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PEASANT REVOLT

Conditions for Russian peasants worsened steadily during the 18th century. Landlords increased their efforts to exploit peasant labor, particularly to take advantage of opportunities to export grain to Western Europe. Government decrees stepped up landlord rights to discipline and punish their serfs, even to kill them or exile them to Siberia.

Peasant discontent increased in this context. In 1773 a major revolt broke out under the leadership of Emel'ian Pugachev (1726–1775), a Don Cossack and former Russian soldier. (Cossacks were a minority group of ex-peasants who began to form military bands on Russia's frontiers in the 15th century. The government used many of them for fighting, but also attempted to bring them under greater control.) The Pugachev rising was one of the great episodes in Russian history, rousing support from many groups before being crushed by Catherine the Great's forces. Pugachev was arrested and beheaded, and his head publicly displayed to demonstrate the folly of revolt.

The following documents come first from the "decrees" of Pugachev himself, in 1773–1774. Pugachev adopted an old protest tradition by saying that he was the legitimate tsar, Peter III. His decrees appealed not just to peasants but to a variety of aggrieved groups. It is important to sort out the various grievances he was trying to capture, to get a picture of the strains that had opened up in early modern Russian society. A second set of documents involves reports by Pugachev's officials.

A third document comes from a serf who was being interrogated by government officials about the uprising. The serf, Vasilii Chernov, renounced his belief in Pugachev as tsar only under extreme torture.

A fourth set of documents emanates from government officials commenting on the uprising. And finally, a fifth document is a decree by Catherine after the rising had been suppressed.

Peasant protest dropped after this great rising, but it would increase once more in the 19th century, as the peasant problem became one of the fundamental issues in Russian society. This set of documents allows analysis of peasant and other grievances, and also raises the question of what kind of sources to believe in a protest situation—the sources from the protest leaders, from the government, or from other quarters. What, in your opinion, did ordinary protesters believe and want?

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PROCLAMATIONS AND DECREES DURING THE PUGACHEV REVOLT, 1773–1774

I. PUGACHEV'S DECREES

[Decree of September 17, 1773, complete text:]

From the autocratic emperor, our great sovereign Petr Feodorovich of all Russia, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Through this, my sovereign decree, be it expressed to the Iaik (Ural) Cossacks: Just as you, my friends, and your grandfathers and fathers served former tsars to the last drop of blood, now should you serve me, the great sovereign and emperor Petr Feodorovich, for the good of your fatherland. For as you stand up for your fatherland, your Cossack glory and that of your children shall not pass away now or ever. And I, the great sovereign, shall bestow my bounty upon you: Cossacks and Kalmyks and Tatars. As for those of you who have been at fault before me, the sovereign and imperial majesty Petr Feodorovich, I, the sovereign Petr Feodorovich, forgive you these faults and confer upon you: the [Iaik, renamed "Ural" as an aftermath of the rebellion] river from its source to its mouth, and land, and meadows, and a monetary wage, and lead, and powder, and grain provisions.

I, the great sovereign and emperor Petr Feodorovich, bestow my bounty upon you.

The seventeenth day of September 1773.

[Decree of October 1773, complete text:]

From our autocratic emperor, the great sovereign of all Russia Petr Feodorovich, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Through this, my sovereign decree, I issue this command to my regular army:

As you, my faithful slaves, soldiers of the regular army, both privates and officers, have in the past served me and my ancestors, the great sovereigns and emperors of all Russia, faithfully and invariably, now likewise must you serve me, your lawful great sovereign Petr Feodorovich, to the last drop of your blood. Cast off the obedience you were forced to show your false commanders, who corrupt you and deprive you, along with themselves, of my good graces; and come to me in obedience and, placing your weapons beneath my banners, display the loyalty of faithful subjects to me, the great sovereign. For this I shall reward you and bestow upon you wages in money and grain and confer ranks upon you; and you and your descendants shall be granted the greatest privileges in my state and shall be enlisted in glorious service, attached to my own person. But if anyone should forget his duty to his hereditary [*prirodnyi*, natural] sovereign Petr Feodorovich, should dare to disobey this, my sovereign decree, and by force of arms should fall into the hands of my faithful army, he shall feel my righteous wrath upon himself and then suffer the death penalty.

The great sovereign emperor of all Russia Petr Feodorovich.

["Manifesto" of Pugachev, July 31, 1774, complete text:]

By the grace of God, we, Petr III, emperor and autocrat of all Russia, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, announce the following tidings to all the world:

Through this sovereign decree we declare, in our monarchical and fatherly mercy, that all who were formerly peasants and subjected landowners shall be faithful subjects and slaves of our own crown; we grant you your ancient cross and prayers [referring to the Old Believers], your heads and your beards, and bestow upon you freedom and liberty and the eternal rights of Cossacks, including freedom from recruiting levies, the soul tax, and other monetary taxes; we confer likewise the ownership of lands, forests, hayfields, fisheries, and salt lakes without purchase or rent; and we free the peasants and all the people from the taxes and oppression formerly imposed by villainous nobles and the venal city judges. And we desire salvation of your souls and a peaceful life on this earth, for which we have tasted and endured many wanderings and many hardships from the above-mentioned villainous nobles. But since our name now flourishes in Russia by the power of Almighty God, we therefore command through this, our sovereign decree: those who formerly were nobles on their estates and patrimonies, opposing our power, disturbing the empire, and despoiling the peasantry shall be caught, executed, and hanged, and treated just in the same fashion as they, lacking any Christian feeling, dealt with you, the peasants. After the extermination of which enemies and villainous nobles, every man may experience peace and a tranquil life, which shall forever endure.

Given the thirty-first day of July 1774.

Petr

[Decree to the Don Cossacks, August, 1774:]

By the grace of God we, Peter III, emperor and autocrat of all Russia, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

A proclamation to the ataman of the Berezov *stanitsa* [Cossack settlement] and to all the Don Cossacks living in it, and to all the world.

Long enough has Russia been filled with the credible rumor of our concealment from the villains (chief senators and nobles); nor was this unknown to foreign states. This resulted from nothing other than the fact that during our reign we beheld that the Christian faith as laid down by the ancient traditions of the holy fathers had been entirely violated and dishonored by the said villainous nobles; instead they introduced into Russia another faith of pernicious invention taken from German customs, and introduced likewise the most godless shaving of beards, and they have done violence to the Christian faith in the cross and in other matters. . . . Looking upon all that has been described above with fatherly compassion, we took pity and intended to free you from their villainous tyranny and to establish liberty throughout Russia.

II. CORRESPONDENCE WITHIN PUGACHEV'S "GOVERNMENT," 1774

Something of the operational methods of Pugachev's army, which at one time numbered perhaps more than twenty thousand troops, is seen in excerpts from instructions and reports such as these.

Reference: Tsentrarkhiv, Pugachevshchina, 1:82, 207.

[Instructions of "Count Chernyshev," the head of Pugachev's State Military Collegium, to Ataman Semen Volkov, February 13, 1774:]

From His Most Exalted Serenity Count Ivan Nikiforovich Chernyshev to Ataman Semen Volkov and *Esaul* [captain] Vasilii Zav'ialov.

Instructions

From a signed letter sent to me by the communal men [*mirskie liudi*] of the Rozh[d] estvenskii factory and the villages of Pristanichnaia and Zobachevka, I have perceived that with the consent of the commune you, Volkov and Zav'ialov, have been elected: you, Volkov, as ataman, and Zav'ialov as esaul. It is therefore incumbent upon you to maintain your detachment in good order and to permit no insubordination and plundering; and if someone shows himself an enemy of His Imperial Majesty and disobedient to you, it is your duty to inflict corporal punishment upon him according to your will and the guilt involved. On the contrary, you must not risk any bad conduct yourselves, and at all times you must heed the manifestos and decrees of His Majesty and execute them immediately, for which you may receive special praise for yourselves. But do not inflict any wrongs, extortions, and desolation upon your detachment, and touch not bribes, being mindful of the inescapable death penalty for any such delinquency. And furthermore, direct your efforts to the immediate execution of the orders and other instructions I send you.

[Report of "Colonel" Bakhtiar Kankeev, July 14, 1774:]

To the most serene and regal emperor Petr Feodorovich, the great autocrat of all Russia, our all-merciful sovereign.

From Colonel Bakhtiar Kankeev to the State Military Collegium [*Gosudarstvennaia Voennaia Kollegiia*]—a most humble report.

At present, during my march along this side of the Kama and Viatka rivers in the Kazan' region, [I find that] people of all callings, young and old alike, wholeheartedly and very willingly desire to serve Your Imperial Majesty and make haste to come to me; from every Russian and Tatar settlement they come out a verst ahead to meet us, and besides offering us bread and salt weep tears of joy that God has elevated you as tsar; they rejoice in Your Majesty and pray that God grant you a long life, so that they may obtain relief from heavy factory labor and taxes. At present we have more than six hundred people, Russians and Tatars, in our military force; each day more people eagerly hasten with promises to serve, and some who are eager to serve come without horses and without weapons. I most humbly beg you to issue to me your imperial decree as to where they can get horses and weapons; for there are noble estates along my route which have horses left in them and these we can seize for the crown and give to the people.

III. SERF TESTIMONY: VASILII CHERNOV

And therefore on the twentieth day of the month [of July 1774], by order of the *sotskii* [elected peasant police official] Andrei Anan'in . . . all the peasants and factory workers assembled at a meeting, at which meeting . . . all shouted unanimously that they would leave their master and become the subjects of the said impostor and scoundrel [*zlodei*] Pugachev, considering him to be their sovereign Peter III; and all who were at the meeting, the peasant deputy [*vybornyi*], the starosta, and the *sotskii* Urusov, together with the peasants and factory workers, were asked to

agree to this. And on their advice all consented to seize and put in chains and confine in the master's house the manager [of the estate and factory], Aleksei Teteev, his wife, Natas'ia Nikolaevna, his brother Ivan Teteev, his nephew Vasilii Ivanov, a Frenchman, a German, and the Vorotynets peasant Andrei Kireev, with this intention: if the scoundrel Pugachev or someone sent by him should come to their village, they would hand the prisoners over to him, so that he might order them to be hanged for the wrongs they had perpetrated. . . .

Therefore, on the morning of the following day, that is, the twenty-third day of July, the priests Ivan Fedorov and Grigorii Timofeev and their sextons, holding icons in their hands, and the peasants with the sotskii and *desiatskii* [assistant to the sotskii], as well as the peasant deputy Stepanov and the elder Chuev . . . and the factory workers, all gathered together with bread and salt, and waited for the said so-called colonel; nor did the priests make them any admonishment; and they all greeted him together when he rode into the settlement. And upon his arrival this so-called colonel went into the tavern, where the factory worker Aleksei . . . had brought the manager's brother Ivan Teteev and his son Vasilii. And the said so-called colonel, inquiring only of their position, ordered them to be hanged on the peasants' gates as had been done with the manager and the others. This was carried out by the peasants Nikita Denisov, Grigorii Krivenkov, and who else hanged them I don't remember any more. After all this had taken place, this so-called colonel first called forth those willing to enter the service of the scoundrel Pugachev, with the announcement that each man who wished to come with him would receive a wage of twenty rubles a month; seduced by this promise, the peasants of Vorotynets along with the sotskii Andrei Anan'in and the factory workers agreed. Then they performed still further villainies, until finally the factory workers were stirred up and, by the order of that so-called colonel and accompanied also by the peasants living in the village of Vorotynets, destroyed the entire linen factory, leaving nothing standing, and divided the cloth up among themselves; they burned the tannery and wrecked the master's house; the belongings of those who were hanged were locked up and sealed in a closet by the elder.

IV. REPORTS BY OFFICIALS

On August 21 of this year a villainous mob of three hundred mounted men and a thousand of the rabble [*chern'*] arrived at the crown village [*dvortsovoe selo*] Raskazovo. Calling together the rabble they gave them wine to drink and themselves drank the health of Petr Feodorovich. The crown peasants met them with bread and salt and helped these scoundrels in their assault on the factories of the manufacturers Tulinov and Olisov: they carried cannon and set fire to the factories. . . .

Along the rivers Vorona and Khoper there are many such villainous parties organized in various bands and totaling two thousand people; and they all agree they should join forces. These same scoundrels testify that in the course of the looting many nobles and other people, the common people excepted, were barbarously tortured and hanged.

The twenty-third day of August 1774.

[Testimony of Second Major (*sekund-maior*) Andrei, son of Mikhail Salmanov, who had been taken prisoner by Pugachev's men and had served with them, September 26, 1774:]

On the march from Saratov to Tsaritsyn, not only did the settlements along the road itself willingly submit to [Pugachev's] will, but from all sides as well priests came forth with the peasants to greet him with bread and salt; they knelt and bowed to the ground, and begged his protection as the sovereign, which people he dismissed to their homes; while his bands raided and despoiled everyone alike. In the town of Dmitrievsk [Kamyshin], which is on the Kamyshenka [River], a certain defense was effected, but soon the firing ceased: the landless Little Russian peasants met them and the soldiers were taken prisoner; Sergeant Abyzov was selected from their number and on the following day was appointed colonel and given a detachment. From the Kamyshenka they went through the territory of the Volga Cossacks, through four of their towns; in each place they were greeted with crosses and joyful congratulations by a large gathering which included priests; and in their chief town of Dubovka even by a whole assembly, elders and Cossacks, all dressed in their best garments, carrying banners and presenting a joyful appearance.

[Testimony of Pugachev's "colonel" Ivan, son of Aleksandr Tvorogov, October 27, 1774:]

I considered the scoundrel to be the true sovereign Peter III because, first, the Iaik Cossacks accepted and considered him as such; second, the old soldiers as well as the people of other classes who through various circumstances happened to be with us made assurances that the scoundrel was the true sovereign; and third, all the rabble, namely the factory and landowners' peasants, bowed down before him joyfully, and zealously furnished us with men and all else that might be demanded of them, without protest.

V. CATHERINE'S MANIFESTO "CONCERNING THE CRIMES OF THE COSSACK PUGACHEV," DEC. 19, 1774

Realizing that our sole aspiration is to bring the empire to the highest degree of prosperity . . . who can help but feel righteous indignation at these internal foes of the tranquillity of the fatherland: these men who, casting aside all manner of obedience, have first dared to raise arms against the legal authority and join that notorious rebel and imposter, the Don Cossack of the Zimoveisk stanitsa Emel'ka [contemptuous form for Emel'ian] Pugachev, and have then for a whole year perpetrated together with him the most ferocious barbarities in the Orenburg, Kazan' [regions], Nizhnii-Novgorod, and Astrakhan' guberniias; who set aflame the churches of God, towns, and settlements, who have pillaged the holy places [*sviatye mesta*, i.e. churches and monasteries] and every sort of property, who with the sword and with various tortures they have devised have smitten and put to death clergymen and persons of high and low estate and of both sexes, including even innocent children. . . .

. . .

And his own accomplices and favorites, the Ilets'k Cossack Tvorogov and the Iaik Cossacks Chumakov and Fedulev, repenting of the villainies in which they had participated, and learning of the pardon promised by the manifestos of Her Imperial Majesty to all those who exhibit sincere repentance, agreed among themselves to put Emel'ka Pugachev in chains and bring him to Iaitskii Gorodok [later renamed Ural'sk]; they induced some other Cossacks, about twenty-five in number, to aid them in this deed and carried it out.