

Peter the Great's management of the Labor resources of the Central Volga region

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Abstract

The great reformer Peter I was in the habit of taking a political approach to everything, including Russia's people. This article analyzes actions taken by Peter the Great with regard to the use of labor resources -- i.e., the population of Russia -- in the construction of the city of St. Petersburg and in shipbuilding. Despite the difficulties involved, local authorities did all they could to follow the orders given by the country's last tsar and first emperor. The Kazan Governorate permanently sent several thousands of skilled craftspeople and other workers to St. Petersburg each year, along with high-quality wood (mostly oak) and finished ships and boats. Those sent to the forests to prepare the shipbuilding timber were known as *lashmany*. One of the first neighborhoods in the new capital was Tatarskaya Sloboda, where the Tatars, Chuvashes, Maris, Urdmurts, Bashkirs, and Kalmyks who had come to the new capital lived in temporary housing. Those involved in the city's construction were given personal attention and protection by the tsar, who would sometimes personally handle complaints from the neighborhood. The Kazan Governorate made a huge contribution to feeding the workers as well; those who left for St. Petersburg were provided with all they would need by their home communities.

Keywords: 18th century; Peter I; peoples of the Central Volga Region; labor resources; shipbuilding

Worthy of wonder is the difference between Peter the Great's state institutions and his temporary ukazes. The former are the product of a broad mind, full of benevolence and wisdom; the latter are cruel, arbitrary, and, it would seem, written with a knout. The former were for eternity, or at least for the future; the latter escaped from an impatient despotic landowner (Pushkin, 1995, 221).

Dedicated to the 350th anniversary

of the first Emperor of Russia Peter I

Introduction

Despite his being a supremely important figure in Russian history, there remain a number of significant gaps in our knowledge of the life and actions of Peter I of Russia. The topic of

Peter the Great and the people of the Central Volga region, for example, has barely been touched. The role the people of the Volga regions played in the implementation of Russia's great reforms of the early 18th century is also an area ripe for exploration.

The transformations that occurred in the first part of the 18th century were predominately connected with solving certain tasks that stood before Russia. They were the continuation of undertakings begun in the previous era, as the 17th century had seen the construction of factories and industrial enterprises, the emergence of trade with the West, and attempts to reform the machinery of the state. Strengthening the state was very much in the interest of the aristocracy as well, as they saw it as only way to avoid the kind of popular uprisings that had become rather commonplace in the 1600s. And both the merchant class and a certain portion of the gentry wanted development in the spheres of commerce and industry, as well as access to the shores of the Baltic for these purposes. The construction of St. Petersburg was therefore directly tied to the reforms of the first quarter of the 18th century. Like the other innovations, the founding of the city of St. Petersburg facilitated the introduction of new measures that paved the way for the development of Russia's industrial capabilities (Luppov, 1957, 3-5).



As such, it appears important to provide a relevant analysis of the primary areas focused on by Peter I in his administration of the country. They include reinforcing the foundations of the government, shipbuilding, a heightened level of concern from the monarch for the wellbeing of the non-Russian peoples of the empire, and protection of the country's labor force. Herein I will concentrate on matters concerning the management of labor resources, largely by focusing on the example of the Central Volga region.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the article is the study of the historical and geographical plan on the foundation of the city of St. Petersburg on the Neva by Peter I. Actions to attract workers from the Middle Volga region are traced. A wide range of primary sources of the beginning of the XVIII century is used.

Results

Labor resources

Russia's history of organizing large construction projects predated Peter I. The Stoneworks Prikaz was established under Ivan the Terrible for this purpose. It was in charge of managing the engineering staff and the skilled workers. They lived in different cities around the country, but were obliged to travel to work on projects when ordered to do so by the

Stoneworks Prikaz (Ibid., 61). The Prikaz had a number of brick factories, and had on worked projects to build city walls in Smolensk, Kazan, and Astrakhan and a bridge across the Moscow River.

The ingenious ideas of Peter I regarding the construction of a European-style city with an outlet to the sea was made a reality within his own lifetime. The first thing that was necessary was a sufficient number of people to do the work. Naturally, these people would have to come from Russia's interior. The tsar issued a series of decrees to accomplish this mass migration.

By the autumn of 1703, approximately 20,000 diggers were employed in the construction of St. Petersburg. Just a year later, the tsar's orders had already mandated that 40,000 diggers be sent to his new city every year from all parts of Russia. Diggers came to St. Petersburg for a shift of two months, of which there were three each year, from March 25 to September 25. Those from the Central Volga region – Alaty, Kazan, Arzamas, Svyazhansk, Simbirsk, Samara, and Syzran – worked the shift from July 25 through to September 25 (Mavrodin, 1983, 83).

The compulsory service was incumbent upon all governorates. Each year the requirements varied, from as many as one worker from every 9 households to as few as one from every 16.

The workers had to bring their own axes, while foreman were required to have chisels, drills, and drawknives. They also brought with them enough food to last the entire journey. When they arrived in St. Petersburg, they were to receive money for food and expenses for one month. The means for covering these expenses were collected from the same stratus of society from which the workers came. The necessary amount was apportioned to the governorate in proportion to the number of households it contained. It was paid by the heads of the households who had not sent any workers to St. Petersburg. Thus the obligation was shared by all peasants and townspeople. Some sent workers, while others sent money (Luppov, 1957, 79).

Despite the difficulties, the local authorities made efforts to execute the orders of the tsar. For example, in October 1708, Commander of Kazan Nikita Kudryavtsev reported that “By your sovereign decree, tribute- and service-bound Tatars from Kazan and other cities of uyezds numbering 2104 persons, and service-bound Chuvashes from Sinibirsk numbering 700 persons, in all 2804 persons, were sent from their households to Sankt-Piterbukh this October on various dates” (Letters, 1946, 888).

On December 18, 1708, Peter I issued a decree creating the initial 8 governorates. The Kazan Governorate included 36 cities (Yaik, Ufa, Samara, Alaty, Tsvilsk, Cheboksary, and others) and the territory surrounding them (Complete, vol. IV, 436). The governorates were created to have similar populations, not territory size. The tsar appointed Count Pyotr Apraksin to head the Governorate of Kazan.

Peter continued to demand reinforcements for the construction of his new city on the Neva River: “Lord Apraksin! Try to send five thousand Tatars, Cheremis, and Mordvins next winter to Petersburg to replace the first ones. Piter (Collection, 1811, 94).

A decree of 1710 ordered that 4720 artisans of various occupations “from settlements and uyezds” be sent to St. Petersburg with their wives and children “to live perpetually”, since St. Petersburg was experiencing a “considerable lack” of master craftsmen “at the Admiralty and around the city”. Houses were built for these migrants prior to their arrival, and the money needed to support them for the year came to 22 rubles per person, which also had to be collected. All eight governorates were required to send people: Moscow – 1417, St. Petersburg – 1034, Kiev – 199, Kazan – 667, Arkhangelgorod – 555, Siberia – 299, Smolensk – 298, Azov – 251 (Luppov, 1957, 78-85).

In 1710, Kazan Governorate sent 667 people to live and work permanently in St. Petersburg. In a letter to Kazan Governor Pyotr Apraksin, Peter the Great articulated the skills he required of those to be sent to the new city. We see from the document that the professions most needed from the Kazan Admiralty were stonemasons (295 people), carpenters (264), blacksmiths (50), bricklayers (13), and shipwrights and apprentices (10), along with cabinet makers and joiners, carvers, and lathe operators. There were even cases when children were sent from the governorate: in 1710, Peter I requested that Governor Apraksin to send to Moscow “little Kalmyk boys and girls, about 10 pairs”. Apparently these children were needed either for doing some kind of work that did not require great physical effort or for training in some sort of trade. That same year, Peter requested that children of clergymen be sent to the St. Petersburg Admiralty to learn carpentry skills (Mansurova, 2010: 118).

The scope of the work, however, also required a huge number of unskilled laborers and specialists in other areas. Peter, as ever highly motivated and focused, kept track of everything personally and did not abide dereliction of duty. On August 18, 1710, he chastised his confederate Pyotr Apraksin: “We are also deeply astonished at you, in that, according to Ulyan Senyavin, you have failed in your task of sending Tatars and Chuvashes here to labor. Specifically: as of today, only 1262 people have arrived, while 474 escaped along the way... The Kazan Governorate must send reinforcements numbering 2867 people to St. Petersburg to work on construction of the city, as well as one ruble each per month, totaling 8601 rubles for three months” (Letters, 1956, 291-292).

The numbers per year of workers sent from the Kazan Governorate are: in 1710 – 8580, in 1711 – 6272, in 1712 – 5733, in 1713 – 7518, and in both 1714 and 1715 – 6024 (Luppov, 1957, 80).

In early 1717, an order was issued for contractors to be sent money to supply ship timber from the forests and for Tatars [read: people from the Kazan Governorate -- A.S] to be sent to St. Petersburg to work (Baranov, 1872, 41).

Those who were sent to the forests for timber were known as *lashmany*. As per the tsar’s orders, Tatars, Chuvashes, Maris, Mordvins, and Russians from the Simbirsk, Nizhny Novgorod, and Kazan Governorates could be called on to work as *lashmany*. The work done by *lashmany*, which consisted largely of felling and hewing wood, was difficult and dangerous.

One researcher of the Simbirsk Governorate lashmany believes that there were no Russians or Orthodox Christians among them. The peasants sent to the Kazan Admiralty were part of the “lashmany” social stratum, but they were initially recorded as Tatars subject to state service. For example, in 1811, 1816, and 1834, the Tatars of the village of Staroye Drozhzhanoye in the Buinsk Uyezd were counted as Tatars obligated to do state service, while in 1858 they were deemed lashmany. Researcher Irshad Gafarov is of the opinion that the majority of the lashmany were Mishar Tatars. And the denomination of Mishar Tatar was defined not as an ethnicity, but rather as a social stratum (Gafarov, 2018, 60). The workers that were sent to the Kazan Admiralty were peasants from the surrounding settlements, largely Tatars, Chuvashes, and Mari.

Not all diggers became permanent residents of St. Petersburg. Many also died in the marshes and bogs. The city was largely made up of those craftsmen and workers who were brought to the city on a permanent basis – masons, bricklayers, metalworkers, fitters, braziers, woodworkers... (Mavrodin, 1983, 88).

Beginning in 1718, the Kazan Governorate was ordered to send one person for every four households. The families of these workers underwent continuous hardships, as the men were gone for up to 6 months (Mansurova, 2010, 118).

And starting in April of that same year, the people who arrived from the governorate were simply not sent home. It was at this time that workers ceased being sent to do construction work in St. Petersburg.

The people of the Central Volga region, as subjects of the Russian Empire, were forced to participate in mandatory recruitment campaigns. In the 1720s there was an acute need for new soldiers not only for military purposes, but also to develop and fortify positions in new territories. An example of this was the construction of the Ladoga Canal (Baranov, 1872, 82, 132).

Among the first neighborhoods to be built in St. Petersburg was the Tatar Sloboda. Contemporaries state that it arose right outside the fortress crownwork. The residents here were Tatars, Chuvashes, Maris, Urdmurts, Bashkirs, and Kalmyks. The name Tatar Sloboda was quite arbitrary, as the district included many ethnicities who originated from many different governorates. One foreign traveller said of the Tatar Market located right across from the crownwork, that here one could purchase “old clothing from any ethnic group” at the lowest prices (Dessription, 1975, 22). Beside it was the Obzhorniy (“gluttonous”) Market. According to the explanation provided by Pyotr Petrov, at that time even the Kalmyk cavalry was called Tatar, and their yurts were known as Tatar dwellings. Also found here was a populous community of Swedish prisoners, along with two of their priests. It should also be noted that before the abolition of serfdom the word “sloboda” was used throughout Russia to indicate any large suburban settlement with a non-serf population, while the word *sloboda* itself comes from a root meaning freedom. In other words, Tatar Sloboda is an exonym. St. Petersburg at that time was not even a city in the true sense. The newcomers set up house as they pleased, in little settlements and neighborhoods. And the term “Tatar” in St. Petersburg of the early 18th century was quite a large umbrella. Even in the Russian census of 1897,

Tatars, Bashkirs, Teptyars, Chuvashes, Azeris, Ottoman Turks, Turkmens, and Kirghiz were lumped together as speakers of “Turko-Tatar languages” (First, 1904, 93-94).

Beginning in 1722 with a decree from Peter I, Tatar (read: non-Russian) boys from the Kazan Governorate were subject to mandatory military service. They arrived in St. Petersburg to serve as officers’ servants and cabin boys (Mansurova, 2010, 118).

The local population was considered under the authority of the Kazan Admiralty Office. For example, under the census’ 2nd revision of 1744, there were more than 4.5 thousand service-obligated Mordvins under the aegis of the office (Demidov, 2018, 78-79).

Attentiveness and protection

“Look after them and protect them steadfastly, so that the Tatars and Chuvashes and Cheremis and Votyaks are not unduly aggrieved, cheated, or hindered in trading by Russian peoples, interpreters, or bailiffs, or by those young informers among their own brother Tatars, Chuvashes, Cheremis, and Votyaks”. This quotation is excerpted from an order by Peter I dated March 31, 1697 to the commanders and princes of the Kazan region, “On administering governmental and land affairs” (Complete, vol. III, 286). The order clearly sets forth the methods and means of governing the populace. On the whole, its contents are permeated with fatherly care not only for Russia, but for all the people who reside in it. The tsar showed particular tenderness for non-Russians. His orders are quite relevant with regard to his fellow Russians even today.

At the same time, it is difficult to overestimate the contribution of the peoples of the Central Volga region to supplying the growing city of St. Petersburg with provisions. And thus the following observation, made in the first decade of the 18th century, is thoroughly justified: “If provisions, and particularly flour, had not been brought in from Novgorod, Pskov, Moscow, and even the Kingdom of Kazan... then not only Petersburg but the entire section of the country would have died of hunger” (Description, 1975, 229).

In May of 1708, the monarch wrote to Commander of Kazan Nikita Kudryavtsev: “When you receive this order to the Kazan Uyezd and other smaller cities and towns, send immediately here to Piterbukh to serve Tatars and Chuvashes, and from the Cheremis if there are not enough Tatars, five thousand people, them and send by water, bringing enough bread only for the journey” (Letters, 1918, 165).

This document better than any other shows Peter Alekseyevich’s strength of character and his generous concern for his subjects. This can also be seen in the fact that the funds were collected from the households that did not send workers. Thus households had the choice of whether to send people to work in St. Petersburg or money to support the migrant workers. The authorities in Kazan and Simbirsk made a sincere attempt to fulfill the tsar’s orders to provide St Petersburg with workers.

Everything the migrants required for both the journey to St. Petersburg and the initial period after their arrival was paid for by their fellow villagers or townspeople. Peter ordered that houses be built for the new arrivals in St Petersburg, most often one hut for every two

families. Thus the sloboda was born. The builders couldn't keep up with the continuous flow of migrants, however, so it was common for them to have to make their own shelter upon arrival (Mavrodin, 1983, 88).

Life was not even easy for the Volga region natives who worked directly under Peter. In addition to the difficult material circumstances, they also had to deal with attacks from bandits and thieves, and with those whose desire it was to sow discord. We can see this particularly well in letters of complaint from Commander of Kazan Kudryavtsev. In 1708 he wrote the tsar a number of such letters. "The Tatars and Chuvashes who have left from Kazan and Ufa uyezds are being told by Bashkir thieves that the conscripts are being sent not by your sovereign order but by profiteers, for their own purposes, and are being told to attack Russian people everywhere... The Bashkir thieves have raided 3 villages near those Chuvash suburbs, killed people, and taken others prisoner" (Letters, 1918, 619).

The local population attempted to defend themselves from the assailants as best they could. "And that Nevezhin, upon learning of a camp 50 versts away with 200 Russians, and also with 100 Chuvashes, attacked them during the night, and killed most of them, and fled from that village quickly, and continued on for 2 versts, leaving them in peace because he did not have enough gunpowder (Ibid., 614). In all such cases the tsar took the side of the working people.

In September of 1710, Peter wrote to the Governor of Kazan Pyotr Apraksin. In his letter he instructs that flour and grain be sent for the winter in a sufficient amount (Collection, 1811, 104). Bread was desperately needed not only for the builders of the northern capital, but also for the soldiers stationed in the Northwest region.

In 1712, Peter issued an order providing housing and an allotment of land for some migrants. According to the document, masons, bricklayers, and other skilled workers in the construction sphere were given plots of land. But in general, the living conditions of most migrants were quite poor. Many lived in dugouts, sheds, or simply under lean-to shelters.

Grain, flour, groats, roe, and cured fatback were brought in from the Central Volga region. The provisions were most often delivered along waterways. The cargo was sent along the Volga to Tver, then along rivers to Lake Ladoga, and then down the Neva River to St. Petersburg (Semyonova, 1998, 165-166).

There are specific instances that bear witness to the special care taken for and intercessions made on behalf of non-Russian workers. For example, in April of 1722, the Senate was tasked with investigating a complaint from Chuvashes of the Yadrinskiy Uyezd, Nizhniy Novgorod Governorate, against the local authorities (Baranov, 1872, 95).

Conclusion

This analysis allows us to draw a number of conclusions. One is that the reforms of the first quarter of the 18th century were quite closely linked to the construction of St. Petersburg. Along with other transformational changes, the construction of the northern capital contributed to the implementation in Russia of new arrangements that would better facilitate

the growth of industry and production power. The Volga forests were not only used for shipbuilding. The city's construction also relied heavily on oak brought from the forests of the Central Volga region. Oak was mostly used as piles for the structures built in the marshy ground of the city. During his famous Persian campaign of 1722-1723, Peter the Great's route took him personally through these lands, to Kozmodemyansk, Kazan, Cheboksary, and Svyazhinsk.

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