremony, he carried on the "folk" celebrations of Epiphany time with his own carousing, partying, and "All Drunken Synod." "Peter also used the carnival atmosphere of *sviatki* to substitute a ceremony that mocked the church for one that had visually demonstrated the superiority of the church to the Tsar." He ends with two notes that almost impishly betray his enjoyment of the process of historical research. Concluding his survey of the early modern practice of the ceremony, he muses, "What are we to make of the Europeanizer Peter, supposedly tragically alien to the Russian masses, introducing *Russian folk* custom to the Russian court?" (16). Paul then leaps to the 20th century, revealing that it was "an accident during the artillery salute that accompanied the [Epiphany] ceremony on the Neva ice" that "increased the tension among Russian government circles" (17) in 1905. Bloody Sunday, he notes cryptically, occurred but three days later.

All this attention to sources does not mean that Paul does not engage in broader interpretation in a different register. He has several articles dedicated to historiography, analyzing the work of particular historians of early modern Russia. The most entertaining and striking of his essays is his analysis of historian N. G. Ustrialov's presentation of the relationship between Peter the Great and his son Aleksei, entitled "Power and the Historian: The Case of Tsarevich Aleksei" (1997). Ustrialov, Bushkovitch noted, was responsible for formulating the accepted interpretation that Aleksei's opposition to his father, ending in his death after torture in 1718, resulted from Aleksei's attachment to conservative Orthodoxy and disdain for Peter's reforms, not from any seri-

ous political conspiracy. The problem, Bushkovitch resoundingly declared, however, was that Ustrialov's account "in reality ... is a web of false clues, faked evidence, large gaps and unsolved mysteries" (177). With his characteristically logical mode of attack ("To start with, there is Aleksei's world view," begins one section of the argument), Bushkovitch systematically follows Ustrialov's career as a court historian to the ultra-conservative Nicholas I. He retraces Ustrialov's work using archives in Moscow and Vienna and tracks the censors' corrections of the volumes of Ustrialov's history of Peter. Step by step, Paul demonstrates that Ustrialov systematically concealed ample archival evidence of a significant aristocratic opposition to Peter and support from Vienna and Sweden against Peter. Bushkovitch shows that Ustrialov consciously omitted this information because he cravenly understood that to cite evidence of opposition to a legitimate tsar would incur Nicholas I's wrath. The essay is a model of Sherlockian investigation, unearthing all manner of sources to get at Ustrialov's mode of work. It culminates with typical Bushkovitchian aplomb: Noting that of all Ustrialov's contemporaries Fedor Dostoevsky most accurately intuited the deception, Paul declares that Ustrialov "did know how to outsmart other academics. He failed to outsmart the creator of Raskol'nikov" (205).

And while his students learn early that Paul is not a fan of "theory" for theory's sake, he is certainly not indifferent to the historian's role of suggesting broad frameworks that make sense of historical complexity. So, for example, he has occasionally directly addressed broad schemes of conceptualization. In his 2006 essay "Popular Religion in the Time of Peter the Great," for example, he took up this difficult concept, exploring religious practice, and state regulation thereof, in Peter the Great's time. His conclusion on the thorny problem of "popular religion" is so thoughtful that it merits quotation:

Perhaps the historian can save appearances by conceiving of the patterns of devotion as poles, one popular with liturgy and the miracle cults as the main form, and one elite with liturgy, private reading, and listening to sermons the main forms alongside some interest in miracle cults. Such an approach might allow the historian to characterize the types of devotion prevalent in various layers of society, but it does not really justify the use of a term like "popular religion." Without a more thorough study of the religion of the ruling elite of Russian society, we cannot hope to know that of the masses, for we will never know just what it is that we are looking at. (158)

Similarly, when in 1986 Paul tackled the complex concept of "The Formation of National Consciousness" in the early modern period, he concluded with firm reflections on the historian's craft. Cautioning, typically, that an early modern Russian "national consciousness can be discerned in the texts of the time, if only historians look for it without reading modern notions into

earlier language and modes of thought" (355), he argues that Russians defined their nation in terms of the political system, and that their political system revolved not around institutions or laws, but around the moral quality of the ruler. Deftly dispensing with the "Moscow-Third Rome" theory, he traces this moral concept of the nation through the 17th century when it began to divide and shift under the influence of European ideas. Noting several new directions in which the concept of Russia developed around the turn of the 18th century (political, ethnic, and imperial ways of defining the nation), he concludes with a remark that might well represent his attitude towards the use of theory and the theoretical concepts: "The path to modern national consciousness from the archaic notions of the 16th century was long and torturous, and *it should not be simplified or artificially smoothed*" (emphasis added; 376).

No one can accuse Paul Bushkovitch of simplifying or artificially smoothing the historical past, or the work of the historian. He revels in the complexity of the past, ferreting out all possible sources, peeling back layers of interpretation from centuries of historians, exposing the context that made a historian's work tendentious, setting a historical problem in its proper historical and even comparative context, and, finally, setting forth his research with clear-eyed, logical exposition and direct prose. His erudition is awe-inspiring, but he deploys it with such verve and enjoyment that readers might not even recognize how smart he is and how fundamental are his contributions whenever he sets pen to paper. His students, whose impressive work is demonstrated in these pages, know better.