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**Peter the Great and British Perceptions of Russia: A study of how
the image of Peter informed British ideas of Russia**

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This dissertation is submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA Honours in History at the University of Canterbury. This dissertation is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of other historians used in the dissertation is credited to the author in the footnote references. The dissertation is approximately 9992 words in length.

Abstract

In British eyes, Russia was considered a non-entity before Peter the Great came into the scene. Aside from trade, it was largely irrelevant to British interests. Very few aspects about the nation appealed to the British. Indeed, Russia was considered the home of a group of ignorant, drunken, and brutish people governed by an absolute monarchy. However, by the end of Peter's reign, Russia was seen in a more positive light. Through the rule of Peter, Russia was able to replace the hitherto powerful Swedish Empire in northern Europe and was firmly established in the Baltic Sea with a powerful navy at its disposal. At the same time, the reforms that characterized Peter's reign so much also led to a shift in how the British perceived Russia in cultural terms. Breaking a trend that existed close to two centuries, the British began to view Russia as a nation that was progressing towards civilisation at a significant pace.

Yet Peter's image in British eyes was significant in encouraging such changes. Many saw Peter as the heart and soul of Russia, giving rise to a tendency to assess Russia from how they perceived Peter. Throughout his reign, the British came to know Peter for a number of things. He was seen as a competent and ambitious ruler who aimed to raise his empire to the highest degree possible. At the same time, he was also seen as an autocratic reformer who was forcing civilisation upon a backward country. With such images at the back of British minds, it was easy for them to invoke an image of a Russia that was threatening and more civilised than before. These perceptions of Peter therefore helped inform British ideas of Russia in a political and cultural context.

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Introduction

(a) The Topic:

Before Peter the Great, Russia was insignificant in British eyes.¹ Politically, relations between the two nations were kept mostly for commercial reasons, though even trade relations fluctuated at different points in time. Culturally speaking, everything about Russia was not held in high-esteem by the British. Contemporary histories available to them all tended to follow a pattern of emphasising, the backward, tyrannical and barbarous nature of Russia and its inhabitants. This pattern along with the perception of political insignificance remained largely intact on the eve that Peter the Great visited London as part of a diplomatic tour around Europe in 1697.

However, Peter's reign was to significantly change this. By the end of his reign, Russia was considered a significant power in European politics, replacing the since then powerful Swedish Empire. Indeed, during Peter's reign, Russia was seen to be much more threatening to British interests than before. Its navy and its strategic location in the Baltic Sea caused the British much anxiety during Peter's reign. On the cultural side, even though it can hardly be said that the perception of Russia had radically changed during Peter's reign, there were nonetheless some changes that he affected. Whereas Russia emanated a sense of a barbaric nation void of all learning and politics, Peter's reign encouraged an image of a less hopeless Russia. Many of the British could now contemplate the idea of a developing Russia.

Given Peter's centrality in Russia's development during his reign, it seems worthwhile to investigate the impact of the czar's image on British perceptions of Russia.² The image of the czar was a powerful one that developed during his life time and outlived the man himself. After all, during Peter's reign at least, there seems to be an almost unanimous opinion that he was considered to be the driver of all these changes, and he was popular for it. Because the image of Peter was so salient in British minds during his lifetime, the development of British perceptions of Peter may have affected how Russia was perceived or reassessed during this period of change. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the role of Peter's image in informing or reshaping contemporary British ideas of Russia.

¹ The use of Britain in this dissertation will refer to both the English state before the Act of Union in 1707 and the British state after it. Likewise, when Russia is referred to, it generally means the state of Muscovy, which was the widely used term to refer to the Russian state until Peter's taking the title Emperor of All Russia in 1721. Thereafter Russia became more popular in use.

² This dissertation will use the term czar rather than the now widely used tsar in order to conform to the wording of contemporary sources to avoid inconsistencies.

(b) Historiography:

In the historiography of Petrine studies, there exists a significant amount of scholarship on numerous aspects of Peter and his reign. However, insofar as this dissertation fits into the historiographical school of intellectual history with its focus in concepts and ideas, scholarship relating to the chosen topic appears to be overshadowed by studies of the more concrete aspects of Peter's reign. The majority of scholarship regarding Peter the Great's impact seems to be confined to social and political studies.³ Hence we have on the political side, studies such as Robert K. Massie's which focuses its chronological narrative on political events surrounding Peter himself. Whereas studies such as Lindsey Hughes' give significant attention to the social impact of Peter's reign. His reforms, themselves have also been given much attention to as in Evgenii V. Anisimov's study. Consequently, as Anthony Cross writes, over the twentieth century 'Peter has continued to command attention in Europe, but inevitably it has been much more in the areas of biography and scholarly investigation into problems raised by aspects of his reign.'⁴

It is difficult to pinpoint why more attention has been afforded to the political and social aspects of Peter the Great and his reign as opposed to the more conceptual aspects, but some conjectures are possible. Motivations for writing political and social histories during the Petrine period can in part be explained by the Cold War climate of the twentieth century. For instance, scholars such as Alex de Jonge held the belief that learning about the 'Russia of Peter's day may help us understand something of its subsequent history.' To that end, de Jonge wrote his political history of Peter's reign 'while never entirely losing sight of the subsequent turn of her history.'⁵ This search for answers in the past to contemporary problems naturally brings the historian to stress the more immediate aspects of the changes of Peter's reign. On the other hand, the reason could also be found within the historical discipline itself. Such subjects as ideas and perceptions can be easily categorized under the historiographical school of intellectual history. Yet as Beverley Southgate remarks, the conceptualization involved in intellectual history 'has not always been welcomed by social, political, economic or so-called "proper" historians.'⁶ As such, historians' focus in the political and social over the more conceptual aspects of Peter's reign could simply be the fact that such subjects are placed at the periphery of their interests.

³ For examples of such studies see, Stephen J. Lee, *Peter the Great*, London, Routledge, 1993; William Marshall, *Peter the Great*, London, Longman Publishers, 1996; M. S. Anderson, *Peter the Great*, 2nd edn, London, Longman Publishers, 1995; Vasili Klyuchevsky, *Peter the Great*, trans. Lilianna Archibald, London, Macmillan & Co, 1958; Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, London, Yale University Press, 1998.

⁴ Anthony Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes: Perceptions and Representations of the Tsar since 1698*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p xi.

⁵ Alex de Jonge, *Fire and Water: A Life of Peter the Great*, London, William Collins & Sons, 1979, p 17.

⁶ Beverley Southgate, 'Intellectual History/History of Ideas', in Stefan Berger, Heiko Feldner and Kevin Passmore (eds.), *Writing History: Theory & Practice*, London, Arnold Publishers, 2003, p 244.

Despite this, there still remains a sizeable amount of scholarship in the English language regarding Peter the Great and his impact in thought and ideas. Notable examples of studies on the image of Peter the Great himself include those by Nicholas V. Riasanovsky's and Anthony Cross'.⁷ There are also studies that not only deal with Peter's image, but his impact on intellectual historical trends. An example would be Richard S. Wortman's chapter on Peter's impact on the symbol and ceremony of the institution of tsardom.⁸ In another study, Hughes also dealt with the ideology surrounding Peter's small wooden houses as symbols of greatness from humble beginnings and the government's efforts to preserve the ideological significance of them to legitimise their power.⁹ Also relevant are studies such as Kevin M. F. Platt's cultural history of how the myths of Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible were incorporated and reshaped in Imperial and Soviet Russian culture.¹⁰

Yet among this of body of literature, the most relevant study to this dissertation's focus is M. S. Anderson's, which details the British perceptions of Petrine Russia, while also gave attention to the development of Peter's image during this period.¹¹ The difference between this study and Anderson's is its focus in the relationship between Peter's image and that of Russia. Because this dissertation is about how the image of Peter informed contemporary British ideas of Petrine Russia, it will be complementary not only to the intellectual aspect of Petrine studies, but also to studies such as those by Anderson which focuses on the British perceptions of Petrine Russia in general.

(c) Methodology, Sources, and Dissertation Outline:

This dissertation will make significant use of diplomatic documents and contemporary publications. Diplomatic documents will be used specifically for the second chapter, whereas contemporary publications will be used throughout all three chapters. The goal of looking at these sources is to first ascertain what they convey about British perceptions of Russia. This method of using primary sources to ascertain such concepts is not new, and is used by numerous scholars such as Cross, Anderson, Riasanovsky who all deal with similar subjects. However, the subject of this dissertation is not simply the perceptions themselves, but the influence of one perception, that of Peter, on another, that of Russia. This has a bearing on how evidence will be interpreted. Therefore, the goal

⁷ Riasanovsky's study confines itself to a Russian setting whereas Cross' is in a British setting. See, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1985; Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes*.

⁸ See, Richard W. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995

⁹ See, Lindsey Hughes, "Nothing is too small for a Great Man': Peter the Great's Little Houses and the Creation of some Petrine Myths", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 81, Issue 4, 2003.

¹⁰ See, Kevin M. F. Platt, *Terror and Greatness: Ivan & Peter as Russian Myths*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011.

¹¹ See, M. S. Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia 1553-1815*, London, Macmillan & Co, 1958, pp 49-79.

of looking at the evidence is to also look for the role of Peter's image in informing those underlying assumptions that fuel British perceptions of Russia.

Access to primary sources such as pamphlets and newsletters mainly comes from EResource databases such as Google Books, which has numerous eighteenth-century sources available for free, the Gale News Vault, which is an online archive of newspapers in the English language, and the Early English Books Online (EEBO) database which has material before 1700.¹² However, the main bulk of British publications from 1700 onwards must come from the Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) database, which is a very comprehensive compilation of eighteenth century literature in the English language.¹³

As many documents pertaining to diplomatic correspondents are confined to archives in Britain, it was impossible to obtain access to them when writing this dissertation. Instead, this study has relied on compilations of diplomatic documents. Two compilations became the main sources. These are Simon Dixon et al's *Britain and Russia in the Age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, and the second volume of William Coxe's *Memoirs of the Life and Administration of Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford* which devotes itself to publishing British correspondences from 1700 to 1730. In a few instances, this study has also made use of cited quotations of primary sources from secondary works such as Janet Hartley's study on the British government's perception of Russia during Peter's reign.¹⁴

Finally, this dissertation divides itself into three main chapters. The first chapter sets up the ground work for the subsequent two and gives a brief discussion of British perceptions of Russia before Peter came into the scene. More specifically, it will discuss how Russia was perceived in cultural as well as political terms from the Elizabethan age up until the eve of Peter's visit to London. The second will devote itself first to a brief discussion of Anglo-Russian relations during Peter's reign. Then it will discuss how the political image of Peter the Great contributed to a perception of a threatening Russia increasingly after 1709. Finally, the third chapter will assess the effect of Peter's image as a successful reformer in encouraging a shift in the cultural perception of Russia. In both the second and third chapters, it will be argued that British perceptions of Peter played a large part in informing their perceptions of Russia both in cultural and political terms.

¹² For web portal to Early English Books Online see, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>. For web portal to Gale News Vault see, <http://gdc.gale.com/products/gale-newsvault/>.

¹³ For web portal to Eighteenth Century Collections Online see, <http://gale.cengage.co.uk/product-highlights/history/eighteenth-century-collections-online.aspx>.

¹⁴ See, Janet Hartley, 'Changing Perspectives: British Views of Russia from the Grand Embassy to the Peace of Nystad', in Lindsey Hughes (ed.), *Peter the Great and the West: New Perspectives*, New York, Macmillan, 2001, pp 53-70.

Perceptions of Russia before Peter the Great

On the eve of Peter's visit to London, the czar of Muscovy was visiting a country whose inhabitants have had a century and more to develop their perceptions of Russia. From the outset of Anglo-Russian relations in Elizabeth I's time, the foundation for an English perception of Russia was laid by those accounts of people who have travelled to that country. A good example of such an account is Giles Fletcher's. Fletcher's position as an Elizabethan diplomat at the time of Ivan IV put him in a position to make many observations which informed English perceptions of Russia. As a result, his account was influential in shaping British perceptions of Russia and, as Lloyd E. Berry & Robert O. Crummey suggest, sums up the Elizabethan experience in Russia.¹⁵

Fletcher's account, essentially not atypical of other accounts during the period, painted a somewhat unpleasant image of Russia, its czar and its people.¹⁶ The country was controlled by a system that was not inherently western European and was recognized as Asiatic.¹⁷ It was a country controlled by the sole authority of a czar. Matters of life and death lie solely on his personal authority. As such, the czar may order an immediate execution against any persons he disliked or for the most trivial reasons.¹⁸ His lavish lifestyle and vast amount of revenues were buttressed on various oppressive means of extracting revenue from the Russian people.¹⁹ To preserve his authority, the czar devised "wicked" and "tyrannous" policies in order to prevent any single noble from growing strong enough to oppose him.²⁰ Thus the oppression inherent in this system must have seemed alien to Englishmen, as indicated by the fact that Fletcher needed to use the words "wicked" and "tyrannous" to describe the conduct of the government.²¹

To Fletcher, this oppressive system consequently imposed almost primitive conditions on the common Russian folk. They have no motivations to pursue any trade, because profits would inevitably be claimed by the state. They live in a state of constant insecurity as they often hide their

¹⁵ Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey (eds.), *Rude & Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth Century English Voyagers*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1968, p 87.

¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis of English accounts of Russia in the Elizabethan period see, Anderson, *Britain's Discovery*, pp 1-32.

¹⁷ Giles Fletcher, "Of the Russe Commonwealth," in Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey (eds.), *Rude & Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth Century English Voyagers*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1968, p 132.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp 134-135.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp 164-168.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp 138-140.

²¹ In fact, Fletcher in his preface actually expressed his gratitude that he lived under the English government rather than the Russian one. See, *Ibid*, p 109.

valuables for fear of extortion.²² Such insecurities led many to become friars partly because “the friar’s life is the safest from the oppressions and exactions that fall upon the commons”.²³

Yet Fletcher also believed that this oppressive system was buttressed by the perception that the Russians were uneducated and lacked civility. The people would not have tolerated the present government “if they were once civilized and brought to more understanding of God and good policy.”²⁴ Yet the Russians would not educate themselves due to a conviction that their way was the best. Nor were the upper echelons of the Russian state inclined to alleviate their ignorance as it was seen as agreeable to their state and manner of government.²⁵ The ordinary Russian as is portrayed in Fletcher’s account is trapped in a situation in which the system and conditions of the nation make them ignorant and uncivil and while at same time is unwilling to remedy this even if they could.

If the czar was portrayed as a cruel ruler who turns on his own subjects, then the Russians in general are not completely innocent of this cruelty either. The cruelty which the common folk are subjected to by their masters reverberates among the common folk themselves. It was written that they treat each other just as cruelly. As a result, Fletcher paints a rather barbarous picture of Russia in general. It is a nation in which everyone prays on each other and is “filled with rapine and murder.” The cruelty of their conduct and the strangeness of their crimes make one question their professed Christianity.²⁶

Their religion of Orthodox Christianity must also have been strange to the Englishman as well. It was described by Fletcher as “corrupted with superstitions.”²⁷ Its strangeness must have struck Fletcher himself, who wrote that this religion harboured many “false opinions”.²⁸ It was not only the common folk who were devoted to this supposedly superstitious religion. The czar himself was also a believer of this religion.²⁹ Consequently, Russia’s superstitions made them susceptible to the trickery of those who wanted to take advantage of them. An example of such trickery was given by Fletcher himself in which the Jeremias II, Patriarch of Constantinople, offered to transfer the seat of the patriarch to Moscow. Upon the completion of this transfer, Jeremias was gifted lavishly by the czar. To Fletcher, this was an example in which a “subtle Greek hath made good advantage of their superstition and is now gone away with rich booty into Poland.”³⁰

²² *Ibid*, p 170.

²³ *Ibid*, p 216.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p 245.

²⁵ *Ibid*, pp 244-245.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p 245.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p 206.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p 228

²⁹ *Ibid*, p 207.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp 207-210

Thus the picture painted by accounts such as Fletcher's and indeed other Elizabethan writers often portrayed Russia as a foreign tyrannical state, with its people living under primitive conditions and lacking civility and education. This government system and the people's uncivility, combined with the prevalence of cruelty helped to cultivate a general image of a barbaric nation. The perceived superstitious nature of their religion and the people's devotion to it also encouraged the image of a superstitious nation as well.

Nor did subsequent accounts throughout the seventeenth century differ in content. Aside from the continual reprinting of Fletcher's account and other significant works on Russia, these new accounts further reinforce the negative perceptions of that nation.³¹ Samuel Collins' account for instance, published in 1671, contained nothing new. Russia continued to be an absolutist state in which their laws were dispensed arbitrarily.³² Power was still concentrated in the person of the czar, who remains as the absolute monarch of the country and monitors his subjects such that 'nothing is done or said at any Feast, publick Meeting, Burial, or Wedding but he knows it.'³³ The country, furthermore, seems to be governed more by bribes than by laws.³⁴ The Russian peoples were still uneducated and seem to have a disposition against learning.³⁵ Cruelty remained imbedded in Russian culture as seen in their judicial system.³⁶ Finally, they were still devoted to a superstitious religion.³⁷

The fact that in general, there were no accounts that deviate from this interpretation of Russia is indicated by John Milton's *A Brief History of Moscovia*. Using available traveller's accounts, Milton's work can be used to show that available information regarding Russia continued to encourage a negative perception of that country.³⁸ His work basically echoes the points that Collins and Fletcher make. Hence with regards to the government, Milton wrote, 'The Emperor exerciseth absolute power' and uses his prerogatives to enrich himself at the expense of his subjects.³⁹ Its religion was considered by Milton to be 'excess with Superstitions'.⁴⁰ With regards to the Russians themselves, Milton perceived them to 'have no Learning, nor will they suffer to be among them'. Additionally, negative traits such as a tendency to be deceitful and a fondness for drinking were also noted by

³¹ Berry and Crummey, *Barbarous Kingdom*, p 108.

³² Samuel Collins, *The Present State of Russia, in a Letter to a Friend at London, containing a Geographical, Historical and Political Account of all those Nations and Territories under the Jurisdiction of the Present Czar*, London, 1671, pp 42.

³³ *Ibid*, pp 46, 116.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp 42, 71-72.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp 2-3

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp 72-73

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp 3-4

³⁸ John Milton, *A Brief History of Moscovia and Of other less-known Countries lying eastward of Russia as far as Cathay*, London, 1682, p 1.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 13-14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

Milton.⁴¹ As such, Milton demonstrates that available information about Russia differed little from information provided by those such as Fletcher.

Subsequent accounts of specific events that travellers bore witness to added new substance to reinforce those negative perceptions about Russia. Thus for instance the impression given in Phillipe Avril's stay in Moscow as recorded in his *Travels into Divers Parts of Europe and Asia* gave further testimony to the reader of the barbarism of the Russians. In his account, Avril retold the story of how he and his company were denied permission to travel through Russia. But Avril and his company stayed for a further two weeks before leaving that country, within which time they witnessed and recorded what was described as the barbarous actions of the Russians in their carnivals. Several people were said to have been murdered during this event and the number killed during this event was said to be an indicator of luck, where the more murdered is considered the better.⁴² Such an account gave the impression of an unsafe country, something similar to the conditions of living in the wild in which fearing for one's life was still the primary concern of man.

At the same time, the diplomatic climate accompanying this developing perception of Russia also promoted an image of Russia as a politically irrelevant nation apart from affairs of trade. Hence in the Elizabethan era, relations were quite cordial by virtue of trade considerations.⁴³ As Berry and Crummey wrote, to the Elizabethans 'Muscovy presented a limited but valuable opportunity for trade.'⁴⁴ The Elizabethans came to realise that trading with the Russians yielded them very lucrative profits. The goods that Russia sold, which were mainly wax and hemp, had a very good market back in England. It was for such reasons as exploiting Russian trade that the Russia Company was chartered in 1554. Trade relations with the Russians became much more important to the English as their navy developed a sort of dependence on those resources that came from Russia, mainly cables and cordage.⁴⁵

Yet despite this, the Elizabethans distanced themselves as far as possible from associating themselves with Russia politically. In truth, the English state was only interested in securing their monopoly of trade in Russia, and aside from that its goals were limited.⁴⁶ Thus the Ivan IV's request to draw Russia and England closer politically by making it possible for the monarchs to seek asylum

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 21.

⁴² *Ibid*, pp 77-78

⁴³ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery*, p 4.

⁴⁴ Berry and Crummey, *Rude & Barbarous Kingdom*, p xi.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery*, p 4-5.

⁴⁶ Berry and Crummey, *Rude & Barbarous Kingdom*, p xi.

in each other's country when the time arose was politely dismissed by Elizabeth I. Furthermore, Elizabethan diplomats were instructed not to encourage any ideas of an Anglo-Russian alliance.⁴⁷

However, Anglo-Russian trade relations reached a low by the seventeenth century. Trade began to gradually diminish in face of Dutch competition.⁴⁸ In fact, there was evidence to indicate that there were only three English ships trading with Russia as opposed to thirty-five Dutch ships during the third decade of the century.⁴⁹ The British had tried to alleviate this by pressing their claim of a monopoly over Russian trade. However, in the end only a new grant of privileges rather than a monopoly was obtained.⁵⁰ This tension was exacerbated following the execution of King Charles I in England in 1649, wherein czar Alexis used the execution as pretence to abolish the English trade privileges in Russia. In terms of political relations, the English continued to be mindful not to be too closely tied to Russia. Notwithstanding the rupture of commercial relations between the two, the English remained reserved when dealing with Russia politically. This is indicated by their unwillingness to aid the Russians against Poland or Turkey.⁵¹ Thus as Anderson wrote, nearing the end of the seventeenth century, Anglo-Russian relations was to decline to the extent that it was almost non-existent.⁵²

Despite this, there remains a perception that trade with this alien nation was in the best interests of Britain. Thus the seventeenth century diarist John Evelyn, who witnessed the arrival of the Muscovite ambassador to England, suggested that the ambassador's pomp reception was so that commercial relations could be rekindled.⁵³ Moreover, in 1697 the British government was being urged by the Russia Company to negotiate with the Russians for the restoration of those privileges. It was possible that these matters were one of those important agendas that King William III discussed with Peter when they met at Utrecht.⁵⁴ It was clear that Russia was still relevant to the English insofar as trade was concerned. Aside from that the 'ordinary English-man... was unwilling to interest himself in a country so remote and apparently unattractive for its own sake.'⁵⁵

Hence by the time Peter arrived in London in 1697, a strong public perception of Russia had already been fostered. Russia was an alien, almost barbaric nation, whose character is completely different from that of Britain. In spite of this negative perception of Russia, the Englishman did acknowledge

⁴⁷ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery*, pp 7-8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p 33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p 34.

⁵⁰ Berry and Crummy, *Rude & Barbarous Kingdom*, pp 89-91.

⁵¹ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery*, p 35.

⁵² *Ibid*, p 35.

⁵³ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, vol. 3, ed. E. S. Beer, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, p 344.

⁵⁴ Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes*, pp 12-13; W. F. Ryan, 'Peter the Great's English Yacht: Admiral Lord Carmarthen and the Russian Tobacco Monopoly', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 69, 1983, p 65.

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery*, p 48.

that their country had some commercial interests in that nation. Yet that was about as much connection with Russia that he would acknowledge. Russia was an alien nation that did not concern Britain beyond trade. However, the subsequent twists and turns of international politics, coupled with new accounts of Russia during Peter's reign were to change much of this.

Peter the Great and the Political Perceptions of Russia

(a) Anglo-Russian Relations, 1700-1725:

To understand changes in perceptions of Russia during Peter's reign, a discussion of the objective developments occurring in international relations is necessary. From beginning to end, Peter's reign coincided with very real changes on the international stage which facilitated a British reassessment of Russia as a political entity. At the turn of the century, the existence of two simultaneous wars in Europe, the Great Northern War and the War of the Spanish Succession meant that Russia became more involved in British foreign policy calculations. Given the fact that Britain was principally concerned with her war with France, a simultaneous war in the north, essentially occurring at the back door of the Holy Roman Empire, made Britain and her allies' situation precarious. It was feared initially not only that the conflict in the north would divert the much needed resources and potential manpower away from the war in the west, but also that Sweden, by far the most powerful potentate in the northern war at the time, would ally herself with France.⁵⁶ Immediate British reactions to this involved attempting to mediate as fast as possible a peace in the north or at least bring Sweden onto their side of the war.⁵⁷ Yet it soon became apparent that peace and Swedish aid were not forthcoming. When the situation became more urgent by Charles' penetration into the Empire by 1706, the British remained determined to keep the two wars isolated by keeping Charles' attention on Russia, away from the war in the west.⁵⁸ British policy in the north during the first decade of the century was therefore to silently encourage Sweden to advance against Russia.

British policy towards Sweden basically informed their policy towards Russia. Throughout the first decade of the war in the north, their diplomacy towards Russia was geared towards preserving relations with Russia and while giving as little aid as possible to her against Sweden. It was always possible that Sweden's attention would return to the west. Thus when Artamon Matveyev was sent to London by Peter to submit a proposal for Russia's entry into the Grand Alliance, Marlborough had warned Godolphin that "you will be careful of making any step with the Muscovite ambassador that may give offense to the Swedes".⁵⁹ As such, throughout this period, Russia was considered but a mere tool to steer Charles away from the west. At the same time the British continued to try and

⁵⁶ Andrew Rothstein, *Peter the Great and Marlborough: Politics and Diplomacy in Converging Wars*, Hong Kong, Macmillan Press, 1986, pp 38-41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p 38.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp 66-68

⁵⁹ 'Marlborough to Godolphin', 12 September, 1707, in Henry L. Synder (ed.), *The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 3, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975, p 900.

extract commercial benefits from Russia.⁶⁰ Until matters in the north were dramatically overturned, as it would after the battle of Poltava in 1709, the British strategy was to give Peter outwardly positive but non-committal answers to Peter's proposals for entry into the alliance. As Marlborough summed it up to the then Secretary of State of the Northern Department in 1708, "the chief design is to amuse the Czar till we can see plainer what the war between him and the King of Sweden will take".⁶¹

British double dealing continued largely uninterrupted until Russia's victory over Sweden at Poltava in 1709. Poltava essentially removed the buffer keeping Russian expansion in check. Now, with the destruction of the Swedish army, Russia was able to secure her conquests in the Baltic.⁶² Indeed, soon after Poltava, Daniel Defoe had predicted that Peter would soon 'bid fair for the Mastership of those Seas [the Baltic Sea]'.⁶³ At the same time with Britain's pre-occupation with its war with France, the sudden collapse of Sweden and the emergence of a victorious Russia alarmed many British leaders. Without Sweden's dominance in the north the situation became fluid, and there were fears that this would distract resources away from the war with France.⁶⁴ Britain therefore devoted all her diplomatic efforts in the north to stabilizing the situation.⁶⁵ Far from the indifference shown to Russia, Britain now sought her co-operation in maintaining order in the north.⁶⁶ But aside from diplomacy, Britain could only keep a watchful eye on the affairs in the north until her hands were finally freed after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714.

For all of Britain's concern with keeping balance in the north during the War of the Spanish Succession, the accession of King George I to the British throne initially opened up opportunities for closer ties with Russia. As Elector of Hanover, George I also eyed Sweden's territorial possessions and sought to take advantage of her weakness.⁶⁷ With his accession to the throne, British interests now became tied to the interest of George's Electorate of Hanover. This naturally brought Britain closer to Russia.⁶⁸ Along with Denmark, the three were to plan an allied invasion of Sweden.⁶⁹ Trade

⁶⁰ Rothstein, *Peter the Great and Marlborough*, p 89.

⁶¹ Marlborough, John Churchill, 'To Mr. Secretary Boyle', 9 May, 1708, in Sir George Murray (ed.), *The Letters and Dispatches of John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough, from 1702-1712*, vol. 4, London, John Murray, 1845, p 8.

⁶² Rothstein, *Peter the Great and Marlborough*, p 123.

⁶³ Daniel Defoe, *Review of the State of the British Nation*, London, 18 August, 1709, second page

⁶⁴ 'Godolphin to Marlborough,' 14 August, 1709, in Henry L. Synder (ed.), *The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 3, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975, p 1342; Rothstein, *Peter the Great and Marlborough*, pp 125-126.

⁶⁵ Rothstein, *Peter the Great and Marlborough*, p 125.

⁶⁶ 'From a letter from the Earl of Sunderland to Lord Townshend on Queen Anne's view of the situation in the North,' 11 October, 1709, in Simon Dixon et al (eds. and trans.), *Britain and Russia in the age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1998, p 89.

⁶⁷ John J. Murray, *George I, The Baltic and the Whig Split of 1717: A Study in Diplomacy and Propaganda*, London, Routledge, 1969, pp 97-99.

⁶⁸ The two nations had seemingly mutual interests in 1715. See, D' Arcy Collyer, 'Notes on the Diplomatic Correspondence between England and Russia in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 14, 1900, pp 149-151.

considerations also tended to bring the two together and in 1715 there were serious talk of a treaty of commerce between the two countries.⁷⁰

But when a planned allied descent onto Sweden was aborted in 1716 and resulted in the quartering of Russian troops within the Empire in Mecklenburg, animosities broke out between Britain and Russia into what was called the Northern Crisis of 1716 to 1717. This animosity did not begin to effectively abate until 1721 with the treaty of Nystad. Indeed, with the changing international situation brought about by Britain's alliance with France in 1717, she could now be openly opposed to Russian advances into central Europe.⁷¹ Over the next few years, Britain was engaged in an active policy of pushing back Russian expansion. In 1719, a defensive alliance was negotiated between Britain, the Holy Roman Emperor, and Saxony, which according to Anderson served to "drive Russian forces from Poland and prevent their return."⁷² In 1720, amidst Russian aggression towards Sweden, an alliance was signed between her and Britain which secured naval aid for Sweden.⁷³ Yet pressures, from public opinion and external factors such as the South Sea Bubble Crisis, forced Britain to cut short her involvement in the Baltic and urge a peace between Sweden and Russia. The result was the Treaty of Nystad in 1721, which guaranteed Russia's conquests in her war with Sweden.⁷⁴

(b) The impact of Peter's image:

It was within these two decades of the eighteenth century that we begin to see a change in the perception of Russia as a political entity. Initially, British actions towards Russia during the first decade, suggested that she was not regarded anymore highly than before. She was but a mere tool to be used to divert Sweden's attention away from the west. As leading politician, the Earl of Godolphin puts it, Peter was considered "the greatest bridle we can have for King of Sweden."⁷⁵ Russia was not important except for trade and keeping the war in the north isolated. But the developments of the second decade had forced a revision. By 1720, Russia was considered a major European power. As a British author wrote, "In Muscovy, we have an instance of a state of the first kind, till lately ignorant of its strength."⁷⁶ Here the reference to a "state of the first kind" refers to

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery*, p 64.

⁷⁰ Anderson, *Peter the Great*, p 74.

⁷¹ Murray, *The Baltic and the Whig Split*, p 284.

⁷² Anderson, *Peter the Great*, pp 77-78.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p 81.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pp 81-82.

⁷⁵ 'Godolphin to Marlborough', 7 August, 1707, in Henry L. Snyder (ed.), *The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975, p 874.

⁷⁶ *The Analysis of the Ballance of Power: Its Necessity, Origin and History is examin'd, and deduc'd from the Common Principles of Justice and Society*, London, 1720, p 51.

those states that could not be equaled in power by any separate state nor minor alliance, or as the author wrote, “to whom the rest is counterpoise.”⁷⁷

Yet an element of threat also accompanied this new perception of a powerful Russia. In the first decade, Russia was considered Sweden’s problem. By the second decade, the British were to find themselves in quite a different situation and there was definitely a sense of a Russian threat in their minds. For instance, one British author conceded that the threat posed by Peter and Russia during the late 1710s was a reasonable justification for the retention of a standing army, which he was arguing against.⁷⁸ Indeed, it would appear that Defoe’s prediction that Peter may bid fair the mastership of the seas seems to be coming true. By 1715, only one year after Britain had emerged from her war with France, Peter had established a firm footing in the Baltic through St. Petersburg and had begun the construction of an impressive fleet there. As Admiral Sir John Norris mentioned in his account of a cordial encounter with Peter’s fleet at Reval, “he has three new sixty Gun-ships built by them [English shipbuilders] at Petersburg that are in every way equal to the best of that Rank in our Country and more handsomely finish’d.”⁷⁹ By 1719, Britain was so cautious of Russia’s naval development that she attempted to recall her shipbuilders who were in Russian service.⁸⁰

Furthermore, it was not only Russia’s naval power that began to alarm the British, but her very position in the Baltic too. In 1715, former British diplomat to Russia, George Mackenzie presented a memorandum to the British government arguing against Russian possession of a Baltic port.⁸¹ To Mackenzie, Russia acquisition of a Baltic port alongside her traditional port of Archangel meant that she essentially had control over “the two keys of the General Magazine of all Naval Stores in Europe”, which Britain, being primarily a naval power, “cannot be without”.⁸² Later on, this consideration had led British leaders to be apprehensive of a break with Russia. As Secretary of State for the Northern Department, Viscount Townshend wrote to British minister James Stanhope in 1716 amidst an anti-Russian atmosphere, that Britain’s inability to import naval stores from any

⁷⁷ *Ballance of Power*, p 38.

⁷⁸ *A Discourse of Standing Armies, Shewing The Folly, Uselessness, and Danger of Standing Armies in Great Britain*, 3rd edn, London, 1722, pp 27-28.

⁷⁹ 'Letter from Admiral Sir John Norris to his father-in-law, Admiral Lord Alymer, on his meeting with a Russian squadron and arrival at Reval,' 30 July, 1715, in Simon Dixon et al (eds. and trans.), *Britain and Russia in the age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1998, pp 148-149.

⁸⁰ 'From a letter from the British envoy to Russia, James Jefferyes, then in Reval, to James Craggs concerning the recall to Britain of British shipbuilders who are greatly magnifying the potential of the czar’s burgeoning fleet', 16 July, 1719, in Simon Dixon et al (eds. and trans.), *Britain and Russia in the age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1998, pp 204-205.

⁸¹ The memorandum was published as an anonymous pamphlet in 1719, but was written by British diplomat George Mackenzie. See, L. W. Hanson, *Contemporary Printed Sources for British and Irish Economic History 1701-1705*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1963, p 264.

⁸² N. N. [George Mackenzie], *Truth is but Truth as it is Timed! Or, our Ministry’s Present Measure against the Muscovite vindicated by Plain and Obvious Reasons; Tending to Prove, That it is no less the Interest of Our British Trade, than that of Our State, that the Czar be not suffer’d to retain a Fleet, if needs must that he should a Sea Port, in the Baltick*, London, 1719, pp 3-4.

other country other than Russia “deserves the greatest consideration” if a break with Russia were to occur.⁸³ Russia was now far from irrelevant to immediate British interests.

But it was not only Russia’s objective position that encouraged British perceptions of a more threatening Russia. Russian power may have reached a stage where it could threaten British interests, but it was how this power was being used that gave her a more dangerous character. This was where British perceptions of Peter affected their dispositions towards Russia. To the British, Peter animated Russia and was considered the soul of that country. After all, many still saw Russia as a nation of slaves with Peter at the head, as Defoe expressed quite clearly. From his perspective, the Russians were subject to Peter as ‘a Gentleman’s Hounds in England are to his Huntsmen’.⁸⁴ This belief that Russia’s total obedience belonged to Peter himself made it easy for the British to see Russia’s policy as an exact reflection of the czar’s personal intentions. Hence in 1711 British diplomat and soon-to-be First Lord of the Admiralty Thomas Wentworth attributed Russia’s drive towards the Baltic to a “great itch” of Peter’s.⁸⁵ Mackenzie was to view Russian policy in similar light. In his memorandum little distinction was made between the Czar’s own personal desires and Russia’s formal policy. As such, the Russian pretension to become a Baltic power was translated to Peter’s “Hopes of being ever more than an Inland Power on this side of Europe”.⁸⁶ This tendency to see Russia in relation to the personal character of Peter continued well into the third decade. When Russian fleets were seen more often in the Baltic region, it was believed by British Under-Secretary of the Northern Department, George Tilson that this was a personal plan of Peter’s to make the maritime powers more accustomed to Russian naval presence. The czar, Tilson wrote in 1721, “is accustoming us to see their Ships more”⁸⁷ Therefore, To the British, Peter was the one figure to understand in order to grasp the direction of Russian policy. Hence Tilson wrote to British diplomat Charles Whitworth in 1722, “I long to hear something certain of ye Czar’s designs: he throws out so many contrary hints, as if he design’d to amuse ye world.”⁸⁸

Because Peter was seen to be the soul of Russia, the perception of his character bears a lot on that of his country. Indeed, it was because Townshend knew of Peter’s personal “great itch” towards the

⁸³ ‘Lord Townshend to Secretary Stanhope’, 4 October, 1716, in William Coxe (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life and Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*, vol. II, London, 1798, p 88.

⁸⁴ Defoe, *Review of the State of the British Nation*, 18 August, 1709, second page.

⁸⁵ ‘From a letter from Lord Raby to Henry St John on the possibility of a Russian naval threat to Britain’s Hanoverian Interests,’ 21 May 1711, in Simon Dixon et al (eds. and trans.), *Britain and Russia in the age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1998, pp 108-109.

⁸⁶ Mackenzie, *Truth is but Truth*, p 6.

⁸⁷ ‘From a letter from George Tilson to Mr Leather on the growth of Russia’s military and naval power’, 21 August, 1721, in Simon Dixon et al (eds. and trans.), *Britain and Russia in the age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1998, p 234.

⁸⁸ Cited in, Hartley, *Peter the Great and the West*, p 66. Original source from, BL, Add. MS 37388, f. 141v: Tilson to Whitworth, London, 9 March 1721/1722.

Baltic, that he saw Russia to be a potential threat to British interests.⁸⁹ By 1716, the widespread opinion that Peter was attempting to establish himself in central Europe and the Baltic helped produce the anti-Russian atmosphere. At the outset of the Northern Crisis, Hanoverian minister Andreas Gottlieb Bernsdorff conveyed his opinion to Stanhope that Peter “is already master by land in the King of Denmark’s country, and is taking measures to be the master of the sea likewise.” Because of this Stanhope was told by Bernsdorff that it “is necessary to crush the czar immediately, to secure his ships, and even to seize his person”⁹⁰ Stanhope was apparently receptive of such strong measures against Peter, as he later wrote that he believed that “mastering” the czar would be “a right measure.”⁹¹ Townshend shared a similar sense of urgency as Stanhope. In a letter to Stanhope, Townshend shared his opinion that there was “a just sense of imminent danger” to central Europe posed by the “behaviour of the czar, who it is plain intends to make himself master of the whole coast of the Baltic.”⁹² To Townshend, the Russian threat was further elevated by his belief that Peter had planned the Russian penetration of central Europe all along. He was apparently of the opinion that “The behaviour of the czar at this juncture is certainly not the effect of a sudden change, but the consequence of a plan he has long been forming.”⁹³ Indeed, the perception of Peter’s drive for the sea and his obsession with the navy did tend to heighten the Russian threat in British eyes, as Norris would later write in 1719, “I think the Czar by his situation, numerous army, and disposition towards the water, to be the most dangerous enemy our country can have.”⁹⁴

In the public domain, political pamphlets involving Russia at the time also tended to reinforce these perceptions of a Russian threat personified by Peter. Even before the Northern Crisis, there were publications warning an imminent Russian threat. An example of this was *Reasons for the conduct of Sweden* published in 1715. Though this pamphlet was a translation of a Dutch pamphlet intended to rouse support for Sweden during this time, its translator thought it prudent to translate it in English so as to persuade the British to take no harmful measures against Sweden.⁹⁵ In this pamphlet, the author warns of a Russian threat as embodied by Peter’s supposed appetite for power. If Peter “ever succeeds in his Designs upon Sweden, all the Favour of your Republick must expect from him,

⁸⁹ ‘Lord Raby to Henry St John’, 21 May, 1711, *Britain and Russia in the age of Peter the Great*, pp 108-109.

⁹⁰ ‘Secretary Stanhope to Lord Townshend’, September 25, 1716, in William Coxe (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life and Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*, vol. II, London, 1798, p 84.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p 85.

⁹² ‘Lord Townshend to Secretary Stanhope’, *Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*, p 89

⁹³ ‘Stephen Poyntz to Secretary Stanhope’, 6 October, 1716, in William Coxe (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life and Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*, vol II, London, 1798, p 91.

⁹⁴ Quoted in David Denis Aldridge, *Sir John Norris and the British Naval Expeditions in the Baltic Sea*, Lund, Nordic Academic Press, 2009, p 222. Source originally from, PRO, SP. 42/75, Norris to Stanhope 7 July.

⁹⁵ Anonymous Translator, *Reasons for the Present Conduct of Sweden, In Relation to the Trade in the Baltick: Set forth in a Letter from a Gentleman at Dantzick, to his Friend at Amsterdam*, London, 1715, first unnumbered page on the translator’s preface.

amounts to no more than what Polyphemus reserved for Ulysses (to be last eaten)[sic].⁹⁶ The advent of the Northern Crisis provided further opportunities for those such as Swedish Minister to Britain, Carl Gyllenborg to encourage an anti-Russian sentiment. In his *Northern Crisis*, a threatening image of Russia was encouraged through a negative portrayal of Peter as an ambitious and greedy monarch.⁹⁷ He wrote of the Czar, “Whatever Ends an insatiate Desire of Opulency, and a boundless Thirst for Dominion can ever put him upon, to satisfy their craving and voracious Appetites, those must, most undoubtedly be his.” To Gyllenborg, Russia’s threatening policy was completely due to Peter’s personal desires to satisfy, among other things, his “boundless Thirst for Dominion.”⁹⁸ Similarly, the publication of Mackenzie’s memorandum into a pamphlet at a time when British policy was actively opposed to Russia in 1719 could not be seen as insignificant. Aside from those objective arguments that Mackenzie made against Russian influence in the Baltic, there also appeared a moralistic tone in it as well. Russia’s present situation, suggests Mackenzie, ‘is much beyond what He [Peter] could morally have promis’d himself, not yet so long ago, on the Issue of this War with Sweden.’⁹⁹ In the context of 1719, in which it was clear that Peter was intent on holding onto his outlet of the Baltic, this pamphlet was arguing that aside from objective British interests, British policy was also aiming to contain an overly ambitious Peter who will not be constrained simply by accepted norms among states. These pamphlets would have played a part in shaping perceptions of Russia and Peter, not least because Britain had a wide reading public which had influence in politics.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, what made Russia more fearful as well was that Peter was not only ambitious, but he was also competent. To many, Russia’s future capacity was closely tied to the competency of her ruler. For instance, though Secretary of Admiralty Josiah Burchett refused to comment on how the emergence of Russia as a new naval power would affect the future, he nonetheless implied that her potential lay in her ruler. In 1720 he wrote, “What will be the event of the Accession of so great a Power [Russia] by Sea and Land, in the Hands of a Prince, Master of so wide a Dominion I leave to the Politicians to discuss”.¹⁰¹ If Russia’s future was to be assessed through Peter, then its future looked promising and threatening. Tilson in 1721 wrote, Peter “is grown so strong & skillful... if he lives long & increases in power in proportion to ye time he first began, he may prove a terror to us

⁹⁶ Anonymous Author, *Reasons for the Present Conduct of Sweden, In Relation to the Trade in the Baltick: Set forth in a Letter from a Gentleman at Dantzick, to his Friend at Amsterdam*, London, 1715, p 16.

⁹⁷ The pamphlet was published anonymously, but scholars such as Anderson confirm that the author is Carl Gyllenborg. See, M. S. Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century: 1713-1789*, 4th edn, London, Routledge, 2000, p 18.

⁹⁸ [Carl Gyllenborg], *The Northern Crisis. Or, Impartial Reflections on the Policies of the Czar, Occasioned by Mynheer Von Stocken’s Reasons for delaying the Descent upon Schonen*, London, 1716, pp 9-10.

⁹⁹ Mackenzie, *Truth is but Truth*, p 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ Murray, *George I, The Baltic and the Whig Split*, p 9

¹⁰¹ Josiah Burchett, *A Complete History of the most Remarkable Transactions at Sea, From the Earliest Accounts of Time to the Conclusions of the Last War with France*, London, 1720, p 19.

all here".¹⁰² Indeed, Peter appears to be the greatest asset that Russia had at her disposal. As Defoe wrote in 1708, 'I am not so jealous of them [the Muscovites] by Sea as I am by Land, and there are a great many Reasons to be jealous of them now more than ever... Why I'll begin at the Beginning; They have a great an active Prince that now governs them.'¹⁰³ Furthermore, political pamphlets such as *Reasons for the Present Conduct of Sweden*, though foreign in nature, also served to promote such a perception. As the author wrote, "you cannot say... that a prince of such immense Power, and boundless Ambition, with competent Skill in the exercise of that Power may soon render himself most formidable to other Princes of Europe."¹⁰⁴ Russia's future capabilities were therefore heavily linked with the image of Peter as a competent ruler.

Because of this, there was also a sense of temporality in Russia's current greatness in British minds. As Hartley points suggests, all this also meant that it was expected that Russia would diminish in power after Peter's death.¹⁰⁵ In 1716, there were many who apparently harboured the view that the "czar's son is a mere Muscovite, and is to ruin all his father has done in a very little while after the czar's death".¹⁰⁶ After Peter's death, there were some who believed that the Russian naval threat was significantly diminished. In 1726, Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Wager wrote, "the Muscovites do not seem to be such a terrible people as they were when the Czar was living, it cannot be imagined the consternation they were in at our arrival [he was to blockade Reval closely][sic]. I have no notion of their galleys being any use."¹⁰⁷ To many, Russia was only powerful because of Peter, and once he exits the scene, she would become more manageable.

¹⁰² 'letter from George Tilson to Mr Leather ', 21 August, 1721, *Britain and Russia in the age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, p 234.

¹⁰³ Daniel Defoe, 'Numb. 71.', in John McVeagh (comp.), *A Review of the State of the British Nation*, vol. 1, London, Pickering & Chatto, 2007, p 346.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p 18

¹⁰⁵ Hartley, *Peter the Great and the West*, p 66.

¹⁰⁶ 'Lord Townshend to Secretary Stanhop,' 27 October, 1716, in William Coxe (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life and Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*, London, 1798, p 118.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Aldridge, *Sir John Norris*, p 274. Source originally from, PRO, SP 42/77, Wager to Townshend, July, 1726

Peter the Great and the Cultural Perceptions of Russia

Under the shadow of the twist and turns of international politics, the cultural perceptions of Russia were also changing. The cause for such changes was largely independent of the events occurring during Peter's reign, and was rather related to available information regarding the state of Russia at the time. However, this change was the result of a long and slow process. From the beginning, Peter's visit to London in 1698 attracted much intrigue from the British.¹⁰⁸ Hence for instance, shortly after Peter's visit, an anonymous author published *A New and Exact Description of Moscovy* to take advantage of this intrigue. However, this so-called "new" description, which was in fact remarkably neutral for its lack of derogatory terms in describing Moscow and its inhabitants, contained nothing new that would overturn the British opinion of Russia.¹⁰⁹ This piece of work demonstrates that by the time Peter had left London, many still considered previous authors to be authoritative references for writing on Russia. As such, Peter's visit to England did not lead to any dramatic change in British perceptions of Russia. In fact, his vandalizing of John Evelyn may be seen by some as typical of the uncultivated behavior of Russians, as Evelyn's servant was to characterize Peter's group and perhaps Peter himself as "right nasty".¹¹⁰ Evelyn would subsequently refer to Peter as "the barbarous prince" when recording his diary entry about the Battle of Narva.¹¹¹

Nonetheless, from Peter's visit onwards, there was an increasing tendency to see Russia from a different perspective. Perhaps one of the most significant works to contribute to this was Jodocus Crull's *The Antient and Present State of Muscovy*. Though Crull's work amounted to no revolution in the conventional interpretation of Russia, his work can be argued as significant in sowing the seeds of change into the British mind-set towards Russia by being the first work to mention some of Peter's early efforts to reform his country.¹¹² This new information had some observable effects on how the British were to subsequently view Russia. For instance, Patrick Gordon, who had probably read Crull's work, suggested in his work, that the Russians' perceived fondness for their own ignorance was "being mightily alter'd" by Peter's actions which Crull had listed. Gordon was one of the first British examples of perceiving change in the conditions of Russia, as he later wrote "it is to

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed analysis of Peter's visit to England in 1698 see, Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes*, pp 16-39.

¹⁰⁹ *A New and Exact Description of Moscovy*, London, 1698, pp 1-28.

¹¹⁰ John Evelyn, *Memoirs of John Evelyn*, vol 3, ed. William Bray, London, Henry Colburn, 1827, p 364.

¹¹¹ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, vol. 5, ed. E. S. Beer, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, pp 438-439.

¹¹² Among these efforts were his permitting his nobles to travel abroad to be educated and the erecting of schools in Moscow. See, Jodocus Crull, *The Antient and Present State of Muscovy, containing a Geographical, Historical and Political Account of all those Nations and Territories under the Jurisdiction of the Present Czar*, London, 1698, p 143.

be hop'd that the Brutish and Stupidity of this People, maybe much reform'd in some time.¹¹³ Yet this change was taking effect as early as 1701, where another writer was to express similar sentiments for similar reasons. On the knowledge that the Czar "hath erected Schools in Moscow and sent the young Nobility to Travel", the author of *A System of Geography* made the prediction that "in all probability this nation will in a short time be much improved."¹¹⁴ By 1710, open acknowledgement that the Russians were changing began to emerge. For instance, Michel de La Roche, author of *Memoirs of Literature*, was to acknowledged that "His Czarish Majesty is equally successful in his Application to form the minds of his Subjects to Arts and Arms" and as a result, "the Muscovites stand fair for acquiring as much Glory by Learning as by War."¹¹⁵

There was, however, no way that the British could have had an in-depth knowledge of what was happening in Russia. Of course, as new factual information became available, they had more material to work with, but their knowledge of Russia remained incomplete and shallow throughout Peter's reign.¹¹⁶ In face of this, the British had to assess Russia from the top down. This was evident in works such as *Memoirs of Literature*, in which the author simply inferred a positive state of Russian learning by the fact that books were being translated into Russian in Moscow as part of Peter's reforms.¹¹⁷ In reality, historians such as Hughes would argue that Peter's intellectual reforms were not as effective as they appeared.¹¹⁸ Given British ignorance of the actual state of Russia, their perceptions of Peter were influential in their assumptions of the state of that country.

Two aspects of Peter's image helped encourage a perception of a Russia rapidly progressing towards civilisation. The first was his image as a westerniser. It was well known even before Peter's visit to London that he had a disposition towards the west. In December 1697, Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, gave a sermon to King William III with clear references to Peter and his civilising intentions. In his sermon, Burnet referred to Peter as 'a mighty Northern Emperor... resolving to raise his Nation, and enlarge his Empire, comes to learn the best Methods of doing it, and goes away full of Wonder, possessed with truer Notions of Government.'¹¹⁹ In fact, Peter's tour around Europe became a testament of his disposition towards the west. Crull for instance wrote, 'The Motive which

¹¹³ Patrick Gordon, *Geography Anatomiz'd or, the Geographical Grammar. Being a Short and Exact Analysis of the whole Body of Modern Geography, After a New and Curious Methodm*, London, 1704, p 82.

¹¹⁴ Herman Moll, *A System of Geography or, a New & Accurate Description of the Earth In all its Empires, Kingdoms and States Illustrated with History and Copography, and Maps of Every Country, Fairly Engraven on Copper, according to the latest Discoveries and Corrections*, London, 1701, p 380.

¹¹⁵ Michel De La Roch, *Memoirs of Literature: Containing a Weekly Account of the State Learning both at Home and Abroad*, vol. 1, London, 1712, p 11.

¹¹⁶ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery*, pp 72-73.

¹¹⁷ Roch, *Memoirs of Literature*, p 11.

¹¹⁸ Hughes, *In the Age of Peter the Great*, p 330.

¹¹⁹ Gilbert, Lord Bishop of Sarum, *A Sermon Preached before the King, at Whitehall, on the Second of December, 1697. Being the Day of Thanksgiving for the Peace*, London, 1698, p 13. According to Cross, the author of this sermon is Gilbert Burnet. See, Cross, *Peter the Great through British Eyes*, p 11.

could induce so great a Prince to leave for some time his Native Country, cannot be attributed to any other Cause than his most ardent Desire of improving his own Knowledge and of his Subjects'.¹²⁰ His preference towards western methods of war was also evident to the British. As Gordon wrote in 1704, 'the Emperor hath already visited some of the best Nations of Europe, purposely to improve himself in Warlike Affairs, both by Sea and Land'.¹²¹ Indeed, it is difficult to find any British publication relating to Peter omitting his image as a civiliser along western lines. As another author wrote of Peter in his survey of European monarchs, 'The present Prince is the greatest that ever sat on that Throne [of Muscovy]... having quelled several Rebellions, and improv'd the Military Discipline and Civil Polity, to a higher Degree than all that have gone before him'.¹²²

The second aspect of Peter's image was Peter the despot. Throughout Peter's reign, by virtue of his position as czar, many of the British knew of the absolute power he wielded in Russia. As the author of *A System of Geography* wrote, 'Russia is absolutely Monarchical; for the Grand Duke, who is called Czar... is absolute master over all his subjects'.¹²³ Two decades later, this perception of the tsarist institution remained intact as the author of *Historico-Political Geography* wrote, the czar is 'truly Despotick, for he is Absolute Lord of the Lives and Estates of his Subjects, who look upon his Will as that of Heaven'.¹²⁴ In some cases, absolute power in the hands of Peter was praised. This was the case for Richard Steele who believed that Peter had the potential to use his absolute power wisely.¹²⁵ At other times, it was attacked as was the case with Defoe. Rejecting Richard Steele's praise of Peter as a hero, Defoe wrote, 'had the Czar of Muscovy generously laid down, and rejected the Unjust and Arbitrary Exercise of the Despotick Government of the Russian Emperors... then he had been a Glorious Prince'.¹²⁶ Regardless of the opinion about Peter's despotic powers, there was no doubt in British minds that Peter was the one in complete control of Russia.

The image of Russia's ruler as a westernising autocrat was important to British perceptions of Russia because it informed them of the likely direction that Russia was and will be heading under Peter.

¹²⁰ Crulls, *Antient and Present State of Muscovy*, p 207.

¹²¹ Gordon, *Geography Anatomiz'd*, p 82.

¹²² *The History of the Imperial & Royal Families of Austria & Bourbon, trac'd down from their Original, to the Present Time. With an Account of their Rise, Advancement and Decay; their Differences, Wars and Quarrels; their Treaties, Alliances and Marriages; and all the Considerable Incidents and Alterations that have happen'd to either; With a View of the present State of their Controversies and Affairs; and of their Several Pretensions to the Crown of Spain*, London, 1708, p 15.

¹²³ Moll, *A System of Geography*, p 381.

¹²⁴ Reverend Paschoud, *Historico-Political Geography: Or, a Description of the Names, Limits, Capitals, Divisions, Descriptions of particular Provinces, Situation, Extent, Air, Soil, Commodities, Rarities, Rivers, Chief Towns, Inhabitants, Manners, Language, Populousness, Dominions, Pretensions, Government, Kings or Princes Genealogy, Titles, Revenues, Residence, States or Courts of Justice, Laws, Nobility, Order of Knighthood, Clergy, Arch-bishopricks, Bishopricks, Universities, Religion, Advantages, Defects, Interests of the several Countries in the World*, vol. 1, London, 1722, p 214.

¹²⁵ Richard Steele, 'No. 139', August 9, 1711, in Donald F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 2, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965, p 49.

¹²⁶ 'From A Review of the State of the British Nation, a commentary by Daniel Defoe on the *Spectator* article of 9 August 1711', August 23, 1711, in Simon Dixon et al (eds. and trans.), *Britain and Russia in the age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1998, p 112.

Hence the author of *A System of Geography*, notwithstanding his acknowledgement of Russia as a despotic state, nonetheless recognised that because Peter was ‘a Valiant Prince, a Lover of Science, especially Mathematicks’, ‘he will in all probability raise the Russian Empire to the highest degree it ever was’.¹²⁷ Thomas Tickell in his poem published around 1713 conveyed a similar perspective when viewing Russia when he wrote, that through Peter “round his empire spread the learned store”.¹²⁸

With new accounts of Russia coming in to Britain such as those of John Perry and F. C. Weber, Peter’s image as a successful autocratic reformer became cemented.¹²⁹ Since Crull’s work no detailed account of Peter and his Russia appeared in British publications until Perry’s *The State of Russia Under the Present Czar*.¹³⁰ A ship builder, John Perry was one of the first foreign specialists enlisted into Peter’s services in 1697. He remained in service until 1712, when he decided to return to England due to ill-treatment and lack of pay.¹³¹ Throughout Perry’s work, British readers were finally able to get a fresh glimpse of the changes going on in Russia for the first time since 1698, and the impression obtained from his work was one of progress through successful reform.

The reader would come to know that Peter was moulding the Russians in a manner that was approved of by the British and the western European countries. In particular, some of these reforms touched on the appearance of the Russians and Peter’s attempt to promote western European fashion, particularly those of Britain’s.¹³² On several Russian practices thought to be uncivil, Peter was making agreeable changes. Hence with regard to the widespread practice of idol worshipping in Russia, which Perry himself has shown contempt for, the reader would be told that Peter was making efforts towards discouraging this practice.¹³³ The illiberal practice of forced marriages, thought by Perry to be the source of the widespread practice of wife beating, was abolished by the

¹²⁷ Moll, *A System of Geography*, p 383.

¹²⁸ Thomas Tickell, “A Poem, On the Prospect of Peace,” in Anonymous (comp.), *The Poetic Works of Thomas Tickell. With the Life of the Author. Cooke’s Edition*, London, n. d., p 18. According to the unknown compiler, the date the poem was originally published coincides with Britain’s negotiation of the peace of Utrecht starting from 1712. See, Anonymous (comp.), *The Poetic Works of Thomas Tickell. With the Life of the Author. Cooke’s Edition*, London, n. d., p ii. This rough date agrees with the date that Cross uses when he also cites Tickell’s poem. See, Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes*, p 48.

¹²⁹ Weber’s work, *The Present State of Russia*, was translated and published anonymously, but the identity of the author is confirmed to be Weber by scholars such as Cross. See, Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes*, p 57; Anderson, *Britain’s Discovery*, p 73.

¹³⁰ According to Perry, his work was the account published since Peter’s visit to England. This view seems to be supported the translator of Weber’s work, who recalled in 1723 of having no knowledge of any other first-hand account of Russia other than Perry’s work and another that was written in high-Dutch. See, John Perry, *The State of Russia Under the Present Czar*, London, 1716, first unnumbered page of the preface; Anonymous (trans.), *The Present State of Russia*, vol. 1, London, 1723, third unnumbered page of the translator’s preface.

¹³¹ For an autobiographical account of his experiences in Russia see, Perry, *The State of Russia Under the Present Czar*, pp 1-57.

¹³² *Ibid*, pp 195-199.

¹³³ *Ibid*, pp 223-224.

Czar.¹³⁴ The Russian practice to mark September to be the start of the year, a practice thought by Perry to be completely illogical, was also changed to conform to the calendar system of the rest of Europe.¹³⁵

Equally significant for Perry's readers were the educational reforms that Peter was undertaking. If the Russians were being made to look European, readers of Perry's work would find that soon they would become as knowledgeable as them. Like Crull, he confirms to his readers that Peter has set up a school for mathematics, and out of its students, "have been chose some of the most ingenious to learn the Mathematicks."¹³⁶ Additionally, the Russian nation was expected to have more educational institutions in the coming years, as Peter "has commanded several Schools of Learning to be set up." All this, in addition to the fact that Peter had ordered for the translation of several educational European books for the benefit of his subjects led Perry to write, "it is to be hoped, that in time his People will be brought to a better Understanding in the Grounds of Religion and moral Virtues, as well as in the Art of War, Trade and other useful Sciences."¹³⁷

In contrast to Perry's overly positive assessment of Peter's reforms, Hanoverian diplomat F. C. Weber's *Present State of Russia* published from 1724 was more moderate in its view of their successes. It acknowledged that cultural changes were being made in Russia, but also that these changes were less successful than Perry had suggested. Thus in his account of the Russian noblewomen, Weber observed that though they may be dressed and told to behave in a European fashion, they had not completely shaken off their "in-born Bashfulness and Awkwardness."¹³⁸ Similarly, even though Weber accepted the notion that the Russians had been educated to an extent, their character still had obvious contemptible flaws.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, Weber did not downplay the impact of Peter's reforms on Russia as he suggests that those reforms were so effective that "nothing now seems wanting" in that country.¹⁴⁰

Through Perry and Weber, the image of Peter as a czar reformer was confirmed. Readers would come to know that it was due to Peter that St. Petersburg could develop into a 'City which may be called a Wonder of the World'.¹⁴¹ Likewise, the reader of Perry's work no doubt knew that it was Peter who desired change and those desires bore fruit accordingly. In fact, Perry had given the impression that Peter, by virtue of his autocratic powers, had everything under control. For instance,

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p 201.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, pp 235-236.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p 211.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, pp 220-221.

¹³⁸ Anonymous Author [F. C. Weber], *The Present State of Russia*, vol. 1, London, 1723, p 149.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, pp 16-19

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, second unnumbered page of author's preface.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p 298.

with regards to Peter's discouragement of beards Perry wrote, 'nothing but the absolute Authority of the Czar, and the Terror of having them pull'd out by the Roots... could have prevailed with the Russes to have parted with their Beards.'¹⁴² Similarly, Weber also stressed the effectiveness of Peter's absolute power when he wrote, 'should the Czar enjoy the Scepter but twenty Years longer, he will do more in his Dominions by this Obedience [of his subjects] than ever any other Monarch did.'¹⁴³ Further promoting Peter's image as a successful reformer was that Perry seemed to suggest that those reforms written about were only the tip of the iceberg. As Perry wrote, "There are a great many other Things which his Majesty has done to reform and convince his People of the Folly of being bigoted to their old Ways and Custom", but that it would be too tedious to recount them all.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, Peter's image as a successful reformer was also implicit when Weber used the phrase, 'nothing seems wanting' to describe the present state of Russia under Peter.

Perry's and Weber's accounts of Russia were important for furthering the British reassessment of Russia. On the one hand, the factual information provided by Perry and Weber definitely informed the British on the present state of Russia. On the other hand, its promotion of Peter as a successful reformer was also significant because it gave further confidence to the Briton to assume that Russia was being successfully civilised by him. Hence we find increasingly after Perry's work the acceptance of both Peter as a successful reformer and more importantly, Russia as a nation emerging out of barbarity. How widespread this perception was can be seen in many comments throughout British writings at the time, such as *Historico-Political Geography*. After giving the popular negative description of the Russians, the author went on to write, "But of late the Muscovites are much civilized from their former barbarities, and are become a warlike and politick nation."¹⁴⁵ Generally, the most telling sign that the British viewed the present state of Russia in a more hopeful attitude was the widespread acceptance of Peter's as a successful ruler, which was becoming common near the end of his reign. Any mention of anything positive in Russia was almost always part of a wider comment of Peter. Hence one author in 1722, in using Peter as an example of an enlightened despot, accepted that he has "without assistance, and even against opposition, rendered his people as famous for arts and arms, as they were contemptible".¹⁴⁶ Likewise Defoe, in a work honouring Peter, was to write in 1723, that the czar, among many other achievements:

Has brought a Nation, who were before the most blind and ignorant, and the greatest condemners of Knowledge, and of all manner of Learning, to be Searchers after Wisdom, studying Sciences and

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p 196.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p 20.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p 237.

¹⁴⁵ Paschoud, *Historico-Political Geography*, pp 212-213.

¹⁴⁶ Cato, *Poplicola's Supplement to Cato's Letter, concerning Popularity*, London, 1722, p 42.

eagerly brining Home Books, Instruments, and Artists, from the most learned parts of the World for their Instruction.¹⁴⁷

Of course, this was an exaggeration that Defoe probably half believed as he later admitted in his work that Peter had not quite “conquered the Obstinate Ignorance of his People.”¹⁴⁸ But what is certain was that Peter’s reputation as a credible westerniser informed Defoe of Russia’s path. Defoe subsequently wrote, if Peter continued to rule and bring in European customs, “in a few years more it may happen that there will be so many men of learning and judgement found in Muscovy, that they will never again return to the brutal life, which they formerly led.”¹⁴⁹

In poetry too there was evidence of a similar acknowledgement that Peter’s reforms resulted tangible results for Russia. In 1718 in his *The Northern Star*, a poem dedicated to Peter, Aaron Hill was to suggest that the present state of the Russians had been brought up to the standards equal to that of the British when he wrote:

Perish the pride, in poor distinction shewn,
That makes man blind, to blessings *not his own!*
Briton and Russian differ, but in name.
In nature’s sense, all nations are the *same.*
One world, divided, *distant brothers* share,
And man is reasons subject – *everywhere.*¹⁵⁰

In a similar attempt to praise Peter, William Doncombe was to acknowledge the state of progress that the Russian nation had been brought up to by Peter in an epigram dedicated to him. In 1724, he wrote of Peter’s achievements in relation to Russia:

T’adorn with Arts a rough and Barbarian Race,
And polish’em with eve’ry Manly Grace:
To chase the Shades of *Ignorance* profound
And spread the Beam of *Knowledge* all around.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ A British Officer in the Service of the Czar [Daniel Defoe], *An Impartial History of the Life and Actions of Peter Alexowitch, the Present Czar of Muscovy: From his Birth down to this Present Time*, London, 1723, p 3. The authorship of this work has been heavily implied by Cross that it is indeed Daniel Defoe. See, Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes*, p 52.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p 7.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p 7.

¹⁵⁰ Aaron Hill, ‘The Northern Star,’ in Anonymous (ed.), *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill, Esq; In Four Volumes Consisting of Letters on Various Subjects, and of Original Poems, Moral and Facetious*, vol. 3, London, 1753, p 185.

¹⁵¹ William Doncombe, ‘Untitled epigram on Peter I’, in John Peter Bernard et al (eds.), *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical: In Which a New and Accurate Translation of that of the Celebrated Mr. Bayle, with the Corretions and Observations Printed in the late Edition at Paris, is included; and the interspersed with several thousand Lives never before published*, London, 1739, p 345.

It is important, however, not to overstate the change in the perceptions of Russia. As Cross wrote, 'To suggest that the eighteenth century brought a complete revolution in British attitudes towards Russia and its culture would be to offer a study chiaroscuro which would unfortunately misrepresent the situation.'¹⁵² Indeed, many authors during Peter's reign were reluctant to accept that Russia was fully civilised. This was evident in several works such as Weber's, Defoe's, and *Historico-Political Geography*.¹⁵³

At the same time, it is also important not to understate this change. The mere fact that the civilization of Russia was almost always a listed achievement of Peter would indicate that writers did believe that Peter's reforms had tangible results and that Russia was more civilised than before. Considering that Russia was largely seen as a barbarous country devoid of all learning for almost two centuries, such a change in perception was a significant break. More importantly, given the lack of comprehensive information regarding Russia at the time, it would also indicate that this significant break was partially encouraged by their belief that Peter was a successful czar reformer.

¹⁵² Anthony Cross, *Anglo-Russica: Aspects of Cultural Relations between Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, Oxford, Berg Publishers, 1993, p 1.

¹⁵³ See pages 23, 25 of dissertation for Weber and Defoe's reluctance to accept fully Russia's civilised state. For another example see, *Historico-Political Geography*, p 213.

Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that the image of Peter the Great had a significant influence on how contemporary British perceived Russia. At the beginning of Peter's reign, the Russia was not well received on the British record. Two centuries of traveller's accounts have promoted the image of Russia as a barbarous nation, whose inhabitants were considered uncivilised in several aspects. Furthermore, the country was seen as largely irrelevant to British interests apart from trade. Because of this, the Britons would avoid political association with that nation as much as possible. However, the dramatic developments of the early eighteenth century had changed much of that by the end of Peter's reign. Russia was now strategically powerful. It had a navy that caused the British much anxiety, and its advantage in the Baltic was Britain's disadvantage. At the same time, the image of Peter also did much to heighten the perceived threat of Russia. Peter was considered the soul of Russia. Russia was a tool to be used by Peter, and it was perceived that he had ambitious plans to use it and was competent enough to do so. As such, Peter's reputation as an ambitious and competent monarch added to the extra threat that Russia then posed to Britain.

During Peter's reign there were also some observable changes in how the British perceived Russia in cultural terms. From the turn of the century, the British began to accept the notion of a more civilised Russia. More important was the fact that the British saw Russia not so much as a barbarous nation now, but more of a developing nation. No matter how small this change may seem, it was a significant break from almost two centuries of negative perceptions. Peter also contributed much to this change of perception. The British had no in-depth knowledge of the actual state of Russia. All they could see was the surface of that country. Because of this, their perception of Peter helped inform Britons on the current state of Russia. The British perceived Peter as a westernising ruler who had absolute control over all the affairs in his country. This perception was reinforced by accounts of Russia such as Perry's and Weber's. Such ideas of Peter gave the British confidence to assume that Russia was more civilised than before and is firmly on the path towards civilisation. Consequently, during Peter's life time, his image did much to encourage a more impressive perception of Russia, both politically and culturally.

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