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Imperial Boundaries is a study of imperial expansion and local transformation on Russia’s Don Steppe frontier during the age of Peter the Great. Brian J. Boeck connects the rivalry of the Russian and Ottoman empires in the northern Black Sea basin to the social history of the Don Cossacks, who were transformed from an open, democratic, multi-ethnic, male fraternity dedicated to frontier raiding into a closed, ethnic community devoted to defending and advancing the boundaries of the Russian state. He shows how by promoting border patrol, migration control, bureaucratic regulation of cross-border contacts, and deportation of dissidents, Peter I destroyed the world of the old steppe and created a new imperial Cossack order in its place. In examining this transformation, Imperial Boundaries addresses key historical issues of imperial expansion, the de-legitimization of non-state violence, the construction of borders, and the encroaching boundaries of state authority in the lives of local communities.

Brian J. Boeck is Assistant Professor in the History Department at DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois.
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IMPERIAL BOUNDARIES

Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great

BRIAN J. BOECK

DePaul University

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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Abbreviations

**source publications**

DAI Arkheograficheskaia komissia, *Dopolneniia k aktam istoricheskim* (Saint Petersburg, 1846–72)


PIB *Pis’ma i bumagi imperatora Petra Velikago* (Saint Petersburg, 1887–)

PSZ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* (Saint Petersburg, 1855–1916)

RIB Arkheograficheskaia komissia, *Russkaia istoricheskaia biblioteka* (Saint Petersburg, 1872–1927) Donskie dela: 18, 24, 26, 29, 34

**archives**

GARO Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rostovskoi oblasti

GAVO Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Voronezhskoi oblasti

RGADA Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov

RGAVMF Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv voenno-morskogo flota

RGVIA Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv

SPFIRI Sankt-Peterburgskii filial Instituta rossiiskoi istorii RAN

**glossary**

**ataman** The elected leader of a Cossack raiding party, settlement, or Host.

**burlak** A transient person, migrant worker, or non-Cossack.

**gorodok** A fortified settlement.

**krug** A Cossack assembly.
liubo  A shout of approval, literally “it is pleasing.”

Rus’  Core territories of the Muscovite state administered under the law code of 1649.

Rossiia  The entire Russian Empire, comprising both Rus’ and other territories administered under distinct juridical frameworks.

stanitsa  (1) A community (2) the politically enfranchised population of a Cossack settlement (3) A Cossack delegation.

starshina  A term for Cossack elected officials. After 1730, Cossack elites recognized by the imperial government.
1. The Don region
2. The wider world of the Don steppe frontier
“Cossacks have made the entire history of Russia,” declared the illustrious Russian writer Leo Tolstoi in 1870. He continued: “Not for nothing do the Europeans call us Cossacks. The Russian people all desire to be Cossacks.”¹ This quote highlights a historical relationship that was central to the course of Romanov empire-building and pervasive in the literary image of Russia, but which problematically straddled Russian conceptions of self and other.² If Cossacks truly represented in Geoffrey Hosking’s term “an alternative Russian ethnos,” what prevented Russians from realizing their desire to acquire a Cossack identity? Imperial boundaries barred their way. While Peter the Great decreed the divide, Cossacks embraced and patrolled boundaries between their communities and Rus’, and identity documents made distinctions legible and permanent.

This book explores how the Don Cossacks negotiated the closing of the frontier that cradled the creation of their community and connects their social history to the rivalry of the Russian and Ottoman Empires in the Black Sea basin. In contrast to several comparable raiding communities such as pirates, uskoks, and buccaneers, which briefly flourished, then vanished, in the no-man’s lands beyond the jurisdiction of established states in the early modern period, the Don Cossacks survived by changing.³ In the age of Peter the Great the Don Host transformed from an open, multi-ethnic fraternity dedicated to raiding Ottoman frontiers into a closed,

¹ Tolstoi was just one of several major Russian writers to view Cossacks as central to Russia’s historical identity. The quote is from Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, The Cossack Hero in Russian Literature: A Study in Cultural Mythology (Madison, Wis., 1992), p. 13.
² In his extensive survey of how Russian empire-building trumped nation-building, Geoffrey Hosking declared: “Both for imperial expansion and frontier defense the Cossacks were indispensable . . . In a sense they were an alternative Russian ethnos, the embryo of a potential Russian nation with a quite different social structure.” Geoffrey Hosking, Russia: People and Empire 1552–1917 (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), p. 12.
Imperial boundaries

ethnic community devoted to defending and advancing the boundaries of the Russian Empire.

RUSSIAN EMPIRE-BUILDING

The Don region, which in the early modern period comprised over 160,000 square kilometers (roughly the size of Illinois or Greece) of land along the Don River and its tributaries in southern Russia and eastern Ukraine, provides a crucial case study for understanding the mechanics and methods of Russian empire-building. The region’s relationship with its Romanov overlords defies many stereotypes of Russia as inherently eager to acquire land, hostile to local autonomy, and ideologically inflexible. Even as Russia consolidated its position in the steppe and incorporated the region into its imperial borders, the Don Cossacks maintained a separate juridical existence within the Russian body politic for centuries.4

Most studies of Russian empire focus on imperial policies of conquest or highlight non-Russian strategies of resistance. This is in line with the theory of empire advanced by Michael Doyle who has defined empire as “a relationship . . . in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society.”5 Ronald Suny placed “inequitable relationships” between core and periphery and perceptions of exploitation at the center of his recent discussion of Russian empire. Without discounting the importance of the colonial paradigm for later periods and other territories within the vast expanses of the Russian imperial experience, in the first part of this study we will witness a reluctant empire which worked with limited resources, frequently displayed tactical flexibility, preferred compromise to conflict, and even in the face of insubordination acted as a reliable partner and patron of its Cossack clients. In this case the “inequitable relationship” inherent in empire worked in favor of the tsar’s Cossack clients, who enjoyed more rights and privileges than almost anyone in Russia save the tsar.

4 The other two major cases of separate deals were the Hetmanate (central Ukraine) and Baltic German territories (Livonia and Estonia). On the Baltic region see Ia. Zutis, Ostzeiskii vopros v XVIII veke (Riga, 1946) and Edward C. Thaden, Russia’s Western Borderlands, 1710–1870 (Princeton, 1984). For a model study of imperial integration, consult Zenon Kohut, Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate 1760s–1830s (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).
Although Don Cossacks have often been portrayed as daring Russian knights or intrepid Orthodox crusaders, this study presents them as a complex community that eludes simple categorization. Their story defies the binary dichotomies that characterize much of the western literature on Russian imperial expansion: Russians vs. non-Russians, Orthodox vs. others, conquerors vs. resistance fighters, agriculturalists vs. nomads, colonists vs. captive nations. They present the paradox of a Russian-speaking group that was central to the course of empire-building, but which ultimately rejected a Russian identity. As such the Don Cossacks were a living embodiment of Russia’s conflicted self-identity as both a nation and an empire.

Drawing upon documentation from six Russian archives, this study suggests that the Don region became a part of Russia as a result of a complex series of ad hoc decisions, diplomatic opportunities, and decisive actions by both metropolitan and local actors between 1667 and 1739. It eschews monolithic models of aggressive Russian expansion that have dominated numerous previous discussions. Instead it argues that no master plan guided Russian actions in the region, examines cases in which different branches of the government issued contradictory decrees in the name of...
the tsar, and explains why Cossacks were at times both advocates for and opponents of imperial expansion.\textsuperscript{10}

One of the major themes of this book is the social construction of Don Cossack identity.\textsuperscript{11} While initially anyone leading a freebooting life style in the steppe could claim a Cossack identity, over time group boundaries consolidated, then closed. Don Cossack identity ceased to be an acquired identity akin to categories such as “pirate” or “cowboy” and instead became an ascribed (blood or birth-based) identity. In only a few generations a community that was once heavily comprised of refugees and fugitives closed its ranks to outsiders and came to consider itself a distinct people.

The first half of \textit{Imperial Boundaries} explores the complex connections between the Cossacks and their frontier world. Four thematic chapters introduce the factors that shaped the life of the Don steppe frontier before 1700. Relying upon gunpowder and grain from the Russian metropole, the Cossacks advanced the cause of empire by contesting Ottoman control of the Black Sea steppes. Cossacks derived subsistence from a delicate balance between raiding, trading, ransoming, and government subsidy. The early social history of the Don region forms a close parallel to heterogeneous pirate communities in which martial exploits and “liberty, equality and brotherhood were the rule rather than the exception.”\textsuperscript{12} The unstudied administrative boundary between Muscovite metropole and Cossack frontier marked a Mason-Dixon like dividing line between liberty and autocracy, recorded/enserfed populations and free individuals, privileged military clients and weaponless subjects of the tsar.

On the subject of autocracy, Chapters five, six, and seven of \textit{Imperial Boundaries} provide a chronological analysis of the period from 1667 to 1695, arguing that the Cossacks were neither unwavering agents of imperial policy nor hapless victims of autocratic writ.\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Donskie Dela}, thousands of


\textsuperscript{13}This study supports those who have argued that autocracy provided Russian society with more \textit{de facto}, but not \textit{de jure}, political agency than it has usually been credited with. For a classic re-articulation of the European view of Russia as a patrimonial state in which the autocratic, all-powerful tsar rules over a docile elite and a debased populace deprived of rights, see Pipes, \textit{Russia Under the Old Regime}. Edward L. Keenan questioned many of the assumptions of autocracy as it was traditionally projected to outsiders and understood by later historians. See “Muscovite Political Folkways,” \textit{Russian Review} 45: 2 (1986), 115–81. For more extensive elaboration on the concept of
Introduction

pages of documents and reports preserved in Moscow, perforate the façade of autocracy to reveal that Cossacks possessed considerable autonomy of action and often forced compromises on the Ambassadorial Chancery (Posol’skii Prikaz), the Russian foreign office that interacted with them in the name of the tsar. In this unique region compelling cross-border considerations often forced Russian rulers to negotiate, not dictate.

The second half of Imperial Boundaries argues that the Russian conquest of the Ottoman fort of Azov in 1696 forever altered the relationship between people and power in the Don region. In Chapters eight, nine and ten analysis of the Russian conquest, administration, and cession of Azov reveals that Tsar Peter’s ambitious objectives of turning the frontier into a borderland did not completely blind him to the concerns of his Cossack clients. A decade of smoldering conflicts sparked by local clashes, contradictory decrees, political uncertainties, and bureaucratic exigencies ignited an imperial conflagration, a total war fought on the middle ground between the Don and Russia. During this era thousands of ordinary people were uprooted from their homes in order to actualize the tsar’s dreams of sailing ships in the Black Sea and thousands more died or deserted the Russian Empire in abortive attempts to resist a new imperial order in the steppe.14 Although Peter I personally signed decrees demanding the destruction of nearly half of the communities in the Don region, he patronized the reconstitution of the Don Host in the decades after the Bulavin rebellion of 1707–08. Chapters eleven through fourteen propose that Peter I became the inadvertent destroyer of the old steppe and the creator of a new imperial Cossack order.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Cossacks and Tatar nomads have often been portrayed as agents of empire in a great struggle by Romanov and Ottoman rulers to control the north


14 For related case studies of migration and colonization, see Nicholas B. Breyfogle, Abby Schrader, and Willard Sunderland, eds., Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History (New York, 2007).
Imperial boundaries

Black Sea coast, but this study will instead focus on the life and death of a common frontier world that both were dependent upon. The Cossack and Tatar communities commingling in the grassland prairies and deltas of the lower Don River basin represented local clients of the Russian tsar and Turkish sultan, but were central for the developing patterns of relations between the two states. They owed their existence and maintenance not so much to a holy war or incessant fighting among “clashing civilizations” but rather to the uneasy coexistence between the two distant empires.

Previous studies have neglected patterns of interaction between these frontier communities. In most Russian accounts the Don Cossacks are depicted as Russian patriots and guardians of Russian borders against attacks by bloodthirsty Turks and nomads. Soviet historians tried to justify Russian southern expansion as a purely defensive move against “Turko-Tatar” aggression. The few studies in Turkish have almost nothing to say about this region and likewise emphasized war, competition, and struggle. A discordant note was sounded by Alan Fisher who emphasized the peaceful nature of Russian–Ottoman state interaction at Azov until 1696, when Peter I took the city from the Ottomans.

In contrast to more conventional treatments of the age of Peter the Great (1672–1725) and his immediate successors, this study seeks to integrate macro and micro historical approaches and provide a mosaic of both central and regional perspectives. Most scholarship, after all, focuses primarily
on Peter and the ruling elites surrounding him. Although Peter I is central to the Cossack story, he appears in this study as an imperial, occasionally imperious, interloper rather than a constant, hands-on commandant. He delegated to confidants and multiple branches of the government the authority to negotiate the boundaries of imperial control over Cossack lands, liberties, and forms of livelihood.

As a rule, studies originating in southern Russia have tried to mold the region’s history into the nation-state paradigm, depicting Don Cossacks as conscious and willing agents of Russian expansion. The most insightful study of relations between the Don and the Russian state was published in 1924 by the émigré historian Sergei Svatikov, who represented the region as an independent “republican colony” of Russia that gradually lost its statehood and autonomy to the mother country. In the Soviet era the Don region above all merited scholarly attention as the perceived staging ground for a series of “peasant wars” that threatened the Russian state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Scholars of the region have produced some impressive archive-based surveys of the socio-economic history of the Don Cossacks, but their studies overlooked cross-cultural interaction, identity politics, and imperial boundaries.

Although the Don region has featured in several studies in English, this is the first extensive, archive-based study to explore its transition from a frontier contested by two empires to a borderland of the Russian empire.
Imperial boundaries

World historian William H. McNeill’s *Europe’s Steppe Frontier* presented the conquest of the steppe as a major event in European history, but he relied heavily on secondary accounts. In an ambitious and extensive recent survey Michael Khodarkovsky chronicled Russia’s efforts over three centuries to “wrest control over the steppe from its nomadic inhabitants.” In presenting the history of the steppe frontier as a single overarching story of Russia’s “unstoppable expansion” and Christian “manifest destiny” he side-stepped the unique dynamic of the Don steppe frontier. In an innovative study of how Russian empire-building, state-building, and nation-building coincided, Willard Sunderland effectively demonstrated that Russian actions produced “not one steppe but several, but each with a particular set of meanings and appearances that changed over time.”

Rather than view the Don steppe exclusively through a Russian prism, *Imperial Boundaries* stresses connections to global patterns of cross-cultural interaction and empire-building. The sea of grass separating the Don region from central Russia was as conducive to political innovation and pragmatic accommodation as any trans-Atlantic frontier. Intertwined processes of land-taking, community-making, and identity-shaping converged to create a Cossack cultural landscape that was unlike any region in central Russia.

Secondly, in telling the story of how a non-state space became an imperial place, I propose that cutting-edge practices of statecraft originated along this edge of empire. New studies have enriched our understanding of how important aspects of international law emerged at the intersections of European empires. Unfortunately, Russia’s innovative solutions to characteristically modern problems of governance have been ignored. This empire initiated forms of territorial sovereignty and documenting individual identity that previous studies have unambiguously claimed as

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30 These themes, along with new property systems, new social relationships, and new political institutions, are emphasized by William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin in “Becoming West: Toward New Meaning for Western History,” in Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin, eds., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past* (New York, 1992), pp. 7–9.
prerogatives of the nation-state, the French Revolution, and the modern international system. Russia advanced notions of “territorial sovereignty and inviolability of political boundaries” long before most European states began to actively demarcate and patrol their borders.\(^{32}\) Russia delegitimized non-state violence and “accepted responsibility for trans-border violence emanating from its territory” two centuries before this became a dominant principle in international law.\(^{33}\) Moreover, this study will demonstrate that by the mid-eighteenth century such markers of modernity as identity documents, universal male military service, registers of birth and death, and deportation of undocumented migrants became regular features of life in the Don region.

Thirdly, this investigation proceeds from the premise that partisanship and partition obliterate middle grounds. Frontiers became borderlands by arrangement, not default.\(^{34}\) Russian boundary maintenance policies deserve comparative attention because they both harkened back to earlier imperial efforts to restrict the mobility of nomads and foreshadowed the functional role of modern borders in managing and controlling the movement of goods and people. In global history various sedentary powers have attempted to create artificial barriers to impede the mobility of nomadic societies and non-state raiders. Like the Roman strategists who built Hadrian’s wall and the Ming politicians who constructed an even greater wall north of Beijing, Russia’s rulers looked to create limits that they could live with.\(^{35}\) The Belgorod line, a system of earthworks and fortifications constructed in the mid-seventeenth century as a deterrent against Tatar raids, initiated a process of territorialization of state sovereignty. By 1671 the Russian authorities had implemented an imperial boundary regime with the Don region that was more rigorous than the border between the emerging nation-states of Spain and France, which has been proclaimed the first “modern” border.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{34}\) On the concept of the middle ground, see Chapter one of this study. In a survey of the situation in North America, Adelman and Aaron seem to suggest that borderlands can arise by default (p. 836). They nonetheless highlight an important “shift from inter-imperial struggle to international coexistence” that preceded attempts to enforce borders (p. 816). Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aaron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104: 3 (1999), 814–41.


Finally, the Don steppe frontier cannot be fully understood apart from its connections to larger processes and patterns in Inner Asian history. Though just a small chapter in the story of how the steppe was won, forceful winds of change first felt here would eventually sweep across Eurasia. The decision of tsars and sultans to restrict raiding and enforce international borders in the early eighteenth century marked the beginning of the end of the Inner Asian steppe arena that had contributed to the emergence of both polities. For over a millennium political entrepreneurs could simulate imperial loyalties while seeking outside opportunities, knowing that they could find refuge in the vast expanses of Eurasia. By partitioning the steppe, shrinking the scope of non-state space, and mandating that people on the move carry government-issued papers, eighteenth-century bureaucrats initiated a process of policing that would herald the twilight of the nomadic era. It is sadly appropriate that Russian and Ottoman diplomats erected kurgans to serve as boundary markers. For centuries such mounds had served as symbols of nomadic power and prestige, now they signified subordination of the steppe to sedentary rulers in distant capitals.

**Sources**

For most of the period under consideration here, the Russian government interacted with the Don Cossacks in the foreign policy realm rather than the domestic policy sphere. In order to deliver news on events in the steppe and Black sea region, Don Cossack delegations journeyed to Moscow several times a year. Upon arriving in the capital they filed written reports and provided oral testimony in response to questions posed to them by Russian officials responsible for foreign affairs. These records, called the *Donskie dela*, form the backbone of sources utilized in the present study.

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Introduction

Due to floods (the Cossack capital Cherkassk was situated on an island in the Don River), fires (1710, 1744, 1858), enemy raids, and the Russian Civil War, very few original documents of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have survived in the Don region itself.\(^{40}\) The fate of the documents generated by the Ottoman administration in Azov is unknown.\(^{41}\) Cossack correspondence with Moscow, and later Saint Petersburg, however, has been extensively preserved. The major collection is housed in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts in Moscow (abbreviated as RGADA) in fond 111, the so-called *Donskie dela* (documents on Don affairs) which extensively covers the period from 1615 to 1721.\(^{42}\) These documents contain a rich record of thousands of pages pertaining to the region’s history, but have not been systematically published for the period after 1650. For the period from 1695–1718 many important documents are preserved in the Naval archive in Saint Petersburg (RGAVMF).\(^{43}\) Records for the period after 1721 are mainly preserved in the Archive of Military History in Moscow (abbreviated as RGVIA).\(^{44}\)

The *Donskie dela* fall into two broad categories: records books (*knigi*) and individual scrolls (*stolbtsy*). These to a large extent complement one another and their content is very similar. They are arranged chronologically and primarily consist of records on the various Cossack delegations that were sent each year to Moscow.\(^{45}\) The main consideration with the sources, of course, is that most of them were generated either by or for the Muscovite government. The Cossack reports (*voiskovye otpiski*) are carefully crafted statements that were above all designed to convince the government that the Cossacks were providing necessary and valuable services to the tsar. Only when absolutely pressured would the Cossacks provide information.

\(^{40}\) For a more detailed discussion of sources see Boeck, *Shifting Boundaries*, pp. 553–60.

\(^{41}\) Because the city was taken by Russian forces on three separate occasions (1637, 1696, and 1736), most local records presumably perished. Ottoman archives have preserved muster rolls and administrative reports from Azov, but almost none have been published or extensively used by historians. See Alan W. Fisher, “Azov in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 21: 2 (1972), 161–74.

\(^{42}\) Other diplomatic collections used in this study include Turkish (fond 89), Crimean (fond 123), and Kalmyk (fond 119) affairs and the records of the Belgorod regiment (which was responsible for the southern frontier).

\(^{43}\) The chancery of Admiral Petr Matveevich Apraksin (fond 233) contains many important documents on Cossack affairs and the government colony at Azov. The records of the Petrine navy are also important (fond 177).

\(^{44}\) At RGVIA, documents on the Don region are in two general collections. The records of the Cossack section (*kazach’ia povyt’ia*) are located in RGVIA, fond 13, opis’ 1/107. Other documents are scattered throughout the files of the Secret Section (*sekretnaia povyt’ia*) which is in fond 20, opis’ 1/47.

\(^{45}\) The overwhelming mass of preserved materials consists of bureaucratic records dedicated to the annual subsidy and the four small and one large delegations sent to the capital annually. In terms of preserved pages, these bureaucratic records account for roughly 80 percent of all documentation.
on their internal affairs, actions that might be interpreted as detrimental to Russian interests, and unrest in their ranks. Information on social and cultural history has to be gleaned from documents produced for practical purposes, such as petitions, statements made during interrogations, and records of disputes or investigations.

In order to gain multiple perspectives on events in the region, the Ambassadorsial Chancery supplemented the Cossack reports with other forms of evidence. It often solicited, and meticulously recorded, oral testimony (rasprosnye rechi) from Cossacks visiting Moscow. Muscovite diplomats wrote reports on their visits to the region and they often paid special attention to the kinds of topics that Cossacks purposefully left out of their reports. Finally, officials in Russian districts adjacent to the Don sometimes sent intelligence reports to Moscow. These materials often appear side by side in files and frequently they were combined together by clerks into bureaucratic summaries (Russian terms for such compendia include spravka, doklad, and vypiska).

A central premise of this book is that a society which was originally anti-bureaucratic at its core was forced to gradually embrace various forms of documenting individual identity and ways of inscribing communities into a standardized administrative grid that was legible to imperial officials. This anti-bureaucratic heritage poses particular challenges for the historian, since prior to the age of Peter the Great the Don Host never generated many of the types of documentation that even the most humble early modern political structures depended upon. On the other hand, this case provides a unique opportunity to survey how communities that originally equated liberty with the right to remain unseen by a government’s gaze confronted the tyranny of bureaucratic paper and became enmeshed in a matrix of documentation.


Because there were no land taxes, customs duties, or other systematic levies, there are no cadastral surveys, tax rolls, or commercial registers. Agriculture’s late appearance in the region means that almost no documentation on land use exists.
In 1887, Tsar Alexander III wrote to the Don Cossack military Host to congratulate it on over three hundred years of service to Russia. He highlighted the fact that in the sixteenth century the Don Host and the Russian Empire matured together. The Cossacks “began to serve Russia in a period in which her might was only being born” and the Host “with its mighty breast guarded these [imperial] boundaries and facilitated the expansion of the territories of the Russian tsardom.”

The narrative of how the Don Cossacks served the rising Russian Empire is a familiar one, but the services that empire rendered to the emergence of the Don Cossacks are less familiar. The empire’s role in shaping the boundaries (ethnic, juridical, territorial) of Cossack communities was no less important than the Cossacks’ role in advancing imperial boundaries.

While Don Cossacks indeed became bulwarks of Romanov power in a changing steppe in the era of Peter I, this imperial arrangement is all too often anachronistically projected onto earlier periods of the region’s history. Few other populations in the empire could trace their ties to the tsars to a time before there was a Romanov dynasty or point to a privileged relationship with Russia that ran the entire course of its imperial history, but the view of Cossacks as loyal border guards was only created in the eighteenth century as they searched for a new role for themselves in the waning years of the steppe frontier. Ironically, for the first hundred years of the Cossacks’ relationship with Russia their service was not publicly acknowledged. The subsidy that the tsars awarded them was a state secret. Paradoxically the Don Cossack settlements that sent men to participate in the conquest of Kazan’ in 1552 and whose sons conquered Siberia together with Yermak in 1582 – the defining events in Russia’s emergence as an empire – were only themselves incorporated into Russia in 1696 with

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1 A. A. Lishin, Akty otnosishchiesia k istorii voiska Donskogo (Novocherkassk, 1891), vol. iii, p. 270.
the conquest of Azov. Prior to then not one, but two, empires played a formative role in the history of the Don Cossacks.

A FRONTIER BETWEEN TWO EMPIRES

Overlooking the mouth of the Don River, nearly equidistant from Moscow and Istanbul, the fortified city of Azov was for over two centuries the northernmost Ottoman outpost in the Black Sea steppes. A vital transit point on the Silk Route in the middle ages, the city remained in Venetian hands until it was conquered by Ottoman forces in 1475. Although its importance as a Eurasian trading emporium declined, Azov immediately became the focal point for relations between the emerging Ottoman and Russian empires. It also served as a critical node of interface between the economies of Eurasian steppe and Black Sea, as well as functioning as a local trading center for the Tatar nomadic groups who inhabited the steppe region. Until the mid-seventeenth century, when Ukraine replaced it as the main theater of Ottoman–Russian interaction, Azov (which the Ottomans called Azak) was the place where traveling ambassadors, merchants, and pilgrims rested after their voyages across the seas of grass and saltwater that separated the two empires.

Up river from Azov, Cossack settlements began to arise in the late fifteenth century. At first drawn to Azov as a source for plunder, these Cossacks (a Turkic word for freebooters or independent operators) took up residence in the lower Don region. Like a parasitic organism that attaches itself to an unwilling host, the Don Cossacks drew their initial lifeblood from the Ottoman presence in the lower Don region. While at first they simply plundered the steppe and river caravans heading to Azov, they gradually turned their symbiosis with Azov into a marketable asset. Cossacks would accompany and protect travelers from depredations by Tatars and other Cossacks during river and steppe journeys from the mouth of the Don River to Muscovy. They also began to trade information on the Black Sea world to the Muscovites for weapons and supplies. Though


3 The Tatars most frequently encountered by the Don Cossacks were remnants of the once powerful Nogai Horde, which declined due to disease, famine, and internecine conflict in the second half of the sixteenth century. For a more detailed discussion and bibliography, see E. V. Kusainova, Russko-nogaiske otnosheniiia i kazachestvo v kontse XV–XVII veke (Volgograd, 2005).
geographically conjoined to Azov, the Cossacks of the Don became clients of a distant Russian tsar.

In the sixteenth century the open steppe was just as devoid of permanent political authority as maps of it were devoid of borderlines, cities, and villages. An Ottoman client polity, the Crimean khanate, claimed much of Eurasia north of the Black Sea as a Chingissid birthright, but it directly administered little land beyond the Crimean peninsula. The khan’s nomadic Tatar subjects seasonally utilized portions of the steppe north of the Black Sea and his forces regularly mounted raids across the steppe into Muscovite territories, but in effect for much of the year the steppe was a huge, unpoliced, no-man’s-land.

While it has become commonplace to use the term “frontier” when discussing Russian southern expansion, previous studies have advanced vastly diverging views of Russian frontiers. Here the steppes of the Don region are described as a frontier in order to convey a sense of the boundless, non-state environment in which Cossack communities emerged. Although there is no established convention of interdisciplinary usage, I have adopted Ladis Kristof’s view of the frontier as a zone of interaction. This resonates well with Owen Lattimore’s concept of the frontier in Inner Asia as “a zone of uncertainty” which was not “fully homogenes with China or the steppe” and could influence both. In medieval Spain the term “frontera,” which is related to the English word frontier, signified a “moving field of military actions” and “a danger zone” in which both reconstruction and seasonal localized warfare (often between Muslims and Christians) was taking place. A Russian term that comes close to approximating the notion of frontier is the traditional understanding of the term ukraina which means outer edge or peripheral zone. This general term, which went out


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of use as a result of its privatization for national purposes by activists of the Ukrainian movement in the nineteenth century, differs from the Russian term for a bordered land (pogranich’e).

Frontiers differ from boundaries by virtue of their flexible, shifting, and amorphous nature. Leonard Thompson has proposed a comparative definition of a frontier that emphasizes cross-cultural interaction:

In our usage, a frontier is an area of interpenetration between societies. It contains three elements: a territorial element, a zone or territory as distinct from a boundary line; a human element, comprising peoples of initially separate and distinct societies; and a process element by which relations among such people commence, develop, and eventually crystallize. A frontier opens with the first contact between members of the two societies. It closes when a single authority has established political and economic dominance over the other.7

Whereas borders are created by states, frontiers come into existence through social interaction. Frontier customs and patterns of interaction can persist after states try to transform frontiers into borderlands, but the very act of constructing borders and asserting sovereignty claims represents a qualitatively new relationship between states, populations, and territory.8

Although I have chosen to employ the term “frontier” in order to contrast the early development of the region with its subsequent fate as a borderland of the Russian Empire after 1700, the Don steppe can also be viewed as a manifestation of a middle ground. Richard White’s study The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region 1650–1815 stressed the importance of reciprocity in imperial encounters between Native Americans and the French in the Great Lakes region.9

Lacking the resources or inclination to stage a monolithic, military invasion, the French forged mutually beneficial trade and political alliances with indigenous groups in territories between French and British colonies. The relationships of the middle ground required both sides to negotiate, accommodate, and acknowledge new rules and rituals that were of mutual

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invention. White’s work was part of a broader trend in which historians sought to integrate cross-cultural interaction, relations of power, legacies of conquest, transformations of landscapes, and the formation of new communities and identities into their narratives of North American history. While Michael Khodarkovsky has recently rejected the applicability of the middle ground concept for Russia’s relations with the nomadic peoples, Thomas Barrett has effectively drawn upon the “new western history” to connect the Terek Cossacks in the Caucasus to their complex cultural world “at the edge of empire.” As my discussion of ethnic diversity in Chapter two and analysis of raiding and ransoming in Chapter three will demonstrate, White’s concept presents an insightful model for unfettering the Don region from historical paradigms in which Cossacks and nomads are portrayed as hostile, irreconcilable representatives of clashing empires, religions, or civilizations.

FROM MANY, ONE: THE FRONTIER AND COSSACK ETHNOGENESIS

In contrast to Russian historians who have primarily sought to trace Cossack roots to Slavic sources, thereby avoiding consideration of cultural symbiosis, Günter Stöckl has convincingly demonstrated that the Cossacks mentioned in Genoese, Greek, and Russian sources from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries were largely of Tatar extraction. From the late thirteenth-century Codex Cumanicus it is clear that the Turkic term ghasal Cosack referred to guards and scouts, but this was a narrow meaning of a broader term. The Genoese in the Crimea employed such hired hands to guard against other Cossacks, who were independent operators, men who had removed themselves from the restraints of both nomadic and sedentary society. While some Cossacks became bandits, others became protection

11 Khodarkovsky, Russia’s Steppe Frontier, p. 227. Thomas M. Barrett, At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700–1860 (Boulder, Col., 1999).
entrepreneurs specializing in guarding people and property from nomads and other Cossacks.¹⁴

Little is known about the sixteenth-century Don Cossacks whose service to Russia was lauded by Alexander III, but a comparative frame of reference situates them among a number of groups that emerged at roughly the same time in non-state territories and interstitial spaces.¹⁵ Frequently such groups were not the products of a single culture or environment but a fusion of diverse elements. Kenneth Bilby highlights the role of heterogeneous elements in the ethnogenesis of new groups in frontier settings: “The resulting sociocultural ‘fusions’ were truly new creations, owing much to the past, but without precedent at the same time. Indeed, the fact that those who evolved these new societies and identities were forced to call upon several cultural pasts, not just one or two, guaranteed original outcomes.”¹⁶ From this perspective the new fusion becomes more important than the precise proportions of its constituent elements, since the sum of cross-cultural influences allowed the group to survive and adapt to its environment.

Although the Don Cossacks would play an important role in Russian history, the socio-cultural fusion they represented was forged in the steppe, where Slavic, Turkic, and Caucasian peoples came into contact. In the sixteenth century, Slavs were increasingly joining hybrid Cossack communities operating in the steppe or around its edges. Early references to Cossacks in Russian documents concern Riazan’, a principality southeast of Moscow on the edge of the steppe. A document from 1519 orders an official to “hire a Riazan’ Cossack or a Tatar” for a mission to Crimea, suggesting a functional equivalence between the two categories.¹⁷ Even though the Cossacks contracted with Russian principalities, they were not drawn immediately into the political orbit of the Muscovite state. A letter from Ivan IV to the Nogai Tatars emphasized the importance of Cossack mixing: “There are many Cossacks roaming in the steppe, Kazanis, Crimeans, Azovites, and other insolent (bolovni) Cossacks. Even from our frontiers

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Hence symbiosis between Slavs and Turkic peoples was a key element in the formation of early Cossack societies. The earliest documented name of a Don Cossack leader is decidedly Turkic: Sary Azman.

The model suggested by Igor Kopytoff for African frontiers provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding early Cossack history. As a result of various social, economic, and environmental pressures, from time to time people are forced to leave their settlements to make new homes in peripheral lands or ecological niches not utilized or claimed by pre-existing societies. In the frontier they are faced with critical survival choices. They must choose what to preserve, what to forget, and what is crucial for survival. Frontiers become incubators for new political communities due to an inability or unwillingness of settlers to reproduce all cultural and social forms predominant in their places of origin. As a result of adaptation, new hybrid societies emerge.

Kopytoff’s vision of how frontier factors could call new polities into existence provides a plausible explanation for the evolution of early Cossack communities in the no-man’s-lands between Riazan’ and the Don.

The chances were better in areas just beyond the peripheries of metropolitan control. These were good areas for the incubation of new petty polities, close enough to the metropole to be bereft of powerful local competing polities (which the metropole would not tolerate) but far enough to be beyond its active concerns.

A Cossack culture and way of life was already extant when Muscovite officials came calling to recruit Cossacks for service in the sixteenth century. Neither nomads nor peasants, the early Cossacks represented a mix of nomads, fugitives, and entrepreneurs. Their numbers were no more than a few thousand. Their weapons and dress adhered to no common standards and can best be described as multicolored and multicultural: integrating elements from the steppe nomads and populations of North Caucasus. They combined steppe skills of horsemanship with expertise in sea, river,

18 Prodolzhenie drevnej rossiiskoi vissiostki (Saint Petersburg, 1793), vol. viii, p. 75. For Sary Azman, see N. A. Mininkov, Donskoe kazachestvo v epokhu pozdneho srednevekov’ia (Rostov-na-Donu, 1998), p. 78.


20 Kopytoff, African Frontier, p. 29.

and portage navigation that can be traced to Rus’. Their hybrid raiding culture conducted amphibious operations in both the river basins and prairies of the southern steppes.

NON-STATE VIOLENCE IN THE EMPLOY OF EMPIRE

The eminent Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky has argued that state policies provided an organizational impetus for the Cossack phenomenon. Prior to the middle of the sixteenth century the Polish and Russian states contracted with Cossacks who lived in the steppe, but relations were episodic. According to Hrushevsky, Cossack groups existed *de facto* before the mid sixteenth century, but they only began to exist *de jure* after state intervention. What he means is that as groups of Cossacks entered into relations with states, one-time transactions were replaced by emerging long-term relationships.

The earliest evidence for a regular affiliation between Cossacks in the Don region and Russian rulers stems from the mid-sixteenth century, when the Muscovite state began to send regular payments to Cossacks, utilizing them as a ready source of supplementary military manpower and rewarding them for diplomatic and information-gathering services they rendered. In 1570, for example the Muscovite envoy to the Turkish Sultan contracted with Don Cossacks to obtain armed accompaniment from Rylsk to Azov. In exchange for these services, the Cossacks affiliated with *ataman* (Cossack leader, hereafter ataman) Misha Cherkashenin were provided with money, clothes, and gunpowder. Such early deals helped to facilitate political relations between Moscow and Istanbul by securing safe passage across the no-man’s-land of the steppe.

Muscovite subsidies, however, also contributed to the consolidation of scattered Cossack communities into organized structures. By consistently dealing with certain Cossack contractors over time, the Muscovite government shaped the evolution of Don Cossack society. Stipendiary Cossacks sponsored by the Russian government arranged themselves into a military brotherhood called the Don Host. They participated as auxiliaries in the campaigns of Tsar Ivan IV, aka Ivan the Terrible (1547–1584) and in 1569 they rendered tremendous assistance to Russia by harassing Ottoman forces.

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23 Although almost all Don Cossack records before the Time of Troubles have been lost, the Nikonian Chronicle preserves several references to the Don Cossacks. See, for example, *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (hereafter PSRL) 13: 271, 326.
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sent against Astrakhan’, the strategic town on the lower Volga recently conquered by Ivan. The loss of sixteenth-century records, however, precludes any attempt to fully reconstruct the terms of their relations with the Russian state. A central element of their deal included the right to travel freely to Russia to trade, but they were prohibited from attacking allies of the tsar or raiding on the Volga River.

When these Cossacks refused to cease raiding, they incurred the wrath of Ivan’s successor, Boris Godunov, who was trying to cement his hold on power by promoting peace. Under Godunov Russian officials stopped sending supplies to the Don Cossacks and “did not allow them into any town.” As a result, during the Time of Troubles (1598–1613) they played a role in the dramatic, destabilizing events unfolding in central Russia. It is also clear, however, that many of the so-called Cossacks who took center stage in Russia’s first civil war had no relationship whatsoever to the Don. The new Romanov dynasty restored the previous policy of autonomy and subsidy. In 1614–15 the Cossacks of the Don received shipments of supplies from Russia and were once again given authorization to trade in Russian towns. Raiding would form one pillar of Cossack subsistence, but Russian subsidy would form an equally important other pillar of Don Cossack existence.

The Muscovite state’s weakness in the steppe region forced it to avoid aggressive actions. When the Don Cossacks unexpectedly captured the Ottoman fort of Azov in 1637 and offered to hand it over to Russia, the Muscovite government had to decide whether to accept or decline the Cossack invitation for Muscovite forces to occupy and annex it.

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27 PSRL, 14, chast’ 1: 61. A decree issued by Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich refers to Godunov’s reign as a time without liberty (nevolia) for Cossacks, when they were not free to travel, were imprisoned, and forbidden to trade. RIB, 18: 248.
30 The relevant documentation is contained in Rosiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (hereafter RGADA), f. 89, turetskie dela, 1642, d. 1.
group of bureaucrats and boyars prepared a report for the tsar estimating the cost of garrisoning and provisioning Azov at over 120,000 rubles per year—such a sum would have depleted the government’s budget and represented an exponential increase in expenditure over the 3,000 rubles annually paid to the Cossacks.\textsuperscript{31} The doubts expressed by participants in a \textit{Zemskii sobor} called to discuss the issue, the tremendous costs, and a healthy respect for Ottoman power, convinced Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich that Muscovy could live without a steppe fort on the edge of the Black Sea. Azov was given back to the Ottoman side, returning the region to the status quo for the rest of the seventeenth century.

In order to understand why Russia would prefer dealing with Cossack clients to outright annexation, it is useful to refer to an important episode in the global history of empire that was not immediately concerned with extending direct territorial sovereignty over other societies. In the early modern period states willingly supported, sometimes even created, armed non-state entities along the edges of empire. In competition to extend power and influence and weaken the position of their enemies, early modern states authorized predatory attacks on the commercial and political interests of competing political structures throughout the globe.

Janice Thomson argues that European empires unleashed non-state violence against each other by contracting with pirates, corsairs, mercenaries, and other non-state actors who were men without a country.\textsuperscript{32} Simultaneously states developed doctrines to disavow themselves of responsibility for the actions of these non-state actors. Hence, a government could give private individuals commissions to attack enemy ships as privateers, but, if they were caught, it could deny responsibility by insisting that the captain and crew were acting on their own initiative. Thomson has termed this a “policy of plausible deniability.” As a result of exploitation of non-state violence, Thomson contends that “neither states nor people could be certain of which practices were backed by state authority and which were not.”\textsuperscript{33}

The Don Host was a political entity that owed its very existence to state sponsorship of non-state violence. As an autonomous client polity of the Muscovite state, the Don Host profited from plundering Ottoman territories. The service they rendered to the Russian Empire primarily consisted of making Ottomans or their subjects feel insecure. The Don

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., ll. 14–15. Budget figures for the period are not available, but the sum would have represented over 10 percent of the entire state budget in the 1680s.


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 44.
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Cossacks participated in numerous steppe raids and over twenty-five major expeditions against Ottoman coastal areas. As an alternative to a Russian military presence in the open steppe, Russian officials subsidized cheap and effective non-state violence (raiding by autonomous Cossack clients) to counter Ottoman influence over the Tatars.

The Cossacks would also serve as the eyes and ears of the Muscovite government in the south. While Muscovy was remote from the world of the Black Sea, it eagerly devoured information about the region. For example, a Muscovite representative was sent to the Don after the Time of Troubles with pages and pages of questions:

Find out by whatever means possible the true situation from local people and anyone on hand, from captives and those who have escaped to the Don from Crimea and the Turkish lands...Has the Crimean tsar and Kalga Shen Girei gone on any campaigns, and are they currently in Crimea? Are there any military forces being mobilized? If so, are there great numbers of them?...Are there any relations between the Turkish Sultan and Crimean tsar and Kalga Shen Girei with the Lithuanian king?...Did the Don Cossacks attack any Turkish ships at sea this year, and if so, how many, and were there Ukrainians (Cherkasy) with them?

Even though large portions of the document have been omitted here for the sake of brevity, we witness the concerns of an eager sideline player, but reluctant participant, who coveted detailed information about developments in the region.

From the earliest times both the Russian and Ottoman Empires determined that events in the open steppe should not be allowed to severely damage diplomatic relations between the two states. At the same time, geopolitical competition dictated that neither power could allow the other to completely dominate the steppe world. Both employed the doctrine of plausible deniability to disavow responsibility for the actions of their clients. Whenever one government would complain to the other, the response would be that the offending parties were acting under their own initiative.

The official policy of the Muscovite government was that the Cossacks were criminals and fugitives who left the Muscovite state and lived in the

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frontier without the sanction of the tsar. In 1574, a letter from Ivan IV to the khan of Crimea, a protectorate of the Ottoman Empire that maintained a separate political structure and often conducted an autonomous foreign policy, disavowed any responsibility for Cossacks raids:

You wrote to us brother that the Don Cossacks attacked Azov and did much damage, but the Don Cossacks do not live on the Don with our permission, for they flee from our state and do not act under our orders. For many years they have lived near Azov, and many live there on the Don, sometimes in peace and sometimes not in peace, but all of these events take place among them [Cossacks and Azov residents] without our knowledge.36

Since they were free people, not subjects, the tsar was neither responsible for punishing them nor accountable for their actions. Russian diplomats often maintained that “the Don is inhabited by outlaws, and fugitive slaves of Boyars and all kinds of transient free people and they make sea attacks of their own volition and not by orders of our Grand Sovereign, and the Grand Sovereign does not stand up for such outlaws.”37

But eventually Russia would come to publicly embrace these “free people.” The Don Host, which was called into creation by frontier circumstances and state exploitation of non-state violence in the sixteenth century, managed to reinvent itself and restructure its relations with a changing Russia. The relationship between Moscow and the Don continued under two ruling dynasties, endured major rebellions that threatened the Russian heartland, persisted through several significant shifts in strategic orientation of the Russian–Ottoman rivalry, weathered the Petrine cultural revolution, and even outlasted the closing of the frontier that called a separate deal into existence. As we will see in subsequent chapters, a complex convergence of factors made it possible for Don Cossacks to celebrate the anniversary of their origins in 1887.

Although various communities in Eurasia called themselves Cossacks and traced their remote origins to the freebooting groups of the sixteenth century, the divergent life trajectories of Cossack communities in the Don, Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and the Urals testify to the fact that there was no single Cossack story or experience.38 The fascinating, but idiosyncratic

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36 V. D. Sukhorukov, Istoricheskoe opisanie zemli Voiska Donskago (Novocherkassk, 1869), p. 59. See also RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, 1640, d. 1, chast’ 1, l. 730b.

37 Sukhorukov, Istoricheskoe opisanie, p. 170.

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history of Cossacks beyond the Urals Mountains should be considered part of a separate Siberian dynamic. Each space displays a different chronology and each case incorporates a distinct combination of cross-cultural interaction, identity politics, imperial policies, and mobilization of violence to secure metropolitan resources or recognition. When viewed through a Eurasian lens the Don Cossacks may appear to be one group in a continuum of “horseman-warriors” in the lands that eventually became Russia’s southern flank, but such an approach disregards Cossacks’ local sense of place and the regional context of community-building and cross-cultural interaction. As the first Cossack society to confront the closing of their frontier, the Don Host’s successful embrace of empire helped other Cossack structures to hedge their bets against obsolescence as more borderlands became hinterlands after 1739.

The uncomplicated nineteenth-century narrative of continuous Don Cossack service to Russia obscures the turbulence that accompanied the region’s integration into the Russian Empire. The Cossacks affiliated with the Don Host successfully weathered the transition from frontier to borderland, but they were not the only Don Cossack community to survive the process. In the late nineteenth century, the Nekrasovite Cossacks, a community forged in the fires of rebellion against Peter I, could commemorate two hundred years of Cossack alienation from Russia and allegiance to the Turkish sultan. Driven from the Don region, they committed to memory an alternate narrative of origins that began with the cataclysm of the Bulavin rebellion of 1707–1708, in which a majority of Don Cossacks perished at the hands of government troops. Their community’s first commandment admonished: “Never return to Russia under the Tsars.”


I have drawn attention to some of these themes in a recent review of literature, see Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 4 (2003), 735–46. Even studies of the same region in the same period reach diverging conclusions. See Boeck, “Rewriting the history of the Terek region,” Central Asian Survey 19: 3/4 (2000), 469–72. For a bibliography and introduction to the diversity of approaches, consult T. V. Tabolina, Izuchenie kazachestva: tendentsii i perspektivy (Moscow, 2000).

For a broad overview that stresses connections, but misses many nuances of regional context, see Albert Seaton, The Horseman of the Steppes: The Story of the Cossacks (London, 1985).

A. Savel’ev, Trekhostletie Voiska Donskago 1570–1870 g. Ocherki iz istorii Donskikh Kazakov (Saint Petersburg, 1870).

On this fascinating community, see the innovative recent study by D. V. Sen’, Voisko Kubanskoe Ignatovo Kavkazskoe: istoricheskie puti kazakov-nekrasovtsev (Krasnodar, 2001).
collective memory emphasized fight and flight, rather than subservience to Russian might.

Cossacks in the Don region could only celebrate three hundred years of service to Russia because their ancestors found new ways to serve empire as their fluid frontier world was replaced by a world of imperial boundaries. The Cossacks who toasted the health of Alexander III in 1887 bore little resemblance to the Cossacks of Ivan IV. Gone were seafaring, raiding, cultural hybridity, plausible deniability in diplomacy, and diversity in dress. Nomadic confederations, non-state space, and the boundless, open steppe had become extinct in the region. Azov was now a Russian grain port and Crimea a tsarist resort. The Don Cossacks had survived as a community by radically transforming their way of life: exchanging raiding for military service, giving up their mobility for the duty of patrolling Russian borders, transforming their male brotherhoods into settled, productive communities, and replacing locally elected leaders with rulers connected to imperial networks of patronage and power. The Don Host could indeed trace its origins to the times of Russia’s “terrible” tsar, but, as we will see, its imperial makeover dated to the age of Peter the Great.
Like the pirates, buccaneers, and maroons that emerged on the margins of European colonial societies in the early modern period, the Don Cossacks created community out of diversity and constructed a new polity in interstitial space between empires. Among the Cossacks outcasts and outlaws could seek liberty. For those returning from Tatar captivity the region served as a halfway house between bondage and new identities. Diversity and decentralization dominated the political and social world of the Don Cossacks.

Most historians have tended to simply view the Don Cossacks as a peculiar group of Russians, consigning the hybrid nature of early Cossack society to the margins of discussions of Cossack identity. In contrast, this study emphasizes that Don Cossacks created a new society, a socio-cultural fusion comprised of diverse elements, but committed to an antibureaucratic and egalitarian political system. Early Cossack identity was not defined by common language or common origins, but by common interest.

**LIBERTY AND AUTOCRACY**

Both Cossack and Russian observers agree that *volia*, translated here as liberty, was a predominant feature of life in the Don, but what did the term mean in a seventeenth-century context? The term itself has connotations of liberty, lack of restraint, and unencumbered actions according to one’s own will. For Russian observers it likely meant the antithesis of the Muscovite value system in which autocracy, bureaucracy, legally protected honor, inherited social status, and an emerging institution of social and migration control, usually labeled serfdom, predominated.¹ There were no Russian

administrators, tax-collectors, clerks, or garrisons in the Don region. The reach of tsarist law codes did not extend to this distant frontier. In the mid-seventeenth century, a Muscovite bureaucrat Grigorii Kotoshikhin noted that this *volia* meant that the Don Cossacks were free to elect their own leaders and judge themselves in all affairs. He envisioned this *de facto* freedom from tsarist control as a core component of the Cossacks’ relationship with Russia: “If they were not given their liberty (*volia*), they would not serve on the Don and they would not obey.”

Liberty also meant the right to remain unrecorded. While in early modern Russia bureaucratic record-keeping served as an instrument of social control, helping the state to facilitate taxation and enforce serfdom, the absence of such records on the Don was viewed by both the Russian state and the Cossacks as an essential element of Cossack liberty. In 1639, a report produced by the Ambassadorial Chancery stated that “there are no lists of names of Cossacks . . . they live by their own free will (*samovol’stvom*) and not by decree.” In 1691, the Host reported that it could not determine how many Cossacks had defected to join a group of renegades because “our population is free, not recorded (*liud u nas ne zapisnoi vol’noi*).” This lack of bureaucratic legibility clearly distinguishes the Don from early modern Russia, but it also creates difficulties in determining the number of Cossacks and the ethnic composition of their communities.

In comparative perspective *volia* can be interpreted as liberation from traditional institutions and relations of power and property. Although Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis took American historiography down a detour into national exceptionalism, his emphasis on unrestraint is insightful: “For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant . . . each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past.”

In non-state space beyond the grasp of traditional power structures, the

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4 Cossack testimony, RGADA, f. 111, d. 5, l. 7.
5 For an introduction to Turner’s legacy, see John Mack Faragher, ed., *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: The Significance of the Frontier in American History and Other Essays* (New York, 1994), here p. 59.
communities of the frontier were free to improvise and experiment. The result was an open political system based upon group consensus.  

Correspondence between Moscow and the Don consistently maneuvered along a middle ground between Russian autocracy and Cossack liberty. Both sides could employ the language of liberty for their own purposes, while recognizing the reciprocity in this relationship. In a missive addressed to the Cossacks in 1625, Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich reminded the Cossacks “we have granted you liberty (vam vol’nost’ uchinili).” This statement couched Cossacks’ de facto liberty in terms that were acceptable to autocracy: it became the result of a generous Romanov behest. In 1692, a Don Cossack leader stressed the connection between imperial favor and Cossack freedom: “by the mercy of the Great Sovereigns our Host is comprised of free people (vol’nymi liud’mi), and they live in cooperation with one another.”

Paradoxically, in written communications with Moscow the Cossacks described the Don River as the tsar’s hereditary possession (otchina) and addressed their reports to him as his slaves/bondsmen (kholopy). Why did these self-styled free people employ servile language in their missives? This symbolic submission to tsarist hierarchy demonstrates that they were astute observers of Russian political theater, which required that roles be cast according to Moscow’s scripts. The master–slave metaphor was an important part of Muscovite political culture, but debate still exists about whether for Russians such terms denoted slavish subordination to a divinely appointed despot or ceremonial terms of relative honor and entitlement. In the Cossack context, however, it is clear that subservient language masked pragmatic politics.

On various occasions the language of liberty became a tool for political leverage. In 1632 the Host wrote “you Great Sovereigns are at liberty to take our heads.” Such reminders usually came at tense times and were


8 Cossack testimony, RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 1, l. 8.


10 A. Karpov, *Ural’tsy: istoricheskii ocherk* (Uralsk, 1911), p. 862. For an analysis of one of these incidents, see the last section of Chapter five.
accompanied by veiled threats of disobedience, again suggesting that the tsar’s liberty over them was unlimited in theory, but conditional in practice. On several occasions when they felt that a tsar was imposing his will on them, Cossacks threatened to abandon the Don region to the tsar’s Muslim enemies and move elsewhere to territories beyond government reach. To a large extent Cossack autonomy was guaranteed by the possibility of exit. These statements provide insight into a relationship in which both the “slaves” and their master could be considered free.

The tsar’s diplomatic missives did not refer to the Cossacks as slaves and were always addressed to “Atamans and Cossacks and the whole Don Host” indicating an understanding that in this territory political power was held in common. Letters and diplomatic speeches were publicly delivered to the entire Cossack populace and they emphasized that Cossacks were special recipients of autocratic mercy (milost’) and reward (zhalovanie). By tradition, but not by means of any legally constituted charter or founding document, they enjoyed a separate deal with the ruling house. The precise parameters of the deal would shift over time, and the contours of Cossack identity would also change dramatically, but the distinction between Cossacks and ordinary subjects of the tsar would persist until the twentieth century.

A MULTI-ETHNIC MARTIAL FRATERNITY

Like the pirate communities of the Atlantic world, Cossack communities were open and egalitarian fraternities that cultivated violent and virulently masculine identities. The brotherhood of Don Cossacks was open to all able-bodied men who arrived on the Don, from Turkish defectors to Russian criminals. Oral traditions recorded in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries emphasized that, initially, few women were permitted in the Don region and suggest that resident women were captive subjects of the community, not members of it.

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11 See also RIB, 18: 340, KVSR, 3: 334; N. A. Mininkov, Donskoe kazachestvo v epokhu pozdnego srednevekov’ia (Rostov-na-Donu, 1998), p. 439. Theoretical insights advanced in Albert Hirschman’s studies of collective action suggest that threats of exit can be considered an important form of political bargaining. See Albert O. Hirschman, Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

12 For early examples, see RIB, 18: 253, 246.


14 For a published example of such traditions, see Evlampii Kotel’nikov, “Istoricheskoe svedenie Voiska Donskago o Verkhnei Kurmoarskoi stanitse,” in Chtenia v obshchestve istorii i drevnosti Rossiiskih 3 (1863), 6–7.
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specialist who visited the Don region in the late seventeenth century, even reported that “at first they suffered no women to live among them, but did worse by making use of boys.”

Prior to mass migrations from Russia in the second half of the seventeenth century, the ethnic composition of the Don Cossack communities was heterogeneous. Since Don Cossack identity developed as an overarching category that united people of diverse backgrounds, Don Cossack identity and Russian identity, regardless of what the latter precisely constituted at that time, were not coterminous. A Cossack could be of Russian background, but not all Cossacks were Russians. This is the kind of ethnic process that Donald Horowitz terms proliferation, since a new group comes into existence without its “parent group” (or groups) losing its (or their) identity.

Both Cossack and Muscovite sources stress the hybrid nature of Cossack society. The Muscovite clerk Kotoshikhin in the mid-seventeenth century remarked that Don Cossacks “are by birth and stock (porodoiu) Muscovites and of other towns, newly baptized Tatars, Zaporozhian Cossacks, and Poles.” In a 1659 letter to the tsar, the Don Cossacks reminded him that “in our Host live many foreigners who have crossed over, Turks and Tatars, and also Greeks, and people from various other lands . . . who serve together with us.” Several prominent Cossack leaders openly acknowledged their ethnic heritage. Mikhail Tatarinov led the Cossack capture of Azov in 1637, Kornilo Iakovlev known as “the Circassian” was key in bringing the rebel Sten’ka Razin to justice, and Petr Emelianov, a prominent leader of the Petrine period, was referred to often as “the Turk.”

Multi-culturalism constituted a central feature of Cossack society. According to Admiral Cruys, even in the early eighteenth century three languages were regularly spoken in Cherkassk, the Cossack capital situated in the lower reaches of the Don River: Russian, Turkish, and “Cossack,” which in this context probably means Ukrainian. Many Ukrainians settled permanently in the Don region and until the late seventeenth

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15 Patrick Gordon, *Diary*, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (henceforth RGVIA), f. 846, op. 15, d. 5, l. 539. I have not attempted to reproduce the orthography of the original, and have modernized Gordon’s spelling.
16 N. A. Mininkov asserted: “Cossackdom in full measure conceived of itself as a part of common Russian unity (obshcherusskogo edinstva),” Mininkov, *Donskoe kazachestvo*, p. 443.
19 RIB, 34: 372.
20 Mininkov, *Donskoe Kazachestvo*, p. 196. For Emelianov, see Chapter 12.
21 K. Kreis [C. Cruys], “Rozyskaniia o Done, Azovskom more, Voronezhe i Azove” in *Otechestvennya zapiski* 53 (1824), 50.
century Zaporozhian Cossacks frequently circulated between the lower Don and lower Dnieper. A high degree of Slavic-Turkic bilingualism is confirmed by the fact that Cossacks often reported on conversations, which they had participated in or overheard, while in Tatar or Ottoman settlements. Others acquired knowledge of Turkic languages in the course of relations with Turks and Tatars on the field of battle, during trade, and/or in captivity.

Many early Cossacks can be considered “mestizos,” since they were the products of sexual encounters between Slavic men and Turkic women. One early observer linked the beginnings of community reproduction to successful raiding campaigns in which women were a key kind of booty: “they acquired from Turks, Kumyks, Crimeans, Kubans, Circassians and various mountain Tatars and from other places all kinds of goods and people, and among these females. They began to take these and cohabitate (sozhitel’stovat’) with them, and thereby began to multiply.”

This sometimes created ambiguities that were difficult to resolve. In 1633, a group of Don Cossacks explained their reluctance to take an oath by kissing the cross in the following manner: “On the Don live people of many lands. Even those who are Russian people they live with basurmanki (Muslim women) and others were begotten from basurmanki.”

This was a region where individuals could acknowledge more than one heritage. In 1686, a Don Cossack identified himself as “Emel’ka, son of Kuz’min, Tuma” and explained that he was born in Cherkassk of a Russian father and Turkish mother. The word Tuma was used to describe people of mixed ethnic heritage in the steppe region. In 1685, Tokhtamysh Tuma testified that he was raised as a Muslim in Crimea. His father was a soldier captured in battle at Smolensk and his mother was a “Muslim woman of Russian stock” (basurmanka russkoi porodoi). His ethnic origins could be unambiguously traced to Russia, but his cultural ambiguity made him a

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22 Viktor Brekhunenko, Stosunky ukrainskoho kozatstva z Donom (Kiev, 1998).
23 The following statements are typical of such reports: “the Cossack Zakhar Ivanov traveled to Crimea to trade. While there in Kaffa he overheard the Turks talking among themselves and reported what they said,” RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, 990b; “the Tatars were speaking in Tatar and Karpushka could understand them because he knows Tatar,” Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Voronezhskoi oblasti (henceforth GAVO), f. 5, op. 2, d. 117, l. 171.
24 Aleksandr Rigel’man, Istoriia ili povestovanie o Donskikh Kazakakh (Moscow, 1846), p. 9.
26 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 13, 2940b.
27 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 2641, ll. 162, 172.
tuma. Similarly, the term boldyr’ was used to designate people of mixed ethnicity, questionable identity, or those who had been assimilated into nomadic culture.28

Lamentably, the surviving sources do not provide any reliable statistical information on the ethnic composition of the Cossack population prior to 1700. Moreover, any attempt to retrospectively categorize the region’s population is fraught with difficulty. For example, someone reading the name Iakim Frolov in a Cossack document of the late seventeenth century might assume that this individual was born into the Frolov family, a well-established, influential Don Cossack clan. Only owing to the fact that Iakim visited Moscow and detailed his biography in a petition to the tsar is it possible to establish that he entered the world as a Circassian boy named Gopsiko, who as an adult brought his family to live in the Don region and converted to Christianity.29

While many Slavic settlers arrived in the Don region from the Russian lands to the north and the Ukrainian lands to the west, a considerable number of Slavs arrived in the Don region from Tatar lands, where they had spent time in captivity. The Cossack reports constantly mention the arrival of Slavic captives from the Tatar settlements of Azov and Kuban. In captivity some experienced religious conversion, cultural assimilation, and ethnic de-racination. For example, a captive testified that he was taken by the Tatars as a child and “cannot speak Russian and does not remember his Russian name.”30 Another related that “he doesn’t know whose son he is [i.e. his surname] and which town he is from, because he was taken into captivity at a young age . . . in Tatar his name was Devlet and he heard from the Tatars that he was of Cherkas (Ukrainian) stock (byl porody Cherkaskoi).”31 Any attempt to impose essentialist notions of national identity on individuals whose fates were so complex obscures the importance of the Don as a middle ground.

The Don region was defined by its diversity. It was a place where people of mixed origins and mixed experiences could find a home. Most of the residents of the Don arrived as refugees, fugitives, or entrepreneurs. Even those who relocated from Russia often desired to escape the consequences of past activities or erase past identities that marked them as

28 For Boldyr’ see Boeck, Shifting Boundaries on the Don Steppe Frontier: Cossacks, Empires and Nomads to 1739 (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002), pp. 66–67.
29 Petition to the tsar, RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 8, l. 39.
30 Oral testimony, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, l. 374.
31 Oral testimony, GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 4, l. 22.
serfs, criminals, or heretics. As Kotoshikhin noted “the Don liberates from all kinds of misfortunes.” The political system of the Don region provided opportunities for all comers, regardless of ethnicity, heterodoxy, or pedigree.

**Equality, Participatory Politics, and the Right of Refuge**

The right of refuge was one of the primary reasons that outsiders elected to join Cossack communities. Patrick Gordon provided a detailed description of the right to refuge:

The greatest rogues and evildoers are most acceptable when they come and best trusted because they are assured that they will not return for fear of punishment, yet being once admitted and settled here, they must live under strict laws as to theft, robbery, and other misbehavior, and are according to their wisdom, courage, and activity esteemed.

No less an authority than Stepan Razin boasted to a government official in 1669 that “Among the Cossacks it has never been the custom to hand over fugitives.” Since early Cossack society knew nothing of class, permanent hierarchy, or inherited status, outcasts and outlaws could hope to start new lives and make careers.

The question of social equality among the Don Cossacks merits more serious consideration than it has been given previously. In part, scholars have been led astray by mistakenly assuming that the oligarchs who emerged in the Don during the reign of Peter I always existed. Soviet historians were especially inclined to seek, and thus “find,” class inequality and class struggle among the Don Cossacks. Most discussions have focused on the Cossack starshina, a term usually translated as “elders.” A. P. Pronshtein, the author of a detailed and insightful scholarly study of social relations in the region, considered the elders a “hereditary corporation of people, possessing riches and making use of great influence.” In contrast, my reading of the documents suggests that the term simply means leaders or elected officials.

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33 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 5, l. 472ob.  
34 KVSR, 1: 151.  
35 See Boeck, *Shifting Boundaries*, 162–64. For an influential early study, see B. N. Tikhomirov, Razinshchina (Moscow, 1930), p. 53.  
37 A document from 1660 states that the starshina of a newly formed group of bandits was hanged. Thus the term itself could not inherently denote any hereditary or corporate status. RIB, 34: 699. For other examples, see Boeck, *Shifting Boundaries*, pp. 75–78.
For the first half of the seventeenth century the evidence of equality is unambiguous. In 1638 the Russian government was on several occasions thwarted in its attempts to have the Don Cossack ataman and ten representatives of the “best sort of people” (lutchie liudi) come to Moscow to testify about the situation in Azov. Finally, a Muscovite official visiting the Don inquired why the Cossacks hadn’t sent any best people in their delegations as requested. He received a blunt reply: “Our best people are those who are elected by the Host and whom we send to the sovereign. [Otherwise] we don’t have best people on the Don, all of us are equal with one another (vse mezh sebia rovny).”

While there were no entrenched, hereditary elites in the Don region before the eighteenth century, temporary rank and elevated status could be conveyed to individuals by the community through election. A rough and raucous form of participatory government emerged in the region. Principles of popular sovereignty guided decision-making, but the Cossacks rarely revealed detailed information on their internal affairs to the government. As I will suggest in Chapter six, selective divulging of information about unruly assemblies and Cossack “liberty” could be a useful rhetorical strategy for explaining Cossack non-compliance with government orders.

The ability of ordinary Cossacks to participate in the selection of their military and political leaders is the main hallmark of the region’s political system. An eloquent description of Cossack politics by a Don Cossack emphasized that leaders were elected by universal consent (vseobshchim soveto).

Patrick Gordon reported: “They choose an ataman by most votes.” On several occasions the Cossacks deposed leaders whose policies they no longer favored. Until the reign of Peter I, the Russian government played no role in the selection of Don Cossack leaders. The ataman of the Host possessed important symbolic power as the Don region’s supreme elected leader, but independently he wielded no formal executive power. Instead, the Cossack assembly, called the krug
Imperial boundaries

(henceforth krug) because it convened in the round, was invested with political sovereignty. An ataman’s main role seems to have been to preside over the rowdy meetings of the krug and submit proposals for its approval. Even the fragmentary accounts of Cossack assemblies provided by government representatives talk about atamans giving speeches, pleading with tears in their eyes, and speaking with “intense passion.” Gordon suggests that an issue was resolved by majority acclamation when the “greatest part of them approve...by throwing up their caps and crying out lubo, lubo, [sic] which is as much as, it pleaseth.” Alternatively, if the assembly reached an impasse it could disperse or dissolve into a brawl.

In addition to serving as a political assembly, the Cossack krug also served as an economic, ceremonial, and judicial space. Convened in the maidan, a Turkic word for a square or large open space, the krug was held in plain view of the population and was accessible to all Cossacks. Muscovite government officials were received not by the ataman, but by the populace. Negotiations with Tatar leaders were also conducted in public. Decisions to conduct raids were authorized by the krug and the spoils of raids were divided by it. The krug acted simultaneously as judge, jury, and, if needed, executioner. Instead of employing courts staffed by professionals trained in written laws, the whole community resolved conflicts by a process of public debate and decision.

The krug’s role as an instrument of Cossack participatory politics is best demonstrated by a case from the mid-seventeenth century. The testimony of Andrei Lazarev, a Muscovite official who was responsible for delivering the annual subsidy to the Cossacks, clearly indicates that no one was exempt from answering to the krug, not even visiting Russian dignitaries. In 1649 Lazarev was called to the krug to testify about letters he wrote to the tsar complaining that Cossacks were not complying with government orders. Fearing for his life and claiming – perhaps feigning – illness, he declined to appear, stating that if guilty of any offense he would answer only to the tsar, not to the Cossacks. Outraged, the Cossacks assembled in the krug and “all shouted that for those words it would be pleasing (liubo) to them to execute [Lazarev].” The “sword of the Host” (sablia voiskovaia) – its very name indicative of a collective ritual element – was brought out in

45 For elaboration, see Boeck, Shifting Boundaries, pp. 81–89; for two prominent published examples, consult DAI, 10: 208, KVSR, 2.2: 57.
46 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 5, l. 540.
47 Report of government official, RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 12, l. 2–3.
49 RIB, 19: 249–44.
preparation for an execution, and a group of Cossacks was sent to drag Lazarev by the feet to the krug. Luckily for him, the quick intervention of the men under his command prevented an immediate execution.

Not long thereafter, however, Lazarev was seized after praying in a chapel – not even Orthodox religious obligations provided an exemption from answering to the assembly – and was dragged in front of the krug “like a prisoner.” There he was upbraided by Ataman Naum Vasiliev for secretly writing to the tsar. Lazarev’s explanation that “as from God, so from the tsar nothing can be kept concealed” failed to satisfy the crowd. A witness who was called to testify that Cossacks in Moscow had faced censure in the Ambassadorial Chancery for Lazarev’s actions, failed to corroborate the ataman’s accusation. According to Lazarev the crowd “seeing Naum’s obvious falsehood, that he agitates for my death even though I am innocent, vociferously shouted at him [Vasiliev], and . . . no more speeches after that were addressed to me.”

This incident demonstrates several important features of the Cossack view of justice. Even though Lazarev was a visiting representative of the tsar, while in the Don region he was viewed as subject to Cossack laws. His status as the representative of a power that was theoretically superior, the tsar, apparently did not in the eyes of the Cossacks give him any form of diplomatic immunity. Even in spite of prejudice against him, for his offensive words and failure to submit to their jurisdiction, Lazarev was nonetheless given a hearing and exonerated by the Cossack assembly, in spite of the fact that their ataman was agitating against him.

A DE-CENTRALIZED WORLD OF FORTIFIED COMMUNITIES

The major political consequence of popular sovereignty was that no centralized system of administrative control developed in the region. The absence of written laws or impersonal institutions sharply distinguishes the political system of the Don from both “feudal” and bureaucratic states. There is no evidence that the Host systematically levied any taxes or maintained a budget. No police force existed prior to 1700. Hence, before the eighteenth century the entire region required only a few scribes who were literate enough to record basic transactions and read orders from the Host.

The Host in Cherkassk claimed supreme authority over all settlements under Don Cossack jurisdiction, but decentralization left virtually all issues
except war and peace in the hands of self-governing, local Cossack communities. Owing to the nomadic threat, Cossack settlements were usually surrounded by wooden palisades or earthen walls. Each fortified settlement, or gorodok, governed itself independently. The fragmentary information that exists about local government suggests that each settlement elected its ataman and other officials. Local convocations convened in each Cossack settlement and its community, termed stanitsa, would determine how to utilize lands, waters, and other resources, which were designated by the Tatar term yurt. Conflicts between communities would either be decided through negotiation, or appeals to the Host for arbitration.

The Host primarily relied on local obedience to Cossack traditions to enforce orders emanating from the capital. The krug in Cherkassk reserved the right to approve raids, mobilize for military actions, and elect atamans to lead campaigns. All Cossack communities were expected to comply with orders for mobilization that were sent from the Host and occasionally they were expected to send representatives to participate in a convocation (s’eезд) of the whole Host. A community that did not comply with orders or participate in convocations could be viewed as suspicious and placed under probation (penia voiskovaia), which meant its residents could not go on campaigns or receive shares of supplies sent by the tsar. Since the government subsidy was delivered to Cherkassk and divided into shares there, if necessary, it could be used as an economic lever for control over the hinterlands.

If the ataman of the Host had problems convincing the krug in Cherkassk to bend to his will, it was even more difficult to impose a single authority over the Cossack hinterlands without the willing compliance of the population. In turbulent times, however, the Host could resort to both threats and cajoling to seek compliance with its orders. For example in 1638, when writing to the northern communities to send reinforcements to Azov, the Host evoked both visions of Cossack glory and threats of ostracism for those who failed to provide assistance. In 1673 it warned that any

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51 This section is based on V. D. Sukhorukov, Istoriishesko opisanie zemli voiska Donskago (Novocherkassk, 1869), pp. 382–83, Mininkov, Donskoe kazachestvo, pp 110–11, and Boeck, Shifting Boundaries, pp. 89, 221. For the few surviving documents on local government, see Trudy Donskago voiskovogo statisticheskago komiteta, 1867, 1: 58–67.

52 Mininkov, Donskoe kazachestvo, pp. 220–21. See also the evidence presented in subsequent chapters.

53 In 1687, for example, the Cossacks living along the Medveditsa River were not given shares of the subsidy due to their continuing support for the religious schism. DAI, 17: 137.

54 Cossack letter, RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, d. 98, 336. For the case from 1673 see S. G. Svatikov, Rossia i Don, 1549–1917 (Belgrade, 1924), p. 132.
community that did not comply with an order would be eternally subject to violence and plunder from fellow Cossacks.

The political system of the Don region functioned fairly well as long as most residents of the region were satisfied with the levels of political liberties and economic opportunities available to them. The threat of coercive violence from Cherkassk was probably not a major factor in compliance, since there are very few known cases in which the Host had to assert its power. Rather, the majority of Cossacks possessed a personal stake in the maintenance of the Cossack order as long as it continued to insure their personal liberty as well as freedom from taxes, the plow, the knout, government officials, and landlords. Collectively, Cossacks shared the right to participate in the governing of their communities and to be publicly judged by their peers. They were proud of their traditions and way of life: the words of an order sent by the Host in 1640 reminded Cossacks to act valiantly since “all lands have envied our Cossack way of life.”

55 Cossack letter, RGADA, f. 210, d. 98, l. 336.
While the Don steppe frontier was no peaceable kingdom it was also no scene of incessant holy war. The raiding economy was calibrated towards equilibrium. Neither the Cossacks nor their nomadic Tatar adversaries were capable of eliminating each other from the face of the earth. They lived in cycles of aggressive and amicable symbiosis, exchanging goods and people under conditions of both war and peace. Although imperial affiliations could be important for local communities, especially for continued access to metropolitan markets and resources, on the ground allegiances and loyalties were ambiguous. The Cossacks were actors in an imperial drama, but government objectives often took second stage to local patterns of raiding, trading, and peacemaking.

The Don region was a middle ground in which the Slavic world receded into the Turkic world. “The middle ground,” Richard White has argued, “is the place in between: in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires.”¹ The Don Cossacks constantly capitalized on their position as operators on the middle ground and derived their subsistence from the shifting boundaries between the Islamic and Christian worlds. While religious differences and imperial objectives legitimated raiding, local peacemaking defied religious dichotomies and forged patterns of common interest. Ransoming activities blurred boundaries between north and south: cross-cultural cooperation could move captive people across political jurisdictions from Moscow to the Caucasus.² The Cossacks forged diplomatic

² As several recent studies attest, historians are finally putting the ransom business at the center of their analyses of encounters between Muslims and Christians in the pre-modern period. Geza David and Pal Fodor, eds., Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders (Leiden, 2007); Jarbel Rodriguez, Captives and Their Saviors in the Medieval Crown of Aragon (Washington, D.C., 2007); Yvonne Friedman, Encounter Between Enemies: Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (Leiden, 2002); Enrica Lucchini, La Merce Umana: Schiavitù e Riscatto dei Liguri nel Seicento (Rome, 1990); Ellen G. Friedman, Spanish Captives in North Africa in the Early Modern Age (Madison, Wisc., 1983).
deals and relationships of trust with both their Russian imperial patrons and their nomadic adversaries.

THE DON COSSACKS AS CLIENTS OF THE MUSCOVITE STATE

The doctrine of plausible deniability allowed the Russian and Ottoman empires to maintain amicable relations while their steppe clients jostled for ascendancy in the frontier. After a few serious confrontations with the Ottoman Empire in the 1560s, the Muscovite state generally pursued a risk-averse policy towards the steppes north of the Black Sea, preferring for most of the seventeenth century to contract with clients rather than deploy its own forces in the lower Don region. The Ottoman side staffed its forts in the region (Azov at the mouth of the Don River and a string of forts along the northern shores of the Black Sea such as Kaffa, Kerch, Temriuk, and Taman) with relatively small garrisons, suggesting that it, too, had little interest in expansion. Until the last decades of the seventeenth century, relations between the Muscovite and Ottoman empires were couched in terms of “love” and “friendship.”

The tsars’ alliance with the Don Cossacks was in many important ways fundamentally different from their relations with the Kalmyks and other nomadic groups of the steppe frontier. The tsars did not demand diplomatic hostages (amanaty) from the Don Cossacks, they did not succeed in early attempts to make Cossacks swear oaths of allegiance and they permitted the transfer of both firearms and gunpowder, which were denied to the nomads, to the Don Host. The Don Cossacks acknowledged an allegiance to the tsar and performed services for him in the steppe in exchange for an annual subsidy and the right to tax exemptions while trading in Russia. At the same time they lived outside of the Muscovite state, governed themselves without outside interference, and conducted independent relations with other frontier communities.

The special status of the Don Cossacks derived from their jurisdiction under the auspices of the Ambassadorial Chancery. Grigorii Kotoshikhin

3 Since Muscovite policy has been ably surveyed by Novosel’skii and Cossack actions have been discussed by Mininkov, Svatikov, and Sukhorukov, I will focus my attention here on the cooperative aspects of the steppe frontier that have been neglected in previous studies.

4 According to Ottoman records, the Janissary garrison at Azov fluctuated between 1,000 and 2,500 men. See Alan W. Fisher, “Azov in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in Jahrhücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 21, heft 2 (1972), 172–74.

writes: “When they come to Moscow they are accorded the same honor as prominent foreigners.” In addition to several small delegations (legkie stanitsy) sent each year to Moscow with reports, each fall the Don Host sent a large delegation (zimovaia stanitsa) to winter in the capital. While being wined and dined at court, these Cossacks were generously rewarded with diplomatic gifts consisting of luxury goods such as cloths, furs, devotional objects, and weapons. The government compensated Cossacks for travel expenses and assigned each Cossack a subsistence allowance consisting of money and liquor. Every spring these recipients of the tsar’s benevolence were sent back to the Don to renew the reciprocal cycle of service, reporting news, and reward.

RUSSIAN SUBSIDY AND COSSACK SUBSISTENCE

While the Don Cossacks were autonomous actors in frontier affairs, the foundations of their society were based upon a delicate balancing act between the Muscovite north and Ottoman south. Raiding, subsidy, and exploitation of natural resources constituted the main subsistence activities, but these activities were all linked in greater or lesser degrees to metropolitan interests. The Cossack and Tatar communities of the Don steppe frontier shared in a common raiding economy upon which both were dependent. Neither group practiced agriculture extensively because of endemic seasonal raiding and warfare, but both raised and herded large quantities of livestock. Fishing and trapping were also significant activities in the local economy.

Both relied to a large extent on trade ties to the states with which they were loosely affiliated. As Anatoly Khazanov has demonstrated, nomads and semi-nomadic pastoralists invariably depend upon relations with sedentary and urban communities and markets. For the Tatars of the Kuban’ steppes, metropolitan markets at Azov and other Ottoman coastal towns were necessary for the conversion of moveable wealth, whether livestock or human captives, into cash. Cossack commerce also depended to a large degree on access to metropolitan goods and markets in Russia. The ability of both groups to pursue distant raids depended upon a relatively secure rear flank.

V. D. Sukhorukov, Istoricheske opisanie (Novocherkassk, 1869), pp. 394–96.
Anatoly M. Khazanov, Nomads and the Outside World (Madison, 1994).
Economic exchange was an important factor in keeping the Don region in the gravitational pull of Russia. The natural resources of the Don could be exchanged with outsiders for goods that were not produced locally. Since the Cossacks were exempt from customs duties, there is only fragmentary evidence on trade between Russia and the Don region. In 1668, Cossacks testified that Russian traders usually brought grain, liquor, clothes, and textiles to the Don and took back salt, fish, furs, and horses. This picture was largely confirmed by the research of Russian historians. Cossacks depended entirely on grain supplies from Russia, since raiding made plow agriculture almost impossible.

While trade was important, direct subsidy constituted the major contribution of the Russian government to the Cossack raiding economy. With only a few exceptions, every year between 1614 and the closing of the Don steppe frontier, the Romanov dynasty delivered to the Cossacks an annual award for their services. Every winter government officials would concentrate stocks of supplies near Voronezh and river boats would be constructed in anticipation of the Donskoi otpusk, the spring release of this subsidy to the Cossacks. This annual event coincided with the return of the Cossack winter delegation from the capital.

Though amounts increased incrementally over time, the shipments from Russia to the Don were never correlated with the size of Cossack populations. The amount of the award was the result of autocratic, or rather bureaucratic, fiat and was based upon what the Muscovite government was willing to provide, not necessarily Cossack needs. Hence it was a subsidy. Grain supplies constituted the largest part of the government shipment, comprising several hundred tons annually. Every year over two tons of lead and gunpowder were also delivered to the Cossacks. This component of the subsidy was especially important, since the export of both items was otherwise prohibited. Muscovite weapons and gunpowder evened the playing field between Cossacks and the nomads, who considerably outnumbered them. Aside from these essentials, large amounts of cash, precious textiles, and liquor were also sent annually for distribution among the Cossacks.

\[10\] A. A. Novosel’skii, “Iz istorii donskoi torgovli v XVII veke,” in Istoriicheskie zapiski 26 (1948), 204, 209, 212.


When the subsidy was delivered to the krug in Cherkassk, the Cossacks were expected to organize fanfare that included shooting from cannons and small arms and prayers for the health of the tsar and his family.

Though the Muscovite government had no direct administrative control over the Don, trade and subsidy gave it tremendous levers for indirect influence over the Cossacks. It could withhold vital supplies, restrict or even completely stop trade. Interdependence, however, usually dictated compromise. The Cossacks had no other source of grain and gunpowder and the Russian state had no other reliable and comparatively cheap means of exerting pressure on Crimean and Ottoman territories.

**RAID, TRADE, OR CRUSADE?**

Although the Don steppe frontier has often been imagined as a scene of polarized imperial competition, local affairs frequently prevailed over imperial objectives. Before discussing what the raiding economy was, it is necessary to briefly explain what it was not. As is invariably the case when patriotic-minded scholars study frontiers that have long been trampled underfoot by the march of time, anachronistic and ethnocentric biases shape the scholarly imagination of the frontier and its role in national development. In this case scholarly emphasis on patriotic crusading has resulted in a confused view of raiding and a blind eye towards trading.

In particular, certain Russian historians have envisioned Cossacks as latter-day crusaders, gallant Russian knights who were fighting a veritable holy war against Muslims. The following quote, by the eminent Soviet literary historian A. N. Robinson, exemplifies this approach:

> In equal measure the Don Cossacks were patriots of the Muscovite state and the Russian land as a whole. Likewise they were passionate adherents of the “Orthodox Christian faith.” These feelings and emotions were particularly sharpened under the influence of their incessant struggle with the Mohammedan East, with “Muslim pagans.”

In recent works Russian historians have privileged patriotism, religion, and the desire to free Slavic captives in their discussions of Cossack raiding. This is not surprising since significant anti-Tatar and anti-Muslim

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14 For a recent example of this approach, see N. A. Mininkov, ‘Donskoe kazachestvo XVI–XVII vv.: cherty kharaktera, v zgliad na mir, osobennosti myshleniia,’” in Novyi Chasovoi 6–7 (Saint Petersburg, 1998), 8–19.
cultural biases have influenced Russian historiography since the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{15} Even when considerable evidence points towards Muscovite cooperation with steppe powers and Islamic states, historians have often followed narrative sources, written by churchmen who stress struggle with “Muslim pagans.” Finally, a group of literary texts about the taking of Azov by the Cossacks has heavily influenced how historians view the Don Cossacks and their society.\textsuperscript{16} The so-called Azov tales describe the taking of Azov by the Cossacks in 1637 and their defense of the city against a massive Ottoman siege in 1641. Because these literary tales provide memorable scenes of valiant Christian heroism and long passages in which the Cossacks rebuke and verbally duel with Ottoman officials, they have shaped how historians view Cossack society and mentalities. I have recently demonstrated, however, that they were written in Moscow, so they have only limited value for reconstructing Cossack ideology.\textsuperscript{17}

The confessional component of Cossack identity was certainly an important one, but other considerations entered the picture often enough to give caution against viewing Cossacks as either saints or crusaders.\textsuperscript{18} There was no official ecclesiastical presence in Cossack communities and the region was primarily served by itinerant priests. At various times individual Cossacks petitioned the tsar for permission to travel to pay homage to icons and holy sites in Russia, which would suggest that they identified with traditional forms of Orthodox piety. When a plague epidemic successfully subsided in 1650, the Host openly declared its commitment to the Orthodox faith by building and consecrating the first church in the region, a cathedral in Cherkassk dedicated to the resurrection of Jesus. Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich patronized this endeavor by subsidizing its construction and sending books, icons, vestments, and liturgical vessels.\textsuperscript{19}

Judging from the Cossack reports, however, there was no “crusading idea” or overriding religious zeal that motivated Cossack military


\textsuperscript{16} For the texts and commentary see Adrianova-Peretts, \textit{Voinskie povesti}.

\textsuperscript{17} For evidence that the texts originate in Moscow, see Boeck, \textit{Shifting Boundaries on the Don Steppe Frontier: Cossacks, Empires and Nomads to 1739} (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002), pp. 770–82.

\textsuperscript{18} On the situation in the seventeenth century, see V. G. Druzhinin, \textit{Raskol na Donu v kontse XVII veka} (Saint Petersburg, 1889), pp. 54–59. See also E. Ovsiannikov, “Sviatoi Tikhon Zadonskii, kak blagoustroitel’ tserkovnoi zhizni i deiatel’ v bor’be s’o staroobriadcheskim raskolom v Donskoi ukrainie,” \textit{Voronezhskii starina} 15 (1914), 3–64.

actions. There also seems to have been little or no unmitigated animosity towards non-Christians. Non-Christian nomadic allies of the Cossacks lived side by side with Cossacks.\textsuperscript{20} In literary tales the Cossacks could defiantly exclaim “We Christians cannot make peace with or trust Muslims!” but in reality they often entered into relationships of trust with Muslims.\textsuperscript{21}

If not crusade, then what? Trading, raiding, and ransoming overlapped to such an extent that they blurred into one continuum of military/economic activity. With the notable exception of the conquest of Azov, campaigns often served little strategic purpose other than plunder. There were very few pitched open battles and territory was neither conquered nor economically exploited. The overwhelming majority of military actions were daring, seasonal, lightning-quick raids in which movable wealth (money, luxury goods, livestock, and people) was appropriated and carried off. Unlike in modern warfare, the goal was not necessarily to annihilate adversaries, but to procure resources. A good campaign, either by land or by sea, usually resulted in more captives than casualties.

In his history of Ukraine Mykhailo Hrushevsky referred to early encounters between Cossacks and Tatars as a kind of “steppe sport.”\textsuperscript{22} I find this notion intriguing because it implies a degree of give and take and suggests that raiding could be a rule-governed activity. What might seem at first to be a frontier free-for-all was in fact a struggle rife with cross-cultural rules of engagement. Periods of attacking, killing, and looting were followed by significant “time outs” in which peace was made, goods were exchanged, and captives were redeemed. There were many occasions in which Cossacks and nomads put aside their weapons and observed jointly created rules of non-violent and amicable interaction. As Richard White has emphasized: “The middle ground depended on the inability of both sides to gain their ends through force.”\textsuperscript{23}

Even an atypical event such as the Cossack conquest of Azov failed to alter the pre-existing patterns of interaction. In March of 1641, during the lull in between Ottoman attempts to recapture Azov, a Muscovite servitor sent with a letter to the Cossacks in Azov reported the following:

\textsuperscript{20} See G. E. Tsapnik, \textit{Kalmyki i donskie kazaki} (Elista, 2005).
\textsuperscript{21} For the Cossack exclamation see Adrianova-Peretts, \textit{Voinskie povesti}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{23} White, \textit{The Middle Ground}, p. 52.
While he, Anufrii, was there about twenty traders came to Azov from Temriuk [an Ottoman city on the Black Sea coast] and brought printed cotton fabrics, moroccos, silks, brocaded textiles, and other goods, and after trading them they left. Prior to their arrival the traders sent word to the Cossacks, then they sent one representative and the Cossacks trusted him and the ataman gave him his hand. Trusting in this, the traders came to Azov and traded. The traders exchanged their goods for Tatar captives.\(^{24}\)

Here in encapsulated form one can see how even at the height of conflict trade and ransom could function in tandem and depend upon common trust that was symbolized by a union of hands.

While trade could even take place in times of crisis, it most often coincided with local peace agreements.\(^{25}\) Peace was usually concluded between the Don Host and officials in Azov, who negotiated for the Tatars under their jurisdiction. A report prepared by the Ambassadorial Chancery in 1696 sums up the pattern of relations between the Cossacks and their neighbors: “The Don Cossacks lived with the Azovites according to the old and ancient customs of the Host. Sometimes they lived in peace and sometimes in breach of peace. Letters from the Great Sovereign commanding them to make or break peace with the Azovites have not been sent.”\(^{26}\) The clerk who prepared the report is trying to stress that, as a rule, Muscovite officials did not insert themselves into local frontier relations. Only during an exchange of imperial ambassadors did Muscovite officials request a local peace in the Don region.

Local peace agreements assumed a diversity of forms. In 1649, the Don Cossacks made peace with the Azovites “for the sake of the Sovereign’s ambassador and the Turkish ambassador” but they did not reach an agreement on the length of the peace.\(^{27}\) In 1671, a mutual non-aggression pact formed the basis of a peace agreement.\(^{28}\) In 1692, the Cossacks wrote: “We concluded peace with the Azovites two months ago on the basis of oaths, not diplomatic hostages, that we shall make peace in order to exchange captives. How long the peace will last is unknown. Whenever one side commits an offense, the peace will be breached.”\(^{29}\) In these examples we see various motivations for peace and different mechanisms for observing peace.


\(^{25}\) RIB, 29: 277; RIB, 34: 199; RGADA, f. 111, 1676, d. 13, l. 88; RGADA, f. 111, 1713, d. 18, l. 96b.

\(^{26}\) RGADA, f. 111, 1695, d. 12, l. 238.  

\(^{27}\) RIB, 29: 277.

\(^{28}\) Krestianskaia voina pod predvoditel’stvom Stepana Razina: sbornik dokumentov (hereafter KVS) (Moscow, 1959), 1: 171.

\(^{29}\) RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 1, l. 11.
Another form of peace illustrates how local conceptions of common interest could override imperial affiliations. In 1657, the Cossacks provided the following report to Moscow:

We concluded peace with the Azovites on the basis of oaths (za dushami)...they swore according to their faith and kissed the Quran that they would give back all Cossacks who were taken during the breach of peace and return all Cossack possessions and horses and cattle. They also swore that they will tell all news that they hear regarding possible campaigns of the Turkish or Crimean tsars. The Azovites adhered to their oath, and Shaban, the Bey of Azov, sent word that the Crimean tsar ordered all Crimeans and Nogais to prepare for campaign and that he with his children and the murzas would attack Rus'.

Similar oaths were sworn and upheld in 1670. While this testimony may seem strange to modern sensibilities, on occasion each side pledged to warn the other on any impending action that would jeopardize the security of the other.

Since both sides worked to build trust, they sometimes preferred no peace to an inadequate peace. In 1670 the Don Host refused to conclude peace with Azov, citing the fact that it could not force the followers of Sten‘ka Razin to abide by it. “If the Azovites are caused foolish injury,” the Don Cossacks reasoned, “they will no longer trust us in the future.”

In 1686, Azov leaders refused to even speak to Don Cossack peacemakers (mirovshchiki) citing the fact that “we have nothing to pay compensation with since vessels with trade goods and the Sultan’s salaries have not arrived.”

When peace between the frontier communities was concluded, goods and people moved back and forth between the Don region and Azov. In 1676, the Cossacks reported to Moscow: “Because of the peace the Cossacks travel to Azov and the Azovites travel to Cherkassk and trade all kinds of goods and foodstuffs with one another without fear of danger.” In 1693, the Don Cossacks reported that “because we are at peace, many of our Cossacks travel to Azov to trade.” In 1700, a Cossack from Cherkassk named Zakhar Ivanov traveled with two Greeks to Kuban’ to trade and while there he had “many lengthy conversations with the Kuban’ residents in Turkish and Tatar because he knows those languages.” Just in these few examples we see how the middle ground of local peacemaking brought

30 RIB, 34: 199. 31 KVSR, 2.2: 101. 32 KVSR, 1: 155.
33 Cossack testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 12, l. 324.
34 Cossack testimony, RGADA, f. 111, 1676, d. 13, l. 88.
35 RGADA, f. 111, 1693, d. 10, l. 19.
36 Sankt-Peterburgskii filial Instituta rossiiskoi iistorii RAN (hereafter SPFIRI), oral testimony, f. 226, op. 1, d. 543, l. 3.
A middle ground between autonomy and dependence

erstwhile adversaries together to exchange goods, people, and even food and information.

Unfortunately, the surviving evidence does not yield information on the volume of trade between the Cossacks and Ottoman territories. This does not mean that trade was insignificant, but only that it cannot be adequately documented. Because there were no customs posts or commercial taxes in the Don region, traditional sources for documenting trade are absent. Moreover, within local trade networks there was no clear boundary between exchanging goods and exchanging people. For example, in 1700 a group of thirty Tatar merchants brought both trade goods and ten captives to exchange/ransom. Other than a few general statements such as this one and those above, almost no mention is made in Cossack documents of what exactly was traded and in what quantities. Fortunately, however, after taking Azov from the Ottoman Empire, Russian customs officials recorded the contents of the first Ottoman merchants to pass through Azov. The cargo of three boats which arrived in mid-September 1699 from Kerch in the Crimea gives some indication of what was traded, but it is impossible to evaluate how representative they were of a previous volume of trade. Their combined load, among other things, included several hundred pieces of cloth and clothing made from materials ranging from camel hair to silk, over three tons of dried fruits, hundreds of pounds of soap and rice, 400 pieces of porcelain ware, and over forty gallons of narbek, an alcoholic beverage. Almost no information about what Turkish traders brought back has been preserved, but traditional Don exports were furs, skins, salted fish, and caviar. Just to cite one available example, in 1704 a Turkish trader coming from Cherkassk paid customs duties on over two tons of caviar!

Raiding often functioned like trade in that it involved a transfer of goods, though this was achieved through extra-economic means. For rank-and-file Cossacks it represented an available, but risky, source of acquiring wealth. After each successful raid the spoils were divided up in roughly equal proportions among all those who participated, with larger shares going to the party’s leaders. Part of the booty was presented also to the

38 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhip voenno-morskogo flota (hereafter RGAVMF), oral testimony, f. 177, d. 14, l. 66.
39 RGAVMF, f. 176, d. 27, 54–56 ob.
Imperial boundaries

ataman and officials of the Don Host who had sanctioned the raid. Some of the booty was marketed by those who had received it as their share, but middlemen often purchased much of it at low prices for ready cash. Captives not prominent enough to ransom would be sold as slaves, while ransom-brokers purchased those who could promise a significant ransom. Ransom fees generally ranged from two to three times the price of a male slave, but would climb proportionally in relation to a person’s status in his own society.

As an important cross-cultural economic activity, ransoming required time and patience. In 1692, the Cossacks reported that they had attacked a group of Tatars who raided the Don region and dispersed them. A Cossack testified to government officials:

Those who gave up we took captive, while we slaughtered those who continued to fight. At present there are many captives on the Don and they all are locked up in chains. They are being held under guard by Frol Minaev, Ivan Semenov, Volodimer Dmitriev, and many others who received them during the division of spoils (duvan).\[^{41}\]

Since captives might escape they had to be held in place until they could be ransomed. In 1686, a Cossack testified in Moscow that in the Don region “there are over two hundred Tatar commoners who were taken at different times and are sitting in anticipation of ransom.”\[^{42}\] Given that ransom fees for adult males often exceeded ninety rubles, the ransom value of the two hundred Tatars on hand in 1686 may have exceeded that year’s government cash subsidy to the Cossacks (5,000 rubles) by a ratio of over 3:1. While this example provides some perspective on the economic importance of ransom activities, there are too many missing variables – such as how many Cossacks were in Tatar captivity that year – to use it as a benchmark. It should be noted, however, that 1686 was neither described as a boom year or a bust year for Cossack raiding.

THE CROSS-CULTURAL RANSOM BUSINESS AS A MIDDLE GROUND

Ransoming blurred the boundaries of war and peace. Though obliged to warfare for its existence, it could reduce conflict or heighten it. A just, smooth ransom deal could soothe passions, while a deal that was perceived as unfair could provoke new raids to be undertaken in vengeance. Both Cossacks and Tatars recognized the institution of baranta (literally “that

\[^{41}\] RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 3, l. 108.

\[^{42}\] A. A. Lishin, Akty otnosiaschiesia k istorii voiska Donskogo (Novocherkassk, 1891), 1: 138.
which is due to me”), which Virginia Martin has described from Kazakh materials as “one method of resolving disputes, which was undertaken as self-reprisal when other solutions were deemed untenable, with the ultimate aim of avenging insult and upholding personal and clan honor.” To give an example of baranta in action, in 1701 a Russian cavalryman named Ivan Balaban from the newly established Petrine fort at Azov unwittingly became the victim of a ransom deal that had gone sour. Earlier a prominent Tatar named Temirkazi had been captured by the Don Cossacks. Though he had been ransomed, he felt aggrieved that his kin had been forced to pay a ransom several times the going rate. To avenge himself, Temirkazi took the Russian as baranta and held him until both sides were ready to negotiate again. In such cases, after enough offenses had accumulated on both sides, peacemakers would meet to agree upon a razdelka (settlement) in which both sides were either compensated or agreed to mutually erase their claims.

Because ransom was such a highly delicate matter it was largely the preserve of prominent figures and professionals. Ransom-brokers functioned like modern bail bond providers, but they plied their cross-cultural trade under much more difficult circumstances. They introduced order and predictability into what were dangerous, chaotic, and risky situations. Without a well-developed system with mutually acknowledged rules, the average Cossack or Tatar would have had little hope of a safe ransom transaction. Where would prospective ransomers and redeemers meet? How would they communicate? What if the “other” side failed to deliver? What if there was an ambush in preparation? In short, by creating a middle ground between the two societies the ransom-brokers were able to facilitate passages from captivity to freedom.

The ransom business was built upon two foundations: trust and surety (poruka). Trust accumulated over successive deals and was essential for expediting the release of captives. For example, in 1677 the Cossacks offered to serve as intermediaries for the Russian government in its negotiations with the Crimean khan for the release of Boyar Vasilii Borisovich Sheremetev and stol’nik Andrei Romodanovskii. The government representatives had wrangled for over a month over where and how to exchange the ransom fee, which amounted to tens of thousands of rubles. The negotiations produced few results. Hearing this, the Cossacks offered to bargain for a quick release, claiming that as soon as the money reached the Don the captives

44 Bureaucratic summary, RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, ll. 175–77.
could be released since “we trust the Azovites and they trust us.” Though in this case the government declined the Cossack offer, Russian captives who contracted with ransom-brokers would often be released before the financial transaction had been completed. This was based not only on trust, but also on the concept of surety.

If a broker would agree to be responsible for the ransom fee, a captive could be entrusted to his care for a certain period of time (usually a few months). A case from the 1670s demonstrates the role of trust and surety in ransom transactions. A Russian soldier named Vasilii Govorukhov, who was captured by the Tatars, approached two Don Cossacks, who were in Azov for peace talks, and “petitioned” them to ransom him. They agreed to be responsible for him and Govorukhov’s Tatar owner released him into their custody. The terms of their deal were described thus: “The Tatar’s agreement with the providers of surety was that they would deliver to Azov his brother, who was in jail in Moscow. If his brother was no longer alive, they were to pay a ransom fee of 150 rubles for Vasilii.” Not only was the Tatar willing to put his trust in the Cossack ransom-brokers, but he also put faith in the fact that the Cossacks could help free his brother who was captured while raiding in Ukraine a few years earlier. They became his link to the distant world of Moscow. As a part of their separate deal with the Russian authorities, the Cossacks often successfully petitioned the Ambassadorial Chancery to hand over to them Tatars who were being held in Russian jails.

The prevalence of credit operations also indicates that ransoming assumed a reliable degree of regularity. In 1701 a Cossack named Mikhail Sulin reported that he traveled to Kaffa and Kerch to ransom two Tatars. While one was ransomed, the other was “handed over on credit” (drugova otdal v dolg). An interesting document from 1706, produced by the Cossacks for the use of the Russian representative in a series of negotiations with the Ottoman side on unresolved claims after borders were introduced, demonstrates how widespread ransom deals involving credit could be. The list details the claims of a dozen Cossacks who had outstanding ransom debts owed to them by Tatars. Some of the claims involved money, but the majority of claims consisted of hundreds of pieces of cloth and textiles, as well as paper, archery equipment, and boots. Once again it is evident that exchange of goods and people were intertwined to a

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45 Cossack testimony, RGADA, f. iii, 1677, d. 33, l. 25.
46 Govorukhov testimony, RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 1549, l. 2.
47 RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 1549, l. 3.
48 Cossack testimony, RGADA, f. iii, 1701, d. 5, l. 60.
49 RGAVMF, f. 177, op.1, d. 88, ll. 474–760b.
considerable degree. Since these claims only represented a portion of deals that had not been completed when imperial officials began to intervene in frontier affairs, the number of successful ransom transactions was certainly much higher.

The cases described above demonstrate that local leaders had constructed mutually acceptable rules for peacemaking and ransoming. They were able to referee frontier relations long before the two empires intervened. Face to face transactions, oaths, and trust helped to minimize risk in certain situations. Raiding was still a deadly game, but for those who could afford to hire cross-cultural counsel, captivity became only a temporary setback. If raiding was indeed a steppe sport, ransoming made the score difficult to settle. The winners were the economically advantaged on both sides, the losers were the rank-and-file Cossacks and Tatars who undertook the risk of raiding, knowing that if they were captured a ransom fee was far beyond their reach. The economics of frontier sport were more like high stakes gambling. For any given individual the chance of striking rich was low, for experienced professionals the balance between risks and rewards was manageable, and a life of servitude was the sad lot of the losers.

For most of the seventeenth century both the Russian and Ottoman empires preferred to leave the Don steppe frontier a realm of local, not full-scale imperial, military confrontation. While for frontier communities steppe sport was often a life-or-death competition played according to local rules, for the imperial powers it was no more than a low-risk form of strategic posturing.

Until the reign of Peter I, local patterns of raiding, trading, and ransoming were only of secondary interest to the two empires. To them what mattered was that Cossacks and Tatars kept the lower Don region a place of contestation.
Recent surveys of Russia’s emergence as an empire have asserted that Russians recognized no clear-cut boundaries between the Rus’ metropole and the other territories affiliated with Rossiia, the empire. But was this in fact true? The evolution of Russia’s southern boundaries in the seventeenth century is a story of exclusion rather than integration. Before the Russian state would attempt to annex the Don region, it first enacted, then enforced, a high degree of separation between itself and the Don. The sum of various seventeenth-century measures contributed to a demarcated and patrolled cordon sanitaire between Russia’s underprivileged ethnic core and privileged Cossack frontier.

This chapter will argue that an imperial boundary – a system of earthen and wooden fortifications called the Belgorod line – made a transformative impact on both Russia and the Don region. The Muscovite state moved from a system of open frontiers to a patrolled infrastructure that demarcated the limits of Rus’ and gave tangible expression to territorial sovereignty. It also inadvertently inaugurated a new era in the settlement history of the Don region: long-distance migration by isolated individuals or small groups gave way to inter-regional migration on a much wider scale. In order to assert and empirically enforce its sovereignty claims in the south, the state began to utilize its new boundary infrastructure not simply to prevent Tatar raids, but also to regulate the migration of its serfs and subjects into territories beyond its jurisdiction in the Don steppe frontier.

Boundaries of integration or exclusion?

Policing Muscovy’s Margins

In the early seventeenth century the steppe presented dual dangers to the sovereignty claims of the tsar. On the one hand, Tatar raids regularly devastated southern districts, disregarding his monopoly over violence and undermining his claims of exclusive jurisdiction over his subjects. On the other hand, the steppe existed as a juridical void beyond the grasp of bureaucrats. Russians who were willing to endure the dangers of steppe life could easily emancipate themselves from government control by migrating to the steppe.

Along the southern frontier there were no clearly delineated state boundaries. The effective line of agricultural settlement and administration remained well behind the forest-steppe line in the vicinity of the zasechnaia cherta, a line of felled trees bolstered by earthen ramparts running from Kozel’sk to Riazan’ about two hundred kilometers south of Moscow. Aside from scouting parties, patrols designed to provide advance warning of Tatar raids, and a few forts, the Muscovite state did little governing in, and even less agricultural exploitation of, the open steppe. The garrison towns of Voronezh, Elets, and Lebedian only represented “islands of Russian settlement.”

Don Cossack communities were concentrated in the lower reaches of the Don River, several hundreds of miles from the area under effective control of the government and the line of agricultural settlement. The Cossacks referred to their political jurisdiction as “the river,” but this expression never came close to clearly expressing territoriality in its modern sense. Roughly ninety miles (150 kilometers) separated the northern Cossack settlements from the southernmost government towns. Owing to these distances, no boundaries between Russian provinces and Don Cossack lands had ever been demarcated or documented by government officials. Due to the fact that a large expanse of uninhabited steppe still separated the Don region from Russia, officials in Moscow were not yet faced with a problem of massive migration to the region.


4 As in the following example: “A search was ordered throughout the whole river.” RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 1359, l. 4.
Correspondingly, the Ambassadorsial Chancery in Moscow neither sought nor permitted the extradition to Russia of anyone who had joined the Don Cossacks, making the territory a haven for those who, like the recruits of the French Foreign Legion, wanted a means to erase their past mistakes. The Muscovite defector Kotoshikhin, who was aware of government policy, emphasized the shift in identity and status that resulted from residence in the Don region:

those who were sentenced to punishment for banditry or thievery and other crimes, stealing from and plundering their boyars, they leave for the Don. If they happen to for some reason come to Moscow, after spending just a week or a month on the Don, no one has any recourse against them for any [past] affair.  

For those who joined the Don Cossacks, the *de facto* liberation from government control that was achieved by living in the steppe was augmented by *de jure* liberation from the jurisdiction of bureaucrats and boyars.

A case from 1637 illustrates this policy in action. A Don Cossack named Smirka who had come to Moscow to deliver a report was recognized as a fugitive. He had signed up to serve in the Muscovite military and had disappeared nearly two years earlier from a government garrison near Penza with his gun, some money, and gunpowder. This was not the case of an ordinary peasant fleeing his master, but of a military man who had deserted service. Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich personally heard the materials of the case and decided to allow Smirka to return to the Don, but without awarding him the cash payment that Don Cossacks traditionally received upon departure from Moscow.  

The services that the Cossacks provided as clients in the no-man’s-land of the steppe outweighed the disadvantages of allowing relatively small groups of Russians to slip out from under the state’s direct administrative control.

Other branches of administration, however, were permitted to enforce the tsar’s sovereignty claims over his Russian subjects. The governors of Russian frontier towns were authorized to arrest, apprehend, and return migrants who had not yet reached the Don region and joined Cossack communities. In 1625, for example, the governor of Voronezh was sent detailed descriptions of four fugitives and ordered to attempt to catch them “in villages and along roads and small paths and along the river

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6 RIB, 18: 586, 599–600.
In the 1630s the Voronezh garrison was responsible for maintaining checkpoints both in the steppe and along the Don River south of the town. Though the probability of apprehending fugitives was slim, especially if they were traveling in small parties, the state attempted to assert sovereignty over its people at its most remote margins. In this case Muscovite officials envisioned Voronezh as a last line of control.

At this early stage claims to control are more significant than actual enforcement. Muscovy was an early pioneer in the bureaucratic process of state-building that John Torpey considers “a new era in human affairs.” In order to assert control over populations, states “monopolized the legitimate authority to permit movement within and across their jurisdictions.”

In the Russian context this involved using identity documents to regulate the flow of people into and out of the Muscovite state. As early as the 1620s government officials distinguished between documented, legitimate temporary travel (po otpusku) to the Don, and undocumented, “unauthorized” (samovol’stvom) movement. Travelers with documents issued by either the government or Cossack authorities were permitted to pass through frontier districts unhindered, while undocumented migration was criminalized.

The policy of non-extradition from the Don region maintained by the Ambassadorial Chancery operated in glaring contradiction to increasing efforts by other branches of the government to appease military servitors and government officials who were being adversely affected by the flight of their peasants. As Richard Hellie has convincingly demonstrated, the Muscovite state turned to serfdom in order to secure agricultural labor for its military servitors. The “middle service class” played a significant role in the development of serfdom through its petitions to the tsar and participation in the Zemskii Sobor of 1649.

The interests of the state and military servitors coincided and were codified in the Law Code (Ulozhenie) of 1649, the legal document that introduced serfdom as a form of migration control and permanently bound peasants to the residences recorded in the

7 N. Vtorov and K. Aleksandrov-Dol’nik, Drevniaia gramoty i drugie pis’mennye pamiatniki, kasatuschchiesia Voronezhskoi gubernii i chastii Azova (Voronezh, 1851–53), vol. 1, p. 128. For another example, see Vtorov and Dol’nik, Drevniaia gramoty, vol. 11, pp. 1–4. For a case from the 1630s, see RGADA, f. 89, 1637, d. 1, ll. 268–70.
10 For a comprehensive treatment see Richard Hellie, Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy (Chicago, 1971).
most recent tax-rolls. The Law Code also severely restricted the mobility of most of the tsar’s subjects.\textsuperscript{11}

While the Law Code provided a framework for criminalizing all unauthorized migration and returning Russian migrants to their former residences, the policies of the Ambassadorial Chancery exempted Russians who became Don Cossacks from its provisions. This did not just apply to individuals, but also to large groups that defected to the Don. In 1649 several hundred Russian soldiers who were sent to the lower Don to help defend the Cossack capital against Ottoman forces deserted to join the Cossacks.\textsuperscript{12} The government did not actively seek their extradition because they helped to enhance security in a time of increased Tatar raids.

FROM OPEN FRONTIER TO ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARY

Devastating raids during and after the Smolensk war (1632–33) revealed that the entire southern flank of the Muscovite state was exposed to Tatar attack. Large-scale raids caused whole districts to become “depopulated” and the number of Russians taken captive numbered in the thousands.\textsuperscript{13} In response to the devastation, in 1635 the state began construction of the Belgorod line, an 800-kilometer-long system of defensive works incorporating forts, wooden and earthen ramparts, ditches, watchtowers, and steppe patrols.\textsuperscript{14} Designed to make the advance of large groups of Tatar cavalry impossible, the system of fortifications closed off the lands between the Vorksla, Donets, Oskol, Tikhaia Sosna, upper Don, Voronezh, and Tsna Rivers.

The completion of the Belgorod line moved the line of agricultural settlement an additional 100 to 200 kilometers to the south.\textsuperscript{15} The Muscovite state was so starved for manpower that during the early years of building

\textsuperscript{11} A. G. Man’kov, Razvitie krepostnogo prava v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVII veka (Moscow, 1962), pp. 248–323.

\textsuperscript{12} N. A. Mininkov, Donskoe kazachestvo v epokhu pozdnego srednevekov’ia (do 1671 g.), 106; V. G. Druzhinin, Popytka Moskovskago pravitel’stvav uvelichit’ chislo kazakov na Donu v seredine XVII-go veka (Saint Petersburg, 1911).

\textsuperscript{13} Akty sobrannye v bibliotekakh i arkhivakh Rossiiskoi imperii III (Saint Petersburg: 1836), p. 143. See also Davies, State Power and Community, pp. 36–43.

\textsuperscript{14} For a full account of the construction of the Belgorod line see, V. P. Zagorovskii, Belgorodskaiia cherta (Voronezh, 1969). For a more extensive treatment of the logistics of southern settlement, see Carol Belkin Stevens, Soldiers on the Steppe: Army Reform and Social Change in Early Modern Russia (DeKalb, Ill., 1995). For community and governance along the Belgorod line, see Davies, State Power and Community.

\textsuperscript{15} Davies, State Power and Community, p. 115.
the line even peasants and former servitors who had become enserfed were permitted to enroll in frontier garrisons.16 Brian Davies has noted that the state was forced “to subordinate the interests of serf owners to its goal of rapid military colonization of the frontier.”17 After the Law Code was enacted, the government found itself embroiled in controversies over the legal status of these newly recruited servitors.18 In March 1656, the tsar initiated a series of massive fugitive dragnets, which were charged with rounding up and returning to their masters thousands of serfs who had settled along the line after its completion in 1653.19 But even as government officials proceeded to scour the Belgorod line for fugitives into the later decades of the seventeenth century, the Don region remained completely off limits to both investigators and landlords.

Though it rarely appears on most modern maps of early modern Russia, the Belgorod line loomed large in the minds of contemporaries. The towns along the line were conceived of by Muscovites as ‘ukraininnye gorody’ (frontier towns).20 The line itself marked the boundary between the open steppe and lands that were considered susceptible to integration into Rus’. As Owen Lattimore has noted, “the very act of drawing a boundary is an acknowledgement that the peoples excluded are not under control and cannot be ruled by command. They must be dealt with by negotiation.”21

Like the Mason-Dixon line, the Belgorod line became a boundary line between freedom and bondage (in the juridical sense that each subject of the tsar was bound to the residence recorded in government cadasters). The steppe territories behind the line would become part of Rus’ and would be fully integrated into the Muscovite socio-economic-political system: direct administration, the control framework established by the Law Code, and an established order inscribed in service books and kreposti (writs of empowerment over someone or something). Beyond it were Cossacks, nomads, and an elusive vision of volia (liberty) that embodied the dreams of the disaffected and the disaffections of the powerful.

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20 Kuts, ”O sviazialakh naseleniia,” 152–53.
After the construction of the Belgorod line, the government’s primary objective was not to promote Russian migration into the steppe, but to prevent it. In May 1666 the first general decree was sent from the tsar ordering the Don Cossacks not to harbor fugitives. Although the Cossacks refused to cooperate and ignored the decree, it initiated a drawn-out struggle of wills between the Muscovite government, the population of southern districts, and the Cossacks. The scale of migration to the Don increasingly became a major concern in the decades after the construction of the Belgorod line.

In 1648, in the aftermath of the Azov siege and devastating Turkish raids, the Don Host reported that 1,700 Cossacks received the annual subsidy from the Russian government. Around 1668 the subsidy was divided among 3,000 Cossacks and in 1675 the number of Cossacks was estimated at 6,000. The number of Cossack settlements tripled between 1650 and 1700. By 1696 the number of Cossacks enrolled for service numbered around 8,000. As the flow of Russian migration to the Don increased, it became difficult for the government to justify the legal loophole that was created long before it had solidified its presence in the steppe. Russians who bribed, outwitted, or outran officials along the Belgorod line were still becoming Cossacks and thus forever slipping out from under the government’s fiscal and administrative yoke.

The government had few options for dealing with the problem. It could try to revise or revoke the Don Host’s separate deal with the tsar, but this move was likely to provoke resistance or even rebellion. Any attempt to introduce administrative control over the Don would severely upset the strategic balance in the south exactly at a time when the Russian government was pursuing a forward policy in Ukraine (next chapter). The only other option was to employ the Belgorod line as a protective membrane to keep the inner, ordered world of Rus’ separate from the outer disorder of the steppe and to put more obstacles in the way of migration. The government chose the latter option.

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22 See Davies, State Power and Community, pp. 177–81.
23 Mininkov, Donskoe kazachestvo, pp. 408, 485.
24 Estimating the region’s population is extremely difficult due to the fact that no population records were kept. See B. Boeck, Shifting Boundaries on the Don Steppe Frontier: Cossacks, Empires and Nomads to 1739 (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002), pp. 58–86. On 1648 see RIB, 26: 800. For 1668 and 1675 see V. G. Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu v kontse XVII veka (Saint Petersburg, 1889), p. 13. For settlements, see S. I. Riabov, Donskiaia zemlia v XVII veke (Volgograd, 1992), pp. 50–62. Several sources note that over 5,000 Cossacks’ participated in the Azov campaigns. This represented roughly two thirds of enrolled Cossacks. See N. S. Chaev, ed., Bulavinskoe vosstanie (1707–1708 gg) (Moscow, 1934), p. 122.
THE BELGOROD LINE AS A BOUNDARY OF SOVEREIGNTY

In his comparative survey of Inner Asian frontiers, Owen Lattimore concluded that Chinese boundary infrastructures not only served “to keep the outsiders from getting in, but to prevent the insiders from getting out.” Similarly the Russian government employed the system of fortifications created to defend against Tatar raids to limit the outward movement of its own population. These efforts to enforce the tsar’s sovereignty claims along the Belgorod line predated by nearly two centuries British efforts to police migration and establish an imperial line of separation between Native American tribal lands and territories under British jurisdiction in North America. While the Belgorod line did not stop all migration, it did help to contain the overwhelming mass of Russian settlement within limits established by the tsar.

Lattimore has argued that even in spite of the tremendous mobilization of resources by the Chinese to construct their Great Walls, the “linear boundary could never be established as an absolute geographical fact.” But boundary maintenance did allow for consolidation of the Chinese-ness of the territories behind the walls. In like measure the infrastructure of the Belgorod line proved functional for consolidating tsarist control over Russian territories and populations in southern districts. Centripetal population loss, from either nomadic raids or unauthorized migration, was successfully limited to hundreds of individuals per year, not thousands. The effectiveness of Tatar raids diminished greatly upon the completion of the line. The infrastructure also survived a crucial test during the Razin uprising (see next chapter). A force of about two thousand men made some unsuccessful attacks on the Belgorod line, but did not manage to penetrate the territory behind it. Benefiting from this new security, nearly one hundred thousand Russian settlers established themselves in districts behind the fortifications. Most of them were successfully integrated into state conditioned systems of land-holding, law and order, and military service. In Lattimore’s language, the state largely succeeded in keeping

28 KVSR, 2.2: 50.
29 Brian Davies concluded that the political culture of the region was “subject to greater regimentation and surveillance” but was “hardly totalitarian.” Davies, *State Power and Community*, p. 207. See also
the districts along the Belgorod line “inward facing” and thus focused on the “central interest,” i.e. autocratic sovereignty.

During the disorders caused by the Don Cossack rebel Stepan Razin, the Muscovite state first began to use the Belgorod line to filter the flow of goods and people in and out of Russian territory. In May 1670 the government took measures to seal off the southern frontier and enforce a total economic blockade of the Don region. In an order sent from the Military chancery to the commander of the Belgorod regiment, the government outlined its new policy:

Additionally, no traders whatsoever are to travel to the Don, with any goods, or grain or food supplies, or with anything else, until the Don is purified of Sten’ka’s banditry. And... if any traders attempt to go to him with any goods or [food] supplies or anything else... those outlaws to be put to death without any mercy in the towns of the Belgorod regiment.\(^{30}\)

In an associated move, the government ordered the entire border with the Don region to be sealed off. In July 1670, an order was sent to over fifty southern towns forbidding trade with and travel to and from the Don. The governor of Belgorod was ordered to announce and enforce a ban against travel to the Don region under penalty of death and to set up checkpoints “in all requisite places.”\(^{31}\)

This first serious attempt to seal off southern borders from the plague of rebellion produced modest results. The economic blockade seems to have made an impact, since Razin’s supporters attacked Korotiak in late summer 1670 in an effort to procure supplies.\(^{32}\) In spite of harsh threats, however, the boundary could not be sealed. The problem was that locals had a good idea of where the “strong checkpoints” were placed and could simply go around them.\(^{33}\) These events demonstrate the limited capabilities that the early modern state had for enforcing boundaries even in a time of dire necessity.

Learning from its weakness, the government decided to revise the rules of engagement on the southern frontier. In 1671 the imperial boundary between Russia and the Don acquired all the trappings of “modern” international boundaries: state-issued travel documents, checkpoints, patrols, customs duties, and inspections.\(^{34}\) All Russians seeking to travel beyond the Belgorod line were ordered to obtain travel documents stating the


\(^{30}\) KVSR, 1: 163. \(^{31}\) KVSR 1: 208. \(^{32}\) KVSR, 2.2: 34, 51. \(^{33}\) KVSR, 2.2: 69, 85, 4: 113–14. \(^{34}\) See KVSR, 4: 90–91.
purpose of the trip, their destination, and the time frame in which they would return. In order to apply for these documents they were required to appear before a government official with witnesses who would both confirm their identity and provide surety for fines if they did not return. Officials along the Belgorod line provided a second layer of surveillance: they were responsible for inspecting travelers and their documents, recording every entry and exit, and arranging for patrols and checkpoints. Implementation of these coordinated measures of migration control and border patrol is demonstrated by several forms of related documentation.

As most states lacking the coercive capabilities of twentieth-century authoritarian regimes have sooner or later realized, patrolling boundaries does not prevent all migration. At best patrols create an “intervening obstacle” between migrants and their points of destination. Recent research on migration has demonstrated that migration control “increases the costs and risks of a decision to go, but usually not prohibitively.”

Even additional measures implemented in the 1680s failed to stem the tide of migration. An order from 1683 mandated capital punishment for anyone caught hiding and guiding fugitives or “secretly showing the trail” to the Don. In 1685 the government began to deploy mobile patrols in places far from the stationary checkpoints and issued orders to detain any undocumented traveler “fleeing” to the Don. Sources from the 1680s also suggest that boundary officials were given the authority to inspect Cossack delegations for fugitives and to punish any Cossacks caught trying to smuggle fugitives past checkpoints.

Reports from various areas suggest that resistance escalated with increased patrols. According to information received in Voronezh in 1681, bands of peasants, numbering over a hundred people and belonging to various landowners, fled after burning their villages and masters’ estates.

35 The policy was incorporated into instructions given to new governors upon assuming commands in towns under the jurisdiction of the Belgorod regiment. In many cases, texts of the actual surety bonds and petitions for travel documents have been preserved. See Davies, State Power and Community, pp. 179–80. See also KVSR, 3: 112–13, 125, 146; M. de Pule, Materiały dla istorii Voronezhskoi i sosiednikh gubernii (Voronezh, 1861), 378; L. B. Veinberg, Materiały po istorii Voronezhskoi i sosiednikh gubernii (Voronezh, 1883), 681; Surety documentation, GAVO, f. 182, op. 1, d. 127, l. 6.


37 Petition quoting decree from the tsar, RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, d. 1059, ll. 722–23.

38 Text of decree and chancery report RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, d. 1525, l. 336–39; Petition quoting orders from tsar, RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, d. 1391, ll. 635–37.

39 Riabov, Donskaja zemlia, pp. 52–54, 82, 92–95. See also Tambov case, RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 3931, Korotiak. Petition, RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, d. 1059, ll. 120–26; Petition and oral testimony from border officials, RGADA, f. 210, Belgorod stol, d. 1260.
They armed themselves with guns and headed south. In 1692 a large group of peasants from near Elets took off in the direction of the Don and, when a landowner’s son and his associates chased them in pursuit, the peasants “fended them off with rifles, wanting to kill them.” Also in 1692, a woman named Aliona fled from her master with her son and daughter, taking with her two horses, two rifles, various possessions, and the documents (kreposti) that bound them to their master. An order sent to several frontier governors in 1685 indicates that the government took the threat of armed resistance by fugitives seriously. “Those who try to fight off the servitors or who don’t allow themselves to be taken,” the document reads, “are to be campaigned against, so that they are captured and not allowed to pass into the Don region.” This was the first blanket decree to authorize lethal force in boundary enforcement.

The decision to keep Russian subjects out of lands set aside for Cossack clients forced the government to turn the Belgorod line into a boundary of territorial sovereignty in its modern sense. The process that Peter Sahlins terms the “territorialization of sovereignty” was taking place in Russia decades earlier than in western Europe. According to Ladis Kristof, a true boundary is not a “legal fiction” but “the outer line of effective control exercised by the central government” that is necessarily “coordinated with an empirical force actually present and asserting itself in the terrain.”

THE NO-MAN’S-LAND BEYOND THE BELGOROD LINE

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the “creeping expansion” of Russian settlement became a source of concern for Cossack leaders. The northern areas of the Don region, an unpoliced, non-state territory nearly the size of Belgium, became a breeding ground for trouble and a magnet

40 De Pule, Materialy, p. 393.  
41 De Pule, Materialy, p. 430.  
42 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Voronezhskoi oblasti (hereafter GAVO), f. 182, op. 1, d. 10, l. 2.  
43 RGADA, f. 210, belg. stol, d. 1525, ll. 336–38.  
46 The term “creeping expansion” was introduced by Alfred Rieber, who stated: “No single governing idea inspired the men who moved into the different areas, nor did the organized power of the state always stand behind them.” Rieber, “Persistent Factors,” pp. 325, 333.
for migrants. While the Host claimed the remote northern branches of the Don River basin, it did not yet control them. The sharp increase in interregional migration after 1650 led to the emergence of a north/south divide within the Don region.

The northern lands of the Don (the Khoper, Medveditsa, and Donets River basins) retained significant stands of riparian forest and were accessible by river and steppe from the Muscovite heartland. They offered rich opportunities for hiding, as well as for hunting, fishing, and fur trapping. In contrast, the southern communities were still no more than fortified islands in the Don River surrounded by a sea of steppe. Far from the Belgorod line and prone to frequent attacks from nomads, they operated within a more limited steppe resource base and remained interconnected with the Black Sea, Azov, and the Kuban’ steppes as they had been since their inception. While the majority of southern settlements dated to before the middle of the seventeenth century, in the north most settlements were founded after 1650. The northern regions emerged as a middle ground between Rus’ and the Don. They housed large numbers of Russian runaway serfs, bandits, and (as we will see in Chapter 7) religious dissidents. If anything united these disparate groups of Russians it was their common choice of the Don region as a place of refuge.

There are some intriguing parallels between the activities of serf fugitives in areas of the Don far from the established centers of Cossack settlement and the “Maroons” of the Americas and the “Creoles” of Africa, who escaped from bondage to form new communities just beyond the reach of political authorities. Such refugee communities built settlements in inaccessible areas, adapted themselves to the environment, and often made periodic incursions back to the lands they escaped from in order to recruit others, plunder, and pillage. Mavis Campbell has stated: “The history of Maroon societies in the New World is the history of guerrilla warfare... its modus operandi has been that of surprise attack and retreat and ingenious ambushes, thereby avoiding direct confrontations.” Many

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47 On forests in the north, see RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 468–69. The Cossack term gul’ba refers to economic activities such as hunting and fishing, which require constant movement and camping. Those who pursued such activities were known as gulebshchiki. For example, a Cossack document from 1686 refers to “gulebshchiki who live in forests, rivers, and along the coast to catch animals.” RGADA, f. 111, 1686, d. 9, ll. 42–44, Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu, pp. 17–18, n. 52. See also a document in Trudy Donskago voiskovago statisticheskago komiteta (Novocherkassk, 1867), vol. 1, p. 58.

48 Riabov, Donkaiia zemlia, 34–41; Surveyor’s report, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 1110–12.

49 This comparative connection was first suggested by Richard Hellie. See Slavery in Russia 1470–1724 (Chicago, 1982), pp. 584–85.

scholars have placed maroons at center stage in narratives of slave resistance, suggesting that flight was a powerful strategy of resistance and assertion of freedom.

Cossack documents are largely silent concerning disorders in the north, but petitions from Russian landowners give descriptions of the activities of fugitives that resonate fairly well with what is known about maroonage as a form of resistance. A collective petition of landowners from Moscow, Riazan’, Shatsk, and Riazhsk provinces, in 1691 stated:

Our people and peasants constantly flee from us with their wives and children to the Don, Khoper, and Medveditsa rivers. They devastated many villages and, when we are away serving or traveling on other business, they pillage our homes, possessions, horses, and all kinds of accouterments and [then] returning from the Khoper they involve our remaining people in banditry.

The fact that landowners from several different districts signed the petition indicates that such activities must have been occurring on a wide scale.

A micro-historical narrative recorded from one of these Khoper bandits provides fascinating details about how flight could easily descend into banditry in the no-man’s-land between Rus’ and the Don:

Conspiring with two comrades (tovarishch) I fled to the great Tsna forest. We lived there for three weeks... but began to starve, so we stole our way to the Khoper. We had neither money nor bread, so we began to steal bread from cellars at night from various villages along the way. We swam across the whole Khoper and took to the forest... The residents in the vicinity began to track us down, so we fled to the Cossack towns.

He then returned to Rus’ with a band of other fugitives to pillage and burn the estate of a gentry man and was later captured, interrogated, and exiled to Siberia. His case stands for the many who used the Don region as a base of operations without joining Cossack communities.

Although the Host asserted jurisdiction over the northern territories, the documents give the impression that its coercive power diminished as one moved farther north. If only a handful of individuals were insolent, the Host could get away with writing letters to the northern Cossack

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51 In addition to the documents cited below, see also A. A. Novosel’skii, “Kollektivnye dvorianskie chelobitnye,” in Dvorianstvo i krepostnoi stroi v Rossii XVI-XVII vv. (Moscow, 1975), pp. 303–43, for documents suggesting that such activities were not limited to the frontier but were taking place in other areas as well.

52 RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 7, l. 74. For a different petition see Riabov, Donskaia zemlia, pp. 95–96.

communities demanding assistance in detaining them. When large numbers of northerners defied orders from Cherkassk, however, only an expedientary force could impose discipline outside of the capital. For example, in 1660 a large punitive force was mounted from throughout the Don region to root out a group of bandits who established a fortified settlement called Riga near the Volga. Disorders emanating from the northern lands would become a defining factor in relations between Russia and the Don in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

Neither checkpoints nor patrols would prove fully effective in keeping the tsar’s subjects in his dominion. As long as the right to refuge remained in force a powerful pull factor enticed Russians to cross the Belgorod line. As more Russians sought to become Cossacks, migration threatened to destabilize the relationship between the Don and Moscow (see Chapters 6 and 10). It also threatened the integrity of the Host and its lands: would Cossack stakeholders in Cherkassk and southern communities reject or protect the newcomers in the north? By the end of the seventeenth century both sides would be drawn into a series of struggles over the northern lands, which became a “zone of uncertainty” between Russia and the Don.

54 A letter sent by the Host in 1677 demanded that they be on the look out for a group of bandits and ordered Cossacks to “seize them in whichever gorodok they appear and to send them to Cherkassk with an armed escort.” RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 15, 1–20b. For a similar case from 1693, see RGADA, f. 111, 1693, d. 10, ll. 34–35.
55 For the 1660 events see RIB, 34: 657–60, 723–24.
Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, a significant shift occurred in the strategic objectives of the Muscovite government. After the construction of the Belgorod line Tatar raids could no longer penetrate the Russian heartland, making it possible for officials to incline their ears towards the chorus of voices calling for Russians to help their Orthodox brethren abroad. Upon accepting a major military commitment in Ukraine, Muscovite officials searched for a strategy that would bring security to their southern frontier. For the first time the tsar’s relationship with the Don Cossacks was brought as a chip to the diplomatic bargaining table in 1667, but Russian officials still treated the Don region with flexibility in order to avoid imperial overreach.

This chapter examines how the shift in Russian strategic priorities tested the boundaries of the alliance between the Don Host and the Russian tsar. It connects the Razin rebellion to the consequences of the Russian involvement in Ukraine after 1654, but argues that neither event radically altered the separate deal between the tsar and the Don Cossacks. Remarkably, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich permitted his representatives to bargain with rebel leaders and failed to punish Don Cossacks who invaded Muscovite territory. The Host evaded implementing “autocratic” will in cases as small in scale as the arrest of a single Cossack criminal or as significant in scope as the construction of a key government fort.

A SHIFT IN STRATEGIC FOCUS

The construction of the Belgorod line greatly increased Muscovite military capabilities. As Carol Stevens has demonstrated, the Belgorod line formed the heart of a complex system of military supply, logistics, and command.¹

¹ Carol Stevens, Soldiers on the Steppe: Army Reform and Social Change in Early Modern Russia (DeKalb, Ill., 1995).

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Unprecedented numbers of military men, provisions, and equipment were concentrated along the southern frontiers of the Muscovite state. The security of the Russian heartland translated into an ability to contemplate and conduct forward actions.

An uprising in Ukraine in 1648 forever changed the geopolitical landscape in the steppes north of the Black Sea. When Ukrainian Cossacks led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky staged an uprising to protest Polish restrictions on Zaporozhian Cossack military actions and policies perceived as prejudiced against the Orthodox faith, a mass rebellion broke out in Ukraine. Khmelnytsky’s forces and swarms of insurgent peasants were able to drive Polish forces from Ukraine, but in order to fully emancipate their territory from Polish sovereignty claims the hetman was forced to seek the military assistance of neighboring states. In 1648 Khmelnytsky concluded an alliance with the Crimean Khanate.

In order to uphold his commitment to combat enemies of Khan Islam Girei, in 1650 Khmelnytsky threatened the Don Cossacks with invasion if they continued to raid Crimea. This brief period of tension and hostility marked the beginning of the end of decades of military cooperation between the Zaporozhia and the Don.

Khmelnytsky also sought Muscovite military assistance. For several years Muscovite decision-makers wavered on whether or not they should act upon exhortations by Zaporozhian Cossacks and Orthodox leaders to militarily intervene in Ukraine, but by 1654 they had decided to undertake a new military commitment. Khmelnytsky negotiated with representatives of the tsar to secure a set of “rights and privileges” (prava i privilei) for the Ukrainian Cossack elite. Whether interpreted as a personal union,
Imperial boundaries

proteCTORATE, or military alliance, the Pereiaslav agreement between Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich and Bohdan Khmelnysky sharply differs from the client relationship that Russia maintained with the Don region. Russia made a formal commitment to defend the hetmanate, “Little Russia” was included in the tsar’s title, and, last but not least, the tsar came to consider Khmelnysky’s Cossacks as his subjects.

The tsar’s alliance with Bohdan Khmelnysky in 1654 and the subsequent Muscovite military engagement in Ukraine radically revised Russia’s view of its southern frontier. Ukraine became the keystone in Russia’s relations with both its southern and western neighbors. Until the partitions of Poland, Russian foreign policy had to be carefully managed in order to avoid a two-pronged attack on Russian positions in Ukraine. The Dnieper borderland became a battleground between Ukrainian Cossack factions, Russia, Poland, and eventually the Ottoman Empire and the consequences of this competition reverberated from the Dniester to the Don.

As a result of the Khmelnysky alliance, it seemed that Russia might be able to alter the balance of power in southeastern Europe. Between 1654 and 1658 Russia flirted with establishing a protectorate over Moldova, offering a diplomatic deal to its ruler Georgii Stefan, but he was driven out of his territories by Ottoman forces. Rather than rescue a potential ally, Russian decisionmakers were preoccupied with the fate of Ukraine. Khmelnysky died in 1657 and his successor Hetman Vyhovsky worked to forge an alliance with the Poles and Tatars. There was no equivalent of a Belgorod line to shield Russian garrisons in Ukraine from Tatar attacks, which could tip the balance in favor of the Polish side.

Faced with a geopolitical dilemma, a Russian diplomat named Afanasii Ordin-Nashchokin devised a plan to use the Don region to divert Tatar military pressure from Ukraine. In 1659 a Don Cossack fleet of dozens of boats raided the coasts of Crimea. The next year, foreshadowing what Tsar Aleksei’s son Peter would do on a much larger scale a few decades later, a fleet of 500 boats was constructed at Voronezh and used for ferrying Russian troops to the lower Don to threaten Crimea. This was not an invasion, but a strategic maneuver designed to keep thousands of Tatar warriors preoccupied with the security of their peninsula.

In response to the danger that Russia might augment the Cossack forces already operating in the Black Sea region, the Ottoman Empire constructed

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6 Ia. S. Grosul, Istoriacheskie sviati narodov SSSR i Rumynii (Moscow, 1965), vol. 11, p. 249.
7 This paragraph is based on V. P. Zagarovskii, “Vopros o russkom morskom flote na Donu do Petra I” in Trudy Voronezhskogo universiteta, vol. 111, no. 1 (1960), 162–63. See also RIB, 34: 510, 561–62.
Testing the boundaries of imperial alliance

New fortifications in the delta of the lower Don in 1660 in order to hinder access to the sea.Using the same strategy that had enabled them to successfully seal off the Bosphorous and doom the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Ottoman forces constructed twin towers (called kalanchy in Cossack documents) at the mouth of the Don River. This action suggests that Ottoman officials did not take lightly the possibility that Russia would increase its strategic presence in the region.

FROM SUBSISTENCE CRISIS TO POLITICAL CRISIS

Just as the Muscovite government was poised to contest Ottoman power in territories north of the Black Sea, troubles forced it to shore up its position in the Don steppe frontier. Disgruntled Don Cossacks exposed the weakness of government garrisons in the Volga region. The Razin uprising, which has erroneously been labeled as a peasant war, actually resulted in part from the unintended consequences of the shift in strategic focus implemented by the Russian government after 1654.

Thanks to a recent study by Michael Khodarkovsky, there is no longer any need to address the question of whether or not the Razin rebellion should really be classified as a “peasant war.” Leo Yaresh has also analyzed the shortcomings of Soviet historiography, which drew inspiration from an obscure article by Karl Marx that portrayed the event as a peasant rebellion that was ignited due to class contradictions between prosperous house-owning (domovite) Cossacks and oppressed naked (golutvennye) Cossacks who sympathized with the oppressed Russian peasantry. A prominent explanation of the Razin rebellion maintains that the construction of Ottoman forts in the mouth of the Don River drastically limited opportunities for Black Sea raiding. While it is certainly the case that the Ottoman forts made passage into the Black Sea more difficult, and diminished the Cossack capacity to conduct distant sea raids, the conclusion that the Black Sea was completely sealed off is erroneous. In

summer 1662 a joint Muscovite–Cossack expeditionary force of twenty-six boats managed to navigate past the Ottoman forts into the Black Sea, attacked Kerch’, devastated its nearby suburbs, and returned to Cherkassk unscathed. Even more significant is the fact that around 1667, the year of Razin’s first actions, Don Cossacks conducted a sea raid against Crimea that resulted in the devastation of several villages.

The Ottoman forts were only one part of the larger problem of Don Cossack subsistence. The construction of the Belgorod line set into motion a migration wave that overwhelmed the precarious balance between people and resources in the Don region. The increase in population coincided with narrowing opportunities for raiding, leaving many Cossacks with no reliable form of subsistence. The subsidy system was also overwhelmed, leaving only a pittance in the hands of each Cossack. To make matters worse, by winter 1666–67 famine conditions prevailed in parts of the region.

The sudden appearance in Voronezh of a band of 500 Don Cossacks led by Vas’ka Us in June 1666 was the first signal that there were serious problems with subsistence in the Don region. The events that followed have been called the “campaign of Vas’ka Us” by historians who see it as a precursor to the Razin rebellion. When he set out for Voronezh in summer 1666, Vas’ka Us and several hundred followers intended to do what many groups of Don Cossacks had done in the past decade: hire themselves to the Muscovite tsar for service against Sweden or Poland. But in order to secure the situation in Ukraine, Moscow was contemplating peace with Poland.

Unlike their predecessors, the group led by Us showed up uninvited and unannounced at a time when military campaigns in the West were winding down. Its first action was to appear before the local authorities in Voronezh and to file a petition to the tsar expressing a desire to serve wherever the

14 Avrich follows Stepanov’s guess that the male population rose to over 20,000. My estimates would suggest a male population of no less than 6,000 and no more than 10,000. See Avrich, Russian Rebels, p. 62; Stepanov, Krest'ianskaia voina, p. 277; B. Boeck, Shifting Boundaries on the Don Steppe Frontier: Cossacks, Empires and Nomads to 1739 (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002), pp. 583–86.
15 KVSR, i: 40.
17 Petition of Cossacks serving in Smolensk, RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 959.
tsar would indicate. A swift refusal from Moscow ordered them to return home without any offer of service or compensation. While a small group set off for Moscow to present a second petition to the tsar, the rest of the Cossacks headed north in the direction of Tula, where they set up camp to wait for the tsar’s answer. On the way, over a thousand peasants liberated themselves from their masters and joined up with the Cossacks, causing panic among the landlords of the region.

In mid-July 1666, the government drew up a plan for dealing with Us. While preparing for a confrontation (a contingent of over a thousand troops was to be mobilized and sent to Tula) the government offered Us a deal: if his men would make an orderly retreat to the Don and hand over the peasants that had accumulated in their camps, they would be paid a one-time subsidy and given supplies and transportation from Voronezh to the Don. If they refused to hand over the peasants, the government would send an armed force against them. Upon hearing rumors that government forces were moving towards Tula, the Cossacks decided not to negotiate and made a hasty retreat home. The lasting consequences of this event are hard to gauge. Us and his followers were deprived of shares in the subsidy for that year and were placed on probation (penia voiskovaia) under threat of the death penalty for any further offense. The government did not impose any sanctions on the Don Cossack Host, but did order the Cossacks to return fugitives without attempting to enforce the order.

On the other hand, the Us campaign demonstrated that the government was unwilling to alleviate the plight of the Cossacks. In spite of the fact that it possessed information that food had become scarce in the region, the government did nothing. When Cossack leaders petitioned the government to increase the subsidy to 10,000 rubles in October 1667, the government took no action.

RAZIN ATTEMPTS TO REVIVE RAIDING

Less than eight months after Us and his men returned to the Don, a group of about a thousand Cossacks headed east toward the Volga under the leadership of Stepan Razin. The Volga had officially been off limits to the Don Cossack raiders for decades due to government policy. Comparatively speaking, an eastern expedition offered a substantially higher proportion of risks and rewards than any other venture available at the time, but Razin

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and his men had to have been aware of the fact that both the Don Host and
the government would disapprove of any action directed against the Volga.
In any case, their decision to press ahead smacked of acute desperation,
untamed bravado, or both.

Since several competent accounts of the Razin rebellion exist, this study
will only offer a brief survey of events as they pertain to the relationship
between Russia and the Don region. While Razin was gathering his force,
the ataman and the Host do not seem to have undertaken any steps
to impede his progress. Additionally, the Don Host did not even alert
the government of Razin’s intentions. The government received reliable
information only from Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan’. Later it upbraided the
Host for not sending any information about Razin’s plans. Even if the
ataman possessed a desire to take action against Razin, the subsistence crisis
left him with very little leverage. The inaction of the Host suggests that
it was waiting for signals of the outcome of Razin’s initial forays before
establishing a clear position. Indeed the fact that only six hundred to a
thousand men joined Razin suggests that a clear majority of Don Cossacks
were watching and waiting in summer 1667.

In May 1667, Razin set out on his Caspian foray. The small government
garrisons along the way proved incapable of restraining him. Before returning
from the Caspian Sea in late summer 1669 his resume included attacks
on merchant fleets, fishing camps, Muscovite government forts, Dagestani
and Turkmen tribes, Persian cities, and Safavid seaside palaces. Much of the
time was spent on the move, securing booty and food, the two resources
which fueled Razin’s enterprise. After losing a large contingent of Cossacks
to battle and disease in 1669, Razin’s ships again appeared near the Volga,
rumored to be heading to either the Don or Terek.

While Razin was raiding in the Caspian, relations between Moscow and
the Don region carried on, in view of the circumstances, pretty much as
usual. The Muscovite government, though dissatisfied with the inaction of
the Don Host, was not ready to risk a break with the Cossacks in 1667–68,
since Ottoman affairs had not been settled and the situation in Ukraine
was precarious. Moreover, reprisals against the Don would alienate the
remaining Cossacks and strengthen Razin’s hand. The government subsidy
was delivered in full to Cherkassk. On at least two occasions between 1666

24 KVSR, 3: 147.
25 One of Razin’s men estimated his initial force as 600 Don Cossacks, see KVSR 1: 146. An early
government estimate put their numbers at 1,000. KVSR 1: 136.
26 V. P. Zagorovskii, “Donskoe kazachestvo i razmery donskikh otpuskov v XVII veke,” in Trudy
and 1668, the Cossacks made peace with Azov so that Russian diplomats on their way to Istanbul could pass, but the Cossacks conducted raids during the intervals between embassies.\textsuperscript{27}

One of those embassies heralded a major shift in government policy. Once again events in Ukraine were the catalyst. Ukrainian Hetman Doroshenko’s defection to the Ottomans created a crisis and called for an urgent clarification of relations between tsar and sultan. The main objective of the embassy of Afanasii Nesterov to Istanbul in 1668 was to seek a restoration of “friendship and love” between the two sovereigns.\textsuperscript{28} The Muscovite government was actually hoping to work together with the Ottoman government to insure peace through reigning in the “willful and evil people in the frontier on both sides who spill human blood.”\textsuperscript{29} After adamantly denying for well over a century that the Muscovite government had any direct influence over the Don Cossacks, the Russian ambassador proposed that future Don Cossack actions could be directly linked to Crimean willingness to sign a peace treaty and cease raiding in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{30} The doctrine of plausible deniability was sacrificed in order to increase security in Ukraine.

If the Don Cossacks were going to be included as players in a new grand frontier strategy, first they would have to all be brought back into the government fold. When Astrakhan’ governor Semen L’vov set out by ship in August 1669 to meet the approaching Cossack fleet in the tributaries of the Volga, he carried with him not a warrant for Razin’s execution, but a writ granting him a pardon.\textsuperscript{31} Razin’s representatives accepted the tsar’s offers of amnesty and agreed to give up their cannons, hand over Muscovite servitors pressed into Razin’s force, and abandon their boats in Tsaritsyn.

On August 25, Razin appeared in Astrakhan’ to surrender his bunchiuk (mace-like symbol of authority) and ten campaign banners to L’vov. Then talks commenced concerning the surrender of the cannons and the return of all captives and goods that the Cossacks had seized during their exploits. Razin refused on all accounts, arguing that the cannons were needed for the trek to the Don, the goods had long since been divided up and sold, and the captives were compensation for the Cossacks lost and wounded during the expedition. He even more categorically refused to have the names of his men recorded, stating that “the recording of Cossacks on the Don

\textsuperscript{27} For peace see RGADA, f. 111, 1666, d. 6, l. 7, and RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, kn. 10, ll. 378–79. For raiding see RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, kn. 10, ll. 245–46, 351–53.

\textsuperscript{28} RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, kn. 10, l. 1440ob.

\textsuperscript{29} RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, kn. 10, l. 1470ob.

\textsuperscript{30} RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, kn. 10, l. 2480ob.

\textsuperscript{31} KVSR, 1: 145.
and Yaik or anywhere has never been allowed under Cossack laws,” and reminded L’vov that in the text of the tsar’s order no mention was made of surrendering their booty or being recorded. Fearing that his understaffed and undependable garrison could not withstand a quarrel with Razin, L’vov sent Razin on his way back to the Don on September 4, 1669 with a paltry convoy of fifty musketeers.

Razin arrived in the Don region in early October 1669, after making a stop in Tsaritsyn to threaten its governor and warn him not to extort money from the Cossacks who traded there. Upon reaching the Don, he kept his troops together and settled them in a newly constructed earthen fort on an island near Kagal’nik. An account by Iumashka Kelimbetev, a Tatar sent from Astrakhan’ by the Muscovite government to gather intelligence, provides one of the few instances of first-hand testimony from Razin himself:

I sent seven of my Cossack comrades to the Great Sovereign to petition on our behalf. They still haven’t returned and I am cautious and fearful of the wrath of the Great Sovereign. As soon as they return with the tsar’s order of pardon for me, I’ll be glad to serve the Great Sovereign with all my comrades and campaign against Crimea or Azov or go wherever the tsar orders, and with my service I will cover [i.e. compensate for] my guilt. But if my delegation does not return from Moscow, I will suspect that the tsar has placed me in disgrace and I will send to the Zaporozhians to propose an alliance.

Thus, Razin’s strategy was to preserve his power base while waiting for confirmation of his pardon from Moscow. Kornilo Iakovlev, the ataman of the Host, also spent late fall and early winter 1669 waiting. But he was waiting for instructions from Moscow on whether the Cossacks should welcome Razin back into the Host or attempt some action against him. While rumors circulated of some impending action by Razin, no one knew what his next action would be, probably not even Razin himself.

With no pardon forthcoming (probably as a result of his refusal to disarm and his brief, but rowdy, stopover in Tsaritsyn) and a continuing estrangement from the Don Host, Razin was left with few options. In April 1670 he showed up at a krug in Cherkassk in which a Muscovite official was delivering orders from the tsar. After accusing him of spying, Razin killed the official and dumped his body in the Don River. When Ataman Kornilo Iakovlev attempted to intervene, Razin told him: “You lead [literally possess, vladet’] your Host, and I’ll lead mine.”

ascendancy remained unchallenged and he stayed in Cherkassk for several days (allegedly he had amassed several thousand additional supporters by this time). Then, he abandoned Cherkassk to prepare his host for military action.

Without a doubt, Sten’ka’s new venture produced the largest rift among Don Cossacks in their history up to that point. Two hosts were indeed forming: a loyal host, which viewed its interests as compatible with those of the government, and Sten’ka’s host, which refused to bow to government interests. For a second time, the Cherkassk Host was paralyzed with fear as more and more Cossacks flocked to Razin’s camp. There is no reliable way to establish how many Cossacks participated in Sten’ka’s next campaign, but estimates range widely from to 3,000 to 10,000 men, which would indicate that a large percentage of Don Cossacks were at least initially willing to join Sten’ka’s new enterprise. Those who joined Razin do not seem to have represented the cream of the Cossack crop. They are described by one observer as “naked ones and gamblers,” in another instance they are described as “single,” while another document terms them “homeless Cossacks from the northern settlements.”

Razin’s forces easily captured Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan’, the two main government outposts on the lower Volga, and then conceived of a bold plan to march to the heart of the Muscovite state. Their objective was to crush the boyars. Appeals to naive monarchism, the belief that a good tsar was being restrained by evil boyars, provided a potent rallying cry for Razin’s forces as they entered Russian districts. For his Cossack constituency, however, the boyars were held to be responsible for the subsistence crisis and “barring the way to the sea.” In one speech, Razin and other Cossacks even expressed dissatisfaction with important members of the inner circle of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich: Prince Iurii Alekseevich Dolgorukii, Prince Nikita Ivanovich Odoevskii, Dumnyi Diak Dementei Bashmakov, and Artamon Sergeevich Matveev. This first-hand knowledge of Muscovite government reveals that Razin was no backwoods bumpkin with a simplistic world-view. He may have even blamed boyar factions for the failure of his pardon.

Immediately after Razin began his march towards Moscow in spring 1670, the Don Host sent a delegation to the tsar to disavow any complicity in Razin’s actions. The Cossacks who had remained loyal decided to throw in their lot with Moscow and they did not want there to be any doubt about it. In turn, the government sent a carefully worded, upbeat letter to

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38 KVSR, 1: 18, 180, 216. 39 KVSR, 1: 155, 1: 180, 2: 98. 40 Avrich, Russian Rebels, p. 79. 41 KVSR, 1: 235. For the importance of these individuals at court, see Paul Bushkovitch, Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power, 1671–1725 (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 33, 67, 52, 55.
Ataman Iakovlev and the Cossacks in July 1670, praising Cossack service: “As in previous times you bravely and courageously served us the Great Sovereigns, now you continue to serve faithfully... and you restrain those who are undependable, and inclined to banditry.” The loyal Cossacks were given reassurance that the subsidy would be delivered as soon as “bandit conflicts on the Don subside and the Cossacks become obedient.”

Behind all the diplomatic formulae, the government was inviting the remaining Cossacks to buy into the reassuring fiction that they had indeed served faithfully. In fact they had not vigorously intervened against their unreliable brethren, they had clearly defied previous orders by not acting against Razin, and they had disobeyed the sovereign by carrying out raids on the Black Sea. The government was trying to salvage the situation by praising the Cossacks who had, despite their inertia, remained loyal and was promising them that the status quo would continue when Razin was captured. The message was that the relationship between Moscow and the Don was mutually beneficial, and that the government was willing to continue it in spite of trouble that Razin had caused.

Though Razin’s forces swelled as they moved up the Volga, in late 1670 a series of strategic defeats at the hands of the better-trained and disciplined government forces (at Simbirsk and Kazan’ on the Volga and at Korotiak on the Belgorod line) quickly deflated Razin’s momentum. Razin returned to the Don to his previous headquarters at Kagal’nik, where he tried to rally the scattered remnants of his invasion force (he still controlled much of the lower Volga) and sought assistance — with no success — from the Kalmyks, Zaporozhians, and Nogai Tatars. The fate of most of Razin’s core Cossack supporters has never been determined, but it seems that most of those who managed to return to the Don in 1670 (one estimate places the total at two thousand) escaped punishment.

In order to consolidate their position in the Don region, in winter 1670–71 Razin and his supporters attempted to seize power in Cherkassk. A Cossack report reads: “During that time in the Host there was discord, and there was no consensus among the Cossacks, and they feared one another.” On that occasion Razin was forced to retreat, but soon his supporters had concocted a plan to break into the house of Ataman Kornilo Iakovlev in the dead of night and murder him. Forewarned of the attack by a knock on his window just minutes before it happened, Iakovlev...
barred his doors and windows in time to prevent his own assassination. Meanwhile, a loyal Cossack force of thirty men, later augmented to over one hundred, came to the relief of the ataman. The first documented attempt to stage a coup in the history of the Don Host ended in victory for the ataman. All told, less than two hundred individuals had settled the fate of the Don Cossack Host. The very same night Iakovlev called a krug to decide the fate of Razin’s henchmen. Those who could be captured were put to death in the krug. After dumping the corpses into the Don, the Cossacks decided that they should codify their resolve to fight Razin by taking a binding oath. The next day, according to a Cossack report, over 5,000 Cossacks showed up to kiss a cross, a gospel book, and an Icon of the Virgin that they would “serve the Great Sovereign, his Tsarist majesty, as before, would not be seduced by any bandit enticements (vorovskie prelesti), and would not join outlaw Sten’ka Razin.”

In mid-April 1671 the Host reported that Cossacks “from all settlements,” (which, whether true or not, emphasized that the Host was once again in control of the Don region), joined together to besiege Razin’s forces at Kagal’nik. Setting the rebel fort ablaze, the forces of the Host used the ensuing confusion to overpower Razin’s men and capture Razin alive. After most of Razin’s main supporters were hung in Cherkassk, the residents of all Cossack settlements were made to swear oaths of loyalty to the tsar. While government forces extinguished the rebels’ last remaining strongholds along the Volga, Ataman Kornilo Iakovlev and a convoy of Cossacks delivered Razin in chains to Moscow, where he was executed in the middle of Red Square with all the pomp and ceremony befitting the Muscovite state’s most famous criminal.

THE AFTERMATH OF RAZIN’S REVOLT

With Sten’ka “the heretic, traitor, and outlaw” dead and the river reunited under a single ataman, life after Razin began. As the cradle of a rebel force that had for a time, albeit brief, threatened the heart of the Muscovite state, the Don region got off without even a slap on the wrist. No punitive expeditions entered Cossack territory, an economic blockade instituted during the uprising was lifted, and the status quo (autonomy and subsidy) was restored. What, then, were the lasting consequences of the Razin rebellion for the Don region?

50 KVSR, 2.2: 100. 51 KVSR, 2.2: 100. 52 KVSR, 2.2: 100. 53 The account of the capture is taken from KVSR, 3: 62. 54 Avrich, Russian Rebels, p. 113.
The development of greatest long-term significance was the emergence of a core group of loyal Cossacks who openly acknowledged that constant cooperation with the government was essential. Razin’s effort to revive unrestricted raiding had failed and Cossack dependence upon Muscovite grain and gunpowder was demonstrated once again. The subsistence crisis and the rebel challenges to the authority of the Host convinced several prominent Cossacks (among them Ataman Kornilo Iakovlev and future atamans Mikhailo Samarenin and Frol Minaev) that service and government subsidy were the only legitimate game in town. Minaev, who had lead Razin’s abortive attack on the government fort at Korotiak in September 1670, returned to the fold and would become the government’s staunchest defender in subsequent decades. He headed a Cossack delegation to Moscow in 1672, the very year that Tsar Alexei’s second wife gave birth to Tsarevich Peter, the future Peter the Great. Twenty-three years later, Minaev, by then the grand old man of Cossack politics, would welcome Peter to the Don region and help him to capture Azov. According to a Cossack oral tradition, along the way to Azov Tsar Peter would call Cossacks to his camp, indulge them with vodka, and pepper them with questions about Razin’s exploits.

Within only months of Razin’s execution, however, ordinary Cossacks again began to openly defy autocratic orders. After swearing in 1671 to serve “wherever the tsar would order” and promising the tsar’s envoy to send a force to Astrakhan’ to help destroy the last nests of Razin’s supporters, the Cossacks failed to send anyone to take part in the final decisive campaigns against the rebels. They did, however, fight to retain the right of refuge. When the government ordered the Cossacks to search for and hand over fugitive soldiers in 1673, they did not deliver a single individual. The sacrifice of Razin was viewed as a voluntary one, a small price to pay for the salvation of the status quo, but not a precedent that could be continuously invoked by the government.

An important diplomatic struggle between Moscow and Cherkassk over extradition reveals crucial information about how the Cossacks and government officials viewed the post-Razin relationship. The incident

55 KVSR, 2.2: 34. See also A. Savel’ev, Trekhsotletie Voiska Donskago 1570–1870 (Saint Petersburg, 1870), p. 362; Riabov, Donskaiia zemlia, p. 187.
56 Evlampii Kotel’nikov, “Istoricheskoie svedenie Voiska Donskago o Verkhnei Kurmoiarskoi stanitse,” in Chiteniia v obshchestve istorii i drevnostei Rossiiskikh 3 (1863), 27.
57 For a more detailed discussion of this period, see B. Boeck, “Capitulation or Negotiation: Relations Between the Don Host and Moscow in the Aftermath of the Razin Uprising,” in Andreas Kappeler, ed., Die Geschichte Russlands im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert aus der Perspektive seiner Regionen, in Forschungen zur osteuropaischen Geschichte, 63 (2004), 382–94.
58 KVSR, 3: 170, 319.
began in 1675 when a government official from Tambov was allegedly attacked in one of the northern settlements by a group of Cossacks led by Sen’ka “Buianka” (the hell-raiser). He was known to have been a bandit and highwayman in the Kozlov district before he escaped from jail and fled to the Don.\textsuperscript{59} He later reemerged in the northernmost Cossack settlement called Beliaev on the Khoper River, where according to the Host he defended Cossack rights against the Tambov official who insulted their traditions.\textsuperscript{60}

The diplomatic battle between Moscow and Cherkassk began in March 1675, when the Ambassadorial Chancery sent an order to the Don Host demanding that Buianka and the other Cossacks involved in the incident be captured and sent to Moscow in chains.\textsuperscript{61} A report by a government official who had just returned from the Don region revealed a deep rift between the Cossack leadership and rank-and-file Cossacks, who were preventing extradition.\textsuperscript{62} In response a second order was immediately penned to the Host demanding that the Cossacks send Buianka and his comrades to Moscow at once “in order not to bring shame and dishonor upon the Host.”\textsuperscript{63}

The Cossacks’ diplomatic counter-offensive commenced in June 1675.\textsuperscript{64} They affirmed that the Tambov official was to blame for the incident and reminded the tsar of the longstanding tradition of non-extradition from the Don. They avoided any mention of Razin, suggesting that in spite of that single extraordinary precedent the right to refuge was still viewed as an essential component of Cossack liberties. The Cossack petition to the tsar carefully reminded the tsar that any attempt to impose his will would have dire strategic consequences:

If you now, Great Sovereign, order that such newly arrived people be seized from the Don and that Sen’ka Buianka and the Cossacks be taken, let it be as you will (\textit{v tom tvoia volia}). For you are free to impose your sovereign will on all of us, your bondsmen. In order that we, your bondsmen, seeing such an order by the Great Sovereign do not disperse in different directions from your sovereign hereditary possession, the river Don, and hand over your sovereign’s hereditary possession to your eternal enemies, Great Sovereign have mercy on us.

Although the clerk who read the document may not have realized it, the Cossacks had used the same veiled threats before.\textsuperscript{65} The clerk in charge

\textsuperscript{59} RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 12, l. 21.

\textsuperscript{60} For the Cossack account, see RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 1359, ll. 5–6.

\textsuperscript{61} RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 12, l. 28.

\textsuperscript{62} RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 12, l. 28–31.

\textsuperscript{63} RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 12, l. 31–32.

\textsuperscript{64} Cossack reports, RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 12, l. 33, and RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 1359, l. 6.

\textsuperscript{65} See for example RGADA, f. 89, 1630, d. 5, l. 98.
apparently decided not to take action, since a note was made to the effect that “in response to their . . . report, no order from the Great Sovereign was sent.” In the first round of diplomatic salvos, the Cossacks had fought to a stalemate.

The next round began in fall 1675. A Muscovite courier returning from the Don brought word that Buianka had been released from detainment under a surety bond and that he was roaming about at will in Cherkassk. The Ambassadorial Chancery revived the demands that Buianka be handed over and now threatened a new economic blockade of the Don region. A series of contentious krugs debated the issue of extradition in fall 1675. In response to appeals by Ataman Iakovlev not to disobey the tsar and incur his wrath, the rank-and-file Cossacks shouted in response: “You’ve developed a taste for taking Cossacks to Moscow tied up as if they were Azov slaves. It should be enough for you that you succeeded in delivering Razin. If Buianka is handed over, the rest of us might as well wait for our summons from Moscow.” Unable to sway the krug in his favor, Iakovlev was forced to resign. His opponents ordered him to go to Moscow with a simple mandate: to say little and convince the government to retreat.

Informed of the balance of power in the Don region, the government once again began to back down. The winter delegation, which arrived in Moscow in mid-November, brought a petition similar to the one filed in June 1675 that included the same appeals to tradition and the same veiled threats. Other reports received by the government indicated that the Cossacks “in all settlements” were becoming anxious and were starting to discuss the possibility of attacking government forces with assistance from Crimea and Azov. Preferring compromise to conflict, the government once again dropped its demands that Buianka be handed over. The krug won a victory and the right to refuge remained in force.

The need to mobilize and utilize every strategic resource explains the government’s unprecedented, un-autocratic flexibility towards the Don region. The conflict over Buianka and the right to refuge broke out as the Russian state, for the first time in its history, was preparing for a full-scale war against the Ottoman empire. The government could not afford to alienate the Host, which was once again considered a key component of Russian diplomacy.

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66 RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 12, l. 34.
67 Report of government official, RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 12, l. 9.
68 RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 12, ll. 39–40. 69 RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 22, ll. 3–60b.
70 KVSR, 3: 352.
71 Both the draft of the government response to the Cossack report and a copy of the response make no mention of Buianka. See RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 22, ll. 10, 38.
The Treaty of Andrusovo concluded between Russia and Poland in 1667 had provided that “frontier Cossacks” be used as part of a joint counter-attack in response to any Ottoman action against either Poland or Russia. When Ottoman forces took Kamenets Podolskii in 1672, the provisions of the treaty were invoked. In fall 1672, a Don Cossack delegation in Moscow was summoned to the Ambassadorial Chancery to provide consultation on how war against Crimea and the Ottoman Black Sea forts could be carried out. After careful deliberation with its Cossack clients, the government drew up a plan to attack and destroy the Ottoman forts in the delta of the Don region in order to make actions at sea possible and to put pressure on Crimea.

Elated that finally they would see some serious action, thousands of Cossacks arrived in summer 1673 for the campaign. A government force of 8,000 men under the command of I. Khitrovo linked up at Cherkassk with the Cossacks and together they marched to the Don River delta. The Muscovite generals were not given direct military command over the Cossacks, but instead were directed to “take council (sovetovat’) with the atamans and Cossacks about all affairs.” Problems in coordinating the actions of two distinct military contingents and the timely arrival of Ottoman reinforcements resulted in the failure to capture the forts. While some of Khitrovo’s men were sent home, a government force of about 5,000 men was left on the Don. Soon a makeshift fort (ratnyi gorodok) was constructed near Cherkassk to house them and their supplies.

In winter 1674 a Cossack delegation in Moscow was once again called in for high-level consultations with Boyar Artemon Matveev and Dumnyi D’iak Grigorii Bogdanov about how to proceed against the Ottomans. This time they recommended constructing a fort on the Mius River. The rationale for building the fort was simple: in order to reach Azov by sea, ships had to pass near the mouth of the Mius River. The fort would provide a base for conducting operations against the galleys that supplied Azov and thereby place a stranglehold on it. The government enthusiastically embraced the plan and sent an engineer to oversee the project.

The most extensive plan for anti-Ottoman action ever endorsed by the Ambassadorial Chancery up to that point was destined for failure. The project was not thwarted by legions of Janissaries or thousands of

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73 Riabov, Donskaia zemlia, p. 187.
74 Instructions to Military Commander, RGADA, f. 111, 1676, d. 13, ll. 69–71.
75 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 7, l. 105; Oral testimony, f. 111, 1675 d. 12, ll. 30–32.
marauding Tatars, but by rank-and-file Cossacks who staunchly opposed it. When the tsar’s order to build the permanent fort was read to the Cossacks in Cherkassk in September 1675 they commenced to shouting and dispersed the krug.\textsuperscript{76} When a second krug was called and Ataman Iakovlev continued to press the issue, a melee ensued and he was forced to spend several days hiding in the camp of the Muscovite forces.

The new ataman, Mikhailo Samarenin, was able to convince about 3,000 Cossacks to at least join an expedition to inspect the site, but he could not convince the Cossacks to accept the plan. Upon seeing the site, they pronounced the ground too unstable for a large, stone structure.\textsuperscript{77} The Cossacks refused to consider the issue of government forts altogether, proclaiming: “Even if the Great Sovereign’s subsidy of a hundred rubles were sent to [each of] us, we wouldn’t construct and sit in those forts. We don’t desire to sit in forts, and we are already willing to die for the sake of the Great Sovereign without forts.”\textsuperscript{78} The officials of the Ambassadorial Chancery expressed their severe consternation in an order from the tsar threatening that if the forts were not built “the subsidy in cash and grain which was sent to them prior to this will never be sent again and from our Great Sovereign’s upper towns it will be forbidden under penalty of death to release all kinds of supplies through to the Don.”\textsuperscript{79} Undaunted by government threats, in November 1675 the krug once again vetoed the government proposal.

Upon staunch Cossack opposition, the government abjured its plan to build the forts and, without further explanation, failed to act on its threats. For the fifth time in roughly a decade, it demonstrated its preference of compromise to conflict. In spite of their faults, the Cossacks were necessary for asserting pressure against Crimea and the Ottoman coastal towns. The government troops, on the other hand, had not demonstrated tremendous effectiveness in either. In 1677, the forces were withdrawn to participate in the Chigirin campaigns in Ukraine.

The fall of Chigirin to the Ottomans forced Russia to again revise its strategy. In order to bolster its position in Ukraine, it agreed to a historic agreement on the southern frontier. The truce of Bakhchisarai, which was negotiated between the tsar and the Crimean Khan, and ratified by the Ottoman Sultan, was a harbinger of new era.\textsuperscript{80} The treaty introduced state

\textsuperscript{76} Report of government official, RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 12, ll. 2–40b.
\textsuperscript{77} This paragraph is based upon RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 12, l. 5.
\textsuperscript{78} RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 12, l. 13. \textsuperscript{79} RGADA, f. 111, 1675, d. 12, ll. 39–40.
\textsuperscript{80} For the negotiations, see Stateinyi spisok stol’nika Vasil’ia Tiapkina i d’iaka Nikity Zotova posol’stva v Krym v 1680 godu dlia zakliuchenia Bakchisarskago dogovora (Odessa, 1850).
demarcation of borders to the Black Sea steppes. The discussions about
demarcation focused solely on the Dnieper region, since the Don was not
yet formally a part of the Russian empire. To facilitate negotiations, the
Russian representative supplied a European printed map of the Muscovite
state, the Dnieper, and the Black Sea region that was written in Polish and
Latin.\textsuperscript{81} The Dnieper was established as the boundary, since in the words of
the Crimean representative: “According to our Muslim religion there can
be no concessions concerning those places where the feet of the Sultan’s
forces have trodden.”\textsuperscript{82} The process of precisely mapping and parceling up
the steppe that they had just commenced would mark the beginning of the
end of the steppe world.

In January 1681, when the negotiations were being concluded, the
Crimean khan once again requested confirmation that the Don and
Zaporozhian Cossacks would be restrained from raiding the territories
of the khan and the sultan. While postponing the issue until the khan
had himself swore an oath (\textit{shert’}) to the tsar, the answer from the tsar’s
representative was clear:

\begin{quote}
We will make the peace treaties known and will command the Don and
Zaporozhian Cossacks to desist from military expeditions and to live in the bor-
derland (\textit{pogranich’ie}) with the peoples (\textit{narody}) of your majesties the khan and
the sultan in peace, and in friendship and love.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

It was not yet within the power of tsar, khan, or sultan to make the lions
and the lambs – or in this case the Cossack foxes and Tatar wolves – to lie
down together, but in the not-so-distant future rulers would begin striving
in that direction. The tsar was willing to admit to Ottoman officials that
he wielded influence over the Don Cossacks, ending over a century of
denying any connection to them, but the boundaries of his authority over
them were still uncertain.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p. 84. \textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 103. \textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 187.
In the last two decades of the seventeenth century Russia and Russians represented the top two political problems confronting the Don Host. While the tsars attempted to reign in Cossack raiding, Russian migrants repeatedly pressured for raids in the Cossack krugs. Ataman Frol Minaev navigated the Host through this dangerous period of migration and division. His effective management of converging crises ultimately depended on cultivating the good will of Vasilii Vasilievich Golitsyn, the de facto ruler of Rossiia.

The 1680s were also an important time of social transition for the Don Host. As more Cossacks welcomed women into their settlements and Cossacks’ sons began to compete with migrants for scarce resources, Cossack leaders sought to define the parameters of Cossack identity and diminish the role of newcomers in Cossack society. In a period in which more and more Cossacks could trace their ancestral origins to Russia, Don Cossacks started to draw sharper distinctions between themselves and Rus’. New terms of inclusion and exclusion emerged in tandem with efforts to regulate relations between natives and newcomers in the Don region.

Migration from Rus’ as a source of division in the Don region

In the second half of the seventeenth century a great contradiction shaped Cossack society: the promise of freedom from serfdom and taxes lured thousands of Russian migrants to the Don, but the region’s limited resource base could not provide sufficient economic opportunities for all who settled there. The Razin rebellion temporarily diverted the destructive forces of the desperate and destitute, but it took only a few years for them to resurface. Restless, poorly integrated, and hungry, fugitives from Russia were becoming the greatest threat to stability in the Host.
As a result of the treaty of Bakhchisarai in 1681 the Ambassadorial Chancery demanded that Cossacks cease raiding areas under Ottoman jurisdiction. Attempts by Frol Minaev and Cossack leaders to urge compliance with government wishes provoked both an internal political crisis within the Host and another subsistence crisis within the region. For four contentious years the government received reports that the Don region was rife with dissension. The governor of Tsaritsyn reported to the government that in early 1682:

In the Cossack gorodki there is no grain and there are no fish in the Don River and the Cossacks have no means of subsistence. In the Host in Cherkassk among the Cossacks frequent krugs have begun to be held and the Cossacks shout at the ataman and starshina that they have become hungry and that no booty is to be had from anywhere since the Great Sovereign has forbid them from campaigning.1

The influx of newcomers exacerbated a difficult situation. The problem of an increasing population and shrinking resource base would become the cause of serious divisions within the Don region.

In the 1680s the first evidence appears that the region’s traditional ecological resource base was becoming a source of local contention. Though some communities had already begun to delineate the boundaries of their territories a generation or so before the 1680s (a document refers to old boundaries which “all know”), the first evidence of conflicts between Don settlements dates to around 1687.2 The process of establishing firm local boundaries, which were delineated on large rocks or trees, indicates that settlements were being founded sufficiently close to one another that communities began to compete for economic resources such as firewood, grazing lands, and hunting grounds. From this time on, officials from the Host in Cherkassk began to adjudicate local boundary disputes between Cossack communities.

Another harbinger of change is the first appearance of plow agriculture in the northern lands of the Don region. Previously, when most settlements were situated in the south, agriculture was simply impractical, since a whole season’s labor could be easily destroyed in one nomadic raid. Moreover, for many Cossacks the plow was a symbol of a world they had left behind. A petition to the tsar from several landlords in Tambov in 1685 gives the first indication that agriculture was being practiced in the northern Cossack lands. It states:

1 V. G. Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu v kontse XVII veka (Saint Petersburg, 1889), p. 17, n. 50.
2 Trudy Donskago voiskovago statisticheskago komiteta, vyp. 1 (Novocherkassk, 1867), p. 58. This date is also confirmed by Evlampii Kotel’nikov, “Istoricheskoe svedenie Voiska Donskago o verkhnei Kurmojarskoj stanitse,” in Chteniia v obshchestve istorii i drevnostei Rossiskikh 3 (1863), p. 10.
Previously along the rivers Khoper and Medveditsa no lands whatsoever were plowed and no grain was sown. The residents acquired grain from the Russian towns and subsisted on game and fish. Now in those gorodki the Cossacks have introduced plow agriculture and hearing that the Cossacks are plowing fields and sowing grain... peasants, landless individuals, and the bondsmen of boyars are fleeing to the Cossacks.

If only in the most distant northern lands of the Don, the world of the village began to encroach upon the world of the Cossack fortified settlement. The initial reaction from the Host was probably to ignore the problem, since nearly four years passed before the Cossacks took action. But the government continued to press its demands that the Cossacks do something about fugitives. In 1685 the tsars issued a new decree forbidding the Cossacks from receiving fugitives and the government continued to pressure the Host in subsequent years. This new government activism on the fugitive question coincided with the renewed commitment to border patrols along the Belgorod line outlined in Chapter 4.

3 RGADA, f. 111. kn. 13, l. 53–530b.  
4 DAI, 17: 125.
In response to government pressure, the Host decided to categorically forbid plowing and sowing in Cossack lands. The importance of the issue is confirmed by the fact that the question was decided and announced in 1689 during a convocation (s’ezd) of the whole Host. The Cossack order leaves little doubt about the official position of the Host: “We sent our judgment of the Host to all gorodki, that no one in any place is to plow or sow grain. If they start to plow, the guilty party is to be beaten to death and deprived of property . . . Whoever desires to plow, should return to their previous place of residence, wherever they have [previously] lived.”5 We do not have any evidence of how the order was perceived, but its implementation was probably hampered by the decentralization of the Host and the great

5 RGADA, f. 111, 1689, d. 21, l. 156–62; Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu, p. 16, n. 49.
distances from Cherkassk of the places in question. The fact that the order was still in place in the mid 1690s is confirmed by Patrick Gordon, who stated: “On the Don it is strictly prohibited to sow or reap any corns.”

In some of the northern territories Cossacks nevertheless flouted the ban. The northern settlements were testing the boundaries of decentralization by defying orders issued in Cherkassk. While Cossack political traditions were firmly established in the south, and many southern Cossacks could claim more than one generation of residence on the Don, the continued existence of the status quo was especially important for the northern regions, which were inundated with newcomers. Increasingly, the communities in the north would emerge as the staunchest defenders of the ancient Cossack right to refuge (see Chapters 10 and 11).

CLOSING RANKS AGAINST MIGRANTS

In response to the flow of migrants from Russia, important changes began to be implemented that redefined and narrowed the boundaries of the Cossack community. Criteria for gaining membership in Cossack society, which was traditionally open to all (males), began to change. The Cossack fraternity began to regulate the entry of outsiders into its ranks. Cossackdom was embarking on a path of evolution from a lifestyle characterized by openness and voluntary affiliation into a community defined by ascriptive (acquired primarily through birth) identity.

Clothing was one of the first markers of a distinct Cossack identity to emerge. There was no such thing as a Don Cossack uniform, which would only be created and standardized by the government for its own purposes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Cossacks, however, clearly recognized specific forms of dress that marked them as Cossacks: red caps and an ensemble combining colorful eastern cloths and textiles with cuts and designs of Caucasian origin. In 1684 members of a Cossack delegation complained to the Ambassadorial Chancery that they had encountered an unfamiliar individual in Moscow wearing Cossack clothing (kazatskoe plat’е) and demanded that this individual be apprehended and brought in for an investigation. This would suggest that by that time dress, status,

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6 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 5, l. 539.
7 Don Cossack uniforms were first introduced in the second half of the eighteenth century. See SPFIRI, f. 226, op. 1, d. 778, for descriptions of these uniforms.
8 For descriptions from 1630, see RIB, 18, 323–34. A case from 1677 suggests a high degree of continuity. RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 15, l. 60.
9 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 12, l. 245. I could not locate the resolution of the case, but it is clear that the case was about whether the individual in question had a right to wear Cossack clothing.
and identity had become intertwined to a considerable degree and that not just anyone was entitled to wear Cossack clothing.

The deluge of Russian settlers also diluted diversity. After the middle of the seventeenth century, ethnographic differences between the northern and southern regions of the Don, which later observers would take special note of, were starting to take shape. Nineteenth-century observers could claim that the northern parts of the Don region were inhabited by light-haired, blue-eyed northerners (verkhovtsy) while in the south one encountered dark-haired, dark-eyed Cossacks who had “Asiatic” visages. This divide was largely a result of seventeenth-century migration patterns, in which the entire northern part of the Don was settled from adjacent Russian regions. Diversity became reserved to the south, where intermixture with Turkic peoples had taken place over a prolonged period. There Cossacks displayed a swarthy appearance and bilingualism was more common. For example, in 1677 a group of Cossacks traveling from Cherkassk to Moscow were mistakenly taken for a band of Mordvinians by government troops, a serious ethnographic error that resulted in a bar-room brawl. Clear evidence of cultural distinctions that eventually crystallized between north and south is also provided in a petition from 1735: a Turk named Makhmut, who was baptized at Cherkassk, requested that he not be assigned to live in the northern settlements since “in those places there is no one to speak Tatar with.”

With the influx of Russians into their formerly multi-ethnic communities, however, Cossacks increasingly defined themselves in contradistinction to Russians. Cossack documents draw clear distinctions between members of their community and the category “Russian,” which was employed to refer to people who were directly subject to the tsar’s officials. In 1659, for example, the Don Cossacks wrote to the tsar that “from Crimea, the Nogai [Hordes], and Azov, captives, Russians, and our Cossacks (ruskie liudi i kazaki nashi) escape and come to us.” Similarly in 1682, in discussions with the Bey of Azov, the Cossacks negotiated for the return of both “the sovereign’s people,” who later in the document are referred to as Russians, and “their [own] Don Cossacks.”

Among Don Cossacks the term “Russian” was becoming reserved for the way of life prevailing across the Belgorod line in Rus’. For example, in 1686 a priest, who was of Cossack background, petitioned the tsar for a

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10 Donskie voiskovye vedomosti 35–36 (1862), 122.
11 For documents related to the incident, see RGADA, f. 111, 1677, d. 15, ll. 21, 34–35, 60–65.
12 RGVIA, f. 13, op 1/107, d. 3, l. 1098.
13 RIB, 34: 562. For a similar case from 1682 see DAI, 17: 209.
14 DAI, 17: 209.
cash gift due to the fact that in Cherkassk “it is impossible to subsist on [church] lands and revenues in accordance with the Russian custom (protiv ruskogo obyknoveniia), because we live among the Turks and Crimeans and various other hordes.”

Cossack documents consistently draw distinctions between the Don and Russian districts, referring to territories behind the Belgorod line as Rus’ or “Russian towns.” In a document from 1692, the leader of a Cossack delegation appealed to the tsar to preserve the right of refuge and not arrest Cossacks and imprison them “for previous Russian affairs (za prezhnie ruskie dela).” In subsequent years this contradistinction would continue to crystallize and be employed by both the Cossacks and the government.

By the late seventeenth century the Don Cossacks were evolving from a fraternity into a community. A 1685 petition by Russian landlords to the tsar complaining about fugitives in the Don region noted that “in those gorodki where in former times there were twenty or fifteen people, now there are two hundred or three hundred, and also many women.” In the sixteen nineties Patrick Gordon recorded that the Don Cossacks had previously shunned wives, “but of late they live with their wives and families.” Finally, in the mid-1680s a Cossack leader testified that about a third of the Don population had been born in the region, which would suggest that the population was starting to sustain itself through natural increase.

As raiding opportunities declined in the 1680s, the traditional source of obtaining captive Turkic women as wives became less reliable. In response Cossacks almost immediately began to seek brides along the Belgorod line. In 1683 the governor of Korotiak, the southernmost government outpost, wrote to complain about Cossack delegations returning from Moscow to the Don. They would spend long periods of time traveling to various towns and districts, ostensibly for the purpose of buying grain, but actually they were looking for married women and girls who could be convinced to run away with them. In 1694 the patriarch received reports that while the Cossacks were in Voronezh they persuaded women to marry them, while other Cossacks would carry away (uvoziat – which could also suggest kidnapping or abduction) girls and married women without a church wedding. The Ambassadorial Chancery was unable to find any order which either expressly permitted or prohibited the marriage of

17 RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 1, l. 10. 18 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 13, l. 530b.
19 Gordon, Diary, RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 4, l. 539.
20 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 12, l. 710b.
21 Report from Korotiak official, RGADA, f. 210, belgorod stol, d. 1059, l. 125.
22 Bureaucratic summary, RGADA, f. 111, op. 1, 1693, d 11, ll. 277–81.
Cossacks while they were in Russia. But it did ask local officials to inspect the boats and carts of Cossack travelers to make sure that they were not smuggling women to the Don.\textsuperscript{23}

As the number of Cossack families increased over time, large numbers of “Cossack sons” competed with newcomers for access to the region’s limited resources. During a period in which the region’s raiding economy failed to provide a stable subsistence for an increasing population (ca. 1680–90), the first nativist backlashes against outsiders are evident. The Cossacks who had established themselves in the region before the era of migration started to close ranks against newcomers. They began to act as a charter group that regulated movement across communal boundaries. John Porter has described a charter group in Canada as a group of early settlers who considered it their prerogative to make decisions “about what other groups are to be let in and what they will be permitted to do.”\textsuperscript{24}

Prior to the 1680s, there do not seem to have been any legal obstacles in the way of fugitives or migrants becoming Cossacks. Quite often only a few years of residence in the Don region was sufficient for a newcomer to gain acceptance by the community and even stand out sufficiently to be elected by his Cossack brethren to join a Cossack delegation to Moscow. For example, a report prepared by the Ambassadorial Chancery from around 1670 suggests that it was common for Cossacks who had spent only five or six years on the Don to be sent as full-fledged members of Cossack delegations to Moscow.\textsuperscript{25} During the last two decades of the seventeenth century, however, it became difficult for migrants to become Cossacks.

No inviolable rule can be discerned concerning mobility into Cossack communities, but evidence points to emerging obstacles. Newly arrived migrants are increasingly referred to in Cossack documents as *burlaki*. The etymology of the word *burlak* (hereafter burlak) – which is first attested in the Russian language in Don Cossack documents from around 1670 – has not been definitively established, but it is used consistently to refer to transient people or migrant workers.\textsuperscript{26} For various reasons, many who migrated to the Don failed to join the Cossack fraternity. The information

\textsuperscript{23} Instructions to Korotiak checkpoint, RGADA, f. 210, belgorod stol, d. 1059, ll. 470–78; instructions to official delivering subsidy, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 13, ll. 2580b–260.


\textsuperscript{25} Bureaucratic summary, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 12, ll. 680b–69.

available about burlaks suggests that they spent years at a time living in the houses of Cossacks performing various types of manual labor. By the late seventeenth century, in many northern communities nearly half the population consisted of burlaks who had not joined, or had not been allowed to join, the Don Cossack Host.

Those who were able to make the transition from burlak to kazak seem to have concluded crucial long-term kinship alliances with members of the Cossack community. For example, a peasant from Elets named Anoshka (Ananii) Pavlov, who migrated to the Don region some time after 1660, spent over twenty years moving from place to place as a burlak (perekhodia v burlakakh). He finally became a Cossack after marrying in(to) Manychskaia community. Avtamashka Pimenov from Tambov lived for ten years in various communities in the north and fed himself by working for hire between 1681 and 1691. Then, he “served the Great Sovereign together with the Don Cossacks.” In 1696 he was captured by the Turks near Azov and his Don Cossack brother-in-law was injured. While it is impossible to say for certain, his marriage to a Cossack’s sister may have been the crucial event which transformed him from hired worker into Cossack.

A cluster of documents from the 1680s reveals a trend towards formalization of Cossack service and discrimination against outsiders. In order to preserve their important economic relationship with Russia, the Cossacks began to close ranks. In 1685, a Cossack named Ivan Iakimov, who was interrogated by a Muscovite government official, testified that “on the Don he was a recorded Don Cossack (byl pis’mennoi donskoi kazak) and every year he received the Great Sovereign’s cash, grain, and cloth subsidy and took part in campaigns with the Don Cossacks.” The statement indicates that receipt of shares of the subsidy and enrollment in service marked his juridical status as a legitimate Cossack. This status distinguished him from the fugitives and burlaks who were living in the region without being formally admitted into the Cossack fraternity. In 1685 a group of Zaporozhian Cossacks, some of whom had lived on the Don for more than ten years,
explained their decision to leave the Don by the fact that “those Don Cossacks who are of Ukrainian stock (Cherkaskoi porody)” were of late “being deprived of adequate shares of the subsidy.” The Zaporozhians sensed that they were being discriminated against because of their non-local background.

The story of a migrant named Petr Smirennyi, who arrived in the Don region from Voronezh around 1678, confirms that outsiders were forced to undergo a trial period in the community before being formally admitted into the Cossack ranks. He spent seven years serving in the household of a Cossack and testified that he was only enrolled into Cossack ranks (v kazaki ego priverstali) under ataman Frol Minaev. His case provides the first known usage of the term priverstat’ (which means to enroll into service) among the Don Cossacks. In the decades that followed, a formal procedure of admission into Cossack ranks was becoming the rule rather than the exception.

Finally, documents from the 1680s capture the spirit of a period in which sentiments in the Host were solidifying against newcomers. A Russian official observed that the naked ones were now forced to stand outside the krug (za krugom). According to a Muscovite official, Ataman Frol Minaev reported to him that a great number of Cossacks in excess of the required number would be ready to serve the tsar that year, but “by no means should those [excess] Cossacks be given the Great Sovereigns’ [plural] subsidy, since many of those who will show up are burlaks, who live among people, not in their own households, and others are drunkards.” The message is clear. The ataman considered the mass of burlaks to be at best second-class citizens unworthy of receiving the tsar’s subsidy. Rather than seek an increase in the subsidy, which would remain the same after 1683, the Host would henceforth limit the number of individuals who would receive it.

If opinion in Cherkassk and the southern communities was beginning to turn against outsiders, evidence also suggests that in some circles membership in the Cossack community began to be viewed as an ascriptive, or in popular terms blood or birth-based, identity. In 1683 the ataman of a Cossack delegation to Moscow pleaded for the return of a Cossack who had been recognized in Moscow as a fugitive musketeer, stating:

34 Report of official, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 13, 103.
35 Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu, p. 11, n. 33. RGADA, f. 111, 1688, d. 22, ll. 5–37.
The Great Sovereigns are aware that on the Don not all those who serve the Great Sovereigns are native, local Don Cossacks (prirodnye, tamoshnye donskie kazaki). There are also fugitives of all ranks who flee to the Don from Moscow and other towns. On the Don true, native Don Cossacks (priamye, prirodnykh donskikh kazakov) make up less than a third [of the population].

The fact that “native”, “local” Cossacks are contrasted with fugitives, suggests an emerging dichotomy between locals and newcomers. The document also describes native Cossacks, who in contrast to “fugitives” were born and reared in the Don region, as priamye, which could be translated as true, legitimate, or of unquestionable status. Though these sentiments were expressed within the context of an argument that sought to prove that among the Don Cossacks natives and newcomers were different but equal, the dichotomy outlined in this document foreshadows the developments of later decades in which differences between natives and newcomers would become the basis of institutionalized inequality.

Those born into the Cossack community began to innately possess a degree of legitimacy – at least for the purposes of situations in which identities could come into question, such as trips to Russia or dealings with the government – that newcomers did not possess. In the case above, the Cossack delegation refused to leave Moscow without their “brother.” Thanks to the good will cultivated between Ataman Frol Minaev and government officials, the delegation succeeded. It convinced V. V. Golitsyn, the main advisor and favorite of Tsarevna Sofia who ruled as regent from 1682–89 during the minority of her younger brothers Ivan and Peter, to allow the Cossack of musketeer origins to return to the Don region. But Golitsyn also authorized an order demanding that henceforth no Cossacks of fugitive origins ever be sent in delegations to Moscow.

ATAMAN FROL MINAEV AND THE MIDDLE GROUND

It has become commonplace in the historiography of Russian empire-building to discuss the co-optation of borderland elites as a major objective of Russian policy makers. But the model of co-optation usually implies a unidirectional view of political agency: imperial officials buy off, manipulate, and bend local actors to their political will in order to achieve imperial

37 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 12, 710b. For Sofia’s deliberation and Golitsyn’s order see clerk’s note 69–690b.

objectives. Due to the participatory nature of politics in the Don region, however, Cossack leaders were accountable to two masters: their Cossack comrades and their imperial overlords. Co-option was not a viable option when opponents of empire could strike back by vetoing disliked measures or deposing an unpopular ataman. Instead, in order to understand Russia’s relations with the Don region it is necessary to propose a more dynamic model that recognizes the benefits that both sides derived from cooperation.

Presiding over many of the changes described above and at the center of efforts by senior Cossacks to manage the political crises caused by migration and diminishing opportunities for raiding, Ataman Frol Minaev was a pivotal figure in the relationship between Russia and the Don. His career as ataman, with the exception of a few brief, but key, pauses, spanned the turbulent transition period from 1680–1700. His policies were marked by periods of cooperation with Russian officials punctuated by shows of defiance and attempts to reopen dialogue.

Minaev was a successful operator on the middle ground. His ability to take care of business with both the northern and southern neighbors of the Don went hand in hand with his leadership of the Host. His path to becoming a Cossack leader involved major successes in raiding, trading, and negotiating. Although nothing is known about his background, he must have been born some time before 1640. By 1660 he was already serving as the elected ataman of a Cossack delegation to Moscow. He sided with Razin initially, but like many of his peers, Minaev managed to disassociate himself from the rebel camp and return to the loyal fold. In the 1670s he frequently lead Cossack delegations to Moscow and raids against the nomads. By 1675 he was noted as one of the most vociferous supporters of Moscow in the debate over whether to hand over Sen’ka Buianka.

As the first ataman whose commercial activities can be documented, Minaev’s career exemplifies how leadership and accumulation of wealth coincided. Minaev’s personal capital probably originated from successful transactions with captives and cattle, obtained during his successful leadership of raids early in his career. In accordance with Cossack custom, a

39 This section is based upon primary sources. For an earlier summary of information about Frol Minaev, see L. M. Savelov, “Sem’ia Frolovykh na Donu,” Trudy XIV arkheologicheskogo s’ezda (Chernigov, 1909), vol. iii, pp. 361–66.
40 RIB, 34: 689. 41 KVSR, 2.2: 23, 34, 98.
43 KVSR, 3: 351.
portion of booty from raids, called the *bashlovka*, was traditionally assigned to the ataman who led them. During trips to Moscow atamans were not only awarded expensive diplomatic gifts, but also were allowed to bring back goods duty free to the Don region. This enabled him to augment his capital through trade.\textsuperscript{44}

Minaev’s fortune was also advanced by the fact that he became a major player in the ransom business. Aside from his political prominence, the key ingredient to his success was that for him ransom was a family business. His wife was a Nogai Tatar from Kuban’ and her brother Uteiko was involved in both trade and ransom affairs on the other side of the frontier.\textsuperscript{45} Kinship cemented trust, which, in addition to capital, was essential to successful ransom transactions. Minaev profited from both ends of the ransom business, ransoming Tatars captured by the Cossacks and making ransom loans to Russians and Cossacks captured by the Tatars. In several cases, he is mentioned as facilitating individual ransom deals involving fairly large sums of money – 150–300 rubles – which multiplied over many transactions would suggest that his overall take was far from modest.\textsuperscript{46} Minaev’s network of acquaintances and associates stretched from the Caucasus to Moscow and many of his associates, including officials of the Ambassadorial Chancery, were personally indebted to him.\textsuperscript{47}

Minaev’s influence over the assembly in Cherkassk waxed and waned with the fortunes of the Cossack community. He struggled, successfully at times and unsuccessfully at others, to convince the Cossacks to act in accordance with Muscovite objectives. He ruled not with an iron hand, but through commanding the respect of the krug at crucial times. In 1685, Frol Minaev confided to a government representative that in a recent krug he “spoke to the Cossacks with tears in his eyes, [telling them] not to break the peace with the Turkish Sultan and Crimean Khan, but they did not listen.”\textsuperscript{48} Only a few months later, in winter 1686, a witness indicated that “many Cossacks appeared in the krug before Ataman Frol Minaev and spoke and pleaded to be allowed to raid on the sea and near Azov, but the ataman did not release them.”\textsuperscript{49} Similarly, in early 1692 he was complaining to the government that he “could no longer restrain such free

\textsuperscript{44} Report of boundary official, RGADA, f. 210, belgorod stol, d. 1260, l. 150.

\textsuperscript{45} Oral testimony, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 14, l. 254; GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 117, l. 135.

\textsuperscript{46} For some of the ransom transactions involving Frol, consult: RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 411ob; RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 2, l. 11; RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 3, ll. 109, 259; RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 14, l. 540b; RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 476ob.

\textsuperscript{47} See DAI 17: 160, 161, 171 and sources in notes above.

\textsuperscript{48} Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 13, 124, l. 1030b.

\textsuperscript{49} Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 13, 3330b.
people (vol’nykh liudei),” while a few months later, after a successful raid, he was spoken of as “ordering” the Cossacks to assist government troops with quarantining the Astrakhan’ and the Terek regions as a result of the plague.50

Though Cossacks were often unsatisfied with the positions he took on certain issues, they seem to have preferred his leadership to the alternatives. In at least three critical moments (in 1683, 1688, and 1694) he was able to overcome resistance from the krug by threatening to resign, which would indicate that his leadership was valued within the region.51 His opponents were only able to outmaneuver him when he was away from the region visiting Moscow.

A significant element of his leadership style consisted of cultivating personal relationships with Russian officials who could serve his political interests. In 1677, while Ataman Mikhailo Samarenin was in the midst of a dispute with a visiting Muscovite diplomat, allegedly plotting to kill him, Frol Minaev cordially entertained the Muscovite official in his home.52 In 1695, on the eve of the first Azov Campaign, he welcomed general Patrick Gordon to the Don by paying him a visit and bringing him “a sheep, some bread, and dried backs of sturgeons.”53 In October 1695 he dined together with Gordon and Tsar Peter I.54 The latter fact is noteworthy, since Minaev actively cultivated the patronage of Vasilii Vasilievich Golitsyn, the leading figure in the administration of Peter’s rival, and sister, Sofiia.

Minaev’s relationship with Golitsyn was based upon a keen understanding of the situation in Moscow and a sober appraisal of Golitsyn’s power, which depended on managing factional struggles at court. In the presence of government representatives Minaev presented himself as a servant of autocratic interests, but he consistently lowered government expectations by emphasizing his own lack of power and portraying Russian migrants as the major source of political instability in the Host.

He frequently navigated a middle ground between obedience, which could be attributed to his leadership, and defiance, which could be blamed on the unruliness of Cossack liberty. In 1682 Frol Minaev headed a delegation to Moscow that successfully sought an increase in the annual subsidy

50 For his inability to restrain the Host see oral testimonies, RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 1, 11. For “ordering” see report of government official, RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 3, 102–3.
51 See next chapter. Also see, RGADA, f. 111, 1694, d. 4, l. 22; DAI, 10: 430.
53 Gordon diary, RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 5, see entry for June 14, ll. 480–82.
54 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 5, l. 5360b.
by emphasizing how difficult it was to restrain the Cossacks from raiding. In 1683 he began sending secret messages to Golitsyn via Muscovite diplomats. He blamed political troubles within the Host on fugitive Muscovite musketeers, who had earlier staged an uprising in Moscow. He linked local conflicts to the metropolitan disturbances that broke out upon the death of Tsar Fedor and asked Golitsyn to stop the government policy of exiling religious rebels to the southern frontier (see next chapter for in-depth coverage of religious dissent). He argued that unruly fugitives almost killed him when the subsidy was divided and he shrewdly convinced Golitsyn that they both were facing common enemies and working for common interests.

In 1685, however, the Cossacks openly defied government orders. They outfitted over fifty boats and plundered Ottoman supply ships laden with food and merchant goods in the Sea of Azov. A Cossack report indicated that Minaev and other office holders “could not restrain the naked ones, because they themselves are afraid of them.” A Cossack delegation in Moscow outlined the potent combination of participatory politics and migration as the causes of defiance. After four krugs “unrestrained liberty (volia) prevailed due to the fact that they have no means of subsistence, while untold multitudes of naked ones and all kinds of vagrants have arrived in the Host and in the krugs there is great shouting.” Minaev repeated the same themes in a secret dispatch to a Muscovite diplomat in the Don region. He diverted the blame for defiance of government orders to migrants, shielding the Cossacks from responsibility.

The government had received reports suggesting that the Don Cossacks had in fact conducted the sea raids at the urging of Jan Sobieski, the king of Poland. The Cossacks had grossly violated their post-Razin pledge not to have relations with other sovereigns and had created a strategic diversion detrimental to the tsar’s peace with the Ottoman Sultan. So how did the government of Golitsyn respond to this major act of Cossack defiance? It sent a mild rebuke to the Don Host and, more importantly, it delivered the full subsidy on schedule. What would explain this apparent lack of government desire to assert its will or punish the Cossacks?

Once again the Don region proved to be a crucial piece of a larger strategic puzzle that involved the Ottoman Empire. In 1683 the Habsburg

55 Official’s report of a dinner in Minaev’s home, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 13, ll. 103–40b. See also, Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu, pp. 111–16.
56 Cossack testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 12, l. 326. 57 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 12, l. 326.
58 This section is based on RGADA, f. 111, kn. 12, 324–260b, and kn. 13, 9–17, 62, 75–760b, 119. See also V. D. Sukhorukov, Istoricheskoe opisanie zemli Voiska Donskago (Novocherkassk, 1869), pp. 322–27.
emperor Leopold and the Polish king Sobieski concluded an alliance against
the Ottomans, who had reached the gates of Vienna. This “Holy Alliance”
was expanded to include Venice, and soon Russia was asked to join. If
it could be convinced to attack Crimea, and thus keep the Tatars from
coming to the aid of Ottoman forces, the balance of power in Central
Europe could be shifted dramatically in favor of the Christian camp.

Fortunately for the Holy Alliance, the Russian government was headed
by Golitsyn. Lindsey Hughes has declared that “Golitsyn figures promi-
nently amongst a small group of ‘new men’ who stood out . . . for their
adoption of western ways, their erudition and culture, their western-
oriented politics, or a combination of the three.”

Talks with Poland commenced in 1684 and Golitsyn began to weigh the opportunities a
coalition would present. In February 1684, Patrick Gordon, the Scottish
military expert who began to play an increasingly prominent role in Rus-
sian military affairs, was called in for private consultations with Golitsyn.
According to Gordon, they discussed the Polish alliance and he emphasized
to Golitsyn the “present opportunities” and “future hazard” of not dealing
with the Tatars and prepared a policy paper at Golitsyn’s request about the
situation. It is interesting to note that Russia’s entry into the diplomatic
and military contest that would come to be known as the “Eastern question”
took place as a result of a Habsburg invitation issued to a western-leaning
Russian statesman who sought advice from a Scottish military expert.

By the time that the Cossacks raided Ottoman territories, Golitsyn was
already negotiating an anti-Ottoman, Polish alliance. Minaev may have
even secretly been informed of this fact by his contacts in the Ambassadorial
Chancery. Moreover, officials in Moscow had monitored via Ukraine the
effectiveness of the 1685 Cossack sea raid. Patrick Gordon recorded: “The
Tatars could not come with any great power out of the Crim[ea], because
of the Don Cosackes having broke with them and threatening to fall into
the Crim[ea].” A provision for Don Cossack raids in the Black Sea was
even included in the treaty of Eternal Peace between Russia and Poland.

Golitsyn was preparing to assume command of nearly 100,000 troops for
an invasion of Crimea. If the Don Cossacks were going to be asked to create
a strategic diversion, at this juncture he needed them more then they needed

59 Lindsey A. J. Hughes, Russia and the West: The Life of a Seventeenth-Century Westernizer, Prince
60 Gordon diary, RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 4, l. 10b.
61 Gordon diary, RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 4, ll. 85, 930b. Paul Bushkovitch, Peter the Great: The
Struggle for Power, 1671–1725 (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 147–48. For the Cossack clause of the Eternal
Peace, see Lindsey Hughes, Sophia: Regent of Russia 1657–1604 (New Haven, 1990), 192.
him. In 1687 Frol Minaev was personally summoned to lead Don Cossack participation in the war effort against Crimea. The Cossacks performed admirably in putting pressure on Crimean coastal areas and were also able to prevail in a land skirmish against a reconnaissance party of about a thousand Tatars. The initial Cossack successes were the only bright spot in the Crimean campaigns, which otherwise were dismal failures. In 1687 Golitsyn’s Russian forces failed to even reach Crimea and were prevented from continuing their march by the burning of the steppe. The second Crimean campaign in 1689 involved indecisive battles, an ignominious retreat, and heavy casualties.

The pattern of preserved evidence suggests that Minaev was the first ataman to place Muscovite government interests on par with Don Cossack interests. He was the first ataman to strategically, but selectively, inform the government of Cossack internal affairs. In 1692 he could testify: “Previously I have always written the absolute truth to the Great Sovereigns and now I do so likewise, remembering the ineffable mercy and rewards of the Great Sovereigns to me.” At the same time, his cultivating the favor of government officials enabled his Cossack constituency to reap the benefits of new opportunities for raiding during and after the Crimean campaigns. This brief Indian Summer of the raiding economy produced some exemplary years such as 1692, when the Cossacks ambushed a group of Tatars and Turks and took over a thousand captives, a quantity that they had not seen “for a long, long time.”

Frol Minaev’s role as a consistent ally of the Russian government won him friends in high places, but it also gained him many adversaries in the Don region. By serving in the Crimean campaigns, Minaev maintained the government good will that would prove essential to his own political survival during the great religious schism of the late 1680s (next chapter). His long tenure in office resulted from his ability to retain both his local and imperial allies while outwitting, and eventually outgunning, his powerful enemies within the Don region.

63 RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 1, l. 11. 64 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, 1692, d. 2, 108–9.
The Don region in the 1680s provides a complex picture of interaction between Russians and non-Russians, Orthodox and others, and Cossacks and nomads. In an era in which religious rebels from Russia fled to the steppe and established common cause with Muslim rulers and in a period in which the tsar mustered the support of Cossacks, Kalmyks, and even Chechens to prevail in a regional struggle with Orthodox dissidents, it becomes problematic to frame Russia’s steppe frontier in terms of religiously motivated Russian state expansion. This brief but important episode in the history of the Russian steppe was not about an aggressive Orthodox Third Rome crusading against the non-Christian peoples of the steppe frontier, but about religious dissidents trying to use the steppe as a staging ground for taking Russia back from the Antichrist.

In the last decades of the seventeenth century, as strong currents of dissent inundated the decentralized world of the Don River, the Don Cossack fraternity was pushed to the brink of fratricide. The fate of the Don Cossack Host hinged upon resolving differences between haves and have-nots, representatives of northern and southern communities, defenders of Nikonian Orthodoxy and Old Ritual, and supporters and opponents of Moscow. A great schism (raskol) challenged the region’s relationship with the Russian government and provoked a civil war that sent roughly one in ten Don Cossacks in search of sanctuary in the North Caucasus.

OLD BELIEVERS FILL THE RELIGIOUS VOID

Divisions within the Don region, such as those between destitute newcomers and well-established Cossacks, dated to the time before the Razin rebellion, but by the 1680s a new source of antagonism had drifted down

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river from Russia: religious schism. Religious reforms initiated by Patriarch Nikon (1652–58) served as a catalyst for the convergence of an explosive combination of forces: local grievances, defense of diverse local forms of Orthodoxy, resentment against top-down imposition of change, and festering dissent against both church and state. The schism caused a significant number of Russians to be in Georg Michels’ words “at war with the Church.”

In the Don region this new source of division threatened to disrupt, if not destroy, the status quo.

Before examining the consequences of the religious schism that convulsed the Don region in the 1680s, it is necessary to outline some of the causes of the rapid spread of Old Believer ideology. Thanks to the excellent study by Russian historian V. G. Druzhinin, this study will only briefly examine the religious issues in order to focus on the power struggle in the Don region. The roots of the raskol can be traced to conditions existing in the region long before refugees transplanted metropolitan teachings to the Don. The Don region did not belong to any bishopric, but was instead under the jurisdiction of the patriarch. Relations with the patriarch were carried on through the Ambassadorial Chancery. Though the patriarch retained the right to appoint priests to the region and confirm the consecration of churches, the existing evidence points to the fact that his role was little more than a rubber stamp authority to confirm decisions proposed by the Cossacks themselves and forwarded to him by the Ambassadorial Chancery.

Since no institution kept extensive records on religious affairs in the Don region, it is difficult to know how many churches existed or how exactly they functioned. Only two full-fledged churches (one in Cherkassk and one in the north) existed in the region, while chapels, only some of which were staffed with priests, served most of the population. Testimony from 1688 confirms this picture. A Cossack who lived in a settlement five days distant from Cherkassk testified that in his area “there is no church and no priest, only a chapel . . . and in the chapel liturgies are never held.”

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3 V. G. Druzhinin, *Raskol na Donu v kontse XVII veka* (Saint Petersburg, 1889), pp. 55–56; DAI, 17, 163. The conclusion about rubber stamp authority is suggested by RGADA, f.111, kn. 22, ll. 245ob–46. Upon receiving a Cossack request to appoint a local d’aichok, whose only documented qualification was that he was good person (dobryi chelovek), as priest, the Ambassadorial Chancery ordered the Metropolitan of Riazan’ to approve the request (l.246). A similar conclusion is suggested by a bureaucratic note in RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 598–99.


5 DAI, 17: 166.
The era of raskol

The spiritual void left by the official church began to be increasingly fulfilled by its spiritual opposition, representatives of Old Belief. The movement which had begun as a result of resistance to changes in ritual under Patriarch Nikon transformed into a grassroots form of resistance to the church hierarchy and, eventually, the government that supported it. The persecution of Old Believers by the government after 1667 sent a number of religious dissidents to the frontiers of the Muscovite state in search of refuge. In the wake of the abortive rebellion of Muscovite musketeers in 1682, new waves of fugitives headed for the northern settlements of the Don region and among these were several radical preachers such as Kuz’ma Kosoi, who was convinced that the world was coming to an end and that the true faith could only be restored in Russia by violent means.

The right of refuge that was traditional in the Don region gave shelter to the Old Believers, but the absence of any opposition to their activities by the official church allowed them to gain influence throughout the Cossack territories. Old Believer priests promptly occupied the religious niches left open by the absence of the official church, holding church services, preaching, taking confessions, and performing rituals. In the northern communities Old Belief took root fairly quickly and Kosoi claimed to have amassed two thousand followers.

The first major incident to demonstrate the potential of Old Believer propaganda to disrupt Cossack society took place in 1683. A blind holy man traveled through the region showing Cossacks what he claimed was a letter from Tsar Ivan Alekseevich (Peter’s brother) appealing to the Cossacks for help. According to the spurious letter, the boyars had massacred the Muscovite musketeers and were responsible for fomenting the religious reforms. In his missive the tsar implored the Cossacks to march on Moscow and suppress the boyars. This attempt to seek Cossack intervention in a metropolitan religious conflict finds a parallel in the repeated efforts by the Ukrainian clergy in the first half of the seventeenth century to get the Zaporozhian Cossacks to actively intervene in defense of the Orthodox faith against Catholic and Uniate oppression.

When read in the krug at Cherkassk, the letter apparently made a great impression on the assembled Cossacks. Frol Minaev had to threaten to resign in order to convince the Cossacks to send a fact-finding delegation to Moscow instead of taking up arms. When news of the letter reached

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6 Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu, pp. 67–95.
7 Ibid., pp. 110–11.
8 Ibid., pp. 105–6.
9 Ibid., p. 99.
12 Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu, p. 112.
the Muscovite government, it ordered the Cossacks to hand over the holy man just as they had handed over Razin.¹³

During a krug convened to discuss the government order, the Cossacks expressed considerable opposition.¹⁴ Ataman Minaev and a few other office holders met secretly with the Muscovite official who had delivered the order, telling him that due to the large number of fugitives, the situation was getting out of control. They urged him to communicate to V. V. Golitsyn that government pressure for extradition would incite the rank and file Cossacks against the government. Instead, the guilty parties should be punished in the Don region. By some unknown means, the ataman was nevertheless able to convince the Cossacks to hand over a fugitive musketeer, who would take responsibility for the letter. This pacified the government, which had discovered that the letter originated in Moscow, allowing it to catch the suspected authors.

For a brief time the Old Believer problem was considered solved, but in 1686 the governor of Voronezh alerted the government to the fact that the Old Believers were once again active in the Don region and were using it as a base to infiltrate neighboring areas.¹⁵ This alarming report provoked a government order to the Host to destroy Old Believer hermitages that had been established along the Medveditsa River in the north. The Cossacks, however, did not implement the order, since they were not convinced that the monks were schismatics.¹⁶ The Old Believers were on the ascendancy.

**THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN FACTIONS**

In late 1686, Frol Minaev gave up his position as ataman in order to travel to Moscow as a member of the winter delegation. He was succeeded by Samoilo Lavrent’ev, an experienced and influential Cossack, who also happened to be a supporter of the Old Believers.¹⁷ While Minaev was in Moscow, Lavrent’ev allowed a fugitive priest to address the Cossacks on the issue of church service books. After considering the issue, a decision was made to use the old, pre-reform, service books, which did not mention either the tsar or the patriarch. Soon religious passions were beginning to divide the Cossacks, and both sides were allegedly preparing for a clash: the supporters of Old Belief were said to be negotiating with the Kalmyks to come to their aid if necessary, and those who supported the reforms, and the government, were said to be planning to kill Lavrent’ev and some of

his associates. Heated discussions took place in a krug convened to discuss church books, but once again the Old Believer supporters prevailed.\textsuperscript{18}

In summer 1687 Kuz'ma Kosoi arrived in Cherkassk. He began preaching about the imminent end of the world, saying: “Christ has ordered us to cleanse the world. We are not afraid of the tsars or the whole universe. The whole Christian faith has fallen away [from the true faith] and in Moscow there is no piety.”\textsuperscript{19} Clashes began to take place between the Old Believer sympathizers and those who supported the government.

That same summer, 1687, Frol Minaev, who had been away serving in the first Crimean Campaign, returned to Cherkassk, setting the stage for a serious show down.\textsuperscript{20} During a krug in which Kosoi was given an opportunity to explain his teachings, Minaev managed to sway opinion against him (allegedly he was plotting a mutiny against the government). Kosoi was captured and his supporters were dispersed.\textsuperscript{21} Minaev used the opportunity to take power once again and get the Cossacks to swear loyalty to the tsars, while Kosoi was delivered to Moscow in fall 1687.

The government, however, used the ascendancy of its supporters to demand the extradition of former ataman Lavrent’ev. In November 1687, however, a fire broke out in Cherkassk, and the ensuing conflagration consumed the entire city.\textsuperscript{22} This event, perhaps interpreted as a sign from above, reinvigorated the Old Believer party which began to agitate openly once again. The government order demanding the extradition of Lavrent’ev, who was esteemed as an experienced (staryi) Cossack, gave them a trump card to play against Minaev.

Lavrent’ev’s supporters began to argue that if he were handed over to Moscow, the rest of them would soon follow in his footsteps.\textsuperscript{23} They convinced the residents of seven settlements in the north to defend his cause before the Host, raising the specter of civil war.\textsuperscript{24} A letter from Cossacks in the north argued that Lavrent’ev should not be handed over, since “never before have they handed over their brothers.” In the history lesson that followed, the letter reminded the Cossacks that even after murdering the government representative Karamyshev (an event which took place in 1630) the tsar had not taken out his wrath upon them. An attempt by the tsars to withhold the subsidy would hardly affect them, since “they know how to feed themselves without it.” Finally, the letter continued to the effect that even the Cossacks who had taken Astrakhan’ [under Razin] and

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 137.  \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 150.  \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 151. See also DAI, 17: 137, 164.
\textsuperscript{21} Druzhinin, \textit{Raskol na Donu}, pp. 152–53.  \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp. 155–77.
\textsuperscript{23} DAI, 17: 199.
killed boyars were not punished.\textsuperscript{25} The argument, all of which was true, seems to have had an effect, since Lavrent’ev was not handed over. Frol Minaev would later apologize to Golitsyn for not informing him of the dire situation in the region at that time by explaining that his opponents had “stirred up the whole river and wanted to kill good people [i.e. the government’s supporters] and no one dared to speak out or even write secretly.”\textsuperscript{26}

The pro-government Cossacks would later suggest that Lavrent’ev and his supporters were planning an insurrection like that of Razin.\textsuperscript{27} According to one report, they were planning to invite nomadic hordes to join them on a campaign to Moscow.\textsuperscript{28} Whether or not this was the case, Lavrent’ev’s supporters were once again gaining influence. They had convinced the krug not to extradite him, and several of his allies were sent to Moscow in the winter delegation, evidently in an effort to suppress the true situation in the region.\textsuperscript{29}

The government, however, continued to press for the extradition of Lavrent’ev and several supporters of Kosoi, the radical preacher.\textsuperscript{30} The renewed demands for extradition once again caused conflict in Cherkassk. During five krugs, the issue could not be settled.\textsuperscript{31} Frol Minaev resigned from office, in fear that his continued advocacy of the government cause would be hazardous to his health. Soon thereafter a compromise of sorts was reached. Frol was called back to resume office and the issue of Lavrent’ev was left unresolved.

Unless Minaev could gain government intervention, Lavrent’ev’s allies in the winter delegation would soon be returning from Moscow, which would strengthen the hand of the Old Believers. In a preemptive move, a Cossack was entrusted with delivering three secret letters to Moscow. The letters denounced several members of the winter delegation, who were described as enemies of church and state.\textsuperscript{32} Kirei Matveev, a supporter of Lavrent’ev who lead the delegation, was described as an inveterate enemy of V. V. Golitsyn and enemy of tsar and patriarch. According to one of the letters, the veracity of which cannot be confirmed, Kirei had even opposed the Crimean campaigns, the pet projects of Golitsyn, boasting: “Why do

\textsuperscript{25} DAL, 17: 200. \textsuperscript{26} DAL, 17: 197.
\textsuperscript{27} DAL, 17: 148, 199. This version seems to have circulated within the government. Patrick Gordon recorded in his diary on May 6, 1688 the following: “It was said of the Dons that they were guilty of some thought of raising some rebellion like to that of Sten’ka Razin.” Gordon diary, RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 4.
\textsuperscript{28} Druzhinin, \textit{Raskol na Donu}, p. 163. \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., pp. 161–62. \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 168.
\textsuperscript{32} DAL, 17: 147–54.
we need to campaign against the Crimean [khan]? We should clean house here first, in these times the Crimean is better than our tsars in Moscow.”

Though the last pronouncement would seem to be foreshadowing the final outcome of the power struggle in the Don region, to be discussed below, the letters were calculated to have a maximum effect on Golitsyn, to whom they were delivered surreptitiously on the night of March 2, 1688. In order to prevent a new rebellion, which according to the letters would erupt in the spring, a few days after receiving the letters the government detained the defamed members of the Cossack delegation.

The pro-government party had successfully outwitted Lavrent’ev’s supporters. Several of them were incarcerated in Moscow, where the Cossack krug could no longer protect them. Under torture, they revealed new information about their confederates in the Don region, while the patronage of Golitsyn, who was thankful to the pro-government Cossacks for their initiative, was secured. The fact that the rest of the Cossacks in the delegation were not arrested sent a signal to the Cossacks in Cherkassk that the government would only punish those who were guilty of serious offenses, giving Minaev some room for maneuvering. The stage was set for one final showdown in Cherkassk.

The government acted, almost as if on cue, sending an order to the Don revealing that Kirei Matveev and his associates had been detained for slandering the tsars and patriarch and planning a new rebellion. The other members of the delegation were given their due honors and would soon be returning with the subsidy, but Lavrent’ev and several others would have to be handed over by May. A letter from Iakov Chernyi, who was now ataman of the delegation in Moscow, confirmed that the remaining members of the delegation were being treated well, but noted that if the Cossacks did not comply with government orders the delegation would be detained in Moscow and the subsidy would not be sent.

The krug convened to discuss the government letter in early April 1688 proved to be the final public discussion of the Old Believer question. The reading of the tsar’s order was a dramatic affair: Minaev and several “experienced (starye), esteemed (znatnye) Cossacks” broke into tears upon hearing that the tsar would not take out his wrath upon all of them. They began agitating for the extradition of Lavrent’ev and his remaining allies, as

36 For a slightly different evaluation of these events, see Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu, pp. 179–81. The description of the krug is contained in the record of the interrogation of Ivan Nikitin, in DAI, 17: 190–99.
37 DAI, 17: 191.
outlined in the order, with Nikitin, the government representative, warning that the tsar’s mercy was not infinite. The ataman also threatened to write to Moscow, exposing by name those who opposed the decision to hand over Lavrent’ev, in order that the innocent would not “suffer together with those outlaws.” At some point, possibly according to a pre-arranged scenario, two Cossacks stepped out of the crowd to denounce Lavrent’ev and Matveev. This helped to sway opinion against them, causing the crowd to shout: “Why shouldn’t we hand over Samoshka and his supporters? We shouldn’t starve to death because of them!” An ally of Lavrent’ev responded: “If you hand over Samoshka Lavrent’ev and his comrades to Moscow, then all of you who hand him over will get such a reward from your brothers, when the northern gorodki gather for a convocation, that none of your names will be remembered.”

Before others could join in, Frol Minaev and his allies pounced upon the Cossack who had just spoken, beating him to a pulp with clubs and tossing his corpse out of the round.

After the bloody spectacle was played out, Minaev used the momentum he had gained to sway the assembly, saying: “If anyone else opposes the order of the Great Sovereigns to send Samoshka and his comrades to Moscow... or endeavors to defend other schismatics, let them also be beaten to death without any investigation.” The Cossacks shouted “Liubo! Liubo!” and the krug was concluded. The account we have, provided by the Muscovite representative Ivan Nikitin, does not explain why Lavrent’ev’s supporters had become so impotent. Evidently, upon hearing the news of Kirei Matveev’s arrest, many were in hiding and others had already fled from Cherkassk to reassess their plans for the future.

With his forces on the upswing, four days later Minaev convened an expanded krug, in which representatives from all the southern stanitsas were present, to decide the fate of Lavrent’ev. The drama continued as Lavrent’ev and several of his allies were taken into custody. Addressing the assembly, Minaev pleaded for unity. If the Cossacks would not kiss the cross and pledge their loyalty to him and fealty to the decision to extradite the Old Believers to Moscow, he would resign at once. They shouted affirmations of loyalty and an ally of Minaev was elected to administer the oath throughout the Don region. The Old Believers on the government’s most-wanted list who could be rounded up, including Samoilo Lavrent’ev, were sent to Moscow with a convoy of fifty Cossacks.

38 DAI, 17: 195. 39 DAI, 17: 193. 40 DAI, 17: 191. 41 DAI, 17: 191. 42 DAI, 17: 192. 43 This paragraph is based upon the testimony in DAI, 17: 192. Also see Druzhinin, Raskol na Donu, pp. 180–82.
Though emboldened by success, Minaev did not overestimate his capacity to control the situation. He wrote to Golitsyn requesting that Kirei Matveev not be released, due to the fact that the “Host has not yet firmly strengthened its position, fearing that Kiriushka [Matveev] and Pashka [Chekunov] would return.” Similar instructions were given orally to Nikitin who was to inform the Ambassadorial Chancery that if the three were released, “in the future they will make life on the Don impossible for all the atamans and Cossacks.” A Cossack named Ian the Greek also wrote to V. V. Golitsyn, warning that if Matveev were released, great insurrections would take place, because “if the Great Sovereigns do not pacify them [Old Believer sympathizers among the Cossacks] there [in Moscow], here [in the Don] there is no one who can do so.” Golitsyn wisely continued his investigation, which generated a good portion of the available sources on the religious schism, and in May 1688 the government publicly executed the Cossacks who were denounced by Minaev and his supporters.

**CIVIL WAR: THE LAST STAND OF THE OLD BELIEVERS**

The situation in the Don region remained polarized. The Old Believers abandoned Cherkassk to regroup their forces, which were stronger in the northern settlements. Without opposition, Minaev further consolidated his hold on the south, gathering in April 1688 a force of around a thousand Cossacks to enforce administration of the loyalty oath. Those who disobeyed were to be put death. In an attempt to rally their sympathizers, the Old Believers circulated a letter claiming that the Host at Cherkassk had “abandoned the true, Orthodox, Christian, old faith,” and had handed over “experienced Cossacks, Samoshka and his comrades, to Moscow for execution, desiring thereby to root out the true Christian faith.” The officials of the Host had trampled on the right to refuge, foreboding dark times for the northern territories.

While the force sent from Cherkassk slowly moved northward administering loyalty oaths, at times more or less at gun point, the dissident Cossacks, who had supported the Old Believers, did not waste time preparing for an armed conflict. 1,700 Cossacks, primarily from the Medveditsa in the north where the Old Believers were strongest,
Imperial boundaries

amassed to defend themselves. They divided their forces in late April 1688, when over a thousand Cossacks abandoned the Don and headed for the North Caucasus, where they found refuge in Kabarda in the Caucasus Mountains.

The remaining hard-core supporters of the Old Believer faction began to prepare for armed resistance to the force sent from Cherkassk. By summer 1688, they had constructed a fort with tall walls and earthen ramparts on an island in the upper reaches of the Medveditsa. They prepared for a siege, stocking up on provisions and adding towers to their fort. According to a Cossack defector, the defenders of the fort consisted of over 300 men, and 300 women and 500 girls, who “had all cut their hair and dressed as males.” The Old Believers even sallied out to attack other settlements and to steal cattle, keeping the Cossacks in the area bunkered down. They massacred the population of Evterev gorodok and burned it to the ground, then issued an ultimatum to the rest of the Cossacks: “If Don Cossacks from all gorodki do not join us on the Kuma [in the Caucasus] and Medveditsa, we will soon march against those gorodki to burn them and hack up their residents.” Around the same time, Old Believer supporters in Panshin turned on their brethren, killing those who opposed them, and headed off to join their comrades. The threat of civil war must have pushed the remaining Cossacks into the government camp, since no further large-scale insurrections are mentioned.

In June 1688 the Host ordered Cossacks from all settlements to prepare for war against the renegades. In summer 1688, the government ordered the Don Cossacks to conduct a joint operation with the Kalmyks against the fort on the Medveditsa, in order to “seize those outlaws, and destroy and burn their abodes so that nothing remains.” Over a thousand Don Cossacks and two thousand government troops sent from Tsaritsyn and Tambov (a significant portion of the garrisons), arrived to take part in the siege. The government forces offered clemency if the Old Believers would surrender and hand over their leaders, but they refused, proclaiming: “Even if we all die, we will not give up the fort and surrender to you. We are going to live here. This fort is a second Jerusalem.”

On April 1, the government forces breached the defenses and occupied most of the fort, while the Old Believers retreated to a hastily constructed

50 DAI, 17: 259. 51 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 119, 1689, d. 2, l. 7.
52 RGADA, f. 119, 1689, d. 2, ll. 9–10. 53 RGADA, f. 119, 1689, d. 2, l. 9.
58 RGADA, f. 119, 1688, d. 10, ll. 1–2. 59 RGADA, f. 119, 1689, d. 2, ll. 10–100b.
bunker. After intense fighting, the Old Believers realized that, as in the case of the Jews who defended old Jerusalem against the Romans, a victory against the Muscovite forces had eluded them. Many committed suicide by drowning themselves in the Medveditsa or hurling themselves into the flames that consumed their bunker during the final assault. All told less than thirty of the fort’s defenders lived through the siege. Violent death dissected the most significant pocket of dissent from the political body of the Don Host.

**FREE COSSACKS SEEK REFUGE IN THE CAUCASUS**

In June 1689, the Cossacks who had escaped to the Caucasus assembled near Azov to launch an attack on the Don. These free Cossacks quickly found common ground with their Muslim neighbors and gathered a force that numbered over two thousand Cossacks, Tatars, and Circassians. They succeeded in capturing three Cossack fortified settlements, while two others surrendered to them without a fight. The Host was incapacitated by this surprise attack, and sent word to the government that “because of those warriors, it is impossible to travel along the Don River.” Although it was too late to save their brethren along the Medveditsa, the free Cossacks proved that they and their Muslim allies could strike deep into the heart of Don Cossack territory.

While the Host at Cherkassk remained on the defensive during summer 1689, supporters of seventeen-year-old Tsar Peter I maneuvered in Moscow to remove his sister Sofiia from the scene. When the military defected from Sofiia, she was sent to a nunnery and Golitsyn was sent into exile. Peter’s mother’s family, the Naryshkin clan, took over the reigns of state. The Cossacks lost a powerful patron in Golitsyn, but his successor as head of the Ambassadorial Chancery was no stranger to Cossack affairs. Emel’ian Ukraintsev was not only a career administrator who had handled diplomatic relations with the Cossacks as a clerk, but also an associate of Frol Minaev who had at one point borrowed money from the ataman. The change of regime in Moscow brought no change in policy towards the Don.

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61 This paragraph is based on M. de Pule, Materialy dlia istorii Voronezhskoi i sozednikh gubernii (Voronezh, 1861), pp. 444–45.

62 Ukraintsev is mentioned in DAI, 17: 170.
In the winter of 1690–91 the free Cossacks resettled to the Agrakhan’ River in northern Dagestan, where they were received by the local Muslim ruler, the Shamkhal of Tarky (called shevkal in Russian documents).\textsuperscript{63} Pursuing the time-honored strategy of offering compromise before combat, the government authorized the Don Host to promise full pardons to those “renegades” who would return to the Don. While repeated attempts to negotiate were rebuffed by the free Cossacks, the government actions belie an intense preoccupation with the Don Cossack “renegades” who had found refuge in the North Caucasus. Though numbering just over a thousand men, they were capable and experienced. Given time to organize, they could do considerable damage to the government’s position in the south: Razin had caused the government considerable headaches with smaller numbers. Even more irksome was the fact that these Cossacks had already achieved what Razin failed to do on two occasions: they had managed to ally and conduct military operations with the Tatars.

Diplomatic efforts to seek extradition of the “renegades” also failed. The Shamkhal, after hearing a Russian diplomat’s offer that if he facilitated the peaceful return of the “renegades” he would be richly rewarded, politely declined: “Those Cossacks came to me from the Don of their own free will and they live in my lands also freely. I did not send for them, and I cannot send them away, because that is not the custom here. I consider them my guests.”\textsuperscript{64}

Russian officials had come face to face with a right to refuge of a different sort: the kind that was customary to strangers in North Caucasian cultures. The Shamkhal agreed, however, to deliver a message to the free Cossacks, who were refusing to meet with government intermediaries.

In their reply, the free Cossacks declined the offer of clemency and proclaimed that now the Shamkal was their tsar.\textsuperscript{65} They also insisted that in a Muslim ruler they had found a just tsar who would not impose upon their religion or liberties. They concluded their letter by warning that if the government decided to send troops against them, they would withdraw to the mountains of Greater Kabarda, which were controlled by allies of the Crimean khan, where “no one would be able to do anything to them.”\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{63} Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 7, l. 46. The Shamkhals controlled much of Daghestan and parts of modern Chechnia. They claimed to be descended from a Muslim holy lineage originally from Sham in Syria. See “Shamkhaly tarkovskie,” in \textit{Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gorisakh} (Tiflis, 1868), vol. 1, pp. 54–59.

\textsuperscript{64} Report of Russian official, RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 7, l. 37.

\textsuperscript{65} RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 7, ll. 39–41. \textsuperscript{66} RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 7, l. 41.
In view of the failure of the diplomatic mission, the government began to plan for a conflict. It solicited advice from the Don Host on how to “root out and destroy” the “renegades.” The sober assessment the Cossacks provided, however, required nothing less than the mobilization of Muscovite military resources in the south, since the Shamkhal had given his oath to protect the free Cossacks and his allies in the North Caucasus would likely come to his assistance.\(^{67}\) According to the Don Cossacks, in order to liquidate the “renegades” the whole Host would be needed, as well as the musketeers stationed in Astrakhan’, troops from Tsaritsyn, the Terek and Greben Cossacks, and the Kalmyks of Aiuka, if they could be secured.

In 1691 the free Cossacks were active once again. The Host wrote to the government warning of a grand coalition of “schismatics,” Azovites, Crimeans, Nogais, and Circassians that aimed to “destroy the Don completely and lead to the occupation of the glorious river Don by the Muslims.”\(^ {68}\) The expected invasion did not materialize, but a band of three hundred free Cossacks attacked some of the northern settlements to harass their opponents and recruit sympathizers.\(^ {69}\) Their propaganda leaflet was seized and sent to Cherkassk for inspection. It read:

Come, Cossacks, to me the Shevkal and live together with your brothers who already live with me. There’s nothing for you on the Don. From the tsars you [each] receive a subsidy of only twenty altyns. In my lands you will be able to dress in gold. The [Persian] Shah’s ships, and also those of your Great Sovereign’s merchants and traders, ply the sea with goods. You can raid them and there will be no prohibition from me, the Shevkal.\(^ {70}\)

The letter was designed to hit the Host right in its softest spot, the fact that neither raiding nor government service could guarantee the average Cossack a good income. It also spoke to Cossack dreams of gold, glory, and Caspian adventures that were still celebrated in song, but were all but dead in deeds.

While the Don Cossacks repeatedly complained to the government about the “renegades,” suggesting that if something were not done about them “stupid people might see their actions and be enticed to follow their example,” the renegades harassed Russian targets in the Caucasus.\(^ {71}\) According to the governor of the Terek fort, in 1691–92 they raided the environs of the fort several times and attacked boats bringing grain supplies.\(^ {72}\) The

\(^{67}\) RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 7, ll. 60–61. \(^ {68}\) Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 4, l. 6.

\(^{69}\) Cossack reports, RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 5, ll. 6–9, ll. 14–20.

\(^{70}\) RGADA, f. 111, 1691, d. 5, l. 7. \(^ {71}\) RGADA, f.111, 1691, d. 5, l. 8.

\(^{72}\) Report from the Terek, SPFIRI, f. 178, op. 1, d. 12348.
small Terek garrison could do little to protect them. If decisive action was not taken against the renegades, they would soon be capable of amputating the Terek Achilles’ heel that formed Moscow’s precarious foothold on the Caucasus. Finally fed up with waiting for a better solution, in September 1692 the government sent four companies of musketeers from lower Volga garrisons to attack the “renegades.”

In fall 1692 the splinter Cossack force was ambushed near the Sunzha River in the North Caucasus and virtually annihilated. All sources seem to agree that in September 1692 as the Muscovite forces approached from the north most of the free Cossacks left their base on the Agrakhan’ River and headed westward towards the Crimean possessions in the Kuban’ region. Along the way they were attacked and decimated by the Chechens, who seem to have been acting under instructions from Russia’s allies in Kabarda. The annihilation of the “renegade” Cossack community in the North Caucasus completed the eradication of the dissident threat. A small group of survivors formed a new community of Kuban’ Cossacks under the protection of the Crimean Khan.

Though Frol Minaev was finally able to triumph over his enemies in the Host, the Muscovite government and the Chechens shared much of the credit. The Cossacks from the Host that marched against their brethren in the north had taken large strides towards the smothering embrace of the government. Those on the other side of the religious divide had sought to avoid the government’s grasp by trailblazing a path to the North Caucasus. Instead they became the first of thousands of Don Cossacks to find themselves entrapped between the government yoke and the Caucasian snare.

73 Report from Astrakhan’, SPFIRI, f. 178, op. 1, d. 12316, ll. 1–2.
74 For a more extensive treatment of these events, see Boeck “K istorii pervogo,” 34–38.
Although Azov was the site of the earliest initiatives of the reign of Tsar Peter I, few western studies have focused on empire-building in the early Petrine period. In her exhaustive survey of Peter’s reign, Lindsay Hughes avoided issues of imperial integration and consciously eschewed discussion of “Cossacks or tribespeople.”¹ Others focused primarily on the imperial rhetoric of the later years of Peter’s reign, a period in which abundant legislation, treatises, and discourses were generated. Histories of the Don region have failed to measure piecemeal changes in administrative practice against the revolutionary transformations taking place in the new government colony next door.² This chapter argues that the conquest of Azov in 1696 brought incorporation of the Don region into the boundaries of the empire, but not coordinated integration of the region into Russian legal structures.

This chapter and subsequent chapters will heed Paul Bushkovitch’s admonition against notions of Tsar Peter “as a sort of Deus ex machina, whose magic wand effects all change in a society that is a vacuum.”³ Correspondingly, this study will devote attention to the intricacies of Petrine policy decisions and invoke the name of the tsar only in cases of his participation in deliberations. In documents devoted to Cossack affairs, Peter emerges as an ambivalent empire-builder who left no clear decree on the degree to which Cossacks would be made to conform to imperial norms.


² None of the academic surveys of the history of the Don Cossacks touch upon the Azov colony. Peter’s Azov enterprise merited a few sentences in an overview dedicated to the region’s history: A. P. Pronshtein et al., *Istoriia Dona s drevneishikh vremen do padeniia krepostnogo prava* (Rostov-na-Donu, 1973), p. 151.

THE CONQUEST OF AZOV: QUESTIONING THE “AZOV QUESTION”

Azov played an important role in the early stages of the Petrine revolution. In order to realize his childhood dreams of sailing ships, the young tsar decided to wage war against the Ottoman Empire, invest in new technologies and new infrastructures, acquire naval know-how from the west, and mobilize thousands of his subjects to build ports in the Don region. The Azov campaigns emerged in a matrix of Peter’s personal motivations (preoccupation with ships and sailing, craving for real rather than “play” military action, desire to assert his status as ruler) and the late Muscovite legacy that he inherited (the anti-Ottoman alliance, foreign military advisors who had served his predecessors and participated in the Crimean campaigns, Cossack client territories which could serve as a staging ground for military action, traditions of ship-building in the vicinity of Voronezh). Together these factors explain why his first imperial efforts were devoted to the Don region.

Historians have often linked the conquest of Azov to Peter’s naval goals or assumed that Azov always existed as a geopolitical problem that Russia was obligated to solve. For example, an official Soviet history of the Petrine period stated: “One of the most important objectives of Russian foreign policy at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was the struggle for southern lands, for an outlet to the Azov and Black Seas, the struggle against Tatars and Turks.” Recent accounts have similarly stressed a desire to acquire access to the sea. If those were truly the problems, Azov was not quite the solution. It was only a small piece of a greater puzzle. Conquering it would neither prevent Tatar raids nor allow Russia to immediately colonize southern lands. Unless new conquests followed, Azov provided an outlet to nowhere, since Ottoman forts still blocked the straits of Kerch, which controlled access to the Black Sea.

Unfortunately, the sources at our disposal give no indication of how and why Peter made the decision to attack Azov. At some point in 1694, when the twenty-two-year-old tsar was spending considerable time with the Swiss military entrepreneur Franz Lefort and Patrick Gordon, the former

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4 For the concept of the Petrine revolution, see James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003).


Incorporation without integration

military advisor of V. V. Golitsyn, he decided to undertake a campaign to the south. Gordon’s diary and Peter’s correspondence are both silent on the issue. In summer 1694 Lefort wrote to his brother in Geneva about a campaign down the Volga to the Caspian, but by 1695 this small venture had metamorphosed into a huge campaign against Azov involving tens of thousands of soldiers. Given the fact that the Cossacks had conquered it on their own in 1637, it was known to be a vulnerable target.

The first Azov campaign, conducted in summer 1695, resulted in neither clear victory nor defeat for the Muscovite forces. Delays in marching from central Russia to Azov – it took up to two months for the bulk of forces and supplies to arrive in the Don region – gave the Ottoman government time to provision and reinforce the garrison for a siege. The uncoordinated actions of the Russian commanders and the inability of the Russian forces to prevent the Ottomans from reinforcing Azov by sea gave the city’s defenders a tactical advantage. Mistakes in siege engineering, combined with several chaotic, unsuccessful attempts to storm the fortress, resulted in heavy casualties and a decision to halt the siege after almost three months.

The major achievement of the campaign was not won by the 20,000 strong Russian invasion force, but by 200 Don Cossacks. On the morning of July 14, 1695, the small, but stealthy, Cossack contingent made a surprise attack on one of the twin Kalanchy towers, which protected the mouth of the Don. After overwhelming the Ottoman garrison and securing the tower, they used its cannons to pound the other tower into surrendering.

For the first time in its history, the Muscovite government possessed forts with a view of southern waters. The success in the Dnieper basin of another Muscovite force, lead by B. P. Sheremet’ev, gave the Muscovite state its first outposts (Kazykermen and Tavan) on the edge of the Black Sea.

Leaving a few thousand troops in the newly conquered forts, Peter took the bulk of his forces back to Russia and began to plan for a bigger and better siege for next year. After tasting battle, and mulling over defeat, Peter wholeheartedly embraced the Azov enterprise: in less than a year Russia would acquire a navy! While sending far and wide for craftsmen, technicians, tools, and blueprints, over twenty thousand residents of the Belgorod line were pressed into work as carpenters, blacksmiths, and other trades deemed

7 M. M. Bogoslovskii, Petr I: materialy dlia biografii (Moscow, 1940), vol. 1, p. 173.
8 For brief accounts of the Azov campaigns see Ocherki istorii SSSR, pp. 435–444; Edward J. Phillips, The Founding of Russia’s Navy: Peter the Great and the Azov Fleet, 1688–1714 (Westport, Conn., 1998), pp. 36–43. For a longer account, see the first volume of M. Bogoslovskii, Petr I.
necessary for the naval effort. Shipbuilding was concentrated in Voronezh and adjacent towns, which had a long tradition of building boats – in part because of the annual shipment of supplies to the Don – and which had been employed for military shipbuilding by Peter’s father. By spring 1696 over a thousand river craft could be put to work transporting men and supplies, while over twenty war galleys built in Voronezh under the guidance of Dutch shipwrights were readied for action.

This time the Russian forces arrived at the mouth of the Don without considerable delay. Upon receiving news that an Ottoman fleet of over twenty galleys and several smaller vessels was approaching Azov, the tsar decided to hold back and not engage the more experienced Ottoman navy. On May 20, 1696, however, the Don Cossacks, led by Frol Minaev, set out for what would be one of their finest hours. Since the path to the sea had been opened the previous year with the taking of the Kalanchy towers, the Cossacks swiftly intercepted the Ottoman fleet, setting fire to one of the large vessels and harassing the smaller ones. They were able to force most of the Ottoman fleet to retreat back to open sea. Edward Phillips, who recently chronicled the rise of the Russian navy, found it surprising that the Cossacks led the naval attack:

It seems sadly ironic that this critical naval victory of the Azov war should have been achieved by Cossacks aboard their lodki while Captain Peter Alekseev and his several galleys rode anchor safely upstream. It was not the presence of a technologically and militarily comparable naval force but the audacity of the primitively equipped Cossacks that cleared the Azov harbor of Turks.

What Phillips neglects to consider, however, is that the Cossacks had over a century of experience in engagements with Ottoman galleys under their belts, while Peter’s newly minted ships had barely been given a test drive. As it turned out, the engagement of 1696 would be the last major sea campaign ever undertaken by the Don Cossacks.

By deviating – if only temporarily – from their mission to re-supply Azov, the Ottoman fleet sealed the fate of Azov. Peter’s pristine galleys and green mariners moved in to the Azov harbor, blocking the path to the fort. With Russian troops and artillery poised to attack by land and

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11 For a full treatment of Peter’s activities in and around Voronezh, see V. P. Zagorovskii, Petr Velikii na Voronezhskoi zemle (Voronezh, 1996).
13 This paragraph is based on Phillips, The Founding of Russia’s Navy, p. 43.
14 Ibid.
sea, the Ottoman navy was unable to reinforce the Azov garrison. After a month-long siege and artillery barrage, the Azov garrison capitulated on July 18, 1696.

Upon accepting the terms of surrender, the Ottomans evacuated the remaining population to Anatolia and Crimea. The Russian forces entered Azov, finding the “whole towne in rubbish and not a whole house or hut in it.” While most of the siege force was soon sent home, a garrison of 8,000 troops was stationed in Azov and other forts at the mouth of the Don. Almost immediately the forces in Azov set to work repairing the fortifications and clearing the rubble. A new fort, which came to be called Pavlov, was to be constructed at the mouth of the Mius River, near the spot where twenty years earlier Peter’s predecessors had aborted plans to construct a fort due to Cossack resistance. This time there would be no opposition.

Only days after Azov was surrendered, the tsar began searching for a place to build a port and he quickly settled upon the site of Taganrog west of the Don. This would become the chief harbor of the Azov colony, which in Peter’s plans was to become the cradle of a great naval force, but in reality became a modest, mostly immobile fleet. Starting virtually from scratch, since the existing Ottoman infrastructure had been heavily damaged during the siege, the Azov enterprise involved the building of ports, forts, and wharves down river from Cherkassk.

**THE DON REGION COEXISTS WITH AZOV**

After taking Azov, Peter quickly turned his mind to other things, such as his grand embassy to Europe and the Northern War. There is very little evidence that Don Cossack affairs commanded the tsar’s attention in the decade after 1696. There is even less evidence that Peter decided to radically revise relations with the Don Cossacks. Upon decreeing the creation of a government colony at Azov, Peter I left his confidants to work out the details of how the new settlements would coexist with the Cossacks. While this left most of their separate deal intact, administrative expediency gave rise to a series of piecemeal decisions that could, as a result of bureaucratic compromise, incognizance, or give and take, chip away at Cossack autonomy.

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15 Ibid., p. 53.  
16 Gordon, Diary, RGVIA, f. 846, op. 15, d. 4, l. 59.  
17 Ibid, ll. 64–65.  
18 This conclusion is supported by both the documents published in the PIB series and an examination of the inventories for the collection of Peter’s papers in RGADA, f. 9, kabinet Petra, op. 2–5, which cover the tsar’s incoming and outgoing correspondence.
Peter recognized that he owed a debt of gratitude to the Cossacks for their assistance in the Azov campaigns. In reward for their achievements, he transferred to the Host the Ottoman tower at the mouth of the Don River that Cossacks captured in 1695. He also provided a special award of two rubles to each of the over one thousand Cossacks injured in the second Azov campaign. In the early years of the Azov enterprise he depended on the Cossacks to defend the colony if it were attacked by the Tatars or Ottomans.

Cossack oral tradition even preserved memories of Peter’s favorable disposition towards the Don in a historical anecdote that explained the acquisition of a new seal for the Host (voiskovaia pechat’) as a result of Petrine admiration. An amazed Peter encountered a drunken Cossack who was naked from the waist up but brandishing a rifle. When he enquired why the Cossack didn’t simply sell the gun to gain money for drink, the Cossack replied that he needed his gun to serve the sovereign and would use it to plunder new clothes from the tsar’s enemies. Amused and delighted, Peter ordered a new seal to depict a Cossack sitting on a barrel, naked from the waist up but proudly brandishing his rifle (see illustration 1).

Unfortunately, due to a deliberate or accidental misreading of evidence by the famous nineteenth-century historian Sergei Solov’yev, historians have imagined that the Cossacks quickly became disillusioned with Peter. Solov’yev reported that around 1700 the government uncovered a plot by a group of disgruntled Don Cossacks who were planning an attempt on the life of the tsar. He quoted a Cossack as saying: “Azov will not remain with the Sovereign for long, the Don Cossacks will take it and hand it over to the Turkish sultan.” In actuality, Peter’s inquisitors unequivocally determined that the “plot” against Peter never existed and merely derived from false

19 The award is mentioned in a bureaucratic note, RGADA, f. 111, 1697, d. 18, l. 510b. On the tower, N. S. Chaev, ed., Bulavin’skoe vostanie (1707–1708 gg) (Moscow, 1934), p. 76.
20 Azov was explicitly instructed to write to Cherkassk for reinforcements if Tatars attacked. RGADA, f. 111, 1695, d. 12, l. 126.
Incorporation without integration

The fact that several Cossacks were handed over to Moscow by the Host for interrogation without considerable opposition, however, reveals valuable information about the evolving relationship between the government and the Don Host. The boundaries of the tsar’s honor had now embraced the Don region.

While the Don Cossacks remained under the jurisdiction of the Ambassadorial Chancery, the Azov colony was placed under the administration of military officials (at first the Pushkarskii prikaz, then the Razriad). Important aspects of the Azov enterprise were also supervised by the Admiralty, a new institution placed in charge of Peter’s emerging navy. This awkward administrative arrangement meant that questions that arose between Azov officials and the Don Cossacks would often have to be submitted to no less than two Muscovite chancelleries for adjudication.

An early case demonstrates that Azov officials were not issued specific instructions concerning the legal status of their Cossack neighbors. In March 1697 they wrote to the Ambassadorial Chancery to obtain information on Cossack leaders in settlements throughout the Don in order to secure their assistance in helping to free supply boats that had become stuck in the sludge and silt of the river. The response indicated that Cossack lands were still bureaucratic terra incognita:

According to the results of a search in the Ambassadorial Chancery in the Donskie dela of previous years through the current year, the chancery has no knowledge of who the leaders are in the gorodki along the Don, the number of Cossacks in them, or whether there are any clerks. There has never been any correspondence with them [individual Cossack settlements]. Prior to this, the Don Cossacks have not performed any kinds of labor, other than [military] services, and they have not been asked to provide labor and transport services... The tsars’ orders about all kinds of his sovereign affairs are sent only to Cherkassk to the ataman of the Host and to the whole Don Host.

The major point was that the Don could not be administratively equated with Russian districts.

For the testimonies demonstrating there was no plot, see RGADA, f. 371, Preobrazhenskii prikaz, op. 1 ch. 1, d. 19, ll. 41–42. The statement about Azov could not be verified, even under duress and torture. It appears to have originated in the mind of a serial informant who had successfully employed gosudarevo slovo to escape a murder charge. RGADA, f. 371, op. 1 ch. 1, d. 291, ll. 10–13, 45.

On honor see Nancy Shields Kollmann, By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999) and Angela Rustmeyer, Dissens und Ehre: Majestätsgewalt und Verbrechen in Russland (1600–1800) (Wiesbaden, 2006).

Bureaucratic summary, RGADA, f. 111, 1695, d. 12, l. 246.
The proximity of Azov to the Cossack lands made it necessary to resolve issues that had never previously arisen in relations between Russia and the Don. This created a process of negotiation between chancelleries about how to correlate government policy with pre-existing Cossack liberties. In this case the exclusive jurisdiction of the Ambassadorial Chancery over the Don prevailed, but it would send a one-time order of implementation (poslushnaia gramota) to Cherkassk ordering the Cossacks to assist the official in charge of freeing the supply boats. This became an important precedent for future actions and orders of implementation became new tools in the government’s administrative arsenal.

The fact that Peter had outlined no grand designs for integrating the Don region into the framework of the Law Code of 1649 is demonstrated by an important case from 1701. Upon investigating an incident in which peasants from Riazan’ who attacked their master’s home fled to the Don region with stolen goods, the Semenovskii Prikaz inquired whether it too could seek an order of implementation demanding that the Cossacks hand over the fugitives. The Ambassadorial Chancery provided the following reply:

In previous years up to the current year 1701, petitioners of various ranks have petitioned the Great Sovereign against the Don Cossacks concerning their fugitive people, peasants, and stolen possessions. In such cases Don Cossacks have not been sent to Moscow for investigation, but the Great Sovereigns’ letters have been sent from the Ambassadorial Chancery to the Don to the atamans of the Host about those affairs, and it has been up to those atamans of the Host to administer justice... No Don Cossacks are sent to Moscow to any chancery without consultation with the Ambassadorial Chancery, because by his Great Sovereign decree the Don Cossacks are under its jurisdiction.

Upon receiving this report Fedor Alekseevich Golovin, a confidant of Peter and head of the Ambassadorial Chancery, upheld the precedence of past tradition, writing: “Order the ataman to investigate that affair according to the customary law of the Host (po voiskovomu obyklomu pravu) as has been written in previous orders from the Great Sovereigns.” This case reveals that Peter and his confidants left Cossack legal autonomy in place. Imperial boundaries still kept the Don region beyond the grasp of both provincial officials and the provisions of the Law Code that gave landlords the unrestricted right to return their serfs.

Nearly five years before he created guberniias as new territorial administrative units in 1708–09, Peter I awarded the official in charge of Azov a

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26 RGADA, f. 111, 1695, d. 12, l. 282. 27 RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, ll. 6–80b.
28 RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 9. On Golovin, see Bushkovitch, Peter the Great, p. 213.
Incorporation without integration

new title that reflected heightened responsibilities: *gubernator*. Responsible for Azov and its satellite settlements (Taganrog, Sergiev, Pavlov, and Mius) the governor served the tsar as both a local administrator and a regional diplomat. He was given the authority to mediate disputes between the Cossacks and Kalmyks and by direct order of the tsar in 1699 he was put in charge of affairs pertaining to the Russian-Ottoman border (see next chapter). But in these matters the Azov administration was expected to be in continuous consultation with the Ambassadorial Chancery.²⁹ Between 1703 and 1711 the office of governor was occupied by Ivan Andreevich Tolstoi. He was the brother of Russia’s first resident ambassador in Istanbul and a relative by marriage of F. M. Apraksin, a favorite of Peter who was put in charge of the admiralty.³⁰

When Peter reformed the state structure of the empire in 1708, he did not include the Don Cossacks in any *guberniia*. There were no names of Cossack settlements in his decree of December 18, 1708 and the Don region was not officially amalgamated into the Azov *guberniia*, which comprised Azov, its satellite settlements, the Voronezh region, and Tambov area.³¹ Starting as early as July 1706, however, a kind of *de facto* overlapping of jurisdiction was recognized within the administration. In that year the Ambassadorial Chancery mandated that copies of decrees pertaining to Cossack affairs be sent to the chancery of Admiral F. M. Apraksin in Voronezh.³² Thus the Azov interlude initiated a *de facto* shift in decision-making on selected issues to Peter’s confidants.

There is no evidence, however, that the tsar or his close advisors questioned the continued existence of the Don Host. The creation of borders with the Ottoman Empire (Chapter 9) threatened to make the traditional frontier role of the Cossacks obsolete, but they had clearly proven their military capabilities during the Azov campaigns and were still a cost-effective fighting force. It was in this period that the government began to pursue a new policy towards the Host, which Bruce Menning has aptly termed a “dual policy of subordination and perpetuation.”³³

Subordination primarily meant insisting on unswerving adherence to imperial decrees. If the tsar mandated that a thousand Cossacks be sent to Novgorod to participate in the Northern War and teach Baltic sailors how to build Cossack boats, they were expected to show up, no questions

²⁹ Instructions to Azov, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 37, ll. 411–14; RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 14, l. 282ob.
³⁰ Bushkovitch, Peter the Great, pp. 279–80.
³¹ PSZ, 4: 436–38.
³² Clerk’s note, RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5010, l. 6.
asked. If the tsar dictated that Cossacks from the northern communities resettle along the two main steppe roads to Azov, he expected compliance. The main departure from Muscovite policy was that previously the Cossacks possessed ample room for maneuvering: from ignoring orders, to foot dragging, to veiled threats about abandoning the Don to the sultan. Now they were surrounded by government military might, not expanses of open steppe.

Perpetuation involved the continuation of previous traditions and aspects of local autonomy that did not contradict government objectives. Cossack customary law reigned supreme in the Don and Cossack krugs still decided upon routine matters of local administration. The fact that the government did not attempt to influence the political situation in Cherkassk suggests that it was content to leave governing in the hands of Cossacks.

Instead of a separate community outside of imperial borders, Cossacks would now be treated as a distinct community within the empire. Connections to the Ambassadorial Chancery helped shield them from many important aspects of the Petrine revolution. Unlike regular forces in the military, which were required to drill incessantly, follow meticulous regulations, and wear Western style, government-designed, garb, the Cossacks avoided uniform standards and continued to serve as auxiliary troops under their own commanders. They were largely spared the religious regimentation that resulted from Petrine policies and even continued to appoint their own priests (see Chapter 12). None of the new taxes or extraordinary levies that were used to pay for ships, provision the military, build canals, or construct the new capital at St. Petersburg were applied to their communities. No European advisors were dispatched to the Don to engineer a more efficient Host.

In fact, the Don Cossacks played a central role in defusing the only serious disorders brought about by Peter’s cultural revolution. In 1705 a rebellion in Astrakhan’ was fueled by discontent over taxation, corruption by local officials, dissent against the ban on beards and Russian style clothing, and outrage over rumors of eager “Germans” forcing themselves – literally

34 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 18, ll. 52, 159–606b, 164–65. 35 Chaev, Bulavin'skoe vosstanie, p. 73.
36 In thousands of pages of information concerning the Don generated by both the Ambassadorial Chancery and Admiralty, I discovered no evidence suggesting that government took any proactive interest in Cossack politics.
37 For Peter’s exploitation of his subjects see Hughes, Russia in the Age, pp. 72–73, 136–37; E. V. Anisman, The Reforms of Peter the Great: Progress Through Coercion in Russia (Armonk, N.Y., 1993), pp. 67, 80–81. Conclusions about the Don region are supported by my explorations in three archives and the published decrees in the Lishin collection.
and figuratively – on reluctant Russians. Since Cossacks suffered from none of these onerous burdens, they easily dismissed overtures from the rebel camp. Instead, the Host mobilized its forces to contain the rebellion from spreading up the Volga and successfully defended Tsaritsyn from rebel attack.

The quelling of the Astrakhan rebellion marked a high point in Cossack relations with the government after the conquest of Azov. In gratitude for their service, Peter richly remunerated the Host with over 20,000 rubles – three times the traditional annual amount – issued it a commemorative decree of thanks, and rewarded the Cossacks with several lavishly embroidered campaign banners and standards. The bonus prize, however, was a special dispensation on clothing. The Don Cossacks, who already maintained distinct modes of dress, would not be forced to wear European-style clothing. In September 1705 Sava Kochet expressed the Cossacks’ gratitude to the tsar:

We Don Cossacks are rewarded and favored above other peoples (vzysskany pred inymi narodami) by the tsar, since to this date we have not been sent a decree from the Great Sovereign concerning beards and clothes. Currently according to our ancient custom each among us wears whatever he likes. Some like to wear clothes and shoes in the Circassian style or Kalmyk style, and yet others are accustomed to wear ancient Russian clothing.

By exempting Cossacks from the clothing reform, their special status within the empire continued to be visually marked. They were recognized as separate and distinct from Peter’s other subjects and would not be absorbed into the mass of population or merged with the military service class.

NEIGHBORS, BUT NOT EQUALS: COSSACKS AND AZOV COLONISTS

The Petrine administration maintained the Don region as a special administrative entity apart from the government colony being created next door at Azov. The uniqueness of the historical relationship between Russia and the Don Cossacks comes into sharper focus when compared to this

alternate, imperial model of developing the lower Don region. Cossacks and Azov colonists lived in adjacent territories, but different worlds.

Almost from day one Peter employed coerced migration and forced labor to compel an unwilling populace to construct Russia’s first Black Sea outposts. The mass conscription of ordinary people for forced labor began with Peter’s attempt to conquer Azov and continued throughout his reign. The tsar treated his Russian subjects as resources, which like nails, lumber, or tar, could be requisitioned in bulk. Tens of thousands of Russians were annually sent to Azov to serve as labor conscripts.41 Expected to serve for a year, bring their own tools, and endure harsh conditions, they were the engine of the Petrine naval revolution.

The Azov settlements pioneered the policies that Evgenii Anisimov has termed “progress through coercion.” According to Anisimov, Peter believed that his Russian subjects “could be trained for study and good work only with the help of coercion, by the stick, for they understood nothing else.”42 As a result, Peter relied on systematic coercion and compulsion to realize his initiatives. The Azov colony was a tremendous worksite: thousands of Russian workers and exiles supervised by foreign engineers and armed overseers engaged in unloading barges, busting rocks, baking bricks, building walls, driving piles, and erecting piers.43 High death rates prevailed among labor conscripts due to disease, malnutrition, and difficult working and living conditions.

The Cossacks, however, were exempted from active participation in the Azov enterprise and they avoided the great demands of “progress through coercion.”44 While their settlements represented the nearest source of manpower – they were hundreds of miles closer to Azov than any of the settlements along the Belgorod line – Cossacks were not utilized as laborers at Azov. Nor were they conscripted as armed overseers for Petrine worksites.

Their only major contribution to the enterprise consisted of occasionally guarding salary shipments and grain stores in transit to Azov.45 Just as importantly, no attempts were made to tax Cossack settlements to finance the Azov enterprise.

42 Anisimov, Reforms, p. 35.
43 For a more detailed discussion of working conditions and death rates, see Boeck, “When Peter Settled for Less.”
44 Just to take one example, in nearly two thousand pages of documents pertaining to Cossack affairs from the years 1700 to 1705 (RGADA, f. 111, books 20 and 22) there are no examples of active participation.
45 Order to assist with grain shipments, RGADA, f. 111, 1699, d. 3, ll. 5–6, 25.
Due to the fact that Peter founded this colony on the coast hundreds of miles from nearest Russian agricultural settlements, provisioning became the major problem of the Azov enterprise. While grain was requisitioned from the households behind the Belgorod line to feed the Azov colony, the government made no attempt to promote agriculture in the Don region.\textsuperscript{46} Setbacks in collecting and transporting provisions translated into frequent subsistence crises for the administration and residents of Azov.\textsuperscript{47} Food shortages regularly plagued Azov and its residents complained that prices of food were many times higher than in central areas of the country. Rather than remain completely dependent upon the Russian government for subsistence, residents of Azov engaged in a lively commerce with Cossack territories buying large quantities of salted fish and other food for their personal needs. The insertion of thousands of government settlers into the region also created an opportunity for Cossacks to trade with the colony. For example, in March 1699 a Cossack named Grisha Rostorguev signed a contract to sell the Azov administration “2 milk cows, 13 Indian chickens [Turkeys], 200 geese, 151 ducks, 948 Russian chickens, and 10,000 eggs.”\textsuperscript{48}

The boom in trade between Cherkassk and Azov necessitated the development of new guidelines for Cossack commerce.\textsuperscript{49} In 1698 Azov officials complained that Cossacks who came to trade in Azov were neither submitting their goods for inspection nor paying duties. Traditionally the Cossacks had enjoyed the tax exemptions for trade within Russian regions, but previously distances were large and districts remote from Cherkassk. In February 1700 a decree from the tsar, initiated by the Ratusha, a new chancery for revenue collection, mandated that in areas under its jurisdiction trade duties would be applied to Cossacks “on par with Russian merchants (protiv ruskikh torgovykh liudei).” The Cossacks resisted compliance with this shift in fiscal policy. In 1701 Azov officials reported that many Cossacks were still not paying duties and in 1703 Azov merchants complained of unfair competition from Don Cossacks who came in boats


\textsuperscript{47} Records of the Azov administration, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 664, 877–78, and f. 177, op. 1, d. 14, l. 910b.; GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 117, l. 108.

\textsuperscript{48} Azov record book, GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 117, l. 184. Since other record books have not survived, this example provides only a tantalizing hint of the range of commodities. See also a Cossack report, GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 244, l. 14.

\textsuperscript{49} This paragraph is based on: instructions to Azov official, GAVO, f. 5, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 15, 21; bureaucratic summary, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 608–608ob; Perepechaeva, \textit{Azov – pogranichnaiia krepost’}, p. 107.
to trade. In 1705, on the eve of the Bulavin uprising (see Chapter 11), Cossacks stopped coming to trade at Azov in protest at new duties for docking their boats in the Azov colony.

The Cossacks also became entangled in a dispute with the residents of Azov over the fisheries of the Don River delta. In 1702, as a result of increasing altercations between Azov residents and Cossacks over lucrative fishing spots, the Military Chancery declared in the name of the tsar that the waters near Azov would be off limits to Cossack fishermen. It appropriated the fisheries for the colonists that it controlled. The Cossacks complained to the Ambassadorial Chancery that they would be unable to either feed themselves or continue military service without access to the fisheries, since their subsistence depended heavily upon income derived from fishing and fish processing. In 1703 perpetuation would prevail over subordination. In this critical case both communities were allowed to use the fisheries and waters near Azov would be treated as unbounded.

In order to regulate traffic between the Azov colony and the Cossack lands the Petrine administration of Azov turned to Muscovite measures for regulating the movement of goods and people: patrols, checkpoints (zastavy), travel documents, and surety bonds. At the edges of the Azov colony officials set up checkpoints on major roads and river crossings. Soldiers were authorized to stop all travelers leaving the Azov colony and demand to see travel documents issued by the Azov administration. Those lacking documents were to be detained and sent back. Checkpoints also carried out fiscal surveillance of travelers. One was described as a river crossing “where inspection is carried out and forbidden goods and alcoholic beverages are confiscated.”

The policy for issuing travel documents to Azov colonists continued the policies instituted along the Belgorod line in the mid-seventeenth century. Travelers had to appear before a government official with witnesses and providers of surety. Travel documents were issued for limited periods of time and mandated return by a specific date. I have found no evidence that Cossacks were obligated to obtain government-issued travel documents for their journeys to Azov, but after the 1700 decree on trade duties

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50 GAVO, f. 5, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 1–4; Bureaucratic summary, RGAMVF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 37, chast’ 1, ll. 283, 356–60; Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 613–613b. Chaev, Bulavinskoe vostanie pp. 76–78.

51 On checkpoints, order from Azov administration, GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 244, l. 13. For more information on how similar policies were pursued in the latter part of Peter’s reign, see Anisimov, Reforms, pp. 226–34.

52 Bureaucratic summary, RGAMVF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 37, chast’ 1, 890b.

53 For copies of travel documents and surety bonds see GAVO, f. 5, op. 1, d. 250.
Cossacks who engaged in long-distance trade with Astrakhan’ and Ottoman territories appear to have obtained letters of introduction from the Host (voiskovoe pis’mo) in order to facilitate their journeys through government checkpoints.54

These emerging jurisdictional boundaries between the Don Host and the Azov colony were not reflected in one of the first printed maps in Russian. As James Cracraft has noted, in the Petrine period European cartographic conventions were imported and Russia “was properly mapped for the first time.”55 In a map commissioned by the tsar and printed in Amsterdam in limited Russian and Latin editions, a projection centering on Crimea reflected Peter’s Black Sea ambitions. In addition to marking boundaries of Great Russia and Little Russia (the Hetmanate), it also clearly delineated and outlined in a separate color a territory called “holdings of the Don Cossacks” (iurty donskikh kazakov). Curiously, none of the ports and forts of the Azov colony appeared on the map.56 This omission would reflect a reality in 1711, when a series of major miscalculations forced Peter to return Azov to the Ottoman Empire.

THE LOSS OF AZOV

Peter’s great victory over the Swedes at Poltava in 1709 set the stage for the Pruth campaign, which would become his greatest failure. When the vanquished Charles XII of Sweden was given refuge in Ottoman territories, Peter began planning for the possibility of further military action while negotiating to have his adversary expelled from Moldova. When the Ottomans unexpectedly declared war in 1710 and sent Tatar raids into Ukraine, Russian diplomats continued searching for either a diplomatic solution or wider military coalition. Convinced by advisors such as Savva Raguzin that the Orthodox populations of the Balkans would rise up against the Ottoman Empire and that Moldova would wholeheartedly support him, Peter marched towards the Danube.57

54 To my knowledge no examples of such letters are preserved, but they are mentioned in passing in reports. RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 608; RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 60.
56 Historians of cartography generally concur that the map was compiled and commissioned before 1701. The death of Tessing, the Amsterdam printer to whom it was sent, probably delayed plans to print the map for wide circulation. A second version was issued in 1727, long after Peter’s Pruth fiasco led to the loss of Azov. Bogoslovskii, Materialy, vol. 1, p. 399, Leo Bagrow, “The first map printed in Russian,” Imago Mundi 12 (1955), 152–55; D. M. Lebedev, Geografiia v Rossii petrovskogo vremeni (Moscow, 1950), pp. 183–91.
57 For the background of the Russo-Turkish war, see S. F. Oreshkova, Russko-turetskie otnosheniia v nachale vozmudatogo veka (Moscow, 1971).
Historians have debated for centuries the reasons for Peter’s disastrous campaign against Ottoman forces on the Pruth River in 1711 which resulted in the cession of Azov. The stunning defeat of a Russian army that had showed considerable promise, a hastily concluded treaty (tainted with hints of bribery, and desperate efforts by the tsar to save his own skin), and the brisk retreat from the Black Sea coast, have assumed legendary proportions. Unexpected problems with provisioning forced Peter to stop his advance near the Pruth River. The promised uprisings by oppressed Christians in the Balkans failed to materialize and the Ottomans advanced without hindrance. In spite of the fact that Russian forces were encircled near Pruth by a larger Ottoman force they put up fierce resistance. After several days of fighting, both sides were ready to bargain. In order to escape from Pruth with his health and his army intact, Peter I agreed to give up Azov and the other Black Sea forts. The result was that after nearly fifteen years of work, the Azov enterprise was abruptly canceled.

The tsar himself wrote to Admiral F. M. Apraksin on July 15, 1711 informing him that everything which could not be evacuated was to be destroyed. In early August 1711 Russian officials packed up and shipped off the bulk of transportable weapons to territories near Voronezh. In late summer 1711 Russian forces hastily constructed a fort with earthen ramparts to house some of the evacuated troops and supplies near Cherkassk, which was called the Tranzhament. On January 2, 1712 Azov was handed over to the Ottoman kapidan pasha, while the destruction of Taganrog and the evacuation of the last troops took place in February 1712.

Just as the Don region served as a staging ground for the conquest of Azov, it would serve as a dumping ground for the detritus of empire upon Peter’s retreat. In late August 1711 remnants of the Azov fleet – three sailing ships and over a dozen smaller vessels – were moved to Cherkassk and parked in its environs. The ships were maintained for a few years, but by 1714 the Cossacks began to complain to Admiral Apraksin that they had sunk into the sand and silt and were clogging the Don all around the

58 For the history of the Pruth campaign, see Akdes Nimet Kurat, Prut Seferi ve Barisi 1123–1711 (Ankara, 1953), and A. Z. Myshlaevskii, Voina s Turtsiei 1711 (Saint Petersburg, 1898). On the treaty, see Akdes Kurat, “Der Prutfeldzug und Prutfrieden von 1711,” Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas 10 (1962), 55–57.
62 This paragraph is based on Elagin, Istoriia russkago flota, vol. 1, p. 242; appendix IV, pp. 136–37; 166–67; Phillips, The Founding, pp. 111–12. For Cossack complaints, see RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 79, l. 257.
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Cossack capital. In 1716, they were junked and dismantled, ending the first phase in the history of Russia’s Black Sea fleet.

If not for imperial overreach – Peter’s gross miscalculations at Pruth in particular, and in the early stages of the Northern War in general – the government colony and military machine created at Azov could have became a bridgehead for further expansion. Peter’s ports and Black Sea fleet never quite matured to the point that they could seriously threaten the Ottoman Empire, but the Azov enterprise did give the government the upper hand in relations with its Cossack clients. On the other hand, Azov depended upon Cossack cooperation to weather any large scale Ottoman attack. Strangely enough, as we will see in subsequent chapters, an unprecedented peace agreement with the Ottomans would permit Russia to subordinate the Don, while a new war with the Ottomans, the very war that sealed the fate of Azov in 1711, would result in a new deal between Peter I and the Don Host.
Although Russia has one of the oldest continuous histories of boundary maintenance, few scholars of Russian empire have taken borders seriously. Focused on dramatic moments of imperial expansion, historians have failed to see important attempts to stop, control, consolidate, and patrol rather than endlessly advance. Only Richard Pipes considered borders important, not because he recognized limits to expansion, but because he preferred to imagine early modern Russia as a totalitarian society and wanted to provide a commentary on the pre-history of the Iron Curtain: “No one was allowed to escape the system. The frontiers of the state were hermetically sealed.” More recently in a magisterial overview of centuries of Russian expansion John LeDonne gave the impression that borders were at best temporary and consistently in flux due to “a slow but steady momentum” aimed at expanding towards the true geographic boundaries of the Eurasian heartland such as mountains and oceans. In his recent survey of Russia’s relations with the steppe, Michael Khodarkovsky all but ignored boundaries, but this oversight can be explained by his decision to privilege the perspectives of his nomadic protagonists, who didn’t think very highly of borders themselves.

Since borders represent the single most neglected aspect of Russian empire-building, this chapter employs unpublished documents from two archives to analyze how the Don steppe frontier became a borderland. Borderlands history not only explores the consequences of the closing of

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3 Khodarkovsky does not discuss the Russian-Ottoman border. In a chapter that ranges from the 1470s to the 1770s he asserts: “There were no borders south of Muscovy, for borders required that neighboring peoples define and agree upon common lines of partition.” Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800* (Bloomington, Ind., 2002), p. 47.
frontiers, but also focuses on how states collude to assert their sovereignty over people, territory, and resources. Because overlapping political, economic, and cultural networks often exist across state-imposed borders, triangular relationships develop between states, regional elites, and subjects on both sides of an international boundary. In order to understand Russian empire-building, it is imperative to explore how local people responded to efforts by Russian officials to create boundaries and attempts to limit unsanctioned contacts and/or conflicts between those defined as subjects and those on the other side of the border who were classified as "aliens." While evaluating how state boundaries could be created and enforced in a landscape lacking trees or other landmarks to serve as boundary markers, I also seek to uncover why a Cossack community that once roamed the boundless expanses of the steppe frontier adopted a borderline state of mind.

In spite of the obstacles to maintaining boundaries in the open steppe, the Russian and Ottoman Empires set out to regulate, then eradicate, the ancient patterns of raiding and local peacemaking that characterized frontier interaction in the Azov region. A full century before European maritime powers negotiated an end to the practice of predatory attacks by privateers in the open seas and took steps to delegitimate non-state violence along their borders, Russian and Ottoman officials put into place an interstate agreement to end the exploitation of non-state violence in the open steppe. This was a very important early example of the practices that Janice Thomson sees as crucial steps in the modern transformation of sovereignty: "State authority was made coterminous with territorial boundaries, and states were held accountable for the trans-border coercive activities of individuals residing within their borders."  

A CONSTRAINT ON RAIDING

Even before borders were introduced, the range of Don Cossack raiding operations had started to shrink. By the late seventeenth century, the amphibious era of Don Cossack history was already on the wane. To a considerable degree the Cossacks suffered from their own successes, since their previous sea raids diminished and dispersed the coastal populations

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of Crimea and Kuban’. Alan Fisher has even suggested that Cossack raids were one of the causes of the economic decline of Crimea, which might explain why booty from sea raids became less significant in the 1680s and 90s.6

Over one hundred years of sea raiding had not only exhausted sources of Black Sea booty, but also created an ecological crisis by depleting the limited supplies of tall, old growth forest in the upper reaches of the Don region. A catastrophe which beset the Don Cossack fleet in 1694 provides clear evidence of the magnitude of the crisis that made state regulation of sea raiding possible for the first time. According to the Host, in fall 1694, Ottoman forces discovered the Cossack fleet that had been hidden after the last sea raid – by submerging – in the delta of the Mius River. Their Turkish adversaries had chopped up the boats and burned the pieces, thereby causing the Cossacks “great damage.” The Host wrote to the tsar: “We do not expect that we will be able to outfit such ships in the future for sea-faring because we have no source of ship hulls (lotoshnye truby) and from Rus’ delivery of such hulls has ceased.”7 Because the Cossacks were no longer capable of independently outfitting vessels, due to a lack of raw materials, their ability to conduct future sea campaigns would completely depend on the mercy of the tsar.

The government approved the Cossack request for lumber, allowing them to outfit the fleet that would save the day during the second Azov campaign. Both ecology and state policy, however, conspired to make 1696 the final chapter in the history of Don Cossack sea raiding. In March 1697 the Cossacks expressed their eagerness to continue the successes of the previous year. Their petition read: “Now that Azov has been taken, the way to the sea is free. But we do not have any vessels fit for sea campaigns. In order to conduct sea campaigns, the Host would need fifty vessels with sails, anchors, and other supplies.”8 The government granted their request to upgrade their fleet, approving the construction of twenty vessels, but the Cossacks had deceived themselves into thinking the “way to the sea is now free.” The mouth of the Don was now in government hands and only it would decide if the time was right to conduct sea campaigns. The decree to set sail never came and over the next few years the Cossack fleet was phased out of existence. Henceforth the steppe would be the only domain of the Don Cossacks, but even that domain would soon be diminished.

7 RGADA, f. 111, 1694, d. 4, ll. 4–6.
8 RGADA, f. 111, 1697, d. 18, ll. 43–450b.
In Moscow preparations were already under way for a peace that would, if properly implemented, forever transform the steppe frontier. The Russian preparations for the Karlowitz Conference, at which Russia and its allies (Poland, Venice, and the Habsburg Empire) would negotiate treaties with the Ottoman Empire, envisioned a new order in the steppe. Cossacks and nomads would be reined in by state intervention.

At the Karlowitz Conference in October 1699, the Russian Empire outlined ten fundamental points upon which it would base peace with the Ottoman Empire. Of these, two were designed to end the steppe-raiding economy as it had existed for centuries: the fourth point proposed that tsar and sultan work together to end raiding and the fifth point provided for the exchange of prisoners by both sides without ransom payments. If the Russian plan gained acceptance, the two empires would not simply negotiate peace, but implement a system to prevent future sources of conflict by criminalizing non-state violence.

If the world of the steppe frontier was about to be permanently altered, this was not immediately evident during the first negotiation session. The Ottoman side, represented by Reis-Efendi Rami and the translator of the Porte, Alexander Mavrokordato, who did most of the talking, began the conference with reference to the past. The Russian ambassador, Voznitsyn, wryly noted in his report that “they began a history from the creation of the world to the present, all the while recalling the strongest ties of friendship and amicable relations [between tsar and sultan], which the whole world marveled at.” Obviously, the Ottoman side chose to begin by emphasizing the long tradition of friendship before in its words “some evil people sowed discord and conflict among friends.” The history lesson concluded with special reference to the tsar’s grandfather:

Over fifty years ago Azov was taken by some willful people and then the Great Sovereign, desiring not to damage his friendship with the Ottoman Porte in any way, ordered it to be handed back immediately... and now the current Great

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10 Bogoslovskii, *Petr I*, vol. iii, p. 393. 11 Ibid., p. 396.
Sovereign... can do the same for the sake of the strongest of friendships, and thereby console (утешит') his majesty the Sultan.\textsuperscript{12}

The Ottoman ambassadors also requested that the Dnieper forts be destroyed and handed back to the Sultan in order to restore friendship. So much had changed in the sixty years since Peter’s grandfather decided not to annex Azov, that Voznitsyn could summarily dismiss the possibility that Azov would be relinquished.

When the Ottoman side requested Azov and the Dnieper forts, Voznitsyn demanded that the Crimean port of Kerch’ be awarded to the Russian side in order to compensate the tsar for Tatar raids, which the Ottoman side had, in spite of previous treaty obligations, failed to prevent.\textsuperscript{13} This demand angered the Ottoman diplomats, sending the talks into a downward spiral. The Russian request seemed to violate the principle of “uti possidetis,” which European negotiators had agreed upon as the basis of the Karlowitz talks. Since Russia did not currently occupy Kerch’, the fort that controlled the entrance from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea, it could not be discussed in the negotiations. For the Russian side, however, the issue was not so clear cut, since the fort was in Crimea and no provision had been made for including the Crimean khanate in the negotiations. The talks stalled over the core issue of whether the khan would be made a party to the negotiations.

While talks stalled between Russian and Ottoman negotiators, Russia’s allies advanced towards conclusion of a separate peace. The Russian side linked the issue of the Dnieper forts to the problem of Tatar raids. The Ottoman side responded that if the forts were returned, it would “take the Tatars in hand as never before and turn them into a peaceful and agricultural people.”\textsuperscript{14} Even though the Russian ambassador did not take this statement at face value, it signaled that the Ottoman side was finally willing to bring the Tatars into the picture. The Ottoman side expressed a willingness to relinquish Azov, while the Russian side showed a readiness to drop demands for Kerch’.\textsuperscript{15} With time running out, it was agreed that new talks would resume in Istanbul after both sides consulted with their respective superiors.

In late 1699 Emelian Ukraintsev was sent to Istanbul to continue negotiations. He brought with him a new set of fundamental points for inclusion in the treaty.\textsuperscript{16} These also amounted to a death sentence for the raiding

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} This paragraph is based on Bogoslovskii, \textit{Petr I}, vol. iii, pp. 397–402.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 404.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 404–5.
\textsuperscript{16} This account of the Istanbul conference is based upon M. M. Bogoslovskii, \textit{Petr I}, vol. v (Moscow, 1948), which was based upon the report of the Ukraintsev embassy preserved in RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, kn. 27.
economy and a warrant for the suppression of non-state violence. Those who conducted raids would be punished and everything that they had “robbed” would be returned to the other side. Each side would be expected to punish felons and conflicts would be settled by diplomats, so that borderland conflicts could not become the cause of a new war. Moreover, the Russian Empire now based its claims for Azov and the Dnieper forts upon a desire to “restrain attacks by willful people.” State accountability for the actions of their subjects and the joint restriction of raiding were placed at the center of the negotiations and, if accepted, would become a foundation of future relations between the empires.

The fate of Azov had been virtually decided at Karlowitz, pending resolution of the problem of the Dnieper forts, but it would take nearly three months to resolve this thorny question. The fate of Kazykermen, which controlled the mouth of the Dnieper, caused the most concern. If it was not restored to the Ottoman side, land transportation between the Balkans and Crimea could be impeded by Russian forces. The Russian side, however, maintained that it was holding the fort for the sole purpose of preventing Tatar raids. Mavrokordato compared the Russian ambitions to those of an unrepentant thief. After stealing two kaftans from a friend (i.e. Azov and Kazykermen), in order to restore the friendship it was necessary to at least return the one of lesser value (i.e. Kazykermen) to the aggrieved party. Ottoman pledges to place a pasha with an army in the fort were rebuffed by Russian assertions that the beys who were stationed there previously took bribes from the Tatars and did nothing to prevent raids.

By April 1700, a compromise was reached. The tsar would dismantle the forts and restore the lands upon which they stood to the Sultan and the Sultan would agree to rein in the Crimean Tatars. This decision cleared the way for substantive talks on Azov. Now that the Dnieper was off the table, Russian officials would bargain for a hinterland for Azov. Talks commenced with a Russian proposal that the Kuban’ River be made the boundary between the two states, “since besides that river there is nothing else to establish as a boundary between both sides.” This proposal, however, shocked the Ottoman representatives, causing them to claim that the tsar desired “to seize the whole East.” The rejection of the Kuban’, the only significant natural boundary, signified that for all practical purposes a boundary would have to be demarcated in the open steppe. The Ottomans countered the Russian proposal with one that was as advantageous for them as the Russian proposal was unfavorable. The boundary could be established at the distance of one cannon shot from Azov. To this, Ukraintsev

17 Bogoslovskii, *Petr I*, vol. v, p. 120. 18 Ibid., p. 109. 19 Ibid., p. 122. 20 Ibid., p. 137.
repeated his previous proposal, arguing that between Azov and Kuban’ the whole steppe was empty and that the Nogais and Circassians all resided beyond the Kuban’. “When the Kuban’ is made the border,” he stated, “love and friendship will be affirmed, because all kinds of conflicts arise due to close borders, and such a distant border as Kuban’ will not be a source of conflict.” The logic was that since the tsar’s subjects did not live in that area, conflicts were not as likely to arise as if the border was close to Azov. It also demonstrates a concept of sovereignty that involved authority claims over territory, not just individuals.

Soon both sides began to budge from their extreme positions, with the Russian side offering to delineate the boundary in terms of days distant from Azov by horse, while the Ottoman side countered by offering hours of distance. Subsequently the difference between hours and days began to be reduced. Finally, both sides agreed to affix the border at a distance of ten hours (south) from Azov. Then, the problem of speed entered the picture. The Ottoman ambassadors mandated that the speed of travel be defined as “moderate riding,” as would befit a pasha, while in no case could postal riding be accepted as the norm. Ukraintsev rejected this suggestion because of its absurdity, stating: “It has never been the practice anywhere to ride in the steppe in an orderly, consistent, and calm (i.e. slow) manner.” In the end, it was decided to ride “as is customary among all peoples,” leaving it to two border “commissars” from each side to work out the differences on the spot.

After settling the boundary question, the issue of the Tatars arose once again. The Russian side unequivocally demanded that the Tatars cease raiding, simultaneously affirming that the Russian state would break with its practice of nearly five centuries and henceforth pay no gifts to them. Ukraintsev stated:

While the Crimean khans previously took gifts, now it is time for them to cease and desist from that and live in peace with Christian sovereigns so that owing to their audacity (derzost’), as they are accustomed to commit robberies by their willfulness, they do not bring down upon themselves some kind of onerous military presence and destruction.

Here, as in the points submitted from the start of negotiations, raiding is equated with armed robbery. The era of tolerance and gifts had come to an end, and the Russian government was signaling that failure to acknowledge this could prove fatal for the Tatars in the future.

21 Ibid., p. 137. 22 Ibid., pp. 138–40. 23 Ibid., p. 141. 24 Ibid., p. 146.
Even in the face of firm opposition, the Ottoman negotiators continued to pressure for the tsar to award some kind of payments to the Crimean khan. The Russian negotiators consistently employed the “just say no” strategy. At one point Mavrokordato even stated: “Charity is not only extended to people, but also to dogs, so that they will be fed and not die from hunger.”25 But the Russians would no longer deign to nourish those who had elected for so long to bite the hands that fed them. The Crimean khan had already lost his former role as intermediary between tsar and sultan, and was soon to be bereft of gifts and deprived of raiding. If Russia had its way, in the coming years the khan would be reduced to the role of an obedient minor player in the affairs of the two empires.

Trade replaced Tatars as the new topic of friction. The Russian negotiators solicited the right of the tsar’s subjects to navigate and trade in the Black Sea basin. After all, now the tsar possessed over a hundred ships and in the words of Ukraintsev “nowhere is it the custom to keep such ships in one place without a profit.”26 Mavrokordato refused to even discuss such a possibility, telling Ukraintsev that for the Ottomans the Black Sea is “like a pure undefiled virgin,” not only would others not be allowed to navigate there, but no one would be allowed to touch her.27 When the topic came up again, Mavrokordato displayed clarity, though not clairvoyance, in stating “the ships of other states will have free navigation in the Black Sea only when the Turkish state falls flat on its back with its legs in the air.”28 Although it was a bitter pill to swallow, the tsar would have to accept that without Ottoman cooperation, which would not be forthcoming, Azov could never be transformed from an economic backwater into a trading emporium.

With the big questions now out of the way, discussions turned to issues of secondary importance. Most of these were accepted without considerable controversy.29 Among these were the Russian suggestions that a general exchange of prisoners take place, while private ransom deals were to be adjudicated by border officials to ensure that high prices would not become a hurdle to freeing captives. Both sides would be obliged to return rebels and fugitives, and punish those who carried out cross-border raids. Officials from both sides would jointly resolve conflicts between Cossacks and nomads. Although the treaty still had to be ratified, not to mention implemented, Russian and Ottoman diplomats had taken the necessary legal steps towards transforming the steppe frontier into a borderland.

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After 1698 Azov officials concentrated most of their energies towards eliminating cross-border conflict in anticipation of a peace agreement. In order to forestall sources of friction before state intervention was introduced to frontier affairs, in June 1699 a decree from the tsar mandated that the Don Cossacks not “conduct any conferences or conclude any agreements on the exchange of captives” with the Kuban’ residents without express authorization from the Ambassadorial Chancery and governor of Azov. This was like mandating that a horseman halt his steed at full gallop without advancing an extra inch. As the government would soon learn, the freezing of conflict resolution had the potential for causing more harm than good.

While it was easy for government officials in distant capitals to rewrite the rules of the ancient game of raiding and ransoming, it was much more difficult to abolish the middle ground and make all sides acknowledge and adhere to the new rules. The administration of Azov was about to receive a crash course in the old ways, which it had little clue about when it set out to start implementation of the peace treaty in 1700. By putting off conflict resolution until the treaty, bad blood had accumulated on both sides of the undelineated border.

In May 1701, two Azov officials, Pavel Boldyr’ and scribe Ivan Dronin were sent on one of the first fact-finding missions to Kuban’ in advance of an anticipated, but still unscheduled, adjudication of frontier conflicts by Russian and Ottoman officials. Their objective was to document Tatar claims against the tsar’s subjects, but soon they became pawns in the conflicts they were supposed to help resolve. Upon reaching lands controlled by Alauvat Murza, one of the leading princes of the Kuban’ Tatars, the Azov officials were seized and brought before Alauvat, who stated that they would be held so that “the governor [of Azov] would institute a settlement (razdelka) at once.”

While the Azov administration could await the appearance of an Ottoman official in order to settle frontier conflicts, which the statesmen had no personal stake in and only possessed dim knowledge of, men like Alauvat were not accustomed to waiting patiently for the completion of bureaucratic niceties. He sent word to Azov that the representatives would be held until the Don Cossacks “paid for the blood” of his son who died in captivity in Cherkassk.

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30 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 14, l. 282ob.
31 Testimony of Boldyr’, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 388–90.
32 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 22, l. 388.
33 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 22, l. 133.
Alauvat expected that the voevoda would act immediately to free “his” people, but no immediate action was forthcoming. Since the treaty stipulated that Russian and Ottoman officials jointly adjudicate conflicts, the names of the Azov officials were just appended to the long lists of unresolved “offenses” (obidy) being compiled by the Russian side for submission to its Ottoman counterpart. While Pavel Boldyr’ was freed, when a Tatar who was believed to be in Cossack captivity came home after what was only a visit to relatives in Cherkassk, the Azov scribe Ivan Dronin remained in captivity. An Azov interpreter sent with a Don Cossack leader to Kuban’ in 1701 reported that he had seen and spoken with Dronin. He chanced upon the destitute diplomat in Alauvat’s ulus as the clerk was emerging from the forest in chains bearing a load of firewood. Dronin told him that he “lives in bondage like unfree men and captives and does all kinds of manual labor after having been robbed of everything.” If serving Tatars was not humiliation enough for a government official, he would later testify that he was forced to borrow money for food from the leaders of the Kuban’ Cossacks, the rebels forced from the Don in 1688.

Dronin would only be released in 1702 when the first Ottoman representatives appeared on the scene. Prior to 1702, the Azov administration’s attempts to comply with the vague guidelines of the treaty produced few tangible results. Since the states had yet to form any system for regulating frontier relations, both old and new rules existed parallel to each other, heightening conflict, not reducing it. An incident from 1701 involving a German captive named Gottlieb Weber illustrates how the legalistic interpretations of the peace treaty advocated by the Russian side came into conflict with well-established frontier traditions.

The high drama began somewhere in Kuban’ one night in July 1701. Weber, who had lived in captivity for eleven years after being taken by the Nogais at Siebenburgen, stole his master’s horse and darted off in the direction of Azov. After an arduous journey, he reached the gates of the fort and was stopped by sentries for identification. As he began to explain who he was, two Nogai traders came running from a nearby trade building (gostinyi dvor) and latched on to Weber, trying to drag him away from the gates. The startled gate-keepers ran to his rescue and took him into

34 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 22, l. 393. 35 RGADA, f. III, 1701, d. 5, l. l. 173.
36 Dronin testimony, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, l. 253.
38 Meeting between Azov officials and Tatar leaders, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 233–40. Weber incident, l. 235ob.
Imperial boundaries

custody. These are the few facts in a case that would be disputed for many
months.

The Tatars began demanding that Weber, who was owned by a Tatar
leader named Kazy Murza, be delivered to them at once. When an Azov
official was sent to discuss the matter with the Kuban’ murza, the Tatar
leader stated that the Azov officials were in the wrong and that the behavior
of the Nogai traders was completely justified:

Prior to this the stipulations in our peace treaties and agreements with the Don
Cossacks, were as follows. If a captive leaves Kuban’ and heads to Cherkassk, and
if he was captured before reaching Cherkassk, he was taken back to Kuban’. And
if a captive ran to Cherkassk and managed to get just one foot in the gate, and the
other foot was outside the gate, and if he was caught by a Kuban’ resident, in such
cases half a ransom fee was paid. 39

The Tatars took for granted that previous jointly created rules of the
middle ground remained in force and that Russian Azov could be equated
with Cossack Cherkassk. They were convinced that, as they complained
in writing to Azov, the German iasyr’(slave) was unjustly taken away from
them. 40

The reply from the Azov officials expressed a view of the incident that
was derived from a different cultural and legal universe. They told the Tatar
leader: “We have no knowledge of what kind of previous agreements and
peace treaties you have had with the Don Cossacks, but now according to
the treaty of peace the lands south of Azov towards Kuban’ for a distance
of ten hours of horse travel have been ceded to the Great Sovereign.” 41 For
Russian officials the whole previous history of frontier relations no longer
mattered. Now that the two states had come to a diplomatic agreement,
a new order would be imposed from above without reference to prior
precedents. From the moment Weber crossed an invisible line somewhere
hours south of Azov, he had entered the tsar’s territory. Now the tsar, and
only the tsar, could and would decide what to do with him.

Outraged by the rejection of tradition and the inflexibility of the Azov
officials, the Tatar leader issued an ultimatum, stating: “If that German is
not handed over by Azov, I’ll gather together a Horde of forty thousand
and will attack Azov and other towns of the Great Sovereign.” 42 It became
increasingly difficult for Tatars to put their trust in an Azov administration
that so easily shoved aside time-tested methods of conflict resolution. Soon

39 RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 219.
40 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, l. 235ob.
41 RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 219–219ob.
42 RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 219–219ob.
thereafter several raids and baranta incidents took place, suggesting that the Tatars were not ready to play by Russian government rules.43

While for the Tatars the transition to the new order was difficult, the Don Cossacks made the best of the new situation. The lean years over the past two decades had made the Cossack community less dependent upon the raiding economy than previously. After 1696 the government efforts to limit raiding coincided with new opportunities for commerce with the Russian garrisons at Azov, softening the impact of raiding restrictions. When the tsar issued a decree in 1701 forbidding all raids not previously authorized by the government, it provoked no opposition.44 By that time, those Cossacks who still linked their livelihood to the raiding economy were already transforming from a frontier framework into a borderland mode of business as usual.

Because the Russian side started enforcing treaty restrictions earlier than the Ottoman side, the Don Cossacks were able to adjust more quickly to new realities. The treaty stipulations prohibited raiding after the peace, but permitted ransom deals. Since the Cossacks had for all intents and purposes ceased cross-border raiding around the time the treaty was concluded, they could manage to profit from their own misfortune: the continuation of Tatar raids after the peace. A clear break with the past breathed new life into the ransom business.

Around 1700 the Don Host redefined cross-border raiding as felonious behavior (vorovstvo). By turning its back on the past and accepting the position being promoted by the Russian government, the border, which still existed only on paper, could serve Cossack interests. A decree issued by the tsar in 1700 provided the legal framework for Cossack action. It authorized them to pursue and capture Kuban’ Tatars who “campaign against the towns of the Great Sovereign and the Cossack towns.”45 Henceforth, armed Tatars found on the wrong side of the invisible border were fair game for Cossack warriors.

When government officials came to investigate Tatar complaints, the Cossacks could claim the legal high ground. In 1703 the Cossacks testified that “sudden felonious attacks” were causing them great destruction. The Tatars continued to rob cattle and people and sell them in Kuban’, but whenever those Tatars were “caught in the act of destruction or banditry, they call themselves ‘good people’ who are just hunting birds and beasts. But of course they come to engage in felony.”46 In 1704, the Cossacks

43 RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, 1702, d. 1, ll. 151–54. 44 RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 109. 45 Azov report, GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 244, l. 11. 46 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 18, l. 384ob.
could claim that they were not violating the peace treaty, only defending themselves against illegal attack. Concerning the Tatars they were holding in custody, they stated: “Their people were taken while committing felonious acts, and therefore they do not have to be returned.” By adopting the language of the treaty stipulations, the Cossacks could depict their actions as border vigilance, which in turn enabled the Russian government to dismiss any Tatar claim that took place on its side of the border.

Willingness to adapt to the new rules of the borderland world allowed the Cossacks to preserve their position in a changing geopolitical environment. By recognizing the border, they gave up the unbounded expanses of the old steppe, but in exchange they reaped the benefits which came with patrolling the Russian Empire’s new backyard. The Tatars, on the other hand, never fully adapted to the geopolitical climate change in the steppe. Their disdain for borders made the Russian Empire more and more eager to corral them, eventually leading to their political extinction.

THE STAGES OF OTTOMAN ENGAGEMENT

Due to the Russian zeal to implement the treaty, borders were becoming manifest in the life of the region long before the physical artifacts of demarcation were created. In contrast, the Ottoman side only gradually inserted itself into the frontier scene. In order to explain this, it is necessary to look at the forces that were influencing Ottoman actions.

During the first years after the loss of Azov, grand strategic considerations took priority in Ottoman planning. In summer 1697, Astrakhan’ Tatars sent to Kuban’ reported to the Russian government that the Sultan had sent over 15,000 laborers to the mouth of the Kuban’ River to construct a new fort. Work proceeded slowly, however, because the workers were dying in large numbers after digging in swampy areas. By 1701, a large stone structure could be seen going up near Taman’, which together with Kerch controlled access to the Black Sea. A Cossack who traded in Ottoman territories reported that in 1702 a new fort was under construction near Kerch. Another informant confirmed that new forts were going up on both sides of the straits of Kerch and provided a second report that the Turks were “dumping rocks into the straits with great haste.” Combined together, all of these labors were designed to prevent Russian boats from entering

47 Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 101.
48 Testimonies can be located in the order discussed in RGADA, f. 111, 1695, ll. 183–84; RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 228; RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, l. 905–9050b; RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, l. 950.
the Black Sea. Before bothering with steppe borders, the Ottoman state concerned itself with building a secure chastity belt for its “virgin” sea.

Peter’s erection of forts near Azov, combined with the flaunting of his naval prowess in southern waters, inspired fears of invasion among the residents and officials of nearby Ottoman territories. A Cossack named Mikhail Sulin reported in 1701 the rumors that were making the rounds in Kaffa during his stay there:

The Turks and Greeks in Kaffa are saying that the tsar has sent 80,000 soldiers to Taganrog and laid the foundations of eighty churches and has permanently transferred to Taganrog 40,000 families. Others express doubts and in their conversations say, “Where could the tsar get so many people from?”

While the numbers were obviously exaggerated several times over, the residents of Crimea could not help but notice the military build-up going on next door. The fear of “Muscovite” invasion seems to have been pervasive in Crimea at that time. A Cossack of Turkish origin named Petr Emelianov reported that when he was in Kerch and Kaffa in summer 1702 several false alarms were sounded in the public squares proclaiming: “The Muscovite forces are advancing towards Crimea by land and by ship!” During talks with Murtaza Pasha, an Ottoman official resident in Kaffa, Emelianov was told that because both Murtaza and the Crimean khan had written several times to Istanbul concerning the constant reports about pending Muscovite action, they were awaiting the arrival of a high Ottoman official, a Kapici Pasha who would investigate the matter. Hence, the possibility that Russia would again unexpectedly attack Ottoman territories was still taken seriously as late as 1702.

The Crimean khanate also seems to have played a major role in postponing the delineation of borders. It stood to lose the most from the creation of a steppe border, since the lands about to be divided between the two empires were previously under its nominal jurisdiction. Although the details are sketchy, it appears that Khan Devlet Girei attempted to derail the peace treaty on several fronts. As mentioned above, he had written letters to the Sultan about the Muscovite threat. In spring 1703, the khan and the vezir allegedly plotted to murder the Russian ambassador, Petr Andreevich Tolstoi, who had taken up residence in Istanbul and was promoting peace at court. The plot was revealed to Tolstoi by the nephew

49 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 610b.
50 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 119, op. 1, 1702, d. 13, l. 4–50b.
51 This information comes from a Cossack who traded in Istanbul. RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 903–4. This account of the Khan’s rebellion differs from that presented in Abou-el-Haj, “The Formal Closure,” 472–74.
of the patriarch of Jerusalem. The khan learned that he was about to be deposed by the sultan and fled to the Circassians in the Caucasus.

A number of different sources suggest that around the time of the transfer of power to a new khan, Ottoman officials started to take a more assertive role in implementing the provisions of the peace treaty. In June 1703, Armenian merchants from Bakhchisarai told the Don Cossacks that “the Turkish Sultan wants to bring the Crimean Tatars under control so that they do not commit willful acts, but that instead they fully obey him.” An escaped Russian captive noted that in summer 1703 a courier from Crimea brought a letter to Kuban’ that was read aloud publicly, ordering the Tatars not to raid. A Don Cossack who was taken captive by the Tatars in late spring or summer 1703 testified that in Kuban’ his captor took him around secretly trying to sell him, but “no one would buy him because of the peace.”

These events also coincide with the rise of Khasan Pasha as an active player in border affairs. Khasan Pasha was the Ottoman official in charge of the fort of Achuev built near Kerch. Despite the fact that Russian documents do not reveal the full extent of the authorities delegated to him, from 1704 he is consistently named as the main Ottoman counterpart of the governor of Azov, Ivan Andreevich Tolstoi (the brother of the Russian ambassador in Istanbul). Khasan served as commandant of Achuev, but did not directly supplant the pre-existing power structure of the region, in which Kuban’ Tatar leaders answered to the Kalga sent from Crimea. Instead, as someone who was “in favor with the [Ottoman] Sultan” he acted as special plenipotentiary for border affairs. According to one of Khasan’s deputies, named Magomet Aga, the sultan’s decree was sent to Khasan “ordering the Kuban’ Murzas to obey him.” His power over local officials was derived from the fact that, as the Cossacks recorded in one report, “he writes to the Turkish Sultan [directly], without consulting the Crimean Khan.” All of these facts suggest that the Ottoman government began to insert itself more actively into the affairs of the North Caucasus, which previously were delegated to the Crimean khan, but no attempts were made to extend direct administrative control over the Kuban’ Tatars.

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52 Azov reports, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, l. 881ob; RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 37, ll. 473, 588.
53 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 37, l. 473.
54 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, l. 9530b.
55 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 25, l. 958.
56 The statement about favor with the Sultan comes from a report by a Tatar resident of Achuev. RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 37, l. 594. The same informant testified that Khasan was not in charge of Kaffa, Kerch, Taman’, and Temriuk, the Ottoman forts in the North Caucasus, suggesting that his was a special appointment.
57 Oral testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 106.
58 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 105.
With the appearance of Khasan Pasha on the scene, the treaty provisions were put on a fast track towards joint implementation. In October 1704, Governor Ivan Tolstoi and Khasan Pasha met near the Ei River to create a border between the two empires. After “much arguing and conversations” about the speed of travel, they decided to simply let their representatives ride from Azov and then evaluate the outcome. As might be predicted from the treaty negotiations, in the race to claim/retain lands south of Azov, the Ottoman representative assumed the relative role of the tortoise and the Russian representative assumed the role of the hare. While Khaplar Keiasa Agmet Aga failed to reach the Ei at the end of ten hours, coming up 1,350 sazhens (2,875 meters/9,450 feet) short, Nikolai Vasiliev managed to ride 5,530 sazhens (11,780 meters/38,710 feet) meters past the Ei River.

Tolstoi and Khasan Pasha decided to affix the border at a distance of 1,660 sazhens (3,500 meters/11,630 feet) south of the Ei, a distance that was roughly in the middle of the two riding marks. On October 15, 1704 the border was marked on the steppe road from Azov to Kuban’. The Russian side erected a pillar and placed an iron cross on top. Across the road, the Ottomans constructed a mound (kurgan) and encircled it with stones. These were the only physical artifacts designating that the frontier had become a borderland. Someone riding on horseback at a high speed in the steppe could easily have failed to notice these paltry symbols of the new order. Henceforth, however, the interventionist actions of state officials were to remind Cossacks and nomads when they transgressed treaty boundaries.

JOINT ENFORCEMENT OF THE BORDER REGIME

The delineation of a border prepared the way for resolution of borderland conflicts on a high level. A system of joint bureaucratic regulation and retribution was set to fully replace the highly personal and face-to-face past transactions between Cossacks and nomads. But before the imperial officials could seek common ground in “restraining willful people” on both sides of the border, they had to first find common language. In view of the fact that such a simple, but fundamental, issue as written communication could have been anticipated by policy-makers in the distant capitals, it is curious that neither side was well prepared for initial encounters.

59 Records of the meeting, RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, 1704, d. 11, 10b.; RGADA, f. 89, op. 2, d. 11, l. 30b–4.
60 RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, 1704, d. 11, 10b.; RGADA, f. 89, op. 2, d. 11, l. 30b–4.
61 This paragraph is based on RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, 1704, d. 11, 10b, RGADA, f. 89, op. 2, d. 11, ll. 30b–4.
As late as 1701, Azov, the Russian imperial outpost on the edge of the Ottoman world, had not been issued any government translators who could read Ottoman Turkish. A note appended to a letter sent by a group of Tatar murzas to the governor of Azov in November 1700 states that the letter was “read aloud by a Turkish prisoner named Ali and translated into Russian by the Kalmyk interpreter Parfenko Mergen.”

By winter 1701 this practice was becoming recognized as a possible liability. The governor of Azov requested a translator from Moscow since he was still using “a Turkish prisoner taken from Kazykermen and it is dangerous to rely on him.”

Hence, for the first years of its existence, Azov got along by employing Turkish prisoners to read Ottoman documents.

Despite the fact that Azov was issued a translator, communication problems would still plague relations over the next few years. After Khasan Pasha began adjudicating claims for the Ottoman side in 1703–4, it took several months just to successfully exchange written communications, which were supposed to be the foundation for reporting and resolving conflicts. A translator sent to Azov by Moscow proved unfit for the job of rendering Ottoman into Russian. Upon looking at a letter, the translator Kutlumamet Tonkachev, stated: “The letter is written in Turkish, but certain words are of a high style and written in Arabic. I cannot translate the letter correctly [podlinno], because I don’t know Arabic.” Across the Sea of Azov, Khasan Pasha was grappling with the same issue. He began to receive letters from Ivan Tolstoi in Russian, but he still did not have a Russian translator! He kindly requested for Tolstoi to write in Greek or French, since he had readers of those languages on hand.

For most of 1704 the translation problem remained unresolved. Much of Tolstoi’s correspondence addressed to the Ottoman side remained untranslated, while Ottoman officials in some cases wrote to Tolstoi in Italian, which was read out loud then translated into Russian. Both sides managed to secure translators, but problems continued. In November 1706, Ivan Tolstoi complained of a yet another translator he had been saddled with, writing:

In this postal bag translations of the [Turkish] letters are not sent because Khasan Pasha and the Kuban’ Sartlan Murza sent their representatives just before the post was to be sent. Moreover, the translator is very bad and not timely. He translates letters from Turkish to Russian with great slowness. Also, in conversations the

62 GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 244, l. 17.  
63 Azov report, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 14, l. 6460b.  
64 Azov report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 7270b.  
65 Summary of translation, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 1430b.  
66 Azov report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 7300b.
representatives often argue with his translations and say he translates improperly. Because of this, a good translator must be sent.\textsuperscript{67}

Thereafter, the communication problems seem to have been resolved, but one wonders how much was lost in translation in those crucial early years of interaction.

The system settled upon for resolving conflicts was by nature highly bureaucratic. Each side would compile lists of “complaints” which were written down and forwarded to the other side for investigation.\textsuperscript{68} Upon receiving the complaint list, officials would consult with their respective subjects, be they Cossacks or nomads, in order to verify details of the incidents at hand. This last procedure was important, because Cossacks and nomads lived on both sides of the border. Officials had to be sure that they had precise information on who had actually committed the acts outlined in the complaints.

If offenders were not caught in the act, it was often difficult to identify the perpetrators of cross-border crimes. For example, a group of travelers attacked in the steppe could only testify in 1705 that they “were attacked by a group of unknown people who yelled in Tatar.”\textsuperscript{69} Even when the ethnic identification of bandits was precise, it was not always easy to ascertain who was responsible for them. For example, in 1701 Tatars claimed that yurt Kalmyks, who answered to the Don Cossacks, had stolen their horses, but the Cossacks asserted that Ayuka’s Kalmyks were to blame.\textsuperscript{70} When Tatars claimed that small parties of Don Cossacks had raided near Crimea in 1704, the Don Cossacks insisted that they were bandits who “only claim to be Don Cossacks” when caught.\textsuperscript{71}

Identification, which would form the basis for written complaints, became an integral part of information-gathering on cross-border incidents. The more precise the information, the better the chances were of pressing the claim. Charges could be filed against a group of Nogais who captured three Russian prisoners and an Azov cavalry officer in 1702, because one of the members of the raiding party was recognized as “the uncle of Agish Murza, Tleuberdei.”\textsuperscript{72} Those who were captured while conducting raids were used to provide testimony and were also employed for the morbid task of identifying compatriots who were killed in previous raids. For example, a Tatar captured in 1704 was taken to the Azov jail and

\textsuperscript{67} RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 864–8640b.

\textsuperscript{68} For typical early documents of this procedure, see RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, ll. 20–38.

\textsuperscript{69} RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, l. 454.

\textsuperscript{70} RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 239.

\textsuperscript{71} RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 321.

\textsuperscript{72} Azov report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 3920b.
shown a collection of heads: “Those heads were shown to him. Looking at those heads, he said that they are those of Nogai Tatars, but whose they are he does not know. One of them he recognized and said ‘that was the head of Daulakai from my same aul.’” Although the dead could not pay for their crimes, their names could be used to file claims against those who got away.

Because identifications were often vague and unreliable, the provisions of the treaty mandating state punishment for cross-border crimes were rarely invoked. It was not always possible for both sides to reach a consensus on whether identifications were correct and cases often remained unresolved after years of investigation. Documents for the period from 1701 to 1705 provide details of only a few executions, which were carried out by the Russian side before Ottoman officials. In 1701, the two leaders of a group of Kalmyks who were caught red-handed with horses stolen from Crimea were executed by hanging in the presence of an official sent from Crimea, while several of their accomplices were beaten with the knout. The same year, two Cossacks who held up a trade caravan of Turks, Tatars, and Armenians, were also hung. These two cases were brought up as precedents in later negotiations, suggesting that they functioned as show trials to demonstrate Russian resolve in the face of perceived Ottoman inaction.

The real reason why the punishment provisions of the peace treaty were so rarely invoked derived from frontier custom. When Khasan Pasha was asked in 1706 why the Ottoman side did not punish felons, he replied:

When those felonious Tatars who raid the Don Cossack gorodki are caught, they are never punished and executed. Instead the Don Cossacks set them free upon receiving ransoms. As soon as those Tatars ransom themselves, they head off for banditry again, trying to recoup their ransom fee and double it.

When the Don Cossacks were asked about this, they confirmed that they had reached agreements with the Tatars not to hand them over for punishment but to ransom or exchange them instead. Though the border treaty mandated death for defiance of the ban on raiding, the old ways of the middle ground still allowed bandits to redeem themselves.

While the Russian side could proclaim righteous indignation that offenders were not punished, the Ottoman side on occasion proved to

73 Tatar testimony, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 397ob.
74 Azov report, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 500ob–501.
75 RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, l. 225.
76 Azov report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 389ob.
77 Oral testimony, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 583.
78 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 583ob.
be better attuned to realities of the old frontier customs. In negotiations conducted in 1706, the case of two Azov soldiers who had attacked and killed some Tatar traders came up for discussion. The Ottoman representative, Kaznodar Abdulla, sought compensation for the victims, but the Russian negotiator, Vasilii Kireev, could only assure him that the claim would be settled along with others and that the perpetrators, who had been arrested, would be executed when the cycle of government negotiations was concluded.

Because early efforts had produced few results, the negotiations conducted between 1704 and 1706 represent the most intense efforts at resolving borderland conflicts. For negotiations with Khasan Pasha in 1704, the Cossacks prepared a list of complaints dating back to 1699. They claimed that 220 Cossacks taken by Kuban’ Tatars had never been returned. The Russian government also forwarded to the Ottoman side its long list of complaints that had accumulated over several years.

In December 1704 the Azov administration attempted to unilaterally introduce a sliding scale of compensation for goods that could not be returned. Bureaucratic wisdom deemed that a horse was worth five rubles, a bull or cow two rubles, while sheep and goats were valued at fractions of a ruble. 123 rubles were sent from Azov with a Tatar named Baraikhtar, but he soon brought the money back claiming the Tatars “want horses and cattle, not money.” The Azov administration, however, refused to take the money back. While for the Russian side the case was closed, for the Tatars the incident remained unresolved.

Khasan Pasha was becoming lodged between a rock and a hard place. He could do little to satisfy Tatar claims, since many of them resulted from cultural misunderstandings such as those outlined above. At the same time, he was constantly asked by the Russian side to restrain the Tatars from raiding. He reported in a letter of April 1705 to Tolstoi:

From the Kitai Kipchak Tatars the leading murzas, Sartlan and others, came to me and said: “The Great Sovereign has concluded peace with his majesty the Turkish Sultan, and we are the slaves (kholopy) of the Sultan and do not want to oppose his decrees. But from Azov and Cherkassk, the Kalmyks come and destroy us and take our animals to their side.” They wanted to chase after them and take baranta as compensation for their horses, but I ordered them not to go for baranta. 83

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79 This paragraph is based on RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 516–17.
80 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 563.
81 Azov report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, l. 4560b.
82 Oral testimony, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 501.
83 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, l. 429–4290b.
Instead, he asked the governor to investigate the incident. In May 1705, however, large groups of Tatars raided Azov, so many that the Azov cavalry units “could not restrain them.” As a result, 32 Russians, 15 “Swedes”, 142 horses, 253 bulls, 12 sheep, 1,512 goats, and 133 calves had to be added to the complaint list. Although it is not clear that the raid was directly related to the incident mentioned in Khasan’s letter, the Azov governor directed his ire at Khasan, threatening that if he did not investigate the incident at once, Tolstoi would write to his brother in Constantinople (sic) to notify him that the Kuban’ Tatars were conducting raids with the pasha’s authorization.

In spite of his limited capacity to control the situation in the Kuban’ region, in 1705 Khasan managed to return 119 captives. This number, however, paled in comparison to the outstanding claims pressed by the Azov administration. In early 1706, the Russian side submitted to the Ottoman side a bureaucratic compendium of unrequited losses from all previous years. It demanded compensation for or the return of: 307 people taken into captivity, with the clothes, money, and guns they were carrying when taken, 4 people killed, 79 wounded, 5,000 stolen horses, of which 23 had saddles and other equipment, 24 horses killed, 4,587 head of cattle, 159 calves, 2,368 goats and sheep, and 15 camels. With Khasan’s capability to restrain the Tatars weakening, the process of conflict resolution was on the brink of buckling under the weight of unresolved claims.

As a result of outstanding claims, a large conference for regulating cross-border conflicts was held on the outskirts of Azov in March 1706. In addition to Khasan, Tolstoi, and officials from Crimea, a high-ranking Ottoman official (Kapici Pasha) named Magomet was sent from Istanbul to witness the proceedings. The leaders of the Tatars and Don Cossacks were also summoned to attend. A whole range of issues were discussed, but in the end, the conference achieved little except for frustrating all involved.

While the Russian side had compiled detailed records about incidents spanning several years, the Tatars came armed with little documentation. Many of the incidents the Tatars complained about were negated from the outset because they occurred in territories ceded to Russia and represented violations of the treaty (border incursions) by the Tatars. When the Nogais submitted a list of claims – they demanded return of 216 people,

84 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, l. 428. 85 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, l. 432.
86 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, ll. 445ob–446. 87 Azov report, RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 498.
88 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 4980b.
89 A record of the conference and its deliberations is preserved in RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 499–571.
90 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 500, 504.
34,064 horses, 3 camels, 250 head of cattle, and 1,280 levki (silver coins) – Russian officials challenged the document. First of all, why were there no specific details about incidents, such as who the victims were, and when and where the incidents had allegedly occurred? Why was none of this ever mentioned in the letters which were exchanged several times a year between Tolstoi, Khasan, and Crimean officials? Assuming the tone of a prosecutor, Vasilii Kireev, took the offensive: “That list was compiled falsely by the Kuban’ murzas and Tatars, desiring to substitute it for the fact that every year they have violated the peace treaty with their felonious raids.” In their defense the Tatars could only counter: “We don’t know who came and took those things and when they happened, because we do not keep records about such matters.” The Ottoman negotiator Kaznodar Abdulla signified that the case was closed by telling the Tatars that “it is impossible to conduct an investigation without accurate information about when, where, and by whom offenses were committed.”

The only result from the meeting was a promise by the Ottoman side that an investigation would be carried out, but by then efforts at regulation and retribution were already breaking down to the point that little could be salvaged. In April 1706, Khasan Pasha confided to a Russian official that the peace process was in danger. In the wake of their humiliation at the conference, the Kuban’ Tatars now demanded 8,000 horses from Azov or they would take baranta. “There is no way I can restrain them,” Khasan warned, “because for a long time they have been a willful people.” He lamented that if there were only some way to “keep them [Russian subjects and nomads] from filing claims against each other” peace could be sustained. This hint, however, was ignored by the Russian official, who proceeded to quote to Khasan from the complaint lists and declared that the Russian side possessed information that Khasan had sent a Russian captive as a gift to his brother in Istanbul.

During the same visit, the Kapici Pasha from Istanbul admitted that he was powerless to do anything about the Tatars, who were agitating for the immediate release from Azov of a prominent Tatar named Kasai. If he were not handed over, it would be impossible to continue returning Russian captives. Moreover, he warned:

I have to stand up for the Kuban’ residents, because I fear they might rebel or betray the Sultan and move away to somewhere else, because for a long time

91 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 508.
92 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 508ob.
93 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 509.
94 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 511.
95 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 572.
96 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 572.
97 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 573ob.
they have been willful people... At present I cannot conduct a just investigation or complete the process of resolution and restitution, because of the self-willed behavior of the Kuban’ residents and due to the fact that I do not have Janissaries with me and do not have anyone with which to pacify those willful people.98

Soon thereafter Kasai was handed over to the Ottoman side “for investigation,” but inertia in the talks became evident. By late 1706, the Azov administration was no longer actively pursuing claims accumulated since its inception as a Russian fort. Instead, it pressured Khasan for the return of twenty-two Russian captives, who, as it turned out, had already been sold into galley slavery.99

THE BREAKDOWN OF THE BORDER COMMISSION

Though the threat of a Tatar rebellion had brought the talks to an impasse, a Don Cossack uprising in 1707–08 caused a hiatus. The rebel leader Kondratii Bulavin hoped that nomads would flock to his camp, but either too much bad blood had accumulated on the other side of the border, or his message of resisting state encroachment failed to reach its destination (see Chapter 11). The peace process insured, however, that neither the Ottomans nor the Tatars would intervene in the military conflict between Peter and his Cossack clients. The crushing of the rebellion made it possible to immediately reopen talks.

In August 1708, another Kapici Pasha, named Ali Aga, was sent from Istanbul.100 By then both sides had abandoned the lion’s share of their previous claims. Now talks centered on the fate of dozens of captives, not restitution of hundreds of captives and thousands of heads of cattle. The Ottoman side demanded that the Don Cossacks would have to surrender thirty-nine Kuban’ Tatars in their custody before it initiated a search for Russians held in Kuban’. The tsar ordered the Cossacks to comply, mandating that they return all Tatars, including those whom they had purchased from Ayuka’s Kalmyks.

In view of the fact that the remaining Don Cossacks owed their continued existence after the rebellion to the mercy of the tsar, they were forced to comply with the order. It seemed that almost ten years into the peace process both sides might finally put an end to “ongoing conflicts,” so the

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98 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 5740b.
99 RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 88, l. 790 passim. In late August 1706, Khasan reported that the twenty-two Russians had been sold to the galleys by the Tatars and explained “I can do nothing about it.”
100 This paragraph is based on a bureaucratic summary, RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5023, ll. 1–8.
Russian government wanted to take firm control of exchanging captives. Even those Tatars who were taken “while committing felonious acts” would be returned to the Ottoman side. Over ninety Tatar captives were rounded up in the Don region and handed over to the Azov administration in fall 1708.\footnote{RGADA, f. 111, 1709, d. 13, l. 13.}

By December 1708, however, the Ottoman side had failed to return any Cossacks. Again and again the Cossacks petitioned the tsar requesting compensation for the Tatars they had surrendered.\footnote{RGADA, f. 111, 1709, d. 13, ll. 21–23.} Those who had purchased Tatars from the Kalmyks, hoping to ransom them for a profit, had been “impoverished” by the government decision, while others had incurred expenses by feeding Tatars they had captured. In winter 1708 the government decided to compensate Cossack petitioners from the Azov treasury, signifying that the old ransom business was about to become a state monopoly.

Before years of “ongoing conflicts” could be definitively resolved, a contingent of Cossack refugees from the Bulavin rebellion provoked a new series of violations of the peace treaty. In fall 1708, Ignat Nekrasov led 1,500–2,000 Don Cossack rebels across the border into the Kuban’ region. There they found refuge, violating the stipulations mandating that both sides return renegades. More importantly, on several occasions in 1708 and 1709, Nekrasov led groups of his Cossacks and the Tatars in raids against the Don region.\footnote{RGADA, f. 111, 1709, d. 13, l. 13.}

The Don Cossacks were convinced that “Nekrasov and the Nogais commit banditry with the approval of the Sultan,” but the Russian government was still willing to work with the Ottoman side.\footnote{RGADA, f. 111, 1709, d. 13, ll. 18–180b, 300b–31.} Ivan Tolstoi attempted to convince Alei Aga to obtain the extradition of Nekrasov; his brother attempted to achieve the same results in Istanbul.\footnote{N. S. Chaev, ed. Bulavinskoe vostanie (1707–1708 gg) (Moscow, 1934), p. 360.} A Russian diplomat in Crimea learned that Nekrasov had settled in the Kuban’ region in the lands of Alauvat Murza, the Azov administration’s old enemy.\footnote{RGADA, f. 123, op. 1, 1709, d. 1, l. 14.} The initial optimism soon began to wane, and as it would turn out, the Russian and Turkish diplomats would only reach an agreement on the return to Russia of the “Nekrasovites” in the late 1950s! The arrival in Ottoman territories of two more famous refugees, the Swedish king and the “traitor” Hetman Mazepa, exhausted the patience of the tsar. The time for talking had expired. War would have to settle the differences between the two states.
Though the peace process broke down, the decision of the Russian and Ottoman Empires to create and enforce borders in the steppe had dramatic effects on the old frontier. In an era in which policy-makers could compare their steppe clients to dogs, the future belonged to those who could teach old dogs new tricks. The Cossacks, who were hand-fed by the Russian government subsidy, learned to patrol the borders that marked their backyard. In contrast, the Tatars retained greater independence from their Ottoman masters, but hunger drove them to forsake obedience school. Their violent feeding forays into Russian territory only exasperated their powerful next-door neighbors. In subsequent decades leash laws would become more and more stringent, eventually leaving no shelter in the steppe for disobedient clients or canine-like predators.
CHAPTER IO

Boundaries of land, liberty, and identity: making the Don region legible to imperial officials (1696–1706)

The question of boundaries became the prime concern of both Cossacks and government bureaucrats in the decade after the conquest of Azov. Who in Moscow had the authority to demand the mapping of Cossack territories and populations? Which lands would the Cossacks retain under a new order in the steppe? How could legitimate Cossacks be distinguished from fugitives from Rus’? The climate of uncertainty made it unclear whether cooperation or resistance would better serve Cossack interests.

Historians have often mischaracterized this period as a time of great confrontation between the towering figure of Peter I and the Don Cossacks. Sergei Riabov recently asserted: “The acquisition of Azov and the mouth of the Don sealed the fate of the Don Host: the government of Peter I gained an opportunity to liquidate the political and social traditions of Don Cossackdom which it hated.”1 Rather than presuppose that Peter I or his government engaged in a conscious assault on Don Cossack autonomy, this chapter instead suggests that the lack of a coordinated policy towards the region contributed to the outbreak of conflicts.

MAKING COSSACK COMMUNITIES LEGIBLE TO RUSSIAN OFFICIALS

The decade after the taking of Azov, in which both the government and the Cossacks were searching for ways to live with each other, has largely been overshadowed by the Bulavin rebellion (Chapter 11), which was an uprising against a new order in the “old steppe.” This new order was initiated by bureaucrats in Moscow who sought to turn Cossack lands into legible spaces and to transform Cossacks into legible subjects of the tsar. Prior to its incorporation into Russia in 1696 the Don region was a non-state space, there were neither official records nor maps, cadastral surveys

nor standardized appraisals of the region’s population or natural resources. Administrators in Moscow were initially “blind” in their dealings with the Don and it took years for this illegible enclave to enter their field of vision.

In his ground-breaking book *Seeing Like a State*, James C. Scott has analyzed how states have sought to make nature and society “legible” by mapping, categorizing, and recording their territories, resources, and populations in ways that were “administratively convenient” for state officials. The state’s gaze focuses most frequently on factors that increase capacities for control and appropriation. Scott relates: “In each case, officials took exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices . . . and created a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored.”

Analyzing extensive, but long-neglected, evidence of state-sponsored mapping projects in seventeenth-century Russia, Valerie Kivelson has recently placed Russia firmly within a series of centralizing states that used surveys, maps, and other verbal and visual tools to know and control their territories and populations. Arguing that “benefits accrued to both state and local participants,” she demonstrated that in early modern Russia local residents frequently called agents of the state into their locales to create maps which might serve their own interests. At the same time a whole web of documentation sought to solidify boundaries of control. Kivelson writes: “The maps assisted the growing body of regulations and the court cases in delineating where peasants belonged and where they did not, which lines they could cross and which they could not.” While in Russia legibility could be mutually acknowledged by state and society as a necessary administrative evil, in the Don region it would be envisioned as a threat of major proportions.

By the Petrine period, administrators were starting to contemplate creating an orderly, rationally governed steppe. Willard Sunderland, author of an informative and wide-ranging survey of Russian steppe-building, writes: “it was increasingly impossible to imagine conquest without appropriation and territorial exploitation without scientific knowledge or rational administration.” In fact, the mapping of the Don River and Sea of Azov in the waning years of the seventeenth century was one of Russia’s first

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attempts to harness the power of science in the service of empire, but navigation, not subjugation, was the goal at this stage. Peter commissioned Cornelius Cruys, a naval advisor from Holland, to write a treatise on the geography, customs, and history of the Don River basin to accompany the maps.\textsuperscript{5} This work, dedicated to Peter’s ill-fated son Aleksei, combined foreign systematization with Russian reconnaissance to produce the first of a series of descriptions of territories and populations that Sunderland views as central to Russian empire-building of the eighteenth century. These early efforts by “enlightened investigators,” however, did not automatically translate into an autocratic desire to transform the Don.

Because the Don had never before been within Russian borders, the illegibility of both Cossack lands and identities only came to the attention of Muscovite bureaucrats in the course of a series of disputes. When Muscovite officials began to apply their assumptions of legibility to Cossack lands, the result was conflict. Different branches of the government issued contradictory decrees in the name of Peter I and previous decisions could be reversed without warning. Webs of competing jurisdictions and clashing bureaucratic interests created a situation in which cases dragged on for years.

In December 1700, Iosaf, the hegumen of the newly founded Forerunner Monastery in Azov, petitioned the tsar, via the Military Chancery, about obtaining some lands near the Donets River that were suitable for agriculture.\textsuperscript{6} The only problem was that these lands were already inhabited. To get around this, the monk wrote that the lands were occupied by recently settled fugitives from the frontier towns “who now call themselves Don Cossacks.” The Military Chancery approved his petition, but an inquiry about the lands in question was sent to the Ambassadorial Chancery. The report it prepared in January 1701 revealed that it lacked any information that could substantiate claims to the lands by the Don Cossacks. The answer to the inquiry indicated that the Don region was an illegible space:

There are no lists of names of Don Cossacks [detailing] who came from where. Concerning lands and resources, in the Ambassadorial Chancery there are no cadastral surveys or census books [of the Cossack lands], and there have never been any. Also there is no record of how many Cossack gorodki exist along the Don and other rivers, or how long ago they were settled, because there have never been any petitions from them to the tsar about settlement or lands. They settle and

\textsuperscript{5} Cornelius Cruys, \textit{Nieuw Paskaart Boek Behelsende de Groote Rivier Don} (Amsterdam, 1704).

\textsuperscript{6} For the records of the case, see RGADA, f. 111, 1701, d. 5, ll. 87–93.
receive people from other places in their gorodki on their own [soboiu], without decrees [from the tsar].

The day had dawned in which bureaucratic paper, or the absence of it, became a defining force in the lives of Don Cossacks.

Iosaf was given permission by the Military Chancery to occupy the lands he coveted, but the Cossacks refused to cede any territory. In summer 1701 both parties pleaded their cases to the government: the Cossacks to the Ambassadorial Chancery, Iosaf to the Military Chancery. While Iosaf based his claim on a decree from Peter issued by the Military Chancery, the Cossacks maintained that the lands of the Donets River basin constituted their ancient hunting grounds. In the first struggle over Cossack turf to be decided in Moscow, the Ambassadorial Chancery, and consequently the Cossacks, prevailed. The Cossack petition had convinced its officials that “those rivers are their ancient Cossack holding.”

Although the Cossacks won this case, territorial squabbles would become a bone of contention between the Cossacks and the government. For the Cossacks the first few years of the newly decreed eighteenth century (Peter had decreed the switch from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar in 1700) were marked by more bureaucratic encroachment upon their lands. The first, and subsequently most consequential, conflict over land arose in 1700 between Cossacks in Pristanskii (on the Khoper River) and a contractor who had rented lands that the government had acquired from the former bishop of Tambov. The incident began when the contractor complained to officials in Tambov that the Cossacks had constructed a mill in “his territory,” stopping the flow of fish up stream. When a surveyor was sent to inspect the situation, the local ataman and Cossacks did not allow him to look at anything and chased him away shouting: “That mill is a Cossack mill and it’s built on our Cossack grants (dachakh)!”

Though this was in many ways a purely local conflict, the issues at stake had far-ranging implications. For the Cossacks in the north it was a test of whether the Host would, or could, protect their interests. In other respects it was a test of how the claims of two separate systems of land-holding – Cossack customary law based ownership on use and exploitation, while the government privileged land grants, titles, and cadastral surveys by state officials – would hold up. For the Monastery Chancery in Moscow the case was simple. The Cossacks had “occupied by force” lands that had been donated to the bishopric of Tambov and were legally acquired,
with requisite documentation, over thirty years prior to the incident. The Cossacks, according to their own testimony, had been using the lands for over forty years, but only obtained a letter from the Host documenting their claims after the incident with the surveyor.11

In February 1701, the Ambassadorial Chancery ordered the Don Host to prohibit the Cossacks from entering the disputed territories. This pronouncement from on high only exacerbated the conflict. According to the Monastery Chancery, in 1701 the Cossacks were spotted cutting down trees, destroying beehives, and herding cattle in the “forbidden” territories.12 After a repeat order was sent to prevent the Cossacks from trespassing, new troubles flared up.13 In April 1704, when the contractor who had leased the lands from the government visited Pristanskii he was summoned to a meeting of the Cossack community (stanichnyi sbor) and read a copy of a letter from the Host affirming that the lands belonged to the Cossacks. They ordered him to get out of their lands, but he refused, stating that he could not do so without a decree from the tsar.

Upon his refusal, the Cossacks mustered together with guns, battle standards, and chain-mail “according to their Cossack custom, as when they go against the enemy” and marched to a village in the disputed territory called, aptly, Russkaia poliana. They read the order from the Host, but the peasants replied that they did not answer to orders from the Cossacks, but would only respect decrees from the tsar. Ordering the peasants to get off Cossack land, the Cossacks drove them out. Then, they marched to the house of the contractor, threatening him and again asking him to turn over the lands to them. Upon his refusal, they proceeded to destroy his beehives and set fire to forests in the disputed territories.14 The conflict simmered on for several more years and was unsettled on the eve of the Bulavin uprising.

The most remarkable fact about this conflict is how quickly documents displaced custom. Although the Don Host was determined not to get deeply involved in this local range war, it did issue an order confirming the boundaries of Cossack settlements. The Host must have realized that the battle against government surveyors would be won and lost in Moscow, but it does not seem to have taken any tough position on the local skirmishes that were keeping lands under contention. The local Cossacks, however, who were defending Cossack lands against encroachment, soon began to feel that Cherkassk was not doing much to protect their rights.

12 Chaev, Bulavinskoе vosstanie, p. 75. 13 Ibid., pp. 84–85. 14 Ibid., pp. 84–85.
While Cossacks in northeastern areas of the Don were quarreling with Russians over lands and forests, Cossacks in the northwest were locked in a confrontation with Ukrainians from the Izium regiment over salt. The presence of this precious resource had attracted settlers and entrepreneurs to lands that were previously used primarily for hunting and trapping. Cossacks claimed that in 1702–03 the Cherkasy started to occupy Cossack lands and began “carving marks and placing boundary markers in the closest possible places to their Cossack settlements.”

When officials from the Military Chancery were sent to investigate the competing claims, Cossack tradition once again came into conflict with bureaucratic deeds. Long-time residents of the area (starozhily) testified:

Years ago before the towns Izium, Moiatskii, and Solianyi were built, the rivers Bakhmut, Krasnaia, and Zherebets were owned by the Don Cossacks. Visitors and people from various towns lived there camp-style for short periods (naezdom) for fishing and trapping and in winter they built shelters and dugouts. There were never any settlements on those rivers and there were never any of their Cossack gorodki or villages. By what decree of the Great Sovereign those Cossacks from various towns owned those rivers . . . we don’t know.

The Cossacks living in the area traced the Cossack presence to the time before the creation of settlements, testifying: “Don Cossacks have owned those rivers Bakhmut, Krasnia, and Zherebets, from their upper reaches to the mouths and up along the Donets River along the ambassadorial crossing in accordance with our Cossack customs. We don’t have kreposti [administrative writs or deeds] of any kind for those rivers and their resources.” The last statement probably sealed the fate of the Cossack claims, for without proper documentation of possession they had no case. The Ukrainian settlers on the other hand could present investigators with titles to the lands issued by the Military Chancery in 1702. The lands were awarded to the Izium Regiment, but the Cossack refused to acknowledge the transfer. Local skirmishes between the Cossacks and the Ukrainians persisted, motivating the Don Host to try to appeal the decision in subsequent years.

While for the Cossacks the common thread running through these conflicts was encroachment upon their lands and liberties, from the government’s perspective, as shaped primarily by the Military Chancery, which administered neighboring districts, the common denominator was the

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15 A summary detailing the development of the case is contained in RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, ll. 198–224.
16 Chaev, Bulavinskoie vostanie, p. 88.
17 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 342–3420b.
18 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 343ob–346.
19 Bureaucratic summaries, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 696–700, and RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, ll. 44–52.
nebulous nature of the Cossack lands. The Ambassadorial Chancery, in case after case, could provide no reliable information for use in boundary disputes. Everywhere Cossacks appealed to their age-old traditions, but nowhere were these traditions inscribed in a legible form (i.e. decrees from the tsar, muster rolls, or cadastral surveys). Last, but not least, peasants and workers kept disappearing into the juridical void of the “Cossack lands” never to return.

The disputes between government officials and Cossacks over lands and boundaries increasingly brought to light new information about the fugitive problem. On several occasions between 1695 and 1698 the government received information from local officials that servitors from southern districts were fleeing to the Don region to avoid paying taxes and building ships. Investigation of the Bakhmut dispute turned up information that in the disputed territories: “The Don Cossacks are settling Russians (russkie liudi). Those Russians are fugitives from the Belgorod line from various towns responsible to Voronezh, and they ran away to avoid service, ruble levies, and ship building.” The Bakhmut region was particularly problematic because it attracted three groups of settlers that each possessed a different set of legal rights: Russians, Ukrainians, and Cossacks. The blurring of these juridical boundaries was a certain recipe for decades of future bureaucratic headaches. After several years of conflict caused by uncertain boundaries, the government decided to act.

In summer 1703 a decree from the tsar ordered two surveyors to visit the northern towns to record the names, populations, and founding dates of Cossack settlements and to search for and deport fugitives who had not participated in the Azov campaigns or who had settled in the region after their conclusion. They were also ordered to sternly warn the ataman of each settlement that the death penalty would apply to anyone found harboring fugitives. These surveys were designed to bring the region into the government’s regime of legibility. As Scott has noted, “legibility amplifies the capacity of the state for discriminating interventions.” Deportation was precisely such an intervention, and in the government’s eyes it would facilitate the un-mixing of population groups.

20 Summary of reports, RGADA, f. 111, 1695, d. 12, ll. 292–93. 21 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 346.
22 A surveyor sent to the Bakhmut area in 1704 was ordered to establish: “At present in those places how many, and in which precise locations, are there settlements of Russians, or Cherkassians, or Don Cossacks.” RGADA, f. 111, donskie dela, kn. 20, l. 342ob.
23 Chaev, Bulavin'skoe vosstanie, 119. For a bureaucratic summary of the incident, see RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 464–730b.
24 Scott, Seeing Like a State, p. 78.
Another group of surveyors was sent from the Admiralty to carry out topical surveys of forests in Cossack territories and to mark trees that could be used in ship-building. The delineation of forest preserves, the so-called zapovednye lesy, also threatened to rob the Cossacks of their own resources. In an insightful discussion of eighteenth-century scientific forestry, Scott argued that administrative mapping requires a “narrowing of vision” and that bureaucratic records “represented only that slice of it that interested the official observer.”  

In this case, steppe lands were excluded, because they were still viewed as valueless. The surveys also represent an early example of what Sunderland has termed Petrine Russia’s “territorial culture,” which witnessed officials cultivating more precise knowledge of territory and putting such knowledge to use.

The Host acquiesced to legibility by allowing the officials to conduct their surveys, but local Cossack communities engaged in a conspiracy of silence concerning identity. The surveyors visited the western branches of the Don and discovered that thirteen settlements had been constructed along the Azov postal roads since 1701, seven settlements had been founded since the Azov conquest, seventeen had been founded between 1670 and 1695, and twelve were founded too long ago for residents to remember. When the surveyors returned to Moscow in early 1704 they reported disappointing news: “In those Cossack settlements we did not come across any servitors or people of all ranks from the Belgorod and Sevsk regiments or any fugitive peasants or bondsmen belonging to Boyars. Not even a single individual.”

Comparing these results to the testimony of a member of a Cossack delegation in Moscow, who was willing to admit that indeed there were many fugitives in those places, the government could sense subterfuge. The first survey only revealed that ordinary Cossacks had colluded with one another to camouflage their comrades.

A statute of limitations for Cossack legitimacy

After decades of ordering the Cossacks not to accept fugitives, the government finally committed itself to enforcing its decrees. It would send more surveyors and officials to record the names of Cossacks in the northern communities and to deport anyone who settled after the first Azov


26 For the quote and results see RGAVMF, f. 177, d. 24, l. 1106, 1110–12 results. For testimony in Moscow see RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 4670b.
campaign. Henceforth Peter’s Azov campaigns would mark the boundary line between legitimacy and illegitimacy in the Cossack community. But would Cherkassk and the northern communities comply?

In a time of new challenges there seems to have been a deficit of capable leadership in the Don. The death of Frol Minaev in May 1700 left the Host without a clearly acknowledged leader. His successor, Ilia Grigoriev, managed to hold office for about a year before being ousted by the Cherkassk krug. Subsequent events suggest a struggle for power and/or crisis of leadership. Lukian Maksimov held the post of ataman in 1701–03, was succeeded by Iakim Filip’ev in 1703–04, who in turn was succeeded by Maksimov again. It is clear that none of Frol Minaev’s successors wielded his influence in either the Don or Moscow. The leadership gap created by Minaev’s death began to be filled not by one, but by several office-holders. The crisis of leadership weakened the hand of Cherkassk, since the Host lacked an influential power broker that Moscow could rely on at a time when the government was modifying its relations with the Don.

Faced with a choice of cooperating with or resisting government-induced modifications to their separate deal with the tsar, the Host in Cherkassk chose accommodation. The right to refuge, the cornerstone of the old Cossack deal with the tsar, had been abrogated on several isolated instances since the late seventeenth century, but the Don Host never formally renounced it. Now, the Host agreed to codify a redefinition of the Cossack community by accepting the government statute of limitations.

In early 1704 the Host signaled that it would now defend the interests of only those who were legitimate in the eyes of the government: the Cossacks who had arrived before the Azov campaigns. In a letter to the tsar no mention was made of the ancient right to refuge, no veiled threats warned the tsar of the consequences of deporting Cossacks. After expressing a willingness to comply with surveys and deportations, the Host noted a discrepancy in the text of the decree. Only two-thirds of the Cossacks had been mobilized to participate in the Azov campaigns, while the other third were left at home to defend their settlements. Now, those defenders faced deportation to the settlements along the Azov postal roads if a change was not mandated. Moreover, “many of those left [at home] were from those people who came to us to the Don from Rus’ long ago, before the Azov campaigns, and others were born in the Cossack gorodki, and not such

27 Minaev’s death is reported in RGAVMF, f. 177, d. 14, l. 331. On his successors, see RGAVMF, f. 177, d. 14, l. 331. For the others, see Chaev, Bulavinskoe vozistanie, pp. 75–87.
that are newly arrived.”28 The petition asked the tsar to modify the decree and concluded by stating that the Cossacks had forbidden the reception of fugitives in all settlements under penalty of death. They were signaling that they would acquiesce and play by government rules.

After presenting their written petition, Abram Savel’ev, the leader of the Cossack delegation, outlined orally a series of other Cossack concerns “which they didn’t dare to write in their report.”29 First, the surveyors were recording the names of everyone in the northern communities, including long-term residents and their children. They complained that the forest surveyors sent from the Admiralty were overstepping their boundaries by beating and deporting Cossacks to Rus’. More importantly, the Cossacks in the north were experiencing “great apprehension” (v velikom sumnenii) fearing that the tsar was angry with them because they were being recorded. They had rightly perceived that their communities were the narrow focus of the government gaze.

The response from the tsar crafted by the Ambassadorsial Chancery was designed to be firm, but reassuring.30 The Cossacks who had arrived before the statute of limitations would not be deported. The land and population surveys were no cause for alarm, since everything was being carried out by order of the tsar for the mere purpose of obtaining accurate information. New settlements, however, would henceforth be forbidden without a decree from the tsar. The surveys would also serve Cossack interests because the tsar had ordered that upon their conclusion all Cossack lands and resources would be confirmed.

The text of the decree suggests that the government was not trying to abolish Cossack autonomy, but attempting to create legitimate, stable boundaries for Cossack lands and communities. In other words, legibility would equal legitimacy. The creation of a strict statute of limitations, combined with the deportation of fugitives, would solidify the boundaries between Cossacks and non-Cossacks. The surveying of Cossack lands would give the government the information it needed to adjudicate, or prevent, territorial disputes. The compilation of population figures would help the government envision a military role for the Don Cossacks after the creation of the Russian-Ottoman border in 1704. None of the documents concerning the surveys, including the secret instructions issued to officials, give any indication that direct administrative subjugation of the Cossack lands was envisioned.

30 This paragraph is based upon the text of the decree in RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 622ob.
The only project that could be interpreted as an attempt to introduce greater government control over the Don was initiated by the Military Chancery. In January 1704, the governor of Tsaritsyn was ordered to send a survey team to inspect possible sights for a fort near the Ilovlya River. As it turned out the new fort was never destined to get off the drawing board. When surveyors came calling, the Cossacks demanded to see an order of implementation from the Ambassadorial Chancery. The surveyors were apparently unable to present such an order and were sent away without being allowed to finish their work. Cossacks in Panshin sought and received approval from the Host to destroy the boundary markers put down by the surveyors prior to their hasty departure.

With the destruction of the boundary markers, the conflict shifted to Moscow. The Cossack petition addressed to the tsar artfully integrated tradition and new realities. It was evocative of the past, yet expressed the apprehensions of an uncertain future. After explaining what had happened with the surveyors and reiterating that the Cossacks were not opposing the tsar’s decree, the Host began its appeal:

We, the whole Host, your bondsmen, tearfully beg your Great Sovereign’s mercy, because in your Great Sovereign’s decree an order has been issued to build a fort between the Don and Ilovlya on the lower bank, between our, your bondsmen’s, above-mentioned Cossack stanitsas. Also forests have been declared protected/off limits and in those gorodki, both northern and lower, our Cossacks have great apprehension about the construction of forts, believing that this is the result of the Great Sovereign’s anger with them. It will be impossible for them to live in those aforementioned gorodki because of encroachment. In those yurts there will no longer be ample expanse and liberty (volia) in fisheries, forests, lands, hay fields, and other resources and the Cossacks in those gorodki will have nothing to subsist on . . . This is why many of the Cossacks from those four gorodki are experiencing apprehension and desire to disperse in different directions . . . We have from ancient times owned, along both sides of the Don and other rivers, the yurts, waters, fisheries, lands, forests, and various other resources that are situated between our, your bondsmen’s, Cossack gorodki. Never before have we been subject to encroachment or ejection (izgoni).

It is notable that for the defense of Cossack territory the old threat of dispersal was revived, although now it was restricted to the settlements at risk. The Cossack appeal expresses a fear that legibility would lead to a loss of control over their own lands and completely deprive them of livelihood. The Cossacks appear to have perceived the connection between

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31 The incident is detailed in a Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, l. 794–96.
32 The petition is in RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 886–88.
33 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 886–87.
Imperial boundaries

legibility and increased capacity for government intervention in daily life.

The Host comprehended that disputes would be settled not on Cossack home turf, but would be refereed in Moscow. The conclusion of the petition reflected the uncertainty of the times. Upon outlining their vision of the dispute, the Cossacks tried to justify the continued existence of their separate deal with the tsar. After emphasizing a present and future willingness to serve the tsar “without even safeguarding our own heads,” they fell back on the only certainty of their situation: the past. The petition outlined how the communities now threatened by the fort had always provided protection from Tatar raids to the government towns of Tsaritsyn and Saratov.\(^34\) In spite of the fact that the Cossacks based their appeal upon frontier services, which might soon belong to bygone days if the border regime instituted by Peter I proved successful, their appeal did not fall on deaf ears. The order to inspect the sites was rescinded, evidently because it had not been pre-approved by the Ambassadorial Chancery.

In response to government complaints that Cossacks were still harboring fugitives, the officials of the Don Host decided to get tough with the northern settlements. According to the Host, in summer 1705 it sent investigators (rozyschchiki) to search for and deport fugitives.\(^35\) Although the report does not indicate the number of fugitives deported, the Host claimed to have even put to death the atamans and prominent residents (lutchie liudi) of some unspecified settlements, while other offenders were shipped off to Azov for hard labor. The fact that dissidents were delivered to the Russian penal system suggests that Cossack leaders were now willing to play by government rules. For the officials of the Host the fugitive problem had finally become a matter of life and death. The first fugitive dragnet and deportation to be conducted by Cossack officials began with bloodshed. In order to appease the government, as well as protect and preserve a community that now was officially closed to outsiders, the Host had moved against other Cossacks who adhered to a wider, more inclusive vision of the Cossack community.

The text of the founding charter for a new settlement also demonstrates that the Host had openly committed itself to maintaining and policing the boundaries of the Cossack community. In December 1705, a Cossack named Timofei Vasiliev was given permission to create a settlement on the Buzuluk River, but the Host sternly warned the would-be Cossack

\(^{34}\) RGADA, f. 111, kn. 20, ll. 887–8870b.

\(^{35}\) This paragraph is based upon RGADA, f. 111, kn. 22, ll. 475–76 and Chaev, Bulavinskoe vosstanie, pp. 111–12.
impresario: “Do not receive any newly arrived people when they start to come from Rus’, and if during the administration of any ataman you do receive them, the ataman will be put to death without mercy and the whole stanitsa will be placed under probation and will be destroyed and its yurt will be taken away.” The blurring of boundaries between Don Cossacks and Russians was officially proclaimed an offense worthy of wiping out a settlement and dispersing its residents.

The fact that the Host sent such an order indicates a clean break with the region’s open past and the Cossack community’s permeable boundaries. Another document from the same year affirmed that only Cossacks with a long history of residence (starozhil’nye kazaki) would be allowed to resettle within the region and that newly arrived Russians (vnov’ prishlye russkie liudi) would not. The Host was declaring its intention to assert control over the de-centralized Cossack hinterlands. No new settlement could appear on the map without approval and no new settlers could claim a Cossack identity.

For rank-and-file Cossacks the act of recording their names in books was interpreted as a sign of Peter’s personal disfavor, even wrath. In order to preserve their territory as an illegible enclave within Petrine Russia, they temporarily blinded the state. In 1704, the residents of Beliaevskoi and Pristanskii – the latter it should be recalled had been involved in the dispute with the contractor in lands claimed by Tambov bishopric – refused to allow government surveyors to search for fugitives or record populations. In Pristanskii the Cossacks beat up a soldier and threatened to drown the government surveyor, Nikita Bekhteev, so “that others would see it and not come here anymore.” Other communities followed suit and Bekhteev, fearing for his life, failed to finish his count along the Khoper and Medveditsa Rivers.

In 1706, Cossacks captured and briefly held Aleksei Gorchakov, whom the government had sent to survey the disputed Bakhmut territories. Since land surveyors and census takers represented the avant-garde of government encroachment, it is no surprise that the first local efforts at resistance were directed at these important symbols of a new order in the steppe.

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36 Trudy Donskago voiskovago statisticheiskago komiteta, vyp. 1 (Novocherkassk, 1867), pp. 64–66.
37 RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5010, l. 20b.
38 For Bekhteev’s report see RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 42, l. 1386ob.
The Bulavin uprising: the last stand of the old steppe (1706–1709)

The Bulavin uprising was the most significant act of coordinated opposition to Petrine policies, but the devastating crushing of the rebellion has long been overshadowed by epic events that took place only months after the fiercest fighting on the Don: the dramatic defection of the Ukrainian hetman Mazepa to the Swedes in late 1708 and the victory of Russian forces at Poltava in early 1709. Moreover, the scale of devastation in the Don region rarely merited mention in Russian recitations of Peter’s Greatness, which tended to emphasize his role as creator and founder, not destroyer.¹

This episode also demonstrates the complexity of Russian empire-building. This was no simple story of imperial aggression meeting local resistance. Peter I initially managed to win the loyalty of about as many Don Cossacks as he alienated. The Bulavin uprising was first and foremost a conflict about who could be considered a Cossack, but imperial intervention turned it into a military struggle between the Don and Rus’.

Historians have tended to ignore the fact that in the final stages of the rebellion Bulavin articulated a vision of Cossacks and nomads, Muslims and true Orthodox Christians fighting in unison to save the steppe from Russian encroachment. Recent studies of Russia’s engagement with the steppe did not discuss this consciously defined attempt to reject Petrine modes of empire-building. Bulavin first attempted to revive the kind of negotiation characteristic of Peter’s predecessors, then he sought Ottoman patronage and military support from the Zaporozhian Cossacks and Tatars. His unsuccessful efforts to forge a coalition of groups disaffected by Russian expansion would be repeated by others in subsequent decades, but with the defeat of the Don insurgents Russia forged a permanent wedge between the peoples of the steppe frontier.

¹ The documents from this period are published in N. S. Chaev, ed., Bulavinske vozstanie (1707–1708 gg) (Moscow, 1934).
While the officials of the Host moved towards active cooperation with the government, in far away Cossack settlements in the north resistance was on the minds of many. Local skirmishes continued over the Bakhmut region, which the government annexed to the tsar’s holdings after unsuccessfully trying to adjudicate the competing claims of Cossacks and the Izium regiment. In 1705, Kondratii Afanasievich Bulavin, the ataman of a nearby Cossack settlement, led a group of Cossacks who attacked and burned the disputed salt-works that had served as the bone of contention.\(^2\) By summer 1707 an endless string of reports about fugitives hiding in the Don region and the festering conflict over the Bakhmut territories had stretched the limits of government patience. The problems had reached such proportions that Peter I, who was on campaign in Poland, was forced to reckon with them personally. In a decree issued July 6, 1707 the tsar ordered Iurii Dolgorukii to conduct an investigation and deportation of fugitives throughout the Don region and authorized him to personally adjudicate the Bakhmut conflict.\(^3\)

In September 1707, Dolgorukii arrived in Cherkassk and outlined his orders to the officials of the Host.\(^4\) Ataman Luk’ian Maksimov, however, claimed that the Host did not have orders to allow an investigation in Cherkassk, but agreed to facilitate the investigation in all the other settlements by sending letters from the Host ordering the Cossacks to obey Dolgorukii. Whether the Host was protecting fugitives in its midst or attempting to preserve the capital as the last island of Cossack autonomy, it severely compromised its position by claiming that no order had been sent from the Great Sovereign not to receive newcomers from Rus’. The Ambassadorial Chancery, which knew that many such orders had been issued, was so perturbed by the declaration of the Host that it assigned a clerk to prepare a report detailing precisely which decrees had been issued over the past few years. Only arrogant incompetence or a puerile attempt at prevarication can explain the written statement of the Host.

The krug at Cherkassk elected five prominent individuals as officials to assist Dolgorukii with the investigation and ordered them to proceed ahead of his search party in order to insure that the residents did not run away.\(^5\) They were also responsible for overseeing the implementation of new orders from the Host, which were aimed at asserting control over Cossack

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\(^3\) Chaev, *Bulavinskoe vosstanie*, pp. 113–14.

\(^4\) Ibid., pp. 116–23.

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 136.
identity. A special order from the Host, which was to be read aloud in every Cossack settlement, mandated that “newly arrived Cossacks” (those who arrived after the cut-off date of 1695) not “call themselves old Cossacks (nazyvatisia starymi kazakami).” Those who dared to illegitimately claim the Cossack name were given a warning: “If those newly arrived Cossacks, not desiring to identify themselves as such (ne khotia sebia v tom iavit’), start to call themselves old Cossacks, and after investigation they are discovered to be newly arrived, they will be put to death, without consulting the Don Host.”6 Once again the Host monopolized the power to determine who was a legitimate Cossack.

The ill-conceived logistics of the Dolgorukii mission doomed it from the start. After doing some spot-checks in a few towns of the lower and middle Don, Dolgorukii headed to the trouble spots in the north. His party consisted of around 150 armed men.7 In order to deport the fugitives, however, he would have to send armed men to accompany them, diluting the number at his disposal for subsequent recording and deporting. Expecting cooperation and compliance, he split his party up into smaller groups numbering at most thirty people and sent them up different branches of the Don.8

Dolgorukii himself marched to the Derkul River in the Donets basin, but he was not prepared for the magnitude of the fugitive problem. The population of one settlement completely dispersed upon hearing of the approach of investigators. Before Dolgorukii’s arrival in another settlement the ataman and entire population swore oaths to one another upon the cross and gospels that they would all “not call themselves newly arrived, but would call themselves old Cossacks.”9 An informant, however, denounced his brethren and told Dolgorukii that out of the population of over two hundred, only six were old Cossacks, three were Ukrainians, and the rest were new arrivals. After recording the population, which outnumbered his party several times over, he beat three leaders with the knout and left everyone else in place “until further notice.” Down the road, he discovered more settlements in which none of the residents could claim to be old Cossacks, but also left the residents in place to await an uncertain fate. One must wonder how Dolgorukii, an experienced military man, felt about leaving in his rear hundreds of disgruntled individuals who had formerly been Cossacks until his clerks came to town and recorded their names in books.

6 Ibid., p. 137. 7 Pod‘iapolskaia, Vostanie, p. 123. 8 Chaev, Bulavinskoe vostanie, pp. 136, 146, 158. 9 Ibid., p. 137.
On the evening of October 8, 1707, Dolgorukii received a warning that the Cossacks were planning to kill him. He did not have much time to ponder his fate, however, as a few hours later a group of Cossacks, led by Kondratii Bulavin, overwhelmed his diminutive force and executed him. While the colonel and his men were sorting the Cossack wheat from the Cossack chaff, Bulavin had been gathering one and all – including according to one document “many burlaks without horses or guns” – for a showdown. After the murder of Dolgorukii, no clear picture of Bulavin’s intentions emerges: one account suggests he was gathering forces to attack nearby towns of the Izium regiment, while other accounts suggested he would head to Azov. Now his name, not Dolgorukii’s, was on everyone’s lips.

THE FIGHT FOR THE OLD STEPPE AND THE SECOND COSSACK CIVIL WAR

Almost immediately, the Don Host collected a force to campaign against Bulavin. For the second time in twenty years, a civil war would be waged in the Don region to determine the future direction of Cossack relations with Russia. On October 18, 1707, after a fierce battle, the forces of the Host sowed dissension in Bulavin’s camp by offering forgiveness to them if they would seize and hand over their leader. Bulavin and his colonels managed to escape from the divided ranks, while under the cover of darkness his forces scattered. Luk’ian Maksimov, the ataman of the Host, rounded up Bulavin’s supporters, burned the settlements that had welcomed him, and slit the noses of those who had collaborated with him as marks of estrangement. The Host had won the first battle, but the war was far from over.

Bulavin’s disappearance from the scene was only temporary. He fled to Zaporozhia to prepare for his second coming. While negotiating with the hesitant Zaporozhians about an alliance, Bulavin began planning a spring offensive. His sympathizers spread leaflets inviting all to join him, but he had yet to articulate an ideology other than unrestraint:

Atamans, brave lads, those who thirst for adventure, free people of all ranks, outlaws and bandits! Whoever wants to join Ataman Kondratii Afanasievich Bulavin, and whoever wants to roam with us in the open steppe, promenade well, drink and eat sweetly, and ride on fine horses, come to the thistles of the headwaters of

the Samara. I have with me 7,000 Don Cossacks, 6,000 Zaporozhians, and 5,000 [Tatars] from the White Horde. From Bulavin.14

Even at this early stage Bulavin portrayed his force as an alliance of Cossacks and nomads. Although Bulavin had grossly exaggerated his numbers, come spring he would in fact have as many Don Cossacks under his command as he claimed while still in hiding.

Pristanskii on the Khoper became the nerve center of the rebellion.15 It had been battling over the lands claimed by the bishop of Tambov for several years and it was one of the only communities in the whole Don region to refuse to have its lands surveyed and population recorded in 1704. Here, the struggle for Cossack liberties, which has often been mislabeled as a “peasant war,” was launched in earnest. Although Bulavin would talk of tackling the boyars and “Germans” who were suspected of ruining the government, he set his sights on Cherkassk.

It took less than a month for Bulavin to establish control of virtually the whole northern half of the Don region.16 The events of previous years, the surveys and especially the doomed deportation mission, convinced many that something had to be done to guard and guarantee Cossack liberties. Bulavin’s spleen was primarily vented at the officials in Cherkassk. According to spies sent from Kozlov, Bulavin’s first objective in late March–early April 1708 was to march on Cherkassk in order to “annihilate the ataman and officials (starshin) of the Host, because of their injustices.”17 Bulavin’s rhetoric never neglected to mention that he was against religious reforms, boyars and Germans, but, when the time came to address his Cossack constituency and elaborate what he was wholeheartedly for, Bulavin outlined his second coming as a struggle to revive “the old steppe (staroe pole).”

Although the rebellion initiated by Bulavin would spill over into neighboring territories, engulfing peasants and laborer conscripts in the violence, it began and ended as a Cossack rebellion. A leaflet addressed to the Don Cossacks by Bulavin in the infancy of the rebellion read:

You atamans and brave lads know how our grandparents and fathers set things down, and how they came into being (kak oni porodilis’), and how prior to this the old steppe (staroe pole) was strong and adhered to. Now the evil enemies of the

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14 Chaev, Bulavinskoe vosstanie, p. 430.
16 Chaev, Bulavinskoe vosstanie, p. 194.
17 Ibid., p. 187. For an alternate reading, see A. Savel’ev, Trekhstoletie Voiska Donskago 1570–1870 gg. Ocherki iz istorii Donskikh Kazakov (Saint Petersburg, 1870), p. 56.
old steppe, those turncoats have not respected things. Let us not now lose the old steppe.\textsuperscript{18}

Cossacks are reminded that there has been a departure from the world and ways of their ancestors. The appeal plays upon a consciousness that the “old steppe” is threatened with extinction. The leaflet leaves it up to listeners to imagine what is threatening the old steppe as well as fill in the cultural content of the term. The rhetoric of olden days evoked memories of a wild, unencumbered, Cossack world that existed before the introduction of various state-imposed boundaries.

It must also be remembered that before Bulavin stirred up the masses of the metropole he took his message of defending Cossack traditions to the Zaporozhians in Ukraine. Upon successfully starting his movement, on May 17, 1708, Bulavin wrote to the Hetman of the Zaporozhians to propose an alliance and update him on the situation in the Don region. He portrayed his actions as an attempt to revive the old ways: “The Don Host had a meeting on the River Khoper in order to affirm things according to custom in our Don Host [along the Don and other rivers] as has been the Cossack custom among our grandfathers, fathers, and among us.”\textsuperscript{19} A letter to the Zaporozhians from Semion Dranyi, one of Bulavin’s assistants, provides the strongest evidence that the rebels viewed the uprising as a means of keeping Cossacks from becoming an endangered species:

\begin{quote}
We await your mutual Cossack brotherly love and assistance, so that our Cossack rivers will be as they were before, and we can be Cossacks, as Cossackdom has been since times immemorial, and so that between us Cossacks there will be unity of thought and brotherhood. You atamans and brave lads of the whole Zaporozhian Host, send assistance to our campaign army as soon as possible, so that in common with you we will not lose our Cossack glory and bravery. Additionally, we are ready to die together with you in any cause of yours, so that Rus’ does not lord over us (\emph{Rus’ nad nami ne vladela}) and our common Cossack glory is not subjected to humiliation.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

In spite of eloquent appeals based upon brotherhood and tradition, the Zaporozhians did not intervene in large numbers, and incidentally, would be crushed by Russian forces following the defection of Mazepa. The Don Cossacks were forced to face government troops on their own in what became a struggle between the Don and Rus’.

\textsuperscript{18} Chaev, \textit{Bulavinskoe vosstanie}, p. 452. \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 457.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp. 459–60. Mazepa claimed credit for the fact that large numbers of Zaporozhians could not join. PIB, 7.2: 880–81.
Bulavin’s Ascendancy and Fall

On April 9, 1708, the second round of the Don Cossack civil war began. Bulavin’s force of over 7,000 men was intercepted by a force of roughly the same size sent from Cherkassk by Ataman Maksimov. This would suggest that the Cossacks on hand were evenly split between supporting the Host and endorsing Bulavin. The conflict between north and south that had raged twenty years prior had flared up again, but on this particular occasion the north would prevail. Whether by treachery or skill, Bulavin’s force managed to attack and disperse its rivals, sending Ataman Maksimov scurrying back to Cherkassk to shore up his faltering position. Although unsuccessful, this campaign convinced Peter I that there was a significant group of loyalists among the Cossacks and probably tempered his wrath against the Host. While no mercy would be shown to the Cossacks in northern settlements that Peter identified as “rebellious”, within only a few weeks of this battle the tsar was already urging his generals to spare the lives of the loyal Cossacks.

Bulavin marched to besiege the Cossack capital. On May 1, after a short period of resistance, Bulavin’s sympathizers inside Cherkassk managed to do what Razin’s backers had failed to do twice: they staged a coup against the ataman and took him and several other officer holders into their custody. Seeing this, the residents of Cherkassk gave up their resistance and Bulavin triumphantly entered the town. On May 6, 1708, a krug was held in Cherkassk that sentenced six office-holders to death. Aside from the ataman, who had compromised himself by not upholding Cossack traditions, the other four had taken part in the Dolgorukii deportation mission. Other office-holders and former office-holders escaped punishment altogether or were detained for only a short while, suggesting that Bulavin directed his wrath against individuals, not a whole class or corporate “oligarchy.” One source even suggests that even this measure was designed to protect them from the golud’ba (naked ones) who desired to kill all native Cossacks (prirodnykh kazakov) in Cherkassk. On May 9, 1708, Bulavin was elected ataman of the Host.

Bulavin had fought his way to the summit of Cossack leadership. Before he could attempt to revive the old steppe, however, he found himself in a free fall from lofty heights. The day before he became ataman, his

25 Chaev, Bulavinskoe vostanie, p. 239. 26 Ibid. 27 Ibid.
The Bulavin uprising

associates in the north sent word that government troops had reached the Khoper and Donets Rivers and were destroying Cossack settlements. In order to keep morale high, Bulavin broke open the treasury of the Host and distributed largesse to his followers. Survival, not reform, became the main item on Bulavin’s agenda.

By mid-May 1708, Ataman Bulavin and his top associates, Semion Dranyi and Ignat Nekrasov adopted a strategy. First, they would stir up the populace in adjacent regions, hoping to provoke an all-out uprising. Bulavin would hold Cherkassk, while Dranyi and Nekrasov engaged the advancing government forces. If rebel forces prevailed, they would move against Azov and into “Rus’ from town to town till Moscow.” If Bulavin’s forces were defeated, they would regroup in the middle Don and escape to seek refuge in the Kuban’ region. The example of the Cossack Old Believers, who had abandoned the Don in the 1680s, was a powerful precedent.

While Bulavin’s associates faced the government forces on the field of battle, his chancery spent the first half of May 1708 churning out appeals to a curious set of addressees: the regiments advancing against him, the Ambassadorial Chancery, the governor of Belgorod, the Zaporozhians, Kuban’ Tatars, and the Kuban’ Cossacks (the remnants of the Cossacks and Old Believers forced out of the Don two decades earlier). Although the rhetoric was adapted for each specific addressee, the central theme was the same in all the appeals: the whole Host had united to oust the old, unjust office-holders in Cherkassk and elect new office-holders to replace them. The appeals portrayed the old office-holders as bandits and Bulavin as the upholder of Cossack tradition. None of the appeals threatened the person of the tsar and none made any programmatic statements about peasant concerns.

At the same time Cossacks were trying to stave off destruction by the forces of the tsar, Bulavin’s chancery wrote to Zaporozhia and Kuban’ to plead for support against the regiments sent by the tsar. With government forces pressing in on the Cossack territories, Bulavin attempted to unite the peoples of the frontier against the forces of borderland divisions. To the Zaporozhians, he preached that the struggle for the Don was also their struggle. To their old nomadic adversaries, the Kuban’ Tatars, Bulavin offered to base peaceful relations on the pre-bureaucratic methods of conflict resolution: trade, resolution/restitution, and trust in oaths. To the Cossacks exiled during the civil war a generation ago, Bulavin offered unity and reconciliation.

Bulavin’s cultivation of relations with figures of authority in the Kuban’ region, beyond the international border and imperial boundary that Peter’s Azov ambitions had created, can also be viewed as a last attempt at reviving the process of negotiation characteristic of the old steppe. While in the borderland world the Cossacks had to stay at home, take orders from government bureaucrats, and watch their territories be recorded, surveyed, and parceled off, in the frontier world of the old steppe they were free to choose how to live, when to fight, and, if necessary, whom to serve. Bulavin would try to make the tsar negotiate with the Cossacks again, but if that proved impossible, he would cancel their deal with him and the Russian state. This is expressed unequivocally in his letter to the Kuban’ Cossacks:

We as a Host write letters to the tsar, but do not go to him [in person]. If our tsar does not reward us, as he rewarded our fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers, or if he starts to oppress/encroach upon our river in any way, we as a Host will abandon him (отлоzhimsia ot nego) and seek the mercy of our heavenly master, and also of the Turkish tsar, that he, the Turkish tsar, not reject us.31

Bulavin asked the leader of the Kuban’ Cossacks to read aloud and translate the letter to Khasan Pasha, the leading Ottoman official in the North Caucasus, indicating that his intentions were more than idle talk. The fact that historians have the privilege of reading Bulavin’s appeal from a copy preserved in a government archive, however, means that the letter was intercepted.

Bulavin’s grand design of a united frontier under Ottoman patronage never had time to materialize. Luckily for Tsar Peter, Ottoman officials adhered to the peace treaty and did not intervene in the military struggle between Russia and the Don. Bulavin’s ideas would soon be revived by the Ukrainian Cossack leaders Mazepa and Pylyp Orlyk. Orest Subtelny credited them, not Bulavin, with “the first instance of anyone contemplating an anti-Moscow bloc . . . in and around the nascent Russian empire.”32

While waiting for answers to his various appeals, Bulavin lost time and face. He sat in Cherkassk while his assistants engaged government forces, constantly advancing in attempts to spread the rebellion to the Volga and Belgorod line, only to be hurled back by government troops. Practically the whole Don took up arms against the advancing regiments commanded by V. V. Dolgorukii, whose brother had led the doomed deportation mission.

31 Ibid., p. 464.
The rebellion of Cossacks in a few northern communities erupted into a mass uprising, yet the ataman was reluctant to lead by example. The dream of recreating the “old steppe,” died with him, first in the house he had taken over from an adversary in Cherkassk, then on the field of battle a few months later.

In July 1708, the failure of Bulavin’s forces to capture Azov, the perennial preoccupation of Cossack imagination, proved fatal for the upstart ataman from the north. “Discontented veterans of the Azov campaign,” writes Paul Avrich, “flocked to Zershchikov’s conspiracy. Overnight even the staunchest insurgents became turncoats.” Understandably, Il’ia Zershchikov, the new ataman of the Host who led the coup against Bulavin, portrayed it as the work of the whole region. Although there is some question whether Bulavin was killed by his attackers or took his own life, there is no doubt that he met his end in Cherkassk. Bulavin indeed managed to enter Azov in July 1708, not as a conqueror, but as a lifeless corpse offered for inspection and desecration to government officials.

**THE DECIMATION OF REBEL RANKS AND DEVASTATION OF REBEL STRONGHOLDS**

Peter’s imperial style would permit no repetition of his father’s handling of the Razin rebellion. In contrast to his father’s government, he sent no delegation to negotiate with the rebels and he blamed whole communities, not individuals, for fanning the flames of rebellion. He endorsed the annihilation of the communities that cradled the uprising and he annexed the disputed territories where the conflict began. In June 1708, Peter I personally signed orders mandating the destruction of virtually all northern settlements. The second Cossack civil war resulted in total war against the Don region and complete triumph for Peter I.

While in late July 1708 the regiments of V. V. Dolgorukii were welcomed to Cherkassk by the loyalists among the Cossacks, Bulavin’s field commanders, Nikita Golyi and Ignat Nekrasov, rallied and regrouped the rebel campaign armies. They still commanded thousands of Cossacks, probably even the majority in the face of savage, wholesale repression,

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35 For a discussion of the conflicting accounts on Bulavin’s death see Pod”iapol’skaia, *Vostanie Bulavina*, pp. 158–78.
36 Chaev, *Bulavinskoe vostanite*, p. 293.
37 Order of destruction, PIB, 7.1: 224; annexation, PIB, 8.1: 81.
but the martial momentum had shifted to the government forces. In late summer 1708, large groups of rebels were caught in a pincer between the forces of Dolgorukii and P. I. Khovanksii, who was advancing from the Volga. While some Cossacks dug in for sieges, others took to flight. Resistance was fierce, continuing into late fall 1708, but the government forces, joined by the Kalmyks who were better suited for the chase, relentlessly pursued and annihilated fleeing pockets of rebels. Decisive battles near Panshin (August 1708), the Donets River (November 1708), and Reshetov (November 1708) wiped out untold thousands of Cossacks. Dolgorukii’s description of the taking of Reshetov gives a sense of the annihilation: “We drove them out of the gorodok and mercilessly slaughtered (rubili) them, leaving over 3,000 of their bandit corpses. The rest threw themselves in the Don. Many drowned, others we shot while they were swimming, and the ones who managed to swim away perished from the great frosts.”

Nikita Golyi, who in early November 1708 commanded over 8,000 rebels, when caught by government forces in February 1709, commanded only twenty hapless, haggard Cossacks who had been reduced to scavenging for food.

The devastation of the Don region was extensive, bordering on total desolation in the northern lands. Months of fighting also took their toll, leaving most of the Don depopulated. When years later he was asked to give an account of his role in suppressing the rebellion for a history-writing project, Dolgorukii could not precisely recall all the settlements he had annihilated, but according to his reckoning around 23,500 rebels were killed during the crushing of rebellion. If this catastrophic figure seems an exaggeration – approaching the whole Cossack population on the eve of the rebellion – it must be remembered that soldiers and laborers from Azov and peasants from adjacent Russian districts joined the rebel camp.

The demographic catastrophe is confirmed by other sources. As a consequence of only the two largest battles, over ten thousand rebels perished. Countless others disappeared in clean-up operations conducted by loyal Cossacks, government forces, and the Kalmyks. While government officials noted the execution of more than six hundred rebels, the reports are by no means comprehensive. Local reprisals in Cossack settlements must also have taken many lives as loyalists punished rebels in the aftermath of the rebellion. For example, in February 1709, several months after the

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41 Ibid., p. 190.
42 Ibid., p. 192.
43 Ibid., pp. 186, 190.
44 Ibid., pp. 182, 185, 189–90, 200.
heaviest fighting subsided, the Cossacks reported to Dolgorukii that along the Khoper they were “constantly searching for and locating ringleaders of the rebellion and drowning them,” while in other communities Cossacks were also “searching for bandits in their midst” and executing them.\textsuperscript{45}

Thanks to the mercy of Peter I, who chose to employ a differentiated approach that involved destroying the rebels and saving the loyalists, the Don Host narrowly escaped extinction. In late November, after the main rebel forces had been wiped out, Dolgorukii traveled north from Cherkassk to administer loyalty oaths to the Cossacks who had not fought for Bulavin.\textsuperscript{46} In the whole Don region only 1,835 Cossacks could be rounded together to take the oath.\textsuperscript{47} Nearly 80 percent of those, 1,478, hailed from southern communities. Comparison of the numbers of Cossacks who took the oath with the government-generated population records, the documents that helped spark the rebellion, also gives a staggering sense of the death and displacement it caused. Only one resident out of over a hundred Cossack residents of Sirotinskii gorodok before the rebellion was around in late 1708 and in other northern settlements for which records can be compared only about 5 percent of pre-uprising Cossacks were on hand to take the oath.\textsuperscript{48} In spite of the fact that these figures cannot be taken as absolutely authoritative, it is clear that in northern areas over 90 percent of the residents died or dispersed during the course of the rebellion.

The reluctance of most historians to mention the destruction is even more remarkable in view of the fact that this was one of the most devastating actions by Russian forces between the sack of Novgorod in 1570 by Ivan “the Terrible” and the scorched earth tactics that led to the forced migration of hundreds of thousands of North Caucasians in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{49} When viewed from a European framework the destruction of the northern Don appears to be proportionally more deadly than the suppression of the Catalan revolt in Spain or the effects of the Thirty Years War in Germany, where about 40 percent of the population died or dispersed.\textsuperscript{50} Even the sack of Magdeburg in 1631, which generations of European observers have condemned as the height of savagery, saw

\textsuperscript{45} Chaev, *Bulavinskoe vosstanie*, p. 361. \textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 355. \textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 356.
\textsuperscript{48} For post-uprising figures see ibid., p. 356. For pre-uprising numbers, see the surveyor’s report in RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 1110–12.
\textsuperscript{50} For European devastation, see M. S. Anderson, *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime 1618–1789* (Guernsey, 1998), p. 68.
survival rates (one in four inhabitants) that seem to have surpassed those of Cossacks in several of the northern settlements (less than one in fifteen).

Taking a pre-war male population of at least 18,000, but more likely in the range of 24,000, it is possible to establish that no less than two thirds of the region’s male population disappeared during the course of the rebellion.

In the wake of the uprising and its suppression, the Don Cossack Host became only a shadow of its former self. The sparse survivors of the post-Bulavin Don Host largely succeeded in preserving the “liberty” and “expanse” of their fisheries, forests, lands, hay fields, and other resources, which they feared losing on the eve of the conflict, but, as a consequence of the uprising, in other spheres they would have to learn to live in government-specified boundaries.

The problem of balancing limited resources and a growing population, which had dogged the Host since the Razin era, disappeared during the devastation of fall 1708, and was replaced by a problem of de-population/lack of manpower (maloliudstvo). A report from the Host to Admiral Apraksin in 1711 reads: “From Piatizbianskoi gorodok to Cherkassk the stanitsas are most depopulated, and in Cherkassk and its outlying stanitsas there are only 1,400 Cossacks.” In 1712, four years after the rebellion, the Host could not muster 5,000 Cossacks requested by the government and explained its predicament in a report: “We cannot . . . collect that number of Cossacks because in Cherkassk there are only 1,600 people and in the northern towns there are few people – in some one hundred, in others seventy, and fifty – and many of those are incapable/ill-equipped (malomoshchnye) and do not have horses.” The Host only sent 3,000 Cossacks and Tatars to assist the government, claiming that because of de-population they had “mustered by halves,” i.e. half were sent to serve and the other half stayed for home defense. This would suggest that four years after the rebellion, the population was roughly 6,000. The additional four thousand represent Cossacks who had been away on campaign in the west when the uprising broke out. Only a minority managed to escape to other places.

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52 For population estimates see B. Boeck, Shifting Boundaries on the Don Steppe Frontier: Cossacks, Empires and Nomads to 1739 (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002), pp. 583–86. Savel’ev mentions a population of about 27,000 in 1707. Savel’ev, Trekhsotletie, p. 57.
53 RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 24, l. 51. This figure closely coincides with Dolgorukii’s statistics concerning oaths.
54 RGADA, f. 111, 1712, d. 5, ll. 9–10. RGADA, f. 111, 1712, d. 7, ll. 1–2.
55 This conclusion is based upon the fact that several reports mention the departure of Nekrasov, without registering any other large population movements outward from the Don.
In the chaos of September 1708, as government troops and Kalmyks put the flame to settlement after settlement, chased and encircled wagon trains laden with thousands of refugees, exterminating “outlaws” and taking the women and children “for themselves,” only one large contingent of Cossacks managed to escape. The forces commanded by Ignat Nekrasov had positioned themselves to the south of Panshin, from which refugees from all over the north had first gathered for a siege then dispersed in panic. Hearing that over 4,000 of their comrades had just been crushed by government forces, Nekrasov put into place the back-up plan he had elaborated jointly with Bulavin in the early days of the Cossack uprising. Since the struggle to lead the Don to the promised land of the “old steppe” had failed, Nekrasov would now guide 1,500–2,000 Cossack refugees across the border into Ottoman territory to the Kuban’ region.

The Nekrasovites, as they would soon come to be called, joined their brethren in exile, the Kuban’ Cossacks, who were driven from the Don a quarter century prior and lived under the personal protection of the Crimean khan. In 1709, the khan told a Russian diplomat, who was trying to win the extradition of the defectors, that “the old Cossacks who live on the Kuban’ asked me to allow him [Nekrasov] to live with them.” Although Crimean officials were not yet willing to admit it, Nekrasov had in fact settled his followers in the Kuban’ region. All attempts to have them extradited to Russia were rebuffed.

Like their predecessors a quarter century earlier, the Nekrasovites did not allow the Cossack loyalists and fellow-travelers to revel in their victory or heal their devastated communities. Upon establishing common cause with their nomadic neighbors in 1709, the Nekrasovites launched a series of punitive raids against the Don. By continuing to raid they were demonstrating that the unrestrained spirit of the old steppe was still alive. A report from the Host details the besieged conditions in which the loyalists lived that year:

The Nekrasovites and Nogais attack and raid . . . and kill Cossacks and take them captive, and steal our herds of horses and cattle, and have devastated us completely.

57 Chaev, Bulavinskoe vostanie, p. 330.
58 The number of Nekrasovites is taken from interrogations of Cossacks who had taken part in Nekrasov’s exodus. See RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 234–35.
59 RGADA, f. 123, 1709, d. 1, l. 13.
60 Chaev, Bulavinskoe vostanie, 360; RGADA, f. 123, 1709, d. 1.
and due to this . . . devastation, lack of horses, and depopulation, we cannot even go out of our gorodki for any reason.  

By remaining bunkered down in their settlements, the Host managed to endure until winter set in and attacks subsided. The attacks continued in 1710 and on two occasions the Cossacks captured Nekrasovite couriers sent to the Don to “stir up rebellion”.  

As a result, the Host sent officials to once again administer loyalty oaths in the northern settlements. In late 1710 a fire of unknown origins broke out in Cherkassk, burning down its wooden ramparts and much of the town. The Host was tight-lipped about the source of the blaze, but the coincidence with the conflagration of 1687, which broke out upon the decision to extradite Old Believers to Moscow, is remarkable.

As the only leader of the uprising to escape execution, Nekrasov became a public enemy of the Petrine state. Government representatives occasionally stumbled onto his “spies” who claimed to be carrying the message of resistance deep into Russia. As long as Nekrasov and his followers escaped punishment, the books on the uprising could not be permanently closed. Disgruntled Cossacks could believe that somewhere, somehow, the dream of Cossack liberty lived on. In the foothills of the Caucasus an alternative vision of Cossackdom existed for those who despised their present situation and came to believe that “Cossacks now live worse than Russian muzhiks!”

61 RGADA, f. 111, 1709, d. 13, ll. 18–19.  
62 RGAMVF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 28, l. 20.  
63 Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, 1710, d. 11, l. 36.  
64 A Nekrasovite spy captured near Tambov in 1719 stated that he had been sent to examine forts from Valuiki to Penza. RGADA, f. 111, kn. 25, l. 138. A Nekrasovite who was caught in 1715, claimed that he was one of eight spies, traveling in the guise of religious pilgrims, sent by Nekrasov to examine government frontier fortifications. They were to meet up in Red Square in Moscow on a specified date and time. RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 103, ll. 187–88.

65 The quote comes from an investigation conducted in 1727. Accusations suggested that groups of Don Cossacks from the north were planning to defect to Nekrasov. RGVIA, f. 20, op. 47, d. 18, ll. 375b–376.
A new era dawned in the history of the Don Cossacks during the destructive crushing of the Bulavin uprising. The region would be rebuilt from the ashes of rebellion, but it would now become a hub for the networks of patronage, protection, cronyism, and corruption that were central features of the Petrine system. Cossack leaders sought to distance themselves from rank-and-file Cossacks by cultivating the favor of well-connected imperial officials. Just as in the metropole the “fledglings of Peter’s nest” could corruptly accrue wealth and power with impunity as long as they enjoyed the personal confidence of the tsar, the ataman of the Don Host became a “little autocrat” who ignored local and imperial laws and lorded over the Host for as long as he enjoyed the confidence of the ruler’s confidants.

In spite of the fact that the most critical transformations of Cossack politics took place soon after 1708, the decade after the uprising is the most neglected period in the historiography of the region. V. D. Sukhorukov, the liberal Don Cossack historian, ended his extensive survey of Don history with the Bulavin rebellion, signifying that Cossack liberty had been crushed. Others only gave limited treatment to the period, probably due to the fact that the Donskie dela could no longer serve as an anchor in a period in which Petrine generals began to determine Cossack policy.

1 Several recent studies have emphasized the importance of protection and corruption in the Petrine period. While Pavlenko’s study of the “fledglings of Peter’s nest” primarily surveyed the activities of A. D. Men’shikov, Serov documented the pervasive criminality among lower-ranking officials. See D. O. Serov, Stroiteli imperii: ocherki gosudarstvennoi i kriminal’noi deiatel’nosti spodvizhnikov Petra I (Novosibirsk, 1996), N. I. Pavlenko, Ptentsy gnezda Petra (Moscow, 1994). The importance of patronage is emphasized by Brenda Meehan-Waters in Autocracy and Aristocracy: The Russian Service Elite of 1730 (New Brunswick, N.J., 1982). The notion that “autocracy spawned little autocrats” was advanced by Meehan-Waters on the basis of reports by foreign diplomats (p. 67).

2 S. G. Svatikov skipped the period between 1711 and 1721. See Rossiia i Don (Belgrade, 1924), pp. 146–57. Pronshtein only used published documents and devoted a few sentences to events of the period. See A. P. Pronshtein, Zemlia Doniskaia v XVIII veke (Rostov-na-Donu, 1961), pp. 222, 226, 232.
and when documents were displaced due to administrative reforms and changes of jurisdiction over the Don.

THE NEW DEAL: REDEMPTION THROUGH SERVICE

In spite of the fact that Colonel V. V. Dolgorukii urged the tsar to “diminish the liberty” (vol’nost’ ubavit’) of the Don, Peter does not seem to have harbored a grudge against the Cossacks. Remarkably he forgave them and left much of their separate deal intact. In the 1720s, I. K. Kirillov, a Senate official, could declare that “the Don Cossacks have a special liberty (osoblivaia vol’nost’) to hold their lands and utilize fisheries and hunting grounds, conduct trade, and keep taverns without paying any excise taxes to the treasury.”

While allowing Cossack communities considerable control over their lands and local affairs, Peter insured that the ataman in Cherkassk was first and foremost his man. In 1708, before leaving the Don with his victorious forces, Dolgorukii deposed Il’ia Zershchikov, who led the coup but had tainted himself in the eyes of the government by serving under Bulavin. Under the watchful gaze of the general who had destroyed much of the Don, the Cossacks were read the tsar’s decree ordering them to elect someone “who would serve the Great Sovereign faithfully without vacillation and treason.” The decree symbolized a new tough, no-nonsense approach to dealing with the remnants of the Don Host.

Though the Don Host was barely capable of defending itself in those years, the outbreak of war with the Ottoman Empire in 1710 gave the Don Cossacks a chance to repay Peter I for their preservation after the rebellion. The price of redemption, however, was readiness for self-sacrifice. In 1711, over half of the Cossacks were mobilized to defend government territories and participate in the Russo-Turkish war. In order to obtain the “decreed number” of Cossacks mandated for military service by the government, the Host began strengthening its control over the remaining communities. The surviving Cossacks would have to accept that the era of voluntary service to the tsar was over. When the “decreed number” of Cossacks to be sent for service was finalized in Cherkassk, no local excuses would suffice for absence.

3 For Dolgorukii’s statement, see N. S. Chaev, ed., Bulavinskoe vostanie (1707–1708 gg) (Moscow, 1934), p. 299.
5 Dolgorukii’s actions are mentioned in the text of the decree, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 53, d. 1, l. 31.
On its own initiative, in May 1711, the Host sent its representatives to all the communities that had not fulfilled their military mobilization quota that year. They were held collectively responsible for individual absences, and ordered to pay fines of ten rubles for each individual who no-showed. In a related show of power, forces from Cherkassk burned down three settlements suspected of harboring traitors. Upon collecting 970 rubles, the Host delivered the money to government officials, demonstrating its resolve to impose its will on recalcitrant Cossacks.

These actions were indicative of a new relationship between people and power in the Don region. The ataman now answered directly to the tsar and the populace would be forced to answer to him. The restructuring of the office of the ataman of the Host, which began immediately after the end of the Bulavin uprising, is the single most important development of the period, but it has not been examined in any detail in the historiography. A recent survey of Don Cossack atamans does not even include a section on Petr Emelianov, the man who transformed the office of ataman.

Only fragments of information scattered throughout the documentary record provide clues about his biography. Although nothing is known about his date or place of birth, the fact that he was of Turkish background is beyond dispute. While in some documents he is given the nickname “the Turk” (Turchanin), in others he is called “Ramazan.” His name began to appear in government documents after the conquest of Azov in which he emerges as a ransom-broker of significant stature. In 1699 he provoked the ire of a captive Azov cavalry officer named Afanasii Kolshinov by driving a hard bargain and demanding a ransom of a thousand rubles from him in order not to be returned to the Tatars! Emelianov’s acumen in assisting the movement of people across frontiers enabled him to expand his enterprises after the conquest of Azov. His knowledge of Russian and Tatar helped him branch out of the ransom business into diplomacy. In 1699 he was

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6 Frolov petition to Apraksin, RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 24, l. 63; Emelianov letter to Apraksin, RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 79, l. 245.
7 Cossack report, RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 24, l. 57.
9 Information on Emelianov surfaces in various reports and testimonies, see RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 1, l. 11; RGVIA, f. 20, op. 47, d. 18, l. 471; RGADA, f. 117, 1701, d. 5, ll. 173–74; RGAVMF, f. 177, op. 1, d. 23, l. 2390b.; RGADA, f. 119, op. 1, 1702, d. 13, l. 4.
10 Kolshinov testimony, GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 117, 1670b.
sent by the Host to negotiate peace with the Kuban’ Tatars. In 1702, he traveled to Kaffa and Kerch in the Crimea “to settle a claim against him by the Armenians,” suggesting that he was involved in trade with the diaspora communities of the Crimea.

He would parlay his prominence into political power. His name is not mentioned among the list of office-holders briefly imprisoned by Bulavin, but this does not necessarily reflect his position in Cherkassk. A better indication of his position is the fact that after the coup against Bulavin, he was sent to Colonel V. V. Dolgorukii with the official notification from the Host of Bulavin’s death in July 1708. He would continue to cultivate ties to Dolgorukii and employ them to enhance his personal power. When the tsar ordered the Cossacks to elect a new ataman to replace Il’ia Zershchikov, who was deposed by decree, Emelianov was chosen to assume leadership of the Host.

Emelianov became the first ataman in Don Cossack history to owe his authority not to a stable Cossack constituency, but to the tsar. In 1709 Peter I, who was traveling through the region on the way to Taganrog, issued an oral decree that Emelianov was not to be deposed. A similar order was communicated to Maksim Kumshatskii, the leader of the contingent of Cossacks who had participated in the Poltava campaign. In winter 1709–10, however, the government learned that Maksim Kumshatskii had been elected to replace Emelianov. As a result, on January 16, 1710, a written decree from the tsar ordered the reinstatement of Emelianov as the ataman of the Host.

He returned to power possessing a document from the tsar confirming his appointment as ataman “in perpetuity” (bezperemenno). Confident that he had friends in high places, Emelianov began asserting his authority over the Host and making decisions without consulting other office-holders. By spring 1711, his high-handed leadership style provoked an open confrontation with Vasilii and Ivan Frolov, the sons of Frol Minaev. When Emelianov denied Ivan Frolov the honor of heading a delegation to Moscow, an inebriated Frolov boasted to Emelianov: “You are the ataman at present, but tomorrow I will be!” In the ensuing argument Emelianov replied: “In order to be ataman one has to have a decree from the Great Sovereign and not simply be self-proclaimed.” Passions were soothed and

11 GAVO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 117, 1670b.  12 Emelianov testimony, RGADA, f. 119, op. 1, 1702, d. 13, l. 4.
15 For decrees, see RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 53, d. 1, l. 31–310b.
16 According to testimony from Andrei Lopatin, the confrontation lead to a fist fight. RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 810b.
the incident was forgotten until May 1711, when Vasilii Frolov decided to denounce several of Emelianov’s wrongdoings. The ataman learned of this and wrote to Fedor Matveevich Apraksin, who was responsible for affairs on the southern flank after the cession of Azov, to accuse Frolov of seditious speech several months earlier.\(^{17}\) Word of this counteraction reached the Frolovs, sending Ivan scurrying to Apraksin to explain his actions as the product of intoxication and ask for leniency.

The fact that the reports were just filed away among Apraksin’s papers, not forwarded to Moscow, suggests that the admiral took little interest in the internal squabbles in Cherkassk. Emelianov was reappointed ataman by the tsar and would remain ataman. What is of great significance is the fact that Cossack leaders began taking their dirty laundry to Apraksin. Previously, Cossack internal affairs were rarely divulged to the government. Now, both the government-appointed ataman and his rivals took their cases directly to a powerful relative and friend of the tsar. The Ambassadorial Chancery, which was still responsible for Cossack affairs, was not even informed of these incidents.

Cossack leaders came to understand that in the Petrine system personal patronage was a key to political survival. According to Brenda Meehan-Waters, in eighteenth-century Russia “imperial favor was a grace that descended down a ladder of patron-client relations.”\(^{18}\) Turning to Apraksin was only natural since, as John LeDonne has argued, “patronage was allocated not by an unidentified ‘state’ but by specific individuals in the hierarchy.”\(^{19}\) Previously the whole Host served as clients of the tsar, now the ataman sought the personal patronage of one of his most influential courtiers and confidants.

Because the rise of the ataman’s power went hand in hand with the cultivation of imperial patronage, it is critical to survey how patronage relations were facilitated and the verbal formulae in which they were expressed. Both Emelianov and his rival, and eventual successor, Vasilii Frolov, sought the patronage of Apraksin during the period in question. A series of letters from Petr Emelianov to Admiral Apraksin in 1714 illustrates the cultivation of both personal and political patronage.\(^{20}\) Calling himself “the seeker of your mercy,” Emelianov asks Apraksin, whom he addresses as “my lord

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\(^{20}\) RGAVM, f. 233, op. i, d. 79, ll. 245–255ob.
(gosudar’) of many years and most-illustrious admiral . . . who enjoys the mercy of the Great Sovereign and is present before his tsarist most-radiant eyes,” to intercede with the tsar concerning various affairs ranging from the relations of the Host with the Tatars to a request by the ataman to have titles to certain fisheries transferred to him. While in the month of January the ataman was sending his patron a stock of fresh lemons, in August he was sending several horses and a supply of smoked sturgeon.

Emelianov’s rival, Vasilii Frolov, managed to stay in the good graces of Apraksin by serving as his purchasing agent, delivering in 1715 several hundred rubles worth of coffee and “other Turkish produce,” to Saint Petersburg. In 1717, as an ataman, he wrote to his “most merciful lord” Apraksin seeking his “fatherly mercy” in the affairs of the Host and in personal matters, signing his letter as “your most obedient and well-wishing slave.” By blurring personal and political ties, both were plugging themselves into the patronage networks that were becoming the prevalent mode of exercising power in eighteenth-century Russia.

In 1714 Petr Emelianov used his patronage ties to rid himself of one of his most outspoken opponents. In August 1714, the ataman wrote to Apraksin claiming that Timofei Sokolov, who had served under Bulavin, was gathering groups of Cossacks and plotting a new rebellion. Allegedly Sokolov had stated “The ataman has destroyed the river,” and he and his associates were accused of “reminiscing about the old days (pominaiut staroe vremia).” Upon the ataman’s denunciation, an order from Saint Petersburg was sent for the arrest of Sokolov and, after a short period of detainment in Saint Petersburg, Sokolov was imprisoned at Solovki.

In actuality, the case was far more complex. Sokolov had indeed served as Bulavin’s deputy, but during the entire period of his stay in office he had secretly informed the Azov governor of Bulavin’s moves, aiding the government efforts to crush the rebellion. He was also one of the leaders of the coup that deposed Bulavin. Sokolov was elected by the krug to head a delegation to investigate abuses by one of the ataman’s representatives, but Emelianov refused to allow Sokolov and another Cossack to carry out the investigation, claiming that “for a long time they have been my enemies.” Some claimed that Sokolov’s only offense was to argue with the ataman.

21 RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 103, l. 314. 22 RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 151, ll. 363–64.
24 RGAVM, f. 233, op. 1, d. 79, l. 253.
25 Incomplete files on the incident can be found in RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 1, ll. 8–11, 82–85, 223–24.
26 Chaev, Bulavinskoe vostanie, p. 308. 27 Oral testimony, RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 103, l. 1060b.
and question his decision to take money designated for the government into the treasury of the Host. Finally, the scribe of the Host later testified to the government that Emelianov had ordered him to write denunciations of Sokolov to both Apraksin and V. V. Dolgorukii and that they were sent without the Host knowing about them. Thus, Emelianov circumvented both the krug and the Ambassadorial Chancery by dealing directly with the confidants of the tsar.

**The Ataman’s Unlimited Power**

The decree from the tsar making Petr Emelianov ataman “in perpetuity” gave him carte blanche to run the Host like he ran his ransom business: with a shrewd eye for profit and an unflinching ability to manipulate those whom circumstances had made dependent upon him. In view of the fact that evidence of the ataman’s abuses and profiteering left traces in five different archives, it is all the more surprising that historians have completely overlooked Emelianov’s tenure in office.

Not all charges waged against Emelianov can be substantiated, but the cumulative weight of evidence demonstrates that he ruled the Host as none before him. The first evidence is contained in Vasilii Frolov’s petition of 1711. According to Frolov, in the aftermath of the Bulavin uprising, Emelianov had taken bribes in exchange for freeing suspected traitors. Then in 1711, after three settlements were burned for harboring fugitives, he took over a hundred rubles in bribes from each settlement and allowed the residents to reoccupy them.

A second denunciation of the ataman to Apraksin was filed in March 1715 by a prominent Cossack hoping to avoid the fate of Sokolov. A Cossack from Cherkassk named Fedor Boyarchenok gave sweeping testimony about the ataman’s control over the Host. He did this due to the fact that the ataman was accusing him of sedition. His falling out with the ataman apparently occurred a few months earlier, when the annual subsidy was delivered and, to their chagrin, the Cossacks discovered that instead of being divided among 7,000 Cossacks, as previously, that year it had supposedly been divided by 9,000. The suspicion was that the ataman, his deputy, and the scribe of the Host had doctored the numbers and pocketed the difference. A confrontation in the krug, in which the ataman was questioned about the numbers, failed to clear up the discrepancy.

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28 Testimony of priest Artemii, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 1, l. 11.
29 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 1, l. 1740b.
30 RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 65–67.
31 The denunciation and related testimony are contained in RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 103, ll. 105–9.
The leitmotif of the lengthy testimony was that the ataman’s henchmen were running roughshod over the entire region. Ten of the ataman’s Tatar slaves terrorized Cherkassk, stealing and destroying Cossack property at will. The ataman had taken away three important fisheries – perhaps the ones for which he petitioned Apraksin – and was renting them out to the Cossacks. He had appropriated lands throughout the north, where settlements had been destroyed during the rebellion, and had constructed a series of mills and khutora (ranches/farms). Cossacks from the north reported to the krug that “we sow, and harvest with scythes and knives grain for him a hundred Cossacks at a time.” The ataman had seized control of forests belonging to the Host and utilized the lumber only for his own enterprises, without repairing fortifications or road foundations (mostovye). He forced merchants to contribute raw materials for his construction projects: a practice which, according to Boyarchenok, “our fathers and grandfathers never knew.” He had rented out trading stalls belonging to the Host to merchants from Voronezh in exchange for large bribes.

Since other files for that year contain no indication that an investigation was conducted, it would seem that Emelianov’s patron protected him by once again simply filing away the denunciation without taking any subsequent action. But just as Boyarchenok’s charges were being shelved by Apraksin’s chancery, officials in Moscow began investigating a series of accusations advanced by another Cherkassk resident, the archpriest Fedor Olimpiev. This investigation, conducted by officials in the capital who had no information about the two previous denunciations of the ataman, also generated allegations that Emelianov was lording over the Don region.

A PASTOR’S PROTEST

The long and rancorous struggle that ensued between pastor Olimpiev and his Cossack flock provides a rare opportunity to survey the turbulent undercurrents of Cossack politics that were usually concealed from the gaze of the Russian government. It also provides unparalleled information about how the Cossacks regarded their local religious leaders. Because the Olimpiev testimony represents important evidence about Cossack treatment of religious authorities and a comprehensive indictment of Cossack corruption in the early eighteenth century, it deserves special scrutiny as a source on changes in Cossack society after Bulavin.

32 RGVAMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 103, l. 1050b.
33 Most of the materials pertinent to the Olimpiev case can be found in RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, which is entirely devoted to the 1718 investigation. Records of the 1715 investigation are contained
Olimpiev was an Orthodox priest who served in the Don region since 1705. He was promoted, by recommendation of the Host, from priest to archpriest of the Cherkassk cathedral. His relations with the Cossacks first started to sour after the Bulavin rebellion. A letter he wrote to V. V. Dolgorukii, denouncing several false priests and traitors who were still at large, was intercepted and read to the krug. Enraged that Olimpiev had snitched, the Cossacks threatened him and held him in chains for a brief time.

After 1712 Olimpiev’s relations with the ataman irrevocably spoiled. His Cossack son-in-law – this fact of kinship ties indicates his integration into Cossack society – was captured by the Tatars in battle. As a personal favor, the priest asked the ataman to ransom his relative and promised in writing to pay the ransom fee. When his son-in-law was about to be exchanged for a Tatar held by the ataman, Emelianov began demanding a thousand rubles to release him (note the similarity with the Kolshinov incident described above). The priest refused to pay and his son-in-law was taken back to Kuban’ by the Tatars. “Seeing the ataman’s lack of mercy,” writes Olimpiev, “I bought three Tatars at high prices and gave them along with two hundred rubles to the ataman . . . but for some unknown reason, he did not give me my letters [of financial obligation] back and has not returned them to this day.” Although his son-in-law was ransomed, the trusting priest had delivered himself into dependence by not getting back his sworn obligations to repay the ataman when the ransom transaction was concluded. At any time Emelianov could demand more payments from the hapless priest. Disgusted that he had been duped, Olimpiev decided to denounce the ataman’s various wrongdoings to the government.

His decision to speak out set into motion a set of events that lead to his final break with the Cossacks and initiated a high-level government investigation on corruption that would last for three years. In 1715 Olimpiev traveled to Moscow to inform on the ataman to church authorities, but Emelianov outmaneuvered him, sending his representative to the Ambassadorsial Chancery to accuse Olimpiev of financial abuses. Olimpiev was briefly questioned, then allowed to return to the Don in winter 1715 after submitting a petition on the ataman’s abuses. By the time he returned in RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, but the file is incomplete. Excerpts from the investigations, which were copied in the nineteenth century, can also be found in GARO, f. 55, op. 1, d. 1470.

34 RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 520b.  35 RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 53.
36 This paragraph is based on RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, ll. 12–13.
37 RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, l. 13.  38 RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, l. l. 17.
to the Don, however, Emelianov had died, making the first petition void before it could even be investigated.

Maksim Kumshatskii was elected to succeed Emelianov. Upon Olimpiev’s return to the Don he was called to the krug where the Cossacks “cursed and yelled all kinds of inappropriate profanities at him.” For divulging their internal affairs to Moscow the Cossacks prohibited him from “interfering in spiritual affairs” in the Don. He appealed to Apraksin for a decree reinstating him, which he received, but by the time he returned to Cherkassk in 1717, Maksim Kumshatskii had also died, leaving him with a decree addressed to a deceased ataman. Realizing that only Moscow could decisively intervene, he once again traveled to the capital.

For a second time, however, Olimpiev arrived in Moscow only to discover that the Cossacks had already forwarded a list of accusations against him. Both sides had prepared for a bureaucratic confrontation. During his brief and turbulent visits to the Don region after 1715, the priest collected new information implicating Emelianov’s successors in abuses of power and enlisted at least two other priests in his search for justice. Out of fear that Olimpiev would expose the endemic corruption in Cherkassk, Cossack leaders closed ranks against their accuser. In a preemptive strike, they accused Olimpiev of offenses ranging from misappropriating church funds to pilfering apples, silverware, and a live goose from Cossack homes.

The bulk of the government investigation was conducted in winter of 1717 and spring 1718 and was supervised by state secretaries Gavril Ivanovich Golovkin and Petr Pavlovich Shafirov, demonstrating that it was considered on the highest level. Testimony was solicited from Olimpiev and another priest named Aleksei and over a dozen Cossacks were called from the Don to answer their charges. The evidence, however, points to the fact that the cards were stacked in favor of the Cossacks. The burden of proof was placed upon Olimpiev and the investigation was carried out without allowing him to confront the Cossacks (i.e. no ochnaia stavka). Neither torture nor intoxication – the usual methods of soliciting truth in an investigation – were employed against Cossack witnesses.

39 This paragraph is based on RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 6, 16.
40 RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, ll. 1–4.
41 The investigators didn’t take these charges very seriously. They briefly questioned Olimpiev about them and he denied all of them. Some of them were clearly fabricated, since they had allegedly taken place during times when Olimpiev’s presence outside the region could be confirmed by government documents. RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, ll. 5–80b.
42 Both secretaries are mentioned in RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 140.
The Olimpiev testimony often reflects inside information about how disaffected Cossacks perceived the situation in the region. In his first denunciation, submitted to the Ambassadorial Chancery in November 1715, Olimpiev focused on the offenses of Ataman Petr Emelianov, but also implicated others as his willing accomplices. Among them were future atamans Maksim Kumshatskii and Aleksei Ivanov (Lopatin), suggesting that several prominent Cossacks were enmeshed in the ataman’s protection racket. The most serious charge, and subsequently the one that would get the most government scrutiny, was that Emelianov had “sold” Russian captives to the Tatars for 5,000 rubles. Next came charges that religious schismatics throughout the region were living under the ataman’s “protection.” Additionally, countless other fugitives found protection in the shadow of the ataman’s unquestioned authority:

All kinds of people with wives and children, and without families, and all kinds of craftsmen, who ran away and hid themselves from government service and taxes, now live in Cherkassk under the ataman’s direction (pod vedeniem atamana) in their own homes. Many others live clandestinely (ukryvatel’stom) among the Cossacks in homes, kitchens, ranches, fisheries, taverns, and other kinds of Cossack enterprises.

After the revocation of the right to refuge and the introduction of deportations, fugitives could only escape the long arm of the law by greasing the grasping palm of the strong arm of the ataman.

Throughout the region the ataman had created a large web of people who were personally dependent upon him and his continued protection of them. Aside from fugitives, the Cossacks in the northern regions lived in legal limbo. In 1711, as a result of the discovery of Nekrasovite spies in the north and the lack of manpower in the south, the government ordered the resettlement of all Cossacks from the northern rivers to the middle and southern Don. The order could not be fully implemented at the time, due to Nekrasovite and Tatar raids, but the existence of the decree, which could be enforced at any moment, made the Cossacks in the north dependent upon the goodwill of Cherkassk.

The Olimpiev testimony suggests that the whole north was brought under the heel of the ataman. He reports the complaints of a Cossack named

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43 For arguments and evidence supporting the reliability of Olimpiev’s testimony, see B. Boeck, Shifting Boundaries on the Don Steppe Frontier: Cossacks, Empires and Nomads to 1739 (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002), p. 448.
44 RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, ll. 1–17ob.
45 RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, l. 8.
46 RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 24, l. 51.
Mikhail Korsunskii, who to no avail attempted to expose the situation to officials of the Transzhament fort in 1714:

Many [Cossacks] from the northern towns complained against Ataman Peter Emelianov and against his caretakers concerning numerous bribes and offenses. The ataman takes from them money, all kinds of silver utensils and gold coins (chervontsy) and many [Cossacks] service his mills, plow his grain, and feed [and shelter] his cattle all winter.47

As the northern Cossacks recovered from the rebellion, reoccupying lands abandoned after the destruction, they were forced to do business with the ataman. Emelianov’s representatives kept a close watch on where settlements were being reconstructed – the government ban on rebuilding the devastated areas was still in force – then came to collect bribes.48 Other settlements were rebuilt under his covert patronage, with his representatives issuing documents to Cossacks along the Khoper and Buzuluk Rivers. Hence, the resettlement of the Don was carried out in the gray area between the ataman’s legal authority and his unchallenged power. The privilege of continued residence in the region hinged on his patronage and protection.

The government, however, showed little interest in investigating, much less intervening in, the system of graft emanating outward from Cherkassk. Its main concern was whether Cossacks had sold, or enslaved, Russians displaced by Tatar raids.49 Here, Olimpiev had many of his facts in order but his interpretation was faulty. The Cossacks had indeed taken into their treasury 5,000 rubles from the Kuban’ Tatars as payment for Russian captives. The money, however, was compensation for prisoners who had died in captivity or who could not be recovered by Tatar officials because they had been sold to far-away places.50 The horrified priest was correct that Christians were “suffering in Muslim hands” but he was unaware that government officials had given approval to such an unrighteous transaction.

The resolution of Olimpiev’s case against the Cossacks revealed that the scales of justice weighed both power and culpability. After it became clear that no actions which could be classified as treason were evident, the investigation was effectively shut down. The Cossack witnesses claimed to have no knowledge of wrongdoings by their leaders and the investigators

47 RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, l. ll. 160b–17. 48 RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, l. 130b.
49 RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 54.
50 RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 110b–111. Olimpiev’s most serious charge, that Ataman Petr Emelianov took 5,000 rubles into the treasury of the Host (RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5164, l. 1), is indeed correct.
made no attempt to solicit more than superficial denials. The fact that upon the conclusion of the investigation a decree from the tsar was sent ordering the Cossacks not to rebuild settlements, harbor fugitives, or employ priests who lacked proper credentials, suggests that Olimpiev’s accusations were given sufficient credence in the Ambassadorial Chancery to warrant a new decree.51

The priest from Cherkassk had gambled in his bid to seek justice against the Cossack establishment. In the end, he lost. Not because he was proven wrong, but because his adversaries possessed more powerful patrons and his revelations about endemic corruption were considered unimportant in the Petrine system. Although Olimpiev was shipped off to the Russian north to be silenced in a monastery, he left an enduring legacy in ecclesiastical matters. He succeeded in convincing the government that the religious affairs of the region deserved closer scrutiny. On March 8, 1718, Gavril Golovkin, the official who lead the investigation of Olimpiev’s accusations, authorized a decree from the tsar removing the Don Cossacks from the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate and subordinating them to the bishop of Voronezh.52 The wording of the decree, which refers to illegitimate priests in the Don region causing “schisms” and “disturbances” reflects the wording of Olimpiev’s petitions.53 Although the archpriest was never to be heard from again, his efforts to make Cossacks respect canon law would now be taken up, without remarkable results, by the bishop of Voronezh.54

Petr Emelianov patronized the rebuilding of the region, but in only a few years he transformed the office of ataman. He was not only able to defy the krug with impunity, but used control of the Host’s chancery to augment his authority. He and his allies employed imperial patronage ties to silence and undermine their opponents. When push came to shove, their testimony was sufficient to thwart ecclesiastical opposition and send a prominent opponent to the dungeons of Solovki.

THE MILITARY COLLEGE ASSUMES CONTROL OF COSSACK AFFAIRS

With the death of Emelianov’s successor Kumshatskii in spring 1717, Vasilii Frolov finally got his day in the sun. He was elected ataman by the Cossacks,

51 RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, ll. 1380b–1390b.
52 On the decree, see RGADA, f. 111, 1723, d. 1, ll. 112–1120b.
53 For the comparisons in the wording of the decrees, see Boeck, Shifting Boundaries, 455.
who wrote to Peter that they had “in accordance with their traditions elected Vasilii Frolov Ataman of the Host until a decree is issued by the Great Sovereign.” Only a decade after the Bulavin rebellion, Cossacks took for granted that the tsar had to attach his seal of approval to the Cossack candidate. Accordingly, Frolov spent the next ten months attempting to obtain confirmation of his election. He petitioned F. M. Apraksin in late fall 1717, begging him to help obtain a decree from Peter I naming him ataman since “among such an unrestrained people it is not without difficulty to get by without a decree from the tsar.” Legitimacy now derived from the tsar’s pen.

In February 1718, the coveted decree arrived. Twenty-four years after a young Vasilii Frolov was taken to Moscow by his father Frol Minaev and bestowed cloths, furs, and a pistol “for his father’s service,” he was awarded, for his own “service and loyalty,” the most lucrative reward the government could bestow on a Don Cossack. He was appointed ataman of the Host “in perpetuity.” In the eighteen years since his illustrious father’s death, two atamans were violently overthrown, a bloody uprising had convulsed and decimated the whole region, and two atamans were deposed by government decree. Petr Emelianov was able to impose his will on the Don in ways that old Frol could hardly have dreamed of.

Vasilii Frolov presided over the period in which, in the words of legal historian S. G. Svatikov, “the Don lost its statehood.” This sweeping conclusion is based upon the fact that in 1721 the Don Cossacks were removed from the jurisdiction of the College of Foreign Affairs, the new name of the Ambassadorial Chancery, and subordinated to the Military College. Although 1721 is a convenient landmark date, pointing towards the future of Cossackdom as an instrument of Russian imperial military power, the events of that year have little to do with Don “statehood.” The decree simply provided de jure confirmation of administrative shifts that had taken place during the whole course of Peter’s reign.

The decree of 1721 was part of the general bureaucratic reshuffling taking place as a result of Petrine administrative reforms and the final shift of the capital from Moscow to Saint Petersburg. The decree was issued on March 3, 1721, and mandated that the Don, Yaik, and Greben (i.e. Terek) Cossacks be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Military College. The fact that the latter two groups had long been subordinated to local officials

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55 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 23, l. 496. 56 RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 151, l. 3630b.
57 For reference to gifts bestowed upon young Vasilii see RGADA, f. 111, 1697, d. 18, l. 48. For his appointment as ataman see RGADA, f. 111, kn. 25, ll. 1100b–111.
58 Svatikov, Rossia i Don, p. 148.
59 PSZ, 6: 367.
suggests that “statehood” was not an issue in the decision. Rather, the objective was to put borderland forces under the central command of the military.

The tsar’s instructions to the Military College gave no clue to either past relations with Don Cossacks or their current situation. A memo sent on March 23, 1721, from the Military College to the College of Foreign Affairs inquires:

In which manner have they [the Don Cossacks] been previously maintained, and, especially, how are their regiments, or companies, or units, comprised? Do they have sets of assigned equipment and what is their current condition? Also, specifically, what are the names of the atamans, and starshiny, and Cossacks, etc.? What kind of cash salary and other provisions are sent to them during war and peace? Is it customary to give them some kind of artillery, and various kinds of armaments, and, if so, what kind specifically? What are the privileges (privilegii) awarded to them prior to this? Other matters pertaining to them and concerning their upkeep, together with [files on] outstanding and unresolved affairs, should be sent to the Military College together with the chancellery specialists who are currently assigned to them.

Aside from its complete ignorance of past practices and future expectations, the document is one of the first, if not the earliest, government documents concerning Don Cossacks to use the term “privileges.” Peter I enshrined the principle of separate deals in Russian law in his General Regulation of 1720 which ordered officials of the new administrative Colleges that he created to administer each people (narod) according to its distinct privileges. Henceforth, Cossacks would be classified as a privileged people within the empire.

While there is no evidence of Cossack opposition to the 1721 decree, soon thereafter they discovered to their great dismay that they had been forgotten in the bureaucratic shuffle. When the Don Cossack delegation was sent to Moscow in winter 1721–22, it discovered that the Military College had not prepared their annual subsidy. For the first time in memory they found themselves running around between several different chanceries and administrative colleges dealing with red tape and trying to collect their traditional allotments. The Petrine process of bureaucratic streamlining had completely botched delivery deadlines that the Muscovite state had managed not to miss since the Time of Troubles. Adding insult to injury,

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61 RGADA, f. 111, kn. 25, l. 10–10b. For the General Regulation see P. A. Syromiatnikov, ed., Zakonodatel’nye akty Petra I (Moscow, 1945), pp. 496–97 and Lindsey Hughes, Russia in the Age of Peter the Great (New Haven, 1998), pp. 109–11, 478, n. 42.
62 Cossack report, RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 1, l. 193.
on May 17, 1722 the Military College announced that henceforth the Don Cossacks would only be allowed to send one delegation a year to Saint Petersburg. Cost-cutting was the culprit. Since a postal system now functioned, they could simply mail their reports instead of coming by the hundreds to be wined, dined, and rewarded at court.

The Cossack response was the closest thing to a spirited defense of ancient customs to ever be penned by a generation of Cossack leaders who were accustomed to publicly acquiescing to government orders. “From olden times we have sent stanitsas,” they wrote, “and were received in the Ambassadorial Chancery and obtained the subsidy there, and never before have we been sent to other chanceries to solicit and receive our subsidy on the basis of [bureaucratic] directives.” The Host outlined how for years Cossacks who had distinguished themselves in service and captives who needed ransom money were sent in delegations to the tsar. Without such delegations, they would not be able to reward bravery and ransom themselves from captivity, hampering their ability to serve, resulting in “privation and poverty.” Their petition concluded boldly, “demanding” that the previous situation be restored. Whether it was due to their cunning argument, powerful patrons, or the imminent outbreak of war in the Caucasus, in fall 1722 the Military College decided to restore the previous situation without alteration.

While their borderland present and frontier past helped them to retain many of their ancient liberties, which were now labeled “privileges,” in 1723 the Cossacks discovered a downside to their position on the border between military and foreign affairs. Upon the death of Vasilii Frolov in May 1723, the Cossacks elected Ivan Matveev (Krasnoshchekov) to succeed him. They wrote to the government requesting a decree confirming the appointment, arguing that “it is impossible to be without a commander here on the border.”

The Military College, which had not yet overseen a transfer of power among the Don Cossacks, was at a loss as to what to do. It wrote to the College of Foreign Affairs asking “how are Don Cossack atamans elected and what kind of decrees by the Imperial Majesty are sent to them to confirm new atamans?” In a wonderful example of bureaucrats passing the buck, the College of Foreign Affairs simply wrote back saying it had no information whatsoever about the matter at hand. The issue was then transferred to the Senate for examination.

61 RGVIA, f. 20, op. t/47, d. 1, l. 185. 64 RGVIA, f. 20, op. t/47, d. 1, l. 193.
62 Clerk’s note, RGVIA, f. 20, op. t/47, d. 1, l. 205. 66 RGVIA, f. 2, op. 1, chast’ 5, sv. 196, l. 167.
63 RGADA, f. III, 1723, d. 1, l. 2.
In a decision signed by Senate secretaries Anisim Maslov, Ivan Kirillov, and Nikifor Kozyrev, the Cossack election of Matveev as ataman was vetoed on June 23, 1723. The reason for the veto would remain the same as the one officially outlined in an order issued to the Host in the name of the tsar on July 9, 1723: Matveev was involved as a defendant in an ongoing investigation between Ottoman and Russian officials on border conflicts. Since he had not yet been cleared of the claims against him, he could not serve as ataman. Cross-border considerations took precedence over the will of the Cossack community.

Instead, Andrei Lopatin was chosen to serve as ataman “until further notice.” With the exception of Emelianov, whose precise background is unknown, the atamans who attained power in the post-Bulavin era were all the sons of men who had distinguished themselves a generation earlier, but this fact only tells part of the story. Prior to the 1720s it was still possible for men born outside the region to be elected to serve as office-holders. It was also possible for those who began serving as rank-and-file Cossacks to rise through the ranks and become Cossack commanders. The term starshina was just an honorary title for office-holders and former office-holders. No legal category or corporate privileges existed until Lopatin’s tenure in office when the Military College began taking steps that would lead to the creation of a hereditary elite.

THE RISE OF THE STARSHINA ELITE

Just as the office of the ataman was shaped by government intervention, in order to have a reliable person in power in Cherkassk in the era after the uprising, the rise of the starshina was stimulated by the power and patronage of the Military College, which began to play the predominant role in deciding Cossack affairs in the last years of Peter’s reign. By the 1720s various Cossack units were serving in far-flung imperial campaigns from Poland to Persia. “Once the Cossack Host had become part of the Russian Empire and was officially classified as an irregular army under
the administration of the Military College,” writes Bruce Menning, “the Don warriors no longer possessed the right or means to demur from any conflict, no matter how distasteful or distant.”73 While participating in these distant campaigns, Cossack leaders interfaced with dozens of officers and generals, making their names and achievements known to officials in Saint Petersburg. These contacts between the Cossacks and the officials of the Military College insured that even the death of Peter I in January 1725 did not disrupt the previous pattern of relations.

For its own purposes, the Military College began restructuring the system of command and reward among the Don Cossack contingents serving in imperial campaigns. Although initially the Cossacks elected their campaign leaders as they had always done previously, by the mid-1720s this was being curtailed by the Military College.74 Instead, Russian generals would appoint Cossacks to command Cossack units on the basis of their past and present achievements in service. For example, Ivan Illovaiskii recorded in a petition that he had served as Esaul of a contingent campaigning along the Volga in 1725, and was “sent by Brigadier Viteranii with a special command against Kalmyk bandits beyond the [fortified] line . . . and for my service the same brigadier awarded me the office of Esaul under the command of campaign Ataman Krasnoshchekov in the Fortress of the Holy Cross.”75 As Russian generals promoted their Cossack protégés, parallel sets of Cossacks could claim to have held similar offices in different campaigns. As a pool of Cossack military leaders who had served in various imperial capacities crystallized, they began to compete with each other for new appointments and commands. This competition created a need for a common denominator against which their service achievements could be measured.

In order to create a uniform standard, some time just before 1730, the Military College created a military rank for Don Cossacks called starshina. This rank was issued only on a case-by-case basis to Cossacks who had distinguished themselves in government service.76 For example, Ivan Ivanovich Frolov, the grandson of Frol Minaev was only “appointed” by the government to the starshina in 1732, just two years before he was chosen to serve as ataman.77 Ivan Illovaiskii, an aspirant to starshina status, submitted

75 Illovaiskii petition, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, l. 65–66.
76 The earliest reference I have located concerns Fedor Ivanov, whose candidacy for starshina status was approved in 1730. His name is mentioned first in the list of precedents appended to Illovaiskii’s petition. RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, l. 66.
77 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, l. 66.
along with his petition to Empress Anna in November 1734 what amounts to a detailed resume of his qualifications: information about his father, all the offices and commands he held since starting service in 1717, names of Russian military leaders he had served with.\textsuperscript{78} The appointment of a carefully selected group of Cossacks to the pool of starshina confirmed an elite status to a small group of pre-screened Cossacks. By 1734, twenty-seven Cossacks had been admitted to the starshina elite, which began appearing as a separate category in all subsequent Cossack population records.\textsuperscript{79}

Within only a generation, the holders of government appointments were becoming a privileged local elite.\textsuperscript{80} By various means they succeeded in transferring their starshina status to their sons, thereby employing imperial patronage to concentrate power in the hands of a small group of people in Cherkassk. Men such as Danilo Efremov, whose grandfather came to the Don as a fugitive in the late seventeenth century, now began to re-style themselves as hereditary nobles. It took only a few short decades for the power structure of the region to be reshaped according to Russian imperial models.

Although government policies helped to transform the office of ataman in the era of Emelianov, in 1734 the highest Cossack office itself was opened to competition from candidates within the government-accredited starshina. Under Ataman Andrei Lopatin (1723–34), Cossacks who aspired to leadership roles did so in the Caucasus or Volga, not on the Don itself. When Ataman Lopatin took ill in November 1734, however, he ordered that his son-in-law, Ivan Ivanovich Frolov, be appointed to serve as ataman upon his death until a decree from the tsar could be issued.\textsuperscript{81} The Cossacks in Cherkassk complied with the dying wish and a krug confirmed the tentative appointment until a decree from the empress was issued.

In winter 1734–35, Empress Anna delegated the authority of selecting a new ataman to the Military College. It was ordered to appoint “Frolov or someone else from among the starshina.”\textsuperscript{82} From among the accredited starshina, four candidates were selected: Ivan Krasnoshchekov, Danilo

\textsuperscript{78} RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, l. 650b.

\textsuperscript{79} The first example I have located that lists starshina as a separate category in population records refers to a Cossack report of 1728, see RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 2, l. 616. In 1733, the starshina numbered twenty-seven individuals, see bureaucratic summary RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, l. 212.

\textsuperscript{80} For an insightful treatment of this process, see Bruce W. Menning “The Emergence of a Military-Administrative Elite in the Don Cossack Land, 1708–1836,” in Walter Pintner and Don Rowney, eds., Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), pp. 130–61.

\textsuperscript{81} Cossack report, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, ll. 1033–35.

\textsuperscript{82} Records of deliberations in the Military College, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, ll. 1037–41.
Efremov, Ivan Vasilievich Frolov, and Ivan Ivanovich Frolov. I. I. Frolov seems to have won because in the words of the Military College decision “the Frolov family has for a long time served diligently and faithfully on the Don in those ataman affairs.”

The fortunes of the Frolovs crested again for a brief time, but the death of Ivan Ivanovich in 1738 would witness the passing of the torch of leadership to a new family. This time the Council of Ministers was asked to appoint an ataman and in spring 1738 only two candidates were seriously considered: Danilo Efremov and Ivan Krasnoshchekov. Both rose to the pinnacle of power outside the Don region. The former as a special representative of the government to the Kalmyks and the latter as a commander in the Caucasus.

The choice fell to Efremov, possibly because he was better connected to Andrei Osterman, who headed the Council of Ministers. The decision to appoint Efremov, signed by Ministers Andrei Osterman and Aleksei Cherkaskoi, made it clear that both candidates were considered capable for the job. As a consolation prize, Krasnoshchekov was proclaimed a brigadier in the Russian army and awarded an annual salary of seven hundred rubles, which was roughly two thousand times more than the paltry share of the annual subsidy received by a rank-and-file Cossack.

On March 4, 1738, the empress signed a decree appointing Efremov ataman and accorded him the honor of being titled ataman of the Host, not “acting” (nakaznoi) ataman. Efremov became the first ataman to be appointed without any participation whatsoever from the krug in Cherkassk. Danilo’s father, Efrem Petrov, was one of the only Cossack office-holders to escape from the ill-fated Dolgorukii deportation mission of 1707, for which he was executed immediately after Bulavin’s coup. A man who had lived most of his life haunted by Bulavin’s actions would now assume leadership of a Host shaped by the legacy of Petr Emelianov in the post-Bulavin era.

Danilo Efremov, who came of age during Emelianov’s administration, eventually outdistanced and surpassed his predecessor. Bruce Menning noted that the Efremovs treated the Don as “their own satrapy” and their

83 RGVIA, f. 13, op. t/107, d. 3, l. 1060.
84 Bureaucratic summary of their service records, RGVIA, f. 13, op. t/107, sv. 6, l. 346.
85 This paragraph is based on RGADA, f. 177 kabinet ministrov, 1736, d. 96, ll. 19–21. In 1736, Osterman wrote to Efremov to request his assistance in obtaining horses and Kalmyk slaves for the court in Saint Petersburg.
86 Military College report, RGVIA, f. 13, op. t/107, sv. 6, l. 411–4110b.
87 RGVIA, f. 13, op. t/107, sv. 6, l. 411.
88 L. M. Savelov, Rod Efremovykh (Saint Petersburg, 1900), p. 3.
period in power produced “a spiraling wave of corruption, mismanagement, and chicanery in the Don administration.”\textsuperscript{89} A descendant of Efremov claimed that an inventory conducted upon Danilo’s death revealed that he owned several chests filled with silver and gold coins, trunks full of furs and precious cloths, over 10,000 horses, slaves of various nationalities, and a number of mills and \textit{khutora} (farms/ranches) throughout the Don region.\textsuperscript{90} The coins alone were reported to total over 500,000 rubles, an amount which — without any adjustment for value fluctuation — represented about half the annual expenditures of the entire Muscovite state around the time Frol Minaev first assumed the office of ataman!

Whether the Efremovs consciously modeled their management of the Host on precedents or whether they just played by the rules as they had been rewritten by Emelianov, his name would be forgotten as their names would be remembered by future generations as the paragon of Cossack power and corruption. As a result of the Emelianov era, the relationship between people and power in the Don region was forever altered. The ataman was no longer elected by his fellow Cossacks, but instead became an agent of the tsar. He owed both his appointment and his power to the patronage ties he cultivated with imperial officials. For ordinary Cossacks opportunities for upward mobility all but disappeared as a result of the government decision to grant seals of approval to a group of leaders it christened as the \textit{starshina}. When all attempts to direct government attention to the endemic graft and corruption of Cherkassk officials repeatedly failed, popular participation was curtailed and real power came to be concentrated in fewer hands. For those in the region not fortunate enough to possess the privilege of being born into the Cossack community, the protection of the powerful became the only way to avoid exploitation and deportation.

\textsuperscript{89} Menning, “The emergence,” p. 154.
\textsuperscript{90} The figures are from A. Filonov, \textit{Ocherki Dona} (Saint Petersburg, 1859), pp. 103–4.
Although by most accounts the Russian Empire never fully succeeded in turning “peasants into Russians,” it did succeed in shaping a Don Cossack people that was fiercely devoted to the Romanov dynasty and committed to a multi-ethnic Rossiia in which some peoples were more equal than others. Precisely because the boundaries of Don Cossack identity shifted so dramatically in only a few decades, the region provides a compelling case study for examining the construction of social identity and the creation of ethnic boundaries. While prior to 1705 the government played a predominant role in this process, suggesting that state intervention was a crucial ingredient in boundary creation and ethnic exclusivity, afterwards much of the initiative passed to Cossack leaders in Cherkassk. As in the modern world, a dynamic developed between documentation and deportation, ethnic exclusivity and economic exploitation. This chapter explores how and why the Cossacks began to codify, verify, and document individual identity in the Don region.¹

Previous studies of eighteenth-century imperial policies have not fully recognized the persistence of a territory conceptualized as Rus’ within the Russian Empire nor analyzed the extent to which early imperial Russia was comprised of separate and distinct legal spaces. Marc Raeff argued that officials sought to create “a uniform pattern of administration throughout the empire.”² James Cracraft outlined the parameters of a Petrine hegemony theory that would not “tolerate diversity in unity.”³ In contrast, Andrei Ivanovich Viazemsky, a Russian official who was active in late

¹ For comparative examples of “the practices through which individual identity has been inscribed, codified, verified, and documented by official institutions in the modern world,” see Jane Caplan and John Torpey, Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World (Princeton, 2001), p. 3.
² Marc Raeff, Imperial Russia 1682–1825: The Coming of Age of Modern Russia (New York, 1971), p. 44.
eighteenth-century efforts to create a new law code for the empire, expressed a different view, which was grounded in practice rather than theory: “The extraordinary vastness of the Russian empire creates many difficulties in systematizing civil law... the diversity of climates, the diversity of faiths and the diversity of peoples, many of whom have preserved their own laws and privileges, impede a single law that is manifest everywhere in the empire.”

In an age in which nearly nine out of ten residents of the Rus’ metropole lived under a raw deal enshrined in the Law Code of 1649 – serfdom, restricted movement, direct taxation, forced labor levies, and state-sponsored alcohol sales quotas – a diverse range of communities within the empire lived under distinct juridical regimes or separate deals with the imperial government. The territorial juxtaposition within the empire of an underprivileged Rus’ metropole (the core districts of the Muscovite state at the time of the Law Code of 1649) and privileged spaces such as the Don, Hetmanate, the Baltic provinces, and parts of Siberia, explains why thousands of Russians would migrate in an attempt to acquire new identities and new juridical statuses. At the same time, a massive influx of Russian serfs across imperial boundaries between Rus’ and the parts of the empire administered under separate deals could threaten both the elites of central districts and the privileged populations of the imperial periphery. Imperial boundary maintenance became a requisite for preserving the privileges of both at the expense of ordinary Russians.

**Defining the Don in Opposition to Rus’**

Russian historians such as N. A. Mininkov were content to explain emerging boundaries between Don Cossacks and ordinary, Russian subjects of the tsar as a result of the government creation of a Cossack estate (soslovie) in 1614, but such an explanation has no grounding in the sources from the period. The soslovie concept did not exist in Russia until the early nineteenth century. Furthermore the soslovie paradigm allowed

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4 S. D. Sheremet’ev, ed., Arkhiv kniazia Viazemskago (Saint Petersburg, 1881), p. 27.
5 For Cossacks as a soslovie see N. A. Mininkov, “Soslovno-pravovoe polozhenie donskogo kazachestva v XVII veke,” in Izvestiia severo-kavkazskikh nauchnykh tsentrov vysshei shkoly 3 (1983), 39–43. Marx described them as an estate in his musings on Razin, see Molodaia Gvardiia 1 (1926), 107.
6 Gregory Freeze has argued that the concept of soslovie only emerged in the nineteenth century. Hence, its application to any prior phenomenon is anachronistic. See Gregory L. Freeze, “The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History,” The American Historical Review 91: 1 (1986), 11–36. On the later development of soslovie and ethnicity, see Charles Steinwedel, “Making Social Groups One Person at a Time: The Identification of Individuals by Estate, Religious Confection,
nationalist historians to evade the problems of ambiguous identity inherent in the Don Cossacks’ situation. This unsuccessful approach made the Cossacks border guards long before any borders were delineated and an “estate” within Russia a full century before they had actually been incorporated into the empire. This approach also ignored the problematic relationship between Cossacks and Rus’, the ethnic core of the empire.

Cossacks could identify with the Romanov dynasty and embrace the imperial idea of the multi-ethnic empire Rossiia — indeed their reports stressed their role in defending Russian imperial borders (Rossiiskie granitsy) — but for them Rus’ represented a separate social order prevailing beyond the patrols and checkpoints of the Belgorod line and its later extensions. A Russian ethnic identity was unattractive for Cossacks because it signified an underprivileged condition of enserfment and servility to local lords that many of their ancestors had rejected. Moreover, to be identified as Russian in the imperial system carried no particular advantages, but to be identified with service to the state and dynasty conveyed tangible benefits. Andreas Kappeler relates: “the Russian government as a rule did not favour the Russian lower classes . . . it not infrequently permitted their economic and legal position to be inferior to that of the non-Russians, whose social status quo and privileges were usually guaranteed.”  

In order to preserve their separate deal with the Romanov dynasty, which guaranteed their personal freedom, immunity from direct taxation, and local autonomy, the Don Cossack community chose to disassociate itself from the larger, unfree, Russian population to its north.

The starting point for this new analysis of Cossack identity is the fact that when the Don Cossacks concluded a deal with the new Romanov dynasty in the early seventeenth century they were an open multi-ethnic fraternity which replenished its ranks through in-migration. A little over a century later, they constituted a community in which membership was primarily acquired through birth and marriage. To facilitate this shift the Don Cossacks constructed an ethnic identity.

Before turning to a discussion of how and why Don Cossacks became an ethnic community, it is necessary to explain the use of the term “ethnic.” Like most communities that are described by academic taxonomists — indigenous and foreign — as ethnic groups, the Don Cossacks did not have an exact equivalent of the term ethnicity, but they did have close

and Ethnicity in Later Imperial Russia,” in Caplan and Torpey, Documenting Individual Identity, pp. 67–83.

equivalents derived from terms pertaining to birth such as “local-born,” “native” and Cossack “by nature” (urozhenets / prirodnij / prirodoi). They came to recognize themselves as a distinct group and, just as importantly, the Russian government categorized them as such.

Long before Cossacks limited entrance to their community, they recognized a distinction between themselves and Russians, who formed the most significant, but not exclusive, parent group of the Don population. This rejection of a Russian identity makes little sense if one prefers to privilege presumed facts of common language or religion over acts of identification by the actors themselves. But all contradictions disappear when laundry lists of cultural criteria are dropped in favor of social anthropologist Fredrik Barth’s proposition that the existence of an ethnic boundary “defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.”

Ethnicity is best described as a process of boundary creation and maintenance. Barth writes:

First, it is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them. In other words, categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact, and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories. Secondly, one finds that stable, persisting, and often vitally important, social relations are maintained across such boundaries, and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses.

This theoretical lens would suggest that dichotimization was promoted by intense, prolonged interaction between Cossacks and Russians, who lived in different administrative jurisdictions and possessed different statuses vis-à-vis the state.

The dichotomy between Cossacks and burlaks resulted from the collective exclusion of outsiders by Cossacks who had put down roots in the region prior to the 1680s. This is the kind of ethnic boundary process that Donald Horowitz has linked to status change within a social hierarchy: “A portion of a caste may find itself more prosperous than the remainder and then proceed to sever its ties in the interest of advancing its collective position, thereby producing two groups where before there was one.”

In order to maintain Cossack status, which was linked to receipt

9 Ibid., pp. 9–10.
of the subsidy from the tsar and collective liberties guaranteed by the
government, the Don Cossack community chose to disassociate itself from
the larger community identified as Russian. As the boundaries of the Cos-
sack community were officially closed to Russians, juridical differences
were increasingly expressed in ethnic terms.

The fact that the Don Host could write to those under its jurisdi-
tion in 1705 saying “You are categorically forbidden to accept Russians
(russkikh liudei) into your community and are not to receive a single
individual,” leaves little doubt that a sharp dichotomy was developing
between Don Cossacks and a category defined as Russian. After all, the
document consciously employed ethnic terminology rather than social
terminology (“people of all ranks,” “serfs,” “fugitives,” etc.).

In view of the evidence presented above, it should come as no sur-
prise that beginning in the early eighteenth century the Don Cossacks are
described as a people (narod). For the Cossacks themselves and Russian
observers, the Don Cossacks were not an integrated part of Russian soci-
ety, but instead represented one of a continuum of borderland peoples. In
September 1705 a Don Cossack leader could proclaim “We Don Cossacks
are rewarded and favored above other peoples by the tsar.” “Among such a
free people (vol’nom narode),” wrote Vasilii Frolov in 1717, “it is not without
difficulty to get by without a decree from the tsar.” Since the Imperial gov-
ernment had not yet adopted the term (soslovie) that would later be applied
to Don Cossacks, their Host was still treated as one of several imperial
populations living under separate deals with the tsar. For example, in 1734
the Military College, which was still cutting its teeth on certain questions
of Cossack administration, wrote to the College of Foreign Affairs asking
if in issuing passports for foreign travel the Don Cossack Host “should
be equated with Malorossiia or other such subject borderland peoples of
the Russian empire (poddanye Rossiskoi imperii pogranichnye narody).” Early
ethnic classification schemes often listed them as a separate Slavic
group and it was not until the nineteenth century that Russian observers
initiated the intellectual privatization of the Cossacks for Russian national
narratives.15

11 Trudy Donskago voiskovago statisticheskago komiteta (1867), vol. 1, p. 67. Various other documents of
the era invoke ethnicity. See N. S. Chaev, ed., Bulavinovskoe vosstanie (Moscow, 1934), pp. 118–19 and
the examples below.
12 V. D. Sukhorukov, Istoriicheskoe opisanie zemli voiska Donskago (Novocherkassk, 1869), p. 354.
13 RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 151, l. 3630ob. 14 See RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 2, l. 4330ob.
15 Kappeler, The Russian Empire, p. 50. See also Ivan I. Bezgloff, “A Russian Document on Cossacks,” in Cossack Quarterly 1 (1962), 11–18. The concept of intellectual privatization was introduced by
One of the primary factors that contributed to ethnogenesis was the social transformation of the Don region. While outsiders as a group were excluded from the emerging Cossack community, individuals could still attain membership. This points to a process of naturalization that operated through kinship and/or fictive kinship ties (i.e. adoption by the community as a whole). Marriage functioned as one of the few remaining avenues through which newcomers could join the Cossack community.

If fugitives and migrants could manage to graft their families on to established Cossack kinship networks, their position in the region could be made more secure. For example, a peasant named Pron’ka Ivanov complained to church authorities in 1693 that his father-in-law Evdokim had fled to the Don region and had convinced Ivanov’s wife Varvara to join them; upon arriving in the Don region Evdokim married off his married daughter to a Don Cossack. Similarly in 1727 a servitor with holdings in near the Tambov region named Nikita Serbin complained to government officials that dozens of his serfs had fled and were living in the Don region. His reports indicated that many had successfully resettled on the Don by marrying into Cossack communities.

A Cossack marriage contract that I discovered in the regional archive in Voronezh suggests that marriage could be regulated to ensure that outsiders could not automatically claim the privileges of group membership. Because it is the only surviving document of its kind, it deserves to be presented in full.

February 7207 [1699], I, Fedor, son of Ivan, take as son-in-law Iosif, son of Iakim, of Sirotinskaia stanitsa into my household for a period of residence of ten years and [promise him] a one-third share. And if I, Fedor, son of Ivan, am no longer alive in ten years and if my wife remarries, Iosif shall take the third part [of Fedor’s holdings]. And if he doesn’t stay a full ten years, nothing will be given [to him]. And if I, Fedor, begin to drive my son-in-law, Iosif, out of my house, Iosif shall complain to good people. And if Iosif goes to Rus’, his wife and family shall not be given to him and the shirt shall be taken off his back in accordance with this agreement and a Cossack verdict. He is not to hang around in taverns or to play zern’ [a form of gambling]. And if he starts to drink heavily, we shall take from him one hundred rubles without legal proceedings, and his hand will be smashed and his eye will be put out with a sharp object and he will be sent away. And being sent away, his wife shall not be given to him. Present at this agreement were marriage-broker and witnesses Savelei Trokhimov, Peter Grigoriev, Peter Naumtsev, Ivan

17 Serbin’s petition to the tsar, RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 1, ll. 304–05.
Imperial boundaries

Stepanov, Fedor Shutov. And this record was written by Karpushka, son of Semen, on the date recorded above.\textsuperscript{18}

It is striking that this document has little in common with marriage contracts known from Russia at that time. There is no mention of a dowry (the sine qua non of Russian pre-nuptial riadnye zapisi), no wedding date is set, and the bride’s name is not even mentioned! In fact, the Russian official who inspected it in 1701 literally couldn’t believe his eyes when he read it, since it lacked the attributes of a Russian marriage contract. To dispel any doubts, both parties testified that it was the authentic marriage agreement.\textsuperscript{19} The document is as much a code of conduct as a marriage contract. A Cossack could impose stringent limits on his son-in-law’s actions before the latter could hope to claim any tangible property. In order to fully join the household, a trial period of life within the community was required and behavior was circumscribed to insure adherence to communal standards.

This document also hints at how marriage could serve as a method of integrating outsiders into Cossack communities. Circumstantial evidence points to the fact that Iosif’s roots lay outside the Don region. The provision that clearly prohibits him from going to Rus’ with his family is crucial, since established Cossacks would have virtually no legitimate reason for moving to central Russia. Since Sirotinskaia was a community near Cherkassk, going to Rus’ was an action that would take considerable effort. Moreover, there would be no need to include such a provision in an agreement between two local families. The nature of the agreement makes it clear that Iosif has no house of his own. While Fedor has clear recourse to a Cossack verdict, i.e. direct appeal to the assembly, in order to enforce the agreement Iosif must seek the intercession of “good people” and risks being sent away.

The provisions of such a document could be used by Cossack parents to insure advantages for themselves when dealing with suitors from among the resident migrant population. To endure the rigorous trial period in the in-laws’ household most probably meant that a groom would be assured of acceptance into the community and eventually could hope to become a Cossack. For the community, represented in this case by the witnesses, the act of marriage was a first step towards integration into a Cossack household. Subsequent conduct would establish whether or not an outsider merited admission into the Cossack ranks.

The transformation in family life that took place during the course of the late seventeenth and first decades of the eighteenth centuries mirrored

\textsuperscript{18} GAVO, f. 5, op. 1, d. 369, l. 16.  \textsuperscript{19} GAVO, f. 5, op. 1, d. 369, l. l. 17.
the changes taking place in other spheres of Cossack life. As more settled forms of subsistence such as ranching, agriculture, and commercial fishing replaced raiding, more stable patterns of family and community life replaced earlier forms of cohabitation. By the first decades of the eighteenth century Cossack families were becoming the rule not the exception. Already in 1700, the Don Cossacks wrote the tsar that they could not send a huge force to Azov in case of a Tatar invasion, stating “we have homes, and wives and children, and it is time we protect ourselves.” By 1733, a government investigation of Don residents who volunteered for resettling along the Tsaritsyn fortified line revealed that approximately 80 percent were married or had been married.

The fact that great numbers of Don Cossacks acquired membership in the community by birth necessitated a shift in how group identity was conceptualized. Whereas previously Cossack society was predominately male, as gender ratios evened out women also became bearers and transmitters of a Cossack identity. Though women could not join the military fraternity, they participated in the creation of community. Cossack daughters transmitted their Cossack status to their children. For example, in 1735 eighteen-year-old Ivan Fedorov, whose father was a fugitive from Voronezh and whose mother was Marfa “a Cossack daughter born in the Don,” was registered as a Cossack. A Cossack document from the mid-eighteenth century could proclaim concerning a group of men and women “they are all of Cossack nature” (vse kazatskoi prirody). Hence, the Don Host came to constitute both a male military force dedicated to serving the tsar and an ethnic community that embraced both genders.

DOCUMENTING INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN THE DON REGION

While it is clear that Cossack communities were regulating movement across communal boundaries well before the eighteenth century, the dichotomy between Cossacks and in-migrants was only given clear documentary expression in the late years of Peter’s reign, which ushered in a new era of documentary controls. Petrine passport policies predate similar efforts in Western Europe by decades, but for some reason their modern dimensions have not been given serious attention. Andreas Fahrmeir mistakenly identified revolutionary France as the place that created “the

21 Statistics compiled by the Military College, RGVIA, op 1/107, sv. 15, d. 14, l. 196, 6000b.
22 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 3, l. 1084.
first modern passport regulations, which obliged all travelers to carry state-issued official identity documents with them at all times.”

Like modern forms of state documentation of individual identity Petrine policies and their local applications in the Don region were designed to “define who belongs and who does not, who may come and go, and to make these distinctions intelligible and enforceable.”

The first identity documents in the Don region were issued not to Cossacks, but migrants. Priest Fedor Olimpiev’s second round of allegations filed in 1718 indicates that under Ataman Petr Emelianov and his successors officials sent to find fugitives often extended illegal protection to those who were willing to pay bribes. He writes:

The atamans and starshiny send to the northern towns and all towns to search for all kinds of in-migrants (prishlykh), and dragoons, and soldiers. The investigators sent by them take bribes from the stanitsas, and in-migrants, and give them permission to live in the gorodki and they issue residence letters (zhilye pis’ma) to others.

In-migrants lived in legal limbo, with no rights, but could obtain documents indicating that they were under the tacit protection of the Cherkassk establishment.

Although there is little evidence of any massive waves of migration to the Don comparable to those of the late seventeenth century, outside the region a perception still existed among Russian officials that the Don was a juridical void into which fugitives could escape. For example, a decree from 1714 expresses ironic satisfaction that “not all peasants have fled to the Don or Siberia, and, thank God, the plague has not hit.” Since desertion and clandestine migration were an empire-wide phenomenon, however, they merited an empire-wide solution.

One gets the impression from Petrine police decrees that all of Russia was on the move, trying to avoid obligations to the state, but the Don was no longer the only front line in the fight against illegal migration. In order to combat widespread evasion of service by conscripts and desertion by soldiers and sailors, several decrees issued by Peter in 1718–19 tightened restrictions on movement in Russia. The famous passport decree issued in

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26 RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 56ob.
27 M. Klochkov, Naselenie Rossi pri Petre Velikom po perepisiam togo vremeni (Saint Petersburg, 1911), p. 229.
October 1719 proclaimed: “no one is to travel anywhere from town to town, or village to village, without travel or transit letters, but each is required to obtain from his superiors a passport or letter of leave.” In all but name, however, the passport regulation repackaged Muscovite practices. The new ingredient, however, was universal enforcement. The decree was printed and ordered to be read aloud several times anywhere and everywhere that people congregated throughout the empire: in churches, markets, public squares, and at trade fairs.

In June 1718, the tsar made it a criminal offense for urban residents to allow transients “without proper identification (bez iavnego svidetel’stva)” to spend the night in their homes or businesses. The penalty for extending hospitality to the undocumented ranged from public beating to exile to confiscation of property, while transients were to be returned to their legitimate places of residence.

In 1719, in order to stem the tide of deserters, imperial military officials were instructed to enforce passport regulations. “If anyone in a town or district or along a road appears without any kind of written attestation/identification (bez vsiakogo pis’mennago svidetel’stva),” the tsar and Senate declared, “they are to be taken into custody as suspicious persons.” Military officials were also authorized to use torture in cases in which a “true identification” (poddlinnoe svidetel’stvo) could not be readily established. The new decrees aimed to rejuvenate the old restrictions on movement, but seem to have had the same mixed results as their Muscovite precedents. The new emphasis on identity papers, however, gave the powerful a new lever for control over individuals apprehended in the act of moving without authorization. Henceforth, state officials in Russia could demand and inspect identity documents from anyone on the move. In the words of a proverb that can still be heard in Russia: “Bez bumazhki ty kakashka, a s bumazhkoi chelovek” (Without a piece of paper you’re a piece of crap, but with a piece of paper you’re a person).

Cossack leaders may have learned from their patron Admiral Apraksin of the renewed importance of bureaucratic paper. In 1717 an official in Voronezh recommended to Apraksin that the only way to stop the Cossacks from harboring fugitives would be to create registers with names of all Cossacks and to simultaneously force the return of “migrants and fugitives

29 PSZ 5: 577.
30 PSZ 5: 775.
31 On the subsequent importance of passports, see Mervyn Matthews, The Passport Society: Controlling Movement in Russia and the USSR (Boulder, Colo., 1993).
from Russian towns” to their places of origin. No action was taken at that time by Apraksin, but soon thereafter Cossacks began to introduce documentary controls of their own.

In 1720, Ataman Vasilii Frolov instituted the first Don Cossack census. It seems apropos that the final bureaucratic step necessary for closing the Cossack community was initiated by the son of Frol Minaev. Decades earlier Frol commenced the process of closing the Cossack fraternity to outsiders by denying them shares of the subsidy. Now Vasilii would complete the juridical process of closing the community by counting, recording, and categorizing the population of the region.

The creation of the first Cossack census records was carried out in November 1720. The aim of this survey was to record the entire male population of the region and establish accurate lists of Cossacks and non-Cossacks legally resident in the region. Lists of the former would be used to facilitate service to the tsar and lists of the latter would be used to establish the right to continued residence in the region. Whereas Cossack liberty was traditionally symbolized by the fact that the population was “not recorded, but is free/unrestrained,” in the imperial era the Cossack books would form the foundation of Cossack imperial service and privileges.

Due to the fact that the earliest record books have not survived intact, it is only possible to use partial versions to reconstruct the process of compiling them. Each male resident was required to present to representatives of the Host evidence or testimony: (1) verifying his identity, (2) establishing his residence in the region prior to 1712, and (3) information on whether he had received shares of the government subsidy in grain, money, or gunpowder. On the basis of the information submitted, individuals would be recorded in one of two books. Those who could provide verification of all three points were recorded in lists of “salaried Cossacks” (called spiski or reestry zhalovannykh kazakov), while those who could verify only the first two points were recorded as “resident burlaks” (ozimeinye burlaki, literally burlaks who had wintered in the region). The latter could continue to

32 For the memorandum to Apraksin, see RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 151, ll. 47–49.
33 Since there are no copies of the Cossack books preserved in government archives, it would seem that they were created by and for the Cossack leaders. A case from the 1730s calls the books, which were kept in Cherkassk, “testimonies given to Ataman Vasilii Frolov.” RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, l. 409.
35 RGADA, f. 111, 1685, d. 5, l. 7.
36 Fragments from one of the Cherkassk stanitsas surveyed in November 1720 are preserved in SFIRI, f. 238 (N. P. Likhachev), op. 2, d. 224/61, ll.1–6. For comparable examples, see Markov, “Krestiane na Donu,” pp. 29–30.
reside in the region, but were not to be considered for service or given shares of the annual subsidy.

A list of Cossacks from Cherkassk demonstrates that in compiling records testimony would be publicly verified by individual Cossacks or the whole community. For example, Kuz’ma Ostaf’ev testified that he was an “old Cossack” and that he was born in Cherkassk, a fact that was sufficient to include him in the list of salaried Cossacks. A burlak named Fedor Nagaev, who was born in Saratov, testified that he had arrived in Cherkassk twenty-three years earlier, but he was asked to provide a witness:

It was ordered to investigate him and they sent the Esaul of the stanitsa, Ivan Vasil’ev, from the meeting . . . to Ivan Silivanov to ask about his [Ostaf’ev’s] time of migration (o skhodstve). Ivan Silivanov said, upon kissing the cross, that his in-migration was around the time that Luk’ian Maksimov led a sea campaign.

Another entry suggests that Cossack identity existed parallel to the process of enrollment in Cossack service: “Burlak Grigorei Chiuchiuy, old-resident Cossack (starozhiloi kazak), and the whole stanitsa knows about him. He is currently not at home, but is tending the herds of the Host.” This individual, whose activity was herding cattle, not participating in battle, was classified as a burlak, even though his Cossack ethnic identity could be verified by the whole community.

The Cossack lists and record books instituted by Vasilii Frolov were intended to give final definition to a Don Cossack community that officially would no longer be open to Russians. After the names of all legitimate Cossacks were verified and codified, the task of excluding outsiders became easier. The primacy of written records kept in Cherkassk would prevail over any large-scale local initiatives to transgress the boundaries of group inclusion/exclusion. At the same time, all who were recorded in the books of Cossack life gained insurance against any confusion that might arise over their Cossack status. In 1728, for example, a Cossack named Potap Nikitov was able to avoid deportation by obtaining a copy of the skazka (testimony) about him in the Cossack books preserved in Cherkassk. Through the process of testifying and recording information about each and every individual, the Cossacks community now endorsed a form of adscribed identity. Group membership was defined by documentary inclusion of all eligible individuals in a central database.

37 SFIRI, f. 238 (N. P. Likhachev), op. 2, d. 224/61, l. 5.
38 SFIRI, f. 238 (N. P. Likhachev), op. 2, d. 224/61, l. 4–40b.
39 SFIRI, f. 238 (N. P. Likhachev), op. 2, d. 224/61, l. 1
40 The case is mentioned in RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 3, l. 409.
The creation of Cossack population records was designed to protect the insider advantages of Cossack sons against in-migrants, but, as is the case wherever boundaries are created, documentary barriers could still be circumvented. Soon the privileged category of a Cossack identity became something that could be acquired in shadowy dealings in the world of fugitives and undocumented in-migrants. A peasant from Voronezh named Nikita Pashkovskii testified in 1727 that a Cossack named Aidar Pakhomov convinced him to migrate to the Don. “Following his instructions,” testified Pashkovskii, “I called myself Nikifor Pakhomov, Cossack son.” Using this identity, assumed from a dead, but recorded, relative of his Cossack patron, he was able to live in various communities.  

Similarly a fugitive named Ivan Lukianov testified that in 1725 he was taken under the protection of a member of the winter delegation. The Cossack brought him to Cherkassk and by unreported means “registered him as a Cossack son in the Cossack books in the stanitsa meeting-house.” In 1727 a landowner named Nikita Serbin from the Shatsk district complained to the Military College that over the past decade two-thirds of his serfs had fled to the Don, effectively bankrupting him. In hopes of having them returned, somehow he obtained — perhaps by sending a peasant to infiltrate the network of former serfs — detailed information on where over thirty individuals and heads of families had resettled in various corners of the Don region. His detective work revealed that “many have changed their names and surnames and others, conspiring criminally, falsely call themselves Poles.”

Due to the fact that citizens of Poland were not subject to Russian serf codes, feigning a Polish identity was a powerful way for Russian serfs to assert freedom. In an age when written identity documents increasingly were used to determine eligibility for deportation, the act of rejecting a Russian identity became a crucial survival skill for the undocumented. Migrants chose to assert membership in a more advantageous category. In addition to changing the old names that, if discovered, could betray them as in-migrants from Rus’ (prishlyi s Rusi, skhodets s Rusi), often they simply claimed they did not know anything about the circumstances of their birth. In an investigation of Don residents who signed up for government service on the Tsaritsyn line in the 1730s, the category “unknown” was the most common response given by respondents who were not born in the Don region or Ukraine when asked about their background.

41 Military college investigation, RGVIA, f. 20, op. 47, d. 18, l. 394.
42 Military college investigation, RGVIA, f. 20, op. 47, d. 18, l. 405ob.
43 RGVIA, f. 20, op. 47, d. 1, l. 305.
44 Lists of names and notations on origins, RGVIA, op. t/107, sv. 15, d. 14, ll. 8–35.
an identity that clearly had a negative valence, came with great risks. Those
who “criminally conspired” to forget where they were born or to call them-
selves kazaki and poliaki realized that the very fact of having been born in
Rus’ made them at best suspect, and at worst subject to deportation.

DEPORTATION AND THE BOUNDARIES OF LEGITIMACY

Although bribery and/or rejection of a Russian origin provided some form
of protection for in-migrants, the Damocles sword of deportation con-
tinued to hang over the heads of all who arrived after 1696, the cut-off
date for legitimacy established by the Russian government. As a result of
landowner Nikita Serbin’s fact-finding and petition described above, the
Military College decided to carry out an inquiry into the fugitive problem.45
A report solicited from the governor of Voronezh revealed that government
gate-keepers were incapable of stemming peasant flight. According to the
Voronezh Chancery in some months over one hundred peasants were cap-
tured at or near government migration checkpoints (zastavy). While not
all were headed for Cossack settlements, many nevertheless managed to
get through by traveling in the open steppe around the checkpoints, which
were placed on major roads. As a result of these reports, in winter 1727–28,
the Military College decided to conduct what the Cossacks later termed a
“deportation (vysylka) from the Don of migrants from Rus’.”

When Aleksei Tarakanov, the commander of the Tranzhament fort built
by order of Peter I, arrived in Cherkassk and presented his orders to deport
all who had settled since 1695, the Cossacks were caught off guard.46
After the Bulavin rebellion, under the protection of Petr Emelianov, large
numbers of outsiders were accepted into Cossack communities in order to
overcome “de-population.”47 Now, the entire resettlement process, which
was carried out off the horizon of the government’s field of administrative
vision, could be undone by decree.

For the first time since before the raskol, Cossack leaders would unite to
defend the cause of in-migrants. The krug decided to petition the tsar not
to deport anyone who settled before 1712. The motivation was simple:

It is impossible to deport from before 1712 because among those [who would be
sent away] are elders and all of the best people . . . and if those [Cossacks who

45 This paragraph is based on RGVIA, f. 20, op. 47, d. 1, ll. 310–11. The phrase “vysylka z Donu prishlykh
liudei s Rusi” is from Cossack testimony, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 3, l. 408 ob.
46 For Tarakanov's report see RGADA, f. 20, d. 54, chast' 1, ll. 8–21.
47 This repopulation of the region is also demonstrated by biographies of hundreds of individuals
reported in RGVIA, op. 1/107, sv. 15, d. 14, ll. 159–95.
settled between 1695 and 1712 and their descendants] are sent away, all of our Cossack yurts will become empty and there will be no one left to defend borders.\textsuperscript{48}

Neither a longing for a return to ancient traditions nor an abiding affinity for new arrivals explains the decision. Instead pragmatism dictated unanimity. Hundreds of Cossacks were technically subject to deportation, and, if the letter of the law were followed and the progeny of one fugitive parent were to be classified as fugitives, perhaps thousands could be uprooted. Tarakanov reported to Saint Petersburg that as a result of investigations in Cherkassk over one hundred families of “atamans’ son-in-laws and other distinguished Cossacks are subject to deportation, which many are crying about.”\textsuperscript{49} Tarakanov also discovered that the two most influential men in Cossack politics after Bulavin, Petr Emelianov and Vasilii Frolov, had married their daughters to men who had arrived after 1695.\textsuperscript{50} The “corporate,” “hereditary” starshina that Soviet historians so loved to hate was found to contain many people who had migrated to the Don and intermarried with Cossacks in the post-Bulavin era.

In spite of the fact that fugitive laws had been on the books for decades, the Cossacks resisted sending back fugitives who had married into local kinship networks. In defiance of the article of the Law Code of 1649 mandating that children born to fugitives be returned to their parents’ masters, the Cossacks refused to give up anyone who had one Cossack parent, male or female.\textsuperscript{51} In 1728 they petitioned the government requesting that in deporting fugitives an exception be made for those who had married Cossacks.\textsuperscript{52} This would only leave vulnerable those who had failed to establish local kinship ties.

In October 1728, the Supreme Privy Council issued a decree in the name of Peter II granting the Cossacks a concession.\textsuperscript{53} Rather than deport those who arrived after 1695, the government would deport all who arrived after 1710, but not 1712 as the Cossacks had requested. The decree also warned the Host that if the Cossacks harbored fugitives in the future, they should fear the tsar’s most “severe wrath”. Although the specter of Ataman Emelianov’s shady dealing had come back to haunt his Cossack subordinates and associates, the horses, fish, and lemons he sent to his imperial patrons may have had a hand in their redemption. Among the

\textsuperscript{48} RGADA, f. 20, d. 54, chast’ 1, l. 8. \textsuperscript{49} RGADA, f. 20, d. 54, chast’ 1, l. 9.
\textsuperscript{50} RGADA, f. 20, d. 54, chast’ 1, l. 9.
\textsuperscript{51} Mentioned in a letter from Military College to the Host, RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 1, ll. 233–233ob.
\textsuperscript{52} RGADA, f. 20, d. 54, l. 9.
\textsuperscript{53} This paragraph is based on the text of the decree RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 18, l. 544ob–545 and the council resolution f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 14, sv. 15, ll. 585ob–586.
members of the Privy Council who took part in the deliberations were V. V. Dolgorukii, the military official who reinstated Emelianov to power in 1710, a date that curiously coincides with the new cut-off date for legitimacy, and F. M. Apraksin, the ataman’s political patron and “lord of many years.” Also included in the deliberations was Gavril Golovkin, who had scuttled investigation of priest Fedor Olimpiev’s extensive reports on the fugitive problem in the Don region in 1718. Old patronage ties to the Petrine establishment seem to have paid off one last time, on the eve of the political shake-ups that took place after the death of Peter II.

The deportation was carried out according to the new guidelines, causing somewhat disappointing results for Tarakanov. Only a few hundred fugitives were rounded up and marched under armed guard back to Russian districts. Tarakanov suspected that the Cossacks employed faulty witnesses who had “backdated their arrival, allowing them to stay on the Don.” He was probably correct. A few years later an unrelated investigation revealed that in 1728 an “in-migrant from Rus’” avoided deportation by bribing two Cossack scribes with gifts totaling twenty-three rubles (almost two years worth of wages). Tarakanov’s totals were also hampered by the fact that nearly half the Don Cossacks were away serving in military campaigns outside the region and could not be questioned about their origins.

In order to facilitate military service in far corners of the empire, Don Cossack communities were becoming bureaucratically mobilized to an unparalleled degree. Though the Cossack books were a useful first step towards codifying the portions of the population eligible for service, like all censuses they quickly became outdated as Cossacks fell in battle and “local-born Cossack sons (iz urozhentsov kazach’i deti)” were called upon to replace them. In order to maintain updated service lists, in 1734 Ataman Andrei Lopatin, the last ataman approved by Peter I, mandated that each community keep a precise record of births and deaths. At the end of each year the totals were to be delivered to Cherkassk along with reports of “which native sons are to be written in the [Cossack] books in the place of those who died.”

As manpower demands from the government increased, the fine line between the privilege of serving the tsar and the burden of being subservient to imperial orders became apparent. In summer 1737 the Don

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54 RGADA, f. 20, d. 54, chast’ 1, l. 18–36. 55 RGADA, f. 20, d. 54, chast’ 1, l. 10.
56 Oral testimony, Tsaritsyn Line Investigation, RGVIA, f. 13, op. i/107, sv. 3, l. 407.
57 Cossack report, RGVIA, f. 13, op. i/107, sv. 2, l. 616.
became the first region in the Russian Empire, and most likely the first in modern Europe, to experience universal military mobilization. That year, in response to government demands, the entire adult male Cossack population of the region was called to serve in the Russo-Turkish war. “In our stanitsas,” the host wrote to Empress Anna, “there are only Cossack wives and children, and very decrepit (skorbnye), elderly (pristarelye) Cossacks, and the latter are present in extremely small numbers.”

In addition to the political will of the Cossack elite to obey imperial orders, the meticulous records served as efficient instruments for facilitating total mobilization. The Host wrote to the empress:

Other than the registered number, 14,378 people, there are no others, because as soon as Cossack children come of age, fifteen or seventeen years, we . . . register them for service to your Imperial Majesty without missing/passing over a single person. Because of the registration [process] there are none remaining [behind in the region] who are fit for service. No one is under our jurisdiction, either in Cherkassk or in the stanitsas, who has remained at home. All are registered annually to the very last man (pogolovno) and are employed [in military service].

Deprived of their ability to choose whether or not to participate in imperial campaigns, the Don Cossacks had become a cog in the government military machine. Rather than the right to refuge, universal military service and readiness for self-sacrifice in the name of defending the empire had become the cornerstone of the Cossack separate deal with the tsar. Since all Cossacks continued to enjoy freedom from taxes, autonomy in local affairs, and local control of resources, all could be forced to serve in an imperial campaign. The simple act of inscribing names in the Cossack books amounted to a life sentence to imperial service.

The future belonged to those who could legitimately claim to be “Cossack sons.” It was ostensibly for their sake that meticulous service records were being compiled and updated. In 1734, Ataman Lopatin redoubled efforts to weed out those now considered unworthy of residence in the region. He initiated the policy of sending “special officials” (narochnye starshiny) to inspect all settlements and khutors (isolated ranches/farmsteads) to look for and deport undocumented migrants. Local Cossack leaders were instructed to comply with the order and any leaders who attempted to hide fugitives or burlaks were to be publicly beaten or put to death.

59 RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 57, l. 561.
60 Cossack report, RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 57, l. 560, 562.
Ataman Lopatin also presided over the settling of a new system of government steppe fortifications called the Tsaritsyn line. This initiative generated some important information on Cossack society and identity in the 1730s. When over two thousand volunteers from the Don answered a government call to resettle along the Tsaritsyn line, a conflict ensued between the Host and the volunteers. The origins of the conflict are obscure, but according to the volunteers, Cossacks in the Host had cautioned the government that those who signed up to settle along the line were “bandits and debtors who owe Cossacks lots of money,” and complained that many of those who signed up were “not authentic [Cossacks] and had no experience in [Cossack] service.” Since the charges were serious, the Military College stepped in to investigate.

Information on each volunteer was meticulously recorded by government officials. The objective was to determine whether the volunteers were indeed Cossacks. Interviewed in their communities, their testimony provides insight into Cossack identity at the time. A clear dichotomy was drawn between urozhentsy (local-born) and skhodtsy (in-migrants). The first group simply had to testify in public about their identity, as in these examples: “Miron, son of Dmitrii, Nepalenyshev, native (prirodnyi) Cossack,” and “My name is Iakov Tolechin, I am a native Cossack of Berezovaia stanitsa.”

Those who were in-migrants had to provide proof to support their claims to a Cossack identity. For some, such as Ivan Popov, this was impossible. He testified “I am from Pereslavl’ district and my motherland (rodina) is in the village of Kolobavye Borki in Riazan’. I have not been sent anywhere by the stanitsa in service and I am not recorded as a Cossack anywhere.” He could not claim to be a Cossack because he was not born in the region and he had never met any formal documentary requirements for joining the exclusive Cossack club. In contrast, a Cossack named Timofei Ivanov testified: “I arrived in the stanitsa at the age of thirteen as an orphan... and I was accepted into the stanitsa by a meeting of the stanitsa.” Maksim Kudriavoi, who was labeled as a prikhodets (in-migrant), failed to meet any conditions for being considered a Cossack. Members of the community in which he lived even testified: “We did

62 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 3, l. 402.
63 This dichotomy is clear from both the questions asked of witnesses, such as “Do you know concerning the Cossacks who signed up to serve along the line whether they are native Cossack children or migrants from somewhere?” (l. 531) and the responses such as “I know which [individuals] are our native Cossack children” (l. 482). See RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 3.
64 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 14, sv. 15, l. 1. 489, 535.
65 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 14, sv. 15, l. 490. 66 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 14, sv. 15, l. l. 387.
not accept him into the stanitsa and we did not send him anywhere for service.”

It is evident that established criteria of communal acceptance were already in place on the local level for determining who belonged and who did not. At the same time the results of the investigation categorized 520 heads of household as “native Don Cossacks (prirodne donskie kazaki)” eligible to serve along the Tsaritsyn line and labeled over five hundred others as ineligible “in-migrants who are Great Russians and Little Russians (skhodtsy velikorossiane i malorossiiane).”

POLICING UNDOCUMENTED MIGRATION

While undocumented migrants were officially excluded from the Don region, they continued to come anyway. Clandestinely sheltered and exploited by Cossacks, most possessed little hope of gaining community membership. As is common in situations in which a shadow migrant labor market exists, individuals could be more easily tolerated than large groups, since they were easier to control. An incident from 1735 demonstrates that the attitude towards uncontrolled mass migration from Rus’ to the Don was unequivocally negative.

The residents of Filonovskaia on the Buzuluk River wrote the Host that year complaining that their community had been overwhelmed by a wave of migrants. They lamented:

Our stanitsa is located on the edge of the Great Russian settlements. This spring, from various, distant Great Russian towns and villages large numbers of people with their wives and children have been coming to us without passports. They beg and announce that in their Great Russian towns the grain crop has failed and a famine has resulted. To the atamans and Cossacks of all stanitsas orders from the Host have been sent by decree of her Great Imperial Majesty that newly arrived fugitives of all ranks from the Great Russian towns are not to be accepted . . . and wherever such burlaks appear, it is ordered to send them from us under [armed] convoy to the Novokhopersk fort for deportation to their previous residences . . . But due to the great numbers of newly arrived burlaks who have come to us, Filonovskaia cannot in any way transport them under guard to the Novokhopersk fort.

It is interesting to note that those from “Great Russian” towns are automatically equated with burlaks, transients, and migrant workers. The

67 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 14, sv. 15, l. l. 401.
68 Report to Military College, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 3, l. 1480b.
69 See Markov, “Krest’iane na Donu,” for more information on this issue in later decades.
70 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 3, l. 435ob.
blurring of a social/occupational identity and a Russian ethnic identity in this document is reminiscent of the widespread usage of the term “wetback” in some circles to describe all recently arrived Mexicans in border states of the United States such as Texas.71 While Russians were not always unwelcome in the Don region, this case shows that the degree of welcome could depend on the ability of local leaders to control them.

In drafting its response to the crisis situation in Filonovskaia, the Don Host came full circle with its own past. Whereas countless decrees from the tsar had been addressed to atamans concerning fugitives in the past seven decades, the Host now petitioned the tsar requesting that local officials in adjacent Russian districts be “strictly forbidden from allowing all ranks of people to come to us to the Don without passports.”72 The Host admitted that the region could need government protection from its own open, accepting past, and it recognized that passports were needed to control movement. No more telling symbol of the profound transformations in Cossack society can be conjured up. While in the past those who called themselves Don Cossacks sheltered runaways from the government, when necessary the new breed of Don Cossacks ran to the government for relief from Russians seeking refuge.

In order for the Cossack community to legally become closed, however, the last individual avenue for attaining admission into the community had to be declared off limits. Because marriage remained an option for subverting the fugitive laws, the Host eventually recognized that intermarriage between Don Cossacks and Russians would have to be outlawed in order to fully close the Cossack community. A document from the archive of Kumylzhenskaia provides stunning confirmation of this policy.73 In 1741, Grigorii Karshin, a Cossack special official sent from Cherkassk, made the leading residents of the community swear on the Bible under penalty of death that they would not harbor any fugitives and that they and everyone in the settlement would neither marry nor allow individuals to be given in marriage to new arrivals from Russian districts (s Rusi). The local priest was also forced to sign the document affirming under penalty of defrockment that he would not under any pretext “marry newly arrived Great Russian girls and women to Cossacks and Cossack sons, and likewise he would not marry new arrivals to Cossack daughters and wives.”74 In 1755 a general order was sent from Cherkassk to all communities forbidding marriages

72 RGVIA, f. 13, op. i/107, sv. 3, l. 436.
73 Donskie voiskovye vedomosti, 1865, no. 8: 54–55.
74 Ibid.
between Cossacks and fugitives. Later, after serfdom was instituted in Ukraine, orders were sent from the Host forbidding marriage between Don Cossacks and “Malorossiiane” (Ukrainians). Although it is a dictum that love will always find a way, in the Don region henceforth any relationship violating the ascribed boundaries of group identity could only continue clandestinely.

In the name of enforcing residence restrictions and deporting fugitives, the first semi-permanent police institutions were organized in the Don region. In order to regulate migration, the Host delegated unlimited search and deportation authority to several special search officials (sysknye starshiny) who received their commissions in Cherkassk. Beginning in the 1730s these officials operated throughout the northern regions of the Don. As seen in the document from Kumlyzhenskaia discussed above, the policies of the Host were aimed at both holding the line against outsiders and instituting greater administrative control over each and every community of the Cossack hinterlands. The threat of death and deportation was only applied selectively, however, assuring elites in Cherkassk that no major local competitors could threaten their central protection racket.

In the 1730s and subsequent decades the policies of official exclusion and private protection continued. On the one hand, search officials could at any moment choose to get tough on migrants. For example, in 1743 Grigorii Karshin patrolled a large trade fair held in one of the northern communities and reported that he had “caught no small number of fugitives of various ranks and burlaks with false documents and passports.” On the other hand, landlords continued to complain to the Military College that Cossacks “desired to keep fugitive peasants in private labors.”

This situation is very similar to the US Mexico border region in the mid-twentieth century. Jorge Bustamante studied how categorization of undocumented Mexican workers as “wetbacks” and “illegals” contributed to their control and exploitation. American employers could use the implicit or explicit threat of arrest and deportation to secure a supply of cheap, politically docile labor: “To be ‘turned in’ became a threat always present in the migrant’s mind.” Local law enforcement officials often colluded in this process because they would prevent enforcement of federal labor and

75 Gosudarstvennyi arkhyv Rostovskoi oblasti (henceforth GARO), f. 339, op. 1, d. 21.
76 GARO, f. 46, atamanskaia kantseliariia, d. 15. See also M. M. Postnikova-Loseva, “Iz istorii sotsial’no-ekonomicheskikh otnochenii na Donu v XVIII v.,” in Istoriicheskie zapiski 60 (1957), 252.
77 See GARO, f. 339, khoperskoe sysknoe nachal’stvno, op. 1, for the records of special officials active in the Khoper region.
79 Ibid., p. 43.
residence laws for local economic reasons but could “stimulate enforce-
ment . . . to dispose of a complaining or useless wetback.”\(^{81}\) Just as a con-
vergence of economic interest and political power “created the wetback” as a cat-
egory of individuals deprived of legal recognition or recourse, terms such as *beglyi* (fugitive), *burlak* (migrant worker), *skhodets* (in-migrant), and *bespashportnyi* (passportless) created similar categories of dependent
laborers in the Don region.

The testimony of an undocumented migrant named Artemii Iakovlev
who returned to his former master in Rus’ after living as a laborer in the Don region between 1734 and 1744 provides striking confirmation of such exploitation.\(^{82}\) He lived and worked under the protection of thirteen
different Cossacks (including *starshina* Grigorii Karshin, the official who
was legally responsible for finding and deporting undocumented migrants)
and during his first seven years in the region he stayed on average with
each Cossack patron for roughly a year. He earned about one ruble a
month plying various occupations, which included ranch work, home
construction, delivering fish on horseback, and rowing river barges, and he
supplemented his income by engaging in petty trade. While living as an
undocumented migrant he experienced numerous injustices: two Cossack
officials appropriated his possessions worth nearly thirty rubles (the fruit
of two years of labor) that he had stored with them, on two occasions he
was not paid any wages after working for several months, and once he was
forced to pay a bribe of fifteen rubles (over a year’s wages) when he was
detained by a special fugitive patrol. He never complained about any of
these injustices to officials in the Don, he simply moved on to another
place and another protector.

In the end, the system of policing by special officials helped to consol-
date group boundaries by intervening on the local level to monitor and
control the activities of migrants. Though officially excluded from Cossack
bedrooms, Russians were still tolerated on Cossack farms, in fields, and in
fish-processing facilities. In the decade after 1739 over 1,700 people were
deporated from the Don region and in the 1760s the number ranged from
100 to 500 annually.\(^{83}\) These figures, combined with the fact that thou-
sands of undocumented migrants continued to reside in the region, would
suggest that Cossack police officials deported with discretion in order to
filter undesirables out of the pool of dependent, undocumented laborers

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\(^{81}\) Ibid., 716.

\(^{82}\) This section is based on Lishin, *Akty*, vol. 11, pp. 359–61.

\(^{83}\) For 1740–50 see A. P. Pronstein, *Zemlia Donskaia v XVIII veke* (Rostov-na-Donu, 1961), pp. 49–
51. The figure from the 1760s is from a report to Catherine’s legislative commission. See *Sbornik
imperatorskogo Russkago istoricheskago obshchestva*, vol. xxxii (Saint Petersburg, 1881), p. 564. For
thousands of resident workers, see Markov, “Krest’iane na Donu,” p. 46.
resident in the Don region. For example, a burlak named Leontii Chibisov was only apprehended after he got drunk and was overheard goading another burlak to leave the Don and saying “for fugitives life in the Host is impossible.”\(^{84}\) The activities of special officials helped to insure that the two population groups remained separate and unequal. In retrospect the policies of policing identity seem to have worked. While large number of outsiders continued to live in the Don region as laborers with few legal rights, the Cossack books and muster rolls do not register any massive migrant influx across the codified boundaries of the Cossack community.\(^ {85}\)

The cumulative effects of these policies aimed at codifying identities contributed to the crystallization of mental boundaries that would outlast any of the other boundaries established in the early imperial period. Because for so long it was so disadvantageous to be identified as Russian, Don Cossacks had no compelling reason to classify themselves as Russians. Because they lived under a separate deal (termed their “liberties,” vol’nosti), the Russian government had no reason to categorize them as such either. The ethnic boundaries formed during the early imperial period would later be subsumed by the notion of soslovie, caste or estate identity, but on a basic communal level Don Cossacks continued to consider Russians outsiders.

An awareness of the ethnic boundaries established between Don Cossacks and Russians in the Don region provides little consolation to those who would promote patriotic myths, but it certainly helps to clarify the importance of the concept of dynastic loyalty in imperial Russian history. The Don Cossacks entered the Russian empire in the early eighteenth century on a superior footing to the enserfed Russian masses. The creative act of forgetting ties to Rus’ and the closing of their community to outsiders enabled the Don Host to long outlive the closing of the steppe frontier that called their community into existence. They maintained a privileged existence as a military caste and ethnic community dedicated to state service until the demise of the Romanov dynasty itself. Unlike the Russian serfs and burlaks who owed their labor to many local masters, the Cossacks of the Don were unfree in a different way. They each owed a lifetime of service to the tsar and empire.

\(^{84}\) Lishin, Akty, vol. ii, p. 354.

\(^{85}\) Between 1734 and 1764 the number of registered Cossacks only increased from 16,805 to 19,880. Pronshtein, Zemlia Donskaiia, p. 71.
Though the disastrous deal concluded at Pruth in 1711 was a great setback for the Russian Empire, the treaty allowed Peter I to turn his back on southern affairs for over a decade. The retreat from the Black Sea and the bitter lessons of the Petrine Azov endeavor, however, only increased the Russian government’s resolve to minimize conflict in the Don region. Under Peter’s successors Russia modified the imperial objectives that first called borderlines into creation, but the empire retained its commitment to finalizing boundaries in the Don steppes.

As the final closing of the Don steppe frontier approached in 1739, more and more Cossacks found themselves on the frontlines of expansion in other parts of the empire. Thousands of Don Cossacks loyal to the Romanov dynasty participated in the opening of new frontiers in the Caucasus, while hundreds of Nekrasovite Cossacks abandoned their adopted home in the Kuban’ region. In the face of the final eradication of the old steppe and closing of imperial boundaries, they chose emigration as a final assertion of Cossack liberty.

RE-ASSERTING BORDERS AGAINST THE NOMADS

In spite of the fact that for Russia both the war and the peace were lost at Pruth in 1711, a successful campaign conducted the very same year marked a turning point in the history of the Pontic steppes. In summer 1711, Kazan’ governor P. M. Apraksin led four thousand Russian cavalrmen and four thousand foot soldiers in a campaign against the Kuban’ region.¹ Joined

¹ This paragraph is based on N. Brandenburg, “Kubanskii pokhod 1711 goda,” Voennyi sbornik 3 (1867), 37–42. Although Brandenburg used a manuscript copy of Apraksin’s report, a comparison with the original report (RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, 1711, d. 5) did not reveal any substantial differences. See also Michael Khodarkovsky, Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600–1771 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), pp. 148–52.
by several thousand Kalmyks, the Russian forces devastated Tatar villages from the bend of the Kuban’ River to the Black Sea coast. Most of the Tatars retreated into the hills across the Kuban’, with many drowning during their hasty flight. While the official results of the expedition are clearly exaggerated – Apraksin claimed to have killed thousands of Tatars, taken tens of thousands prisoners, and captured hundreds of thousands of animals – the Kuban’ campaign was the first time that a Russian army and its allies were able to successfully operate in the North Caucasian steppes. Even more importantly, the campaign demonstrated that given strategically positioned fortified outposts, Russian armies could push the nomads out of the steppe and corral them in the mountain foothills of the Caucasus. Although the cession of Azov made steppe operations impractical for a few decades, Apraksin’s campaign laid the groundwork for new strategies that would be employed by Russian armies that annihilated the Tatars in the later decades of the eighteenth century.

The restoration of Azov to the Ottoman side in 1711 could not turn back the clock to the era before the region became a borderland. Neither the Don Cossacks nor the Ottoman garrison at Azov that stood opposite them were the same communities that had closely interacted a quarter century ago. The Kuban’ Tatars and Nekrasovite Cossacks provided a link of continuity between frontier and borderland, but they were the odd men out in a situation marked by cross-border cooperation.

The system of border relations implemented after Pruth did not change substantively. Rather than a new departure, it represented act two of the old system of commissars, complaint lists, and compensation. Moreover, all the shortcomings of the old system were carried over into its continuation. The most notable shortcoming being that no one could control or predict the actions of the Tatars. This time, however, the empires lowered their expectations with respect to Tatar compliance and pledged to maintain peaceful relations.

Oblivious to the peace-process taking place in imperial capitals, the Tatars continued to raid with impunity. Between 1709 and 1713 the alliance between the Cossacks of Ignat Nekrasov and the Kuban’ Tatars wreaked considerable havoc on the Don region. In 1713 the Host reported to the Russian government: “In various months the Kuban’ horde together with the outlaw, traitor, and apostate to the cross Ignashka Nekrasov have caused considerable destruction to the northern settlements, taking many people as captives and killing others.”

2 Cossack report, RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 79, ll. 257–58.
Because they had until recently lived as Don Cossacks, the Nekrasovites were well suited to exploit their knowledge of Don Cossack geography, fortifications, and siege tactics. Judging by their scale and tenacity, the early raids can even be considered a low-scale continuation of the Bulavin uprising. According to figures submitted to the government by the Don Host, in 1713 nearly a thousand Cossacks could not be accounted for after the joint Nekrasovite-Nogai raids. This suggests that roughly 10 percent of the Cossacks on hand at the time were either captured or defected to Nekrasov.

The only bright spot in this era of rebuilding and Tatar raids was the cooperative relationship that emerged between the Ottoman garrison at Azov and the Don Host. In 1713 officials of the Host expressed their enthusiasm for the amicable coexistence that was initiated after Azov was handed over:

The Azov residents are keeping the peace and extend to us all types of friendship. They also send to us written information warning of Tatar attacks. They come to us to Cherkassk to buy grain and food and bring their goods. Likewise we go to Azov to purchase all kinds of vegetables and we are always free to travel. The Azov residents live in Cherkassk, and we in Azov, for a month or two at a time in order to trade. They also allow us to fish freely in the Don up to the towers and even allow small vessels to pass into the sea.

Though the honeymoon would not last forever, this kind of condominium was fostered by Russian and Ottoman efforts to restrain those under their immediate jurisdiction: the Don Cossacks and the Azov garrison.

If not for the incessant Tatar and Nekrasovite raids, all might have been quiet in the borderland. But because some did not recognize borders or adhere to the restrictions they aimed to impose, delineation of a new boundary became all the more important. The border demarcation of 1714 was carried out on a larger scale than before, but this time it was the Ottoman side that insisted on a precise delineation of a new steppe border from the Dnieper to the Don rivers. In response to an offer by the Russian representative Stepan Kolychev to save time and energy by designating a few well-known natural landmarks as the border, the Ottoman representative Ibrahim Aga declined the offer. “Unless markers are erected,” he replied, “the Tatars will never comply with such a border and will call everything up to Moscow itself their land.” The two sides cooperated in erecting

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3 Russian claims list, RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, 1717, d. 4, l. 180.
4 Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, 1713, d. 18, ll. 90b–10.
5 Record of the commission, RGADA, f. 89, 1714, d. 11, l. 73.
seventeen large mounds (kurgans) in places where hills and rivers could not serve as boundary markers. Although not quite a straight line, the intention was to create a linear border so that “the land on the right side [when facing east from the Dnieper] will be Islamic and on the left side... from the Dnieper to the Don... land will belong to the Russian side.” When finished, the commissars produced acts attesting that the border was delineated to mutual satisfaction.

Upon conclusion of the peace, a decree ordered the Don Cossacks “to live with the Azov residents and Tatars without quarreling and without clandestinely or openly causing provocations.” Subsequently, the Don Cossacks could affirm with all honesty in 1715 that “we do not raid their places and do not allow our Cossacks to take vengeance for the offenses committed against us and we observe your Great Sovereign’s decree with great care in order not to cause a violation of the peace treaty.” In 1718 they could write “we observe your Great Sovereign decree with great care, and do not allow bandit Cossacks or our yurt Kalmyks or Tatars to raid anywhere.”

Since the Russian conquest of Azov, raiding had simply ceased to play a central role in the Cossack economy. The ransom business revived after 1711, but only because of the nomads. Shifting patterns of relations between the Kalmyks and Tatars are difficult to trace, but Cossack testimony confirms that both groups continued to raid one another. This allowed Cossack ransom brokers to ply their lucrative trade by serving as intermediaries between warring nomadic groups. In summer 1715, in response to a government inquiry, the Host wrote: “Azov Turks and Nogai Tatars bring captives and Aiuka’s Kalmyks to Cherkassk and exchange them for Turks and Tatars or sell them at market price for ransom.” In 1718, a Cossack leader told government officials: “We do not take Turks and Kuban’ residents captive ourselves. Instead we purchase them from the Kalmyks with our own money and exchange them.”

In an age when Cossack raids were virtually a thing of the past, any hint of actions that could be perceived as raiding was big news. In 1718, archpriest Fedor Olimpiev reported to government officials that Ivan (Matveev) Krasnoshchekov and a large group of Cossacks had traveled to the Terek

6 Record of demarcation (mezhevaia zapis’), RGADA, f. 89, op. 3, 1714, d. 32, l. 6.
7 Decree mentioned in Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 8, l. 30b.
8 Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, 1714, d. 10, 30b.
9 Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 8, l. 30b.
10 Cossack report dated 1714, RGADA, f. 159, op. 2, d. 5153, l. 3, and Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, 1715, d. 22b, l. 41.
11 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 53, d. 1, l. 112. 12 Cossack petition, RGADA, f. 111, 1718, d. 1, l. 117ob.
region in the North Caucasus to collect some debts. On the way back they allegedly attacked a group of Kuban’ Tatars and returned home laden with captives and cattle. When officials investigated, many details of the incident coincided with Olimpiev’s account, but they were given a totally different spin.

Krasnoshchekov’s narration of the incident provides a unique glimpse into the waning world of the steppe:

We were returning to Cherkassk the same way we came. As we neared the Yegorlyk River we noticed a group of about ninety people crossing the river from the Kuban’ side directly ahead of us. As we drew close to each other, I asked them: “What kind of people are you?” A Nekrasovite answered: “We are Don Cossacks from Panshin and Kachalinskaia stanitsas and are heading for booty to Kuban’.” But I knew that by decree of the Great Sovereign our Don Cossacks are forbidden from raiding and in Cherkassk it has been announced to all that such activities are strictly forbidden. So I asked them which well-known Cossacks were with them and by whose permission they were heading to Kuban’. But they did not answer and headed back to their party... I sent a representative to inform them that between the Tsarist Majesty and his Majesty the Sultan peace is being observed and on both sides it is forbidden to campaign. He was also instructed to find out who they are and where they were going and to tell them not to cause any conflict contrary to the peace. But the Kuban’ residents did not allow the representative to approach them and commenced to attacking us... After a big fight we took twenty Kuban’ residents captive and killed about thirty in battle.

Though a Nekrasovite could easily pass as a Don Cossack, from whom his group had splintered almost a decade before the incident, his understanding of the prevailing attitudes in the Don region was woefully behind the times. In this minor steppe incident there is ample evidence of a collision between the psychology of the old steppe and a state of mind in which borders mattered. While for the Nekrasovite it was still natural to imagine a situation in which Don Cossacks could be heading across the steppe for a raid, for Krasnoshchekov such a scenario was by its very nature suspicious. Even if the account of the incident was restructured for government consumption, it proves the extent to which raiding had become delegitimated in the Don region.

**NEW FRONTIERS: THE DISQUIETING CAUCASUS**

In contrast to the quiet Don, the Kuban’ region became increasingly disquieting for imperial officials. After reinstalling themselves in Azov,
Ottoman officials did very little to quell cross-border raiding by the Tatars. Consequently, a Cossack leader testified “the Kuban’ Tatars do not keep the peace and they do not fear the Turks.”15 As evident in Chapter 9, Ottoman officials often treaded lightly with the nomads lest they personally take the blame for a Tatar rebellion. In summer 1715 their worst fears were realized.

The circumstances of the rebellion by the Tatar prince Bakhty Girei are difficult to piece together from the second-hand information that reached Russian government officials, but its effects would be felt throughout the steppe from the Caucasus to the middle Volga. In late summer 1715 a delegation of Kuban’ Tatars appeared in Cherkassk. In talks with the ataman they asked to enter into the tsar’s service: “The Kuban’ Deli Bakhty Girei Sultan murdered several of our best princes . . . the [Tatar] princes and common people desire to come to the Don Host and seek the favor of his Tsarist majesty and migrate (kochevat’) along the Don and other steppe rivers.”16 Since the era of their Nogai great grandfathers, who allied with Ivan IV, the world of the steppe had irreversibly changed. No realignment of nomadic confederations would result from this initiative. The Ambassadorial Chancery wrote back to the Don Host refusing the Tatars permission to cross over to the Russian side. In the world of borders it would be a violation of the peace treaty for the Russian tsar to receive or harbor them.

Rebuffed in their offer to switch sides and serve the tsar as their ancestors had once done, the Kuban’ Tatars had little choice but to deal with Bakhty Girei, an upstart member of the reigning dynasty in Crimea. In summer 1717 he led them on a great raid up the Volga River into Russian districts adjacent to the town of Penza. The Don Cossacks managed to free about a thousand Russian captives by ambushing the Tatars at night or attacking while they were watering their horses and Ottoman officials later managed to round up an equal amount, but thousands of Russians captured that summer would never see home again.17

There was no longer any tolerance, however, for independent operators in the borderlands adjacent to Azov. In spring 1718 the Crimean Khan was able to foment a coalition against Bakhty Girei. When Crimean Tatars, Circassians, Nekrasovite Cossacks, and Ottoman garrison troops campaigned against him, his allies in Kuban’ deserted him.18 He fled toward the mountains with only a few hundred staunch supporters. The North

15 RGADA, f. 111, 1713, d. 18, l. 90b. 16 Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, 1715, d. 22b, ll. 1130b–114.
17 Bureaucratic summary, RGADA, f. 89, op. 1, 1717, d. 4, l–172. See also Khodarkovsky, Where Two Worlds Met, pp. 160–61.
18 Cossack report, RGADA, f. 111, kn. 23, ll. 8870b–889.
Caucasus had become a magnet for those looking for new frontiers and new fights.

While states were working together to subdue confrontation on the Don steppe frontier, in the Caucasus everything was still very much in play. Pro-Crimean and pro-Russian factions fought for predominance over Kabarda, which controlled access to the mountain passes leading south into Georgia. Slowly, but inexorably, the Caucasus was becoming the main arena in which Russian and Ottoman interests were beginning to compete and conflict.

An urgent plea for help in 1718 gave Don Cossacks a preview of coming imperial attractions. In May 1718, the Terek Cossacks wrote to the Don Host pleading for immediate help against their local adversaries. As it would remain for centuries, the Terek region of the North Caucasus was sharply contested ground:

The Hordes from beyond the Terek... besiege our gorodki and vanquish us as enemies and kill and take our Cossacks captive. They also drive away our herds of cattle and horses. More than our other enemies, the Chechens (chechentsy) attack us daily, making it impossible to leave the confines of our settlements.\(^\text{19}\)

The Terek Cossacks feared that without reinforcements, they might soon be driven out of the region.

Given the green light by the government, the Don Cossacks sent several hundred volunteers to help their Cossack brethren in the Caucasus.\(^\text{20}\) They were led by Ivan Matveev Krasnoshchekov, who, as we have already seen, was no neophyte in Caucasian affairs. Together with the Terek Cossacks and pro-Russian Kabardians, the Don command campaigned against the Chechens. According to a report presented to the Don Host in March 1720, the Chechens were routed. Over a thousand women and children were taken captive and over three hundred Chechen men were killed in battle. The initial successes, however, were deceptive. They only added fuel to the fire of what would become one of the longest, most intractable struggles for imperial domination in modern history: the Russian Empire’s struggle to subdue Chechnia.

With the end of the Northern War in 1721, Peter could focus his attention on the south for the first time since the early years of his reign. A fortunate correlation of events facilitated a shift in strategic focus to the Caspian region. Just as Russia was consolidating gains in the Baltic region, events

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\(^{19}\) RGADA, f. 111, kn. 23, l. 876.

\(^{20}\) This paragraph is based on the Cossack report in RGAVMF, f. 233, op. 1, d. 193, l. 40–400b.
in Persia opened up new possibilities for intervention in the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{21} When Shah Hussein was overthrown in early 1722, Persia was thrown into chaos. Immediately after hearing the news, Peter began planning for a grab on Persia’s Caspian provinces. By summer 1722 a Russian army numbering over 80,000, including several thousand Cossacks, was marching towards Derbent.\textsuperscript{22} Russia had for the first time mobilized significant military resources in order to enter the contest for imperial supremacy in the Caucasus.

In Russia’s effort to transform its precarious Terek foothold in the Caucasus into a new staging ground for imperial conquests, the Don Cossacks constituted a valuable military and human resource. In the early years of Peter’s Caucasian commitment, campaign ataman Krasnoshchekov led a group of Don Cossacks and Kalmyks who raided northern Dagestan, clearing the way for the construction in 1723 of a new fort at the confluence of the Agrakhan’ and Sulak Rivers named in honor of the Holy Cross.\textsuperscript{23} In 1724, one thousand Don Cossack families were ordered to permanently resettle along the Agrakhan’.\textsuperscript{24} Ironically, they took up residence in the very same lands that were once occupied by Cossack religious refugees from the Don in the 1690s. The Agrakhan’ Cossacks would in time be merged with the Terek Cossacks, but their experience in the last year of Peter’s reign established an important precedent for later imperial policies of moving thousands of Cossacks from closing frontiers such as the Dnieper basin in Ukraine and the Don region to new frontiers in the Caucasus.

Other Don Cossacks saw duty in the Caucasus at regular intervals over the next decades. This was the beginning of an imperial pattern in which a third or more of the Don Cossacks would be expected to serve each year outside the Don in other parts of the empire.\textsuperscript{25} While the conquest of the Caucasus falls outside of the purview of this study, it should be noted that in the 1720s and 1730s on average 3,000–4,000 Don Cossacks – about one in four enrolled for service at any given moment – were annually stationed in the North Caucasus.\textsuperscript{26} Increasingly, new generations of Don

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\textsuperscript{23} Solov’ev, \textit{Istoriia Rossii}, vol. ix, p. 370.

\textsuperscript{24} Bureaucratic summary RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, ll. 223–24; Kozlov, \textit{Kavkaz}, p. 58. On the later history of the Terek Cossacks, see Thomas M. Barrett, \textit{At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasian Frontier, 1700–1860} (Boulder, Colo., 1999).


\textsuperscript{26} Bureaucratic summary, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, ll. 223–24.
Cossacks gained their military experience not against Azov, but against Chechens and other Caucasian foes.27

The center of gravity in Russian–Ottoman relations also shifted to the Caucasus. The Russian incursion into the Trans-Caucasus greatly alarmed Ottoman officials. After the beginning of Peter’s Persian campaign, the French ambassador in Istanbul made what would seem to be a prophetic remark to the Russian ambassador: “Tell your court, that the crux of the matter is simple: to preserve peace with Turkey, do not interfere in Persian affairs. A continuation of the war in Persian provinces will lead to a break with Turkey.”28 Though repeated efforts over several years were made to back down from conflict, even a new treaty and the delineation of spheres of influence in the Caucasus could not keep competing Russian and Ottoman interests from colliding in the region.

Roughly a decade after Peter’s death, Russian policy-makers could imagine tearing up the Pruth treaty. In 1736, Veshniakov, the Russian resident in Istanbul wrote: “Fear of the Turks rests only upon legends . . . now they are faint-hearted and cowardly, all of them sensing the end of their illegitimate power.”29 During the war of 1736, General Münnich outlined blueprints for future Russian expansion.30 The plan was simple: take Crimea and subjugate the nomads of the North Caucasus depriving the Ottoman Empire of its steppe buffer. Then, in subsequent years take the war to other areas by land and sea, even to Constantinople itself. With such objectives on the table, the Don region was destined to shift from borderland to hinterland.

One last war would be waged between Russia and the Ottoman Empire to determine who would control the Don delta, but by then Azov was just a small part of a huge strategic picture. The roots of this new war were deeply entangled in the European balance of power and the situation in the Caucasus.31 According to reports filed by Veshniakov, the Russian ambassador in Istanbul, British diplomats, and French renegades in Ottoman service such as Bonneval were urging the Porte to ally with Sweden against Russia. This could prove extremely dangerous if Russia were forced to simultaneously fight wars on two flanks. The best defense would be a good offense. In 1735, Russia concluded an anti-Ottoman alliance with Kuly Khan of Persia that all but guaranteed a new war.

27 Service record of I. Ilovaiskii, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, d. 3, l. 65.
30 Report to Council of Ministers, RGADA, f. 177 (Council of Ministers), 1736, d. 1006, ll. 1–8.
31 A. Kochubinskii, Graf Andrei Osterman i razdel Turtsii (Odessa, 1899), pp. 150–51.
Some of the first salvos in this new war were fired in the Don delta, the traditional scene of Russian–Ottoman rivalry. In July 1735, Field Marshal Münich was given orders to lay siege to Azov. By March 1736 the siege had successfully begun and the Kalanchy towers were taken. Optimistic that with the fort encircled by land and sea the Ottoman garrison could not hold out, Münnich headed for Ukraine to prepare for an invasion of Crimea. On June 19, 1736 the pasha of Azov capitulated and for the final time Ottoman forces were evacuated from Azov. With the final exit of the Ottoman garrison from the lower Don region, the Cossacks lost one of the last critical links to the old frontier.

The entire Don Host was mobilized to take part in the government campaigns in southern Ukraine and Crimea. Total military mobilization of all Don Cossacks took its toll on the Don region. In July 1737 the Kuban’ Tatars got word that “on the Don in the Cossack gorodki . . . there are no forces and all to the very last man (pogolovno) have been sent in service.”32 A force of 6,000 Kuban’ residents, including over five hundred Nekrasovites, attacked the Don region. The Nekrasovites showed the Tatars where to ford the Don and led the attack. After a whole day of fighting Kumshatskii was burned and most of its inhabitants were killed or taken captive. In attacks on seven settlements that summer the Don Cossacks incurred staggering losses.33 While 14 Cossacks, 16 elderly Cossacks, 324 “Cossack wives,” and 614 “Cossack children” were taken captive, 28 minors and elderly Cossacks died defending their settlements and 50 others perished from fires. The Tatars carried off 4,026 horses, 10,270 cows, 500 calves, and 21,900 sheep. They burned 300 homes, 350 auxiliary structures such as barns and pens, and put the torch to thousands of bushels of grain and fodder. The destruction of several settlements was the cost of subservience to imperial orders.

In order to avenge the attack, the government authorized a military campaign against Kuban’.34 Several thousand Don Cossacks joined with Kalmyk leader Donduk Ombo for an attack on the Tatars. Although the invasion force succeeded in destroying Tatar villages, Nekrasovite Cossack strongholds, and the Kuban’ Tatar capital Kopyl situated near the bend of the Kuban’ River, most of the Tatars managed to withdraw across the river into the foothills of the Caucasus. Once again the Tatars retreated

32 E. D. Felitsyn, ed., Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov otnosiashchikhsia k istorii kubanskago kazach’iago voiska i kubanskoj oblasti (Ekaterinodar, 1904), p. 95. This compilation contains documents from RGVIA. (Henceforth Felitsyn, Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov.)
33 Felitsyn, Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov, p. 105.
34 This paragraph is based upon Felitsyn, Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov, pp. 138–45.
from the steppe, leaving their cattle to be captured by the Kalmyks. By adopting the Kuban’ as their last line of defense, the Tatars taught Russian strategists exactly what they needed to know to corral them in the future. It was only a matter of time before generals such as Alexander Suvorov would systematically advance Russian forts along the course of the Kuban’ River, pinning the nomads between the mighty river and the Caucasus mountains.  

In their counter-attack, the Don Cossacks desperately desired to crush the Nekrasovite Cossacks, who since the Bulavin rebellion had repeatedly demonstrated that the unrestrained spirit of the old steppe was alive. They discovered, however, that the Nekrasovites had also headed to the hills. According to Nekrasovite defectors, some members of their community began to contemplate returning to Russia, while a majority remained resolute that “the Russian Empress would not forgive them and if they returned to the Don they would all be hanged.”

Not long thereafter, in order to preserve their small, but fiercely defiant community, many Nekrasovite Cossacks boarded boats and shipped off in search of shelter in more distant Ottoman territories. A marginal note in a Nekrasovite manuscript reads: “In the year 7249 (1740–41) the Host migrated to Trabzon, Samsun, and the Danube as a result of persecution (goneniia) by tsaritsa Anna.” In Nekrasovite oral tradition Ignat Nekrasov assumed the role of a cultural hero who “built boats and ferried the whole Host across [the sea] to the Danube.” Although some Nekrasovites stayed behind to find their fortunes in the Kuban’, Cossacks hostile to the Russian Empire could no longer rely on the steppes and foothills of the Caucasus to provide them ample refuge. The Nekrasovites, the last island of Don Cossack liberty in a changing steppe, embarked on a centuries-long odyssey to preserve Old Belief and an unbound Cossack way of life. Their trek would take groups of them to Romania, Anatolia, and eventually even to Oregon and Alaska. Their modest migration foreshadowed the later mass migrations from the northwest Caucasus of hundreds of thousands of Tatars and Circassians.

35 V. A. Solov’ev, Suvorov na Kubani (Krasnodar, 1992).
36 Felitsyn, Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov, p. 143.
39 For a complete account of the Nekrasovites, see D. V. Sen’, Voisko Kubanskoe Ignatovo Kavkazskoe: istoricheskie puti kazakov-nekrasovtsev (Krasnodar, 2001).
The Russian Empire won the war in the Azov theater, but again lost the peace negotiations. The Belgrade treaty of 1739 resulted in the final annexation of Azov to the Russian Empire, but failed to give Russia any significant other territorial gains.\textsuperscript{40} When the Habsburg Empire withdrew from the war and concluded a separate peace, Russia hastily negotiated peace with the Ottoman Empire. Relying on the French ambassador as an intermediary, the Russian side bargained to simply retain Azov.\textsuperscript{41} Borders returned to where they stood around 1700, but according to the treaty the steppe was supposed to become a de-militarized “barrier.” Within only a few decades after the conclusion of this “eternal peace” between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, however, new wars would bring the Black Sea and North Caucasian steppes under Russian control. From Dagestan to the Dniester nomads were dispossessed of their lands.\textsuperscript{42} By 1800 the old steppe was extinct.

### THE END OF AN ERA

For the Don Cossacks the finalization of the border in 1739 was just a formality. Long before the Turks were permanently pushed out of the lower Don, all the real martial action was taking place elsewhere. The Don was still the Cossack homeland and base of operations, but after the 1720s they performed their former frontier raison d’être (fighting, riding, and raiding) anywhere and everywhere that imperial orders dictated. Even though the frontier world that created their community was vanishing around them, the Don Cossacks maintained their separate deal with the Romanov dynasty through serving the empire in far-flung imperial wars. By turning Cossack frontier military traditions into portable assets, the Russian state and Don Host together laid the foundations for the future of the Cossack community.

The Don Cossacks contributed to victories in the Russo-Ottoman wars of the eighteenth century, the campaigns against Prussia and partitions of Poland, the Napoleonic wars and campaign of 1812, the Caucasian Wars, and the pacification of the Polish uprising of 1863. According to Philip Longworth: “There was no war, hardly a skirmish in which the Cossacks did not participate.”\textsuperscript{43} While in the imperial era a Russian peasant’s chance

\textsuperscript{40} For the text of the treaty see PSZ, 10: 898–904.
of being conscripted into the Tsar’s army ranged from roughly one in eighty in the eighteenth century to one in twenty-six in the early nineteenth century, the Don Cossacks in the words of Robert H. McNeal “continued to render not much less than truly universal military service.” Leo Tolstoy was correct to conclude that the fate of Russia as an empire was closely intertwined with the services rendered to it by Cossacks.

The passing of the Don steppe frontier was a slow and gradual process for the Don Host. Year after year, Cossacks learned to live in government-specified boundaries, but one document in particular epitomizes the end of the old steppe. In 1732, the Russian and Ottoman border officials decided that “people from both sides should not for any reason cross the border without passports.” Eager to demonstrate that it was upholding the order, in 1733 the Don Host wrote to the empress: “By virtue of your Imperial Majesty’s decrees . . . our Cossacks do not cross the border for any reason without passports bearing the seal awarded to us by your ancestors.” “Though a few dare to enter the Turkish border by managing to steal around checkpoints,” the Host wrote, “we catch them and punish them without mercy in our public (vesenarodnykh) krugs.”

In this one declaration all the transformations that took place in the Don region in the age of Peter the Great are evident. The steppe was partitioned. Interaction between the Cossack and nomad subjects of the two empires was regulated and limited. Whereas Cossacks could once freely roam boundless expanses, now they needed passports just to travel in the steppe to hunt or fish. The leaders of the Host acted as the empire’s agents, using a seal issued by Peter I to legitimate and control movement across the border. While in the not-so-distant past Don Cossacks did everything in their power to subvert migration checkpoints and everything they represented, now they manned them. The few who failed to make the attitude adjustment necessary for living in circumscribed boundaries were caught and punished. The krug, once a symbol of Cossack democracy and liberty, had become an arena for punishing offenders of the boundary regime.

More than any other event, a minor incident from 1734 encapsulates the end of the era of the Don steppe frontier. In fall 1734, over 2,000 people from both sides should not for any reason cross the border without passports.


45 Correspondence relating to decision, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 2, ll. 377–99, for quote 379.

46 Cossack report, RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 2, l. 380.

47 RGVIA, f. 13, op. 1/107, sv. 2, l. 380.

48 This paragraph is based on Cossack report, RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 57, ll. 256–600b.
nomads raided the Don region. They succeeded in driving off 2,687 horses, 3,340 cows, and 11,638 sheep and goats from pastures in the Don steppe. Cossacks from various communities mounted their steeds and “did everything possible to intercept them while they were still in imperial Russian boundaries (Rossiiskikh granitsakh).”

The chase was vigorous in this race across open space, but before the Cossacks could overtake the nomads, they saw them pass over a hill into foreign, Ottoman territory. They desperately wanted to chase them and “take revenge” but, recalling imperial decrees, they “feared to cross the border and enter into Turkish territory.” They stopped in their tracks. The chase was abandoned. The Cossacks returned home and...wrote a letter to the Russian government. Rather than employ their swift steeds and sharp swords to fight their foes to the finish, they used their pens to report yet another “border incursion.” For the Don Cossacks the steppe had been permanently overtaken by imperial boundaries.

49 RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 57, l. 259. 50 RGVIA, f. 20, op. 1/47, d. 57, l. 259.
By forging a middle ground between the sedentary Slavic communities of the northern forests and the nomadic Turkic groups of the southern steppes, the Cossacks bridged a centuries-old ecological divide and facilitated a decisive shift in the balance of power between forest and steppe in the early modern period. Of Russia, but not necessarily Russian, Don Cossack freebooters advanced the cause of empire by contesting Ottoman control of the Black Sea region and facilitating the Russian conquest of vast expanses of Eurasia. When their world of frontier raiding and trading was replaced by a world of imperial boundaries in the early eighteenth century, the communities of the Don avoided extinction by embracing ethnic and juridical distinction. The Cossacks who survived the Russian reordering of the steppe re-invented themselves as servants of the Romanov dynasty, becoming imperial bodyguards and border guards, mountain men and mounted patrolmen.

The Don Cossacks were not a captive nation annexed by an aggressive empire, but a community created through the joint efforts of imperial officials and residents of a closing frontier. They represented a living legacy of the regional, dynastic, bureaucratic, and diplomatic forces that shaped Russian expansion. No nation-centered narrative can explain their experience. Their persistence in the imperial era resulted from the very fact that they seceded from a population category that was identified as “Russian” and synonymous with serfs, subjects, and powerless people. By 1739 Don Cossacks had closed their communities to Russians and codified their boundaries in record books and birth registers. Facts of common language, religion, and, in many cases, ethnic origin were purposefully played down by both the Cossacks and their imperial patrons. Thereafter in the Don region ordinary Russians were not treated as the titular nation of a powerful empire, but instead were disdained as burlaks, Slavic “wetbacks” subject to derision, exploitation, or deportation back to Rus’. 

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In the early imperial era the Don Cossacks conceded to a Faustian bargain with Tsar Peter I. They would continue to maintain personal liberties, Cossack customary law, freedom from direct taxation, and participatory politics on the local level, but they would serve wherever and whenever imperial officials dictated. They were important actors in Russian imperial history, but they did not fight and die in far-flung conflicts as Russians. During the imperial centuries the Don Cossacks fought for the tsar and their separate deal with him.

Their was the earliest and longest lasting separate deal in an empire of separate deals. The complex nature of Russian expansion contributed to the proliferation of separate rules and procedures for different territories and population groups prior to the nineteenth century and many later attempts at reform involved efforts to unmake these separate deals. No systematic survey has analyzed all of these juridical arrangements, which embraced groups ranging in size from several hundred individuals to several million people and could last from centuries to just a few decades, but significant parts of Rossiia were decreed off limits to ordinary Russians and declared administratively superior to Rus’. The history of the Russian empire must be remapped to account for local enclaves and juridical spaces such as the Don that were within the empire but distinguished by imperial boundaries.

The Don region was just one of many spaces in Eurasia in which ordinary Russians sought to remake their identities. It forms a geographically small, but historically significant, part of the untold story of how countless individuals from the empire’s underprivileged ethnic core used migration across international, administrative, ethnic, and estate boundaries to reject the debased juridical status ascribed to the overwhelming majority of russkie liudi. While many studies have focused on imperial policies of Russification and acculturation of non-Russians to Russian culture, few have examined the rejection of Rus’ as a social order or the shedding of a Russian identity as a marker of servile status. In the seventeenth century the search for security in the south and the need for manpower that it generated created legal loopholes that permitted legions of serfs to embrace imperial service by becoming Cossacks. In the eighteenth century hundreds of thousands of ordinary Russians sought better deals across imperial boundaries: first among the Don Cossacks and later among the Bashkirs, Bessarabians, and Poles.

“Ivans who have forgotten their origins” when apprehended by government officials. Some went native in the expanses of Siberia, others crossed over to Muslims in the North Caucasus and yet others learned to pass as Ukrainians by mastering enough phrases in “Little Russian” to fend off fugitive patrols. Analyzing these physical and representational migrations will occupy a prominent place in the future story of Russia as a multi-ethnic empire.

In order to police its dynamic borderlands and to enforce migration restrictions mandated by its Muscovite legacy, six decades before the French Revolution, Russia “sought to monopolize the capacity to authorize the movement of persons—and unambiguously to establish their identities in order to enforce this authority.” In the Petrine period Russia claimed “unobstructed access” to populations that could be used “to work and fight for the state” a full hundred years before Prussia and Napoleonic France would promote similar policies. Early modern Russia became the first state to attempt to regulate and record every entry and exit from its territory, to require government-issued travel documents for all movement (internal and external), and to criminalize all efforts to assist undocumented migrants. It consistently asserted its sovereignty claims over individuals and at times patrolled the territorial limits of the ruler’s sovereignty with such severity that it became the first modern state to authorize the use of lethal force against unauthorized border crossers.

The Cossack experience demonstrates that maintenance of imperial boundaries could depend as much on inculcating a borderline state of mind as actively and aggressively patrolling state territories. The contrasting destinies of the Don Cossacks and their nomadic neighbors suggest that

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4 On Russians attempting to pass as Ukrainians, see a decree from 1763 which provides for cases in which “someone’s fugitive peasants are discovered...and they have learned to speak Little Russian, so that their lords took them for real Little Russians (prinimali iako suschikh Malorossiian) but not fugitives.” Materialy po istorii Voronezhskoi sosedi gubernii 13, p. 1374. For Siberia see Willard Sunderland, “Russians into Iakuts? ‘Going Native’ and Problems of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North, 1870s-1914,” Slavic Review 55: 4 (1996), 806–25.
7 RGADA, f. 210, belg. stol, d. 1525, ll. 336–38; PSZ, 7: 275–76.
Imperial boundaries

demarcating boundaries in the steppe was ultimately less significant than state-sponsored incentives for maintaining them. Borders presented an opportunity for Cossacks to transform raiding and other forms of non-state violence into state-sanctioned policing and patrol activities. While Don Cossacks adapted to borderland rules, in effect exchanging outlaw status for a badge, their nomadic counterparts never accommodated to border restrictions nor appreciated the opportunities they presented. As a result, the passing of the old steppe frontier also heralded the imminent end of the nomadic era.

The shifting boundaries of imperial authority over Cossack communities in the age of Peter the Great forms a prelude to an era of coerced migration and people-moving along the northern shores of the Black Sea. The empire rendered active assistance in uprooting dissenters from Cossack communities and in turn “loyal” Cossacks repaid the favor by aiding imperial conquest. Imperial writ forced the migration of both Azov’s Turkish inhabitants and pioneer Russian settlers. “Renegade” or free Cossacks were displaced from the Don region in 1688 and 1708, from Dagestan in 1692, and from Kuban’ in 1741. The devastation of the Don region as a result of the Bulavin uprising gave “loyal” Cossack leaders an opportunity to restock the Don with dependent and politically impotent individuals. Starting in 1724 with the Agrakhan’ colony, existing Cossack communities began to act as reservoirs for repopulating imperial areas in the North Caucasus that became depopulated due to government policies of forcing out populations categorized as politically unreliable. The lands of the Kuban’ Tatars would be taken over by former Zaporozhian Cossacks from Ukraine, who themselves became displaced when imperial boundaries overtook their lands in the 1770s. When the overwhelming majority of Circassian peoples were forced out of their ancient homelands in the North Caucasus mountains in the 1860s, Don Cossacks were called upon by the imperial government to help settle the newly vacated lands beyond the Kuban’. The Don Cossacks were so entangled with Russia’s push to the south that they became both the beneficiaries and casualties of this process.

Like the Baltic Germans, the Don Cossacks celebrated their pride of place among imperial populations and cultivated a fiercely local sense of place within the empire. But in stark contrast to the Baltic provinces, which were dominated by “foreign” architecture, religion, language, and

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8 F. A. Shcherbina, Istoriia kubanskago kazach’iago voiska (Ekaterinodar, 1913), vol. 1.
9 For the forced migration of Tatars and North Caucasians, see Bedri Habicoglu, Kafkasıdan Anadoluya Gıçler (İstanbul, 1993); Mark Pinson, “Russian Policy and the Emigration of the Crimean Tatars to the Ottoman Empire, 1854–1862,” Giney-Dogu Arastirmaları Dergisi 1 (1972), 37–56. For Don Cossack settlement, see Shcherbina, Istoriia kubanskago kazach’iago voiska, vol. 11.
culture, generations of Russian writers could imagine Cossack places as Russian spaces. Whether they welcomed it or not, by the nineteenth century Cossacks became a part of the imagined community of literate Russians.\(^\text{10}\) Intellectual privatization of Cossacks for national narratives has impeded historians from taking imperial identities seriously and has prevented them from identifying and analyzing important categories of Rossiiane who felt no love loss for central Russia.

The persistence of Don Cossack ethnic boundaries throughout the imperial era of Russian history has not been explored, but enough evidence exists to suggest that Cossacks continued to exclude Russians from their imagined community. Aleksandr Rigel’man, who wrote about his encounters with the Don Cossacks in the 1770s, noted that they distanced themselves from the Russian populations of the empire:

They cannot say anything certain about their origins. They believe that they descend from some free (vol’nykh) peoples, and most probably come from the Circassians and mountain peoples. Therefore they do not consider themselves Muscovites by nature (prirodoiu). They think that they have Russified, while living with Russia, but not that they are Russians.\(^\text{11}\)

Note the continued importance of forgetting ethnic origins, the coincidence between assertion of a non-Russian identity and liberties, and the downplaying of factors that could link them to the empire’s ethnic core. Decades later, the ambiguities of Don Cossack identity startled A. Filonov, a Russian writer who traveled to the Don region in 1856. He recorded for posterity his puzzling encounters with Don Cossacks.

For the third day I ride across these steppes and for the third day the same thoughts continue to occupy me. Whenever one stops at a station they invariably ask: “What’s new in your Rus’?” (a chto u vas na Rusi) It’s amazing! It’s as if the Cossacks do not consider themselves Russians while at the same time whole regiments of them defend Russia. They stand for Rus’. They are her children, every last one of them from ataman to common Cossack. They are Russians. They have the very same Orthodox faith, the very same dedication for the honor of the tsar. But they ask: “Are you a Russian?” “Are you from Russia?” It’s strange!\(^\text{12}\)

The dichotomy between the Don and Rus’ was still current in Cossack minds. The Cossack sense of separateness and notion that Rus’ begins ethnographically to the north of the Don Cossack lands continued to be


\(^{11}\) Aleksandr Rigel’man, Istoriia ili povestovanie o donskikh kazakakh (Moscow, 1846), p. 1.

\(^{12}\) A. Filonov, Ocherki Dona (Saint Petersburg, 1859), p. 3.
articulated. For a Russian observer it was disconcerting to discover that Cossacks whom literary imagination championed as heroic Russians and defenders of Rus’ turned out to in fact be ambivalent towards a Russian identity.¹³

Cossack identity continued to be constructed not only on a bedrock of particularism and privileges, but also upon a vision of ethnic exclusivity. Russians continued to be viewed by Don Cossacks as a social and ethnic “other.” A Don Cossack officer named N. I. Krasnov wrote in 1863: “Any kind of administrative order (postanovlenie) that is not of their own initiative causes dissatisfaction among the Dontsy and enmity towards the inogorodnie, whom they call ‘Russians’, considering themselves somehow a separate people (schitaia sebia kak by otdel’nym narodom).”¹⁴ The burlaks came to be called inogorodnie in the late eighteenth century, but they continued to represent the social face that Cossacks associated with the Russian name. Even on the eve of the fall of the empire the same sense of separateness expressed in Cossack documents of the early eighteenth century was still pervasive. In summer 1906 a Don Cossack delegate to the State Duma in Saint Petersburg declared in a speech: “A Cossack will never tell you that he’s a Russian. No, he says: ‘I’m a Cossack.’”¹⁵ Such sentiments are also woven throughout Quiet Flows the Don, the Nobel prize-winning early Soviet novel attributed to Mikhail Sholokhov.¹⁶

As modernity dawned in the Don, Cossacks could not conveniently commit to any political framework that would force them to share liberty, equality and fraternity with the Russian masses because this would mean the end of their separate deal with the ruling dynasty. A community that had adapted to survive in the early imperial period became an entrenched, conservative force in the late imperial era.¹⁷ While for many subjects of the tsar liberal reforms and notions of citizenship represented a step up in the world, for Cossacks the civil equality of all citizens threatened to spell

¹³ Literary myths have long shaped perceptions of Cossacks. Deutsch Kornblatt provides a stimulating analysis of how Russian authors created the Cossack myth in Russian literature as a way of mediating Russian conceptions of Europe and Asia, alien and self, freedom and repression, nature and civilization. See Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, The Cossack Hero in Russian Literature: A Study in Cultural Mythology (Madison, Wisc., 1992).

¹⁴ S. G. Svatikov, Rossii i Don (Belgrade, 1924), p. 347.


¹⁶ For the rancor caused by the renewed controversy over the authorship of the novel, consult N. I. Glushkov, Pravda i lozh’ o M. A. Sholokhove: ob’ektivnoe literaturovedenie protiv skandal’nogo (Rostov-na-Donu, 2002).

¹⁷ See Robert H. McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, 1815–1914 (New York, 1987). For a good analysis of social history in the period, see Shane O’ Rourke, Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia (Hampshire, 2000).
the end of their particular distinction. They survived the closing of their frontier by becoming a privileged people within the empire. To survive the end of empire, however, they needed to become something more than a military caste with special ties to the ruling dynasty.

Emancipation from their separate deal with Russia’s rulers would only come in 1917, but by then the modern world was quickly closing in on a Cossack society whose culture was shaped in the waning years of the old steppe. Mechanization of agriculture and warfare threatened to make their horse-centered culture obsolete. Forced with a choice between proclaiming themselves a nation and preserving their empire, the Don Host wavered and was swept away together with the old regime.¹⁸

Once again, parts of the Don would rise in rebellion against a new regime, but defeat at the hands of the Bolsheviks did not result in a new deal with Moscow.¹⁹ Instead, all traces of a separate Cossack existence were officially eliminated. With the end of the monarchy, the Don Cossacks would be melted into the Russian masses. In revolutionary Russia the future now belonged to the burlaks.

When Red armies from the north closed in on the Don in 1920, many Cossacks fled towards the Caucasus hoping to find shelter beyond the Kuban’ River. They soon followed in the footsteps of the Nekrasovites, boarding boats to cross the Black Sea. Separated from home and hearth by Bolshevik boundaries, most were unable to retrieve their wives and children before emigrating. Thousands of Cossacks once again became men without families and warriors without a country. In an ironic twist of fate, the Don Host ended its illustrious history on the run in search of refuge.

¹⁸ P. N. Krasnov, Kazach’ia samostiinost’ (Berlin, 1921); Donskaia Letopis’ (Belgrade, 1923–24).
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