Introduction

This is a book about how individuals in early modern Russia—primarily in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—defended their personal honor and how the state participated in that process by providing legal norms and access to litigation. Honor in Muscovy was a rhetoric of personal dignity that accrued to all subjects of the tsar, regardless of social rank; only notorious criminals were denied the opportunity to litigate to defend their good name. Honor and its defense in Muscovy present the historian with a remarkably rich field of meaning. Because honor disputes involved insult, they reveal concepts of identity, social values, and interactions among individuals. Because honor was possessed by individuals in all social ranks, even by slaves, it reflects on the nature of society in Muscovy and the relations of society to the state. The book explores a wide range of aspects of early modern Russia through the prism of honor: litigation and legality, social hierarchy and community, concepts of individual and collective identity, ideology and institutions of governance.

Honor shows itself in the early Russian historical record in two arenas: in legislation and litigation over insult to honor (beschest'e), which was primarily verbal insult, and in litigation among members of the landed cavalry elite over precedence in service assignment (mestnichestvo). Such elite precedence was based on calculations of genealogy and clan service. Legislation was issued by the grand princes (tsars after 1547), and the judicial venues were the tsar’s courts. Judges were grand-princely appointees—governors in the provinces or high-ranking administrators in various offices in the Kremlin. The striking aspect about defense of honor in Muscovy is its social inclusiveness: All subjects of the tsar could litigate, although, as we see in Chapter 1, the institutions of litigation also included significant defense of social hierarchy.
Its social inclusiveness might seem to distinguish the Muscovite concept of honor from commonplace notions of honor in European history. To modern minds, "honor" is associated with medieval chivalry or aristocratic dueling and politesse, not with the everyday activities of the common man or woman. In fact, nonelite groups in premodern Europe defended their honor with a vigor equal to that of noblemen, and it is in this comparative context that one should view the Muscovite defense of honor. In sixteenth-century England, for example, yeoman farmers and artisans clogged the courts with suits for defamation; in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dijon and eighteenth-century Paris, master craftsmen and artisans sought recompense for insult; in Italy, courts entertained suits from prostitutes as well as noblemen; in early modern Germany, guilds asserted corporate honor. At the same time, across the board, insulted individuals and groups took the law

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into their own hands, redressing insult with shaming rituals, physical assault, vendetta, and feud. By the sixteenth century, aristocrats and the socially ambitious began to separate themselves from the rest of society through their stylized reaction to insult (the duel) and by adopting new standards of "civility." Thus honor accrued to individuals and collectives, reflecting a societal understanding that people had honor and that it should be publicly defended.

Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that the sensibility of honor as an attribute of all members of a community, which he calls primal honor, has its roots in a common European heritage grounded in, first, an Indo-European association of honor with family, blood, and valor (Tacitus, for example, chronicled Germanic tribes' keen sensitivity to personal affront and family honor); and second, the moderating influence of the Stoic and Christian values that emphasize personal virtue, civility, and the cultivation of self-esteem distinct from the world's estimation. Other writers have seconded the idea of honor as "a pan-European moral code." James Farr noted that the thirteenth-century Spanish law code, the Partidas, defines as insults to honor words and acts that were also considered insults to honor in sixteenth-century France. Our Russian cases resound with very similar calumnies and insulting actions.

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8Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982), chap. 2; a revised and abridged edition is *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York, 1986). Baroja adds a third source, the Roman concept of honor as office and title: "Honour and Shame," p. 83.

Early modern Russia did not share all of the influences that shaped honor in other European countries. Its elite, for example, never reached the point of social development that drove European noblemen to invent the duel. (Muscovites first encountered the duel in the seventeenth century as a European import.) But Russia’s heritage, nevertheless, was Indo-European, whether traced through the East Slavs themselves or through the Normans, who first catalyzed political formation among the East Slavs. It shared with Europe an agrarian, peasant economy. Early Russia’s Orthodox Christianity shared with Catholicism a belief in human dignity, which underlay the defense of honor across the European plain. Russia was part of the pan-European culture in which reputation and status, codified as personal honor, were basic building blocks of community and identity.

The social inclusiveness of honor in theory and in the practice of litigation raises issues of its social significance. How did honor function on the local level? How did individuals use such litigation to defend or advance their status? How did honor litigation relate to broader patterns of conflict and conflict resolution? These questions provide one focus of this book: I will explore how honor litigation provided a means for individuals and communities to pursue or resolve tensions and to structure personal relations.

In Muscovy, however, more than in the European states contemporary with it, the state was closely identified with the defense of honor. The tsar’s administration codified laws and provided court venues, whereas in Europe venues were myriad. The Catholic Church, local courts, and high courts shared jurisdiction over defamation according to the content of the insult. In Russia also, as Chapter 4 details, the state devised precedence litigation for the elite and maintained official military and genealogical records from which to calculate relative rank. This practice eliminated the need for the elite to generate such extralegal means as vendettas and duels to defend honor. Finally, in Russia, the state itself was imbricated in the rhetoric of honor; the tsar and his representations stood at the apex of the community of honor (see Chapter 5). Thus, the second focus of this book: how honor fits into the broader array of Muscovite political institutions and concepts. I argue that the state used the defense of honor as one of many strategies to integrate the peoples of its growing and diverse empire.

I try to balance these two perspectives through a bottom-up social inquiry into the uses of honor based on the knowledge that a sense of personal dignity was ambient among East Slavs long before Muscovy consolidated power, and through a top-down examination of how the state co-opted honor for its own objectives. Neither approach should be taken as primary. Particularly to be

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10Sharpe, Defamation, pp. 3–6.
avoided is a “statist” reading of the latter perspective as maintaining that ideas and institutions such as honor had meaning in Russia only insofar as the state created them and bestowed them on the people. Indeed, individuals and communities were adept manipulators of received discourses and institutions such as honor. Honor can and should be construed both locally and at the macro level, because both coexisted in the complex society of premodern Muscovy. To better understand how honor served both state and community, I first examine the complexity of community and the diversity of governing strategies in the sixteenth century.

Forging Structures of Governance

In Muscovy, the sixteenth century was a period of administrative consolidation over a constantly expanding realm. Like Fernand Braudel’s “long sixteenth century” in the Mediterranean world, Moscow’s sixteenth century begins earlier, with Ivan III, who served as heir presumptive with his father from c. 1448 and ruled from 1462 to 1505.11 His administration initiated many of the key goals, strategies, and institutions that endured through the 1500s. In turn, it was a “long fourteenth century” that had prepared the ground for this sixteenth-century consolidation of power.12 The seminal era from the 1290s to the mid-1400s was one of opportunistic reaction to the political and economic collapse of both the Golden Horde and the Teutonic Knights. Moscow’s grand princes and boyar elite, like their counterparts in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, responded by putting their houses in order domestically and by aggressively expanding their territory.13 That Moscow’s rulers reacted

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12Elsewhere I describe the fourteenth century as “formative” for the political elite: Kinship and Politics. The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345–1547 (Stanford, 1987), chap. 1.
in this way to the regional vacuum of power bespeaks no unusual messianic self-conception, no plan for world domination or nomadic spirit.\textsuperscript{14}

Moscow's European neighbors were also gobbling up territory by the sixteenth century, even before any had developed theories of mercantilism or absolutism to legitimize expansion of land, people, and resources. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and British looked overseas for expansion, while the Habsburgs and Jagiellonians pushed toward the frontier borderlands of the steppe eastward from the Danube toward the Caspian Sea. These empires were driven variously by dynastic imperative, political pressures, and economic needs. In Muscovy's case, economic pressures were excuse enough. Within its fifteenth-century borders, natural resources were scarce and land was relatively unproductive because of poor soil, poorly timed precipitation, and a short growing season.\textsuperscript{15} Expansion provided income from the far Northern and Siberian fur trade and from export and transit trade along major trade routes (the Volga River and the Baltic and White Seas).

For more than a hundred years, Moscow was remarkably successful in its drive to expand. The debacle of the Livonian War (1558–82)\textsuperscript{1} halted expansion toward the Baltic until Peter the Great's time, but expansion south and east continued with little interruption. By the demise of the Daniilovich line in 1598,\textsuperscript{16} the realm stretched from Novgorod and Pskov northwest of Moscow eastward along the White Sea littoral to the Ob' River beyond the Ural Mountains and occupied most of the forested land north of the steppe and east of Smolensk. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Muscovite empire comprised several distinct regions. The Center was the heartland around Moscow, settled primarily by Orthodox East Slavs, where peasant agriculture and a landed cavalry elite dominated economy and society. Another region was the North, the old Novgorodian lands stretching from the Gulf of Finland to the Urals, north


\textsuperscript{16}The Daniilovich line was a branch of the Kievan Riurikide princely clan, descendants of Prince Daniil Alexandrovich, who died in 1303. The dynasty died out in 1598 with the death of Ivan IV's last and childless son, Fedor Ivanovich.
These spectacular wooden churches and village buildings at Kizhi illustrate the wooden architecture of the isolated villages in the Russian North, an area that Moscow conquered from Novgorod in the late fifteenth century. (Photograph: Jack Kollmann.)

of Moscow, where landed cavalrymen were few. Here forest exploitation, fishing, and hunting played a greater role in the economy than agriculture, and communities of peasants free of landlord control were the social norm. Orthodox East Slavs coexisted with converted and non-Christian Finno-Ugric peoples, as well as with non-Christian or recently converted Permian and Zyrian tribes. On the recently conquered western frontier, other Orthodox East Slavs and some Catholic East Slavs who had for several generations lived under the Grand Duchy of Lithuania fell under Muscovite suzerainty. Here cities enjoyed self-government, and nobility and bourgeoisie enjoyed corporate privileges and rights.

The steppe frontier, ever expanding to the south and east, was a land in transition, shared by communities of free Orthodox East Slavic peasants and Cossacks, increasingly joined by members of the elite who brought enserfment and central control of the land fund. The Middle Volga was populated by a variety of peoples subordinate until 1552 to the Khanate of Kazan; the Mordvinians and Mari were Finno-Ugric, and only some were Christianized; the Tatars and Turkic Chuvash were Muslim. Late in the century and through the seventeenth century, Muscovite control expanded to the Turkic nomadic peoples of the
steppe south of the Urals and to the indigenous peoples of western and eventually eastern Siberia. Siberian natives spoke a variety of indigenous languages and practiced animistic religions.

Muscovite tsars claimed sovereignty over these myriad peoples, expressing this assertion in their official titles with the words gosudar' and (by the end of the sixteenth century) samoderzhets. Both terms have been construed as claiming a sort of despotic total control, but contemporaries understood the terms to imply “sovereignty” without a connotation of servility.17 As sovereigns of “all the Rus’ lands” and beyond, Muscovy’s rulers exercised their power with flexibility and pragmatic accommodation to existing social and political institutions. In so delegating and recognizing local leadership, Muscovite rulers did not divide sovereignty and thereby create political pluralism along a European legal model; they retained a patrimonial claim to unilateral sovereignty. They devolved the execution of power, however, to a startlingly wide array of institutions and practices.

Geography and demography forced their hand to some extent. In the far northern forests, settlement was dispersed and villages were tiny (averaging one to three households), with denser settlement only near major towns and monasteries, primarily in the Center. The rigors of the climate (long winter freeze, short growing season, northern latitude, infertile soil) prevented larger population accumulation.18 S. B. Veselovskii’s image of the fifteenth-century countryside is memorable: “From a bird’s eye or airplane’s view an area settled with numerous tiny villages must have looked like a leopard’s coat, in which the background was forest, and the settlements, scattered among the fields and meadows, were spots of various size and irregular shape.” Even as late as 1724, the population density of the Empire averaged fewer than ten inhabitants per square verst (a verst equals approximately two-thirds of a mile) in areas other than the provinces of Moscow (with twenty inhabitants per square verst) and Kiev (with ten to twenty).19

Governance in such conditions was difficult; add the element of physical expanse, and it became challenging indeed. As Peter Brown cautioned, writing


about Byzantium, “Distance [is] the First Enemy of all extended empires. . . .
Terrifyingly active and peremptory at the center, the imperial system of gov-
ernment found itself becalmed on a Sargasso Sea once it reached the provinces.” 20
Distances were daunting in the Muscovite empire: From Moscow to Perm’ in
the upper Kama basin today is 1,378 kilometers by rail; to Tomsk in Western
Siberia, 3,500; to Vladivostok on the Pacific, 9,297. The Volga River alone,
Muscovy’s major trade artery, measures over 3,500 kilometers in length. Cli­
mate added to the difficulties of communication: Encumbered by mud most of
the spring and autumn, dirt roads were easily passable only in May through
August; winter freeze speeded transportation, but temperatures inhibited
movement. When the need was urgent, huge distances could be covered very
quickly by a post system, but as a rule, central government stood at a far remove
from most communities. 21

Nevertheless Moscow’s sixteenth-century rulers were obsessed with the same
sorts of issues that beleaguered their European counterparts—that is, how to
enlist local elites in their project of state expansion, how to expand their
armies, and how to tax to pay for it all. In short, mobilization of resources
was their overriding concern. Faced with an apparent dearth of bureau­
cratic personnel, or perhaps most accurately, of liquid resources with which
to compensate a central officialdom, the state reacted by defining its job
minimally, demanding only the right to mobilize fiscal, natural, and human
resources; to administer high justice; and to monopolize war, peace, and for­
eign alliances. To accomplish these tasks, the Kremlin delegated, when possible,
mundane administrative tasks to the groups best constituted to accomplish
them. In most cases those groups existed; in other cases, the state created or
enhanced them.

A major priority for Muscovy in the sixteenth century was the cultivation of
a metropolitan (Moscow-based) elite who would execute central policy. To do
so, the Kremlin both brought new clans into high status and co-opted elites
from conquered areas. High-ranking clans were invited to join the court elite,
provided that they converted to Orthodoxy. Princely families of the ruling
Gedyminide dynasty of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and of the Kazan’ rul­
ing house, princes from the North Caucasus, sovereign princely lines from old
Rus’ principalities such as Iaroslavl’, Rostov, and Suzdal’—all added jewels to

20Peter Brown, Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire (Madison,
21See, for example, how quickly documents travelled from the Center to the provinces when
the issue was suspected treason: N. Ia. Novombergskii, Slovo i delo gosudarevy. Protsessy do
izdania Ulozheniia Alekseia Mikhailovicha 1649 goda, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1911). See also Paul
Shott, “Transportation in Russia,” Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History 39
the Moscow grand prince's crown. Richly rewarded with status, land, and booty, these new clans and new boyars contributed to stability as the empire was assembled piecemeal. At midcentury, the government moved to bolster elite cohesion by compiling genealogical books and military musters to support the precedence (or mestnichestvo) system of status ranking based on family heritage and service.

Moscow’s grand princes cultivated and co-opted this metropolitan elite, and delegated administrative power, by tolerating pockets of limited sovereignty. Their kinsmen received appanage principalities, as did some high-ranking princely families (primarily from the Grand Duchy) called service princes. In the midfifteenth century, a quasi-independent Tatar principality was created at Kasimov to cultivate support among dissident princes in Kazan’, and a Nogai counterpart was created at Romanov in the midsixteenth century to serve similar purposes. Even the vast tracks in the Urals awarded to the Stroganov family in return for colonization and trade development were pockets of independent rule that provided Moscow an administrative machine in a


24 On service princes, see M. E. Bychkova, Sostav klassa feodalov Rossii v XVI v. Istoriko-genealogicheskoe issledovanie (Moscow, 1986), chap. 2.
far-flung corner of the realm.\textsuperscript{25} The rulers of all such lands wielded judicial authority and the right to grant immunities from their own jurisdiction to landholders within their holdings. They had their own cavalry forces and administrative elites and were limited only by a prohibition against foreign alliances. These various institutions were phased out from the 1560s through the midseventeenth century as their political utility waned, but they reflect Muscovite autocrats’ willingness to diffuse administrative authority in ways not threatening to central power. At the same time, secular and ecclesiastical landholders enjoyed broad grants of immunity from the ruler’s administrative, fiscal, and judicial authority.

At the local level, Moscow used similar strategies of cultivation, co-optation, and devolution of administration.\textsuperscript{26} In the North, they relied on existing communes of free peasants (\textit{volosti}) under the supervision of governors (\textit{namestniki}); even monasteries and cathedrals in some places participated in secular administration. Georg Michels has shown that even in the late seventeenth century, the communities of the North were far removed from central governance.\textsuperscript{27} In the Middle Volga and Siberia, local elites were co-opted. Tatar and Siberian elites kept their indigenous institutions, laws, and practices as long as they stayed loyal; these populations were taxed through a system different from that employed in the Center, paying in furs or their equivalent. This levy was called a \textit{iiasak}, while peasants in the Center paid a “tax burden” (\textit{tiaglo}) in cash, kind, or service. In Smolensk and other western areas, noblemen and burghers maintained their corporate privileges and institutions. Such an eclectic and laissez-faire policy was a mainstay of colonial practice into the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{28} On the steppe frontier, governors enjoyed wide authority in the absence of local gentry, and frontier military forces straddled the social categories of peasant, townsman, and privileged cavalry. Moscow put most of its energies into the Center, however, working to forge strong provincial communities of landed gentry cavalrymen, who both constituted the army and served as a quasi-bureaucracy.


By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia

For the cavalrymen of newly conquered lands, Moscow pursued a gradualist policy of political integration: For the first several decades after conquest, principalities in the Center and towns such as Novgorod and Pskov in the northwest were ruled through separate “courts” (dvortsy) and majordomos (dvoretskie)\(^{29}\); only gradually over the century were these offices blended into the growing system of central bureaus.\(^{30}\) An even more powerful mechanism of forging local elites, however, was the service tenure land system (pomest’e), grants of populated land held on condition of military service. Muscovy used these grants to create new provincial gentries or to reshape existing elites significantly. The land and peasant labor needed to expand the pomest’e system were obtained not only through conquest, but also by transferring free peasant communes to newly recruited cavalrymen. From Novgorod, eight thousand men were deported to various provinces in the Center (Vladimir, Nizhnnii Novgorod, Pereiaslav’l’, and others) and replaced with about two thousand men from Moscow. Throughout the century, such population resettlements served as a tool to populate newly conquered areas or to bolster frontier economies shattered by war. In the 1570s, for example, petty landholders from the Novgorod environs were moved into the newly conquered western frontier (Velikie Luki, Toropets, Dorogobuzh, Smolensk, and Viaz’ma), while others were moved to recently captured territories in Livonia. When Russian settlers were driven out of Livonia, they were resettled on the Novgorod frontier as border guards and used to restore the local economy. These relocations disrupted regional attachments and provided the opportunity to create new regional solidarities.\(^{31}\)


The state enlisted such local elites to carry out central policy in fiscal and criminal matters, thereby cultivating group solidarity. Loyalty to clan and region was a latent consciousness that Muscovy accentuated. In the early decades of the sixteenth century, the collection of taxes for fortification was shifted from centrally appointed governors to local elites; in the 1530s, criminal jurisdiction was transferred to locally selected boards of landed cavalrymen. In the 1550s, local collection of taxes in the Center and the North was transferred to boards of taxpaying peasants or townsmen selected by their communes.32 Increasingly, as the state transferred peasant communes to landlords, administrative and judicial power over peasants shifted away from the central apparatus; private landlords maintained such immunities from grand-princent administration even after midcentury, when the state was revoking fiscal immunities.33 By overseeing petty judicial issues, landlords in essence saved the state from maintaining an extensive local bureaucracy.

Through legislation on inheritance and the transfer of hereditary property, the state constituted stronger local gentry communities in the Center. From the 1550s to 1570s, edicts prohibited landholders in certain areas and most princely clans from selling patrimonial lands to individuals not of the given region or clan. The effect was to enhance what some scholars call local “corporations” of gentry who mustered to war together, maintained law and order, and dominated local offices.34 By the seventeenth century, in the Center and on the frontier as gentry moved southward, these policies created vigorous local power networks. Valerie Kivelson has described, for example, how gentry factions dominated office-holding and local politics in seventeenth-century Vladimir-Suzdal’. Brian Davies and Carol Belkin Stevens graphically describe how frontier governors bent central policy to local conditions. Davies cites a
particularly striking example in which a local community complained that its new governor refused to accept the customary bribes that had previously ensured that incumbents would be beholden to local interests.  

These strategies allowed Moscow to develop a larger army, with attendant social stratification and tension. In the sixteenth century, Muscovy's military was primarily a cavalry, composed of a landed elite that served seasonally and provided its own equipment, horses, and training. The cavalry army grew steadily in the sixteenth century. Its leadership elite—the "sovereign's court" (gosudarev dvor)—grew from a handful of boyars and their courts to about 3,000 men at mid-sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, the sovereign's court had evolved a series of ranks (stol'nik, striiapchii, and the like), and contemporary documents distinguished these men as those "who serve from the Moscow list" (po Moskovskomu spisku) as opposed to those who serve from a provincial town (po gorodu). According to the remuneration scale of the end at the century, the highest ranks received 3.5 times more land than the lowest provincial gentry. Legislation on dishonor enforced this social hierarchy.

Paralleling this growth of the Moscow-based and provincial cavalry was the creation in the sixteenth century of an expansive non-cavalry army with more modern equipment and techniques. At midcentury, musketeers, artillery, and Cossack regiments numbered around 30,000, outnumbering the ca. 21,000 cavalry servitors; by the end of the century, there were about 30,000 cavalrymen, 20,000 musketeers, 3,500 artillerymen, and significant numbers of frontier Cossacks and non-Russian troops (e.g., Bashkirs, Tatars). Often called in English contract servitors, these troops did not enjoy tax privileges or the right to own land or peasants. They straddled urban and rural society. Some, such as

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38On the absence of class tension within the metropolitan or Moscow-based elite, see Zimin, "O politicheskikh predposylkah," pp. 21–27; V. B. Kobrin, *Vlast' i sobstvennost',* chaps. 3, 6; Pavlov, *Gosudarev dvor*.

regiments of Cossacks, tended farm plots to supplement income; others lived off the revenues of artisanal work in the off-campaign season. These new communities created social diversity, especially on the frontiers, that blurred the more rigid social distinctions maintained in the Center.

While Muscovy aggressively cultivated its metropolitan and provincial cavalry elite as a means of expanding its military forces and of mobilizing peasant labor, it left a wide range of administrative activity in the hands of communities themselves. In towns, for example, the state cultivated a small elite of merchants (gosti), who served as the grand prince’s factors, overseeing international trade, collecting tolls and revenues from state monopolies, and the like. They enjoyed tax and land privileges similar to the highest elite. Muscovy’s urban artisans and small merchants, however, paid taxes and suffered competition from the artisans and tradesmen of landlords and ecclesiastical institutions such as monasteries who enjoyed tax immunities. Towns enjoyed limited self-government through communes (posady), which oversaw day-to-day governance and constituted a liaison with the grand prince’s governor.40

Communal organization similarly provided the backbone of day-to-day administration among the peasants, whether in the far North where peasant volosti persisted or on landlords’ properties. Landlords often governed through peasant communes and their boards of elders, with only the wealthiest among them employing bailiffs. Peasant communes had oversight in day-to-day issues of law and order, cooperative agrarian endeavors, and tax collection.41 At the level of individuals, a wide degree of authority was left to landlords, family patriarchs, communal elders, and the church. Family patriarchs exerted authority over households of slaves, serfs, women, children, and other dependents; social welfare was left to families, neighbors, communes, landlords, parishes, monasteries, and the religious hierarchy. The Orthodox Church itself constituted a nexus of diffused power. It wielded extensive authority as a landlord over its peasant villages and urban settlements, and it acted as the societal arbiter of cultural expression, promoting a theocratic, patriarchal, and hierarchic view of society and state that complemented the ruler’s assertions of autocracy. By age-old statutes and tradition, the Orthodox Church, with its law codes derived from Byzantium, had jurisdiction over all the Muscovite Orthodox pop-
ulace in crimes declared church related and nearly total jurisdiction, save for the highest crimes, for individuals living on its lands. Thus the picture is of a centralized state mobilizing only a narrow range of essential resources and services, devolving administrative authority or tolerating local autonomies as expedient. The same situation of calculated decentralization is evident in legal practice.

In legal reform, for example, Muscovite rulers moved toward standardization by issuing two law codes (1497, 1550) that served as judge’s handbooks, sketching out procedure, court fees, and laws on particular issues. At the same time, however, other codes served different purposes or communities. Church courts used ecclesiastical law codes, portions of which dated back to Kiev Rus’. The Russkaiia pravda, a compendium of East Slavic customary law dating from the Kievan era, continued to circulate in Muscovite lands, presumably for village courts (a new redaction was done in the early seventeenth century). In 1589, a version of the 1550 Moscow law code, adapted to the social structure and economic patterns of the North, was compiled but not officially sanctioned; contemporary sources also cite a separate Perm’ law code (Zyrianskii sudebnik). Thus, even Muscovy’s striving toward judicial uniformity was belied by the multiplicity of judicial venues, without, apparently, interfering with its overall project of mobilization. All in all, sixteenth-century governance amounted to a patchwork quilt of forms and practices: peasant communes in the North; corporate estates in the west; iasak-paying tribes and indigenous elites on the Middle Volga and in Siberia; governors presiding over a motley array of Cossacks, musketeers, and siege forces on the steppe frontier; and provincial gentry and boyar elite with their dependent peasants in the Center. The Kremlin maintained its claims to high justice, taxation, and military and diplomatic affairs, and local communities bore the brunt of mundane administration.

All this evidence suggests that the tsars’ claim of autocracy encompassed a remarkably varied political economy. Although this approach was pragmatic and functioned in the sixteenth century, it existed in tension with the state’s continued desire to mobilize resources. The better Moscow’s rulers could knit together their disparate lands, the better they would accomplish their goals. They had a

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43 As difficult as it was when the prevailing orthodoxy exaggerated Muscovy’s centralization, some Soviet scholars tried to argue for the diversity of Muscovy’s governing strategies: Tikhomirov, Rossitva v XVI stoletii; Veselovskii, “Poslednie udely”; Zimin, “Lenin”; idem, “O politicheskikh predposylkah.”
hard row to hoe, however, as they tried to forge even minimal cohesion. Leaving to Chapter 5 a consideration of the strategies of integration that the state employed, one among them being the rhetoric and practice of honor, let us here reflect on what this means for an understanding of Russian autocracy.

The Nature of Autocracy

On one hand, the nature of Muscovite autocracy seems self-evident: It was despotic, nearly totalitarian. Such a conception has a long heritage. Marshall Poe has demonstrated that the trope of Muscovy as a despotic state was imposed by European (English, German) travelers to Muscovy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and grew as much from their local prejudices and classical education as from their familiarity with the practice of Muscovite autocratic power. This view was sustained by nineteenth-century statist scholarship and reinvigorated in the twentieth century because of Cold War tensions between the West and Stalin’s Russia. The most salient feature of this approach is the sharp distinction it draws between Muscovy and Europe, which is idealized as the normative model of development.

This contrast is based by and large on abstract concepts of legality, rather than on an analysis of the practice of autocracy. It emphasizes the inadequacies of Russia’s juridical development in comparison with that of Europe, particularly with regard to the rights of communities and individuals. Muscovy did not share the traditional hallmarks of the European (read French, British, and to some extent, German) path of development: There were no legal limits on the power of the tsar, and Muscovy had no enfranchised corporate bodies or representative institutions of a truly constitutional, parliamentary type. From a juridical point of view, Muscovy did not have feudalism, with its implicit guarantees of reciprocal political rights, private property, and sanctity of law. In sum, Muscovy would seem to live up to the interpretation that holds that government was arbitrary, rule uniformly administered, and society disenfranchised and passive.

On the other hand, the above description of Muscovite governance strikes a dissonant chord, inasmuch as it depicts Muscovy in terms that should sound familiar to readers of current early modern European historiography. Simply put, current work on early modern European politics is moving beyond the traditional juridical focus and evolutionary framework to explore the complexities

of the practice of state power. Recent work on early modern absolutism provides a good example. Once seen as a sort of totalizing vehicle for the destruction of feudal classes, absolutism in Europe is now presented as an expedient amalgam of new political claims executed through the co-optation and involvement of traditional elites, corporate institutions, and mind-sets. Historians are focusing on clientelism and patronage and on personal and affective ties, finding them more significant structures of power than the once-assumed categorical shift to rational bureaucracy, "new men," and parliamentary institutions. Microhistorical studies have demonstrated the tremendous diversity that early modern European monarchs presided over, tolerated, and manipulated—diversity in regional customs, in social groups and their legal statuses, in language and confessions, in deviance from official norms, and the like. Such historical work is paralleled by shifts in theory away from totalizing paradigms, especially evolutionary ones, and toward the interplay of people and institutions in the practice of politics.

Regarding the key issue of legality, the early modern European experience is proving more complex than the traditional presumptions of rule by law would indicate. Significantly, a recent study of the phenomenon of aristocracy in European history manages to avoid any mention of juridical privileges, finding the essence of aristocracy in such practices as endogamous marriage patterns, privileged access to resources and political position, distinct patterns of education and culture, and the like; and scholarship since Sir Lewis Namier has exposed the extralegal machinations of politics in early modern parliamentary institutions so central to the older construction of a normative European path. Mark Kishlansky, for example, argues that parliamentary elections in England through the midseventeenth century were governed by a principle of "harmonious choice" rather than by "contest" over principle and ideology. Harmonious choice, he argues, "knit the local society together...It was a ritual of

45J. Russell Major traces the demise of the old paradigm and sums up historiography in From Renaissance Monarchy to Absolute Monarchy (Baltimore and London, 1994); he discusses his idea of the early modern "transition from feudalism to clientelism" in "Bastard Feudalism and the Kiss . . .," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 17, no. 3 (1987):509-35.
affirmation that bound the participants to each other and recreated their collective identity."50 As our conceptions of early modern Europe change, with more attention to praxis, Muscovy looks more a part of an early modern European continuum.

Recent scholarship on Muscovy, for example, looks beyond both the traditional equation of autocracy with despotic power and the Soviet Marxist view of the state as the embodiment of dominant class oppression.51 It is less tied to evolutionary schemes of development based on a model of European progress, and explores structures in an "anthropological" manner, to use Peter Burke's phrase.52 And it presents a conception of Russian autocracy that accommodates a dynamic interaction between state and society that cannot be captured in juridical terms alone.

Tension over the nature of Muscovite political power, however, is palpable in the historiography and well exemplified by a debate between Richard Pipes and George Weickhardt.53 Concerning the nature of private property in Muscovite Russia, Pipes argued that because the tsar could in theory always confiscate property (and often did in practice), there was no true private property and no rule by law in premodern Russia. Weickhardt, admitting the tsar's theoretical right to confiscate, pointed out that rulers did so relatively rarely and argued that confiscations were limited by law to allegations of treason, that the day-to-day practice of landholding indicated de facto private ownership, and that judicial practice demonstrated predictability and consistency. Weickhardt's argument is reminiscent of Richard Hellie's stance. Ordinarily no friend to the Muscovite centralized state (in much of his work Hellie has emphasized the slavery of the people and the "hypertrophy" of state power), he nevertheless avers that Muscovy possessed "a high degree of 'legality'": "While law and autocracy may diverge in theory, the law seems to have been applied properly most of the time. . . . [E]arly modern Russian authorities achieved explicit


51Soviet historians did not take the European Marxist turn toward a Gramscian appreciation of cultural hegemony and a more complex model of causation (despite some parallel experimentation in the 1960s; see essays collected in Samuel H. Baron and Nancy W. Heer, eds., *Windows on the Russian Past: Essays on Soviet Historiography since Stalin* [Columbus, Ohio, 1977]). Nor did it take an Annales-type move toward material and social history grounded in a nonevolutionary scheme of historical change. On recent trends, see Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces*; Stevens, *Soldiers on the Steppe*; Davies, *State Power*; Michels, "The Violent Old Belief."

52Peter Burke distinguishes social history from historical anthropology by the latter's lesser emphasis on change over time: *Historical Anthropology*, chap. 1.

and noncontradictory rules that were publicized, made available, and administered as decreed.54 Ultimately, Pipes’ and Weickhardt’s stances may be irreconcilable, because they are based on different visions of the role of law in a putative European historical path.

The stakes in such debates are high because of their presentist implications. For those who see autocracy as despotism, Russia’s future today is doomed, because it lacks essential legal preconditions for modern liberal development. For those who see autocracy as less powerful in practice than in claim, Russia’s future potential is less gloomy, because its history provides evidence of agency and voluntarism. The prognosis is somewhere in between. Undoubtedly Russia still needs to confront its historical legacies of serfdom, weak urban development, and minimal education and literacy, which disadvantage it in the “European” comparison. It might be argued, however, that the absence of legal charters and corporate estates is not a categorical obstacle toward progress. Although prediction is not our task here, it is safe to say that these presentist debates provide perhaps the deepest level of significance of this research on honor. It is my goal here to stimulate rethinking of the nature of power in Russian history by exploring the practice of honor, a practice that contrasts the rhetoric of authority with the negotiation of those discourses and that sees state power as comprised in large part by the actions of individuals and social communities performing as knowledgeable actors within received political institutions.

Sources

Source materials on honor in early modern Russia are relatively scarce; particularly lacking are narrative discussions of honor and the “honorable man” comparable to the extensive early modern European literature on these themes. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and France, for example, humanist debates recast the concept of honor away from the medieval emphasis on birth and military valor toward a new focus on religious piety and civic virtue. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy, a broad literature explored the intricacies of honor and insult (the “point of honor”) and the proper execution of the duel.55 Across Europe, handbooks for the aspiring nobleman dictated standards of civility and politesse that became the hallmarks of elite “men of honor.”


Muscovy was not a society with a habit for such learned discourse. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the rural population was primarily illiterate; the very small merchant and artisan classes displayed limited, functional literacy only. The cavalry elite similarly focused on military valor and religious piety, but did not engage in literary life. Even among the boyars, literacy was virtually unknown until the mid- to late seventeenth century. Pockets of literacy existed among monks and church hierarchs, but not among parish clergy. Outside of church and monastic scriptoria, the greatest concentration of literacy was in the Kremlin ministries, where secretaries and undersecretaries (d’iaki and pod’iachie) possessed secular (Russian chancery language)—not learned (Slavonic)—literacy and did not apply their knowledge to nonbureaucratic genres until the midseventeenth century. Most important, Muscovy lacked professions: There were no lawyers, no universities or seminaries, almost no secondary schools, and no traditions of learned country gentlemen. Printing got under way, under church supervision, in the 1620s and focused primarily on ecclesiastical works. Thus, although honor was palpable to Muscovites, there was little social or institutional support for narrative reflection on it.

Some reflections on honor did appear in the church’s moralistic and penitential texts, but by and large clerics devoted themselves to different genres and concerns: combating heresy in disquisitions; tracing the Russian past as a strand in the ongoing chronicle of universal Christendom in annals; developing a quasi-theocratic ideology of church and state in liturgical ritual, art, and court ceremony; and creating pietistic resources in hagiography and homilies. But clerical writers also preached moral behavior in didactic texts, such as the fourteenth-century Emerald and Bee and the later Domostroi, a source that merits particular attention. Produced in the midsixteenth century at either Novgorod or Moscow, the Domostroi shows signs of foreign provenance and Russian reworking. Some of its sixty-plus chapters outline a patriarchal and Orthodox system of values based on deference to God, tsar, family, and father, while others convey practical instruction for household managers—in other words, for women—on such matters as gardening, canning, cooking, and managing household servants. Given the low rate of lay literacy in sixteenth-century Muscovy, it is difficult to see for whom this compendium was useful, and indeed its manuscript history suggests that it circulated among a small

readership of priests, merchants, boyars, and landed provincial gentry.\(^{57}\) The code of values it depicts should be regarded as an idealized one, but as we will see in Chapter 1, it is compatible with the concerns Muscovites expressed when they complained about insults to their honor. Other, more secular primers and handbooks of deportment began to circulate in Russia only in the late seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century in response to the growth of the landed and civil service elite and the ready reception of European culture and social norms.\(^{58}\) Precisely because they represent new systems of values, they do not help in analyzing honor in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Russia.

Foreign travelers' accounts of early modern Russia are seductively attractive with regard to honor and social values. Visitors to Muscovy such as the German diplomat Sigismund von Herberstein, the Elizabethan envoy Giles Fletcher, and the German scholar Adam Olearius, to name a few, were ethnographically inclined to a surprising degree, pausing to describe daily life, dress, marriage customs, and behavior among the elite (Herberstein) and the peasantry (Olearius). But the picture they present is on the whole negative, colored by the common trope that Russia's "nobility" and people were uncultured, servile, and prone to violence, quite the opposite of contemporary European civilization.\(^{59}\) A similarly rich but less tainted source is Grigorii Kotoshikhin's description of Muscovite governmental institutions and practices, written in exile for the Swedish king between 1666 and 1667. This work gives attention to court politics and the household life of the tsar and boyars and is a good source on judicial procedure, including the defense of honor.\(^{60}\)

In the end, however, we are left with legal materials as our primary sources for the study of honor in Muscovy. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, the laws are laconic. They give standards of compensation and punishment for

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insult to honor but do not define honor in either an explicit or theoretical way. Until the nineteenth century, there was no law that specifically addressed defamation by slander or libel. We must turn to court cases to define honor and trace how individuals and communities used it, but these court cases too are problematic.

I have gathered a database of more than one thousand cases of precedence (mestnichestvo), of which some are archival but most published. A few of the precedence cases are mammoth compendia of legal precedents submitted in support of the litigants; most are telegraphically short, noting the names of the litigants and a quick, on-the-spot resolution. By contrast, suits for dishonor (beschest'e) are Rabelaisian in content, reflecting the raucous world of insult and injury in all possible settings. Dishonor suits in Moscow and provincial archives, most of them still unpublished, number into the thousands. I have compiled a database of more than six hundred archival and published beschest'e suits (for more on these sources and the database, see Chapter 1). The typical “case” consists of an initial petition and often a rejoinder by the defendant; some cases include testimony from witnesses. Very few describe full judicial procedure including the verdict: For only slightly more than one-fourth of the suits in the database do we know the resolution. The remaining cases were settled out of court, or their records have been lost to posterity. Thus, dishonor suits are generally fragmentary and brief. There are few full-blown narratives, only fleeting glimpses of the lives of men and women in all of Muscovy’s regions and social statuses. Nevertheless, in the aggregate these suits give a consistent, compelling impression of how honor served Muscovites.

Given the paucity of sources other than litigation, it is not surprising that the historiography on honor in Muscovy is weakly developed. That is not the case for precedence (mestnichestvo), which has merited extensive attention because it represented, in many historians’ views, a struggle between tsar and elite for power. On the theme of dishonor (beschest’e), only a few articles can be found, most of them drawing on published laws and court cases: Nikolai Lange examined standards of punishment in dishonor suits; Serge Levitsky surveyed the law; B. N. Floria analyzed the social hierarchy implicit in dishonor fines; and Horace W. Dewey surveyed the practice of dishonor litigation, linking its emergence in the sixteenth century with Muscovy’s increasing

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social stratification. Two studies survey literate opinion on honor from the Kievan era through the seventeenth century, while a handful of essays trace the evolution of European-influenced laws on defamation in nineteenth-century Russia. This literature does not put forward a comprehensive interpretation about the role of honor and dishonor in Muscovy, nor has it prompted debates about its significance in Russian history.

The absence of narrative disquisitions on honor may be a blessing in disguise; the theories of jurists and philosophers can obscure a messy reality. With our sources primarily judicial, the voices of individuals come through, although of course in the idiom of court practice. Only a diary, memoir, or epistolary source could give us a firmer grasp of how people internalized the concept of honor, but such sources are the exception anywhere in early modern Europe, let alone Muscovy.

Theories of Honor

Before launching into the thick of Muscovite insult and anger, it would help us to reflect in general terms on the meaning of honor in premodern societies. Richard van Dülmen wrote that “in hardly any society does honor play so great a role as in the early modern society of orders.” Indeed, honor was ubiquitous in early modern Europe, and this circumstance immediately sets these societies apart from our own. The sociologist Peter Berger wrote that to us moderns, the concept of honor is hopelessly antiquated: “Honor occupies about the same place in contemporary usage as chastity. An individual asserting it hardly invites admiration, and one who claims to have lost it is an object


64Van Dülmen, Kultur und Alltag 2:194.
of amusement rather than sympathy.” For a modern person, insult is virtually incomprehensible unless it involves material rather than merely psychological damage. But to many premodern people, honor itself was a tangible good. Shakespeare, of course, is an authority: “He that filches from me my good name / Robs me of that which not enriches him, / And makes me poor indeed.” But there is other, more prosaic evidence as well. In 1696, a Yorkshire woman upbraided gossipers for defaming another woman, declaring “they might as well take her life as her good name from her.” And Peter Moogk notes that mid-eighteenth-century French Canadians were observed to be “more keen to acquire high esteem than to amass riches.” Honor was important in premodern terms because it acted as a symbolic language with which to communicate status and identity, as well as a social praxis with which to defend or advance same.

Most fundamentally, honor is a cultural construct that shapes both personal identity and place in community. The sociologist Erving Goffman argued that identity is constructed by inculcation with norms and attitudes that may come to seem natural in a particular group, class, or culture, but, he cautions, that are not really natural at all: “Universal human nature is not a very human thing. By acquiring it, the person becomes a kind of construct, built up not from inner psychic propensities but from moral rules that are impressed upon him from without.” He calls socially constructed identity the “face” a person puts toward the world and argues that “saving face” is crucial to maintaining identity. Goffman points out that if a person is careful to save face “primarily from duty to himself, one speaks in our society of pride; when he does so because of duty to wider social units, and receives support from these units in doing so, one speaks of honor.” In other words, honor is personal identity socially ratified. This inescapable link between personal esteem and public

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approbation puts the symbolic discourse of honor at the heart of understanding a premodern society's social structures and relationships.

Anthropologists have devoted significant attention to honor, followed more recently by historians, many of them cited above. The anthropological study of honor was launched in the 1960s, primarily by scholars of the Mediterranean region. In search of fundamental social values, they put forward the linked concepts of honor and shame. "Honor and shame" societies, they argued, were primarily small-scale agrarian face-to-face (or as one scholar wryly put it, in reference to endemic village squabbles, "back-to-back") communities "where the social personality of the actor is as significant as his office." Such communities tend to have loose social boundaries and to be agonistic or conflict-ridden: "Within the minimal solidary groups of these societies, be they small or large families or clans, spheres of action are well defined, non-overlapping and non-competitive. . . . [But] outside these groups . . . [honor] has to be asserted and vindicated." Honor works, then, as a means to define social insiders and outsiders.

Most noteworthy in the Mediterranean is the central position of women in the social value system. Women held the key to a family's honor because of their sexual power: Promiscuity could disgrace families, whereas modesty reflected well on the family unit. Women were thus expected to cultivate "shame," whereas men's honor was calculated by their success in defending their family's women from insult. Male honor could be enhanced by sexual exploits with other men's women, married or unmarried, actions that created tension in the system. Honor is thus a tangible aspect of a family's resources, "symbolic capital" in Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, and a weapon with which rivalries, ambitions, and all manner of conflict can be played out.

Early modern Muscovy shows great affinities with Mediterranean honor and shame societies, and this anthropological literature is thus all the more apt


69 Revisionist theory centers on Michael Herzfeld's argument that hospitality was a more central ethic in these societies than honor and shame: "'As in Your Own House': Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society," in Gilmore, ed., Honor and Shame, pp. 75–89.

70 Peristiany, "Introduction," in idem, ed., Honour and Shame, p. 11.


for us. Julian Pitt-Rivers pointed out the “complexity” of honor, the fact that it can simultaneously play different roles in society and for individuals. Chronicling some of those significances, from the personal to the social, Pitt-Rivers noted that honor can be a personal calculation of self-esteem; a socially esteemed attribute, such as chastity; an impersonal measure of achievement, such as an office or political precedence; or a means for collective definition of groups, such as families, clans, guilds, or nations. Honor can even be linked with the sacred and with political authority: A person’s true honor can be construed as the essence given to him by God or by the temporal rulers who are God’s worldly delegates. Economic status, gender, social role, and political position all shaped definitions of honor—almost universally, it seems, standards of honorable behavior for women diverged from those for men. In some places and times, honor had a strong corporate character. In early modern Europe, for example, guilds elaborated and assiduously defended a code of artisanal honor quite distinct from honor for noblemen; whole social groups were declared “dishonorable” because their professions were considered unclean (butchers, executioners, and others). European nobilities, as noted above, developed an exclusive code of honor in the early modern period in response to social change. In Muscovy, by contrast, codes of honor made few qualitative distinctions between social groups, perhaps reflecting Muscovy’s absence of corporate bodies and its less complex social stratification.

It is the ambiguity, tension, and necessary dependence between the public and private aspects of honor that make it so socially versatile. Where a society accords a high value to personal honor, the state can wield the discourse of honor in its own interest. As Pitt-Rivers puts it, “transactions of honour . . . not only provide, on the psychological side, a nexus between the ideals of society and their reproduction in the actions of individuals . . . but, on the social side, between the ideal order and the terrestrial order, validating the realities of power and making the sanctified order of precedence correspond to them.” Because identity is grounded in social values, “social integration” is advanced as well as “the legitimation of established power.” In a similar vein, Elvin Hatch argues that people respect honor because they derive satisfaction and self-esteem from internalized social values that simultaneously affirm dominant discourses. 

73 Those working with the Mediterranean “honor and shame” paradigm include Ramon A. Gutierrez, “Marriage, Sex and the Family: Social Change in Colonial New Mexico, 1690–1846,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1980; Patricia Seed, To Love, Honor and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821 (Stanford, 1988); Peter Burke, Historical Anthropology; Thomas Cohen and Elizabeth Cohen, Words and Deeds; Elizabeth Cohen, “Honor and Gender.”


But honor is not merely a static tool of social control. It is also an independent cultural discourse that individuals can manipulate, recreate, and modify for individual or group self-interest. Cultural norms like honor, as Pitt-Rivers wrote, are

a structure of conflicting premises within which the struggle for dominance took place. . . . The achievement of honor was not then simply a refraction or demonstration of the reality of power or precedence, as Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, chapter 10) thought, but also a means of achieving or maintaining them through the control of the definition of honor. 77

Theory on honor pushes us to look at the destabilizing and interactional roles it played. As Elizabeth Cohen noted, “honor with its norms, its rhetoric and its strong emotional charge offered a set of resources for the conduct of interpersonal strife.” 78 It is particularly apt for conflict and conflict resolution because of the complementary behavior patterns it prescribes. Reminding one of Wyatt-Brown’s twofold definition of “primal honor,” Pitt-Rivers speaks of “two opposed—and ultimately complementary—registers” that govern behavior in Western civilization: “the first associated with honor, competition, triumph, the male sex, possession and the profane world, and the other with peace, amity, grace, purity, renunciation, the female sex, dispossession in favor of others, and the sacred.” They are complementary because the person who has won dominance must adopt the opposite virtues to merit honor: generosity, magnanimity, moderation. 79

Theorists often point out that litigation over honor can be the last step in an escalating tension between parties that can then be settled by the cathartic experience of public exposure. Honor gave disputants a symbolic system, ritualistic and ceremonial, with a familiarity to the community that advanced the cause of reconciliation. The execution of a litigation—with public declarations of insult and affront, formulaic and florid language, mediated settlements or sanctions carried out in public—could be a resolving experience. It could also be disruptive, however, if individuals litigated in order to harass. Then artificial delays or continued insults could make it a theater for compounding antagonisms. In either case, the value system and praxis of honor shaped social interaction.

79 Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Postscript: The Place of Grace in Anthropology,” in Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers., eds., *Honor and Grace*, pp. 242–43. Although Pitt-Rivers’s gender associations are stereotypical (the sacred is often a male characteristic, as Valerie Kivelson pointed out to me), the theory of complementary registers is helpful.
Looking at the viewpoint of the insulter rather than that of the offended party, we can see further societal functions for honor. Sensitivity to honor makes insult a potent weapon. In order to avoid the humiliation of actually having to defend one's honor, individuals are more inclined to behave by society's norms. If they overstep such bounds, communities could subject them to humiliation, in charivaris for cuckolded husbands or in gestures, taunts, and defilement of private property for people whose morals were deemed by neighbors to be "loose." Thus, while most of the insults uttered and brought to court in honor cases from England to Muscovy may have been uttered in hot blood in the midst of some drunken or heated dispute, others might represent the moralizing or malicious voice of the community trying to control its members.

At root, then, honor can be seen as one of the means to define and police the boundaries of community. Honor gives community members a discourse—a rhetoric and a cultural practice—with which to shape the way they interact, to identify insiders and outsiders in a community, or to pursue conflict. Other ideas and cultural practices (piety, service, or gender roles, for example) complement and complicate these patterns of interaction. Honor as a discourse reflecting social place is sensitive to social change: Conflicts over honor tend to proliferate when societal verities are at risk, when social mobility, economic change, or religious and ideological debate disrupt conventional assessments of identity and disturb the ordering of traditional communities. Defense of honor, then, becomes a means of shoring up status.

All these social functions and psychological meanings of honor make their appearance in early modern Muscovy. Litigations on insult reveal the social constructs deemed appropriate for the smooth functioning of social interaction and social hierarchy in any given society. They reveal the petty tensions of life in face-to-face communities, from village courtyards to city streets to Kremlin palaces. They show how honor values bolstered the social and political status quo, providing an embodiment of an idealized image of state and society. And they demonstrate in their waxing and waning how Muscovites responded to changes in social structure and moral order as they negotiated the turbulent sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

I explore these various issues by moving from the micro to the macro. Chapter 1 explores the definition of honor in Muscovy, and Chapter 2 links discourse...
with praxis by examining women’s central place in Muscovite concepts of honor. Continuing the synchronic or “anthropological” approach and focusing on the praxis of honor, Chapter 3 uses honor litigation as a case study of Muscovite legal culture. In Chapter 4, I analyze the practice of precedence ranking in the elite based on clan honor (mestnichestvo). Chapter 5 then places honor in the context of the state’s strategies of governance and political integration, devoting particular attention to the rhetoric of autocracy. Chapter 6 assesses change over time, examining the social and political factors that contributed to the abolition of precedence in 1682, with particular attention to the emergence of “absolutist” rhetoric and practices of power. Finally, the Epilogue traces continuities in the social significance of honor into the Imperial period of Russian history.