



Muscovy in 1533

When his father, Grand Prince Vasilii III, died in 1533, Ivan, then three years old, became Grand Prince of Moscow and All Rus'. Muscovy's domestic institutions and international situation determined how the Muscovite elite dealt with a minor ruler. These factors also influenced how the adult Ivan would relate to the elite, to the Muscovite governmental apparatus, and to Muscovite society. This chapter first examines the rise of Muscovy before 1533 and the uncertainties affecting dynastic succession, then it explores some of the major characteristics of the Muscovite polity and society: Muscovy's political structure and political culture, the development of a bureaucracy and an administrative apparatus, the concept of centralization, and the reciprocal relationship between the government and society.

The Muscovite principality arose at the turn of the fourteenth century, when the Mongols still ruled the land. By the middle of the fourteenth century it had become a grand principality. As a result of continued expansion during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, by the time of Ivan's accession it encompassed all the formerly independent Russian principalities of the northeast, including Tver and Riazan, as well as the formerly independent city-states of the northwest, Lord Novgorod the Great and Pskov.

Muscovy had even conquered the city of Smolensk from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and extended Muscovite rule into the former heartland of the ancestor of all three East Slavic peoples (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians) of Kievan (Kyivan) Rus', the Dnieper (Dnipro) River valley, by taking the city of Chernigov (Chernihiv). Although Muscovy did not try to conquer the city of Kiev itself, the Muscovite elite remained fully conscious of Muscovy's Kievan roots.

Muscovy had become more powerful than its long-time regional rival, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which included considerable East Slavic territories populated by Ukrainians and Belarusians. Poland also included East Slavic lands, and the elected king of Poland after 1506 automatically became Grand Duke of Lithuania. Polish and Latin sources called East Slavs living under Polish and Lithuanian rule "Ruthenians." I refer to "Poland-Lithuania" as one country, although they were separate states with the same ruler until 1569, when they formally united in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Lithuania was not reconciled to losing East Slavic territory, such as Smolensk, to Muscovite expansion and particularly coveted Novgorod and Pskov, which it had never ruled.

The territorial boundaries of Muscovy to the west reached the state created by the crusading Livonian Knights on the Baltic Sea, called Livonia, which monopolized Muscovite-Baltic trade. Muscovy also bordered Finland, then part of Sweden; Sweden and Muscovy competed for influence over the Lapp population of the Arctic Circle. Sweden, Denmark, and Poland-Lithuania all had territorial designs on Livonia, which became especially prominent after war erupted between Muscovy and Livonia in 1558. The Livonian War lasted twenty-five years, and Muscovy lost.

The Juchid *ulus*, commonly and anachronistically called the Golden Horde in scholarship, the Mongol successor state of the Mongol Empire that had conquered Rus' in the thirteenth century, had disappeared by the time Ivan came to the throne. The Juchid ulus derived its name from Juchi, Chinggis Khan's eldest son, to whom Chinggis left the western lands conquered by the Mongols, and the Turkic word "ulus," meaning a polity. In the middle of the sixteenth century a Muscovite writer gave the Juchid ulus the name "the Golden Horde" (*Zolotaia orda*).¹ However, its successor states, the khanates of Kazan, Astrakhan, Crimea, and Sibir (western Siberia), and the nomadic Nogai hordes, still threatened Muscovy's southern and southeastern borders with slave raids. Under Ivan's grandfather, Ivan

III, Muscovy had begun encroaching down the Volga River to influence Kazan. Ivan completed the process by conquering Kazan and Astrakhan in 1552 and 1556. The Crimeans retaliated by burning Moscow in 1571. Crimea had more military resources than Kazan. Muscovy and Poland-Lithuania engaged in a bidding war to bribe the Crimeans to attack the other, and both lost. The Crimeans raided the Ukrainian and southern Polish regions as well as Muscovite territory. Therefore, the ruler of Moscow always faced the risk of a two-front war, on the south and southeast with Muslim Tatar states and on the west and northwest with Christian states.

Until 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, the Patriarch of Constantinople appointed the Metropolitan of All Rus', the head of the Rus' Orthodox Church, usually a Greek, originally one metropolitan in Kiev. In the fourteenth century the metropolitan moved to Moscow. In 1453 the Muscovite Church became autocephalous, although after 1458 a rival Metropolitan of All Rus' was established in Halych for East Slavs under Polish and Lithuanian sovereignty. We are interested only in the metropolitan in Moscow. Historians disagree as to how much control the grand prince of Moscow exercised over the autocephalous Russian Church and the selection of its metropolitan. The Russian church continued to show due respect to the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople, who was also the recipient of royal philanthropy. Some historians assert that it was the triangular relationship among the grand prince of Moscow, the Metropolitan of Moscow, and the Patriarch of Constantinople, and not just relations between the grand prince and the metropolitan, that created political tensions in Moscow.

Both the Habsburg Holy Roman emperor and the pope knew about Muscovy. Imperial envoys had visited Muscovy during the reign of Ivan III, in part because Muscovy and the empire had a common enemy in Poland-Lithuania and in part because the emperors, like the popes, never ceased hoping for Muscovite aid against the Ottomans. Indeed, the Ottoman threat played a role in the papacy's intervention as matchmaker in arranging Ivan III's marriage to Sophia Palaiologa, the niece of the last Byzantine emperor. The pope wanted Muscovy to expel the Turks from Constantinople. Muscovite rulers knew that Muscovy lacked the military capacity to accomplish such a goal. Moscow assiduously courted the sultan's approval, in part because of the profitable oriental trade and in part in hopes, no more fulfilled than those of the Holy Roman emperor or pope

for a Muscovite crusade, that the sultan would restrain the ruler he treated as his vassal, the Crimean khan, from raiding Muscovite territory.

Therefore, Muscovite expansion before Ivan's accession left in its wake potential problems in dealing with Moscow's neighbors, the Tatars, Livonians, and Lithuanians.

DYNASTIC SUCCESSION

At home, in the middle of the fifteenth century, Muscovy endured a long dynastic war over succession. Vasiliï II claimed the throne by direct succession from his father, Vasiliï I. Vasiliï I's brothers and nephews asserted a counterclaim by collateral succession, from brother to brother. Vasiliï II won. Brothers and nephews of the grand prince of Moscow became holders of appanages, hereditary semiautonomous domains with their own institutions. In the absence of a direct heir, an appanage prince could still claim the throne. Before Vasiliï III had an heir, his eldest brother, Prince Iurii Ivanovich, had been heir apparent, and his younger brother, Prince Andrei Ivanovich, next in line. When Ivan ascended the throne as a minor, his appanage princely uncles became a problem. Muscovy lacked a fixed law of succession, so the ambiguity of direct or collateral succession could only be resolved by politics, a very problematic process sometimes, as the crisis of 1553, when it was expected that Ivan was fatally ill, demonstrated all too clearly.

MUSCOVY'S POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL CULTURE

In the absence of a mentally and physically competent adult male grand prince after Ivan's accession as a boy, someone else had to fill the vacuum at the center of political authority. Muscovy's political structure and culture determined how the elite would respond to this situation.

Muscovy's political culture rested upon tradition (*starina*) and custom (*obychai*), not codified laws. No fundamental law regulated dynastic succession or political decision making. Muscovy lacked Renaissance abstract political theory, however marginal such theorizing was to political reality in contemporary states.² The absence of constitutional legislation gave the Muscovite political elite a certain degree of flexibility in adapting to

changing circumstances. Nothing prevented Muscovites from declaring innovations in administration to be the restoration of tradition, which they did. Failure to deal with political problems cannot be blamed on the customary nature of the Muscovite government.

The Royal Council (Duma) stood at the apex of the administrative structure. It was more than an ad hoc meeting of whichever councillors the ruler (or whoever acted in his name) decided to summon at the moment; it was an institution. Muscovite diplomatic sources beginning in 1536 referred to gentry who lived “in the Royal Council.” (In the sixteenth century the word “*dvoriane*” referred to members of the royal court or household [*dvor*], literally “courtiers,” who included boyars, gentry, and others; it was only in the seventeenth century that it acquired the meaning of “gentry.” In this study I translate *deti boiarskie* / *deti boiarstvo* as “gentry” and *dvoriane*, except when dealing with conciliar gentry, as “courtiers” or “members of the court.”) Beginning in 1555, the sources referred to the Privy Council (Blizhnaia дума), not just to “privy councillors.” While the relationship of the Privy Council to the Royal Council remains obscure, nevertheless these references demonstrate that the Muscovite political structure recognized the existence of functioning permanent political bodies. At Ivan’s ascension only boyars and associate boyars (*okol’nicie*) belonged to the Royal Council. The boyars, from approximately twenty to forty families, constituted the upper elite (gentry and some bureaucrats formed the lower elite). They filled the major civilian and military leadership posts. Judging by boyar testaments, land purchases and donations, and cadastres, they owned large amounts of land, the major form of wealth in Muscovy, as patrimonies (*votchiny*). However, the Royal Council was a state, not a class, organ. Modern historians invented the term “Boyar Council” (Boiarskaia дума).

Later in Ivan’s reign, without impugning boyar preeminence, Ivan appointed members of two additional classes to the Royal Council: conciliar gentry (*dumnye dvoriane*, the only case during the sixteenth century in which *dvoriane* meant “gentry”) and conciliar state secretaries (*dumnye d’iaki*). “State secretaries” refers to clerks who worked for the central government, as opposed to those who worked for individuals, other institutions, or freelanced. The highest level of state secretary was conciliar state secretary. The gentry had begun assuming more prominence in Muscovite service after the Muscovite annexation of Novgorod, when Ivan III initiated a program of assigning conditional land grants (*pomest’ia*) to gentry military

servitors as a reward for service. (Boyars accepted conditional land grants as well.) By Ivan IV's reign, gentry who held conditional land grants and did not serve could forfeit those grants. Gentry cavalry archers constituted the core of the Muscovite army and occupied lower administrative offices than did boyars. Although state secretaries and almost all treasurers (*kaznachei*) were nonaristocratic bureaucrats, the office of majordomo (*dvoretskoi*), an official in charge of the ruler's personal properties, could be a boyar or an associate boyar. Only one treasurer ever rose to boyar rank. The majordomos and treasurers of boyar rank who helped set policy acted not as boyars or members of the Royal Council but as officials. The state secretaries were the highest-ranking professional bureaucrats in Muscovy. They headed the most important administrative bureaus. State secretaries served on "boyar" diplomatic negotiating teams.⁴ Historians have paid much attention to how the boyars reacted to the promotion of gentry and state secretaries to positions of influence in the Muscovite governmental apparatus because much of traditional historiography assumes that rulers sought to offset aristocratic influence by relying upon gentry and non-noble bureaucrats. In this study "nobles" or "the nobility" refers to the Muscovite boyars (aristocracy) and gentry combined.⁵

Officially, the ruler decided who acquired the status of boyar. He did so primarily but not exclusively on the basis of genealogical seniority within the clans customarily entitled to supply members.⁶ The word "boyars" often encompassed associate boyars as well. Unofficial texts also employed the word "magnates" (*vel'mozhi*).⁷ The ruler could not dispense with the leadership of the boyars, who commanded his armies, administered the most important provinces and cities, advised him in council, and who alone had the experience to perform these services.

Why the Royal Council could not prevent Ivan from committing atrocities is a question that has dominated modern historiography.⁸ Legal historians in particular have blamed this failure on the absence of boyar constitutional and political rights that would have enabled them to stand up to Ivan the way the English barons stood up to King John, producing the Magna Carta in 1215. (Such historians would do well to remember that later King John in effect tore up the charter.) Such a rigid approach to political history underestimates the Muscovite ability to manipulate their customary institutions.⁹ No law regulated the competence of the Royal Council or how the ruler selected its members. Legislation could become law without its

approval, as was also true of the English Parliament.¹⁰ In all likelihood the boyars arrived at decisions by consensus, not voting, but because no minutes of the council's proceedings survive, this inference cannot be tested. In any event the Royal Council presented all its decisions as unanimous. It is likely that all boyars belonged to the Royal Council but unlikely that all boyars actually attended any given session, because some were always out of town with field armies, in various cities as governors, on leave, sick, or in disgrace ("disgrace" officially deprived a courtier out of favor of the tsar's physical presence; the nature and duration of the punishment depended entirely upon the ruler's discretion).¹¹

Muscovy lacked any concept that the Royal Council should oppose the ruler. No law defined the rights of the Royal Council, but no law defined the rights of the ruler either. Custom dictated that no member of the Royal Council could be punished without trial by the grand prince or the boyars, but political reality permitted exceptions.¹² Tradition expected the ruler and his boyars to cooperate, rendering the distinction between the Royal Council's legislative and consultative authority moot. The ruler should consult his subjects, especially his elite; if he did not, he was a bad ruler. Literary texts, icons and frescoes, palace and church architecture, and ritual and ceremony—in a word, image and performance—articulated this same harmonious conception of politics. A grand prince without a royal council would have been as unthinkable as a royal council without a grand prince.¹³ Muscovite political culture did not share the assumption of many historians that conflict should and did govern the relationship between the ruler and the boyars.

Boyar dominance of Muscovite politics depended in part upon the boyars' relationship to members of other social groups active in administration. Unfortunately, we know only enough about patronage-client relationships among the elite to conclude that they existed.¹⁴ Theoretically, boyars could patronize other boyars, gentry, or officials. In addition, non-boyar members of the elite such as appanage and serving princes (southwest border princes who retained some regalian rights when they switched loyalty from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to Muscovy), as well as bishops and monasteries, had their own clients. Therefore, as in France, nobles could choose to act on the basis of kinship or patronage. Loyalty to one set of ties might entail disloyalty to another.¹⁵ Of course, the boyar clans played politics among themselves, most of all via marital alliances. Kinship politics among

boyars did not exclude non-kinship political relationships among boyars or between boyars and non-boyars.

Who initiated policy cannot be established.¹⁶ The ruler (if not a minor), the boyars, the metropolitan, leading clerics, and even state officials—state secretaries, majordomos, and treasurers—could all contribute to policy formulation, formally or informally.¹⁷ State officials were not just flunkies who took orders. State secretaries wrote and presented “position papers” to the Royal Council. If it approved them, they became decrees or decisions. If it rejected them, most likely the paper on which they were written was discarded. Without an adult ruler the Royal Council had to play a stronger role in government, unless someone else successfully acted in the name of the ruler, as Ivan’s mother did for a time.

During Ivan’s minority changes in bureaucratic personnel did not reflect changes in the boyar clans dominating the Royal Council. No boyar faction constituted a “government” in the modern sense of controlling the entire administrative apparatus of state. Consequently, continuity in government operation resulted from cooperation. It was not a case of just the leading boyar clans playing musical chairs at the top. The entire elite, including the gentry and highest apolitical professional bureaucrats, had to work together. Only such cooperation explains Muscovy’s ability to defend its borders and even to innovate in domestic policy during Ivan’s minority. Preserving the dynasty constituted the number one priority of the elite as a whole, and in this it succeeded: Ivan lived to adulthood. However, chaos at the top did permit greater abuse of authority in the provinces.¹⁸

THE BUREAUS AND BUREAUCRACY

Historians have long considered the development of a bureaucracy, a professional administrative apparatus, as a hallmark of the new, modern monarchies of the sixteenth century. A bureaucracy freed the monarch from dependence upon the “feudal” aristocracy, and provided an instrument for the implementation of royal policy. Ivan’s Muscovy certainly had officials, but whether it had a bureaucracy depends upon one’s definition of the word. Max Weber defined a bureaucracy as a completely meritocratic, rational, efficient administration independent of outside interests. Because this sociological “ideal type” exists only in theory, Muscovy could hardly have a Weberian bureaucracy. Whether Tudor England had a Weberian

bureaucracy remains disputed. As in Muscovy, results, personality, and power mattered more than abstract, rational principles or plans. It is more productive to look at bureaucracy not as an institution but as a process.¹⁹

Counterintuitively, Muscovy had bureaucrats before it had bureaus (*prikazy*). By the beginning of the sixteenth century state secretaries conducted administrative business according to standardized procedures and wrote administrative documents in professional jargon. The government apparatus evolved out of the household of the ruler, the Royal Council, or the treasury.²⁰ Because departments were not established by decree, we know only the date of the first reference to a department, not necessarily its date of creation. Most departments appear first as “huts” (singular, *izba*) and did not acquire the designation “bureau” (*prikaz*) before the 1560s. Even after that, either designation could apply.²¹ Some bureaus utilized names without either “bureau” or “hut,” such as the Treasury (Kazna) and the Register (Razriad), which could also appear as the Registry Bureau (Razriadnyi prikaz). To further complicate matters, sources refer to state secretaries as bureau secretaries earlier than the first reference to the bureau itself. Allusions to “registry secretaries” (*razriadnye d'iaki*) predate the first reference to the Registry. Therefore when the Law Code of 1550 referred to “bureau people” (*prikaznye liudi*), it did not mean “people who work in bureaus” but “people (civilian officials) who take orders.” “To work in a ‘bureau’” (*v prikaze*) meant to work under someone’s supervision.²² During Ivan’s reign Muscovy never developed a “bureau system” in which all bureaucratic institutions became “bureaus,” although more bureaus existed by the 1570s than earlier.

Muscovy’s administrative structure remained “unsystematic,” not only in its terminology but also in its functionality. Even bureaus differed in the type of activity they performed. Some served a single function everywhere, while others served multiple functions in a single territory.²³ The *dvor* sometimes served as the household, headed by a majordomo, which administered all estates owned by the dynasty and supplied the ruler and his royal family with necessities, and sometimes as the court, which included boyars, gentry, the armorer, the master of the bedroom, and the keeper-of-the-seal. (I say “the ruler’s household” or “the household of the ruler” or “royal household” to refer to Ivan’s royal household; “household” by itself refers to someone else’s household.) The court served governmental functions and included the Royal Council. Muscovites did not perceive a distinction between

public and private bureaus. The two functions varied in other countries too, and at different times in the same country. The tsar served as head of the two highest-ranking bureaus, the Ambassadorial Bureau and the Registry.²⁴ The Law Code of 1550, unlike the preceding Law Code of 1497, made mention of the majordomos as well as the treasurer, demonstrating that state law drew no distinction between the ruler's household and other elements of the state administrative apparatus.²⁵

During Ivan's reign, Muscovite administration became less "personal" and more "institutional." At the beginning of Ivan's reign documents from an office did not even carry the office's name. Scribes wrote documents in Ivan's name. If necessary, the documents would refer recipients to a specific official or boyar in Moscow, not to an office. Early but inconsistent references to the Anti-Brigandage Bureau constitute the exception. Gradually the concept of "institution" took hold. A 1577 report to the Royal Council recounted cooperation by the Conditional Land Bureau (*Pomestnyi prikaz*), the Registry, and Major Revenue (*Bol'shoi prikhod*, also known as the Bureau of Major Revenue) by name in sending cash to gentry without conditional estates in frontier districts.²⁶

Muscovy was underadministered in terms of the number of officials per capita. However, enough officials already resided in Moscow to merit special attention by the 1551 Church Council of One Hundred Chapters (*Stoglav*). The Council authorized early and late masses in Moscow's churches to accommodate officials' work schedules.²⁷ Therefore, scribes and state secretaries staffing government offices had a tangible social presence in the capital.

CENTRALIZATION

In traditional historiography bureaucratization usually goes hand in hand with centralization, but neither the Muscovite state nor Ivan articulated any such concept.²⁸ Centralization is a matter of degree.²⁹ No sixteenth-century state possessed the kind of central administration, civil service, standing army, countrywide treasury, or uniform tax system that the concept of centralization evokes. In Muscovy, as elsewhere, the central authorities lacked the wherewithal to impose homogeneity.

The Muscovite government had a mixed record on centralization issues. Territorial unification certainly "centralized" political authority in Moscow.

Regulatory charters (*ustavnye gramoty*) strengthened central control over the provinces by defining very precisely how much a governor (*namestnik*) or county administrator (*volostel*, from *volost*, “county”) could collect as taxes, fees, and customs, when he could do so, and how many people (who had to be housed and fed) could accompany him when he visited localities. Local representatives had to witness his court proceedings.³⁰

However, the government continued to issue fiscal and judicial immunities. Judicial immunities exempted laymen or ecclesiastical institutions from the jurisdiction of governors by placing them under the direct jurisdiction of the grand prince and later of the tsar. Fiscal immunities exempted them from taxes, which depleted central revenue. One motive need not explain the issuance of all immunity charters. Administrative routine, soliciting political support, or, for immunities to monasteries, religious piety might all have inspired charters.³¹ The central government had trouble just keeping track of what immunities it had already issued. In 1551 the government performed the most extensive review of immunity charters of any year of Ivan’s reign. It renewed, modified, or issued 170 charters. Although judicial immunities underwent greater modification than fiscal immunities, on the whole immunities decreased. Moscow adjusted ecclesiastical judicial immunities to fit the provisions of the Council of One Hundred Chapters.

Moreover, Moscow had no monopoly on issuing immunity charters. Appanage princes could also issue them, and Moscow made no attempt to abolish the appanage system. The government abolished the Staritskii appanage more than once, but then restored it, until the cadet branch of the royal line died out naturally. Ivan gave an appanage to a refugee Wallachian voivode. Ivan offered appanages to any children he would sire with Englishwoman Mary Hastings. In his testament he left the throne to his elder son, Tsarevich Ivan, but an appanage to his younger son, Tsarevich Fedor.³² Holders of such appanages could no longer issue coinage or conduct foreign policy, but they still retained administrative autonomy.³³ The perpetuation of the appanage system attests that either Moscow, or later Ivan himself, did not favor centralization, or that neither the government nor Ivan thought appanages threatened centralization. Inconsistently, however, Moscow did gradually abolish the regalian rights of serving princes, much as the Tudors treated English marcher lords.³⁴

Despite what some contemporary foreigners wrote, Muscovy conspicuously lacked uniformity. Muscovy had multiple currencies (Novgorodian

and Muscovite), systems of weights and measures (the “share” [*vyt*] or “units” [*obzhy*], the “plow” [*sokha*] or the “quarter” [*chetvert*, *chet*]), legal systems (state law, canon law, Shari’a), tax systems, faiths (Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, animism), and languages (Russian, Tatar, and many more). Such heterogeneity was endemic in contemporary states.³⁵ Muscovite heterogeneity set limits to Muscovite centralization.

Moscow, like London and Paris, did centralize political and administrative decision making. In 1553 the English had to wait on their ship on the White Sea while the local authorities sent to Moscow for instructions. Muscovy, England, and France, although they did not have identical political structures, differed in this respect from a federal state like the Holy Roman Empire, or composite states, in which previously separate polities retained their autonomous institutions and customs when they united, such as Spain or Poland-Lithuania.³⁶ Muscovy was not a composite state. Its annexed territories, whatever their regionalism, did not retain their political structures, princely lines, or legal systems and did not support separatism.

Therefore, the Muscovite government pursued centralization only partially. Centralization, in Muscovy and in some other countries, was a negotiated and inconsistent process. Moreover, the ostensibly centralized Muscovite state, like other supposedly centralized states, often utilized decentralized mechanisms, such as local self-government, to achieve its goals.

STATE AND SOCIETY

Traditional historiography argues that the Muscovite government dominated society, that all social groups lacked autonomy and meekly served the state; this is the hypertrophic school conception of the relationship of state and society.³⁷ Recent scholarship has contested that paradigm by arguing that the boyars ran the government collegially and by consensus; this is the consensus and collegial school perception of the relationship between the state and society.³⁸ The relationship between the state and society in Muscovy cannot be reduced to a single formula, however. Neither interpretation adequately explains all of Ivan’s reign. We do not know who initiated, let alone who influenced, policy decisions.³⁹ Sometimes “autocracy,” the theory of unlimited royal authority, was a facade, but at other times the consensus of the boyars was also a facade. In any event the significance of the theory of autocracy for Ivan’s ideology has been exaggerated.⁴⁰ As elsewhere,

centralization and negotiated contractual modes of rule might go hand in hand. Ivan's minority fits neither paradigm.⁴¹

In practice the state knew that its administrative reach exceeded its grasp. The government acknowledged that its ability to control its dispersed population was limited. It delegated authority to its officials and local social groups and admitted its own lack of omniscience. Ivan, like other contemporary rulers, had great difficulty getting his officials to carry out his orders.⁴² The ruler called his boyars his "slaves," and boyars called themselves "slaves" of the ruler, but a boyar who petitioned Ivan as his "slave" enhanced, not demeaned, his own status.⁴³ Boyars knew that they could sell their slaves, but the tsar could not sell his boyars. Ivan considered Muscovy his patrimony (*votchina*), which he could bequeath to his heir, but he could not sell it as a boyar could sell his patrimony.

The ideal that the ruler should consult (*sovetovati*) his advisors, shared even by Niccolò Machiavelli,⁴⁴ should not be confused with reality. During his minority, Ivan "consulted" his mother; as an adult, he "consulted" his brother, Prince Iurii, considered by many historians to have been a deaf-mute, although the matter is not so simple.⁴⁵ The appearance of consultation had genuine meaning to the Muscovite court, but it should not automatically be taken literally. It is impossible to correlate Ivan's proclivity for "consultation" and his supposedly "autocratic" aspirations.⁴⁶

Muscovites distinguished the ruler from both society and the state. Narratives and documents refer to "the land's and the sovereign's business" (*zemkoe i gosudarskoe delo*), separating the affairs of the "land" (*zemlia*) from those of the ruler.⁴⁷ The "land" could be society or the state in this passage. In 1536 Muscovite negotiators informed Lithuanian representatives that although Ivan was young, his *gosudarstvo* was "mature." Usually "gosudarstvo" meant "reign," how long a ruler had been "sovereign" (*gosudar*), but this reference indicates duration from before Ivan's time, an abstraction, the "state."⁴⁸ State secretary Fedor Karpov, who was familiar with some of Aristotle's works, wrote of the "general good" and the "common good" (*delo narodnoe, obshchee chelovecheskoe delo*), but no other writer used these concepts. One could compare these phrases to the Latin *res publica/publicae* or Polish *Rzeczpospolita* (the name of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).⁴⁹

Historians cite Ivan's increasing reliance upon political surety (loyalty) oaths by boyars as evidence of state domination of society.⁵⁰ Whether

contemporary states employed similar oaths to prevent defection seems unclear.⁵¹ Such sureties reflect the increasing political tension between Ivan and his elite. However, we do not know if the guarantors supported the man for whom they stood surety, and therefore opposed Ivan's policies, or, to the contrary, whether they served the government loyally as unpaid surveillance officers.⁵² After Ivan's reign, sureties for princes and boyars disappeared, but late in Ivan's reign the surety practice spread throughout the Muscovite administrative apparatus as a means of insuring job performance. The need for political sureties may attest to the weakness of the social bond between the state and its subjects rather than the strength of state domination over society. The Muscovite government apparently used collective responsibility, a group guarantee of service performance or obligation fulfillment, like surety, more often and at higher levels of society than contemporary states because of Muscovy's underadministration.⁵³

Muscovy's customary political structure and culture underwent considerable change during the sixteenth century. Muscovites camouflaged innovation as a return to custom. The ruler and his elite either consulted or pretended to consult each other as the political situation warranted. Territorial expansion produced centralized political decision making in Moscow, but the locus of authority within the city of Moscow varied because of accidental factors such as the presence of a boy ruler. The personal relationship between the ruler and his subjects, especially the members of the elite, did not prevent the growth of institutional affiliations or consciousness within the administrative apparatus. The state did not unilaterally dominate society, because it lacked the resources to do so, and acknowledged that constraint upon its activity by delegating operational policy implementation to its officials on the scene outside Moscow or to local institutions. In conclusion the hypertrophic and consensual or collegial models of the relationship between the state and society are both partially correct and partially incorrect. Muscovites did not confuse unambiguous political or social ideals with ambiguous, and certainly malleable, political and social reality.