

The Cult of Peter the Great
Among the South Slavs in the 18th Century.

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June 2, 1982

"Our Peter has neither rivals nor models

since the beginning of the world:

He is akin and equal to no one but himself."

-Vassarion Belinsky-

"If a man must be found, who, in our conception

resembles God, I find none excepting

Peter the Great."

-Michael Lomonosov-¹

"What is the difference between God and the Tsar,

if both are offered the same respect?

Even... though God is high (up) and the Tsar is

far (away), nevertheless a prayer to the

former and service to the latter will not be in vain."

-Peter the Great-²

This was not, however, the image of Peter the Great that was held by the people. He was the "Batiushka Tsar," their own little Father Tsar. An old Russian proverb states that "without the Tsar, the land is a widow; without the Tsar, the people is an orphan."³ Peter had been like one of the people: he had worked

Introduction

Peter the Great is among one of the most controversial men of the past three centuries. During the thirty-six years of his reign in Russia, his reforms changed the very focus of the country, and opened it for the first time to the Western world. For these actions, he was either loved or hated. By many he was said to be the Anti-Christ, sent to destroy Russia by allowing her to be contaminated by foreign influences. There were rumors that he was not a Russian at all, but a German changeling ruling over Russia with the purpose of damning all her souls to perdition.³ To many of Peter's European contemporaries, he was something of a natural savage, full of innate good sense and good humor, but very rough and ill-mannered.⁴ To Voltaire and his contemporaries, Peter was the first great "enlightened despot." He proved to them that progress could be legislated for reluctant peoples, and that the forces of religion and tradition could be confronted and defeated. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Petrine myth of the individual ruler of genius overturning the dark superstition and backwardness of his people had been introduced and accepted in Europe.

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beside them, fought beside them, dined with them, attended their weddings, and often stood as God-father to their children. When Peter would travel outside of Russia, he preferred to live among the common people, rather than stay in richer accommodations. He was like one of them, and yet he was much more. In the eyes of the people, his actions and deeds became embellished until they took on the characteristics of a myth. Peter was not only the Tsar, he was the people's "Zemnomu Bogu," their God on earth.

This paper will deal with the cult of Peter the Great among the South Slavs in the eighteenth century. The Slavs perceived Peter much in the same way that the Russian people did. He was their Saviour, their Moses who had come to free them from the yoke of Ottoman oppression. He was the only true defender of the Orthodox church, and he was their last hope. Out of their need, their desire for freedom, Peter's myth took on the proportions of a cult, and the Slavs worshipped him as a God. This cult became the foundation for the beginning of Russian intervention in the Balkan peninsula. When Peter answered the Slavs' call for help against the Ottoman Turks and the Catholic Hapsburgs, he established the basis for the Russian (and later Soviet) policy of Pan-Slavism.

The topic will be undertaken in three parts. The first section will deal with Tsar Peter; the images of him that turned the "tishaishii" (most gentle) tsar into the "Gosudar Imperator" (sovereign emperor), epithets which remained in use until 1917.⁶ These images of Peter were taken by the people and used to enhance the Tsar's position among them. Part two will deal with the South

Slavs; their flight into Hungary to escape from the Turks, their absorption into the Military Frontier, and the circumstances that brought them to call on Peter for assistance. Section three will discuss the reactions of the Slavs to Peter, the development and perpetuation of the cult of Peter the Great among the South Slavs, and the reaction of other powers to Russian intervention in the area.

In this paper, with only minor exceptions, I have adhered to the system of transliteration used by the Library of Congress. Plurals of non-translatable Russian words (boyars, gubernias) have been anglicized. All dates will be given according to the modern calendar. Translations of materials in Serbo-Croatian were done through the courtesy of Dr. Dmitrije Djordjevic.

Part I; Tsar Peter

"Our Lord Peter the Great, who has drawn us from nothingness
into being."¹

Peter was born into a society that was ready for change. While he is often given the credit for the very transformation and modernization of the Russian state, these changes actually began to take shape before Peter's time, back in the seventeenth century. While the majority of the Russian people were content to dwell in Russia's old inertia, a small handful of progressive people had already begun to separate themselves from the existing social order. They were painfully aware of the growing gulf between Russia and the West, and were themselves no longer content to live a way of life inherited from ancient times. Two directions began to emerge, the Old Russian and the European. While the smaller group sought the cure for Russia abroad, the majority preferred to find their solution by keeping Russia even further isolated from the West, and by clinging firmly to the old, established traditions and rejecting innovations. They felt that Russia, "Holy Russia," must shun both the infidels in the East and the foreigners in the West to remain strong.²

Previous Tsars were in agreement with the traditionalist views. The duty of the Tsar, who was chosen by and responsible only to God, was to look after his people like a father. The Tsars took their roles as patriarchs quite seriously. They were an example for the people to follow, or, to use a more contemporary term, they were their childrens' role model. They addressed their

subjects as children, and had the same unlimited power over them that a father has over his own children. For the sake of their people, the Tsars also took their roles as Defenders of the Faith seriously. It seemed to the people as though the fate of Russia depended entirely upon the personal piety of the Tsar. For their part, the people came to look upon the Tsar as a type of semi-deity. Some old Russian proverbs illustrate this view.

"Only God and the Tsar know."

"One Sun shines in Heaven, and the Russian Tsar on earth."

"Through God and the Tsar, Russia is strong."³

Peter's father, Tsar Alexis Mikhailovitch, was an example of the "holy" Russian Tsar. He was pious to the point of being nicknamed, "the Young Monk," on his succession to the throne in 1645, at the age of sixteen. He became known as the tishaishii tsar, the quietest, gentlest, and most pious of all the Tsars. His hours each day were spent in either prayer or administrative work with his boyars. His personal habits were austere, and his court was said to more closely resemble a monastery than any of the other royal courts of Europe.

Alexis, with his devout nature, was greatly influenced by the Patriarch Nikon (from Novogorod) of the Russian Orthodox Church, and became embroiled in a religious problem that would affect Russia for years to come. The cleric exercised a powerful authority upon the monarch, and was even given the title of "Great Sovereign" by Alexis, which was a rare honor. However, Nikon came into conflict with traditional Orthodox views. He expressed the idea, common to the Catholic West, that the church

was superior to the state, and he endeavored to assert his position over that of the sovereigns'.⁴ In this Nikon went too far, and was accused by his peers of papism. Nikon never refuted this charge, and even said that in many aspects of religion, the Pope was right. Nikon and Alexis quarreled in 1658, resulting in the start of Nikon's fall from his position of power in the church. This climaxed in 1667, when Nikon was first deposed as Patriarch, and then defrocked. He spent the remainder of his life in exile, in a distant monastery.

The controversy around Nikon was not based only on his supposed papist views, but around his reform of church practices and religious books. These reforms resulted in a permanent split in the church. Those that kept to the religion before the reforms were called the "Old Believers." The religion after Nikon's reforms was now termed, the "New Religion." Many of the Old Believers saw the religious issues as an opportunity for the expression of social protest, against the ever-increasing importations from the West. In this manner, a great many people embraced the schism - they were probably as many as twenty per cent of the Russian population at that time.⁵ Tsar Alexis saw his precious church divided, and spent the last decade of his reign in the midst of religious strife.

This was the realm that Peter inherited. If the prevailing attitude in Moscovite Russia was, "Be careful; see that you do not lose the good things handed down to you from yesterday," Peter's attitude was that of, "Forward, do not fear change. Seek to bring about a tomorrow that will be better than today."⁶ He

moved with speed and assurance, to bring about his desired changes in Russian life.

Peter came into power by various stages. First, as a boy of ten, he was designated co-tsar with his older, half brother Ivan in 1682. Seven years later, he and his followers gained effective control of the government in 1689. At that time, Peter was only eighteen, and more interested in building his budding navy than running the country. The government was run by his mother, the Tsaritsa Natalya, and her family, the Naryshkins. Peter finally came into sole rule in 1694, upon the death of his mother.

What Peter brought to the monarchy, in addition to his extraordinary physical attributes, (over six feet, seven inches in height and weighing approximately two hundred and fifty pounds) was his very unusual mind. He possessed an insatiable intellectual curiosity, coupled with an amazing ability to learn. Everything was of interest to the Tsar. Two of his most frequent phrases were, "What is this for? I will see this!" His mind could best be described as active and practical, able to quickly grasp problems, and to devise solutions, if not to construct theories.

The reforms and changes that Peter introduced are both numerous and famous. In order to demonstrate how the cult of Peter the Great began, this section will focus on how he was viewed by the people, by using certain historic examples to illustrate how his popularity among the people grew and took on the proportions of a myth. If, as Michael Cherniavsky states, a myth is founded on the need to justify reality, how did the myth that was established around Peter help the Serbian people? What were the characteristics

of Peter that the people came to love, and helped to secure his role as Defender of the Orthodox? While Peter was already "larger-than-life," what were the qualities that gave him immortal fame?

To many, Peter was known as the "Artisan Tsar," for he greatly enjoyed working with his hands, and prided himself on his ability to make almost anything from a ship to a pair of shoes. While in Amsterdam, he worked incognito as a ship-carpenter, and strictly adhered to all regulations of the shipyard.⁷ Another time, when visiting a manufacturing plant in Istia, Peter forged several bars of iron ore. He made his companions of the journey blow the bellows, stir the fire, carry coals, and do all the labouring work of journeymen blacksmiths. The Tsar demanded payment from Muller, the owner of the plant, and was paid at the same rate as all the other workmen. He used the money, "to buy me a pair of shoes, of which I stand in great need." He immediately went to a neighboring shop, bought the shoes, and took great pleasure in them, saying, "I have earned them well, by the sweat of my brow, with hammer and anvil." A bar of iron, forged by his own hand, is still in the Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg, but this one was forged later at Olonetz.⁸ This type of incident helped to enhance Peter's image in the eyes of the people. He was a working example of the teachings of the church. Did not God say to Adam, "By the sweat of thy brow shall thou earn thy bread?"⁹ Peter's father, Tsar Alexis, might have been more pious in his devotions than his son,

but Peter spent more time practicing his religious philosophy through his actions out in public. His high visibility among his subjects helped to build his myth.

When Peter sought to learn about something, be it a craft or an art, he would start at the bottom and work his way up. His sense of humility was deeply appreciated by his subjects. The people liked the fact that the Tsar would not use his rank, but preferred to be judged solely on his merits. What was even more unique, and especially endearing to the people, was that Peter forced his nobles to do the same. When Peter was in training to become a sailor, there is a popular tale told of the time that he was left in charge of the helm during a violent storm. At the height of the storm, the helmsman pushed the floundering Tsar out of his way, saying that he knew better how to steer the ship. After he had safely navigated the ship through a dangerous passage and into a safe anchorage, the man realized what he had done. He threw himself at the Tsar's feet, and begged forgiveness for his rudeness. "Peter took him up, and, as usual when pleased, kissed him on the forehead. 'There is nothing to forgive. I owe you my thanks, not alone for our rescue from danger, but for the very proper rebuke.' He then made him a present of his drenched clothes and settled on him a small pension."¹⁰ There are many such anecdotes of Peter's adventures in the Navy and the Army, and they all served to create a great deal of respect and admiration for the Tsar among the people.

Although Peter himself received no formal, systematic education, he quickly realized the need for more advanced technical

training and education for his people. He opened up the Nemeckaja sloboda, (German Suburb) whose residents, along with numerous teachers they imported from the West, would impart their advanced knowledge to the Russians. These "foreigners" as they were called, had been sequestered in the German Suburb to assuage the anti-foreign passions of the Russian Orthodox clergy.¹¹ Enclosure in the Suburb allowed the Europeans to maintain their habits and traditions from the West. They had their own churches, both Lutheran and Calvinist, (Catholics were not allowed churches, but the priests could say mass in private homes) spoke their own languages, and educated their children in the European manner. They were also allowed open correspondence with their home countries, and this created a flow of news that kept them updated on all that was happening outside of Russia's borders. Despite the church ban on contact with foreigners, bolder Russians, "thirsty for some knowledge and intelligent conversation, began to mingle with the residents of the German Suburb."¹² Western habits began to permeate the Russian way of life, such as the eating of salads (which at first the Russians called grass), and likewise the foreigners took on many Russian qualities. There even began to be intermarriages, such as the one between Alexis Matveev and the Scottish Mary Hamilton. It was at their home, in the Suburb, that Tsar Alexis first met Peter's mother, Natalya Naryshkina.

It was the German Suburb that captured the heart of Tsar Peter as a young man. The colorful variety of people and customs fueled his active imagination and kept his interests fresh. It was first through the residents of the Suburb that Peter became aware of the

benefits that association with Europe had to offer Russia. He utilized his contacts there, and through them used their special knowledge for the enhancement of life in Russia.

Upon his succession to the throne, Peter overruled the hostile sentiments of the clergy towards foreigners, and surrounded himself with Europeans. They not only gave him knowledge, but imparted a sense of gaiety and liveliness that the Russian court had long been lacking. They encouraged Peter in his avid desire to explore all aspects of life, and indulged him shamelessly. They would accompany him everywhere, be it to a forge where they would work for the day, or, most often, drinking until dawn. It was here in the Suburb that Peter formed his "Jolly Company" of comrades, among them, General Patrick Gordon and Francis LeFort. The Jolly Company could consist at any time from approximately eighty to two hundred followers. They consumed enormous amounts of food, with even larger amounts of drink. Their banquets could go on from one to three days, with the guests simply rolling on the floor when they became intoxicated or sleepy.

In addition to the many spontaneous drinking bouts and banquets, the Jolly Company engaged in organized buffoonery. The most famous (or infamous) incident occurred when they were made into the "All-Joking, All-Drunken Synod of Fools and Jesters," with a mock "Prince-Pope," college of cardinals, assorted deacons, priests and bishops. Peter himself served as a deacon, and was responsible for drawing up the Synod rules and rituals. The Tsar personally planned the arrangements for the wedding of Jacob Turgenev, his favorite jesyer. The wedding lasted three days, and

climaxed in the couples' triumphant entry into Moscow, at the head of a large procession, mounted on a camel.

How did this image of Peter, that of a drunken reveller, mesh with that of the artisan Tsar? To the people, Peter was simply upholding the centuries old Russian tradition of intemperance. In the words of Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev in the seventeenth century, drink was, "the joy of the Russes."¹³ Everyone drank, peasants, priests, boyars, and now, openly, the Tsar. To be drunk was an essential part of Russian hospitality. Unless your guests were sent home drunk, the evening would be considered a failure. The fact that very few could keep up with the Tsar's capacity for drink, enhanced his fame with the people. This image of Peter only gave the people one more close bond with their Emperor.

Peter, in another aspect of his role of patriarch, had to serve as judge to his people. While he was often vengeful and exacting in his punishments, he was always seen as being fair in his dealings with the common people. An example of his fury can be found in his conduct during the executions of the Streltsy, his elite guard, after their second uprising. Many of them the Tsar personally beheaded for their treason. During this period, everyone fell within the sweep of the Tsar's wrath. Priests who were discovered to have prayed for the success of the uprising were condemned to death. A woman, passing in front of a gibbet erected before the Kremlin, said of the men hanging there, "Alas! Who knows whether you were guilty or innocent?" She was quickly

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denounced as one who expressed sympathy for the traitors, and arrested. After she was able to prove to Peter that she was only expressing compassion for all people who suffered, she was released.¹⁴

A lighter example of Peter's sense of justice deals with the time Peter treated the wife of his valet for a toothache. This story has been reprinted many times, but only once, in a 1839 manuscript, was this completed version found. Peter liked to fancy himself as a dentist, and upon hearing the valet's wife was ill with a toothache, insisted on seeing her. When the Tsar examined her she said that there was nothing wrong. Her husband told the Tsar that she would always say that, in the presence of a doctor. Peter then proceeded to have the woman held, and he extracted the tooth himself..."A few days later, the Tsar learned from other members of his household, that the woman's tooth ailed nothing, and that the whole was a trick of the husband to be avenged of his wife's supposed gallantries. Peter was not to be trifled with; the poor woman had been pained unnecessarily, and the trick was put upon him. Peter called his valet, and gave him a severe chastisement with his own hands.¹⁵

The Tsar was a harsh judge, but fair to his people. Stories like the two examples above showed a ruler who was interested in the truth, and took the time to find it. He made the people feel that everyone was equal in his eyes, from the lowest peasant to the highest boyar. He further demonstrated this, when he regretfully signed his own son's death warrant, after Alexis had been tried and found guilty of treason.

There are many tales in the life of Peter the Great to illustrate his interaction with his people. Many are founded in

hard fact, and others in fiction. Yet even the fictional accounts show a deep reverence and love for the Tsar. One of the main difficulties with biographies of Peter, is that they are extremely biased. The Russians assumed an attitude of abject servility and religious worship to the Tsar's memory and deeds.¹⁶ Peter was larger than life, and his exploits brought fame and honor to the Russian people. This was the Tsar that would be worshiped by the South Slavs.

In 1453, at Constantinople, the Ottoman Empire conquered the Byzantine Empire. This was a turning point in the history of the Balkans. The Ottoman Empire was a powerful state, and it was the first of its kind in the region. The Ottoman Empire was a powerful state, and it was the first of its kind in the region. The Ottoman Empire was a powerful state, and it was the first of its kind in the region.

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According to Ottoman theory, the principal attribute of sovereignty was the right of the sovereign sultan, or the Porta, to hold as Imperial Possessions all sources of wealth in his empire, together with sufficient authority for him to exploit these sources for his own benefit. The entire structure of Ottoman society was based on this essential assumption.² During the period

part II: The South Slavs

Throughout the past, the Balkan peninsula has been the home of many different nationalities, or ethnic groups. These nationalities have been subjected to many different influences from the neighboring world, for because of the area's geographic diversity, Slavic communities were never quite large enough or sufficiently strong enough to ward off well-armed invaders. In respect to the topic of this paper, it is necessary to understand two of the major influences on the South Slavs: the Ottoman Empire and the Hapsburg monarchy. The Ottoman ruling policies in regards to the Balkan peninsula and the Austro-Turkish conflict led to the migration of the South Slavs into the Hapsburg monarchy.

In 1389, at Kosovo, the Ottoman Turks smashed Serbian resistance and took control of the Balkan peninsula, destroying both the Bulgarian and the Serbian kingdoms. By 1500, except for a small number of Montenegrins, all of the Balkan Slavs were subjected to Turkish rule. For the next three centuries, the Slavs remained isolated, physically and culturally, from the rest of Europe.¹

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MAP 16. Turkish advances and conquests. (1) The directions of Turkish advancement; (2) localities of important battles; (3) year of temporary conquest; (4) year of permanent conquest.

of Ottoman conquests, there was no policy of forced conversion to Islam, for the ruling class or for the peasantry. The Turks felt that such an effort would disrupt the main purpose of Ottoman government, the collection of taxes for the Porte. In this manner, the Balkan peasantry and church remained intact, while the Balkan nobility was given the opportunity to be assimilated into Turkish society. If the nobles wished to

convert, there was a chance for the nobles to advance socially within the Ottoman system. The Turks displayed generally enlightened policies towards their conquered peoples, while backing up these policies with superior military strength.³

It was because of these "enlightened policies" that religion became a key factor in Balkan life. The Turks granted official recognition to the Orthodox Church as a "millet" or national religious community in the Balkans. The Serbian Patriarchate at Pec was recognized from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. In the southern parts of the Balkan peninsula, the Orthodox Church was the power that kept the Balkan Christians united during the years of Ottoman domination. In the north, in Croatia and parts of Transylvania, the Catholic Church was the dominate force for the people. Both churches were able to operate due to the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, which started in the sixteenth century.

With the growth of the Hapsburg monarchy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these northern parts of the Balkans became Austrian and Hungarian territories. This area was used as a type of buffer zone against the Turks, and many of the area's residents were converted to Catholicism. The Catholic church was not involved in a struggle against Orthodoxy, but each one, in her own domain, made full use of their hierarchy and institutions in order to prevent their adherents from becoming absorbed into the Ottoman-Turkish world, through conversion to Islam.⁴

Although the two churches were not hostile to each other, the Catholic church, and her defenders the Hapsburg monarchs, had been

long associated with the struggle to drive the Infidel Turks out of Europe. In 1529, Turkish armies almost captured Vienna,⁵ and they again unsuccessfully laid siege to the city in 1683. The Turks saw the Hapsburgs as using the Catholic church to cover their true expansionist policies. As for the Orthodox church, until the appearance of a powerful Russia on the international scene, Orthodoxy presented no threat to the Ottoman empire, for the most important centers of the eastern church were within the Ottoman territory.⁶ When Moscow became widely accepted as the "Third Rome," many Orthodox loyalties were shifted from Constantinople to Moscow. However, this threat or challenge to Orthodox leadership was not as important to the Turks as the threat of Hapsburg expansion.

This "threat" of course, was a double-sided one, for the Turks wished to expand their empire to the north just as much as the Hapsburgs wished to expand into the south of the Balkan peninsula. In an effort to block the upward movement of the Turks into Europe, Ferdinand I of Austria established the Croatian Military Frontier,⁷ at the requests of the Inner Austrian Estates who were being ravaged by Turkish raids. In the summer of 1522, Ferdinand moved mercenary troops to garrison a number of strong points in Croatia. This action temporarily blocked the Turkish invasion route.

In the following years, Ferdinand's financial position deteriorated, and it became impossible for him to maintain an adequate military force in the Frontier. A solution was found to this in the employment of military colonists. The Turkish advance

had driven thousands of refugees from Balkan lands into northern Croatia. These refugees were assigned land, (which was readily available in the devastated frontier region) on the condition that they be ready for military service in time of need. Further immigration into the area was encouraged among the remnants of the local, exclusively Roman Catholic population. They received substantial privileges, including the right to share in captured booty, the right to elect their own officials, (subject to Hapsburg approval) and they were relieved of the usual manorial obligations. Most importantly, while they did not receive the same rights as the Catholic colonists, all colonists of Orthodox faith were promised freedom of religion. This was an important right for the Serbs, and allowed them to retain their cultural ties to the Balkans. Later in 1630, Emperor Ferdinand II consolidated the various rights, regulations, and statutes of the Military Frontier into one comprehensive document, the Statuta Valachorum, which emphasized and confirmed the military character of the border establishment.⁸

In 1683, the Austrians repulsed the last Ottoman offensive on Vienna, and advanced on the entire front against the Turks. Five years later, the Austrian army reached Pec, the seat of the Serbian patriarchate. While in Pec, the Austrians encouraged a general uprising against Ottoman rule. Patriarch Arsenije, the Serbs' spiritual and political leader, was suspicious of Austrian motives. The patriarch enjoyed an essentially privileged status under Ottoman rule, and Arsenije was insistent to secure firm guarantees of Austrian respect for "traditional Serbian rights" as the price for revolt against the Porte.⁹ Arsenije also asked for

help from Italy and Russia to liberate the Serbs from the Turks, and to prevent them from being forced into a union with Catholic Austria. When his pleas for aid were politely refused, Leopold I of Austria threatened to depose the patriarch unless the Serbs joined his Imperial forces. In the absence of alternatives,¹⁰ Arsenije consented.

In 1689, the Turkish forces mustered and went on the offensive. When the Austrian general Piccolomini was defeated at Skoplje, it marked the end of Austrian arms in Serbia, and the army withdrew. Fearing revenge from the Turks, Arsenije led a mass migration of over thirty thousand families of Slavs into Southern Hungary, where they settled into the Military Frontier.

In response to the movement, Leopold issued the Proclamation of 1690. In it, he granted far more concessions to the Slavs than just the religious rights given by Ferdinand. He guaranteed the Orthodox church religious autonomy, and gave the Patriarch authority in both spiritual and secular matters for all of his followers, whether civilian or military.¹¹ The Serbs would also be exempt from taxation under Austrian sovereignty. These privileges were to be extended to all Serbs who might be forced to seek asylum in Austrian lands, on Arsenije's request.

Life in the Frontier did have a rather special advantage for the Slavs. After years of cultural isolation under Ottoman rule, they were brought into direct contact with Central Europe. While at the time this might not have seemed important, but in later years, it would play a large role in the settlement of the Eastern Question. It would give the Hapsburgs their claim to part of the

Balkan peninsula.

Although the privileges granted the Slavs by Leopold were reaffirmed in the following years, the Inner Austrian Estates, Croatian and Hungarian authorities were opposed to them. The Catholic church was openly hostile to the new settlers. Here were almost ninety thousand people who could not be taxed, converted, or tried under civilian law. The migration had also greatly increased the Serbian element in the military border, where in many settlements the Slavs constituted over one-half of the population. Local authorities used their established power to exploit the newcomers, and many violations of their rights occurred.

There was also a great deal of pressure on the Serbs to accept the Uniate faith, a creed using the Greek rite but in communion with Rome. The Uniates were more acceptable to the Austrians than the Orthodox, and were treated much more favorably. A number of Serbs in the Military Frontier did join the faith and became Uniates. The danger to the Serbs from this policy would be their loss of Orthodox unity. The extent to which this policy was effective can be seen in the election for the Serbian bishopric of Pakratz in 1704. Patriarch Arsenije was shocked to find a Uniate as candidate for the post, and it was with great difficulty that he was able to buy off this position and give the bishopric to an Orthodox Serb.¹²

When the Austrian Emperor turned a "blind eye" to the problems of the Slavic population in the Military Frontier, the Slavs were forced to look elsewhere for a champion. They came to believe that their champion would be Peter the Great.

Part III: The Cult of Peter the Great

The cult of Russia among the South Slavs was initiated before the migration into the Austro-Hungarian lands. The Balkan Orthodox, roused into revolt against the Turks in 1683 by Austrian campaigns on the peninsula, were faced with the return of the Ottomans as the tide of war reversed. Despite the fact that Emperor Leopold had granted the Serbs in his dominions freedom of worship, the Slavs were aware of attempts to convert the Serbs in Hungary to the Catholic faith (or at least into becoming Uniates). Patriarch Arsenije discussed a possible alliance with the Austrian officials, but after learning about Austrian mistreatment of Serbs, he turned to the Russians Tsars, Ivan and minor Peter in 1688. "Come to help your co-religionists and servants,"¹ was his plea to the Tsars. He received a reply from the Tsars on January 20, 1689,

and He sent this appeal to Moscow in the person of Isaiah, the Archimandrite of Saint Paul's monastery on Mount Athos.² Isaiah arrived in Moscow on September 13, 1688, and orally delivered the following message from all the Orthodox Christians under Ottoman rule. They requested Russia to attack the Turks, and not to allow the Austrian Empire or Venice to conquer them,

because there are Christians under the Pontificate who share the Orthodox common religion and language. They expect with joy the warriors of their Russian master. If the Romans conquer the Orthodox Christian lands and Constantinople, Orthodoxy will be destroyed. When the Russian army approaches Belgrade, the Voyvod will meet them with his army, and when the Russians come to the

Danube, 300,000 Serbs, Bulgars and Walachians will gather start the uprising, and open the road to Constantinople.³

This appeal stressed to the Tsars the similarities of language and religion between the Serbian people and the Russians. Curiously, it did not use as a primary argument that the Balkans were about to be recaptured by the Moslem Turks. The main focus of the plea was to save not just the Serbs, but all of Orthodoxy from the Catholics. While the Ottomans would indeed punish the Serbs for their political offenses against the Empire, they knew that they would not be punished solely for their religious beliefs.⁴ Whether the Serbs thought that this would be a more persuasive argument to present to the Russians than just the Ottoman re-taking of the Balkan peninsula is unclear, but appeals on behalf of similar religious and ethnic ties became the basis for future relations between Russia and the Slavs.

Isaiah received a reply from the Tsars on January 20, 1689, and was sent back to the Patriarch.⁵ Unfortunately, he was quickly captured by the Austrians, his letters seized, and he was held prisoner for two years until Russian intervention gained his release. The Tsars had expressed sympathy with the Serbian problem, but politely refused to interfere at this time, leaving the door open for future assistance. Arsenije, without an answer from Russia, waivered between Venice and Austria. The Viennese court, having now been forewarned (through Isaiah's letters) of possible Russian intervention, pressed the Patriarch, who finally joined the Austrians with a large number of insurgents. The reversal in the war, coupled with the withdrawal of Austrian troops back to

The opportunity of yet another victory over the Turks, cited by

north of the Danube, brought about the migration of the Slavs into the Military Frontier.

Despite Emperor Leopold's Proclamation of 1690, giving the Slav population in the military border numerous privileges, friction and conflict continued between the Catholics and Orthodox. The Slavs again turned to Russia for help. Peter, now sole Tsar, was one of the most popular monarchs in Europe. He was just twenty two, handsome, and possessed such energy that he seemed to be everywhere and involved in everything at once. Peter, after having failed in his first campaign in his war against the Turks in 1695, brought thirty sea-going vessels and approximately one thousand barges to Azov in 1696. After a two month battle, the Turks surrendered the city to the Tsar in July, 1696. Russian prestige was greatly enhanced by this victory, especially among the Serbs.

Peter's victory against the Turks increased the Slavic enthusiasm for the vigorous young ruler, and kept alive the Serbian hope for the liberation of the Balkans. The Patriarch kept close contact with the Russian representative in Vienna, taking care to always maintain cordial ties with Moscow. Arsenije sent a letter through the representative to Peter, on the occasion of the Tsar's birthday, the 31st of May, 1696, once again asking for help. The correspondence was delivered to the Tsar by the minister in September of 1696, along with his report giving a history of the Serbian settlement in Austria, and the Patriarch's complaints. At the end of his report, the minister added, "My Master, they have had a hard and sad life. They hope to be freed by your Imperial Majesty and God's help." 6

The opportunity of yet another victory over the Turks, aided by

an uprising of Christians in support of Orthodox Russia, however inviting, did not move Peter to immediate action. He and two hundred and fifty of his courtiers were planning to set off on what would be termed the Tsar's "Grand Embassy," his eighteen month tour of Europe. They were scheduled to leave Moscow early in 1697.⁷ Peter's reply to Arsenije expressed sympathy with the plight of the Serbs, but politely refused involvement at this time. To show his good faith, the Tsar included gifts of icons, money, and several jeweled portraits of himself with the letter to Arsenije.

After traveling through the Baltic provinces, Holland, England and other German states, Peter reached Vienna in 1698. He had come to urge his ally Leopold to continue the war with the Ottomans, only to have Austria sign the Treaty of Karlowitz, (completed in 1699) ending all Austro-Turkish hostilities. The Tsar regarded this as an act of treachery on behalf of his ally, and Russia would only agree to sign a two year truce agreement with Turkey, instead of a permanent treaty.

It was during these negotiations in Vienna that Peter, himself, came into contact with the Patriarch Arsenije. Arsenije asked the Tsar to try and pressure Leopold into keeping his 1690 promises of privileges to the Serbs. The Patriarch also seized the opportunity to indebt himself to the Russians, by supplying the minister Voznitsyn with loyal intermediaries to help conduct the peace treaty with the Ottomans.

Following the peace congress, Voznitsyn traveled to several Serbian settlements in the Frontier. He was most warmly received as the Tsar's emissary, and his cordial receptions kept active the idea

of Orthodox support for the Tsar. In 1699, Voznitsyn sent his agent, disguised as a monk, to the Patriarch Dositheus in Constantinople, a supporter of Peter. Voznitsyn wanted to investigate the possibility of an Orthodox Christian uprising in behalf of Russia. The Patriarch told the agent that he honestly could not say whether or not there would be active support for such a move. Voznitsyn reported to Peter, that in case the Russian army appears on the Danube,

innumerable masses of our people, our religion, and our language, would rise and take up arms, based on the principle of religious solidarity and the principle of ethnic Slavic solidarity.⁸

Whether he had other information than that of Dositheus, or simply surmised this from his own travel experiences is unclear. This is just one example of the conflicting intelligence reports that would influence Peter. However, once again the prospect of renewed war with Turkey would have to wait, for in 1700, Peter entered into a war with Sweden that would occupy him and the Russian forces for the next ten years.

The Serbs had been disappointed, but retained their faith in the Tsar. The friction between the residents in the Military Frontier continued. There was increased pressure on behalf of the Catholic church to coerce the Orthodox into converting, or at least accepting the Uniate rites.⁹ In May of 1702, approximately one thousand Serbian families left the Frontier and returned to their homes in the Balkan lands. It was also during this time, that plans were discussed by several Serbian families to immigrate to Russia, from their homes in the Walachien principality. They continued to send letters and requests for aid to Moscow, for Peter remained their last hope for

liberation. Typical examples of these requests can be seen in the following:

1702 "Besides God, we have no ruler like your Majesty."

1705 "Peter, our last hope, except for hope in God."

1709 "Be merciful to your Serbian relatives, as we have no other emperor, besides God."¹⁰

these pleas came from all aspects of Serbian society, religious, military and secular. They most always contained the promise of support for the Tsar, if only Peter would come to their rescue.

The steadfast faith that the Serbs had in Peter never diminished, in fact, it grew larger as news arrived about the Northern War. Each of his exploits added to his already larger-than-life image. After Peter's victory over the Swedish in 1709 at Poltava, his popularity increased enormously. Surely, if the Tsar could triumph over King Charles XII, he could help restore the Serbs to their lands. The Northern War had not only inflated their expectations of the Tsar, but it had inflated his own view of the political scene at the time.

King Charles had fled to the protection of the Porte following his defeat at Poltava. Soon, Charles, with the support of the French, convinced the Porte to declare war on Russia. Peter was not prepared for war in the south, with his forces still heavily concentrated in the north.¹¹ His only hope for success was to call on the Serbs and ask them to now prove their past promises, and give the Russians active support in their battle against the Turks. The Tsar issued several proclamations to the Balkan Christians, one of which read,

Now I come to your aid. If your heart wishes, do not run away from my great empire, for it is just. Let not the Turks deceive you, and do not run from my word. Shake

off fear, and fight for the faith, and for the church, for which we shall shed our last drop of blood.¹²

The Tsar's battle plan was rash, and hastily conceived. They would strike in force for the Danube, sweep into armed alliance the two Rumanian prinicipalities of Moldavia and Walachia, and summon all Christians (Orthodox and Catholic) to rise up and defeat their Moslem masters.¹³ Peter had already received the promise of support from the hospodars of Walachia and Moldavia, (Brancovo and Cantemir) before the declaration of war. It is important to note that Brancovo and Cantemir were vassals of the Porte, and not under Austrian control. Brancovo promised thirty thousand troops, and supplies for the Russian army when it reached Walachia; Cantemir pledged ten thousand troops.

The Serbian militia in the Military Frontier prepared to join the Tsar's forces, under the command of General Sheremetev. However, Hospodar Brancovo again changed his allegiance, informed Emperor Leopold of the militia's plans, and asked Leopold to prevent their joining Sheremetev. The three leaders of the militia were arrested, and the union of the Slavs and Russians was prevented.

Brancovo's betrayal had a devastating effect on the Russian campaign. Without the Serbian militia and the Walachian forces, Peter had only thiryt-eight thousand infantrymen to one hundred twenty thousand Turkish infantrymen and eighty thousand cavalrymen.¹⁴ The Tsar also found that the Moldavians could not make up for the lack of the promised Walachian supplies. After several days of losing battle at Pruth, the Tsar, faced with the real possibility of capture for himself and the Tsaritsa, sent Sheremetev to negotiate terms for surrender. Peter was fortunate that the Porte was reluctant to

continue the war. As it turned out, Russia lost all of the property she had gained in the 1696 campaign: Azov and Taganrog were to be returned, the Black Sea fleet abandoned, and all of the Russian lower-Dnieper forts were to be destroyed. In addition, all Russian troops were to leave Poland, and the Tsar's right to keep an ambassador at Constantinople was canceled.¹⁵ The Pruth campaign had been lost through misinformation about support, a hasty battle plan conceived by a young leader riding on the crest of easy successes at Azov and Poltava, and the treachery of a vassal.

The defeat did not end the enthusiasm for Emperor Peter in the Balkans. In fact, it caused his cult of personality to grow even larger. He had finally come to aid the Orthodox, and had been thwarted by treachery. After the peace between Russia and the Turks had been signed in 1713, the Serbs in the Hapsburg monarchy decided to continue their fight for liberation alone. While they knew that they could not get military support from Russia, they asked Peter to send them books and teachers. In 1724, the Tsar sent what would now be called a technical-assistance mission to Serbia, headed by Maxim Suvorov. He helped to establish the first schools in the Serbian settlements, and initiated the study of grammar and languages. This started a period of Russian influence in education among the South Slavs that lasted long past the death of Tsar Peter in 1725.

The Serbs continued their adoration of the Tsar, keeping his cult of personality alive for many years. The name of Emperor Peter was mentioned at every feast, on saint's days, and on every important occasion in the people's lives. Among the South Slavs, this adoration of Peter found expression in their epic folk poetry. These poems,

... songs, are a part of the oral history that kept the past alive for new generations. They were often embellished upon by each new poet-singer, but those that were preserved by publication illustrate the rich peasant style of the eighteenth century folk artists.

The following poem was written by Zaharije Orfelin, and published in his monography about Peter the Great in 1772. Orfelin was the editor of the oldest "periodical" among the Slavs, the Slavoserbski Magazin, printed only once in 1768. Orfelin tells of how the Slavs prayed to God "for a mighty wind to bring the Emperor Peter.....to free the Holy Mountain.... and to help exterminate the infidel." Four years later, it was republished in Russian by Prince Maxim Cherbатов. Because of the poem's Russophile contents, and the Messianic idea of liberation of the Slavs by Peter the Great, the poem was soon heard in every region of the country, and was responsible in part for keeping the cult alive during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Zaharije Orfelin - 1772

Now when this book is read,
that the Moscovy is fighting the Turks,
The Christians are praying to God, to be on the side of
their Emperor.

And now, please God, fulfill our wish
in the Glory of Your Name.

The devils are afraid of you, and certainly the Turks
are also.

They are so like wolves.

Oh God, send the mighty wind to bring us Emperor Peter
to the plain of Constantinople, and let him do your will,
On the ground and on the sea, to free the Holy Mountain,
and all it's monasteries, as well as all the monks.
So that they can sing to Your Glory.
And let the Turks be afraid of us,
Your Glory to be known.
So that many kings will wonder,
how one could with God's help day and night, the humble Serbs
and the Poor,
As well as others without might,
crying day and night, from You, oh God, expect help.
Rid us, Dear God, if You wish, if it is possible,
from the Turkish might.
And for Your Glorious Name, we cry, all the prisoners
in prison,

Until we have the glorious Moscow
where is to be found the mighty army,
And in the churches, the same liturgy, they will add to
our plea.
Until we have God's Will, the Christians will be better,
the Christians will make candles
So that in front of us will appear the old soul
and the look of Emperor Peter, all over the region,
It will exterminate the infidel,
and Constantinople, the Glorious place, will become what it
was for the Fatherland.
Because the prophecy is that much money will be spent
to ransom Your sheep.
And the Christians will be delighted, and will fight with us
against the Turk and Tartar,
Until they are totally smashed.
To cut down the Kadiz,
And to reach Scutari and Sofia, and to step over the Turks,
The Turks will break our laws to make Mohammed better,

And from our churches and altars,
they make mosques and towers.

On these towers the hoja is praying, and he is yelling, but
let him be evil.

So we shall cut the grass, as though it would be the Turks.

And now we have to drink wine,
and everyone will raise the first glass to the bright Emperor's
crown.

The mighty Emperor of the Moscovite,
The fundamental ruler of the East and West.

All souls are expecting help from him,
To send his servants to cure the Christians pains.

Help us, Dear God, to come under Your Mercy.

Help everyone you can, but not the Infidel.

Orfelin's work can be compared to Pushkin's poem, "The Bronze Horseman," published in 1837, as examples of the cult of Peter the Great. Pushkin tells how Peter, "with mighty thoughts elate," founded the city of St. Petersburg, and how his spirit lingers to protect the city over one hundred years after his death. Both poems served to keep alive the idea that, despite oppression, there was hope through Peter. In his time, Peter had worked some rather spectacular achievements for Russia, yet he still had time to concern himself with the plight of the Serbs. Perhaps, in the future, one of Peter's heirs would again be able to try and help the Serbs.

In the eighteenth century, the Austrians tried to change the focus of the Military Frontier, for through the Serbian settlements it had become increasingly pro-Russian. The attitude of the Hapsburgs, always closely allied with the Catholic church, was thoroughly opportunistic towards their Orthodox subjects. Concessions granted

to the "non-Uniate Greek rite," as it was officially called, were determined solely by reasons of state.¹⁶ Just as long as the military services of the Orthodox were needed, their religion was respected: when the need passed, the monarchy did nothing to stop the Catholic hierarchy who, with the help of local military officials, tried to forcibly convert the Serbs to Catholicism, or at least into accepting the Uniate rites.

Maria Theresa, who came to the Austrian throne in 1740, was determined to strengthen her realm, and issued a series of Theresan reforms, of which reorganization of the military frontier system was an integral part. She was also a zealous Catholic, and the thought of saving thousands of Orthodox souls caused her to endorse measures that clearly violated the Serbs' military border privileges. In 1741, she promised to turn over the Theiss-Maros districts (Serbian settlements) to the Hungarian Diet. When the transfer actually took place in 1750, there were riots, and a near mutiny in the militia. Russian agents, active in all Orthodox regiments at this time, recruited several thousand families for immigration to southern Russia. The openly pro-Russian sentiments among the Serbian militia, the Orthodox clergy, and the civilian elements of the Frontier disturbed the Austrian government greatly. Orders were given to arrest all Russian agents, "especially the Orthodox priests," and deport them immediately.¹⁷

Joseph II of Austria, was in many ways more tolerant than his predecessors, but under his control the Serbs began to see less religious rights. The Austrians decided that it would become necessary to subdue the Serbian Orthodox church, and tutor them in the proper

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"regulament," and in this way tighten their control of the Military Frontier. Part of this reform, was the abolishment of some of the Serbian monasteries within the Frontier, and the exile of the monks. The Hapsburgs established their right to confirm the election of the Serbian Patriarch, and began to influence the Serb National Church Congress by "helping" to select delegates that would be acceptable to the crown. The Illyrian Regulation of 1770 not only limited the function of the Orthodox hierarchy to religious duties, but established procedures for the convocation and conduct of church congresses and elections. The Regulation also set strict controls for the printing of religious materials and conduct of religious schools. It even eliminated over fifty feast days from the Orthodox calendar.

Reform also went outside of the church, and was aimed directly at the Russians. No "foreigner" was allowed to teach in the Frontier schools, and only prescribed books (prescribed by the government and Catholic church) would be allowed. There had come to be a predominance of Russian language books in the Slavic churches, and all of them, in one way or another, were directed against Austria. The final blow came when the Hapsburgs declared, in the Erlauterungs-Rescript of 1779, that all privileges granted to the Orthodox Church were subject to amendment and interpretation.¹⁸ It would, of course, be Catholic Hapsburg interpretation, and the end of any religious rights for the Orthodox.

Yet, try as they might, the Austrians could not destroy the cult of Peter the Great, which had become so firmly established among the Slavs. The harsh restrictions imposed upon the Serbs by Austria made them look towards Russia, and the relative weakness of

Peter's immediate heirs only served to heighten his image in the eyes of the people. However, the most important aspects of the cult would be its effects on the futures of Russia and the Balkans. Peter had begun the first, continuous relations between Russia and the Slavs.¹⁹ Russia had accepted the role of Champion of the Serbs, based on their common ethnic and religious ties. This role would become the Russian policy of Pan-Slavism, and would be an important consideration in the Eastern Question of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Peter's relationship with the Orthodox Slavs marked the beginning of Russian, and later Soviet interest in the Balkan peninsula. All of these things would come about, because through the Slavs' worship of Peter the Great, both he and Russia would become tied to the Serbian movement for liberation from the Ottoman conquerors and the religious persecution of the Hapsburg monarchy.²⁰

FOOTNOTES - INTRODUCTION

- 1) M.V. Lomonosov "Panegyric to the Sovereign Emperor Peter the Great," in Marc Raeff (ed.) Russian Intellectual History (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966) p 42-48
- 2) Marc Raeff (ed.) Peter the Great Changes Russia (D.C. Heath and Company 1972) p 142
- 3) Michael Cherniavsky Tsar and People (Random House 1968) p 75
- 4) L.J. Olivia (ed.) Peter the Great (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970) p 106-108
- 5) Cherniavsky, p 44
- 6) Ibid. p 83

FOOTNOTES - PART I

- 1) Marc Raeff, Peter the Great Reformer or Revolutionary
(D.C. Heath, 1963) p 8
- 2) Ibid. p 73-74
- 3) Robert Massie, Peter the Great (Ballantine Books, 1980) p 8-11
- 4) Nickolas Riasanovsky, History of Russia (Oxford Press 1977)
p 200
- 5) Michael Cherniavsky, Structure of Russian History (Random
House, 1970) p 154-158
- 6) Raeff, p 72
- 7) Riasanovsky, p 239
- 8) John Murray, A Memoir of the Life of Peter the Great (Bradbury
and Evans, 1839) p 54-55
- 9) Ibid. p 55
- 10) Ibid. p 24
- 11) Massie, p 112
- 12) Samuel Baron "Origins of the 17th Century Moscow Nemeckaja
Sloboda," California Slavic Studies p 96
- 13) Massie, p 118
- 14) Ibid. p 256
- 15) Murray, p 63-64
- 16) Xenia Gasiorowska, The Image of Peter the Great (University
of Wisconsin Press, 1979) p 42

FOOTNOTES - PART II

- 1) David MacKenzie, The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism (Cornell University Press, 1967) p 2
- 2) Charles and Barbara Jelavich, The Balkans in Transition (University of California Press, 1963) p 57
- 3) Dmitrije Djordjevic and Stephen Fischer-Galati, The Balkan Revolutionary Tradition (Columbia University Press, 1981) p 36
- 4) Jelavich, p 117
- 5) John McKay, ed. A History of Western Society (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979) p 521
- 6) Vladimir Dedijer, History of Yugoslavia (McGraw Hill, 1974) p 185
- 7) Eric Rothenburg, The Military Border in Croatia (University of Chicago Press, 1966) p 7
- 8) Ibid. p 11
- 9) Djordjevic, p 38
- 10) Ibid. p 39
- 11) Rothenburg, p 13
- 12) H.W. Temperley, History of Serbia (Howard Fertig, 1969) p 168
- 13) Ibid. p 557
- 14) Ibid. p 560
- 15) Rothenburg, p 20-30
- 16) Ibid. p 34
- 17) Ibid. p 59
- 18) Jelavich, p 167
- 19) Kostic, Cult

Note: The two works by Mita Kostic cited above, can be found at the University of California at Santa Barbara Library, in Serbo-Croatian.

FOOTNOTES - PART III

- 1) Mita Kostic, "The Cult of Peter the Great in the 18th Century" (Belgrade, 1959) tape transcript
- 2) B.H. Sumner, Peter the Great and the Ottoman Empire (London, 1949) p 34
- 3) Kostic, Cult
- 4) Temperley, p 131
- 5) Kostic, Cult
- 6) Kostic, Cult
- 7) Riasanovsky, p 243
- 8) Kostic, Cult
- 9) Rothenburg, p 13
- 10) Mita Kostic, "The Western-European Cultural Crossroads of the Serbs in the 18th Century. (Belgrade, 1964)
- 11) B.H. Sumner, Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia (London, 1960)
- 12) Massie, p 553
- 13) Sumner, Emergence, p 77
- 14) Massie, p 557
- 15) Ibid. p 560
- 16) Rothengurg, p 28-30
- 17) Ibid. p 34
- 18) Ibid. p 59
- 19) Jelavich, p 167
- 20) Kostic, Cult

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