Institutions and laws to defend personal honor appeared first in Muscovite law codes and practice in the mid-sixteenth century. The timing is no coincidence. The protection of honor in various forms was a response to social tension, and the sixteenth century was a time of intense political and social change. I explore here the social setting in which Muscovite protections of honor emerged on the background of long-standing cultural traditions of honor and then turn to Muscovite definitions of honor in practice.

Social Tensions in Sixteenth-Century Russia

As detailed in the Introduction, the sixteenth century was in many respects the classic century of pre-Petrine Russian history. It was the century when Muscovy leapt into the status of imperial power with aggressive conquests stretching from Belarus' to western Siberia; the century when Moscow created enduring institutions of governance based on a privileged landed military elite; the century when the grand princes officially became “tsars,” claiming the imperial heritage of Byzantium and of the Golden Horde; the century, according to some schemes, when “centralization” was achieved by defeating “remnants of feudal opposition.”¹ However one construes it, the sixteenth century was one of consolidation of power and institution building.

It was, however, also a century of disruption and recasting of communities. Free peasant communes were being transferred to landlords; peasants and towns­men were being recruited into petty gentry, into the contract servitor military units (musketeers, Cossacks, artillery); peasants were being burdened with serving on local tax-collection boards and with other tasks of local government, responsibilities that were generally not welcomed. Local landed elites were being recast with population transfers, new recruitment, new strictures on landholding and inheritance, and new duties presiding over local law and order in the brig­andage reform of the 1530s. The boyar elite doubled in size by the midsixteenth century, with newcomers hailing from both newly arrived princely families and indigenous nonprincely families. Whole new social categories were being created—privileged merchants (gosti, first attested at midcentury), bureaucratic scribes (d'aki and pod'iachie), contract servitors. More and more people were selling themselves into slavery to escape poverty. At the broadest level, the state itself was becoming multiethnic and far more socially diverse with the absorption of non-Slavic lands, although, because colonial policy did not attempt assimila­tion, imperial expansion may not have had any direct impact on the life experience of people in the rest of the realm, except for the highest elites.

These changes were the result of the state’s concerted effort to mobilize its resources in the sixteenth century. It was an intense but not catastrophic process, one that yielded social stress and tension nonetheless. At the same time, however, the state suffered catastrophic disruption that further upset social patterns. Although the hundred years from the mid-1400s to the mid-1500s was a time of economic and demographic growth, the decades from the 1570s through the end of the century witnessed economic devastation from causes natural (famine, epidemic) and political. Ivan IV’s Oprichnina (1564–72) wreaked havoc on gentry and peasants in the Center and the North. The Livonian War (1558–82) decimated populations in the northwest regions (Novgorod, Pskov areas). The state financed its military and bureaucratic expansion throughout the century with predatory taxation that crippled the populace. The result of these various depredations was impoverishment and depopulation; peasants fled the lands northwest of Moscow and some parts of the Center to the various frontiers or to more accommodating owners. Other peasants and poor gentry opted for personal servitude to landlords as one of the few social safety nets available to them. The state responded with limitations on peasant mobility (limitations that proved nearly impossible to enforce) and cadastral recording to bind peasants to their villages; together these strategies paved the way for enserfment. The state also intensified efforts to prevent peasants, townsmen, and poor gentry from becoming slaves voluntarily.2

---
2Jerome Blum, Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1969), chaps. 8, 10, 13, 14; G. V. Abramovich, “Gosudarstvennye povinnosti vladel’ch­eskikh krest’ian severo-zapadnoi Rusi v XVI–pervoi chetverti XVII veka,” Istoriia SSSR 3 (1972):63–84; N. A. Rozhkov, Sel’skoe khoziaistvo Moskovskoi Rusi v XVI veke (Moscow, 1899); Richard Hellie, Slavery in Russia, 1450–1725 (Chicago and London, 1982), pp. 4–18.
The life experience of many Muscovites in the sixteenth century challenged social hierarchy and undermined personal security. Traditional communities were recreating themselves. It was in very similar circumstances of social disruption and increasing social stratification in Elizabethan England that J. A. Sharpe observed a sharp rise in defamation suits, and Muscovite concerns about honor also erupted in sixteenth-century conditions. Later a resurgence of suits over honor in the last decades of the seventeenth century can be observed, when social categories again were in flux (see Epilogue). In such circumstances, honor was used as a response to social tensions from the bottom of society up and from the state down.

It was as a very practical mechanism to cope with new configurations at court, in villages, and on the frontier that honor was deployed. People did not respond to disruption with works of narrative literature pondering social change and its causes or with reflections on social structure that were comparable to medieval European essays on the "great chain of being" or early modern disquisitions on civility and honor. Rather, the state responded with the opportunity to litigate and with laconic law codes that listed scales of recompense for insult to honor. For the state, honor was a mechanism for building social stability; for individuals, it was a way to reinforce social status when communities were changing all around. Thus Muscovy's juridical institutions to defend honor can be seen as offspring of change. They were grounded, however, in East Slavic tradition and derived their strength from that link with the past.

Honor before Muscovy

Judging by the evidence of the earliest legal sources, a consciousness of personal dignity that could be publicly defended had long existed among the East Slavs. Legal sources of the eleventh to fifteenth centuries protected personal dignity, although they do not use the Muscovite-era term for "honor" (chest').

---


By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia

in the pre-Muscovite period, that term was associated with military glory or with the godliness attributed to saints and heavenly figures. The short and expanded redactions of the Russian Law (Russkaia pravda) are replete with references to offenses to personal honor, which are often (but not consistently) termed injury (obida) or disgrace (sram, sorom, sramota). The short redaction of the Russian Law reflects legal norms of the eleventh century, whereas the expanded redaction represents norms of earlier generations compiled by the thirteenth century and remaining in effect in the later Rus’ and Muscovite lands well into the sixteenth century. In the sixteenth century, the Russian Law was edited again, indicating that this collection of East Slavic customary law complemented the mainly procedural Muscovite law codes of 1497 and 1550 and was still in use.

In the Russian Law, humiliating actions were singled out for punishment. In the short redaction alone, several such affronts are identified, some not even called “injury” (obida): a blow of a sheathed sword or hilt of a sword (art. 4); striking with an object or back of a hand (art. 3); cutting off a mustache or beard (art. 8); threat with a sword (art. 9); a slave striking a free man (art. 17); and pushing and shoving that does not result in serious bodily harm (art. 10). Those labeled “injury” suggest affront to dignity as well as physical damage: bloody or bruising assault (art. 2); severed finger (art. 7); theft of a slave, horse, weapon, hunting dog or bird, clothing (arts. 13, 29, 37); failure to repay a debt (art. 15). In some of these cases, the fine mandated compensation over and above restitution; in others, a humiliating assault was compensated more than a less-humiliating blow (four times the fine for a blow from the back of the

---


6L. A. Chernaia, “‘Chest’: Predstavleniia o chesti i beschestii v russkoi literature XI–XVIII vv.,” in A. S. Demin, ed., Dreverusskaia literatura. Izobrazhenie obschestva (Moscow, 1991), pp. 56–84; on godliness, see pp. 56–57. Chernaia proposes a three-stage evolution of honor, from honor based in family (in the Kievan era), to honor associated with service rank (in the Muscovite period), to the beginnings of an assertion of honor as dignity and worth separate from worldly rank and heritage (in the Petrine period). The scheme is too categorical for the Muscovite period, inasmuch as litigation over precedence and dishonor rely on criteria of both family and rank, and because the scheme masks the intensely personal commitment individuals felt to their honor even if it were based in family, rank, and external marks of status.


hand, as opposed to a bloodying assault). The expanded redaction repeats many of these clauses, although it less often awarded supplemental compensation and added compensation to the grand-princely court. Still, the Expanded Russian Law maintained the short redaction’s protections against humiliating affronts and injuries. Interestingly, neither code cites verbal insult specifically but concentrates on actions detrimental to dignity.

The concept of dignity evinced in Kievan law codes was socially inclusive; the codes used subjects such as “men” (muzhi) or “whosoever” (kto kogo). A few social distinctions are evident: In the Expanded Russian Law, for example, a higher bloodwite (a monetary compensation to kinsman of a murdered person) for elite men is indicated, but all social groups had the right to avenge murder; also, different compensations were mandated for a peasant and a prince’s official who were unjustly tortured (arts. 1, 19–27, 33). However, the social inclusiveness of clauses reflecting dignity is striking. The expanded redaction, for example, extends the categories of persons protected from humiliating assault beyond the norms of the short redaction to include slaves and indentured servants who suffered at the hands of their masters (arts. 56, 59–62). Other twelfth- and thirteenth-century law codes often use the terminology of “disgrace” or “shame” (sram, sorom, sramota) for affronts to an individual’s decorum, reputation, and status as a free and law-abiding subject, while maintaining social inclusiveness. The Expanded Russian Law uses this term to refer to a freeman’s compensation for the “shame” of being struck by a slave (art. 65). Twelfth- and thirteenth-century Novgorod and Smolensk trade treaties consider false arrest “shameful.” These treaties and a church legal statute label as “disgrace” such offenses against women as impugning a woman’s reputation and hitting a woman not one’s wife, uncovering a woman’s hair (as insulting as damaging a man’s beard in Russian Orthodox custom), and sexual offenses such as adultery. Parallelizing later Muscovite practice, these provisions support social breadth even while respecting social hierarchy; compensation for rape, for example, was usually calculated according to social status.

Later legal sources from Novgorod, the church, and fifteenth-century Muscovy continue the defense of personal dignity. Laws protected individuals from such insults as the assault of a pregnant woman, the beating of a slave (whereupon he or she should be freed), a woman fighting or striking

her husband, and the uncovering of a woman's hair or the cutting of a man's mustache or beard. Threat of harm and false arrest continued to be compensated. Verbal insult and solicitude to reputation also occur in ecclesiastical and secular law codes: An early church statute claimed church jurisdiction over verbal insult, and another guaranteed compensation to women called whores. Another ecclesiastical code condemned false accusation. Novgorod secular and ecclesiastical judicial charters protected the reputation of court officials and litigants from slander.

Clearly legal sources—secular and ecclesiastical—of Kiev Rus', the towns of the northwest, and the principalities of the northeast through the fifteenth century evinced a concern for humiliation as well as injury in their concept of crime. They do not generalize a practice of redress for insult, either in terminology or legal definition, as consistently as did the Muscovite state in the sixteenth century. But by the fifteenth century, legal codes planted the seed of Muscovite practices by adopting a consistent terminology for dishonor based on the root word "chest" ("honor"); thus "beschest'e" or "dishonor") and linked it more and more to issues of reputation. A very early usage of "dishonor" is in a midfourteenth-century manuscript of an ecclesiastical code, the Court Law for the People, where quarreling is labeled "dishonor" (beschest'e). Other usages date to the fifteenth century: In reworkings of the Russian Law, dishonor is associated with physical assault, although in an ecclesiastical code of that century, the Pravosudie metropolichie, dishonor involves reputation ("dishonor" payment is given to a tavern owner in whose establishment a murder was committed). The Pravosudie metropolichie and a fifteenth-century reworking of the Expanded Russian Law also list compensation for "dishonor" to various secular and ecclesiastical officials without defining dishonor. When early Muscovite sources use the term

15 Verbal insult: RZ 1:140, art. 9. Insult to women: RZ 1:169, art. 25.
17 Sreznevskii lists relatively few uses of the word "dishonor" (beschest'e) in fourteenth-century sources; it was mainly used in a religious meaning: Materialy 1: cols. 81–82. Later uses in Muscovite sources are frequent and reflect the meaning here described: SRIa 1 (1975):179–80.
18 Zakon sudnyi, p. 42.
“dishonor,” it was similarly associated with verbal insult (as discussed below, in the section Muscovite Honor in Law and Litigation).

Thus pre-Muscovite legal sources reflect a societal respect for dignity, personal inviolability, and reputation. The interest of the law would seem to be to avoid violence, to maintain standards of decorum and gender roles, to protect family by punishing sexual promiscuity, and to uphold a person’s good name in the community. For the individual, honor would seem to reside in honest living, sexual probity, restraint of emotions, peaceableness, and respect for social hierarchy and office. Narrative sources on honor in the pre-Muscovite and Muscovite periods suggest similar social values. If the Russian Law and subsequent legal codes defined personal dignity negatively, by identifying behavior to be avoided, we can look to prescriptive handbooks and other didactic literature such as panegyrics, hagiography, and penitentials (handbooks for clergy on the conduct of confession and penance for various sins) for a positive evaluation of those social values that made up what later came to be called “honor.” Here the picture is skewed somewhat by the fact that such sources emanated from the church and prescribed perhaps an extreme code of behavior. George Fedotov, for example, remarks on the irrelevance, even the detrimental effect, of imposing an ascetic ideal on the laity. Nevertheless, these works establish a prescribed ideal that was reflected to a great degree in Muscovite-era litigation.

One primary handbook of moral behavior—the Izmaragd or Emerald—circulated in the Rus’ lands in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; in the sixteenth century, the Domostroi was compiled. These handbooks do not present themselves as defining the “honorable man”; the Emerald fits the genre of Orthodox pietistic “admonition,” and the Domostroi is in many ways a typical early modern handbook of domestic management. The one is more pietistic, the other more practical. But both present similar codes of values based in ascetic, Orthodox ideals and can be used to surmise the society’s implicit standards of honor. The handbooks put religious virtues first: piety, devotion to God’s word in scripture, and charity to the poor. As for worldly behavior, they stress the cultivation of inner meekness, from which stems a number of other virtues—obedience, silence, sexual probity.

Meekness and humility (smirenie) appear as high attributes in handbooks and other sources, such as panegyrics and hagiography. The saintly ideal, even for laymen, was the ascetic monk, but even princes were praised for meekness.

By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia

Prince Andrei Bogoliubskii is thus hailed: “He was meek (smiren) and humble and simple in his wisdom and quiet and kind and loving and merciful.” Handbooks preached the cultivation of self-effacing virtues: “that fear which the angels have, humility and submission, meekness, mildness, soberness, obedience, attention.” The Domostroi also accentuated meekness and subservience in its admonition to patriarchs “not to steal, live dissolutely, lie, slander, envy, offend, accuse falsely, quarrel with others, condemn, carouse, mock, remember evil, or be angry with anyone.” Forgiveness, kindness, Christian charity, and peacefulness assure moral perfection.

To achieve these lofty goals of deportment, obedience is to be cultivated. The Emerald declares, “Obedience is king over all good works and all virtues. Fasting leads up to the doors; alms, to heaven; charity and peace, to the throne of God, but obedience will put you at the right hand of God.” Obedience begins with filial piety; children must respect parents, and parents must instill in them such subservience. The Domostroi warns that if children are allowed to grow up lazy, disobedient, and undisciplined, parents’ reputation will suffer: “Your house will be dishonored, your good name destroyed. You will be reproached by your neighbors, ridiculed by your enemies.” In turn, silence or prayer will help ensure honorable conduct.

Silence and prayer protect the pious from the temptations of sin that come from loose talk. The Domostroi enjoins:

> While working, engage in prayer or devout conversation or remain silent. If any work is begun with an idle or wicked word, with complaints or jokes, with blasphemy or filthy speech, from such work and from such conversations God’s mercy departs. . . . Thoughtless Christians thus invite into their minds devils, who put into their minds evil, enmity, and hate. These demons arouse the Christians’ thoughts to lust, anger, blasphemy, foul speech, and every sort of evil.

> For women in particular, obedience and silence were cardinal virtues. The Emerald declares: “Listen, O wives, to the precept of God and learn to obey your husbands in silence.” The Domostroi repeats the sentiment: “Every day a wife should consult with her husband and should ask his advice on every matter. She should remember what he requires of her.” Women should avoid oppor-

---


tunities to gossip and slander: “With her servants the mistress should never engage in idle talk or mocking speech. She should not invite market women, idle wenches, or sorcerers of any sort to the house. . . . A good woman monitors herself. . . . She refuses to listen to or to indulge in bad, mocking, or lecherous speech. . . . She should not gossip about anyone. . . . The husband and wife should never listen to gossip or believe a tale without direct evidence.”

Penitentials also resonate this theme with persistent attention to sins of slander and lying. Implicit here is a link between deportment and social stability: Loose talk is to be avoided because it invites sin and gossip and because it creates rumors and suspicions that can ruin another’s reputation or set in motion angry rivalries.

Tranquillity in communities was a high virtue, particularly for the sixteenth-century Domostroi, perhaps reflecting the added challenges of collective life in a time of change. The Domostroi enjoins the good Christian to treat his neighbors with charity:

Anyone who is good, whether he lives in a village or a town, is neighborly. He exacts reasonable rents and dues from his peasants, whether for the government or for his own chancery, at the proper time; he does not use force, robbery, or torture. . . . Merchants, master-craftsmen, and small landowners should likewise be straightforward and devout as they pursue trade, engage in crafts, or till the soil. They should not steal, rob, pillage, slander others, tell lies, curse, engage in duplicity or sharp trading practices. They should trade, work their crafts, or raise grain by means of their own honest strength.

The Domostroi also endorses social hierarchy: Each man should excel at his station in life, aspiring no higher than God had ordained for him. “Someone . . . who imitates other people, living beyond his means by borrowing or acquiring ill-gotten gains, will find his honor turn to great dishonor. Such a person will find himself subject to ridicule and scorn. . . . For every person must flee vainglory, flattery and ill-gotten gains and live according to his means.”

In addition to these prescriptions for conduct supportive of the social status quo, didactic literature prescribed another instrument of social stability: sexual probity. Eve Levin has argued that Orthodoxy among the East Slavs dwelled on sexual sin more than did Latin Catholic Christianity precisely because of a concern for the social disruption of promiscuity. Orthodox teaching on the topic was thereby tortured. Chastity was held up as a universal ideal; the necessity of

27 Pouncy, Domostroi, pp. 131–32, 139.
29 Pouncy, Domostroi, pp. 121–123.
procreative sex within marriage was only grudgingly accepted and generally dis­
couraged, and all other sexual behavior was roundly condemned. Thus there are the frequent occasions of praise of people who, though married, live with spouses without blemish of sexual misbehavior, even without conjugal relations. Dmitrii Donskoi is praised because "before marriage he preserved his body in chastity . . . and after his wedding he also kept his body chaste, without sin. . . . He lived with his Princess Avdotiia twenty-two years in chastity and had with her sons and daughters and raised them in piety." Iuliana Lazarevskaia is praised for abstaining from conjugal relations: "Then she begged her husband to allow her to join a convent. He did not let her do so, but they agreed to live together without sexual relations."

Interestingly, moralistic handbooks do not devote extensive attention to sexual conduct, other than warning parents to preserve sons' and especially daughters' chastity: "Fathers must guard and protect their children, keeping them chaste and free from every sin, just as the eyelid guards the pupil and as though these were their own souls." Penitentials, however, put in first place a range of queries regarding sexual sins, dwarfing by comparison the emphasis they put on transgressions such as theft, assault, murder, slander, and child neglect, which were perhaps regarded as less frequent or less socially disruptive. Hagiography and panegyrics to grand princes similarly stress chastity, purity, and avoidance of all bodily passions. St. Sergii, for example, is praised: "And always in every way he deprived his body and withered away his flesh and preserved his cleanliness of body and soul without sullying it." In the next chapter, I further pursue the link between sexuality, women's honor, and social stability.

The Domostroi's quotation of a classic Byzantine "admonition to the young" would seem to sum up expectations for virtuous behavior for all, not just the young, judging by themes seen in law codes, didactic literature, and, as we see later in this chapter, litigation:

Be pure in your soul and free from the passions of the body. Have a short stride, a quiet voice, and a pious word. Be moderate with food and drink, silent before your elders, obedient to those wiser than you. Be submissive to your superiors and genuinely loving to those equal to or below you. Separate yourself from all evil and carnal things. Say little, think much. Do not cut people down with words or indulge in idle conversation. Do not be impudent; blush with shame.

---

33Pouncy, Domostroi, p. 93.
34Tainaia ispoved, pp. 145, 159–62 and passim.
36Pouncy, Domostroi, p. 98.
It would seem that ideally, honor is to be had in decorous behavior, piety, meekness, the absence of violence, and respect for family and community. What it meant to merit honor did not vary greatly from pre-Muscovite to Muscovite places and times; what changed was the public place of honor. Until the sixteenth century, law codes had not standardized the concept, nor are litigations known before Muscovy. One Novgorod birch-bark document—in which a woman complained that she and her daughter were defamed with sexual slander—suggests that in this urban republic, litigation was possible. But the Muscovite state took an active role in resolving conflicts over honor and insult and focused the meaning of “dishonor” (beschest’ë) on reputation—that is, on verbal insult—even more than on humiliating assault. Those words and deeds that people considered humiliating amounted to a paradigm of the honorable individual that paralleled the prescriptions of law codes and handbooks from the Kiev era to the sixteenth century.

Muscovite Honor in Law and Litigation

As in pre-Muscovite Rus’, no Muscovite source spelled out a systematic definition of “honor.” It is as if defining honor were unnecessary, because standards of proper behavior were common knowledge. In this, Muscovy differs from its early modern European counterparts. In the medieval Latin West, church law generally covered jurisdiction over insult, based on the theory that publicly uttered insult undermined the harmony of a Christian community and interfered with the church’s enforcement of Christian morals. Over time, canon law established parameters for insulting word and deed. By the sixteenth century, civil courts in England, France, Spain, and elsewhere were also claiming jurisdiction over insult; they based their claim on the heritage of Roman law and drew on its concept of injuria.
In principle, Muscovy also had access to classical concepts of defamation: Justinian's Digest (mid-sixth century) devotes a chapter to injuria, and later Byzantine compilations of Justinian civil law, such as the Ecloga (726) and the Procheiros nomos (870s), found their way to Muscovy in Slavic translations of the Byzantine Nomokanon (Kormčaja kniga). But these particular aspects of the Nomokanon were not used; Muscovite secular law was not modeled on either Byzantine canon or lay law, nor did Muscovites emulate the Byzantine penchant for jurisprudence. Muscovite secular law was practical and laconic. This is not to say, however, that Muscovites had no sensitivity to defamation. As Pollock and Maitland put it so quaintly a hundred years ago concerning medieval England: "Nothing could be less true than that our ancestors in the days of their barbarism could only feel blows and treated hard words as of no account." Like medieval Englishmen, Muscovites vigorously sued and won protection from insult, both verbal and physical. Their indifference to theoretical consideration of defamation bespeaks Russia's limited development of the Byzantine legal heritage rather than indifference to the principle involved.

Although no Muscovite law paused to define what constituted verbal insult or humiliating act, from references scattered throughout law codes we can extrapolate a good sense of what honor meant and test it against people's concerns expressed in litigation. Early law codes raise the issues of verbal insult and respect for high status. The Dvina Charter of 1397–98 stated: "Whoever insults a boyar verbally or beats him bloodied, or bruises him, should be sentenced by the governor to pay dishonor according to the family heritage [of the injured party]." Although the 1497 law code (Sudebnik) does not use the term "dishonor," it provides sanctions for "verbal insult" (lai). The 1550 law code begins the specific treatment of "dishonor" with a clause defining recompense for insult, but it does not suggest what dishonor is. For Muscovites, insult was primarily a verbal offense: Various terms for verbal insult (lai, bran', neprigozhie slova, nepristoinye slova) are trademarks of dishonor suits. For what those insulting words were, we have to rely on litigation. First, though, we can extrapolate from law codes—starting in 1550 through the seventeenth century—several other aspects of the meaning and use of honor in Muscovy.

43Dvina Charter: RZ 2:181, art. 2. 1497 law code: RZ 2:61, art. 53; the article is repeated in the 1550 law code: RZ 2:102, art. 31.
Legislation was concerned with defending personal dignity from verbal abuse and humiliating assault. As a rule, laws distinguished between dishonor (*bezchest'e*) and physical injury (*uvech'e*) and did not consider most assault dishonoring. But certain types of physical assault were deemed humiliating, particularly those related to sexual infractions and reputation: Rape was harshly punished, and assault on a woman, especially if she were pregnant, was compensated with prison and twofold dishonor fines. False accusations of illegitimate birth were also dishonoring. Echoing the Russian Law and appanage-era legislation, litigation also shows that affronts to personal decorum such as pulling a woman's braid or knocking off her hat were dishonoring (just as pulling a man's beard or ripping his clothing was considered an insult).

Legislation used the concept of honor to promote peace in communities, resonating with the handbooks' concern over neighborliness and social order. By law, assaults on a house insulted the owner; conversely, a host's physically abusing his invited guests was a dishonor to them. It was considered dishonoring to be bitten by another man or attacked by dogs.

In addition, laws used honor in a variety of ways that simultaneously defended reputation and curbed judicial abuses. From the 1550s on, for example, victims of insults to reputation—such as rendering a false judgment, giving false testimony, making a false arrest, submitting a false accusation to a court, planting evidence, or writing a false loan document on someone—were compensated for "dishonor." Disrespect to the officers of the state was similarly dishonoring.

---

44 On *uvech'e* and *bezchest'e* distinguished in law codes, see 1550 law code: RZ 2:101, art. 26; 1589 law code: PRP 4:421, art. 73; 1649 law code: RZ 3: chap. 1, art. 5, p. 85; chap. 3, art. 5, p. 90; chap. 10, art. 106, p. 113; art. 136, p. 121; art. 142, p. 123; arts. 162–63, pp. 128–29; art. 199, p. 134; art. 281, p. 150; chap. 21, art. 88, p. 245; chap. 22, arts. 11, 17, p. 249.


to individual and tsar. Assaulting a serviceman in a military encampment was a dishonor to him; intentional misspelling in a document or improperly using someone’s name or rank in direct address denigrated a person’s social rank; assaulting a bailiff as he served papers was dishonor to him and to the tsar’s administration as represented by the document. Other laws specifically upheld the orderly working of the judicial system. To employ a mediator and then not abide by his resolution was punished as a dishonor to him; quarreling in a courtroom before judges was punished with a twofold dishonor fine. Taking the law into your own hands also called forth punishment as well as bringing dishonor to the victim. Torturing a thief instead of turning him in to authorities, for example, was a dishonor to him. Finally, a wide range of “dishonors” involved insult to the church or to the tsar and his representations. They included such offenses as quarreling in a church or in the tsar’s chambers or insulting a judge. Often these offenses that affected state institutions as well as individuals were punished with at least a twofold dishonor fine, as well as with any appropriate compensation, to underscore their seriousness. So, laws show us the ways in which the courts used the concept of honor. They protected individuals from insult to reputation and at the same time discouraged petty violence and disorder in communities; they defended home and neighborhood from violence; they discouraged abuse of the judicial system; and they inculcated respect for the tsar, his representatives, and institutions.

Litigation reveals the spicy details of what Muscovites really said when they insulted one another. I have gathered a database of more than six hundred partial and complete litigations over honor, of which more than half are archival and the rest published. The collection seems to represent the chronological, geographical, and thematic breadth of the concept and practice. The litigations stem from some of the many institutions with judicial authority in early modern Russia. Functions like adjudication, tax collection, and military recruitment were generally not connected in a hierarchy of central and local offices. A few chanceries were established by the seventeenth century with primary responsibility for litigation involving the landed elite (the Moscow and Vladimir Judicial Chanceries), but other offices also handled suits for these

51 For further details, see my “Honor and Dishonor in Early Modern Russia,” Forschungen 46 (1992):131–46.
ranks as well as for other social categories. Judicial authority over the city of Moscow was given to the “Land” Chancery (Zemskii prikaz), for example, while the Foreign Affairs Chancery had jurisdiction over much of the North and over some non-Russian groups on the western and steppe frontiers. At the same time, local governors in the Center, Siberia, and the steppe frontiers had broad judicial authority over all social ranks; in the North, communal institutions and even ecclesiastical offices could serve as courts. Furthermore, landlords had judicial authority over their dependent peasantry, as did the church over its clerics, monks, nuns, and secular dependents. Thus, surviving records on dishonor litigation are scattered in many archives because of their various institutional provenances.

The database for the present study represents a broad range of the possible sources of adjudication on dishonor. Approximately half (378) of its 632 cases are held in the archive of the Military Service Chancery (Razriadnyi prikaz), but because records from many different chanceries fell into that repository over time, it is a varied resource. The rest of the database comes from various secular and ecclesiastical juridical institutions.

The collection has considerable social and geographical diversity. It gives pride of place to military servitors, but urban people, ecclesiastical officials and their dependents, peasants, and slaves are also represented. Geographically, it contains numerous cases from all of Muscovy’s several regions: the Center, the Novgorod lands, the western and steppe frontiers, the North (the Dvina, Perm’, and Viatka lands), and Siberia, with the Center and steppe frontiers somewhat predominating.

52 Judicial authority over the city of Moscow was given to the “Land” Chancery (Zemskii prikaz), for example, while the Foreign Affairs Chancery had jurisdiction over much of the North and over some non-Russian groups on the western and steppe frontiers. At the same time, local governors in the Center, Siberia, and the steppe frontiers had broad judicial authority over all social ranks; in the North, communal institutions and even ecclesiastical offices could serve as courts. Furthermore, landlords had judicial authority over their dependent peasantry, as did the church over its clerics, monks, nuns, and secular dependents. Thus, surviving records on dishonor litigation are scattered in many archives because of their various institutional provenances.

The database for the present study represents a broad range of the possible sources of adjudication on dishonor. Approximately half (378) of its 632 cases are held in the archive of the Military Service Chancery (Razriadnyi prikaz), but because records from many different chanceries fell into that repository over time, it is a varied resource. The rest of the database comes from various secular and ecclesiastical juridical institutions.

The collection has considerable social and geographical diversity. It gives pride of place to military servitors, but urban people, ecclesiastical officials and their dependents, peasants, and slaves are also represented. Geographically, it contains numerous cases from all of Muscovy’s several regions: the Center, the Novgorod lands, the western and steppe frontiers, the North (the Dvina, Perm’, and Viatka lands), and Siberia, with the Center and steppe frontiers somewhat predominating.


54 These include the State Armory (some published in Moskovskaiia delovaia i bytovaia pis’memnost’ XVII veka [Moscow, 1968], and Pamiatniki delovoi pis’memnosti XVII veka. Vladimirskii krai [Moscow, 1984]); local governors’ courts in the Vladimir (Pamiatniki delovoi), Perm’ (Titov, Kungurskie akt), the Northern Dvina, and Sol’ Vychegodsk areas (Russkaia istoricheskaia biblioteka [RIB], 39 vols. [St. Petersburg and Leningrad, 1872–1929], vol. 12 [1890], and vol. 14 [1894]); the courts of the Metropolitan of Rostov Velikii (Pamiatnikipis’memnosti v muzeiakh Volgodskoi oblasti. Katalog-putevoditel’, 5 vols. in 11 pts. [Vologda, 1982–89]) and of the cathedral church of Ustiug Velikii (RIB 25 [1908]); and monasteries and churches in Novgorod, Astrakhan’, Nizhni Novgorod, and elsewhere (RIB 2 [1875]).

55 Only 130 cases involved litigants of whom neither were in military service; in another 71 cases, a nonmilitary person was involved with a military man, leaving 431 suits between military men of various ranks.
The collection has a broad chronological range, but only a handful of such litigations survive for the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; they increase steadily through the seventeenth century. This pattern is attested not only in this relatively small database, but also in the approximately two thousand dishonor cases recorded in the published description of the Military Service Chancery archive. In both my database and the archive, the number of dishonor suits increased dramatically from the 1670s through the 1690s, reflecting the tremendous social change of those decades. The decline in the incidence of such suits exhibited by my collection and by the archive after the 1690s is a result of institutional reorganization in the Petrine era, not lack of interest (the Epilogue discusses the continued significance of honor after Peter).

Looking at dishonor as represented in the database in the aggregate, we see that physical assault alone was rarely an occasion for dishonor. It usually accompanied verbal insult. In the 558 cases in which the type of insult can be ascertained, assault was paired with verbal abuse in 189 suits (33%); in only 45 cases, humiliating physical assault alone was dishonoring. In a majority of cases (324), insult was by word alone. Personal reputation was so highly regarded because Muscovite society gave it tangible value, according responsible position in local government to men of known good reputation (the so-called “leading citizens,” liutsbchie or dobrye liudi) and denying trust and honor to “known evil men” (vedomye likbie liudi). By and large, there was a common core of insulting vocabulary, which sketches out what Muscovites considered the honorable person. Although some gender and social class distinctions are evident, they do not constitute separate discourses of honor.

Of highest concern to Muscovites were allegations of unlawful behavior. The most frequent type of insult in the litigations in the database accused men and women of thievery, criminal behavior, flight from military service, and the like. This recalls both the Domostroi’s injunctions not to lie, cheat, or steal.

56 The archival description for the Military Service Chancery is Opisanie dokumentov i bumag, khran v Moskovskom arkhive Ministerstva iustitsii, 21 vols. (1869–1921), vols. 9–20 (1894–1921). The chronological breakdown is the following: in both my database and the archive, fewer than 10 cases per decade from 1500 through 1619; 1620s: 44 cases in the database, 19 in the archive; 1630s: 44 [39]; 1640s: 85 [78]; 1650s: 45 [122]; 1660s: 47 [91]; 1670s: 69 [178]; 1680s: 101 [445]; 1690s: 94 [893]; 1700s: 35 [124]; 1710s: 15 [0]; 1720s: 2 [0].


58 Vor: RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, stb. 138, ll. 331–46 (1638); RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 162, ll. 13–16, 160–65 (1645); stb. 675, ll. 86–93 (1673); stb. 2749, ll. 12–38 (1701). Flight from service: RGADA f. 210, Belgorod stol, stb. 857, ll. 42–60 (1693); RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 2686, ll. 1–14 (1702). Treason: RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 214, ll. 150–52 (1658); stb. 346, ll. 302–4 (1660); stb. 612, ll. 58–80 (1682).
and numerous law codes concerned with false accusation of wrongdoing. Family and family reputation, and the closely related issue of sexual probity, formed the second most sensitive area. Litigation over "mother oaths," over slurs to the reputation of the family, and over accusations of adultery, loose morals, and the like was common. Here the gender difference is pronounced: Although both men and women complained of such insults, the majority of the 207 suits involving women concerned aspersions on their moral character. Filial piety was also demanded of the honorable person. Parents sued children for assault and disrespect, and punishments rendered in such cases were higher than the usual monetary fines. Religious piety was a given: Although it did not arise often in these cases, if a person were accused of lack of Orthodox piety, he or she could sue. Again, we have seen these concerns repeatedly in didactic literature and law codes.

A third common concern was social standing. No matter how lowly in the social hierarchy, Muscovites objected if their social rank were insulted. Boyars declared that their families had never served as provincial gentry, provincial gentrymen bridled at being called musketeers, musketeers rejected the label of taxpaying city person, and even slaves objected to being called field-workers when they worked as their master's bailiffs! A decree even declared that one cannot use the rank of standard bearer (znamenshchik) as a slur. Individuals sued for dishonor whenever their names, families, or ranks were insulted. Litigants protested being called "khudoj kniazhishek" (paltry little princeling), "detishki boiarskie" (little sons of boyars), and "grivnenyi voevodishka" (penny farthing little governor). They also cried foul when it was alleged that they had been beaten for a previous crime, because corporal punishment was in practice reserved for the lowest social groups or for noto-

59Men accused of sodomy and incest: K. P. Pobedonostsev, ed., Istoriko-iuridicheskie akty perekhodnoi epokhi XVII–XVIII vekov (Moscow, 1887), pp. 45–46 (1703); RIB 12, no. 143, cols. 589–95 (1683). Insults to women (also see Chapter 2): RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 139, ll. 473–94 (1635); stb. 192, ll. 143–63 (1649); K. P. Pobedonostsev, Materialy dlia istorii prikaznogo sudoproizvodstva v Rossi (Moscow, 1890), delo 43, p. 98 (1713).

60RZ 3:248 (chap. 22, arts. 4, 5). Examples: RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 384, ll. 163–64 (1667); stb. 2574, ll. 12–17 (1701).

61Interestingly, rarely did people insult others by calling them "heretics" (one instance is Delovaia pis'mennost' Vologodskogo kraia XVII–XVIII vv. [Vologda, 1979], p. 27); they used more generic phrases such as "enemy of God": RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 400, ll. 90–106 (1674); stb. 2686, ll. 1–14 (1702); stb. 1377, ll. 42–46 (1691).

62The outraged slave: AAE 2, no. 142, pp. 257–58.


64A sampling includes RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, stb. 174, ll. 312–15 (1644); stb. 1370, ll. 125, 136–37 (1692); RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 153, ll. 117–25 (1632); stb. 315, ll. 1–34 (1655); stb. 787, ll. 71–79 (1678); Moskovskaiia delovaiia, pt. 2, nos. 32–33, pp. 60–61 (1639); PSZ 1, vol. 3, no. 1460, pp. 149–51 (1693).
rious crimes. Finally, a wide range of miscellaneous taunts and names (e.g., "bald devil," "son of a bitch," "dog," "puppy")—the sort of "fightin' words" that could spark a brawl—could be litigated in court instead of by fisticuffs.

Concerns of status rank, even precedence (*mestnichestvo*), do not constitute separate discourses of honor for separate social groups, as they did in early modern Spain, Germany, and elsewhere. Rather, they are intensifications of values relevant to all. Men as well as women resented sexual slander; taxed people as well as boyars were sensitive about social rank. Nor did Muscovites engage in the rich vocabulary of insulting gesture that medieval Frenchmen or sixteenth-century Italians used, nor indulge in pasquinades, that is, satirical lampoons posted for the world to see. But in content, Muscovy's concept of honor shared much in common with its European contemporaries. Research on several early modern states—England, France and French Canada, Italy, Germany, and Spain—shows women's particular sensitivity to sexual slander. Accusations of criminal behavior similarly topped the list of insults in Elizabethan England, in sixteenth-century Dijon, and in eighteenth-century Paris. A thirteenth-century Spanish law code, the *Partidas*, defined a range of dishonoring words and deeds that paralleled Muscovite concerns: insulting words, blows by stick and stone, and assault on one's personal property or home.

Why Muscovite concepts of honor parallel early modern European concerns is difficult to say. To some extent, one might argue that they are universal human

---

65 The Conciliar Law Code of 1649, for example, mandated that a corrupt official should be beaten for his crime, unless he were "more honorable" (*pochestnee*), in which case he would be imprisoned: chap. 10, art. 20 (RZ 3:105). Examples: RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 729, ll. 118–28 (1676); Pobedonostsev, *Istoriko-iuridicheskie akty*, pp. 41–51 (1705).

66 A sampling includes RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 1064, ll. 10–13 (1687); stb. 558, ll. 453–75 (1644); stb. 787, ll. 71–79 (1678); stb. 177, ll. 56–92 (1649); published almost in full in I. E. Zabelin, *Domashnii byt russkikh tsarei v XVI i XVII st.* Pt. 1, 4th exp. ed. [Moscow, 1918], pp. 373–82; stb. 315, ll. 1–34 (1655); stb. 1013, ll. 22–40 (1669); stb. 153, ll. 117–25 (1632); *Moskovskaia delovaia*, pt. 2, no. 14, p. 52 (1634).


values, but because these concepts are so bound up with defense of socially con­
structed institutions (such as the family and social ranks) or of socially con­
structed gender roles, one should be wary of such assumptions. Most likely, the
connection lies in Russia’s cultural commonalties with those aspects of the Euro­
pean past that are said to have generated European honor consciousness: Chris­
tianity (whether in Catholic or Byzantine form) and the Germanic legacy shared
by East Slavs (through Rus’-era Vikings) and much of Western Europe.

Who Was Honorable in Muscovy

Like its Kievan and appanage-era antecedents, Muscovite law was socially
inclusive. The implicit message that honor was an attribute of all social groups
was made explicit by the 1589 law code, which identified those who were inel­
gible to claim protection of honor as “thieves, criminals, arsonists and known
evil men.”71 In other words, people who had harmed the community had no
honor, but everyone else shared in it. This stands in sharp contrast to early
modern Germany, for example, where whole categories of people were deemed
outcasts because they engaged in “dishonorable” professions (executioners,
barbers, butchers, and others) and where guilds defined artisanal honor sepa­
rately from the honor of other social groups.72

Such an inclusive definition left a remarkable array of persons considered
members in good standing of the Muscovite community. The 1550 law code,
although brief, nevertheless dispels any impression that honor was a preserve
of the elite. It details the fees for insulting persons of all secular ranks: from
taxed people and even slaves to the political elite, and to wives and daughters
of all of the above.73 Charters of local administration in 1556 and 1561 affirm
the honor of taxpayers, both urban and rural.74 The 1589 law code was com­
piled to serve Muscovy’s northern hinterlands; this area by and large lacked a

71“A tatem, i razboinikam, i zazhigalshchikam i vedomym likhim liudem bezchestiia net”: PRP
4:421 (art. 71).
Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1993; Mack Walker, German Home Towns: Community, State,
and General Estate 1648–1871 (Ithaca, N.Y., and London, 1971), chap. 3; van Dülmen, Kultur
Bemerkungen zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte und zur Konzeptualisierung,” in Klaus Schreiner and
Gerd Schwerhof, eds., Verletzte Ehre. EhrKonflikte in Gesellschaften des Mittelalters und der
frühen Neuzeit (Cologne, 1995), pp. 29–62.
73RZ 2:101 (art. 26). This clause is repeated in the “Consolidated” (svodnyi) law code of the
early seventeenth century: PRP 4:500 (art. 26).
privileged landed elite and featured a trading economy of artisans, merchants, fishermen, trappers, and the like. In addition to the familiar landed cavalrymen, tsarist officials, merchants, artisans, peasants, slaves, and elected communal officers whose honor was protected in the 1550 code, the 1589 code added a diverse list of persons, including priests, monks, and other church people; registered and unregistered minstrels; beggars and street entertainers; bastards, whores, and seeresses; musketeers and Cossacks!75

The Conciliar Law Code of 1649 was the high-water mark of definitions of dishonor compensation.76 Its almost seventy-five articles (compared with one article in the 1550 law code and thirty-one in 1589) add church hierarchs and institutions where they had not been previously (the 1589 law code had mentioned priests, but not hierarchs or specific monasteries).77 Case law, however, as early as the late fifteenth century, shows that clerics shared in the symbolic community of honor.78 For secular ranks, the 1649 code aggregated groups more than the 1589 code had done, but it still identified more social ranks and more complexity in redress of insult than had previous codes. Reading the 1649 law code on compensation for dishonor is like reading a catalog of contemporary social structure. Many new ranks of military and administrative servitors appear, as well as a hierarchy of merchant ranks; taxpayers in town and country (the peasants were enserfed by now) and even vagrants (guliaschchie liudi) are included. Without stating it specifically, Muscovite law codes from 1550 through the seventeenth century portray the entire society as united by honor.

The symbolic community of honor in theory and practice included non-Orthodox and non-Russians. The 1649 law code makes foreigners eligible for protection under all the law and defines the dishonor value of Cossacks and hetmans, who were not necessarily Russian or Orthodox.79 A 1699 law defined the dishonor value for Greeks insulted by foreigners.80 Several suits involving non-Russians can be found. In 1639, a member of an eminent North Caucasus family, Prince Ivan Cherkasskii (who was most likely Orthodox), said he was vul-

---

75 PRP 4:419-21 (arts. 41-72).
76 In 1620 and 1645, specific decrees had defined the dishonor fees for various levels of merchants: V. A. Varentsov, "Zhalovannaia gramota . . .," Sovetskie arkhivy 1979, no. 6, p. 60, and ZA no. 304, p. 210.
77 Conciliar Law Code of 1649: RZ 3:106-12 (chaps. 10, arts. 27-99); 251 (chap. 23, art. 3; chap. 24, arts. 1-2).
78 AI 1, no. 50, pp. 98-99.
80 1699: PSZ 3, no. 1731 (the compensation was fifty rubles).
nable to insult because of his “foreign origin” (inozemstvo). In 1640, a European, calling himself a “foreigner in Moscow service” (Moskovskii kornovoi inozemets), successfully defended himself against the charge that he had insulted another foreigner and that man’s wife. The tsar’s trumpeter, the European Christopher Tsytsekler, in 1643 sued a cavalryman for verbal insult. In 1687, a commander (rotmistr) of a new model regiment was beaten by court order for insubordination: He had called his superior officer, Mikula von Berdin, a “petty foreigner” or “petty German” (nemchinishka) and a “drunkard.” A foreigner, Tobias Krigel’, won a dishonor suit in 1711 against a soldier for false accusation. In 1720, an Armenian won a dual settlement against two Armenians (one of whom identified himself as a “newly baptized Armenian,” indicating conversion to Orthodoxy), for verbal insult and for assault on him and his wife.

Because some of the non-Russian and non-Orthodox disputants were European, it might be speculated that they brought with them a European consciousness of honor. But the vigor of the Muscovite practice of honor on its own terms is shown by the fact that in the seventeenth century, Siberian and Tatar natives also embraced the Muscovite concept of honor. Dishonor laws do not include subject peoples, who in contemporary sources were called iasachnye liudi (native peoples of the North, Siberia, and Middle Volga who paid tribute called the iasak) or sluzhilye tatare (Tatars in Muscovite service), or were identified by ethnic names (e.g., Tunguz, Mordva, Chuvash, Bashkir). Cases involving these groups proliferated as the iasak lands were more closely integrated into the central administration. As early as 1639/40, a group of Siberian natives sued their local governors for not giving them the traditional gift of wine, but substituting beer, which, they complained, would bring “shame” (pozor) on them “before their brothers.” Here they were adapting native concepts of dignity to Muscovite legal opportunities. In 1640, to cite another example, a converted Iakut woman sued three local workers for verbal abuse; they had called her a “thief.” In 1673, a Iakut sued another Iakut for assaulting his wife, raping her, and thus dishonoring her. And in 1680, two service


83Published descriptions of Siberian archives give the impression that few dishonor suits occurred among the non-Russian populace: N. N. Ogloblin, Obozrenie stolbtsov i knig Sibirsrgo prikaza (1592–1768 gg.), 4 vols. (Moscow, 1895–1901), 1 (1895):171–73, 199–201, and 3 (1900):89–175 passim, esp. 156–57; M. P. Putsillo, Ukazatel’ delam i rukopisiam otv. do Sibiri . . . (Moscow, 1879). Ogloblin observed that most surviving petitions from native peoples in Siberia were collective complaints about official corruption: Obozrenie 3:156–57. But unpublished archival descriptions are full of dishonor suits: RGADA, f. 1103 (Arzamas), 1167 (Temnikov and Kadom), 1175 (Shatsk), and 1177 (Iakutsk).

84Ogoblin, Obozrenie 3 (1900):158.
Tatars settled a land and dishonor dispute with a trial. By the end of the seventeenth century, instructions to governors in Siberia explicitly ordered them to protect local natives from insults and damages (obidy), and a treaty of 1689 with Mongol-Buriat tribal elders defined compensation for insult (beschest’e) to tsarist emissaries in numbers of camels, horses, bulls, and sheep.

At the same time that Muscovite treatment of insult embraced the entire populace, it also—paralleling Kiev precedent—affirmed social hierarchy. Above all, honor was a collective attribute. Not only in the system of precedence, for example, did individuals sue to protect their family honor from the insult of one member’s denigrating military assignment; whole clans sometimes petitioned the tsar to protect their family name from blemish. In 1671, the descendants of Grishka Otrep’ev, notorious in Russian history as a pretender to the throne in 1605, petitioned to change their clan name from Otrep’ev to Nelidov. Their petition enumerates examples of loyal service to the tsar by members of the clan, but laments “we serve the tsars truly and nevertheless we receive only disdain and great shame, innocently, for sixty years, because of our surname, because of the criminality of Grishka Otrep’ev.” The request was granted and the new surname enrolled in the Military Service Chancery records. Similarly, the Il’in clan sued in 1654 to protect its family name from taint by association with a kinsman, Nazarka Petrov syn Il’in. He had been exiled to the steppe frontier town of Kozlov for criminal deeds; the petition alleges that there he served in positions inferior to men that his clan should not have to serve beneath. The clan petitioned to have it recorded that his infamy should not affect their honor, so that they would not suffer “disgrace and eternal shame.”

Thus we should not exaggerate the degree to which honor accrued to the individual per se; defense of honor protected the dignity of social groups at the same time that individuals benefited. Not only did honor protect clans, it also protected corporate bodies by calculating dishonor compensation according to

---


86 Instructions to governors: PSZ 3, no. 1595 (1697), and PSZ 4, no. 1822 (1701). 1689 treaty: PSZ 3, no. 1329, sect. IX, arts. 2–4. One might also cite in this regard the definition of the jurisdiction of the tsar’s criminal authority included in the first Digest of Laws of the Russian Empire. Only a few categories of recently conquered peoples were exempted; they included nomads in Siberia, the Caucasus, and Transcaucasia, and the Kalmyks on the lower Volga; Svod zakonov rossiiskoi imperii, poveleniem Imperatora Nikolaia Pavlovicha sostavlenyi. Vol. 15. Zakony ugolovnye (St. Petersburg, 1832), bk. 1, art. 168, notes I–III.

87 1671: RGADA, f. 210, Moscow stol, stb. 731, l. 777. Otrep’ev was the First False Dmitrii in the Time of Troubles; he ruled briefly in 1605–6. 1634: RGADA, f. 210, Belogorod stol, stb. 1202, l. 278.
Cultural Concepts of Honor 53

social rank. The distinctions became ever more meticulous as service ranks grew more complex. The list of social categories for which honor compensations were defined in the first such compendium (the 1550 law code) is the simplest. As noted, it makes no mention of ecclesiastical ranks at all and no explicit mention of the highest court ranks, such as boyars and okol'niche. Rather, the latter are included in a general rubric of high-ranking cavalrymen (deti boiarskie) on "kormlenie" (literally, "feeding"). These are men who enjoyed annual upkeep from the tsar or from communities that they administered. They represented a social range from the tsar's personal counselors (the boyars) to governors of towns or rural cantons. Their fines were equated with their annual income. This was also true for the next level down, cavalrymen "with cash allotments," which refers to the cash grants given to the rank and file army. As a rule, these were settled on service tenure estates (pomest'e). In the mid-sixteenth century, the tsar's highest-ranking servitors, the boyars, could have received one hundred rubles as cash grant annually in addition to land allotments. Below the boyars, the military service hierarchy was divided into twenty-five ranks, with annual payments that descended to six rubles for the lowest cavalry ranks.88 The third social group mentioned in the 1550 dishonor statute comprises the state secretaries of the tsar's "palace" (polatnye) and "court" (dvortsovye) administrations, denoting the structures then being superseded by the chancery (prikaz) system. As with the military ranks, the compensation scale for these tsarist officials was left flexible, in this case to be reckoned "as the tsar and grand prince will order."

All other social groups were accorded specific dishonor fees significantly lower than the privileged ranks of the military and bureaucracy. Only the tsar's "great merchants" (bol'sbie gosti) merited sizable dishonor compensation in comparison with the military ranks (fifty rubles), and only five rubles were awarded for "tradesmen, taxed city people and all people of middling (serednie) ranks," as well as for a "boyar's senior servant" (in other words, an indentured servant or slave). One ruble went to a peasant and a lesser servant of a large landholder (boiarstvii chelovek molotchii) or to a lesser (molodchii) taxed city person. In addition, a private lord's "deputy, bailiff and sergeant at arms" (tiun, dovotchik, pravedchik) were valued at their cash salaries.89 Nevertheless, the

88N. E. Nosov, "Boiarskaia kniga 1556. g. . . .," in Voprosy ekonomiki i klassovykh otnoshenii v Russkom gosudarstve XII–XVII vekov (Moscow and Leningrad, 1960), pp. 203–4. Richard Hel­lie notes that by the end of the century, these many gradations had been reduced to six, with cash payments ranging from twelve to five rubles: Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy (Chi­cago, 1971), p. 36. See a graduated scale of service tenure land awards to boyars (two hundred cheti—a unit of land equal to approximately 1.4 acres), provincial gentry (fifty cheti), and under­secretaries (eight cheti) in 1586/87: ZA no. 44, p. 63.

social range extends from boyar to slave. The 1550 law code portrays a social order stratified by status more than by class, with greater prestige accorded to military than to nonmilitary men and as a rule greater material compensation to military men than to all but the highest civilian ranks.

The 1589 law code is in many ways not comparable to the 1550 code in its social hierarchy, because it was designed for the significantly different society of the North. Nevertheless, the same principles were applied. The 1589 code repeated the clauses of the 1550 code but made greater differentiation among merchants, according fifty, twenty, and twelve rubles, respectively, to “great, middle and lesser gosti.” After reiterating the 1550 clauses, the 1589 code enumerated social groups more specific to the North—those associated with its communal administration and more free-wheeling society. Valued at five rubles were judges, elected communal officials, and church elders; at three rubles were peasants who traded, lent money, or were regarded as “leading citizen[s]” (dobryi chelovek) in rural communes (volosti); two rubles were mandated for “leading citizen[s]” from a smaller settlement, while “lesser” men from such a small community got one and a half rubles; two rubles also went to hundredmen (lesser communal officials) and to registered minstrels. Receiving less than one ruble was a dazzling array of humanity: communal elected officials called fiftymen and decurions, unregistered minstrels, bastards (vybliadki), beggars and needy souls living under the protection of the church (klikun; kalik), whores (bliadi), and wise-women (vidmi). Receiving dishonor awards according to their incomes or “as the tsar orders” were state secretaries, priests, and other parish clerics; monks and nuns; widows and other impoverished people; and finally, the musketeers, Cossacks, infantrymen, and fortifications experts who constituted, far more than did landed cavalrymen, the military defenders of the North. The 1589 code’s meticulous attention to so many relatively lowly social groups shows the North to have been a relatively unstratified haven of independent communes and trading communities, devoid of the heavy social weight that the landed military elite exerted in the Center.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, social and political change had generated not only a more complex social hierarchy, but also a much more complex sense of relative prestige. Significantly, the officers of the church were given pride of place and to some extent greater compensation for insult in the 1649 Conciliar Law Code. This accords with the heightened presence of the church in seventeenth-century court life after the 1589 creation of the Patriarchate in Moscow, the reign of Patriarch Filaret (1619–33; previously a boyar, father of Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich, and the power behind the throne in Mikhail Fedorovich’s early

---


years), and the influx of reformist clerics in the post–Time of Troubles era.92 The ways in which the 1649 code compensated church officials for dishonor were paralleled by its treatment of secular ranks, and it distinguished far more sharply than previous codes between the Moscow-based civilian elite and church hierarchs on the one hand and the provincial gentry and lesser social ranks on the other.

Breaking with sixteenth-century tradition, sanctions in the 1649 code included corporal punishment and imprisonment as well as monetary fines; progressively harsher sanctions (ranging from fines to incarceration to corporal punishment) were applied as the social disparity between insulter and insulted expanded.93 Thus, if a member of the highest secular ranks (the conciliar or dumnye ranks: boyar, okol' nichii, dumnyi dvorianin, dumnyi d' iak) insulted the patriarch, that person was subject to a public ritual of humiliation. But if a less high-ranking military servitor of Moscow or provincial ranks or a high merchant (gost') insulted the patriarch, he was to be whipped; and if a lesser merchant, taxed urban or rural person, noncavalry military man, or anyone of any lesser rank insulted the patriarch, he was to be publicly beaten and imprisoned for a month. The sanctions for insulting civilians followed similar principles: As a rule, the higher the social status of the insulter or victim, the more symbolic or monetary the fine; the lower the status of the insulter and the greater the social disparity between insulter and victim, the more corporal the punishment; the lesser the social disparity between insulter and victim, the more monetary was the sanction. The tables depict the complex code of punishments and social hierarchy schematically.94

Cash fines were pegged to the annual salary of landed military men and given in schedules for monasteries and the taxed social groups. For the latter, the fines ranged widely, from one hundred rubles for the privileged Stroganov family, five to fifty rubles for various ranks of merchants, five to seven rubles for taxed peasants and urban people of three grades (stat'ii), and one ruble for peasants on the tsar's estates and for vagrants. Cash compensation for military ranks in the seventeenth century was at least two hundred rubles for the conciliar ranks, descending to less than ten rubles for the youngest or worst-equipped men in the provincial ranks.95

92On reformist trends in the seventeenth century, see Bushkovitch, Religion and Society, chap. 3.
93See Nikolai I. Lange's study of punishments for insult to honor: "O nakaniakh [sic] i vzyskaniiakh za beschestie po drevnemu russkomu pravdu," Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia 102 (1859):161–224. See also N. Evreinov, Istoria telesnykh nakazanii v Rossii (New York, 1979); A. G. Timofeev, Istoria telesnykh nakazanii v russkom prave (St. Petersburg, 1897); N. D. Sergeevskii, Nakazanie v russkom prave XVII veka (St. Petersburg, 1887).
94RZ 3:106–12 (chap. 10, arts. 27–99). See a 1687 petition in which a monastery built after 1649 asked that its proper dishonor value be established: RGADA f. 210, Moscow stol, stb. 717, pt. 1, ll. 23–24.
Aggregate social divisions according to the Conciliar Law Code of 1649

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1</td>
<td>Patriarch (art. 27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2</td>
<td>Metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops (art. 28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3</td>
<td>The four conciliar (dumnye) ranks (arts. 27–29, 90–92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 4</td>
<td>Abbots, abbesses, other monastery and convent officers, monks, and nuns (art. 29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 5</td>
<td>Moscow and provincial landed cavalrymen and high merchants (gosti) (arts. 30, 91, 92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 6</td>
<td>Merchants of the two “hundreds,” taxed urban and rural people, non-landed military men, and all other people (arts. 31, 92, 94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 7</td>
<td>Priests (arts. 85–89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 8</td>
<td>Ecclesiastical secular staff (scribes, cavalrymen, slaves) (arts. 95–98)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sanctions for insult in increasing order of corporal severity

**High-status insulter and victim**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ritual of humiliation</th>
<th>If a person of category 3 insults the patriarch, category 1 (art. 27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very high fine</td>
<td>If category 3 insults category 2 (art. 28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to the tsar’s determination</td>
<td>If category 3 insults category 3 (art. 90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If category 3 insults category 4 (art. 29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relatively low-status victims or minimal social disparity between litigants**

| Fine by annual cash payment | If category 1, 2, or 4 insults category 3 or 5 (art. 83) |
|                            | If category 5 insults category 3 (art. 91)                  |
|                            | If anyone insults category 5 (art. 93)                      |
| Fine by schedule of fees included in code | If category 6 insults category 4 (arts. 31–82) |
|                            | If anyone insults category 6 (art. 94)                      |
|                            | If anyone insults category 7 (arts. 85–89)                   |
|                            | If anyone insults category 8 (arts. 95–98)                   |

**Greater social disparity between low-born insulter and higher-status victim**

| Unspecified amount of time in prison | If category 5 insults category 2 (art. 30) |
| Beating with bastinadoes (batogi)    | If category 5 insults category 1 (art. 30)  |
| Beating with bastinadoes and three to four days in prison | If category 6 insults category 2 (art. 31)  |
| Beating with a knout and two weeks in prison | If category 6 insults category 3 (art. 92)  |
| Public beating and a month in prison | If category 6 insults category 1 (art. 31)  |
The late seventeenth-century traveler Augustin Meyerberg captured the variety of Muscovite military ranks and social groups: here a merchant, a gentryman, two boyar’s servants armed with bow and arrow, a musketeer, and two Tatars. It was this traditional attire that Peter I decreed Muscovites should abandon in favor of European styles. (Illustration: Augustin Meyerberg, *Al'bom Meierberga: vidy i bytovye kartinyRossii XVII veka* [St. Petersburg, 1903]. Courtesy of Harvard College Library.)

In terms of relative status, ecclesiastical ranks were privileged over secular ones by their primacy in the 1649 code and by the harshness of sanctions for offenses against them. Meanwhile, secular society was divided between, on the one hand, landed military men and the highest merchants, and on the other hand, everyone else: the taxed, the enserfed, the dependent, and the enslaved. Furthermore, within these large groups, hierarchy was reflected in differential
dishonor payments and sanctions. The effect was to accentuate the social distance between the landed military elite (Moscow and provincial) and the rest of society, thus planting the seeds of a landed nobility even when the landed cavalry was becoming militarily obsolete.96 Also significant is the 1649 code's indifference to bondage and freedom: For purposes of honor offenses, serfs and slaves are socially aggregated with free men such as merchants and musketeers. Thus, sanctions, legislation, and cases reveal the corporate structure of Muscovite society. Although psychologically individuals suffered insult on a personal level and received compensation as individuals, socially their honor was tied up with the complex web of corporate groups of which they were a part—family, clan, town and village, landlord's properties, regiment or rank, and status and office.

Honor and Social Identity

The corporate structure of Muscovite society is revealed not only in sources having to do with honor, but also in similar documentary sources. If one surveys Muscovite literature for what might be called social theory, one does not find it. Unlike their European counterparts, Muscovites did not engage in abstract theory about society.97 Some classical social or political theory did circulate in Russia—in translated sources (the Secreta secretorum or Pseudo-Aristotle, Byzantine secular law), moralistic writings (the Domostroi), and publicists (I. S. Peresvetov)—but it was not systematized and had little social impact. The only native narrative source—setting aside foreign travelers' accounts—that might serve this purpose is Grigorii Kotoshikhin's report to the Swedish king, but it focuses on government institutions and the elite and is descriptive more than analytical. One could, in a way similar to Daniel Row-


land's analysis of chronicles, survey historical works for their implicit vision of society. But the fact remains that Muscovites did not reflect self-consciously on the collective body in which they lived. Confirming the implications of sources on honor, Muscovites did not have a collective vision, even a collective noun, for their society as an entity. They saw society in multiplicity, not unity.

This conception is evident in myriad sources. When individuals presented themselves to the tsar in petitions, for example, they cited successively the major affiliations that structured their lives. Religion—Russian Orthodoxy for the most part—was apparently so basic as not to need specification. Not surprisingly, family and household were primary sources of identity. Men used the patronymic to identify their father: "your sovereign orphan, the tailor Shestachko, son of Pavel." Women identified themselves in terms of the men who were responsible for them, often adding subservient adjectives: "the poor widow, prisoner of war, from Roslov'l, Luker'itsa, Aleksei Shumiatskii's humble daughter and humble wife of Stepan Makovnev."

Equally important in self-identification were rank and region, the two being inextricably associated with each other because of government policy. The cavalry army mustered in regional units; the state summoned elected representatives to assemblies according to territorial units. Taxpaying strata in different regions enjoyed different political institutions and privileges. The peasants and townsfolk of the North (the old Novgorodian lands, especially west of the Urals), for example, enjoyed a more independent local government than that of the increasingly enserfed and more bureaucratically controlled central and frontier


100RIB 25, no. 2, cols. 2–3 (1624).


102For examples, see A. A. Zimin, ed., Tysiachnaia kniga 1550 g. i dvorovaia tetrad' 50-kh godov XVI v. (Moscow, 1950); Sobranie gosudarstvennykh gramot i dogovorov (SGGD), 5 pts. (Moscow, 1813–94) 3, no. 40, pp. 171–73 (1618); idem, Knigi razriadnye po ofitsial'nym onykh spiskam . . . (KR), 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1853–55), I: cols. 781–85 (1621); SGGD 3: no. 113, pp. 381–84 (1642).

103For summons to select representatives to state assemblies in Galich, Novgorod, and other towns, see AAE 3, no. 105, p. 144 (1619); Vu. V. Got'e, Akty, otn. k istorii zemskikh soborov (Moscow, 1909), no. 10, pp. 35–36 (1636), nos. 13–15, pp. 60–62 (1648); P. P. Smirnov, "Neskol'ko dokumentov iz istorii Sobornogo Ulozhenia i Zemskogo Sobora 1648–1649 gg.," Chtenia v Imp. obschestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete. Sbornik (Chtenia), 264 vols. (Moscow, 1845–1918), 1913, bk. 4, nos. 2–8, pp. 8–17 (1648); AAE 4: no. 27, pp. 40–41 (1648). Instructions of Vladimir gentrymen to their delegate: St. Petersburgskii filial arkhiva Institutta rossiiskoi istorii Rossiskoi akademii nauk, Koll. 9, no. 2 (1648).
parts of the realm. Thus, taxpayers identified the many coordinates of their town or village: “your sovereign orphan of Vazha province, Kokshenskaia district, Spaskaia commune, the poor, destroyed man Ftorushka Stepanov Timofeeva.”

Indentured men added region to their reference to their masters: “man of Stepan Iakovlevich Miliukov of Suzdal’ province, Suzdal’ province, Tumakov village, Ratmanko Samuilov.”

A provincial gentryman or a man of a lesser servitor class identified himself as “man of Suzdal” or “man of Uglich” or by region and rank (“your slave, the Cossack hundredman of the Siberian towns of Eniseisk Island, Stenka Ivanov”). Musketeers or men in new-model army units did not enjoy the right to own land and serfs and were mustered by regiment, rather than region. Their self-identification reflects that: “musketeer of Mikita Dmitrievich Bestuzhev’s regiment, Gavrilko Faleev” or “your slave, hundredman of the Moscow musketeers, Ganka Bibikov.”

Foreigners serving at the court cited their occupations: “your slave, doctor Vendelinka Siblist” and “the foreigner, master artisan of lacework, Ontoshka Tamsan [Anthony Thomson].” Only for the conciliar ranks was region and rank often omitted, in tacit assertion of the tsar’s personal (at least in theory) acquaintance with his advisors.

Similarly, when groups of individuals submitted collective petitions, they relied on discrete, not generalizing, descriptions of their collectivity, citing region and rank: “your slaves the stol’niki, striapchie, and Moscow gentry and zhil’tsy and men of all ranks and the holders of service and ancestral land (pomeshchiki i votschinniki) of Tula, Solova, Odoev, Dedilov and other towns.”

Records of assemblies—called in modern historiography “Councils of the Land” (zemski sobory)—similarly presented society as a compilation of ranks (chiny). Here, for example, is the description of what most scholars consider the last such assembly, in 1653:

104 On more centrally controlled cities, see J. Michael Hittle, The Service City: State and Townsmen in Russia, 1600–1800 (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1979); on the North, see M. M. Bogoslovskii, Zemskoe samoupravlenie na russkom Severu v XVII veke. [Vols. 1–2], Ocheniiia (1910), bk. 1, and (1912), bks. 2 and 3; idem, “Zemskie chelobitnye v drevnei Rusi,” Bogoslovskii vestnik 1911, nos. 1–4.

105 RIB 14, no. 284, col. 643 (1620); another example: Pamiatniki delovoi, no. 133, p. 168 (1631).

106 Pamiatniki delovoi, no. 132, p. 167 (1629).

107 RIB 2, no. 176/7, col. 722 (1638); RGADA f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 122, l. 122.

108 RIB 25, no. 206, col. 271 (1654).

109 RGADA f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 84, l. 21 (1632); Moskovskaia delovaia, no. 34, p. 61 (after 1644).


The Great Sovereign Most Holy Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus’ Nikon, the Krutitsa Metropolitan Sylvester, the Metropolitan of Serbia Mikhailo, archimandrites and hegumens with all the Holy Council, boyars, okol’ nichie, men in other conciliar (dumnye) ranks, stol’niki, striapchie, Moscow-based gentry, zhil’tsy, provincial gentry (dvoriane and deti boiariske), merchants (gosti) and trading people and people of all other ranks of the merchant and textile guilds and of the taxpaying hundreds and of the tsar’s tax-free neighborhoods and musketeers.¹¹²

It is thus not surprising that a word for “society” was not used in the Muscovite vocabulary. In the late seventeenth century, the Belarus’ scholar Simeon Polotskii coined the word grazhdanstvo for “society” in paraphrasing Plutarch’s civic verse, but the usage did not catch on.¹¹³ The modern Russian word for society, obshchestvo, gained currency in this meaning only in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, again appearing first in translations of European texts.¹¹⁴ When interest in social theory did develop in the late seventeenth century, it was prompted by the influx of European ideas.¹¹⁵ For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Muscovites, as reflected in dishonor scales and terminology, local ties and status groups were more significant structuring principles of lived experience than abstract concepts.

¹¹² SGGD 3, no. 157, p. 481 (1653).
Muscovites presented themselves as belonging simultaneously to several communities: kin group, household, patronage network, indenture, village, town, and social rank. They had little better understanding that they lived in a single entity, even as authorities promoted numerous practices and discourses (such as honor and religion) to create some modicum of cohesion. There is nothing surprising in this; across Europe in the medieval and early modern periods, individuals perceived self in terms of social group. Caroline Bynum has forcefully revised the idea that the twelfth century in Western Europe witnessed the discovery of the individual in a modern sense; rather, she sees the era as preoccupied with defining new forms of group life and models for individual behavior within those groups. Bynum argues that individuality as discussed by twelfth-century theologians involved conformity to ideal types, necessarily associating self with community. Other scholars of the medieval Latin West, such as Antony Black, also depict individual identity as embedded in a diversity of communities: "In fact people were related to many different kinds of groups: universal and local Church, kingdom, feudal domain, city, village, gild, confraternity, family. . . . There was no single, all-pervasive, over-arching 'society,' but a wide variety of compulsory and voluntary groups." Even later, in the early modern period, when national consciousness was emerging in learned writings in Europe, local, family, and patronage links were more important in practical politics than national or generalized ideological loyalties. Literate Europeans may have had access to abstract theory on society that Muscovy did not (although even that theory was diverse in opinion), but the lived experience of individuals had much in common in all these premodern communities. Although Muscovites were acting within the context of a unified political arena—a multinational empire ruled by the tsar—self and group identification was local and particularistic.

Muscovites’ concerns about honor express the society’s living social values. Admittedly, those values were ideals as much as living realities; they were a code to which individuals aspired and not all achieved. There were, after all, real

116Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), chap. III.
criminals and “loose women” in Muscovy. This was a discourse—a social ideal and cultural practice that could be manipulated for personal ends. The insults Muscovites hurled at one another may not reflect actual social behavior as much as the common values people tried to live by. Nevertheless, these values were a part of real life: They indicate the parameters within which people could live without incurring social opprobrium or official sanction. They depict the Muscovite social community as structured by family and rank and shaped by Orthodox religious belief and by respect for the authority of the tsar. They make paramount the ideals of honesty, loyal service, piety, meekness, neighborliness, and sexual probity. Honor was a theory and practice that gave Muscovites some theoretical basis for cohesion. The concept of honor was in essence parallel to Orthodoxy as a unifying body of ideas and practice. It is to the individual’s practice of honor, in general, and for women in particular, that we now turn.