In July 1650, the governor and military commander on the southern frontier, Prince Petr Grigor'evich Romodanovskii, assigned a gentryman from Poshekhon'e, Prince Vasilii Sheleshpanskii, to serve as a hundredman (sotennyi golova). Sheleshpanskii refused to accept his orders because the assignment would make him subordinate to Romodanovskii's deputy, Fedor Glebov. Romodanovskii immediately threw him into prison for insubordination, and from prison Sheleshpanskii in turn petitioned the tsar for redress of the shame of serving below Glebov. The tsar responded promptly. He scolded Romodanovskii for imprisoning Sheleshpanskii: “It is not for you to award yourself compensation for dishonor.” And he ruled in favor of Prince Sheleshpanskii: “The Glebovy have never outranked the princes from the Beloozero area. The Sheleshpanskie princes are high-born people (liudi rodoslovnie)” (with the implication that the Glebovy were not). But the tsar instructed Sheleshpanskii to serve as ordered, presumably to minimize disruption in the field and presumably with no negative precedent set against the family honor. For good measure, he reminded Romodanovskii of the customary deference to high birth: He was to select “upstanding, exemplary” (dobrye, ikonnye) men, but not “people of eminent patrimony, people with honor (otecheskie deti, liudi chestnye), so as to avoid insult to them (oskorblenie).”

This sharp encounter between the tsar and his general and between a man of princely heritage and a nonprince of lesser family heritage sets in relief some of the key themes of precedence. Men had the right to protect their family heritage

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1RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, stb. 147, ll. 48–49 (7158). In this chapter, Muscovite-style dates (reckoned from the purported beginning of the world with each year starting in September) will be included for ease of locating citations in source publications. Thus, 7158 was the year extending from September 1, 1649, to August 31, 1650.
as they moved through the ranks in their mandatory, lifelong military service careers; the tsar alone had the authority to resolve claims about place and honor, and he did so with verve and dispatch. In more complicated disputes, formal adjudication based on written evidence of family heritage or service careers took the place of the tsar’s seemingly snap judgment shown here. The important thing is that complaints were addressed and, as a rule, expeditiously resolved. Although seniority in some form in court or military functions was observed in many other monarchies, nothing quite like Muscovy’s system of precedence was practiced elsewhere.\(^2\)

**The Forms of Precedence Litigation**

The scholarly literature on precedence is copious, as befits an institution so closely associated with elite status and with the ruler’s discretion in governance.\(^3\) Here I will give only an overview of the institution and its historiography before turning to an analysis of the social origins and long-term significance of precedence.

Precedence litigations were disputes over service assignment that arose among leaders of the tsar’s army. In theory, only members of the leadership corps were eligible—that is, those men serving from “the Moscow list” (*Moskovskii spisok*), who acted as generals, governors, and diplomats. As Sheleshpanskii’s suit indicates, lesser military ranks could not participate: Provincial gentrymen (*deti boyarskie, dvoriane*) and military men not of the traditional cavalry formations (i.e., musketeers, artillery, new model infantry, and cavalry) did not have “place.” Nor did men in nonmilitary status, with few exceptions: The tsar’s state secretaries (*d’iaki*) and merchants were by and large excluded.

Disputes over precedence could erupt in the Kremlin at the announcement of assignments at the Military Service Chancery (*Razriadnyi prikaz*); in audience with the tsar himself; or in the field when orders were changed, troops

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were transferred, or two armies were joined (skhod). Disputed assignments were usually military but could also be administrative, diplomatic, or even ceremonial—such as seating at a reception or banquet, placement in a procession, or service as a ryn'ya (one of a group of honorary bodyguards of the ruler). Plaintiffs sued for the sake of their entire clan, which would suffer reduced honor should the given family member be forced to serve in the subordinate role. Disputes were to be settled by a reckoning of the relative status of the litigants, based on two aspects of the litigants’ family heritage. One was the genealogical status of one family in comparison with the other; the other was the relative seniority of service positions held by the litigants or by their ancestors. In theory, the staff of the Military Service Chancery took the factors of clan service and genealogy into consideration before making assignments, but disputes did arise. With all the generations of litigants’ families deemed fair game, with the fallibility of previous generations’ rank assignments regarding seniority, and with litigants using personal copies of service records, precedents to support each side could easily be found. Resolution was not always easy.4

The stakes were high: One man’s service below a perceived inferior created a precedent that could reduce the status of his entire clan. Individuals resorted to dramatic gestures to avoid such humiliation. Such an incident is the celebrated case of 1650 when okol’nychii Prince Ivan Ivanovich Romodanovskii was ordered to sit in a lesser position than okol’nychii Vasilii Vasil’evich Buturlin at a banquet with Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich and Patriarch Iosif in the Kremlin. Romodanovskii refused to sit at table, at which point the tsar ordered him forcibly taken to his seat. He then slid off the bench and was lifted up and held in place through the banquet. His recalcitrance reflected his unwillingness to accept an earlier defeat in a precedence suit against the same Buturlin. For this stubbornness, he was briefly imprisoned and sent to perform a ritual of humiliation before Buturlin (such rituals are discussed in the Precedence in Practice section).5 In a similar incident in 1614, Boyar Prince Boris Mikhailovich Lykov declared that he would rather be executed than sit at table below an inferior. For this, he too was sent in humiliation to his rival.6 Finally, equally recalcitrant was Prince Grigorii Afanas’evich Kozlovskii, who refused in 1691 to sit at table below an inferior even though precedence had been abolished nearly a decade earlier. Rather than attend, Kozlovskii pleaded illness but was brought forcibly in a simple, undignified cart to the palace—he had hidden away his coach and horses. As a sign of his recalcitrance, he wore black clothing and refused to

remove it and get out of the cart. He was then forcibly carried to the palace, wrapped bodily in a rug. When deposited at the banquet table, he lay supine and was then held in sitting position in his assigned place. For all this recalcitrance, he was demoted from boyar rank to provincial service. Men risked their personal status in passionate defense of their families’ honor.

Two strategies were used in arguing superior status in those precedence litigations that got to the stage of argument (as we shall see, many did not progress that far). The one that has received almost exclusive attention from historians was a complex reckoning of relative status, although in actual practice it was rarely used. When men of equally high clan status contested rank, the argument could be carried out by comparison of individual service careers and clan genealogy, contrasting the relative status of the service and of the genealogical position within the clan of the plaintiff (or of one of his kinsmen) with that of the defendant (or a kinsman). In such cases, calculations could become complicated. The plaintiff, for example, could cite instances in which he or an ancestor had served with the defendant or his ancestor; then he would compare not the valor of the service, but the hierarchical relation of the ranks held. The plaintiff might then go on to calculate how many places in their clans separated him and his opponent from the ancestors whose service had been mentioned. If the plaintiff were more senior in his clan than the defendant in his, and (or) if the plaintiff’s ancestor had served in a position higher than that held by the defendant’s ancestor, then the plaintiff claimed that he should serve in a position higher than that held by the defendant. 8 In other words, a man had a place both in the seniority system of his clan and in comparison with other families, “v svoem rodu i v schete.” 9

Precedence presupposed the ability to calculate a man’s place in his family so that it could be compared accurately with another man’s place in his family. The rule used for such calculation was expressed in this way: “The son of the first brother has long been equal in status to the fourth [brother].” 10 According to


this rule, fourth, fifth, and later brothers were considered to have the same rank in the clan as their first, second, and later nephews. In other words, each first son was numbered three ranks or “places” (mesta) junior to his father, and his younger brothers were one rank apart from each other. Many members of a clan in various branches could thus have the same place in relationship to their common progenitor. If a clan founder was numbered one, his three sons were numbered four, five, and six; the first two sons of the eldest son (number four) were numbered seven and eight, while the first two sons of the second brother (number five) were numbers eight and nine, and so on (for one family’s genealogical rankings, see the genealogy above). This sequencing order was similar to that used for succession to boyar position in those few clans who had the traditional right to inherit boyar status at court; boyar succession was also collateral but could include more than four sons if so many survived to adulthood. Collateral succession among the Rus’ elites descended from the system of succession of the Riurikide clan of Kiev Rus’; the Moscow ruling family was a noted and significant exception.11

The four-man principle was probably suggested by the typical biological pattern of survival in elite clans. Seldom were there more than four eligible brothers in one lineage of one clan alive at one time; the fourth brother who survived to take his turn in boyar succession was a rarity. Furthermore, the ranking system described above replicated the common experience of demographic survival in clans. Men who were ranked the same in a clan would have been about the same age and would have had approximately the same experience in service.12 Thus this abstract rule, mimicking demographic reality, allowed comparison of men in two families, a much more challenging task than comparing military service assignments. There the comparison was fairly straightforward, because the relative importance of most military ranks remained stable until the seventeenth century. Then military reform added many new roles for the traditional elite, and indeed such expansion was one of the causes of the demise of precedence.

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12V. O. Kliuchevskii makes this point: *Kurs* 2:148.
Let us look at this strategy of litigation in practice. An argument based on service careers took place in 1583/84 between Prince A. D. Khilkov and Fedor Mikhailov syn Laskirev, one of the few in this collection that was actually won by the plaintiff. Even then, however, the distinction is fine, because for Khilkov, this suit was for dishonor occasioned by claims Laskirev made in a different suit. The vigilance with which clans safeguarded their reputations against smear is thus illustrated. Laskirev had been assigned to serve under S. V. Godunov in a diplomatic audience, and he sued Godunov for place. In his suit, he presented excerpts from military service books that mentioned Khilkov's grandfather, father, and other kin in positions subordinate to members of Laskirev's clan. Khilkov got wind of it and immediately protested to correct the record. In his suit, he defended his clan's seniority to the Laskirevy in two ways: First, he disputed the veracity of Laskirev's military service rosters, and second, he pointed out that on two occasions cited in the Godunov-Laskirev suit, two different Laskirevy had not protested having to serve under two different Khilkovy. The judges checked out the military service citations and could verify none of Laskirev's, whereas Khilkov's claims by and large checked out. The judges also cited as significant the Laskirevy's previous failures to sue. Khilkov won the suit.\(^{13}\)

The Laskirev-Khilkov suit did not turn on genealogical considerations, but rather service rank; a case of 1598 between two members of the Zvenigorodskii princely clan illustrates genealogical calculations. Prince Vasilii Andreev syn Zvenigorodskii and his cousin Prince Andrei Dmitreev syn Zvenigorodskii were fifth and fourth military commanders in Smolensk, respectively, and Prince Vasilii protested his subordinate assignment. Investigation into the genealogies found that the plaintiff and defendant shared the same genealogical ranking with respect to their common grandfather, Prince Mikhail Zvenigorodskii. The plaintiff was the second son of his father, who was a first-born son; thus, because the grandfather was ranked number one, the son was ranked three places lower, or four, and the grandson-plaintiff was ranked three more places lower for his generation, plus another place lower as second son, or eight (see the genealogy). For the defendant, Prince Andrei, because the grandfather was number one, his father (a second son) ranked five, and he himself as a first son was ranked three places lower, or eight, like his cousin the plaintiff Prince Vasilii. The judges, having laid out these relationships, therefore decreed that the two men were to be written "mixed" (meshaiuchii), or alternating in the documents, with no fixed precedence given to one or the other.\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\)Pogodin, *Dela* 2, no. 3, pp. 61–66.

In actual practice, however, cases rarely came to such detailed elaboration. The second strategy, unremarked by historians but much more frequently invoked in cases, was grosser in format and became more and more common as less eminent families rose to higher service ranks, beginning in the late sixteenth century. As noted above, in theory only “high-born” families had “place” and could seek a reckoning. These were the families who served from Moscow, held the highest administrative and military ranks, and were recorded in official genealogical (rodoslovnye) books. Inferior clans were those who served from a provincial town (po gorodovomu spisku), often holding positions such as locally elected elders for criminal affairs, state secretaries and undersecretaries, and those in service to monasteries or church prelates. Thus, if a plaintiff believed that his opponent was of such lowly status, he simply proved the ancestry, without detailed genealogical reckonings or comparisons of service records. As early as 1589, litigants stated confidently that the tsar had issued an order forbidding non-high-born (nerodoslovnye) people from suing high-born people. In that year, for example, a man from the Olfer’ev clan lost a suit and was told: “The Olfer’evy are nerodoslovnye liudi and such people never have reckoning of place with high-born people (rodoslovnye).” The principle persisted: In 1673, a member of the Khrushchov clan sued the Karkadinov family and was resolutely told, “In relation to you, the Karkadinovy are honorable and high-born people; [they are] princes of Smolensk, and in relation to them you are not high born. And a non-high-born person has no reckoning nor place with high-born men and will not in the future have it.” These categories were broadly used in litigation, with plaintiffs asserting that their rival’s family hailed from the provinces; had served the church, not the tsar; had never had “honor”; and the like. Such calculations even came to outrank service. One litigant was told, for example, “The Boriatinskie princes are honorable and high-born people (liudi chestnye i rodoslovnye), and you are a man of lowly heritage (nerodoslovnyi), and although your ancestors have served in military campaigns higher than the Boriatinskie, you can still serve less then they.” And recall the tsar’s solicitude toward high-born clans expressed in Prince Sheleshanskii’s suit, summarized at the beginning of this chapter: The tsar instructed the local governor not to place high-born families in assignments that might humiliate them.

15 The terminology translated as “high-born” was various: rodoslovnye implies enrolled in official genealogical books; narochitye means eminent; otecheskie refers to patrimony (otechestvo).


17 Of the myriad examples, here are a few: RK 1598-1636, p. 310, and DR 1: cols. 138–40 (7122); KR 1: cols. 86–88, and DR 1: col. 217 (7123–24); RGADA, f. 210, Prikaznyi stol, stb. 2537, ll. 16–32 (7132); DR 1: col. 890 (7135); DR 2: col. 452 (7143); DR 2: cols. 500–1 (7144). Boriatinskie: DR 2: col. 453 (7143).
Litigation for precedence based on family heritage and service became common and routinized by the mid-sixteenth century. The practice flourished in the sixteenth century: Iurii M. Eskin has identified 1,624 cases from the late fifteenth century to the abolition of precedence in 1682, unevenly distributed.\(^{18}\) Even taking into account loss of archival documents, the ballooning of the institution from the 1570s through 1590s is striking. While Eskin recorded forty to fifty cases per decade in the 1540s–60s, in the 1570s, he identified 305. Such high numbers of litigations persisted until the Time of Troubles, when the pace began to decline, particularly after the mid-seventeenth century.\(^{19}\) The boom in litigation in the late sixteenth century responds to the expansion of the service corps and to the disruptions in the elite caused by the *Oprichnina* (which created in essence a parallel elite, for whom status had to be created when the *Oprichnina* was abandoned in 1572).\(^{20}\)

The seventeenth-century decline had many causes. First was deliberate policy: More and more campaigns, ceremonial occasions, and ranks were declared "without place" (*bez mest*), that is, inapplicable for purposes of precedence calculations. As a result, as Robert Crummey noted, precedence applied only to "the court nobility in particular situations" and left the government wide latitude in governance.\(^{21}\) Second was the increasing complexity of establishing relative ranking. Clans had died out over time, except in junior lines not covered by genealogical books, leading by the late seventeenth century to a cynical sense that the tsar could raise and lower individuals at will.\(^{22}\) The problem was compounded by the fact that genealogical books were not actively compiled after the 1620s, itself a reflection of a change in the significance of family in politics. Finally, litigation declined because of disillusionment with the system. The

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\(^{18}\)Iu. M. Eskin, *Mestnichestvo v Rossii. XVI–XVII vv. Khronologicheskii reestr* (Moscow, 1994). His publication includes 1,720 items, but 96 of them are laws, not litigations.

\(^{19}\)My research on precedence is based on a database that is about one-third smaller than Eskin’s; in a decade-by-decade breakdown, that proportion generally holds true, except for the 1570s, 1600s, and 1650s–60s. The numbers of cases in my and Eskin’s databases respectively are the following: undated (in my database), 11; pre-1500, 0/16; 1500s, 5/7; 1510s, 3/5; 1520s, 4/1; 1530s, 5/9; 1540s, 30/51; 1550s, 24/52; 1560s, 23/43; 1570s, 62/305; 1580s, 211/262; 1590s, 156/245; 1600s, 58/175; 1610s, 108/153; 1620s, 128/146; 1630s, 84/108; 1640s, 72/119; 1650s, 40/93; 1660s, 24/61; 1670s, 23/39; 1680s, 4/14; 1690s, 2/13.

\(^{20}\)On the political tensions of the 1580s and precedence, see Iu. N. Mel’nikov, “Mestnichestvo i politicheskaiia bor’ba v Rossii v 80 -x godakh XVI v.,” Candidate dissertation, Institute of the History of the USSR of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow, 1979.

\(^{21}\)Crummey, “Reflections,” pp. 275–80. Eskin (*Mestnichestvo*) identified “without place” decrees in 1552, 1554, 1570, 1573, 1584, 1591, 1597, 1598, 1601, 1609, 1611, 1614, 1616, 1619, 1621, 1632, 1638–42, 1645, 1646, 1648, 1650, 1651, 1654, and 1678. He also records declarations that certain kinds of service were permanently “without place,” such as service in flanks in the armies (1550), as urban fire wardens (*ob’eizbie*) (in 1600, 1601, 1603, 1604, 1616, 1617, 1619, 1620, 1621, and 1648), as bannermen (*znamenschikhi*) (1646, 1655), and in cross processions (1679).

seventeenth century witnessed the widening of the social basis of precedence. Provincial gentrymen and state secretaries were engaging in the system, making it less and less an instrument of social exclusivity for the upper elite. At the same time, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, government service was changing radically: New men were flooding into service, old families were moving into nonmilitary service, and military and bureaucratic service patterns were meshing. In such a context, precedence appeared more and more antiquated. It was abolished as a basis for service assignments in 1682.

Interpretations of Precedence

A system in which the grand prince is seemingly bound to accept the predetermed relations of family status contradicts the idea that the Muscovite tsar had "autocratic" power. Thus precedence has long been a litmus test for historians. Did precedence limit autocracy? Did it preserve elite privilege against ambitious monarchs or, conversely, put a feudal brake on the progress of more rational principles of state service? These questions represent some of the range of opinion on precedence since its abolition. Surveying the historiography is illuminating, but not for understanding precedence in its own terms. Because most discussions of precedence interpret it on a macrohistorical level, analyzing the historiography turns into a survey of the great debates about state and society in Russian history.

Few historians have found anything good in precedence. M. M. Shcherbatov perhaps made the most concerted effort for a positive interpretation. In his late 1780s essay on "the corruption of morals" in Russia, he praised precedence for fostering estate pride and downplayed its negative effects. Echoing Montesquieu, he argued that institutions like precedence established the balance of power between ruler and noblemen necessary for stable government. But his argument for balance of powers was a rare one. Most scholarship, statist-dominated, condemned precedence as an obstacle to progress. In the early works of the statist school, precedence plays a pivotal role in the dialectical struggle that was said to have raged from Ivan III's time to Peter I (roughly 1450–1700) between "state relations" and the "kinship principle." K. D. Kavelin in 1847 argued that Ivan III began the introduction of public, "juridical" values in political life but was

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stymied in his goals by aristocratic opposition that forced him to respect precedence in appointing officers. Kavelin argued that only Peter I succeeded in destroying the aristocracy and the retrograde attitudes it represented.26

S. M. Solov'ev gave precedence a similarly prominent place in a Hegelian scheme of evolution. Writing from the 1850s through 1870s, Solov'ev saw precedence as the outgrowth of the aristocratic pretensions of the increasingly numerous princes in Muscovite service. He condemned it for preventing the healthy development of estate (soslovie) consciousness in Russia, and he identified the new classes that arose in the wake of the Time of Troubles as the bearers of the “state principle,” who ultimately forced the abolition of precedence.27

A different take on the statist approach that has had staying power was exemplified by M. N. Karamzin, who argued that precedence was an expedient tool used by rulers against aristocracy. He saw precedence as a manifestation of the aristocracy’s excessive pride and a threat to the state, but one that was tolerated by rulers like Ivan IV and Boris Godunov because precedence quarrels themselves undermined the aristocracy.28 In these views, the state was unambiguously a positive force and aristocracy a retrograde one.

The Slavophile critics of these early statists rejected both their evolutionary dynamic and their positive appraisal of post-Petrine institutions and society. But, showing their Romanticism, they also condemned precedence, not because they favored the state, but because they saw it as an overly juridical and formal mechanism that disrupted their idealized organic balance of state and elite and thus helped to foster, even in Muscovite times, an “internal disintegration” that led to Peter I’s “betrayal” of traditional Russian culture.29

Much of the debate on precedence was publicistic and allegorical, implicitly contributing to current discussions about Russian political development. Late nineteenth-century historiography was no less instrumental but tended to be more liberal than statist; it saw in precedence an opportunity for pluralistic development missed by a somnolent or selfish elite.30 Both N. I. Kos-

26K. D. Kavelin, Sobranie sochinenii. Vol. 1: Monografii po russkoi istorii (Moscow, 1897), cols. 5–66.
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tomarov and V. O. Kliuchevskii lamented the boyars' inability to move Russia toward pluralism and progress and blamed precedence. 31 Kliuchevskii condemned it for allowing the elite to perpetuate clan exclusivity over estate solidarity and for sowing suspicion and senseless quarreling in the elite. 32 He declared that precedence not only harmed the aristocracy and Muscovy's military preparedness, but also impeded historical progress in general for Russia. Echoing Karamzin, but with different value judgment, Kostomarov saw precedence as deleterious to the aristocracy (in that it prevented the boyars from consolidating as an estate) and regretted that it benefited the state by giving rulers a tool with which to manipulate the aristocracy. 33 A. I. Markevich was the undisputed dean of studies of precedence, author of two immense volumes chronicling the historiography and the history of the institution. Writing in 1879 and 1888, he attempted a more positive evaluation, arguing that precedence was abolished by the initiative of the aristocracy as a step in its conscious transformation from an old-style kinship-based elite to a new-style juridical estate. 34 At the turn of the century, the great historians N. P. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii and S. F. Platonov both displayed liberal proclivities in condemning precedence for obstructing the emergence of new classes and political pluralism, 35 an approach by and large paralleled from a Marxist point of view by M. N. Pokrovskii. 36 His work set the standard for the Soviet line on precedence, which saw it as an obstructionist tool of the "feudal" aristocracy in its struggle against centralization or against the rising gentry. S. O. Shmidt's work is less hackneyed; he, for example, pointed out the ritualistic

31 Among juridical historians, the views of M. F. Vladimirskii-Budanov on precedence were essentially the same as Kliuchevskii's, while V. I. Sergeevich was more supportive of state authority and construed precedence as a positive phenomenon, inasmuch as it encouraged men to serve loyally and thus promoted the consolidation of the state. M. F. Vladimirskii-Budanov, Obzor istorii russkogo prava, 6th ed. (St. Petersburg and Kiev, 1909), pp. 115–27, esp. pp. 125–27; V. I. Sergeevich, Lektisi i isledovaniia po drevnei istorii russkogo prava, 3d ed. (St. Petersburg, 1903), pp. 112–28, esp. p. 126. M. A. D'iankonov's view is also similar to Kliuchevskii's: Ocherki obshchestvennogo i gosudarstvennogo stroia drevnei Russi, 4th ed. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1926), pp. 225–32.


34 Markevich, Istoriiia mestnichestva, chap. 2; "Chto takoe?" pp. 262–71, esp. pp. 268–69 and 271. See also his O mestnichestve.


and patriarchal aspects of precedence and associated its emergence with the development of absolutism.\textsuperscript{37}

A fresh perspective on precedence is embodied in the work of A. E. Presniakov, writing in 1917, and S. B. Veselovskii, writing in the 1930s and 1940s. They proceeded from the assumption of a consensual community of self-interest of ruler and elite. They saw precedence as an outgrowth of the importance of kinship ties in Muscovite society, of the traditional value given to hierarchy, and of the consultative relationship between ruler and elite. Both regarded such patrimonial relationships as healthy; they lauded the relative lack of conflict between Muscovite sovereigns and boyars and condemned the consolidation of the autocratic state as detrimental to Muscovy's evolution toward a more pluralistic and democratic order.\textsuperscript{38}

Recent scholarship on precedence reflects the less tendentious, more complex analysis of Muscovite politics and society that we find in Presniakov, Veselovskii, and Shmidt. Ann Kleimola follows Shmidt's lead in identifying precedence as beneficial to autocracy, but she also makes the comment that precedence helped to integrate new families into power in a way not disruptive of political stability.\textsuperscript{39} Robert Crummey concurs that precedence was a phenomenon associated with Muscovy's transition to a new political structure, but also suggests that historians have exaggerated its importance and argues that precedence was primarily significant as a psychological compensation to Muscovite boyars for the obligation of full-time service.\textsuperscript{40} Iu. M. Eskin and Iu. N. Mel'nikov take a sociological approach, comparing the social function of precedence for the Muscovite elite with that played by primogeniture and entail in other European "feudal" societies—that is, it allowed the elite to maintain family and clan solidarity by guaranteeing them access to the


\textsuperscript{38}A. E. Presniakov, \textit{Moskovskoe tsarstvo} (Petrograd, 1918), chaps. 3-5, 10; S. B. Veselovskii, \textit{Issledovaniia po istorii klassa sluzhilykh zemlevladel'tsev} (hereafter Veselovskii, ISZ) (Moscow, 1969), pp. 103-4, 469-76.


\textsuperscript{40}Crummey, "Reflections." See also Keep, "Muscovite Elite."
lucrative rewards of high rank. Different as they are, these recent works share an appreciation of the complexities of interaction between sovereign and elite; they move away from evolutionary schemes of development to a structural quest for the social functionality of institutions like precedence. Here I will extend that approach by looking at aggregate trends in the resolution of precedence cases. Those trends will return us to the great question posed by the historiography—that is, whether precedence served autocrat or elite. First, however, we look at the social foundations of the emergence of precedence as revealed in its earliest sources.

Sources of Precedence

At the most general level, precedence litigations were a natural outgrowth of status consciousness at the court. As in other medieval and early modern monarchies, court life was ordered by hierarchy. Heinrich Fichtenau, in his magisterial study of “mentalities and social orders” in early Europe, gives pride of place to hierarchical ordering as a fundamental consciousness of medieval society. Social ordering by rank and seniority found its justification in Christian interpretation of God’s creation of the natural order; the hierarchies of Roman antiquity and of the Roman and Byzantine churches perpetuated these ideas for both Europe and the Rus’ lands.

That rank and hierarchy were structuring principles at the Muscovite court is not at all surprising. We see them in the earliest fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sources: Boyar signatories on grand-princely treaties and wills, for example, maintain a fairly consistent order over several decades. Diplomatic audiences observed meticulously scripted protocols wherein successive stages of greeting and escorting the envoy ever closer to the ruler were staffed by men of increasingly higher status, culminating in the boyars, who sat in specific honorific order to the grand prince’s right and left. Sometimes determining relative rank was so complex that it imperiled the occasion. For example, a large Muscovite delegation to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in

Adam Olearius described the grandeur of the Holstein ambassadors’ reception and depicted it in the 1647 edition of his Travels. The tsar was flanked by four ceremonial bodyguards (rynđy); his boyars sat in strict order of precedence along the walls. “Along the walls around to the left [and right], and opposite the Tsar, sat over fifty distinguished
and splendidly dressed boyars, princes and state counselors,” (trans. Samuel H. Baron). (Illustration: Adam Olearius, *Oft begehre Beschreibung der neuen Orientalischen Reise* [Schleswig, 1647]. Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Southern California Libraries.)
1495 was ordered to proceed "without regard to place," presumably because the task of establishing hierarchy among fifty-odd servitors was almost impossible. Conversely, an instruction to Muscovite envoys in Lithuania in 1503 bids the envoys to respect the seniority of the main envoy as symbolic of the grand prince himself. Indeed, the arrogance (vysokoumie) of Prince Semen Ivanovich Riapolovskii—who had apparently refused to defer to the senior diplomat in an earlier embassy—was held up to the 1503 envoys as an example of extreme public insult to the grand prince. Contemporary Lithuanian magnates similarly recognized, and probably empathized with, the Muscovite system of hierarchical place ranking: Writing to Muscovite boyars at a tense moment in a dynastic crisis of the 1490s, Lithuanian magnates demurred at addressing them by name, because "We do not know your places at this time, who is sitting above whom in the presence of your sovereign."46

But precedence developed a more intense and formalized system of determining rank than in other comparable premodern states. It eventually culminated in the compilation of extensive official and unofficial genealogical and military service records. Why precedence in Muscovy took so formalized a turn can only be answered speculatively. One factor may have been the concentration of power and resources in the hands of the grand prince: Because Muscovy had so relatively underdeveloped an urban and agrarian economy, and because natural resources and land were increasingly claimed as state monopolies, status at court mattered more than in a setting where aristocrats could depend on their own estates, business involvements, local political activity, or engagement in other spheres for wealth and status. Also, the speed with which the Muscovite elite grew might have forced a more bureaucratic solution to social tensions.47

Unquestionably, the tensions caused by expansion in the elite provided impetus for precedence to emerge, just as later moments of social turbulence (the Oprichnina, the Time of Troubles) occasioned a spurt of litigation.48 The story of the expansion of the Muscovite elite is a familiar one.49 After the ruling dynasty's victory in the midfifteenth-century dynastic war and during the grand principality's rapid territorial expansion from the 1470s through 1510, new families came to the court in waves. Established Muscovite clans, generally but

47Markevich puts forward a similar list of preconditions for precedence: Istoriia mestnichestva, pp. 213–14.
49Veselovskii, ISZ; Oswald P. Backus, Motives of West Russian Nobles in Deserting Lithuania for Moscow, 1377–1514 (Lawrence, Kans., 1957); A. A. Zimin, Formirovanie boiarshoi aristokratii v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XV– pervoi treti XVI v. (Moscow, 1988); M. E. Bychkova, Sostav klassa feodalov Rossii v XVI v. Istoriiko-genealogicheskoe issledovanie (Moscow, 1986).
not exclusively nonprincely, were faced with new families whose backgrounds commanded instant respect: scions of ruling dynasties from Russian principalities, from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and from Tatar khanates. Rapidly the newcomers were absorbed into the leadership corps; some were so prestigious they were given the semiautonomous status of “service princes” discussed in the Introduction. In the disruption of Ivan IV’s minority (1533–47), some of these princely newcomers won hereditary boyar status. It was this upheaval in power relations that sparked frequent disputes over precedence and a corresponding routinization of the process of litigation in the 1530s and 1540s. But the regularization of litigations was made possible by the gradual compilation of sources recording genealogy and relative rank at court in the fifteenth century; this documentary production was also occasioned by disruptions in the status quo and expressed a growing genealogical and rank consciousness in the elite.

A dispute in the 1460s mobilized a range of sources that show how tension over status had built up over the century. The litigants were the boyars Vasilii Fedorovich Saburov and Grigorii Vasil’evich Zabolotskii; Saburov testified that Zabolotskii had tried to sit in a more honorable seat (“higher,” vysshe) than he at an official banquet, and contended that he, Saburov, was ranked “a place higher” than Zabolotskii, because his father had been ranked “several places” higher than Zabolotskii’s father. Saburov referred for confirmation to the expertise of “the old boyars Gennadii Buturlin and Mikhail Borisovich Pleshcheev.”

From these “old boyars,” the court obtained several documents that testify to ongoing record keeping in the fifteenth century. They were essentially lists recording boyars’ relative status. One submitted document, the “Memo” of Petr Konstantinovich Dobrynskii (active at court in the 1430s and 1440s until he suffered disgrace in 1445), lists women who were boyars’ wives around 1418,
when Prince Iurii Patrikeevich married the daughter of Grand Prince Vasilii Dmitrievich; a related memo associated with Gennadiii Buturlin lists the boyars whom Prince Iurii Patrikeevich “bypassed” (zaekhal) in status at the time of his arrival in 1408. The “old boyar” Pleshcheev contributed a list of boyars in the 1420s and the colorful “kika” tale (referring to a married woman’s headdress), which includes a hierarchical ranking of fifteenth-century boyars and relates an incident at the all-important wedding of Prince Iurii Patrikeevich in 1418. Patriarch of the Saburov clan Fedor Sabur allegedly insisted on sitting higher than Prince Fedor Khovanskii, the elder brother of the groom, despite Khovanskii’s protest that his brother was about to become brother-in-law of the sovereign. To this implication that Prince Iurii’s success in marriage should raise his entire clan in status, Fedor Sabur replied, “He has status only because of marriage; you have no marriage tie to bring you such status” (u togo Bog v kike, a u tobia Boga v kike net—literally, “He has God in his wife’s headdress, but you have no God in your wife’s headdress”). The tale showcases the tensions that later persisted in the precedence system, countering claims to status based on marriage and kinship with claims based on service heritage. Its colorful qualities prompted A. A. Zimin to label it “legendary,” but it shows the principles of status and growing genealogical consciousness at court nonetheless.

These various lists of hierarchies at the fifteenth-century court reveal how disruptive was the arrival of Prince Iurii Patrikeevich. Within ten years of his arrival in Moscow, this scion of a branch of the ruling Gediminide line pulled off the coup of marrying into the grand-princely family; by the next generation, Patrikeev in-laws of the grand prince had displaced the previous inner circle of boyars and endured in power to the end of the century. The ranking lists cited by the “old boyars” Buturlin and Pleshcheev indicate that the established elite rallied to the challenge of new blood by compiling records of seniority at court.

An added impetus to the compilation of such records may have been demographic growth in the core boyar clans that made face-to-face means of reckoning seniority too difficult. Other disputes over place apparently occurred in the fifteenth century. The “Letter” of Gennadiii Buturlin and the “kika” tale

58See my Kinship and Politics, pp. 133–40.
make reference to previous suits between other clans, and the fact that a formal judgment charter was issued in the 1460s dispute suggests that the elite was outgrowing the intimate size that earlier might have made disputes relatively easy to adjudicate. With the waves of princely newcomers from the 1470s on, the threat to the status quo was all the more intense.

Other early litigations show increasing complexity in argumentation and procedure. In 1469, a dispute over precedence in military service is mentioned but not elaborated. In 1500, on the eve of a major battle, Boyar Iuri Zakhar'ich, younger brother of the powerful boyar Iakov Zakhar'ich, protested being assigned in the rear guard (storozhevyi polk) under Prince Daniil Vasil'evich Shchenia in the center regiment (bol'shoi polk); his dissatisfaction appeared to be not with Prince Daniil but with the rear guard. The grand prince and his adjudicating boyars, however, turned him down, citing instances from military service records showing that the rear guard was not harmful to one's honor and arguing that there was not a formal hierarchy among the regiments (as was indeed established in the 1550s).

Genealogical considerations were paramount in a case from 1504, in which P. M. Pleshcheev sued Petr Grigor'evich Loban Zabolotskii for refusing to serve with him. Pleshcheev argued that he was higher because his clan was higher than the Saburovy and the Osteevy, who were in turn higher than the Zabolotskii. He cited as evidence two documents from the 1450s and the 1460s judgment charter. Petr Loban countered that his status was higher because of his position in his clan; he was the second son of his father, while Pleshcheev was the third son. Pleshcheev won the case with his argument based on the public status of his ancestors in addition to his genealogical position in his clan and among clans. This suit introduces some of the elements that characterize mature precedence litigations: a generally accepted hierarchy of clans, more specific reference to individuals' genealogical position in their clans, and recourse to documentary records. In order for cases to be litigated on these complex terms, more systematic records were needed.

Not surprisingly, more formal records evolved to help the established families hold their own against expanding old and arrived new clans. The first effort to compile a genealogical record of status relations apparently was made in the 1490s or early in the sixteenth century; we find it appended to the Typogra-
It was not fully systematic or comprehensive but made an effort in that direction. The Typography genealogical articles are a varied collection of princely and boyar family trees; lists of boyars, including some of the “old boyars” materials just discussed; and miscellaneous narrative tales about boyars and princes. The items in the collection fall into several groups representing different eras of compilation. The oldest group would seem to be the collection of a few hierarchical lists of boyars and boiaryni, the two “memos” discussed above, and several brief genealogies of nonprincely Moscow boyar clans. The genealogies generally do not extend beyond the 1440s and sometimes end as early as the 1420s. One might associate the compilation of this group with the era of the dynastic war (1430s and 1440s), judging by the individuals included and the many passing references made to events of the war. The tension created within the elite by the defection in that war of some Moscow boyars and the influx of other clans likely prompted compilation of these genealogies. Other sources included in the Typography articles testify to further efforts of genealogical compilation going on in the fifteenth century.

At the same time that Muscovite boyar families were compiling their genealogies in the early and midfifteenth century, sovereign princely families in the major centers of Northeast Rus’ and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were doing likewise. In the first decades of the fifteenth century, for example, chronicles in Novgorod and Rostov included newly compiled family trees of princes of Moscow, Rostov, Beloozero, and Novgorod. A prototype of the Typography collection’s

65PSRL 24:227–34. The collection is written on different paper than the chronicle to which it is appended; its paper dates from ca. 1504, whereas the chronicle’s paper dates from the 1520s–30s. Its hand is different from the two hands exhibited in the chronicle, and its author used cinnabar far more frequently. The manuscript is Gosudarstvennii istoricheskii muzei, Manuscript Division, Collection of the Synod Library, no. 789, with the genealogical materials on fols. 319–39. The manuscript and its “seventeenth-century” binding is described in T. N. Protas’eva, ed., Opisanie rukopisei Sinodal’nogo sobrania (ne voshedshikh v opisanie A. V. Gorskogo i K. I. Nevostroeva). Pt. I: Nos. 577–819 (Moscow, 1970), p. 137, and M. N. Tikhomirov, Kratkie zamenki o letopisnykh proizvedeniah v rukopisykh sobraniah Moskvy (Moscow, 1962), p. 142.


Muscovite grand-princely genealogy was composed for the 1440s Sofiia First chronicle; it is accompanied by lists of metropolitanates and dioceses that were also included in the Typography collection. 68 A Muscovite chronicle edited in 1477 developed this growing tradition of dynastic genealogy by including a large collection of princely family trees from Moscow, Iaroslavl’, Rostov, and Tver’, as well as the list of Tatar khans. These various princely family trees were taken into the Typography compendium, in part, no doubt, because by the end of the fifteenth century, the relevant princely lines had emigrated to Muscovite service. 69

It is possible that the Typography collection was assembled by a particular faction for self-glorification. Perhaps it was intended to showcase princely families from Rostov, Tver’, Suzdal’, and Smolensk. Their entries here are lengthy compared with the generally brief boyar genealogies—they lead up to the 1470s and 1480s. Or perhaps its patrons were the two nonprincely boyar clans that received the most extended treatment in the document (Vsevolozh-Zabolotski, Kobylin-Koshkin). The collection, however, is so motley as to be a poor showcase for the pretensions of any of these candidates. Nor is it a comprehensive reflection of the current power hierarchy during the dynastic conflict of the 1490s; significant players in the crisis such as the Patrikeev princes, the Koshkin boyars, and some Obolenskii princely boyars were left out. 70 The collection looks most like an early attempt to systematize records of hierarchy, at a time when other efforts of compilation—chronicles and military service books, for example—were also taking place at the Kremlin court. 71 Because the manuscript itself has some suggestive paleographical links with the grand-princely chancery, 72 perhaps we should best see the Typography compilation in that official context.

68 See PSRL 5 (1851):90-91. They were then included in grand-princely chronicles of the 1490s: PSRL 27 (1962):298, 367.


71 Military service books are discussed below; on fifteenth-century Muscovite chronicle compendia, see Lur’e, Obshcherusskie letopisi, and idem, Dve istorii Rusi XV veka (St. Petersburg, 1994).

72 De visu inspection of the Typography chronicle manuscript shows the watermark to be a papal tiara, very similar to K. Ia. Tromonin, Iz’iasnienia znakov, vidimykh v pischei bumage . . . (Moscow, 1844), nos. 616 and 618, dated 1538, and to N. P. Likhachev, Bumaga i drevneishie bumazhnye mel’nitsy v Moskovskom gosudarstve (St. Petersburg, 1891), nos. 643 (1521) and 639 (1499). The shield is very similar to E. Laucsevicius, Popierius Lietuvoje XV–XVIII a., 1 vol. with album (Vilnius, 1967), no. 2132 (1533, 1532) or no. 2131 (1514, 1518, 1520). It is also close to Tromonin, no. 816 (1513) and no. 819 (1538). Thus, 1520s–1530s, a slightly different dating than that offered by Protas’eva and Tikhomirov (1510s–1520s). But the watermarks on the Typography genealogical collection are different: a shield of the city of Paris that can be identified with N. P. Likhachev, Paleograficheskoe znachenie bumazhnykh vodianykh znakov, 3 vols. and addendum (St. Petersburg, 1899), nos. 2943–44 (1504), and a sunburst identified as Likachev, Znachenie, nos. 2941–42 (1504). Significantly, the dated paper on which Likhachev found the city of Paris and sunburst marks was a grand-princely charter: RGADA, fond 135, no. 1, sect. IV, item 17, fols. 2, 7. This might indicate that the compilation was done at the Kremlin court.
By the 1530s and 1540s, such compilation efforts had reached fruition. Genealogical records were being compiled at the court in a more comprehensive and systematic manner. In the 1530s, a lengthy collection of princely genealogies was appended to the Resurrection chronicle, and by the 1540s, at least two different collections of family trees of Moscow princely and boyar clans were compiled and disseminated. These deserve the name “genealogical books (rodoslovnye knigi),” because they updated all clans to the present generation and used a standardized format. Such compilations were associated with the court: M. E. Bychkova links one of the two 1540s redactions with the Shuiskii princes, who won primacy among the boyars briefly in Ivan IV’s minority. At roughly the same time, namely the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the court was also compiling military service records. Muster rolls of the officers in some campaigns of the early and midfifteenth century had been included in Muscovite chronicles; by the 1480s, they were being integrated into formalized books (razriadnye knigi). That one of the impetuses for compiling these books was the need to verify status rankings in the elite on the basis of service is indicated by the fact that razriadnye knigi include sources that fixed status relationships at the most politically sensitive moments in court life. Those sources were rosters of attendants at weddings in the ruling family, where great boyars and their wives were called on to perform ceremonial duties in order of importance by their seniority and political power.

In the 1550s, these parallel efforts at genealogical and military muster compilation culminated in two official editions: the Sovereign’s Military Muster Roll and Sovereign’s Genealogy (Gosudarev razriad; Gosudarev rodoslovet). These, especially the military muster, continued to be the recognized authorities, even though alternative redactions of both types of books (with more campaign rosters and more clans included) were compiled long thereafter—through the 1620s for genealogical books and in different forms through the seventeenth century for military musters. With such sources, suits could be argued on complex genealogical and service considerations; precedence in a mature form was


75These rosters (svadebnye razriady) were distributed by date in the earliest edition (RK 1475–1605) but assembled at the beginning of the 1550s edition (RK 1550–1636). On such sources, see Russell Martin, “Royal Marriage in Muscovy, 1500–1725,” Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1996.

76N. P. Likhachev, “Gosudarev Rodoslovet” i rod Adashevykh (St. Petersburg, 1897), and Razriadnye d’iaki; Bychkova, Rodoslovnye knigi; Buganov, Razriadnye knigi; D. N. Afshits, “Razriadnaia kniga Moskovskikh gosudarei XVI v.” Problemy istochnikovedenia 6 (1958):130–51.
emerging. The elite and the state had created an effective instrument for dealing with the social disruption occasioned by their persistent empire-building.

It is remarkable that the elite took recourse to litigation rather than to private vendetta or dueling. Dueling was in fact not an available option at this time: It developed in Italy as a fashion for the elite only around the sixteenth century and then spread gradually through Europe. In some ways, of course, as Robert Crummey has observed, precedence functioned as a bloodless duel, containing conflict without risk of life. Feuding and private vengeance, conversely, present a more intriguing case. Muscovy certainly had elements that could have supported private violence, such as a strong consciousness of personal honor and the strong societal importance of family and clan. Such violence does not, however, seem to have been a recourse for elite families. The reason is probably to be found in the intimate association of disputes over rank with state service. The government was involved from the start, and feuding is often associated with situations in which central government was weak and patrimonial clans strong. Accordingly, feuding and vendetta are best curtailed by social and attitudinal changes, as well as by the criminalization of the practices and the development of legal avenues to deal with insult. Muscovy had both the coercive power to prevent private vendetta and a legal system capable of resolving disputes to the satisfaction of litigants, as we have seen in Chapter 3.

The preferability of legal recourse was brought home to the elite periodically when political instability opened the door to vendettas, such as in the dynastic war of the 1430s–40s, when Grand Prince Vasilii II and his cousin Prince Vasilii Kosoi were reciprocally blinded in their bitter struggle for the throne. The period of boyar rule in the 1530s–40s witnessed the arrests and murders of several leading boyars in the Shuiskii and Bel’skii princely clans and within their factions. And Ivan IV's bloody Oprichnina can be construed as the unleashing—willful or unintended—of private vendettas among boyar factions. Experiences such as these undoubtedly had a cautioning effect on families anxious to avenge an insult. The indifference of Muscovites to dueling even when the practice was known in the seventeenth century from contact with Europeans probably also bespeaks the elite's indifference to the idea of exclusive, corporate status. Not until the late seventeenth century do we see stirrings of the idea that the upper

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77 Most scholars consider suits before the 1530s not "precedence" proper: Zimin, "Istochniki"; Klemola, "Status"; Shmidt, "Mestnichestvo i absoliutizm"; Buganov, "Vrazhdotvornee."  
80 Muir, Mad Blood, esp. chap. 8; Christopher Boehm, Blood Revenge (Philadelphia, 1984); Keith M. Brown, Bloodfeud in Scotland, 1573–1625 (Edinburgh, 1986).
elite should be distinguished as an aristocracy—a trend that would have been promoted by a socially exclusive ritual such as dueling.

Precedence developed in response to social tensions that, if left unchecked, could have threatened the success of Moscow’s project to expand in territory and power. It constituted a legal solution to a social and political problem and is best understood as one of many strategies that the state evolved in its drive to mobilize resources (and to keep stability while so doing). It does not seem to have been a rearguard defense by an entrenched elite to safeguard its ancient rights, as some historians argue. There were no such ingrained rights, no age-old aristocracies in Muscovy. There was a small band of boyar families that had been tied by bonds of personal service and loyalty to the Moscow grand princes, constituting the roots of an elite that grew suddenly and precipitously from 1450 or so. Precedence norms evolved with the elite itself, in a fluid situation of constant growth and invention of solutions to emerging problems. The question remains, however, of how precedence functioned over the long term to serve the elite and state.

Precedence in Practice

To answer that question, I turn to litigation for evidence of actual practice. The source basis is a collection of 1,076 cases, which numbers about one-third fewer than the approximately 1,620 cases that Iu. M. Eskin has identified, but which is proportionally equivalent in chronological distribution.81 The database represents most cases from the published versions of military service musters, the principal Muscovite repositories of records of precedence disputes, and numerous archival cases.

Analysis of the patterns of almost two centuries of litigation is surprising and striking. In terms of historiographic interpretations, these patterns support Veselovskii’s and Presniakov’s understanding of Muscovite politics as patrimonial and discredit the ideas that the elite used precedence for upward mobility or that the autocrat was hobbled by it. Simply put, most of the time in precedence suits, plaintiffs lost and the status quo of clan hierarchy was affirmed. But, significantly, the tsar turned plaintiffs down in a variety of ways to cushion the blow (see the table), deftly limiting disaffection among losers and asserting his authority over the disposition of his men. Thus precedence was a quintessentially patrimonial institution, allowing the ruler to pursue policy while appeasing his men in the most personal and familiar of terms. Of the 1,076 cases in the database, in only approximately 1% (14 cases) did the plaintiffs win outright, and four of these are associated with the Buturlin

81Eskin, Mestnichestvo v Rossii; see nn. 18–19 above.
clan, whose precedence records have long been regarded with suspicion.\(^{82}\) That outright vindications were rare, however, should not imply that precedence did not satisfy litigants and resolve tensions. It did so in a more consensus-building fashion, often by preemptively removing the source of tension. In approximately 24% (254 cases) of the cases in the database, the tsar appeased the plaintiff without recourse to trial. Within that 24%, several expedients were used. Usually the tsar declared the disputed service relationship “without place” (“bez mest,” i.e., setting no precedents for future litigation); sometimes he reassigned the disputants without further need of a suit on the issues; and occasionally he declared the men equal (mestniki).\(^{83}\) Let us look at these strategies in turn.

Tsars declared litigants bez mest in many ways, not only by literally pronouncing the fact. Apparently simply accepting and recording the petition also made a disputed service assignment “without place”: We find many instances of the tsar agreeing to record the petition or explicitly declaring service “without place.”\(^ {84}\) In 1649, Prince A. M. Volkonskii, for example, was assigned to accompany the Swedish ambassador, while Iakov Zagriaskoi served the Habsburg ambassador. At the time, Volkonskii regarded his ambassador as lesser, but did not sue because, as he noted in his later petition, this was “the tsar’s

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<tr>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Percentage of total* (number of cases of 1,076 total)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plaintiff wins trial</td>
<td>1 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaintiff appeased without trial</td>
<td>24 (254)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaintiff told to “serve as ordered”</td>
<td>12 (132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No follow-up recorded</td>
<td>14 (155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaintiff is refused (loses case)</td>
<td>48 (521)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When plaintiff loses case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With trial</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With no trial</td>
<td>85</td>
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*Percentages are rounded to nearest whole number.
affair." But when the two ambassadors attended services at the Kremlin on Palm Sunday and Volkonskii's ambassador was publicly listed below Zagriaskoi's, then he found the service unbearable. Volkonskii sued, and the tsar readily agreed to call this service "without place."

Reassignment was also an easy way out for the tsar; it was frequent in the 24% of cases in which plaintiffs were appeased without trial. For example, in 1613, five men were assigned to be ceremonial bodyguards (ryndy) to the tsar. The fifth sued the third, and the tsar dismissed them all and selected four different men. Similarly, a state secretary who sued another state secretary in 1628

85Pogodin, Dela 5, no. 13, pp. 340–41; RGADA, Zapisnye knigi moskovskogo stola, opis' 6a, delo 12, ll. 201–11v (7170).
over precedence was replaced rather than being made to serve.\(^{86}\) Sometimes clarifying the assignment did the trick. In 1586, E. I. Saburov was sent as first military commander (voevoda) to Toropets, where Prince V. K. Shish Pronskoi was already serving as governor (namestnik). Saburov protested serving under him. The tsar immediately elaborated: Saburov was to have sole authority on military affairs (delo ratnoe) and Pronskoi was to have administrative authority (namesnicheskoe), essentially making the men equal.\(^{87}\) Thus a campaign or ceremonial occasion could proceed as planned without participants fearing an insult to their honor and eternal shame to their clan.

In a less conciliatory mechanism, the tsar instructed the litigants to serve as ordered, generally without benefit of "without place" reassurance, and promised them a litigation after the service was over. This meant that service would go ahead, but it put the burden on the litigants to pursue their grievances. This formulation occurred in approximately 12\% of the database cases (132 cases), with approximately one-half mentioning that the suit occurred but not giving the resolution, and records for the other half failing to mention whether a suit subsequently occurred. In approximately 14\% of the cases (155 cases), no follow-up whatsoever is recorded. Certainly, in some cases, loss of documents explains the absence of information. But, as with dishonor litigations, these statistics might indicate that litigants chose not to pursue their suits, even though failure to follow through was regarded as admission of inferior status. Such was stated explicitly in a 1619 suit between Boyar Prince D. I. Mezetskii and I. A. Pleshcheev. Mezetskii failed to pursue the suit, and the military service muster notes that "To Ivan Pleshcheev, it was clear that he was made equal (rozveden) with Mezetskii and he did not petition further for a trial."\(^{88}\) Why not pursue a case? Perhaps because the procedure was tedious and expensive; perhaps because if the suit were lost, it could result in the clan's being publicly humiliated; or perhaps, most saliently, because hopes for victory were slim. The calculation that litigants probably made was that if they sued and succeeded in getting appeased (as we recall happened in 24\% of the suits in the database), their clan was in some way vindicated, and they would come out ahead. If that did not occur, pursuit was essentially pointless and risky.

Nevertheless, many persevered, and they were generally disappointed. Almost one-half of the cases in the database (521 cases) were lost by the plaintiff. Approximately 15\% of the time, he lost after a trial based on the sort of genealogical and service calculations spelled out earlier. But in approximately 85\% of the cases that were lost, no such litigation was involved. The most frequent outcome of a petition about precedence was for the tsar, or a spokesman

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\(^{87}\) RK 1559–1605, p. 216 (7094).

\(^{88}\) DR 1: cols. 409–10 (7127).
acting in his name, to reject the plaintiff summarily. The tsar might point out that the disputed service was not eligible for precedence calculations. In 1625, for example, stol’nik Prince V. G. Romodanovskii was assigned to summon an ambassador to the table at a ceremonial banquet, while stol’nik Prince F. B. Tatev was to serve at the table. Romodanovskii considered his role inferior to Tatev’s and thus insulting, but the tsar refused his suit, saying that traditionally there was no application of precedence in this particular sort of service. Similarly, R. F. Khrushchov was assigned in 1658 to serve under Prince G. G. Romodanovskii; when Romodanovskii informed him that he had given L. P. Liapunov authority over the fortress while Romodanovskii went to inspect another outpost, Khrushchov protested serving under Liapunov. But the tsar responded that this service would not set a precedent regarding place; all orders would continue to be addressed to Romodanovskii, and Khrushchov would not be considered serving under Liapunov for purposes of “place.”

Often the clarification took the form of reminding the litigants of the 1550 rule that defined the relative place of the command positions in the flanks of the army on campaign and declared many of the relationships to be “without place.” (For example, the first commanders of the advance, right, left, and rear guards were to rank lower than the chief of the central unit.) In 1551, when Boyar Prince V. I. Vorotynskii protested serving as second in command of the “great” (bol’shoi) or central regiment while Boyar Prince P. M. Shcheniatiev was first in the right flank, the tsar responded that according to the rule, “The second in command in the great regiment has no affair with the commanders of the right, forward, and rear flanks; they are to be without place and no calculations of place (shchet) will be given.” But for good measure, he added that in any case, the Vorotynskii princes could serve below the Shcheniatiev princes.

Indeed, often the tsar asserted immediately that a particular family outranked another and that the suit was completely out of line. For example, in 1564, another Vorotynskii, Boyar Prince Alexander Ivanovich, protested serving first in the forward flank when Boyar Prince I. I. Pronskoi was first in the more prestigious right flank. The tsar—the redoubtable Ivan the Terrible—retorted to him, according to the written record: “You should know your own measure and serve by my order in my service.” Case dismissed. Similarly, in 1630, when assignments were being given out “at the hand of the tsar,” stol’nik Prince I. A. Khilkov protested serving first in the main flank of the auxiliary army when stol’nik Prince M. M. Temkin-Rostovskii was first in the main flank in the major army.

911551: RK 1475–1605 1, pt. 2, pp. 403–4 (7059); RK 1475–1598, pp. 132–33 (7059); RK 1550–1636 1, p. 14 (all 7059). Other examples include RK 1475–1598, p. 154 (7064); DR 2: col. 452 (7143).
Joining the two armies together (skhod) for battle formation would put him subordinate. Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich refused him on the spot, telling him he was suing inappropriately (ne po delu): “The Khilkovye have no primacy over (ne soshlos’s) the Temkiny.” Similarly, in 1631, V.P. Chevkin sued I. I. Pushkin, again over the touchy issue of two armies joining together and service assignments made “at the hand of the tsar” thereby being rearranged. Pushkin countersued for this dishonor, saying that “The Chevkiny have always served as captains under my father and uncles; Chevkin himself served under me and my cousin Boris Grgor’evich Pushkin, and now he sues at the instigation of my enemies.” Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich (according to the written account) turned to Chevkin in anger and distress (kruchina), saying that he sued “inappropriately, not in accordance with his rank” (ne delom, ne po svoei mere). Again, case dismissed.92

The tsar dispatched Boyar I. P. Sheremetev’s suit against Boyar Prince N. I. Odoevskii in 1645 with similar aplomb. Three days after the disputed service, Mikhail Volosheninov, the Conciliar State Secretary (dumnyi d’iak) of the Military Service Chancery, announced to Sheremetev in the tsar’s anteroom before many people that he had sued inappropriately: “Your kinsmen under previous tsars without fail served with the Odoevskie and never sued about it.” For dishonor to Odoevskii, he was ordered imprisoned. In a similar case involving less eminent litigants, the resolution was the same but the punishment harsher: The losing plaintiff, N. V. Kaftyrev, was beaten with bastinadoes and imprisoned for dishonor to Prince N. V. Meshcherskoi.93

Frequently, the principle that decided cases was that provincial families have no “place” versus elite families. For example, in 1625, D. D. Shenkurskoi was assigned to serve under I. V. Izmailov in Mozhaisk. But Shenkurskoi protested that his kinsmen “have served well”: His great-grandfather was a mayor of Novgorod and served second to Prince V. Paletskii as governor of that city under VasiliII and Ivan IV, and his kinsmen “never served under Ivan Izmailov in any circumstances.” But Izmailov sued for insult, and the judges concurred: “The Izmailovy of old under many sovereigns served in high honor (v chesti) in many places as military commanders.” They pointed out that Ivan Izmailov’s brother Artemii held the high rank of okol’nichii and that Ivan and his brothers have “had the honor of serving as stol’ni.” But the plaintiff’s father served in Kostroma in provincial service (s gorodom), and “The Shenkurskie never served in any high honor nor anywhere as military commanders.” So the judges imprisoned Shenkurskoi for dishonor to Izmailov (one source says he was also beaten with bastinadoes) and told him to serve as ordered.94

Sometimes the tsar lost patience with an insistent litigant who refused to wait until after service was over for his hearing; then he would punish the plaintiff for his disobedience, sometimes regardless of the merits of the case. For example, Prince S. I. Shekhovskoi sued in 1638 over serving as second commander in the main flank when stroĭnik Prince S. I. Velikii-Gagin was second in the rear guard. He was refused because the whole campaign had been declared "without place," yet still he persisted. The tsar retorted that he had sued "acting like a criminal" (svoim vorovstvom) and could in fact serve far inferior to Prince Velikii-Gagin—he and even his father could serve below Velikii-Gagin and even below his son! For dishonor to the defendant, he was imprisoned, and for disobedience he was exiled to Siberia. Similarly, if less harshly, M. A. Ziuzin and B. I. Pushkin were sent in 1648 to Sweden as ambassadors, and Ziuzin sued over his inferior rank. He cited many cases from the 1550s through the 1640s in which Pushkiny served under his ancestors. Pushkin countersued for dishonor: "Even Mikita's great-grandfather Grigorii Ziuzin could serve less than me. They are lowly [literally, 'young'] people and not high born (liudi molodye i nerodoslouanye); you cannot even find precedents in service where they served with us (sluchaev na nikh pisat' ne nakovo)." And he cited "the tsar's order that low-born do not sue high-born people, nor receive a trial with them." Indeed, when the case came to trial, it was verified that the Pushkiny were included in the Sovereign's Genealogy, but not the Ziuziny. The judges ruled in Pushkin's favor on the basis of the service record he had put forward; for dishonor, the plaintiff was ordered imprisoned and then sent in humiliation to Pushkin after imprisonment. But even after that, Ziuzin refused to serve as ordered and so was imprisoned again, and his patrimonial and service-tenure lands were confiscated. The properties were restored when he was released from a long imprisonment, by which time, the military service muster book noted, he had managed to avoid carrying out the disputed service.95

Losing a suit for precedence was not without risks. It required at the very least that the plaintiff serve in the disputed place, thus setting an official precedent that could in the future be used against his clan. If the defendant countersued for the dishonor of the plaintiff's allegations, losing litigants might be compelled to pay a hefty dishonor fine or suffer corporal punishment as determined in the guidelines established by law. Litigants risked further punishment if they were recalcitrant. Litigants who refused to accept the verdict and to serve as ordered could be fined, imprisoned, beaten, or even suffer confiscation of property and exile. Yet much of the punishment that the tsar meted out to stubborn litigants was exemplary; the threat of imprisonment was often enough to enforce compliance. Frequently the harshest sentences were miti-

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gated by the tsar’s mercy after being announced, and prison sentences were brief enough to make a point without causing undue suffering. They ranged from “a day and a night” to three days, rarely longer.96

For particularly recalcitrant litigants who refused to accept their subordinate status after a suit over precedence, the tsars could decree a ritual of public humiliation called being “surrendered by the head” (vydacha golovoi u). It was reserved generally for men in the highest ranks and for the most extreme cases. The ceremony is so peculiar to modern eyes, and yet so powerful in the Muscovite context, that a long narrative description by the seventeenth-century Muscovite state secretary, Grigorii Kotoshikhin, deserves to be quoted.

And those men who do not wish to serve under boyars are sent to the boyars at their home “by the head” for having dishonored a boyar. And on the day when the tsar orders some boyar or okol’niichii or stol’nik sent by the head to a boyar for dishonor, or when a dumnyi dvorianin or dumnyi d’iak or stol’nik is sent to an okol’niichii, that day the boyar or okol’niichii does not appear before the men who had not wanted to serve under him were being sent to him by the head. And he awaits him. And such men are sent to them with a state secretary or an undersecretary; and bailiffs, seizing those men by the arms, lead him to the boyar’s home and do not permit him to ride on horseback. And when they have led him to the home of the man with whom he had not wanted to serve, they place him on the lowest staircase and the state secretary or undersecretary orders that the boyar be informed of their arrival. . . . And the boyar goes out on to the porch to the state secretary or undersecretary, and the state secretary or undersecretary begins to deliver his speech, proclaiming that the Great Sovereign has ordered and the boyars have decided that this man, who did not want to serve with him, be brought to him, the boyar, by the head for having dishonored a boyar. And that boyar expresses his humble thanks for the tsar’s favor and he orders that the man whom they had brought be released to his own home. But in releasing him to his home, he orders that he [the loser] not mount his horse in the courtyard nor lead his horse into the courtyard. And the man whom they have sent by the head to him, as he is walking from the tsar’s palace to the boyar’s courtyard, and when he is in the boyar’s courtyard, insults him and dishonors him with all manner of abuse. But that man [the winner] does nothing to him in response to his wicked insulting words and he cannot, since the tsar sends that man to him because of his dishonor, out of love for him, but for no other purpose, not so that the man would kill or injure him. And anyone who inflicted such malicious dishonor and assault on such a man sent to him would be himself punished doubly, because he dishonors not the man who has been sent to him but actually the tsar himself. And that boyar [the winner] to whom they bring [the loser] gives them [the attendants]

generous gifts, and on the next day that boyar goes to the tsar and, having arrived, humbly thanks the tsar for his favor, for having ordered that his rival be sent to him by the head.97

What makes this ritual so powerful is that it acts out simultaneously vindication and graciousness, thereby enforcing social hierarchy and stability in the elite. It gave public satisfaction to the winner of the suit by forcing the loser to proceed on foot to his rival’s courtyard and prostrate himself before him. But it also worked to restore consensus among the boyars in a sort of Durkheimian catharsis, as the ceremony allowed the vanquished to declare again his claims against the winner and as the norms of the ritual explicitly denied the winner the right to respond. Being surrendered by the head allowed the loser a venting of spleen to balance the winner’s victory. Each, in theory, walked away satisfied, ready to bury their animosity and cease whatever disruption their quarrel was causing the tsar. The ritual was a social drama that resolved conflict in a way that restored traditional values.98

These immediate responses, in particular the speedy determinations of the general relationship of clans, show a system flexible enough to respond to conflict and resolve it expeditiously. In light of this evidence, the old arguments—that precedence inhibited the tsar’s autocratic authority or that, conversely, it kept the aristocratic elite too busy to conceive of the idea of corporate rights—seem off the mark. The system described here was a utilitarian means of conflict resolution that functioned because the players were committed to this very personal and patrimonial system. The strongest leitmotif in these suits is the tsar’s knowledge of his men and his confidence in his authority. Tsars present themselves as stern but fatherly patriarchs. When provoked, they respond with a mixture of anger and distress; the verb used is kruchinit’, meaning to cause grief, sorrow, and distress, as well as to provoke to anger. It conveys both long-suffering patience and frequent loss of temper, as the tsar goes about his job of schooling his children. Mikhail Fedorovich, for instance, left many examples of how he personally kept his troops in line with firm discipline and occasionally a sharp tongue.

At a banquet in 1613, for example, Boyar Prince B. M. Lykov sued for place against the tsar’s uncle Boyar Ivan Nikitich Romanov. The tsar “was distressed at Prince Boris,” repeating to him many times that he could sit lower than

97Kotoshikhin, O Rossi, pp. 44–45.
Romanov, as he had in the past. Lykov replied that “It would be better to be executed than to serve lower than Romanov,” but if the tsar should order him to serve lesser because of Ivan Nikitich’s kinship with the tsar, then he would serve. Mikhail Fedorovich retorted that Lykov could be less than his uncle Ivan Nikitich “by many measures aside from my kinship with him.” He admonished Lykov not to distress him further and to sit at the table. Lykov refused again and returned home; the tsar sent after him and ordered him “surrendered by the head” to the tsar’s uncle. Similarly, D. B. Voeikov sued B. G. Pushkin in 1626 and was harshly rebuffed by the Conciliar State Secretary of the Military Service Chancery, F. F. Likhachev, who called him and another litigant “petty gentrymen” (detishki boiarstkie) and promised harsh punishment if they sued again. But Voeikov repeated his suit, and Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich himself chewed him out: According to the extant record, the tsar insulted him “with a mother oath,” also repeated the “petty gentryman” (synchish boiarstkiii) label, and declared “If you sue again, I will order you publicly shamed (opozoriti)!” In a suit of 1618, Mikhail Fedorovich told a plaintiff that he was acting like a cheat (plutal), pointing out that he was from a lowly family of provincial gentrymen from Kashira (liudi molodye, Koshirenia). In 1622, he turned down a suit, threatening “great disgrace and merciless punishment” should the plaintiff sue again; when he did sue again, the tsar refused him “with great anger” (s velikoiu kruchinoi) and ordered him imprisoned.99

Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich was not unique. In 1580, Ivan IV threatened execution to a recalcitrant litigant, whom he said “was talking nonsense, not knowing a thing (bredit, ne znaia)”; he called another a cheat (plutaet). In 1585, Tsar Fedor Ivanovich told a litigant that he played the fool (duroval) by bringing suit.100 The examples can be multiplied.101 Some of this language may have been penned by scribes, but most accounts quote a tsar directly at audiences and at banquets and seem to represent his real participation. Sometimes judges themselves took on the role of disciplinarian. In two cases of 1623, for example, the judges “expressed great distress and anger (kruchinilis)” and called one litigant a “slave” and berated another with insults (laiali).102

In these cases, the tsars exhibit what has been called in the European context “zealous anger”—that is, an extreme response by a lord or sovereign calculated to set right the imbalance caused by human pride. Kings and lords frequently


101From Aleksei Mikhailovich’s time: DR 3: cols. 287 (7160), 361 (7161), 479 (7163), 482 (7163); RGADA, f. 210, Moscow stol, stb. 262, II. 140–45; PSZ 1, vol. 1, no. 156, pp. 363–64 (7160). From Fedor Alekseevich’s time: RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, stb. 933, II. 39–40 (7187); RGADA, f. 210, Moscow stol, stb. 1032, II. 51–65 (7187).

chastised their vassals for disrespect or pretensions to power; their anger shocked subordinates into restoring established social hierarchies.\textsuperscript{103} The power of the outburst was in its evocation of the righteous anger of the Old Testament God; high emotion was justified by the responsibilities of lordship.

Sovereigns throughout this period also explicitly declared their authority over rank assignments. In 1500, Ivan III informed a recalcitrant general that “You are not serving Daniil [the defendant], you are serving me and my affairs.” Ivan IV in 1558 told a plaintiff that he was acting like a fool (duruet): “We send our servitors [literally, slaves] on our service where it is appropriate.” Mikhail Fedorovich instructed a Conciliar State Secretary to inform a plaintiff that he was reassigned, but not because his claim for precedence was justified; rather, the tsar can choose to send anyone anywhere he wants. On another occasion, he assured a litigant “According to my sovereign order, the boyars [in charge of assignments] assign as military commanders those who can serve with each other.” In another suit, he informed two litigants that they were both low born and had no “place”—“Where the tsar orders them to serve, they will serve.” Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich said the same thing in 1660 in refusing a suit: “We assign our generals knowing who can be with whom.”\textsuperscript{104} Clearly, the ruler and his bureaucracy had the last word in this system.

Tsarist authority worked because servitors accepted the system and because rulers wielded their power with flexibility and empathy. Families tried to respect the tsar’s prerogative to set their “place.” We have seen above, for example, Prince Lykov agreeing to serve if the tsar made an explicit exception. Many other suits are prefaced by plaintiffs’ earnest assurance that they were “ready to serve as assigned, but . . .,” followed by their apologetically pointing out to the ruler what seemed to them an unjust assignment.\textsuperscript{105} In other cases, litigants turned to the tsar confident of vindication: “The tsar knows our family status,” they declared.\textsuperscript{106} They had reason to hope on the tsar’s judgment because, as we have seen, there was great latitude available for assignments. The “without place” rule was liberally used for whole campaigns and types of service and readily applied to appease disputing servitors (in approximately one-fourth of these cases, recall, some form of appeasement carried the day).


\textsuperscript{105}DR 2: col. 443 (7143); KR 2: col. 547 (7142); DR 2: col. 350 (7142); DR 2: col. 420 (7143).

\textsuperscript{106}DR 1: cols. 984, 990–996 passim (7136).
Further, the tsar bestowed mercy to moderate the system, as he did in all litigation. Not often, but in cases of very harsh punishment, he lessened the sentence, often citing the reconciling influence of saints’ celebrations or the intercession of holy or respected individuals. In 1623, for example, Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich in great anger sentenced a recalcitrant suitor to demotion to provincial service, but then, on the occasion of the holy day of Metropolitan Peter, he reinstated him to rank. Similarly, in 1625, he forgave a sentence of imprisonment and disgrace after the intercession of his father, Patriarch Filaret, on the occasion of the holy day of Metropolitan Aleksii. In 1633, the tsar ordered two stol’niky reprieved as they were being led to prison. In 1640, the tsar ordered two litigants to be released from the service of which they had complained because “They are young and do not understand campaigns in the field,” even though they were still punished for the dishonor of their suit. In 1669, two recalcitrant litigants, who had “deeply angered” Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich and “caused great harm to the Tsar’s affairs,” were nevertheless spared execution and instead exiled to their country estates “after the intercession of the tsar’s children.” In 1672, a stol’nik ordered beaten with bastinadoes was pardoned and imprisoned instead.107

The expeditiousness with which cases were resolved also suggests something of the functionality of precedence. It did not tie up the government with interminable suits on the eve of important battles. As A. I. Markevich remarked long ago, complaints were often decided on the spot by rejection or deferment. Robert Crummey concurs, noting that precedence worked efficiently and that the government had ample flexibility to work around it when necessary.108 Thus, even though its critics declared that it harmed Muscovy’s military preparedness, and Peter I later roundly condemned it in 1719 (almost 40 years after its abolition), precedence probably did not play a negative role in military readiness or governance.109

In light of this evidence, we might raise anew the question of cui bona: Whom did precedence benefit? Winners in suits clearly won defense of their status and perhaps even scrambled up the status hierarchy by dint of the victory. But winners were so few as to be unimportant. Perhaps the many plaintiffs who were rebuffed in their efforts to claim higher place might have gained social esteem in the process, because filing the suit was a means of asserting that the


two families were on a par. By and large, however, the benefits of precedence would seem to have redounded not to those who initiated suits, but to the defendants that consistently won. Precedence most often worked to affirm traditional status relationships as reflected in the original service assignments that fell under dispute, and thus it affirmed the social status quo. It also affirmed not only the tsar's power but the whole patrimonial political system.

Precedence consolidated the elite around the ruler because it simultaneously gave established families assurance of their social status, offered hope to aspiring families for higher prestige, and gave the ruler a forum in which to display his benevolence as well as his authority. Precedence allowed ambitious men to aspire to status while hardly hindering the ruler's discretion in service assignment or jostling old families from high status. When change in the status hierarchy came, as it did continually, it resulted not from aggressive litigation, but from the more traditional means by which elites were renewed across the European stage—mortality of and within clans, grand princes welcoming new families to the elite, and the elite expanding with military and bureaucratic reform and growth. An important part of the equation unquestionably was that the rapid expansion of the bureaucracy and military in the sixteenth and especially seventeenth centuries gave sovereigns a range of options. They could tolerate precedence in order to cultivate an aristocratic elite within the elite while not tying their hands or limiting social mobility. Aspiring families could enjoy lucrative leadership positions even if they never did succeed in winning the cachet of "place" in the precedence system; gradually that cachet dissipated as well. The grand princes, then, could get the best of both worlds by offering ambitious men the opportunity to litigate while neither threatening the social status quo nor denying other avenues to up-and-comers.

One could perhaps argue that precedence, in fact, enhanced "autocracy"—some might even say "absolutism." But each term should be used cautiously. These litigations show that political relations—even in the seventeenth century, when the bureaucracy and empire it served were growing by leaps and bounds—were personal and face to face. Like French monarchs of this same time, Russian tsars could use court rituals such as precedence disputes to keep their men in line and to enunciate standards of behavior and social status. In a fast-growing government, precedence litigations, regardless of how much the tsars might have preferred not to be bothered with these cavils, kept the sinews of the patrimonial political system flexible. If one takes "autocracy" or "absolutism" to connote a dynamic system of interdependencies between ruler and myriad elites and social groups, then precedence was indeed a tool of build-

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10 On the renewal of elites, see my *Kinship and Politics*, pp. 105-8.

ing "autocracy." To avoid quibbling over definitions, one might best think of precedence as a strategy in the maintenance of traditional political stability. As Anthony Giddens and Michael Mann have stressed in their theories of premodern social systems, large centralized states in premodern conditions cannot hope to create deep and broad social cohesion. Means of communication were simply insufficient. The key to success was the cultivation of an elite willing to execute the policies of the center. Most fundamentally, such cultivation took the form of material rewards and high social status. Precedence can be seen as a key strategy for building a loyal elite and for responding to social change; the result was a strong and flexible state.
