#228

# DEATH AND DYING IN EARLY MODERN RUSSIA

Daniel H. Kaiser
Professor of Social Studies
Grinnell College

---

**Daniel H. Kaiser** is the Joseph F. Rosenfield Professor of Social Studies and a Professor of History at Grinnell College in Iowa. Dr. Kaiser's previous publications include *The Growth of Law in Medieval Russia* (Princeton, 1980), as well as a number of articles on the legal history of Muscovite and Kievan Russia. He is the editor of *The Workers' Revolution in Russia, 1917: The View from Below* (Cambridge, 1987). As a Kennan Institute Research fellow in 1986, Dr. Kaiser completed *Marriage and the Family in Early Modern Russia* (forth- coming). "Death and Dying in Early Modern Russia," an excerpt from that work, was delivered at a colloquium on May 22, 1986, at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies.

The author gratefully acknowledges support from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Kennan Institute, and Grinnell College, and extends special thanks to his Kennan Institute assistant, Susan Conwell, and to his Grinnell College student assistants, Kina Carpino and Brian McMahon, for data entry and graphics preparation.

#228

# DEATH AND DYING IN EARLY MODERN RUSSIA

Daniel H. Kaiser
Professor of Social Studies
Grinnell College

---

**Daniel H. Kaiser** is the Joseph F. Rosenfield Professor of Social Studies and a Professor of History at Grinnell College in Iowa. Dr. Kaiser's previous publications include *The Growth of Law in Medieval Russia* (Princeton, 1980), as well as a number of articles on the legal history of Muscovite and Kievan Russia. He is the editor of *The Workers' Revolution in Russia, 1917: The View from Below* (Cambridge, 1987). As a Kennan Institute Research fellow in 1986, Dr. Kaiser completed *Marriage and the Family in Early Modern Russia* (forth- coming). "Death and Dying in Early Modern Russia," an excerpt from that work, was delivered at a colloquium on May 22, 1986, at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies.

The author gratefully acknowledges support from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Kennan Institute, and Grinnell College, and extends special thanks to his Kennan Institute assistant, Susan Conwell, and to his Grinnell College student assistants, Kina Carpino and Brian McMahon, for data entry and graphics preparation.

**The Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies**
**The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars**

The Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies was established in 1975 as a program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The Kennan Institute was created to provide a center where advanced research on Russia and the Soviet Union could be pursued by American and foreign scholars, where Russian and Soviet studies throughout the United States could be encouraged and supported, and where contact could be maintained with similar institutions abroad.

The Kennan Institute is a meeting place for scholars, government officials and analysts, and other specialists. The Institute's efforts to bridge the gap between academic and public sectors has resulted in novel and stimulating approaches to a wide range of topics.

The Kennan Institute is supported by contributions from foundations, corporations, individuals and the United States government.

**Kennan Institute Occasional Papers**

The Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies makes Occasional Papers available to all those interested in Russian and Soviet Studies. Occasional Papers are submitted by Kennan Institute scholars and visiting speakers, particularly those who wish to receive timely feedback on their work. They are generally working papers that result from seminars, colloquia, and conferences held under the auspices of the Kennan Institute. Copies of Occasional Papers and a list of papers currently available can be obtained, free of charge, by writing to:

Occasional Papers
Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies
370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW, Suite 704
Washington, D.C. 20024-2518

The Kennan Institute is a nonpartisan institution committed to the exploration of a broad range of scholarship. It does not necessarily endorse the ideas presented in its Occasional Papers.

## Introduction

It is never easy to know how a dying man or woman approaches death. Human society has long shrouded death in symbol and coded ritual precisely because it mingles with the unknowable potency of life. Like the Tree of Knowledge, understanding of death remains forbidden to mortals: to taste the fruit is to become a god. This attitude may explain the fantastic myths that surface in many cultures to explain death. Mircea Eliade, commenting on one improbable story, suggests that "the passage from Being to Non-Being is so hopelessly incomprehensible that a ridiculous explanation is more convincing [exactly] because it is ridiculously absurd."[1]

The mystery within which culture wraps death makes it a difficult subject for social scientists. Anthropologists and ethnographers, almost from the beginning of these disciplines, included death among their subjects of study, but until recently historians have not much probed the history of death. In part, the sources are to blame. The dying themselves, sometimes very seriously ill, were rarely in a position to provide extensive narratives of their last moments. And witnesses to death, even when they were literate, often failed to record what they had observed, simply because the event was all too ordinary or because they themselves were affected by contact with that powerful realm.

Some historians, however, have rescued the history of death from inattention. Taking their cue from anthropologists, they have inserted death into the narrative of the past, arguing that human visions of death are an essential component of human culture. The sources, it turns out, are reasonably numerous. Historians have prowled through cemeteries, examining gravestones and cemetery architecture; they have mined prescriptive manuals on the "art of dying;" and they have consulted records of expenditure for kings' funerals.[2]

---

[1] Mircea Eliade, "Mythologies of Death: An Introduction," in Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh (eds.), *Religious Encounters with Death*, (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1977), p. 14.

[2] For example, John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death Among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study of Religion, Culture and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Philippe Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), trans. as *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981); Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. by Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Ralph Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France* (Geneva: Droz, 1960); Paul S. Fritz, "The Trade in Death: The Royal Funerals in England, 1685-1830," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15 (1981-82), pp. 291-316; Fritz, "From 'Public' to 'Private': The Royal Funerals in England, 1500-1830," in Joachim Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), pp.61-79; Richard A. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetary in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984); T.S.R. Boase, *Death in the Middle Ages: Mortality, Judgment and Remembrance* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972).

For surveys of some of this enormous literature, see Kuno Böse, "Das

Arguably, the most successful work has depended upon last wills and testaments. Over the last few decades, scholars in England, America, and the European continent have combed these sources, revealing attitudes to death, the role of religion, levels of mortality, limits of kinship universes, and much else.[3]

There is so far no history of death in Russia, in spite of its obvious importance to understanding Russian culture. Nineteenth-century interest in peasant culture certainly included death, but this initiative has found little echo in 20th-century Soviet ethnography or history.[4] While voluminous studies of peasant costume, dwelling construction, and even marital life have appeared, few studies have treated death.[5]

Surely the sources are not the only cause of this silence. Although disparate and sometimes difficult to work with, plentiful materials exist with which to write a history of death. Like ethnographers of a later time, Western visitors to Muscovy in the 16th and 17th centuries often reported on how Muscovites treated their dead. Their reports are sometimes contradictory, but nevertheless they provide valuable information on death ritual. Churchmen,

---

Thema 'Tod' in der neueren französischen Geschichtsschreibung: Ein Überblick," in Paul Richard Blum, *Studien zur Thematik des Todes im 16. Jahrhundert* (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek, 1983), pp. 1-20; John McManners, "Death and the French Historians," in *Mirrors of Mortality*, pp. 106-130; Michel Vovelle, "Encore la Mort: un peu plus qu'une mode?" *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 37 (1982), pp. 276-87; Vovelle, "L'Histoire des hommes au miroir de la mort," in Herman Braet and Werner Verbeke (eds.), *Death in the Middle Ages* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1983), pp. 1-18; Vovelle, *La mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

[3] Michel Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1973); Vovelle, *Mourir autrefois: attitudes collectives devant la mort aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974); Pierre Chaunu, *La Mort à Paris XVI^e, XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1978); Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, *Vivre et mourir en Lyonnais: A la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1981); Jacques Chiffoleau, "Ce qui changer la mort dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Age," in *Death in the Middle Ages*, pp. 117-33; Philip T. Hoffman, "Wills and Statistics: Tobit Analysis and the Counter Reformation in Lyon," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 14 (1983-84), pp. 813-34; Robert Gottfried, *Epidemic Disease in Fifteenth-Century England: The Medical and the Demographic Consequences* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978); John E. Crowley, "The Importance of Kinship: Testamentary Evidence from South Carolina," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (1985-86), pp. 559-77.

[4] There is a huge collection of local ethnographies compiled in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and I will make no effort to reproduce it here. Typical and useful for this paper is A. Tereshchenko, *Byt russkogo naroda* (St. Petersburg, 1948). The bulk of Part III is devoted to death rituals.

[5] An important exception which has an excellent, although brief, description of death ritual is G.S. Maslova, *Narodnaia odezhda v vostochnoslavianskikh traditsionnykh obychaiakh i obriadakh XIX-nachala XX v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), pp. 85-101. For an example of the selective ethnography in an otherwise excellent book, see *Etnografiia russkogo krest'ianstva Sibiri XVII-seredina XIX v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981).

too, had reason to take note of death. Not only was it appropriate to their calling, but because the dying regularly donated goods or money to church institutions, clerics had reason to record these gifts and the obligations they incurred in accepting them. And finally, increasing numbers of Muscovites came to compose testaments both for disposing of their social obligations and for securing their welfare beyond the grave.

Compared to the huge numbers of wills used for studies in Provence, Paris, and England, the Muscovite fund is small.[6] Pierre Chaunu estimates that early in the 16th century about five percent of Parisians prepared formal testaments.[7] It is impossible to know what percentage of Muscovites took this final step. What is clear is that relatively few wills survive. Without a professional notariate and without civilian oversight, Muscovy had less reason to archive wills. Almost without exception, Muscovite wills survive only because the goods they bequeathed ultimately came into the possession of individual church institutions, who retained the wills as a record of their right to the donated property. The sometimes stormy subsequent fate of these institutions had unhappy consequences for their archives.

Geographically and chronologically dispersed, extant Muscovite wills, together with the other sources on death in early modern Russia, provide brilliant, if narrow, insights into Muscovite death. Like other rituals vital to the human experience, death in Russia reveals the complex interaction between Christian culture and pre-Christian values. Deciphering the relative contributions of each is sometimes difficult, but study of death ritual makes it eminently clear that even in the 16th century Russian Orthodoxy was still making gains on practices with which it had struggled for centuries. While by the 17th century churchmen had reason to congratulate themselves on their successes, they had also made compromises with rites that owed little to Christian inspiration.

**Death and Disaster in Muscovy**

Everywhere in early modern Europe, death was more familiar than it is today. In many villages, about one child in four died before celebrating its first birthday, and half of all children did not survive to adulthood. Combined with late marriage and limited marital fertility, these mortality levels had a serious impact upon the population, which in the 16th and 17th centuries declined or, where birth rates kept even with mortality, remained basically stable.[8]

---

[6] Chiffoleau employed about 6,000 testaments, Chaunu 8,000, and Gottfried about 20,000. The present study is based on 371 wills drawn from both published and unpublished sources. For a brief and early description of the Muscovite will and my treatment of the data (exclusive of the variables used for this paper), see Daniel H. Kaiser, "Databanks for a History of the Family in Early Modern Russia," in Thomas F. Moberg (ed.), *Databases in the Humanities and Social Sciences. 1985* (Osprey: Paradigm Press, 1987), pp. 207-209.

[7] Chaunu, *La mort*, pp. 227-28.

[8] Michael W. Flinn, *The European Demographic System, 1500-1820* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 16-17; Jacques Dupaquier, "Population," in Peter Burke (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 13: *Companion Volume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Long-term trends obscure episodic disasters. Until sometime in the 18th century, periodic crises--dependent primarily upon famine, disease and war--cut deep swaths in the population.[9] Alain Croix calculated, for example, that in Nantes approximately 22 of the 100 years between 1500 and 1599 qualified as "crises."[10] The area around Paris endured great waves of death in 1553-54, 1568, 1572, 1580, 1582, 1587, 1631, 1648-52, 1662, and 1676-81. In France as a whole, crises in the late 1620s, late 1630s, 1648-52, 1676, 1680, and 1691-92 interrupted the population recovery then apparently underway.[11] Similar disasters affected other parts of Europe at about the same time. Norway, for example, observed significantly higher mortality in 1650, 1660, 1670, 1673, 1693, and 1695, while some Italian parishes suffered losses around 1630, 1650, 1675, and 1690.[12] Registers from English parishes document similar meteoric increases in mortality.[13]

The evidence for Muscovy is not so precise. In the absence of parish registers or census data, the historian must depend upon conventional liter-

---

1979), p. 83; Dupaquier, *La population française aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), p. 24.

[9] There has been much discussion about the role of "crises" in the pre-modern demographic regime. For an interesting discussion of the interrelated roles of nutrition, disease, and war, see Myron P. Gutmann, "Putting Crises in Perspective: The Impact of War on Civilian Populations in the Seventeenth Century," *Annales de démographie historique* 1977, pp. 101-128.

[10] Alan Croix, *Nantes et le Pay nantais au XVI^e siècle: Étude démographique* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1974), pp. 107-35.

[11] J. M. Moriceau, "Les crises démographiques dans le Sud de la région Parisienne de 1560 à 1670," *Annales de démographie historique* 1980, pp. 106-113; Jean Ganiage, *Trois villages de l'Ile de France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), pp. 30-31; Jacques Dupaquier, "Villages et petites villes de la géneralité de Paris," *Annales de démographie historique* 1969, pp. 11; Dupaquier, *La population française*, pp. 11-13, 42-45. But see M. Sudre, who observes that, unlike much of old-regime Europe, in these years, St. Michel experienced no crises ("Aspects démographiques de la paroisse Saint-Michel de Bordeaux (1660-1680)," *Annales de démographie historique* 1974, p. 232).

[12] Jean-Noel Biraben, "Pour reconstituer le mouvement de la population aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles," *Annales de démographie historique* 1980, p. 42; Dante Bolognesi, "Vicende demografiche della Città e del territoria de Russi nei secoli XVII e XVIII," *Studi Romagnoli* 29 (1978), pp. 131-166. See also A. Perrenoud, "Le mortalité à Genève de 1625 à 1825," *Annales de démographie historique* 1978, p. 213; and Wilhelm Abel, *Massenarmut und Hungerkrisen im votindustriellen Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 37-45.

[13] Roger Schofield, "'Crisis' Mortality," in Michael Drake (ed.), *Population Studies from Parish Registers* (Derbyshire: Local Population Studies, 1982), pp. 97-108; John Skinner, "'Crisis Mortality' in Buckinghamshire 1600-1750," *Local Population Studies* 28 (1982), pp. 67-72; Leslie Bradley, "An Enquiry into Seasonality in Baptisms, Marriages and Burials," in *Population Studies from Paris Registers*, p. 93; Marjorie K. McIntosh, "Servants and the Household Unit in an Elizabethan English Community," *Journal of Family History* 9 (Spring, 1984), p. 6.

ary sources that depicted crises only in general terms. "A great many starved in cities, villages and along the roads," reports one source describing a famine in 1557.[14] It is impossible to extract a quantitative value from these accounts. All the same, the narrative sources demonstrate unequivocally that Muscovy, like its European parallels, suffered occasional crises. One attempt to catalog these calamities suggests that Russia endured famine for 14 years in the 16th century and 15 in the 17th century.[15] In addition, Muscovy waged serious bouts with epidemic disease--principally plague and typhus--in 1506-1508, 1552-53, 1563-68, 1570-71, 1592, 1602, 1606, 1654, and 1690.[16] Without local numerical data, the exact impact of these disasters is unknowable. It appears that the Muscovite population recovered somewhat in the last years of the 17th century, when slow growth helped to overcome deficits inherited from an earlier time.[17] All the same, compared to 20th century experience, death was much closer to Muscovites in early modern times, especially during the periodic crises that disease and famine brought.

**Approaching Death**

Overall high mortality and occasional demographic crises provided Muscovites with sufficient opportunities to anticipate and contemplate their own deaths. But the available sources make it difficult to confirm that they did. The clerics, who might be expected to have had both higher levels of literacy and more reason to ponder death, left scant evidence that they, more than any others, reflected on death and its meaning. Orthodoxy, never much inclined to the rational expositions of Western Christendom, preferred symbolic modes of worship. Therefore, few Muscovite funeral sermons or meditations, like those that pepper the records from Puritan New England, survive.[18]

It seems reasonable to presume, nevertheless, that Muscovites, too, sometimes wrestled with death, perhaps only as each approached his own end. Muscovite wills provide some helpful insight into how men and women approached death, inasmuch as the normal time for composing one's last will and testament

---

[14] Quoted in Arcadius Kahan, "Natural Calamities and Their Effect upon the Food Supply in Russia (An Introduction to a Catalogue)," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 16 (1968), p. 371.

[15] Kahan, "Natural Calamities," pp. 370-72.

[16] John T. Alexander, *Bubonic Plague in Early Modern Russia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 16-21.

[17] Ia. E. Vodarskii, "Naselenie Rossii v kontse XVII-nachale XVIII veka (Problemy, metodika, issledovaniia, rezul'taty)," in R. N. Pullata (ed.), *Problemy istoricheskoi demografii SSSR. Sbornik statei* (Tallinn: AN SSSR, nauchnyi sovet po istoricheskoi geografii i kartografii; AN Estonskoi SSR, institut istorii, 1977), pp. 50-59.

[18] From late 17th century Muscovy there do survive, however, some verse epitaphs, like those of Simeon Polotskii in memory of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich and Sil'vestr Medvedev on the death of Polotskii himself (N. K. Gudzii, *Khrestomatii po drevnei russkoi literature XI-XVII vekov*, 6th ed. [Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1955], pp. 505-7, 512-13). But these are, by comparison with the Western European and American parallels, very spare, and in any case unusual. Elaborate funeral sermons form an important part of the evidence in Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death*.

was just prior to death. Churchmen preferred and prescribed this particular moment. The gravity of the occasion and the proximity to the expected meeting with God combined to urge seriousness and generosity upon testators.[19]

Whether by clerical design or not, the surviving documents confirm that many a testator was already seriously ill when he composed his will. Vasilei Stepanov syn Zagriazhskoi composed his will one month before death, "being," as he put it, "on my deathbed."[20] Ivan Ivanov died about 60 years before Zagriazhskoi, but he was equally close to death: the preface to his will observed that he "lay on his bed, near to death."[21] The peasant Prokof'i Borodkin prepared his will in July 1691, "while remembering the hour of death."[22] Ivan Kotlunin evidently came to death's door quite unexpectedly, since he dictated his will in July 1630, while en route to Moscow. He was gravely ill, he said, so he prepared his testament "for the sake of the hour of death."[23] And Dorofei Nikitin syn Perevoznikov arranged his will "in sickness at the end of life and near death."[24]

It seems likely that many other testators found in grave illness reason to compose their wills, even when the documents themselves reveal no hint of the circumstances. For example, the will of the very wealthy merchant, Gavriil Fetiev, prepared late in December 1683, contains no mention of illness. But in the probate hearing, the Kolmogory archbishop reports that Fetiev was ill indeed:

> ...On December 20, 1683, by the will of the Praiseworthy God according to his unspeakable just fates and good will the merchant [*gost'*] Gavriil Martinovich Fetiev was ill in our archepiscopal residence, lying on his death bed, and we visited him numerous times throughout the entire day in his great sickness....[25]

In another case, a testator recalls that his brother, when compiling his own testament, had lain "ill, near to death's hour."[26] Other testators simply

---

[19] See Aleksandr Mitkevich, *O forme zaveshchanii: Istoriko-iuridicheskii ocherk* (Tiflis, 1893), pp. 53-55.

[20] "Gramota Patriarkha Ioakima o dukhovnom zaveshchanii Vasiliia Zagriazhskogo, 1670 g.," *Chteniia v Obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete* (hereafter *ChOIDR*) (1869), bk. 4, pp. 57-59.

[21] P. I. Shchukin, *Sbornik starinnykh bumag khranishchikhsia v muzee P. I. Shchukina*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1896-1902), p. 20.

[22] *Akty otnosiashchiesia do iuridicheskogo byta Drevnei Rossii* (hereafter AIuB), vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1836), no. 86.IV.

[23] Shchukin, *Sbornik*, vol. 4, pp. 22-24.

[24] "Akty Slobodoskogo Bogoiavlenskogo monastyria, Arkhiereiskogo doma, tserkvei i drugie," *Trudy Viatskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Kommissii* 1915, no. 1, pp. 129-30.

[25] Shchukin, *Sbornik*, vol. 2, pp. 56-57.

[26] *Russkaia istoricheskaia biblioteka* (hereafter *RIB*), (St. Petersburg-Leningrad, 1872-1927) vol. 14, no. 50.

confessed that they "lay in illness,"[27] "at the end of life,"[28] or aware that "the end [of life] overtakes me."[29] Some testators averred only that they prepared their last wishes while "departing this earth."[30]

Occasionally, testators were so seriously ill that they could not muster the strength to sign their own testaments, giving rise to subsequent queries about the legitimacy of the documents. In 1678, for example, Vasilii Iakovlevich Golokhvastov died, leaving behind a sizable estate. Two weeks later, Patriarch Ioakim heard the will in a probate session. But the will did not have the testator's signature, and the Patriarch inquired of the dead man's confessor why. Archpriest Maksim replied that he had signed in place of Golokhvastov "because [Golokhvastov lay in such] sickness that he could not affix his signature."[31]

The case of Fedor Ivanovich Sheremetev illustrates the same point. Sheremetev had anticipated death in 1645, but had escaped. His luck did not hold out, however, and he composed a second will late in June 1649. By July 6, 1649, Sheremetev was dead, and his will was presented to the Patriarch for confirmation. Here, too, the dead man's signature was missing. Again, the confessor stepped forward to explain the irregularity: "and the hand of Fedor Ivanovich is not [appended] to this oral memorandum because he now [*sic*] cannot see with his eyes because of his great illness and advanced old age."[32]

Even worse disabilities could preclude the testator signing his own will. When another probate hearing brought out the fact that a testator's signature

---

[27] Shchukin, Sbornik, vol. 4, pp. 15, 16; N.P. Likhachev, Sbornik aktov sobrannykh v arkhivakh i bibliotekh, 2 vyp. in 1 vol. (St. Petersburg, 1895), no. 29.

[28] Akty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii severno-vostochnoi Rusi kontsa XIV-nachala XVI v. (hereafter ASEI), vol. 3 (Moscow: AN SSSR-Nauka, 1952-64), no. 68.

[29] RIB, vol. 17, no. 1.

[30] I. M. "Dukhovnaia izustnaia pamiat' stroitelia Makar'evo-Zheltovodskogo monastyria Avramiia," *Vremennik Obshchestva istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh* 8 (1850), pp. 43-50; *Gramoty velikogo Novgoroda i Pskova* (hereafter *GVNP*), nos. 210, 157; *ASEI*, vol. 1, no. 11; S. O. Schmidt, "Neizvestnye dokumenty XVI v.," *Istoricheskii arkhiv* 1961, no. 4, pp. 152-153 (no. 3); Shchukin, *Sbornik,* vol. 2, pp. 57-58, 88-89; "Dukhovnoe zaveshchanie," *Trudy Pskovskogo Arkheologicheskogo obshchestva za 1907-1908 gody* (Pskov, 1909), p 113 (no. 1); V. G. Geiman (ed.), *Materialy po istorii Karelii XII-XVI vv.* (Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Karelo-Finskoi SSR, 1941), nos. 48, 169; Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, nos. 26, 29; A. V. Selivanov, *Rod dvorian Polivanovykh XIV-XX vv., Trudy Vladimirskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Kommissii* 5 (1903), pp. 59-61 (appendix); L. M. Savelov, "Kniazia Pozharskie. II. Prilozheniia," *Letopis' istoriko-rodoslovnogo obshchestva v Moskve*, 6-7 (1906), pp. 53-60 (appendix, no. 9); N. P. Voskovoinikova, "Rodovoi arkhiv krest'ianskoi sem'i Artem'evykh-Khlyzlovykh," *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1966 g.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), pp. 384-406 (nos. 9, 10).

[31] S.I. Kotkov and A.S. Oreshnikov (eds), *Moskovskaia delovaia i bytovaia pis'mennost' XVII veka* (hereafter *MDBP*) (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), no. 61.

[32] A.V. Barsukov, *Rod Sheremetevykh*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1881-1904), pp. 510-24.

was missing, the executors observed that the will was, nonetheless, legitimate. The dead man, they said, "could not affix his [own] hand since his hands were amputated in [his] illness."[33] A later testament made out for Mitrofan Lavrov was also without a signature, the testator being prevented from signing "by cruel disease."[34]

Muscovite testators, then, prepared their wills believing that death was at hand, but the very immediacy of death may well have robbed them of the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the personal tragedy. Ivan Shetnev, for example, reported that he had written his testament with his own hand "for speed and on account of my illness."[35] Small wonder that Shetnev spent little time speculating on the human condition.

For the Orthodox, it was essential to confess prior to death. To judge from the list of witnesses, executors, and copyists, churchmen were regularly in attendance when testaments were drawn up, and they undoubtedly affected the situation. Representatives of a sure future who were empowered to oversee the transition to eternal life, clerics made it difficult for the dying to give full vent to the confusion implicit in death. But some testators managed to pierce the standard verbiage, providing clues to what they thought as they stared into the darkness.

In September 1406, Metropolitan Kiprian himself paused to survey his life and its imminent end:

> I, sinful and humble Kiprian, Metropolitan, have seen that age has caught me; I have fallen into various and frequent illnesses, by which now I am constrained...as a punishment from God for my sins, by the illness that multiplies in me now, heralding nothing but death....[36]

Although Kiprian went on to affirm confidence in Christian salvation, every man or woman who has endured, or seen others endure, the incapacities of old age and terminal illness must sympathize with his observation. But it is unlikely that this sentiment, or even the phrasing, originated with Kiprian. The syntax indicates that Kiprian or the copyist misremembered the wording from another source.

Certainly, Kiprian's sentiment was popular, recorded in almost identical phrasing in later Muscovite testaments. For example, 265 years after Kiprian, Evdokiia Fedorovna Odoevskaia updated the grammar and admitted to more confusion than had the Metropolitan:

> I have seen how old age catches me and frequent and incurable illnesses multiply...heralding nothing but death and the fearsome judgment of the Saviors of a future age...and therefore my heart is troubled in me and a deathly fear falls on me and the darkness of bewilderment

---

[33] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 25.

[34] "Dukhovnye zaveshchaniia," *Trudy Pskovskogo arkheologicheskogo obshchestva za 1907-1908 gody* (Pskov, 1909), pp. 114-115 (no. 3).

[35] Sergei Shumakov, *Obzor gramot kollegii ekonomii*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1899-1917), pp. 75-76 (no. 148).

[36] *AIuB*, vol. 1, no. 83.

covers me....[37]

Other wills contain similar sentiments, often reproducing the precise wording of these examples.[38] But the repetition of phrases need not, however, convict these men and women of disingenuousness. They believed, after all, that they were dying, and there was little reason to dissemble.

To be sure, Muscovite wills regularly repeat the standard formulas of Christian faith, affirming confidence in the Trinity and in the just judgment of God. At the same time, there are innovations and alterations that betray the initiative of the dying. In 1693, for example, Pekla Matveevna Vasilikha looked over her life, noting that the time for reckoning had come. Like others, she trusted in the salvation of God, but another faith was also at work:

> And I, the above-named [slave of God], knowing myself to be closer to death than to life, henceforth entrust my soul to the hand of the Lord God and my body to his holy mother earth [*ego sviatoi zemli mattse*] from which I was created....[39]

It is barely conceivable that a confessor would suggest that the earth was anyone's "holy mother." More likely, Pekla Vasilikha had absorbed that theology from her mother's milk.

Other testaments avoid the standard phrasing almost entirely, and in the process paint in brilliant colors the reality of Muscovite death. Mikhail Nazarov, a peasant from a village owned by the Suzdal' Pokrovskii Convent, also composed his testament while "departing this world." As it turns out, death came to him by violence rather than by disease or hunger. In December 1692, Nazarov and another villager had gone to Moscow to sell some meat. They had done quite well, and they set off for home with 50 rubles between them. While in Moscow, however, they had made the acquaintance of Kuzma Fedorov, a peasant from another Suzdal' village, and Fedorov accompanied Nazarov and his friend on the trip home. When they reached St. Nicholas Monastery, Fedorov inexplicably stayed behind. The two friends thought little of it, and went on their way. Unfortunately for them, Fedorov soon reappeared, this time with a pal, known to Nazarov only as Grishka. The renewed acquaintance proved most unpleasant:

> ...he Kuzma with his comrade Grishko began to beat my comrade Mikhail Lukoianov and me to death, and he Kuzma ordered his comrade Grishka with a knife to cut [us] and from my comrade Mikhail Lukoianov they took money [totaling] twenty-five and a half rubles and from me Mikhail they also took twenty-five, and having beat us they

---

[37] Barsukov, *Rod Sheremetevykh*, vol. 7, pp. 341-50.

[38] *Drevniaia Rossiiskaia Vivliofika* (hereafter, *DRV*), vol. 14, 2nd. edition (Moscow 1788-91), pp. 147-48; "Dukhovnye zaveshchaniia," *Trudy Chernigovskoi Gubernskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Kommissii* 10 (1913), pp. 190-91, 94-95 (nos. 2, 4). Barsukov, *Rod Sheremetevykh*, vol. 3, pp. 495-510.

[39] "Dukhovnye zaveshcheniia," *Trudy Chernigovskoi Gubernskoi*. 10 (1913), pp. 190-91 (no. 2).

abandoned us as dead below their village of Tolchkovo....

Nevertheless, both men were still alive, and they made their way into the village, where they spent the night with another peasant. The next day, they reached their own village, where Lukoianov promptly died from his wounds. Six days later, Nazarov himself anticipated death, and used his entire testament to record the story.[40]

Muscovite testaments also confirm the deadly role of disease in the 16th and 17th centuries. A probate hearing for the will of Semen Vasil'ev syn Stepanov took place on March 30, 1570. Grigorei Dolgorukii, who was Stepanov's son-in-law and one of his executors, affirmed that the will was genuine, but observed that he himself had not been present when Stepanov, had died. Another executor, Paisii Michiurin, had advised Dolgorukii that everything was in order. According to Dolgorukii, "my father-in-law Semen fell ill during the plague and wrote this testament...."[41]

Disease was dangerous not only for the testators. A 1571 will was prepared for Gregorei Fedorov syn Mataftin, who may well have died of plague, although the will does not specify the cause of death. An epidemic was evidently in progress, however, since by the time the will was read before the Bishop of Vologda and Perm at probate, the surviving witnesses had to inform the bishop that neither the secretary who had written the document nor one of the witnesses who had attended was available to confirm their roles. They had both died, carried away by plague.[42] A 1636 probate hearing demonstrates just how deadly the 17th century world could be. When it came time to inquire of the witnesses whether the document just read was the will whose compilation they had attended, the dead man's confessor and the copyist who had prepared the will answered that it was, but went on to observe that "all the witnesses are dead." Not quite, as it turns out, but mortality was impressive all the same: "Bogolep, Foka, [and] Petr died; Nikifor [went] to Siberia; Semen was tonsured; and Ivan died."[43] In other words, four of the six witnesses had died.

**The Cosmology of Death**

For Muscovites, no less than for us, death inspired anxiety about the unknown future. Ivan Afanas'ev syn Chaikovskii confessed as he prepared his will that he did so "fearing the hour of death."[44] The wife of Aleksei Stepanov syn Dokhturov, Tat'iana Vasil'eva doch', admitted a similar dread, but also supplied her description of death: "I do here write this testamentary letter, seeing my illnesses, and fearing the hour of death and the separation of my

---

[40] S. I. Kotkov (ed.), *Pamiatniki delovoi pis'mennosti XVII veka. Vladimirskii krai* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), no. 255.

[41] *Akty feodal'nogo zemlevladeniia i khoziaistva XIV-XVI vekov* (hereafter *AFZ*), vol. 2 (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1951-61), no. 352.

[42] V. D. Nazarov, "Iz istorii agrarnoi politiki tsarizma v XVI veke," *Sovetskie arkhivy* 1968, no. 3, p. 112 (no. 4).

[43] Shumakov, *Obzor*, vol. 4, pp. 312-13, no. 945.

[44] Iv. Suvorov, "K istorii roda Chaikovskikh," *Russkaia starina* 47 (1916), pp. 401-3.

soul from my body...."[45]

The division of the universe into matter and spirit has deep roots in the human experience. Ethnographers have often observed how widespread is the idea that, at death, human flesh separates from a spirit or soul. Indeed, the vitality of the soul is the very source of taboos governing periods of mourning, the proper ritual for which is essential in order to protect living society from the displeased and wronged deceased.[46]

Christianity constructed its own variant on this cosmology, and Muscovite testators confirmed their dualist conception of reality. Some simply asserted the separability of body and soul, as, for example, Mikhailo Petrov syn Zinov'ev who requested his wife "to bury my body and remember my soul."[47] Kirill Artem'evich Miliukov had a more complete vision. He prepared his testament, he said, in the event that "God should choose to send his death-dealing angel for my very sinful soul and my soul be taken out of my very sinful body...."[48] The Archbishop of Viatka and Perm, Iona, brought a more theological perspective to the same thought:

> I...,Iona,...before the death of my flesh, considering the perishability and impermanence of our natural life, for this [reason] and [to anticipate] the unannounced time of my end, have decided to inscribe this testament... [lest] the hour of death fall on me suddenly, or the strength to speak is taken away, or my memory goes weak, or I depart for the home of my eternity without a farewell or last kiss.[49]

Whatever the corruptibility of the flesh, Iona planned, nevertheless, to live as spirit in a heavenly home. Others shared his hope. In 1688, Ivan Vasil'ev syn Panov dictated his testament in the event that "the Lord God chooses to resettle my soul from this earthly life into the eternal bliss of a heavenly kingdom."[50] Iurii Iansheevich Suleshov directed that services be said after his death for, among other things, "the separation of my soul from the body."[51]

Confidence in an afterlife occasionally inspired testators to worry, not so much about themselves, as about those they left behind. Leontei Posnikov,

---

[45] N. Chulkov, "Kniaginia Tat'iana Vasil'evna Khovanskaia," *Letopis' istoriko-rodoslovnogo obshchestva v Moskve* 24 (1910), pp. 44-45.

[46] Jack Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors: A Study of the Mortuary Customs of the LoDagaa of West Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 17.

[47] Nikolai Borisovich Iusupov, *O rode Iusupovykh*, 2 vols. in 1 (St. Petersburg, 1866-67), pp. 364-65 (no. 11).

[48] "Zaveshchaniia," *Zhurnal 91-go zasedaniia Tverskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Kommissii*, pp. 16-17.

[49] *Akty iuridicheskie ili sobranie forma starinnogo deloproizvodstva* (hereafter *AIu*) (St. Petersburg, 1838), no. 428.

[50] Shchukin, *Sbornik*, vol. 3, pp. 176-79.

[51] "Izustnaia pamiat' boiarina kniazia Iur'ia Ansheevicha Suleshova, 1643 g.," *Letopis' istoriko-rodoslovnogo obshchestva v Moskve* 5, no. 2 (1909), pp. 21-30.

in bequeathing a religious object to Stefan Ivanovich Moshkov, begged:

> ...tearfully falling to the earth, please, my lord, do not wail at the burial of me, a sinner... and I will pray for you and for your 'sister' Evdokiia Grigor'evna and for your children for health and the salvation of God from the king of heaven.[52]

Ivan Solovtsov was obviously anxious about his children. Time and again throughout his testament he recalled them by name, urging upon them, not only his legacy but also familial regard for one another. Finally, together with all the spiritual blessings he could recall, Solovtsov requested from God that his sons should die properly:

> Give, Lord, my sons Iakov, Misiur', Mikhail and Fedosei the blessing of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...and at the end of their lives, give them, Lord, repentance before death; deem them worthy partakers, Lord, of your holy, most honorable body and blood; do not deprive them, Lord, of the image of the angel and archangel and heavenly blessings at the Second Judgment....[53]

Solovtsov wanted his sons to die confessed, as worthy communicants of the Holy Eucharist, so that their souls might then inherit future bliss in some extra-terrestrial realm. Their bodies awaited a gloomier fate.

**The Corpse**

As in Puritan New England and across much of Europe, the announcement of death in Muscovy came with the ringing of church bells.[54] It was then necessary to prepare the corpse for delivery to its final resting place. From an early time, church manuals had prescribed that the corpse be washed with warm water, but few witnesses to Muscovite funerals mention washing.[55] Kotoshikhin, however, reports that the first task confronting those who prepared a dead tsar for burial was to wash the corpse with water, and it seems likely that ordinary Muscovites also received a final cleansing.[56]

---

[52] Shumakov, *Obzor*, vol. 4, pp. 77-78 (no. 149).

[53] *Sbornik dokumentov po istorii SSSR dlia seminarskikh i prakticheskikh zaniatii*, vol. 3: *XVI vek* (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1972), no. 72.

[54] The ringing of bells, beating of drums or the like are common forms of announcing death. Stannard reports that during epidemics in New England bell-ringing had to be suspended so noisy were the bells (*The Puritan Way of Death*, p. 112).

[55] "Trebnik serediny XIV veka, pergamennyi," *Obshchestvo liubitelei drevnei pis'mennosti* 24 (1878), pp. 78-78v.

[56] Grigorii Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii v tsarstvovanie Alekseia Mikhailovicha*, 4th ed. (St. Petersburg, 1906; reprint edition, The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 19; Tereshchenko, *Byt* pt. III, pp. 79-80. Maslova reports that by the 19th century many villages had professional corpse washers (*Narodnaia odezhda*, p. 87).

Olearius says that, once a priest had prayed for a dead man or woman, the corpse was "washed clean and dressed in white linen clothing and shoes of fine red leather...."[57] Robert Best claimed that "when any man or woman dyeth, they stretch him out, and put a newe payre of shooes on his feet, because he hath a great iourney to goe; then they do winde him in a sheet, as we do...."[58] Fletcher, however, observed that the dead did not receive a shroud. Instead, "they bury their dead, as the party used to goe, with coate, hose, bootes, hat and the rest of his apparell."[59] Margeret has it only slightly different: "They put a new shirt on the deceased, leggings, shoes which are like slippers, and a cap."[60] Even the tsars bore their normal attire into the earth.[61]

If the dying cared about their grave clothing, few showed it in their testaments. Only a handful of the extant Muscovite wills specify particular apparel. Fedor Ivanovich Khvorostinin clearly thought a great deal about his death, and his testament shows that he had the wherewithal to accomplish all that he thought appropriate. Like some other wealthy and highly-ranked Muscovites, Khvorostinin prescribed that the Patriarch himself should sing the funeral liturgy. Furthermore, Khvorostinin urged his executors to "dress my sinful body in my dark blue long coat [*okhaben'*] [with] the silver buttons on it."[62]

Somewhat earlier, Semen Dmitrievich Peshkov Saburov had ordered his executors "to cover my sinful body with my marten fur coat [trimmed with] green velvet...."[63] However, Peshkov-Saburov evidently did not expect to be buried in this outfit, since he went on to specify that the fur coat be donated to the monastery in which he was buried. It may be that Peshkov-Saburov had in mind, not being dressed in his fur coat, but that it be spread over his coffin, from which it could be easily removed for donation to the monastery once the funeral cortege reached the burial place.

Precisely this intention emerges from the testament of Ivan Vasil'evich Volynskii, who requested that attendants "cover my coffin with my gold ceremonial coat."[64] Olearius says that it was normal for mourners to drape the coffin "with a cloth or the cloak of the deceased."[65] A 17th century illustration of a funeral cortege en route to the cemetery shows such a closed

---

[57] Adam Olearius, *The Travels of Olearius in 17th Century Russia*, trans. and ed. by Samuel H. Baron (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 274.

[58] E. Delmar Morgan and C.H. Coote (eds.), *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia by Anthony Jenkinson and Other Englishmen*, vol. 2 (New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.) pp. 375-76.

[59] Giles Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, intro. by Richard Pipes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 106v.

[60] Jacques Margeret, *The Russian Empire and Grand Duchy of Muscovy: A 17th-Century French Account*, trans. and ed. by Chester S.L. Dunning (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1983), p. 24.

[61] Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii*, p. 19.

[62] Sergii Sheremetev, "Dukhovnoe zaveshchanie kniazia F.I. Khvorostinina," *Russkii arkhiv* (1896), bk. 1, no. 4, pp. 571-75.

[63] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 13.

[64] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 26.

[65] Olearius, *Travels*, p. 274.

coffin with a piece of clothing draped over it.[66] Palls of precious cloth covered royal coffins.[67]

While pious Christians, anxious about their appearance on the day that Christ called them from their graves to a bodily resurrection, might wish to be resplendently dressed, even in death, the display of empty clothing atop a coffin is harder to understand. Of course, conspicuous consumption might be at work here. Other aspects of Muscovite death ritual spectacularly separate the wealthy from the poor whose means did not permit so grand a send-off. But the limp appearance of the dead person's clothing, even clothing of a most elegant and expensive sort, seems poorly suited to demonstrating social distance.

Churchmen may have played a part in introducing this custom, since monastic gift books bulge with reports of gifts of precious clothing, presumably taken from atop coffins prior to burial. But it seems more likely that the symbolism derives from deeper cultural roots. Jack Goody has pointed out that in some cultures the clothes of the deceased are thought to bear the distinctive features of their former wearer.[68] The dead man's clothes atop the coffin, like the effigies affixed atop the coffins of English monarchs, might serve as physical depictions of the deceased.[69]

In other words, it is possible that clothing, whether worn by the deceased or placed on the coffin, served to emphasize the individual's participation in this last ritual of life. Ethnographers have observed that Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians sometimes bury the corpse in wedding clothes or in clothes sanctified by having been in church.[70] These clothes make the link with the living community and with the series of rituals essential to society more direct. With the departure of these clothes, the dead person, too, ritually departs the community.

The arrangement of the corpse also had symbolic value. According to a 14th century source, it was important to make the sign of the cross on the lips, fingers, hands, and legs of the dead.[71] Some sources report that it was essential for the spouse and kinsmen to kiss the corpse, but, aside from royal

---

[66] V. Prokhurov, *Russkie drevnosti*, vol. 2, after p. 16 (iv).

[67] The coffin of Tsar Aleksei Alekseevich, for example, was draped with a silk cloth bearing silver brocade (*DRV*, vol. 14, p. 66), and the coffin of Tsarevna Tat'iana Mikhailovna was draped with gold satin (*DRV*, vol. 11, p. 112). Likewise, the coffin of Irina Mikhailovna was covered with velvet decorated with precious stones, while Iakov Kudenetovich Cherkasskii went to his grave under a gold velvet cloth (Archmandrite Leonid, *Vkladnaia kniga Moskovskogo Novospasskogo monastyria, Pamiatniki Drevnei Pis'mennosti i iskusstva* [St. Petersburg, 1883], pp. 27, 31).

[68] "Material goods with which he [the dead man] is associated are in fact part of the man himself as a social object; man, clothes, and tools are aspects of the unit of social relations, a social personality." (Goody, *Death Property and the Ancestors*, p. 200).

[69] Fritz, "The Trade in Death," pp. 296-97; Fritz, "From 'Public' to 'Private'," pp. 73-74.

[70] Maslova, *Narodnaia odezhda*, p. 85.

[71] "Trebnik," p. 78v.

funerals, there is no evidence for this in Muscovy.[72] Evidently, the ritual went further, obliging those who prepared the corpse for burial to cross the hands of the deceased, a practice that lingered on into the modern era.[73] The hands then were made to hold objects of ritual value. In modern times, the dead held candles, an icon, or a Psalter, which were obviously intended to ease the transfer into the realm of darkness.[74]

Muscovite sources add another charmed object which the deceased carried with them to the grave. Among the "superstitious and prophane ceremonies" for which Giles Fletcher censured Muscovites was the practice of placing in the hands of the dead person "a letter to Saint Nicolas: whom they make their chiefe mediatour, and as it were, the porter of heauen gates, as the Papistes doe their Peter."[75] Another 16th century reporter asserts that "they forget not to put a testimony in his [the corpse's] right hand, which the priest giueth him, to testifie vnto S. Nicholas that he dyed a Christian man or woman."[76] Olearius calls the document a "passport to [heaven]," purchased from church authorities, and he provides a sample:

> We N. N., bishop and priest here in N., do hereby acknowledge and witness that [the deceased] actually lived among us as a genuine, righteous Greek Christian. Though he sometimes sinned, he nevertheless repented of his sins, and received absolution and Holy Communion for forgiveness. He revered God and His saints, and fasted and prayed fittingly. With me, N. N., his confessor, he was fully reconciled, and I forgave him all his sins. Therefore, we have issued him this passport to show to S. Peter and the other saints that he may be admitted without hindrance to the gates of bliss.[77]

Only one description of a royal funeral makes any mention of this particular rite,[78] and there is no direct allusion to it in any extant Muscovite testament. Certainly, the Orthodox believed that confession was essential to

---

[72] The narrative of the funeral of Tsar Aleksei Alekseevich, for example, reports that the boyars and other ranking persons in attendance "kissed his [Aleksei's] royal hand" (*DRV*, vol. 14, p. 68). At the funeral of tsaritsa Agaf'ia Simeonovna, the record says that "the face of the Tsaritsa remained uncovered during the liturgy until the kiss, and then they kissed her on the hand" (*DRV*, vol. 11, p. 208). Also see *DRV*, vol. 11, p. 209, where there was no kissing of the corpse, although the narrative makes this seem unusual.

[73] Olearius, *Travels*, p. 274; Tereshchenko, *Byt*, pt III, pp. 80, 88.

[74] Byzantine church practice specified a Psalter for a monk, a Gospel for a priest, the eucharist for a bishop and an icon for a layman (James Kyriakakis, "Byzantine Burial Customs: Care of the Deceased from Death to the Prothesis," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18 [Spring, 1974], pp. 56-57).

[75] Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, p. 106; also Samuel Collins, *The Present State of Russia* (London: John Winter for Dorman Newman, 1671), p. 21.

[76] *Early Voyages and Travels*, pp. 375-76.

[77] Olearius, *Travels*, p. 275.

[78] *DRV*, vol. 11, p. 208.

achieve heaven, and confessors were responsible for their charges, as the probate hearings prove. But that confessors sold absolution is less obvious. Confessors often did come in for a gift from the dying. Just over a third of the testaments bequeath money or goods to the confessor, and 20 testators also made gifts to a second confessor. But it is impossible to determine whether the gifts were part of the issuance of a "passport."

Final farewells required the singing of the funeral mass, usually in a church. In the case of the tsars, this meant transporting the body in formal cortege to the Archangel Cathedral in the Kremlin. Kotoshikhin describes the funeral train:

> The Patriarch and all [church] authorities, and priests and deacons gather at the tsar's chambers, all robed in clerical vestments, and the tsaritsa and tsareviches and tsarevnas, and boyars and the ranking men, together with boyars' wives and many [other] women, [all] dressed in black clothes, [also gather], and having taken [hold] of the [coffin holding the] tsar's body, they walk from the tsar's chambers according to rank: in front go the deacons, priests, singers and clerks, and they sing the canons, and after them priests carry the tsar's body, and after the tsar's body come the Patriarch and [other church] authorities and the tsarevichi and boyars, and then the tsaritsa and tsarevnas and boyars' wives and many [other] people, male and female, all together without division by rank, sobbing and crying.[79]

The funeral of Aleksei Mikhailovich conformed to this description. According to Reitenfels, four boyars at a time carried the lid to the tsar's coffin, preceding another alternating set of four who bore the coffin itself. Then came the new tsar, Fedor Alekseevich, and the widowed Tsaritsa Natalia, each of whom traveled in a seat borne by four boyars. After them came the former tsar's five daughters from his first marriage. Numerous clergy and various ranking men and women also took part in the cortege. The scene apparently provoked a tremendous outpouring of grief, "as if several bells with the most piercing tone rang over our ears."[80]

Other members of the royal family traveled to their graves with similar accompaniment. When the Tsarevich Aleksei Alekseevich died in January 1670, ranking men carried the coffin to a sled covered with velvet for the journey to burial. Before the body went the priests and deacons, holding icons, and after them, the Tsar's and Patriarch's clerks, who sang the lament. Metropolitans, archbishops, bishops, archmandrites and abbots came next, just in front of the coffin. Then the tsar himself "in mourning clothes," the tsarevichi,

---

[79] Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii*, p. 20. For comparison with English monarchs' funerals of about the same time, see Fritz, "From 'Public' to 'Private,'" pp. 62-68.

[80] E. Tarnava-Borichevskii, "Izvlechenie iz skazanii Iakova Reitenfel'sa o sostoianii Rossii pri tsare Aleksii Mikhailoviche," *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* 23 (1839); *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1830), no. 629.

boyars and other elite servitors, all dressed in black. Again, the funeral provoked a great sea of tears and storms of wailing.[81]

Female Romanovs received slightly different treatment. Tat'iana Mikhailovna, for example, died in 1706. Like other women of the family, she was buried in the Cathedral of the Resurrection in the Ascension Monastery, rather than in the Archangel Cathedral. Tat'iana Mikhailovna went to her last resting place, not in a sled, but on a litter covered with red cloth onto which the coffin, itself covered with gold satin, was set. Before the coffin walked the clergy, carrying various icons and crosses, and the choristers who sang the dirge. The higher clergy came just before the body, around which eight deacons with censers walked. Boyars and other ranking men, all dressed "in black French and Saxon tunics" befitting the Petrine era, preceded the royal family along the whole course of the journey. Wives of Muscovy's elite servitors came last. They, too, were dressed in black and carrying candles.[82]

Lesser lights went to their graves with less pomp, although the cortege had a roughly similar outline, as Olearius reports:

> The withdrawal of the body occurs in the following manner. Four or six persons carry it out...Before the body walk several veiled women from among the closest friends of the deceased, giving forth extremely sad laments and cries. By turns they cry out very loudly, quiet down, and resume bewailing the untimely departure of their friend...Meanwhile, some priests go before and after the deceased, carrying icons and censers...Behind the deceased follow a throng of his closest friends and acquaintances, in no particular order, each carrying a wax candle in his hand.[83]

Whether a throng attended or not, ordinary Muscovites, like their social betters, went to the earth in the company of churchmen and kinsmen. Icons, incense, and candles helped light the way into the dark kingdom of death, and some testators provided funds to guarantee ample supplies for the mourners.[84] "Friends and kinsemen of the party departed carry in theyr handes small waxe candles, and they weepe and howle, and make much lamentation" while accompany-

---

[81] *DRV*, vol. 14, pp. 65-68. The use of a sled for transporting the coffin evidently has a long history. Lubor Niederle points out that even Vladimir Monomakh pondered this form of transport while he composed his testament (*Byt i kul'tura drevnikh slavian* [Prague: Plamia, 1924], p. 100).

[82] *DRV*, vol. 14, pp. 111-13.

[83] Olearius, *Travels*, p. 275.

[84] *Sbornik gramot kollegii ekonomii*, (hereafter *SGKE*) (Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1922-29), vol. 1, nos. 346, 466; *RIB*, vol. 14, nos. 98, 100, 117; *Akty Russkogo Gosudarstva 1505-1526 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), (hereafter *ARG*), no. 108; *AFZ*, vol. 2, no. 332; Sergei Shumakov (ed.), *Tverskie akty izdannye Uchenoiu Arkhivnoiu Kommisseiu* (Tver', 1896-97), no. 67; Shmidt, "Neizvestnye dokumenty XVI v.," p. 154, no. 5. See the drawing of a Muscovite funeral that shows the mourners with candles in hand (Augustin Mayerberg, *Al'bom Meierberga. Vidy i bytovye kartiny Rossii XVII veka* [St. Petersburg, 1903], p. 86).

ing the corpse to burial.[85]

Margeret, too, says that "kinsfolk and friends" took part in the burial procession. He adds that

> a number of women lament their dead, ask [the deceased] why he has died--if he was not favored by the emperor, if he did not have enough wealth, enough children, an honest wife. If it is a woman, they ask if she did not have a good husband, and similar foolishness.[86]

Collins, too, says that mourners continually inquired of the dead why he had died.[87] These queries reinforce the notion that the living, in some sense, still counted the deceased among their number. Not only might he be blamed for his own death, but, since the complaints were directed to him, he was evidently thought to be able to hear them.

Fletcher says that women mourners

> come to lament for the dead party: and stand howling ouer the bodie, after a prophane, and heathenish manner (sometimes in the house, sometimes bringing the bodie into the backside) asking him what hee wanted, and what he meant to die.[88]

The same image recurs pictorially in Mayerberg's album. Although the burial represented here had few in attendance, agitated women mourners are very much in evidence.[89] By some accounts, women were hired especially for the task, perhaps, says Collins, because "the Russians count that the greatest Funeral where are most Women-mourners."[90] By the 19th century, if not before, many villages of Russia had professional mourners, and ethnographers took down samples of the laments offered on behalf of the dead.[91] Similar plaints must have lingered over the graves of the dead in the 16th and 17th centuries.

As in many other cultures, the dead were buried promptly in Muscovy. Jacques Margeret claimed that no corpse was held longer than 24 hours, and Samuel Collins reported that the corpse remained in the church "not long before it be buried in the church yard."[92] Giles Fletcher, however, noted that, in winter,

> when all is covered with snow, and the ground is so hard frozen, as that no spade, nor pikeaxe can enter their

---

[85] *Early Voyages and Travels*, p. 376.

[86] Margaret, *The Russian Empire*, p. 24.

[87] Collins, *The Present State of Russia*, p. 21.

[88] Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, pp. 106-106v.

[89] Mayerberg, *Al'bom*, p. 86.

[90] Collins, *The Present State of Russia*, p. 20.

[91] Alex E. Alexander, *Russian Folklore: An Anthology in English Translation* (Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 95-98.

[92] Margaret, *The Russian Empire*, p. 24; Collins, *The Present State of Russia*, p. 20.

> manner is not to burie their dead, but to keepe the bodies (so many as die all the Winter time) in an house... which they call *Bohsedom*, that is, Gods House: where the dead bodies are pyled vp together, like billets on a woodstack, as hard with the frost as a very stone, till the Springtide come and resolueth the frost: what time every man taketh his dead friend and committeth him to the ground.[93]

Adam Olearius, who visited Muscovy 50 years after Fletcher and 50 years before Collins, reports still another variant. The coffin of a deceased notable, he said, remained in the church eight days in winter time, the priest daily censing the corpse with myrrh.[94]

No one in Muscovy was more notable than the tsars, but the available evidence indicates that they were buried on the day they died, unless they died at night. Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, who died in mid-winter (January 29, 1676), was buried the same day.[95] Similarly, Tsarevna Feodos'ia Ioannovna (May 12, 1691), Tsarevich Aleksandr Petrovich (May 14, 1692), and Tsarevna Tat'iana Mikhailovna (August 24, 1706) were all buried on the day they died.[96]

Occasionally, members of the tsar's family were buried the day after death. Examples include Tsaritsa Agaf'ia Simeonovna (died July 15, 1671), Tsarevna Mariia Ioannovna (February 14, 1692), and Tsar Fedor Alekseevich (April 28, 1682).[97] Delays were usually the result of death late in the day or at night. But normal practice was prompt burial, as the death of Tsarevich Il'ia Fedorovich clearly illustrates. Il'ia died on the evening of July 21, 1681, a Thursday, "but there was no burial on Friday because the Sovereign was [away] on campaign". Singing of the funeral mass and burial were postponed until Saturday, July 23.[98] In other words, if the Tsar had been in Moscow, Il'ia would have been buried on Friday.

It is impossible to verify whether all the dead entered their graves so quickly. Quite possibly, Fletcher is right in saying that during very deep colds, burials were postponed. Epidemics, too, undoubtedly altered normal burial practice.[99] But the natural processes of decay may have encouraged haste. In Muscovy, unlike Elizabethan England, there was evidently little

---

[93] Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, p. 106.

[94] Olearius, *Travels*, p. 274.

[95] *Pol'noe sobranie zakonov Rossiskoi imperii*, 1st edition (St. Petersburg: 1845) (hereafter *PSZ)*, vol. 2, no. 629. But Reitenfels says the corpse stayed unburied for seven days (Tarnava-Borichevskii, "Izvlecheniia," p. 17).

[96] *DRV*, vol. 11, pp. 203, 213; *DRV*, vol. 14, p. 111; *PSZ*, vol. 4, no. 2118. On the life of Tat'iana, see A. Ikonnikova, "Tsaritsy i tsarevny iz doma Romanovykh," *Russkii arkhiv* (1913), bk. 3, pp. 352-54.

[97] *DRV*, vol. 11, pp. 207, 210, 211.

[98] *DRV*, vol. 11, p. 209.

[99] Heinrich von Staden reports that during the plague attack of 1570-71 "large pits were dug around the city of Moscow and the dead were thrown in them without coffins, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred, five hundred in a pile" (Thomas Esper [ed. and trans.], *The Land and Government of Muscovy*, [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967], p. 46). Cold, too, surely delayed burial in Muscovy, as reflection on the Leningrad seige winter of 1941-42 suggests.

embalming.[100] Only one case unambiguously asserts that the dead man's body was treated in some way. Boris Godunov had hoped to prop up his somewhat tenuous power by marrying off his daughter to Prince John, brother to Denmark's King Christian. But in October 1602, the intended groom, a Lutheran, fell ill and died before the month was out. Isaac Massa, a Dutch witness, reports that "they placed the embalmed body in an oak coffin...." John's burial, however, was far from ordinary for Muscovy. A Lutheran minister conducted the funeral services, even delivering a funeral sermon, and foreigners escorted the body to the place of burial.[101] It seems unlikely that John's funeral represented in any way Muscovite practice and no other instances of embalming are reported in the sources.

Nevertheless, in at least a few cases, the dead reached their graves long after they had died, whether or not they were embalmed. For example, Petr Semenovich Stroganov died on March 24, 1639, but was not finally interred until May 6. Likewise, Daniil Ivanovich Stroganov died October 19, 1668, but did not enter his permanent rest until March 8 of the following year. Fedora Stroganova died in late 1649, but was not buried for at least two and a half months.[102] It may be that the Stroganovs, like other Muscovite testators, specified in their wills that, if they died far from their family burying ground, the executors were to transport their bodies back to central Muscovy and inter them together with relatives who had preceded them in death. In 1620, for instance, Ivan Vasil'evich Shchelkalov lay dying in Tiumen', Siberia, far from the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery near Moscow. As he dictated his last will and testament, however, Shchelkalov made certain to urge his executors "to carry my sinful body from Siberia and place it in the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery alongside my father's tomb."[103] Other testators made similar provisions, and carrying them out undoubtedly required time and a method to offset or anticipate bodily decay. But for tsars and ordinary folk alike, burial normally followed death very quickly.

**Graves**

The grand princes and tsars of Muscovy took as their final resting place tombs in the Archangel Cathedral in Moscow's Kremlin. Visitors to the Kremlin can still locate the stone sepulchres of members of the Riurikid and Romanov dynasties, at least up until Peter the Great, who created a new burial place in Petersburg. For others of Muscovy's citizenry, the question of where to be buried was not so automatic.

Already in the Middle Ages, Latin Christians strove to be buried close to a saint's remains, near to the altar, or even in the walls of the church. Christendom's churches became, as Aries points out, "veritable cities of the dead."[104] Those interred outside the church walls then aimed to be as close

---

[100] Richard L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 714.

[101] Isaac Massa, *Kratkoe izvestie Moskovii v nachale XVII v.* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1937), pp. 67-69.

[102] "Vypiska iz Sol'vychegodskogo sinodika," *Permskaia starina* 6 (1895), pp. 183-84.

[103] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 25.

[104] Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 49.

as possible. Jockeying for pride of place, however, gradually disappeared, particularly in that most rational of times, the 18th century.[105]

Muscovites showed little concern for the locus of their graves. Just over a quarter of all the extant testaments include some specifics about burial, but they almost always identified only the church or monastery in which the testator hoped for a place. To Muscovite testators, proximity to one's kinsmen, rather than holy relics, figured prominently in burial considerations. Ivan Ivanovich Shuiskii, for example, hoped for burial in the church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Suzdal', "next to my brother Aleksandr Ivanovich and above the grave of Princess Gorbataia."[106] Vasilii Borisov syn Sheremetev directed that he be buried on his estate "in Kolomenskoe district in the village of Chirkino near the church of the Shroud of the Virgin where my parents are buried."[107]

Only a handful of the wills provide instructions about burial locations within the church, and all but one seem little related to anxieties about piety and social station. At the end of April 1698, Mikhail Leont'evich Minin prepared for his final rest and, perhaps contrary to expectations, he decided to be buried in a village church, rather than in one of Muscovy's great cathedrals. Consequently, his will provides exact instructions for the executors and clerical authorities to find the place in which he wished to await resurrection:

> Bury my sinful body in Moscow district in the Peremyshkaia region in the Church of the Resurrection of Christ which is in the village of Sertiakino; [bury me] on the left side of the altar one sazhen [about seven feet] distant....[108]

But together with such hard-and-fast prescriptions, there could also be flexibility. Vladimir Timofeevich Dolgorukii, for example, expressed his preference for burial alongside his father in the Chudov Monastery, where a stone tablet had already been placed. But if, says Dolgorukii, it proves impossible "to bury [my body] in the Chudov Monastery alongside my parents, then bury [me] by the Holy Life-Giving Trinity close to the church."[109] Ivan Golova Solovtsov, who prepared his will sometime in late 1594 or early 1595, prescribed that he be buried "in the Cathedral of the Savior on the right side, by the staircase...."[110]

Ivan Volynskii, like Vladimir Dolgorukii, hoped to be buried in the Chudov Monastery, but he went further in locating his future grave: "bury my body by the Miracle-Working [St.] Aleksei in the Chudov Monastery."[111] The

---

[105] Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 320-21; Vovelle, *Mourir autrefois*, pp. 200-202; Vovelle, *Piété baroque*, pp. 337-39.

[106] G. S. Sh., "Kniaz' Vasilii Ivanovich Shuiskii," *Starina i novizna* 11 (1906), pp. 258-64.

[107] Barsukov, *Rod Sheremetevykh*, vol. 8, pp. 506-11.

[108] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 29.

[109] "Dukhovnaia kniazia Vladimira Timofeevicha Dolgorukova," *Izvestiia russkogo genealogicheskogo obshchestva* 2 (1903) pp. 17-25.

[110] *Sbornik dokumentov po istorii SSSR*, ch. 3: *XVI vek*, no. 72.

[111] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 26.

wish to be near saints' remains was common to many of Volynskii's predecessors in Latin Christendom, but it appears only rarely in Muscovite death preparations, chiefly in the 17th century. Earlier Christians apparently did not worry about where to deposit their mortal remains.

Similarly, the urge to erect gravestones does not seem to have much affected Muscovites. To be sure, there was real interest in commemoration, particularly with prayers. But the durability that gravestones promised did not attract the attention of Muscovy's dying. Fedor Khvorostinin, already mentioned above, had prepared a grave marker even before he died, as he pointed out in his will: "...on it [the gravestone] is written: 'the place of Prince Fedor Ivanovich Khvorostinin.'"[117] Elaborate inscriptions were rare. Ivan Solovtsov, who wished for a stone tomb, asked that his executors see to it that they "write on it [his tomb] the inscription given to my confessor."[118] What Solovtsov wished written we do not know, but even his contemplation of the epitaph was unusual. Mikhail Minin was more modest. Although he was concerned to have some sort of gravestone commemoration, he asked only that they "write on it whatever is fitting."[119] Another dying man did no more than prescribe that a stone be placed on his grave: what it said apparently mattered little.[120]

Only two testators, both of whom also detailed epitaphs, specified what kind of burial vault they wished. Solovtsov's was the humbler: "...and lay out my vault with brick either at the corners or around the middle, and cover [it] with stone...."[121] Minin envisioned something rather more grand:

> ...and build over my grave [in the Church of the Resurrection of Christ] a chamber of brick, one and three-quarters sazhens [about 8.75 feet] in length and two sazhens [about 14 feet] across and cover it with carving and place a stone marker on me and write on it whatever is fitting, and beneath that marker place a white stone...[122]

But the dying did not, for the most part, aspire to clutter the interiors of Muscovy's churches with gaudy, obtrusive sepulchres. Instead, they preferred to perpetuate their memory by other means.

**Neither Life Nor Death**

Arnold Van Gennep, Robert Hertz, Victor Turner and others have observed that death rituals frequently include a liminal period when the deceased, although marked off from the world of the living, are not yet joined to the world of the dead. In the cultures of Southeast Asia that so attracted Hertz, mourners

---

[117] Sheremetev, "Dukhovnoe zaveshchanie kniazia F. I. Khvorostinina," pp. 571-75.

[118] *Sbornik dokumentov po istorii SSSR*, ch. 3: *XVI vek*, no. 72.

[119] Likhachev, *Sbornik actov*, no. 29.

[120] Grigorii Khilkov (ed.), *Sbornik kniazia Khilkova* (St. Petersburg, 1879), no. 55.

[121] *Sbornik dokumentov po istorii SSSR*, ch. 3: *XVI vek*, no. 72.

[122] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 29.

emphasize this intermediate stage by delaying the final burial or cremation of the deceased for some time, often for up to a year. Only at the "second burial" is the deceased reckoned to be fully departed. Variations on this practice can be found throughout the world.[118]

Hertz pointed out that the length of the period between the first and second "burials" depended, in some cases, upon the processes of natural decay. Only when the flesh had decomposed and bones alone remained was it appropriate to inter or cremate the remains. Subsequently, the bones came to be identified with the dead person.[119] Such sentiment is not confined to exotic locations. In medieval Europe, for example, it sometimes happened that a man died while far from home and his associates, with no hope of returning the decomposing body, resorted to boiling the flesh and fat away. Only the bones were then transported for final burial.[120] Today, rural Greece still replicates the practices of Europeans of an earlier time, when kinsmen disinterred the dead some years after burial. The flesh having decayed, the bones then found a suitable resting place.[121]

So far as we know, Muscovite Christians did not emulate these techniques.[122] Muscovites buried their dead promptly, and never subsequently unearthed them. Therefore, liminality finds expression, not in the burial rites themselves, but rather in the periodicity that characterized Muscovite death remembrances, all of which revolved around a period of 40 days. The chief component of the death ritual was the memorial mass that was celebrated daily for 40 days after a person's death. Called *sorokousty*, these remembrances punctuated the period of mourning.

Exactly when they came into use in Muscovy is unknown. Overall, 41 percent of all testators requested *sorokousty* and the trend accelerated over time. Calls for these remembrances were rare in the 15th century, becoming

---

[118] Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Robert Hertz, "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death," in Hertz, Death and the Right Hand, trans. by Rodney and Claudia Needham (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 27-86; Victor Turner, The Forest of Symbols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 93-111; Turner, "Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process," in Religious Encounters With Death, pp. 24-39; Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Glen W. Davidson, "In Search of Paradigms: Death and Destiny in Seventeenth-Century North America," in Religious Encounters With Death, pp. 218-22; Robert Garland, The Greek Way of Death (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 1-12, 38-47.

[119] Hertz, "A Contribution," pp. 30-34, 41-46, 83.

[120] Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, p. 262; R.C. Finucane, "Sacred Corpse, Profane Carrion: Social Ideals and Death Rituals in the Later Middle Ages," in Mirrors of Mortality, p. 46.

[121] Loring Danforth, The Death Rituals of Rural Greece, photo by Alexander Tsiaras (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

[122] But see Evel Gasparini, "Studies in Old Slavic Religion: Urbrus," History of Religion 2 (Summer, 1962), pp. 112-39.

frequent only in the 17th century.[123] But why Muscovite, and earlier still Greek, Orthodox practice should settle on 40 days is not clear.[124] Hindu ritual lasts only 10 days after cremation, by which time, as the symbolism demonstrates, new life is already engendered from death. Among the Bolivian Laymi, ritual mourning lasts but eight days, although the Laymi think that the souls of the dead are not freed until as much as two years after death.[125] In medieval Western monasteries, commemoration of the dead went on for 30 days after burial, but normal Latin practice was to hold observances on the day of burial, the eighth day after death, and again on the first anniversary.[126]

Muscovite ritual had its own rhythm, and the 40 days after death were central to all observances. There are many biblical precedents that might be invoked to explain the choice: the Israelites wandered for 40 years before settling in the Promised Land; Christ endured 40 days of temptation in the wilderness before taking up his cross; and Lent itself, of course, institutionalizes that liminal period in Christ's life, when he already lived under the shadow of the cross. Muscovite Christians, however, seem to have been little bothered by the need to explain the mourning interval. Quite the contrary: to my knowledge, not one attempted any exegesis of the practice.

But irrespective of its origin, the number 40 clearly took on a magical significance all its own. Among those wills directing the performance of *sorokousty*, for example, the favorite payment amounted to 40 altyns (1.2 rubles). Persons who wished the services to be performed simultaneously at various churches often specified 40 churches. In some cases, the testator dictated which churches, but, in others, the dying man or woman seemed oblivious to the identity of the churches. The important thing was that it be 40 churches, evidently because the number itself was charmed.[127]

Burials of members of the Romanov family illustrate the regard for the 40-day interval. According to Grigorii Kotoshikhin, after the tsars were buried, church clerks read the Psalter and prayers day and night at the grave

---

[123] Only 11.3 percent of the 62 wills from before 1500 requested *sorokousty*, compared to 39.8 percent of the 103 from 1550 to 1599, 52.4 percent of the 63 from 1600-1649, and 59.5 percent of the 84 wills from after 1649.

[124] Ancient Greeks, long before the appearance of Christianity, observed a 30 day mourning period (Garland, *Greek Way of Death*, p. 104), but the Orthodox South Slavs marked the 40th day (Monette Ribeyrol and Dominique Schnapper, "Cérémonies funéraires dans la Yougoslavie orthodoxe," *Archives européenes de sociologie* 17 [1976]) p. 230.

[125] Eliade, "Mythologies of Death," p. 16; Jonathan Parry, "Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic," in Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (eds.), *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 84; Olivia Haris, "The Dead and the Devils Among the Bolivian Laymi," in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, p. 16.

[126] Finucane, "Sacred Corpse, Profane Carrion," p. 45; Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 178.

[127] Ogrofena Semenovna Rostovskaia, for example, requested 40 funeral masses at 40 different churches, and another 40 masses the day after burial. At the conclusion of the 40 days of mourning, she wanted an additional 40 funeral masses together with another 40 ordinary masses. Finally, she paid for a series of *sorokousty*, 40 altyns each (*AFZ*, vol. 2, no. 332).

for 40 days. Furthermore, in all monasteries and churches in both Moscow and the provinces, minds were said for the dead sovereign for six weeks (probably 40 days).[128] The records of the deaths of Tsarevich Aleksei Alekseevich (1670) and Tsarevna Tat'iana Mikhailovna (1706) both detail changing guards of the social elite, who "for the whole 40-day period, changing each 24 hours, spent the day and night" at the grave of the deceased. In Tat'iana's case, women stood guard and, in Aleksei's, men. Whether they read the Psalter the record does not say, but their graveside vigil reveals the solemnity and uncertainty of the 40-day interval.[129]

The texts make it clear that the 40 days after death represented a dangerous transitional period when the soul of the deceased had not yet found its permanent rest. One modern commentator has suggested that, during this period, the soul of the dead person made its journey to hell and, if successful, to heaven.[130] Whatever the danger, Muscovite testators were sensitive to the problem, and some attempted to minimize the consequences, not only with the daily mass, but also by hiring persons to read the Psalter day and night for all 40 days. For persons of substance, the readings might go on simultaneously at the dead person's home and at the grave which, if outside, was apparently provided with a grass shelter against the elements. Samuel Collins, who believed that observances lasted no more than 30 days, made no pretense of understanding the meaning of the Psalter readings, but Olearius discerned a cosmological explanation:

> In the cemetery, over the burial place or grave, those who have the means arrange small shelters, usually hung with mats, in which a person may stand. Here, for six weeks, in the morning and afternoon, a priest, chaplain, or monk must read some Psalms of David and several chapters of the New Testament, for the welfare of the soul of the deceased. Though the Russians, like the Greeks, do not believe in purgatory...nevertheless they do believe in the existence of two special places that souls reach as soon as they are loosed, where they wait the Last Judgment and the resurrection of their bodies....They contend that a soul that has left the body and is on its way to the latter place [Hell] may be brought into the true path to bliss and to life with the good angels by the zealous prayers and intercession of his former confessor, priest, monk, or anyone else.[131]

Whether Olearius was correct in the particulars, he was surely correct in thinking that Muscovites believed that the Psalter and prayers helped assure a

---

[128] Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii*, pp. 19-20.

[129] *DRV*, vol. 14, pp. 68-95, 111-22. The record shows, by the way, that all did not personally fulfill their duty, although when they did not, they sent their servants in their stead.

[130] V. A. Rudnev, *Obriady narodnye i obriady tserkovnye*, (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1982), p. 43.

[131] Collins, *The Present State of Russia*, p. 22; Olearius, *Travels*, pp. 276-77.

happy destination for the dead person's soul.

Not only tsars earned remembrance during the 40 days. In addition to those requesting *sorokousty,* another 10 percent of the Muscovite wills make provisions for readings of the Psalter. Vladimir Ivanovich Bastanov, for example, urged his executors to "hire [someone] to read the Psalter over my grave and at my home for the whole six weeks [after death] without interruption."[132] Mikhail Minin requested that the Psalter be read both at the grave and at home, but specified only daytime reading. Ivan Shchelkalov wanted the Psalms said day and night for all 40 days.[133] Some testators invoked the magic of the Psalter for longer periods. Vasilii Borisovich Sheremetev, for instance, paid for readings day and night for one whole year.[134] Apparently sensitivity to this form of mediation grew over time. Among the testaments I have gathered, none dated from before 1500 and only five from the 16th century mention the Psalter, but more than two-thirds of the citations belong to testaments compiled after 1649.

In addition to the ongoing daily masses and readings from the Psalter during the 40 days after death, Muscovites might also be remembered by special services on the 3rd, 9th, 20th and 40th days after death. Exactly when, and for whom, these intervals came into use is unclear. At least in the 17th century, the tsars were remembered in this way. Kotoshikhin observes that after the death of the tsar, there were special observances on the third day and again after three weeks (probably 20 days).[135] Official records of deaths in the dynasty show that the whole cycle was often observed. Tsar Fedor Alekseevich was remembered on each of those days, and when Tsarevich Il'ia Fedorovich died, the record makes special mention of the fact that no celebrations were held on the 3rd, 9th and 40th days, thus underlining the deviation from the norm.[136]

Sixteenth-century travellers to Muscovy make no mention of these ceremonies, but Olearius, who visited Muscovy in the 17th century, noted that:

> The Russians mourn their dead six weeks. The wealthy during this period organize three great feasts, inviting not only the friends, but all the priests who were present at the funeral. They are held on the third, ninth, and 20th days, but why they select these and not other days I have not yet been able to learn from them.[137]

Although Olearius was mistaken in thinking that the commemorations always required feasts, the rhythm he relates is surely on the mark, as Muscovite

---

[132] *Sbornik kniazia Khilkova*, no. 55; see also Arkhmandrit Grigorii, "Dukhovnaia zheny Alekseia Ivanovicha Godunova, Ol'gi Vasil'evny, Urozhdennoi Zuzinoi," *ChOIDR* (1868), bk. 4, pp. 1-5; *MDBP*, no. 61; *Tverskie akty*, no. 67; and "Spisok s dukhovnoi torgovogo gostia Gavrily Martinova Fetieva," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, no. 106 (February 1829), pp. 170-202.

[133] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, nos. 25, 29.

[134] Barsukov, *Rod Sheremetevykh* 8, pp. 506-11; see also "Spisok s dukhovnoi torgovogo gostia Gavrily Martinova Fetieva," pp. 170-202.

[135] Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii*, p. 20.

[136] *DRV*, vol. 11, pp. 210, 213.

[137] Olearius, *Travels*, p. 276.

wills prove.

Ivan Vasil'evich Shchelkalov bequeathed money to feast the monks of the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery, where he hoped to be buried, specifying meals on the 3rd, 9th, 20th and 40th days after death. At the same time, he also established that funds be left in Tiumen' where he was dying, to feed the poor and feast local clerics on the same dates.[138] Ivan Mikhailovich Glinskii skipped the food entirely, specifying only that alms be handed out to the poor: 20 rubles on the 3rd day after death; 10 rubles on the 9th; 15 on the 20th; and 20 rubles on the 40th day.[139] Apparently, these observances required no particular ritual: only the dates themselves were important.

It is far from clear exactly what importance they had. There is a certain logic to an observance on the 40th day; the *sorochina* or "fortieth," marked the end of a dangerous time, and, with mourning formally concluded, a fitting farewell makes sense. Reasons for the other intervals are more difficult to discern. There is, of course, a direct and simple numerical relation between 20 and 40, as there is between 3 and 9. But the relation is not the same for both, and neither group has an exact relation with the other--that is, neither 20 nor 40 will yield neatly to division by 3, and no factor of 3 will net 20 or 40.[140]

It may be that the numbers depend upon two different inspirations, both ostensibly rooted in Christian teaching.[141] If a 40-day interval did derive from one of the biblical instances cited above, then 20 days might well have come into use as a simple midway point in what is, after all, a fairly extended period. By the same token, biblical inspirations for multiples of three are legion; in both the Old and New Testaments, there are identifiable trinities: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Old; and Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the New. Probably closer to Orthodox Christian inspiration were the three days that separated Gethsemane from the resurrection. Without attempting to ascertain their origins, one modern commentator has suggested that the bizarre combination of dates indicated specific stages in the soul's progress toward heaven. On the 3rd day, the soul ascends to the sky. On the 9th, it reaches the heavenly chapels, from which it descends into hell for an entire month. On the 40th day, judgment decides the soul's future: to remain in hell or ascend to heaven.[142]

Arbitrariness and illogicality belie the explanation, but other evidence demonstrates that the isolated dates, quite independent of the specific intervals, point to stages in a process by which the soul came to rest. Niederle observed that, long before Christianity had won over the Russian countryside,

---

[138] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 25; see also *AFZ*, vol. 2, no. 207.

[139] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 19; see also Sheremetev, "Dukhovnoe zaveshchanie kniazia F. I. Khvorostinina," pp. 571-75.

[140] Perhaps this explains Collins' assertion that Muscovites mourned the death for 30, rather than 40, days (*The Present State of Russia*, p. 22).

[141] Greek antique practice may be at work here, since Garland reports that in the classical period mourners paid commemorative visits to the tomb of the death on the 3rd, 9th, and 30th days after death (*Greek Way of Death*, p. 104), and the South Slavs observed the 3rd, 9th and 40th days after death (together with 3 months, 6 months and one year, sometimes 3 years and 7 years) (Ribeyrol and Schnapper, "Cérémonies funéraires," p. 230).

[142] Rudnev, *Obriady*, p. 43.

the dead were recalled in special remembrances on the 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th, 9th, 20th and 40th days.[143] Later Slavs absorbed different parts of this tradition. Nineteenth-century Belorussians, for example, marked death with commemorations on the 3rd, 7th and 40th days after death, while in northern Russia the 3rd, 6th, 9th, 12th, and 40th days were observed.[144] The deviations from Muscovite practice suggest that the stages, rather than the specific dates, were most important.[145]

With the arrival of the 40th day, mourning officially came to an end, but not before a final memorial meal was held. Margeret describes it this way:

> At the end of six weeks the widow and some close friends gather together at the grave, bringing things to drink and to eat. After they have cried a lot, asking the same questions [as the mourners at burial had asked] again, they eat the food which they brought. Then they distribute the remainder to the poor. That is the way it is among the common people. However, if it is someone of quality who has died, a feast is held in the home after the closest relatives have returned from the sepulchre.[146]

Royal mourners, too, feasted in memory of the dead after the 40 days of grief. Kotoshikhin says that the church hierarchs, the tsaritsa, the tsarevichi and others, having heard the funeral mass sung one last time, then gathered around a table. Simultaneously, monks and the poor throughout the country ate in honor of the dead tsar.[147]

Commemorative meals of this kind have a long history. The Romans and Greeks both practiced them and, almost as far back as written records go, the Slavs observed memorial meals.[148] As in other cultures, these meals, taken in the presence of the deceased at the grave, are also shared with the deceased, underlining the fact that the mourners believed the dead still to be among them. Typically, the menu featured special breads or a grain dish *(kut'ia)*. Kotoshikhin says that *kut'ia* was served in honor of the dead tsar on the third day after death, and Olearius mentions it at the feasts held on the 3rd, 9th and 20th days.[149] Both the bread and the *kut'ia* associate the custom with fertility and the ancestors, a logical pair to death that emerges from funeral customs elsewhere in the world. Well into the modern era, Slavs continued to gather at cemeteries with these dishes.[150]

In their fully developed form, of course, these meals became simple

---

[143] Nierdele, *Byt*, p. 109.

[144] Tereshchenko, *Byt*, pt. III, p. 89; Alexander, *Russian Folklore*, p. 97.

[145] For an example of a quite different system of stages, see Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors*, pp. 44-49.

[146] Margeret, *The Russian Empire*, p. 25.

[147] Kotoshikin, *O Rossii*, p. 21.

[148] Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 233; Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, pp. 110-15; Niederle, *Byt*, pp. 102-11.

[149] Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii*, p. 20; Olearius, *Travels*, p. 276.

[150] Tereshchenko, *Byt*, pt. III, p. 122.

instruments of commemoration. But in their origins, they had much more powerful meanings, emphasizing the transitory status of the dead who had not yet fully departed from their earthly relatives. Throughout the 40-day period following death, kinsmen came to the grave to socialize with their dead relative, thus, emphasizing the liminal status of the deceased.

Muscovite wills dimly reflect still another aspect of liminality. As noted above, in cultures where secondary burial is practiced, the skeletal remains are thought to contain the bodily essence of the deceased. It is the bones, rather than flesh, that are interred or cremated at the end of the funeral cycle. Western stories about ghosts reproduce a similar image: skeletons or "dry bones" are common representations of the dead on the prowl. Muscovite testators provide a curious echo of this notion, usually in sections of the will that prohibit kinsmen from interfering in the property dispositions outlined in the will. In 1435, Fedor Ostaf'evich concluded his testament by urging his son Stepan, brother Vasil'i and his grandchildren "not to disturb my bones nor offend them about my land, water or movable property, but protect them for the sake of God, and do not violate my testament."[151] Two hundred years later, Ol'ga Vasil'eva doch' Godunova (neé Zuzina) threatened judgment before God for any "who wish to interfere in my estate and [so] disturb my bones."[152] Neither testator was worried about someone actually disinterring their bodies, since neither asked to be buried on their property. Instead, violating their last wishes raised the prospect of shaking their skeletons from slumber.

Whether these threats had the desired effect or not, they help bring into relief the liminal, intermediate status of the dead. Throughout the 40 days following death, the deceased remained ceremonially and socially among the living. The long term future of the dead was hazier to Muscovites, prompting them to attempt to extend the memory of the deceased among those still alive.

**Commemoration**

Philippe Ariès has argued that, with the passing of the Middle Ages, dying Western Europeans paid increasing attention to securing their memory. No longer were the masses sufficient and, gradually, more elaborate funerary inscriptions on tombs of stone appeared. The terse wording of medieval epitaphs, often containing nothing more than the name of the person buried beneath, gave way to more voluminous biographies, complete with date of death, age at death and the identities of other family members. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Western graveyard inscriptions came to include short homilies or essays intended to glorify the deceased. But the chief purpose of the gravestones surely must have been to perpetuate the memory of the dead man or woman. True, churchmen thought of memory somewhat more narrowly, applying it especially to martyrs whose deaths had served a special end. The ordinary monument simply invited the visitor to recall a particular life, or to call into memory a specific person.[153]

So far, there is no parallel study of Muscovite tombstones. But the urge

---

[151] *GVNP*, no. 111.

[152] Arkhimandrit Grigorii, "Dukhovnaia zheny Alekseia Ivanovicha Godunova," pp. 1-5.

[153] Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 216-30.

to commemoration was every bit as strong in Muscovy as it was in the Latin parishes of the West. Muscovite testators differed only in the instrument they emphasized. In the lands around Moscow, especially in the 17th and early 18th centuries, it was not the gravestone that perpetuated the memory of the deceased, but the clerical services or feasts conducted in their honor. With increasing frequency, Muscovite testators called on their heirs and executors to endow various church institutions in their name. In return, the dying expected to have their names sounded in those churches and monasteries in perpetuity, either in the course of singing the daily liturgy or during special memorial meals.

The simplest and apparently most popular method of obtaining this result was to provide an endowment in exchange for having one's name entered in the *sinodikon*, a calender list indicating the exact date or dates on which to mention the deceased in the daily liturgy. About 20 percent of Muscovy's testators specifically requested that their names be entered in the *sinodikons*, but the number actually entered was almost certainly much higher. How else would these testators expect churchmen to pray for them? Three-quarters of the testators directly solicited prayers for themselves, whether they mentioned the *sinodikons* or not.

A dying man and woman might also choose to endow a commemorative meal for a local monastic community, in which case the donor's name was entered in a feast book (*kormovaia kniga*). Like the *sinodikon*, the feast book bore a calendar organization and included the names of donors to be remembered in this way. Presumably Orthodox Christendom came to enshrine the dead with periodic meals by adopting the pagan practice of ancestor veneration.[154] As previously noted, long before Christianity had won many converts among them the Slavs were feasting over the graves of departed kinsmen.

The feast books confirm the donors' desire to be remembered as individuals, which is why feasts were requested on both birthdays and death days. The feast book of the Iaroslavl' Spasskii Monastery, for example, notes that its very purpose was to record "feasts for [all] donors, for whichever princes, boyars and all ranks of people who die as Orthodox Christians, on whatever day is appropriate, on [the days of] their birth and death."[155] Specific entries, however, explicitly identify only the dates on which individuals died, recalling a second date, presumably the birth date, simply with the notation that this service was "in his memory" (*v pamiat' emu*). Despite the vagueness of terminology, the meaning is nevertheless clear, as the will of Ivan Mikhailovich Glinskii shows: "and have the archmandrite write me [my name] in the eternal *sinodikon*, and feed the brothers [of the monastery] twice a year in memory of my soul and in memory of my clan--[the first meal] on the day of my death and the other on the day of my birth...."[156]

The Stroganov *sinodikon* also lists two commemorations for each donor. Fedor Vasil'ev syn Okhlopkov, husband of Mariia Stroganova, was recalled in two places, September 25, when he had died (1568), and again on September 21,

---

[154] The Romans, for example, gathered to feast on the birthday of the deceased (Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, p. 248).

[155] I. A. Vakhrameev, *Istoricheskie akty Iaroslavskogo Spasskogo monastyria*, vol. 4: *Kniga kormovaia iz Iaroslavlia povolgskogo monastyria* (Moscow, 1896), p. 1.

[156] Likhachev, *Sbornik aktov*, no. 19.

presumably his birthday. Iosif Fedorov syn Stroganov had died on February 12, and his name was likewise entered on the list to be remembered in prayer on that day. In addition, his name found a place on the lists for April 4. Even infants gained at least two mentions: Simeon Semenov syn Stroganov, an infant, is recalled on both February 13 and March 25, the day he died.[157] A 16th-century feast book for the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery reproduces the same system.

Extraordinary gifts could provoke still a third remembrance. In 1562, Tsar Ivan IV provided an enormous endowment for his wife, Anastasiia Romanova. The gift, 1000 rubles, was large enough for Ivan to insist on three commemorative feasts, two large and one "medium." The large feasts coincided with Anastasiia's death (August 7) and birth (October 29). We do not know what the third commemorated. Ivan, who lived to see several wives die, also endowed the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery when Mariia Cherkesskaia died in 1569. Again, the large gift sponsored three commemorative meals, including one on the day of death (September 7). Two years later, Ivan enriched the Trinity Monastery still another time, remembering a third wife, Marfa Sobakina. A smaller gift--a mere 700 rubles--brought just two remembrances each year: the first on the day of her death (November 14) and the other "in her memory" without any notation of date.[158]

Ordinary Muscovites, as well as tsars, enlisted clerical prayers for the dead. The gift book of the Nizhnii Novgorod Pechersk monastery, for example, contains relatively few names of the great and powerful, but abounds in gifts made by townsmen, priests, clerks, and even peasants and landless peasants (*bobyli*). For example, the peasant Semen Syrokhvatov donated three rubles to the monastery in March 1656, "and for his gift they buried his father and brother in the monastery and wrote [their names] in the *sinodikon*." In the same year, the townsman (*posadskoi chelovek*) Ivan Grigor'ev donated some wax, incense and honey. In return, his mother and father gained places in the *sinodikon*. In 1661, a priest from the village of Pal'tso donated a two-year-old foal to secure the memory of his parents.[159]

The commemorations, whether exclusively in the daily liturgy or through the more memorable special meals, helped to preserve the memory of a specific individual in Muscovite consciousness. Intoning the name of the deceased identified him or her as distinct from all other dead, and the practice of specifying minds on the days of both birth and death reminded all who heard them that this person, and no other, was the object of prayer. Within great families, like the Stroganovs, these records also helped perpetuate the lineage, recalling even small children who left behind them neither heirs nor lasting achievements.

---

[157] "Vypiska iz Sol'vychegodskogo sinodika," pp. 176-78.

[158] "Kormovaia kniga XVI veka, Biblioteki Troitskoi Sergievoi Lavry No. 821, 1. 92," *ChOIDR*, bk. 2, p. 37.

[159] *Vkladnaia kniga nizhegorodskogo pecherskogo monastyria*, (Moscow, 1898), pp. 29, 25, 39. I have made no precise calculations of the proportional weight of different estates, but A.A. Titov observes in the preface that "the Pechersk monastery was not [made] wealthy by boyar gifts so usual for that time: more Nizhgorodians--clergy, tradesmen and peasants--contributed" to the monastery (*Vkladnaia kniga nizhegorodskogo pecherskogo monastyria*, p. iv).

Men and women who lived to generate children had, of course, more hope of being remembered. Not only might their achievements merit lasting recognition, but they could also hope to live on in the memories of their own children and perhaps even of their grandchildren. Furthermore, their descendants might purchase prayers for them. Muscovite testators showed themselves sensitive to this form of commemoration, requesting in their testaments prayers for other deceased family members. The distribution of requests is revealing (see Table 1). The urge to commemoration clearly depended upon self-interest: it was the testator, after all, who confronted death at the moment the document was drawn up, and it was only to be expected that he would be most concerned about himself. But the other remembrances are just as interesting, providing a rough outline of kinship awareness in early modern Russia. To some extent, of course, the natural process of aging and death affected the results. That is, more ascendants than laterals or descendants preceded testators in death, and it is therefore quite logical to expect Muscovite testators to remember their parents more often than their children, brothers, or sisters. But the testators of this population, who were overwhelmingly male (n = 305, 82.2%), showed a marked preference to recall male relatives, and relatively little inclination to recall spouses.

Table 1
Frequency of Prayers for Kin

| Prayers For: | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Self | 283 | 76.3 |
| Father | 114 | 30.7 |
| Mother | 103 | 27.8 |
| Spouse | 43 | 11.6 |
| Clan (rod) | 25 | 6.7 |
| Brother | 20 | 5.4 |
| Sister | 5 | 1.3 |
| Uncle/Aunt | 8 | 2.2 |
| Others | 45 | 12.1 |

Note: Totals more than 100 percent because many testators included mentions in more than one category.

It may be that the great majority of the testators' spouses were themselves still alive, although this circumstance did not prevent some testators from purchasing prayers for their spouses against the day when they would be necessary. But the usual practice seems to have been for the living spouse to purchase commemoration for the deceased, as the gift book of Moscow's Rozhdestvenskii (Nativity) Monastery indicates.[160] From September 1681 through May 1695, the book records 71 commemorative gifts. Of these, 68 belong to women, most identified clearly as widows (n = 44, 62%). Another 21 (29.6%) were described as *staritsa* or elder, probably widows who took the veil after their husbands' deaths, and three are called simply "wives" (4.2%). Even men

[160] "Vkladnaia kniga Moskovskogo Rozhdestvenskogo monastyria, kontsa XVII veka," in Shchukin, *Sbornik*, vol. 7, pp. 2-12.

who make gifts to the monastery did so on behalf of their wives, whether living or dead. For example, in December 1581, a priest by the name of Fedor Ivanov donated 13 rubles, "and for that contribution [he received the promise] to accept as a nun his [Fedor's] spouse Ul'iana Leont'eva doch' at the appropriate time."[161]

The monastic gift books demonstrate that of the testators did not enlist their own names in the *sinodikons*, their heirs often did. Husbands might ask to have their wives remembered, and wives, their husbands. Similarly, donors requested prayers for brothers, sisters, children, uncles, and fathers- and mothers-in-law. But the great majority of these requests seek to commemorate parents (*roditeli*). The precise meaning of this term, however, extended far beyond the narrow categories of mother and father, embracing kinsmen of distant relation, and could include as many as 68 names.[162] The intention was, as the gifts noted, to keep the deceased "in eternal remembrance" (*v vechnyi pominok*).

Recalled regularly by name, the dead continued among their descendants who, in turn, were made aware of their ancestors, or "parents." Muscovites evidently thought that prayers benefitted the souls of the deceased, but, at the same time, these commemorations clearly helped society to deal with the inexplicable mystery that envelops death. Commemoration aided society in other ways as well, particularly by encouraging philanthropy. Testators regularly emancipated some or all of their slaves, asking in return only to be remembered.[163] And, like their contemporaries in Western Europe, dying Muscovites used their deaths as an occasion for almsgiving, at burial during the 40-day commemoration, or even on the anniversaries of death.[164] These long-term commemorations perpetuated remembrances that began immediately at death, and kept generations of Muscovites fictively among the living.

**Conclusions**

The brutal frequency and intensity with which death struck in early modern Europe sometimes obscures the importance of death, irrespective of mortality levels. As Jack Goody has noted, death "is the most critical, the most final, of crisis situations, which capitalizes culture and social organization for actor and observer alike."[165] Like other vital moments in life--notably birth and marriage--death belongs to the most fundamental of human experiences, obliging an individual to come to grips with the meaning of life. But society, too, has to adjust, distributing the social responsibilities that the dying person exercised.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that death ritual should play an important role in the villages of early modern Europe. Buffeted though they were by the winds of epidemic disease, war, and nutritional disasters, men and

---

[161] "Vkladnaia kniga Moskovskogo Rozhdestvenskogo monastyria," p. 3.

[162] *Vkladnaia kniga nizhegorodskogo pecherskogo monastyria*, p. 56.

[163] Thirty-nine percent of Muscovite testators emancipated at least some of their slaves.

[164] Just over 17 percent of Muscovite wills specify funeral charity.

[165] Jack Goody, "Death and the Interpretation of Culture: A Bibliographic Overview," in David E. Stannard (ed.) *Death in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), p. 8.

women of the 16th and 17th centuries nevertheless joined people of other, calmer times in according death its due. Much of the ritual depended upon Christian inspiration. After all, clerics oversaw the last moments, helped prepare the last will and testament, consecrated the body on interment, and supplied a detailed cosmology that fit death into life.

But not all the ritual derived from Christian teaching. "Religion was," says Kaspar von Greyerz, "an all pervasive force in pre-industrial society, by far transcending the life of the church."[166] Indeed, as with marriage and birth, Christianity came to control death ritual rather late. Long before the missionaries of Mediterranean culture penetrated the distant reaches of Europe, the men and women settled there had already constructed their own explanations of death and had established rites by which to recognize its great power.

In early modern Russia, too, death was revered long before churchmen promised resurrection. And Russian clerics got rather a later start than their Latin counterparts. During the Middle Ages, substantial numbers of Europeans were dying in the care of the clergy and creating testaments that affirmed the triune God,[167] but clerical influence at death was still minimal on the eastern edge of Europe in the 15th century. The spare testaments that survive are pale shadows of the rich ritual that had accompanied death among the Slavs for centuries before Christianization, and clerical moralizing proves that these rites died slowly.[168]

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the church clearly gained an increasingly firm hold over Muscovite death ritual, evidently making up some of the difference that had earlier separated the Russian from the Latin church. While few testators before 1500 had solicited clerical prayers during the 40-day period following death, the numbers increased markedly over the next two centuries. Similarly, the reading of the Psalter over the grave was unknown to earlier testators, but it appears with increasing frequency in 17th century wills. Listing of the deceased in clerical *sinodikons* and feast books also became more popular. The testaments themselves became more visibly important: whereas a 15th century testament required no more than a few lines, some 17th century documents occupy tens of pages and observe a rigid protocol.

At the same time, early modern Russian death rituals continued practices whose origins lay deep in pagan death cosmologies. The periodicity of mourning, the nature of commemoration, the funeral cortege, and funeral meals all derived their meaning from rituals that pre-dated Christianization. Even the idea that death separated spirit from body was part of pagan religion long before the message of Easter reached these lands. But Orthodox clerics, by both advancing their own rituals and adopting those they found in Muscovy, continued to make headway.

---

[166] Kaspar von Greyerz, "Introduction," in Kaspar von Greyerz (ed.), *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 1.

[167] Marie-Thérèse Lorcin employed about half the 4,000 wills recorded in Lyon and approximately a tenth of the 11,000 recorded in Forez in the period from about 1300 to 1500 (*Vivre et mourir en Lyonnais*, pp. 5, 19, 36, 194).

[168] See, for example, N. M. Gal'kovskii, *Bor'ba khristianstva s ostatkami iazychestva v drevnei Rusi*, vol. 2 (Moscow-Khar'kov 1913-16), pp. 164-75, 179-83.

As Michel Vovelle has ably shown, the 18th century in France witnessed a secularization that penetrated even death rituals. Christian formulas and rites common to testaments of an earlier time disappeared, and clerical power over burial waned.[169] Whether Russian practice continued to mirror European trends into the 18th century is unknown. Certainly, Russian sovereigns did their best to impose rationality on the lives and manners of their subjects. In 1649, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, building on legislation of the preceding century, attempted to stem the tide of land falling into church hands, unsuccessfully prohibiting church institutions from acquiring estates by bequest.[170] Eighteenth-century sovereigns were more persistent. Indeed, the Church Reform of 1764, which eliminated monasteries erected and sustained by donations from the deceased, frustrated the hopes of the dead who had expected to have their names sounded in prayer until the end of time.[171]

More importantly, these rationalizing reforms struck at institutions and conceptions of reality basic to the human experience, on both an individual and social level. With mere mortal authority, reforms challenged the mysteries that had dominated human society in Eastern Europe for centuries.

---

[169] Vovelle, *Mourir autrefois*, pp. 202-204; Vovelle, *Piété baroque*, passim.

[170] *Pamiatniki russkogo prava*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Gosiurizdat, 1952-63), pp. 210-11.

[171] Brenda Meehan-Waters, "Popular Piety, Local Initiative and the Founding of Women's Religious Communities in Russia, 1764-1907," Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies Occasional Paper (1986), no. 215, pp. 1-2.