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Unsalaries and Unfed

Town Clerks' Means of Survival in Southwest Russia under Peter I

ANNA JOUKOVSKAIA

In the last two decades, the historiography of administration in the Muscovite state and the early Russian empire has been enriched by a whole range of in-depth studies on a variety of themes such as the internal organization of the Military and Robbery chancelleries (*prikazy*), the identity and composition of Moscow secretaries (*d'iaki*) and clerks (*pod'iachie*) during the Time of Troubles, the paperwork procedures of the patriarchal chancelleries, the efficiency of the St. Petersburg colleges, attempts by Peter I to create an independent court system, the inner workings of the Petrine Senate, and the Chancellery of Investigations' methods of combating crime.¹

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¹ A nonexhaustive list that exemplifies the range of themes would include V. A. Aleksandrov and N. N. Pokrovskii, *Vlast' i obshchestvo: Sibir' v XVII v.* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1991); E. V. Vershinin, *Voevodskoe upravlenie v Sibiri: XVII v.* (Ekaterinburg: Tsentr "Razvivaiushchee obuchenie," 1998); E. V. Anisimov, *Gosudarstvennye preobrazovaniia i samodержavie Petra Velikogo v pervoi chetverti XVIII veka* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1997); M. O. Akishin, *Rossiiskii absolutizm i upravlenie Sibiri XVIII veka: Organizatsiia i sostav gosudarstvennogo apparata* (Moscow: ATS, 2003); D. V. Liseitsev, *Posol'skii prikaz v epokhu Smuty* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2003); Brian Davies, *State Power and Community in Early Modern Russia: The Case of Kozlov, 1635–1649* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); M. B. Bulgakov, *Gosudarstvennye sluzhby posadskikh liudei v XVII veke* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2004); V. I. Ivanov, *Bukhgalterskii uchet v Rossii XVI–XVII vv.: Istoriko-istochnikovedcheskoe issledovanie monastyrskikh prikhodo-rashodnykh knig* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2005); P. L. Sedov, *Zakat Moskovskogo tsarstva: Tsarskii dvor kontsa XVII veka* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2006); D. O. Serov, *Administratsiia Petra I* (Moscow: OGI, 2007); L. F. Pisar'kova, *Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie Rossii s kontsa XVII do kontsa XVIII veka: Evoliutsiia biurokraticheskoi sistemy* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007); D. A. Redin, *Administrativnyye struktury i biurokratiia Urala v epokhu petrovskikh reform: Zapadnye uezdy Sibirskoi gubernii v 1711–1727 gg.* (Ekaterinburg: Volot, 2007); O. V. Novokhatko, *Razriad v 185 [1676/1677] godu* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2007); Christoph Witzernath, *Cossacks and the*

The revival of administrative history is particularly welcome after its ebb during the 1980s and 1990s.² Researchers specializing in the history of governance (and I include myself) should, however, acknowledge that the general picture of the Russian administration during the 17th and 18th centuries that we offer to a larger readership no longer corresponds to the state of the art. In otherwise useful reference literature, students read statements such as “what was solely a palace administration in 1450 evolved into a differentiated system based on ‘proto-Weberian’ functional chancelleries a century or so later”; the 17th-century Muscovite chancelleries were staffed “by a professional bureaucracy which did not depend on personal relations”;³ “Russia’s bureaucratic processes, expectations, and conduct [in the 17th century] were ... a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon, much like computerization in late 20th-century life.”⁴ Yet the research of the past

Russian Empire, 1598–1725: Manipulation, Rebellion, and Expansion into Siberia (London: Routledge, 2007); M. V. Babich and I. V. Babich, *Oblastnye praviteli Rossii, 1719–1739 gg.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008); Liseitsev, *Prikaznaia sistema Moskovskogo gosudarstva v epokhu Smuty* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2009); Serov, *Sudebnaia reforma Petra I: Istoriko-pravovoe issledovanie. Monografiia* (Moscow: Zertsalo-M, 2009); I. A. Ustinova, *Knigi Patriarskhikh prikazov 1620–1649 gg. kak istoricheskii istochnik* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2011); N. F. Demidova, *Sluzhilaia biurokratiia v Rossii XVII veka (1625–1700): Biograficheskii spravochnik* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2011); N. V. Rybalko, *Rossiiskaia prikaznaia biurokratiia v Smutnoe vremia nachala XVII v.* (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2011), reviewed in this issue of *Kritika*; A. V. Demkin, *Vnutrenniaia politika Ekateriny I i Verkhovnogo Tainogo Soveta* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2011); E. V. Akel’ev, *Povsednevnaia zhizn’ vorovskogo mira Moskvy vo vremena Van’ki Kaina* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2012); Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and A. V. Vorob’ev, “Deloproizvodstvo Razboinogo prikaza kak istoricheskii istochnik po istorii gosudarstvennogo upravleniia v Rossii XVI–pervoi poloviny XVII v.” (Candidate’s diss., Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, Moscow, 2012).

² For some of the reasons for the suspension of interest in administrative history in the 1980s and 1990s, see Valerie A. Kivelson, “Culture and Politics, or the Curious Absence of Muscovite State Building in Current American Historical Writing,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, 1–2 (2005): 19–28.

³ Richard Hellie, “The Expanding Role of the State in Russia,” in *Modernizing Muscovy: Reform and Social Change in Seventeenth-Century Russia*, ed. Jarmo Kotilaine and Marshall Poe (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 29–55, here 30.

⁴ Peter Brown, “Bureaucratic Administration in Seventeenth-Century Russia,” in *Modernizing Muscovy*, 57–78, here 78. That the Russian administration was already bureaucratic in character prior to the 19th century has been expressed, more or less explicitly, by many historians, including in textbooks and reference works. See, e.g., S. M. Troitskii, *Russkii absoliutizm i dvorianstvo v XVIII v.: Formirovanie biurokratii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), 4–7, 46–47; N. F. Demidova, *Sluzhilaia biurokratiia v Rossii XVII veka i ee rol’ v formirovanii absoliutizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), 17–18, 190–92; B. N. Mironov, *Sotsial’naia istoriia Rossii perioda imperii (XVIII–nachalo XX v.): Genezis lichnosti, demokraticheskoi sem’i, grazhdanskogo obschestva i pravovogo gosudarstva*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999), 2:162–75; T. G. Arkhipova, M. F. Rumiantseva, and A. S. Senin, *Istoriia gosudarstvennoi sluzhby v Rossii*

two decades has warned us to be more cautious, alerting us that Muscovite administration had little in common with what the public today recognizes as bureaucracy. We should not, therefore, continue to give readers the sense that they would feel at home in a Moscow chancellery, let alone a provincial town governor's office. I do not dispute the stability and efficiency of the Muscovite state administration from the 16th century onward, a fact proven long ago.⁵ It is also entirely plausible that in the second half of the 17th century, certain choice parts of this administration actually acquired some of the functional traits of modern bureaucratic organizations (this was the case in the most sophisticated central bureaus, such as the Military Chancellery). But to claim that the administrative organs of the Muscovite state and the early Russian empire constituted a bureaucratic system or that their agents were professional bureaucrats is either to eviscerate the definition of bureaucracy or to persist in applying an abstract concept to a historical situation that it cannot explain. Far more convincing is the opinion of historians who date the professionalization of administrative personnel, its unification into a specific social group, and the development of a particular civil service ethos to the 19th century.⁶

One of the largest-scale tasks awaiting historians of the Muscovite and early imperial administrative systems is to describe and account for their regional diversity. Although historians have never ignored this phenomenon, we have certainly paid too little attention to it.⁷ The centralization of administrative authority in Moscow or St. Petersburg does not itself signify that administrative practices and personnel profiles were uniform throughout the state. N. F. Demidova has led the way, uncovering stark regional differences in the socioeconomic profiles of secretaries and clerks in the center

XVIII–XIX veka: *Uchebnoe posobie* (Moscow: RGGU, 1999), 6–12, 19–20; and Pissar'kova, *Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie Rossii*, 3–14.

⁵ See Peter B. Brown, "Early Modern Russian Bureaucracy: The Evolution of the Chancellery System from Ivan III to Peter the Great, 1478–1717" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1978).

⁶ Walter McKenzie Pintner, "The Evolution of Civil Officialdom, 1755–1855," in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Pintner and Don Karl Rowney (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 190–248; John P. LeDonne, *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762–1796* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 15–16; LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700–1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), ix.

⁷ For example, the regional diversity of the socioeconomic profiles of secretaries appeared self-evident to N. P. Likhachev as early as 1888 (*Razriadnye d'iaki XVI veka: Opyt istoricheskogo issledovaniia* [Moscow: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2007], 226). See also Susan Smith-Peter, "How to Write a Region: Local and Regional Historiography," *Kritika* 5, 3 (2004): 527–42.

and north, west and southwest, and Siberia when compared with Moscow.⁸ Before a new general synthesis can be offered, therefore, the study of the administrative system must continue to pass through a period of local and regional investigation, with a special attention devoted to cross-regional comparison.⁹

One of the current tasks for the historiography of administration is to reveal the sources of the economic survival of clerks in the 18th century. At the end of the 17th century, clerks made up more than 95 percent (about 4,500 people) of the men employed at Moscow chancelleries and their regional branches.¹⁰ They were responsible for carrying out a substantial portion of vital administrative tasks.¹¹ For most of the 17th century, Moscow and town clerks usually received a sort of salary, or remuneration (*zhalovanie*), from the tsar. In addition, they were directly remunerated by the governed populations and individual clients, who provided clerks with “feed” (*korm*), various perquisites (*dokhody ot del, posbliny, pochesti, pominki, vziatki*), and “bribes” (*posuly, vziatki*).¹² By contrast, in the reign of Peter I and up to the 1760s, the vast majority of clerks (not only in the provinces but also in the capitals) received state compensation either on an extremely irregular basis or not at all.¹³ How did three generations of clerks and their family members support themselves? The present article contributes to the resolution of this issue.

⁸ Demidova, *Sluzhilaia biurokratiia*, 62–75.

⁹ Others have reached the same conclusion for 19th-century Russia. See most notably Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Nizhni Novgorod* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 9.

¹⁰ The number comes from Demidova, *Sluzhilaia biurokratiia*, 37.

¹¹ On clerks, see the bibliography compiled by Peter Brown ending with 1990 (*Modernizing Muscovy*, 57–60). More recent works are included in the bibliographical citation at the beginning of this article.

¹² The word *vziatka* once denoted *both* regular perquisites *and* illicit, abusive bribes, but only the latter sense survived in modern Russian. On salaries, see Peter B. Brown, “The Service Land Chancellery Clerks of Seventeenth-Century Russia: Their Regime, Salaries, and Economic Survival,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 52, 1 (2004): 33–68; and Demidova, *Sluzhilaia biurokratiia*, 122–37. For definitions of “feed” and perquisites, see Brian Davies, “The Politics of Give and Take: *Kormlenie* as Service Remuneration and Generalized Exchange, 1488–1726,” in *Culture and Identity in Muscovy, 1359–1584*, ed. Ann M. Kleimola and Gail D. Lenhoff (Moscow: ITZ-Garant, 1997), 39, 42–44. For an estimation of the revenue of Moscow chancellery clerks in the 17th century, see P. V. Sedov, “Podnosheniia v moskovskikh prikazakh XVII veka,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 1 (1996): 139–50, here 147–48. On *vziatki* as bribes, see D. O. Serov, “Petr I kak iskorenitel’ vziatochnichestva,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* 3/150 (2013): 70–95.

¹³ L. F. Pisar’kova, “Rossiiskaia biurokratiia v epokhu Petra I,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 2 (2004): 3–19.

Historians generally point to the above-mentioned practices of “feeding” (*kormlenie*) and perquisites. Some researchers have suggested the importance of sources of income for secretaries and clerks that were not associated with administrative activity: for example, profits from the use of land, house rent, or private lessons.¹⁴ Until recently, however, the results consisted only of a disparate set of facts about income, which demands a more systematic approach.

In 2007, D. A. Redin completed the first—and thus far the only—systematic study of “feeding” in his monograph on the administration of the Urals. Methodically gathered, his collection of data on the livelihoods of all members of the Ural administration led Redin to the conclusion that in the beginning of the 18th century, “with the abandonment of the service land [*pomest'e*] system ... and the state’s ongoing inability to offer local officials (in the broad sense of the term) a stable and sufficient salary, feeding [*kormlenie*] became a structural element of their maintenance.” According to Redin, the “practice of feeding integrated officials of all ranks, regardless of their social origins and financial standing ... was decisive ... in establishing their social status.”¹⁵ Redin’s ideas are both original and convincing. At the same time, the question arises whether characterizations of Russia as a whole can be extrapolated from his conclusions about “feeding,” which are based on data about a particular region.

The results of my research, based on materials from the southwest of the empire, the town and district (*uezd*) of Sevsk, show the existence of substantial regional variety in the way clerks made their living during the reign of Peter I. This article demonstrates that Sevsk clerks had to earn a living in various ways, a substantial number of which were quite unrelated to clerical activities. I also hope to show that a local microhistorical investigation can provide more than narrow answers to narrow inquiries, introducing new questions for general historiographic debate.



This article is based on archival sources from 1680 to 1730.¹⁶ A particular feature of my method is the systematic use of deeds, a type of document

¹⁴ O. E. Kosheleva, *Liudi Sankt-Peterburgskogo ostroma Petrovskogo vremeni* (Moscow: OGI, 2004), 270–73.

¹⁵ Redin, *Administrativnye struktury i biurokratiia Urala*, 554–55.

¹⁶ All archival materials referenced in this article come from the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov, RGADA).

seldom referenced by historians of Russian administration.¹⁷ Excellently preserved record books of deeds (*knigi zapisi kreposteĭ*) make possible the discovery of clerks' income sources, ones not directly related to their rank and official activity. I have identified all deeds registered in Sevsk from 1701 to 1725 (wills, marriage contracts, purchase and sale contracts, surety bonds, employment contracts, indentured labor contracts, etc.) that contain the names of Sevsk's clerks and town-square clerks (*ploshchadnye pod'iachĭe*). Clerks acted not only as parties in agreements but also as witnesses and guarantors, and they often signed on behalf of illiterate parties. Thus the record books of deeds reveal a unique picture of life in the district, in which secretaries, clerks, and town-square clerks not only appeared as representatives of the state authority but behaved as participants in the local socioeconomic environment alongside other residents. At the same time, traditional types of sources of administrative history (paperwork from the Military Chancellery, the Sevsk governor's office [*razriadnaia izba*], the Sevsk magistrate's chamber, etc.) allow a fairly complete understanding of the income that local clerks earned as a result of performing, or not performing, their "office work" (*prikaznaia rabota*). The simultaneous study of chancellery paperwork and deeds significantly modifies the existing view of the income structure of not just a few individual clerks but of two generations of all clerks in an important provincial urban center.

The characteristics of the town of Sevsk and its district make it of particular interest to historians of administration. From the 1620s until the end of the 17th century, Sevsk was one of the important military centers in a large region that defended against both the Crimean Tatars and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; it was placed under the exclusive administrative and judicial purview of the Military Chancellery.¹⁸ Sevsk district comprised the Komaritskaia court peasants' canton (*dvortsovaia volost'*), which provided about 5,000 men for service in dragoon regiments. During Peter I's reign, this vast and fertile district was home to between 20,000 and 60,000 inhabitants, for whom the town of Sevsk was the economic, administrative, and judicial capital.¹⁹ The fortified town housed a garrison of 500–800 people. An official

¹⁷ The informative potential of 18th-century deed books has been analyzed by G. D. Kapustina, "Zapisnye knigi Moskovskoi krepostnoi kontory kak istoricheskii istochnik: Pervaia chetvert' XVIII v.," *Problemy istochnikovedeniia*, no. 7 (1959): 216–73.

¹⁸ On this frontier, see Brian Davies, *Warfare, State, and Society on the Black Sea Steppe, 1500–1700* (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁹ D. I. Sviatskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk gorodov Sevskia, Dmitrovska i Komaritskoi volosti* (Orel: Khalizev, 1908); A. A. Novosel'skii, "Dvortsovye krest'iane Komaritskoi volosti vo vtoroi polovine 17 v.," in *Voprosy istorii sel'skogo khoziaistva, krest'ianstva i revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii: Sbornik statei k 75-letiiu akademika Nikolaia Mikhailovicha Druzhinina*, ed. L. M.

commercial district (*posad*) appeared in Sevsk only in the 1680s, when 52 people were registered as townsmen (*posadskie liudi*) from the ranks of free itinerants (*guliashchie liudi*) and retired servicemen.²⁰ By the first quarter of the 18th century, the number of townsmen had already reached 800.²¹

Sevsk was distinguished from most provincial towns by its surprisingly large number of clerks. My calculations show that in the beginning of the 18th century, there were more than 70 clerks and an equal number of town-square clerks.²² By contrast, the number of clerks in most provincial towns did not exceed 5 people, and only a trading center as large as Novgorod had an equally sizable contingent of clerks (about 80 in 1691).²³

There were special reasons for this distinctive trait. Originally a small fortress designed for local defense, Sevsk developed in the second half of the 17th century into a logistics hub for southwest Russia. This was a place where servicemen, stores, and money ebbed and flowed at the rapid pace of campaign seasons. It was also a place where military commanders transiting from Moscow formed troops, and they urgently needed scribal services for the duration of a campaign. Resident clerks tended to evade regimental “service and work” (*sluzhba i rabota*), for it was “disinterested” (*beskorystnaia*) and obliged them to travel.²⁴ For Sevsk army group commanders and the town governor (*voevoda*), it was difficult to force the clerks to obey; it was easier to reward anyone who agreed to provide scribal services (typically, literate local servicemen or clerks’ sons) with the rank of clerk. That is why, in my opinion, clerks were so

Ivanov (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1961), 65–80; N. B. Shelamanova, “Komaritskaia volost’ i Sevskii uezd v pervoi polovine 17 v.,” in *Voprosy istorii khoziaistva i naseleniia Rossii 17 v.: Ocherki po istoricheskoi geografii 17 v.*, ed. L. G. Beskrovnyi (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1974), 191–214; Ia. E. Vodarskii, “Territorii i naselenie Sevskogo razriada vo vtoroi polovine 17–nachale 18 vv.,” in *Voprosy istorii khoziaistva i naseleniia Rossii 17 v.*, 215–36. To get an idea of what material life in Sevsk could have been, one might turn to Daniel Kaiser’s vivid picture of Tula, which had also grown from a frontier fortress: Daniel H. Kaiser, “Urban Identities in Sixteenth-Century Muscovy: The Case of Tula,” in *Culture and Identity in Muscovy*, 203–26.

²⁰ This data comes from Anton Sergeevich Rakitin (RGADA f. 210, Sevskie knigi, op. 6G, d. 20, ll. 489–92) and can be accessed at <http://diderix.petergen.com> (accessed August 2013).

²¹ Census Book of Merchants and Artisans in the Town of Sevsk, 1721–22, RGADA f. 769, op. 1, d. 379, l. 113.

²² On town-square clerks, see N. P. Likhachev, “Ploshchadnye pod’iachie XVII v.,” in *Sbornik statei po russkoi istorii, posviashchennykh S. F. Platonovu* (Petrograd: Ogni, 1922), 139–43; M. F. Zlotnikov, “Pod’iachie Ivanovskoi ploshchadi: K istorii notariata Moskovskoi Rusi,” *Sbornik statei, posviashchennykh A. S. Lappo-Danilevskomu* (Petrograd: M. M. Stasiulevich, 1916), 82–130; M. B. Bulgakov, “Pskovskie ploshchadnye pod’iachie v pervoi polovine XVII v.,” *Pskov*, no. 20 (2004): 66–69.

²³ Demidova, *Sluzhilaia biurokratiia*, 50.

²⁴ The term *beskorystnaia rabota* was used by clerks to denote work that did not bring any material compensation to them (*koryst*—profit, interest, greed, mercenariness).

numerous in Sevsk. Besides, clerks who had accomplished regimental “service and work” for a season or two usually petitioned for “additions” (*pridachi*) to their “entitlement rate to the sovereign’s remuneration” (*oklad gosudareva zhalovaniia*). Governors distributed “additions” liberally, circumventing the Military Chancellery normally responsible for such allotments.²⁵

Since the task at hand is to highlight regional diversity, it does not seem to be a methodological problem that Sevsk was, in this sense, an exceptional—not a typical—town. As the number of local studies of the social history of administration increases, historians will inevitably discover new and unexpected differences. Generalization should occur not through the rejection of extremes and the computation of an average but through the identification of mechanisms and patterns of influence on the administrative system exerted by economical, social, political, geographical, and cultural factors.



I first describe typical “clerkish” types of work that could generate revenue, then explore various forms of entrepreneurship exhibited by Sevsk clerks.

In the 1670s, the population of Sevsk district provided moderate cash and food gifts to the town governor and the secretary of Sevsk, a practice that closely resembled traditional “feeding” on holidays and other particular occasions (though the word “feed” was not used in local documentation). Clerks, for their part, did not figure as recipients of such gifts; communities paid them only for clerical work.²⁶ In addition, clerks received cash remuneration from the local treasury under the control of the Military Chancellery. But in the 1690s, for reasons that are not clear, this system was undermined. On the one hand, governors and secretaries grew accustomed to taking excessive quantities of “feed,” and clerks started following their example.²⁷ On the other hand, the Military Chancellery stopped allocating funds for the clerks’ salaries.²⁸ The population of the Sevsk district petitioned repeatedly against

²⁵ In 1690, the Military Chancellery conducted a muster of the 48 Sevsk clerks and discovered the governors’ liberality (RGADA f. 210, op. 6G, kniga 20, d. 14, ll. 418–49 ob.).

²⁶ Sevsk district, Receipt and Expenditure Books of Elected Elders, 1670–73, RGADA f. 210, op. 22, d. 126, ll. 4–4 ob., 10–10 ob., 19–20.

²⁷ G. P. Enin, *Voevodskoe kormlenie v Rossii v 17 veke: Soderzhanie naseleniem uezda gosudarstvennogo organa vlasti* (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskaia natsional’naia biblioteka, 2000), 136–46.

²⁸ The distribution of salaries to clerks is last mentioned in 1694. There are neither receipt nor expenditure entries for clerks’ salaries in the receipt and expenditure books of the Sevsk governor’s office (RGADA f. 1157, op. 1, d. 21), in the revisory books of the Sevsk governor’s

the abuse and finally, in 1699, obtained a favorable decision from Peter I.²⁹ The town governor and two resident secretaries in Sevsk were ordered to stop their exactions, which were to be replaced by a relatively moderate cash allowance (*gosudarevo zhalovan'e*) of 500 rubles for the governor and 150 rubles for each secretary, collected and paid by the elected elders (*starosty*) of the district communities. Judging by the elders' receipt and expenditure books, this order was implemented.³⁰ As for clerks, the government chose not to entitle them to any form of collective prestation from the local population and did not resume paying them from the Treasury. Accordingly, clerks were compelled to care for themselves.

A traditional activity of clerks was to provide expert support and advice to petitioners.³¹ For instance, in January 1702, the Sevsk clerk Iur'ia Simonov signed a contract at the deeds office with three watchmen of the Sevsk governor's office. The document stipulated that the clerk would take one of them to Moscow, help him file a petition at the Military Chancellery regarding the watchmen's back pay, and lend them money for "judicial expenses"—including bribes. If the petitions proved successful, the clients agreed to pay Simonov the monetary equivalent of the annual salary for three watchmen, around 18 rubles in total.³² In short, with this single service, the clerk earned an amount comparable to his own (chronically unpaid) "sovereign's remuneration" of 22 rubles.³³ Simonov needed the money: he

office, the books of ordinary and extraordinary collections of the Komaritskaia court canton (RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 50, d. 49), or in the Sevsk province collection books (RGADA f. 954, op. 1, d. 6). There are notes about the distribution of "support money" in the amount of 5 rubles due to regimental service (RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 26, d. 116, ll. 1–1 ob.; op. 8, viazka 28, d. 81, ll. 1–2; op. 5, spisok 76, d. 6, ll. 320–20 ob.; op. 8, viazka 27, d. 81, ll. 1–2; op. 5, spisok 76, d. 7, l. 323 ob.).

²⁹ M. M. Bogoslovskii, *Petr I: Materialy dlia biografii* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2007), 3:364–65; Enin, *Voevodskoe kormlenie*, 145.

³⁰ Collection Books, 1701, RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 55, d. 608, ll. 1854–59 ob.; op. 21, d. 1163, ll. 1–44; Collection Books, 1702, RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 55, d. 609, ll. 1860–1920 ob. Due to the arrears, the secretaries were actually able to get paid by turns, once every two years.

³¹ References to this activity (*khodit' za delami*) are regularly found in Sevsk sources: RGADA f. 442, op. 1, d. 1653, ll. 12 ob., 47 ob., 110 ob.; f. 769, op. 1, d. 401, l. 2; f. 769, op. 1, d. 405, ll. 5–5 ob.; f. 769, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 88–88 ob.

³² Sevsk Book of Old Deeds, 1667–1701, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9905, ll. 262–62 ob. In the first third of the 18th century, the standard salary for Sevsk's watchmen was 6 rubles: Protocols of the Sevski Governor's Office, 1728, RGADA f. 442, op. 1, d. 1711, ll. 291 ob.–92, 538–38 ob.).

³³ Lists of Clerks and Watchmen of Sevsk Governor's Office, RGADA f. 210, op. 7A, kn. 85, d. 10, ll. 156–64 ob. and kn. 65, d. 7, l. 662 ob.; f. 210, op. 6G, kn. 23, d. 12, ll. 286–319, 313.

was about to give his sister in marriage and had promised the groom (the son of a Sevsk priest) a dowry of 108 rubles.³⁴

Some clerks became permanently employed by private individuals. In 1710–20, no fewer than ten clerks from Sevsk “lived on the allodial land of His Serene Highness the Prince, Lord Menshikov,” working in the “chancellery houses” (*prikaznye izby*) in the village of Ivanovskoe, the towns of Iampol’ and Pochep, and other estates.³⁵ Prior to their employment by Menshikov, some of them had acquired significant experience working in the Sevsk governor’s office or in the canton office (*zemskaiia izba*) of the peasant headmen (*burmistry*) of the Komaritskaia court canton. Thus Iur’ia Simonov and Ivan Bol’shoi Deviatnin had “attended to the sovereign’s business” for 20 years, specializing in the collection of money owed to the Treasury.³⁶ They were also proficient in conducting legal proceedings.³⁷ It is not surprising, then, that these clerks found a use for their skills in managing allodial property. After the death of Prince Menshikov, some clerks returned to the governor’s office.³⁸

Peasant residents of the Sevsk district also employed clerks to draw up village communities’ official documents, since the majority of elected village elders and swornmen (*tseloval’niki*) were insufficiently literate to do this work on their own. Elected elders negotiated the employment contract; its

³⁴ Sevsk Deed Book, 1702, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9907, ll. 318 ob.–319 ob.

³⁵ Sevsk Census Books, 1711, RGADA f. 1209, op. 1, d. 1089, l. 32 ob.; Cash Arrears Book, 1720, RGADA f. 954, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 66 ob.–67, 132 ob.; Receipt Book of Salary Money, 1722, RGADA f. 954, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 91 ob.–97 ob.; Sevsk Deed Book, 1714, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9924, l. 110 ob.; Investigative Case Based on Denunciation by Komaritskii Residents, 1717, RGADA f. 282, op. 1, d. 2357, ll. 12–12 ob.; Receipt and Expenditure Books of Sevsk Governor’s Office, 1715–16, RGADA f. 1157, op. 1, d. 21, l. 35 ob.

³⁶ Record Book of Clerical Appointments in Sevsk Governor’s Office, 1698, RGADA f. 210, op. 21, d. 1051, l. 3; Lists of Clerks of Sevsk Governor’s Office and Town-Square Clerks, 1705, RGADA f. 210, op. 6G, kn. 32, l. 6; Documents Regarding the Collection of Judicial, Stamp, and Horse-Sale Taxes, RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 37, d. 12, ll. 14 ob.–15; Lists of Clerks of Sevsk Governor’s Office, 1705–6, RGADA f. 210, op. 6G, kn. 32, ll. 3, 405 ob.; Receipt and Expenditure Books of the Regiment of *dumnyi dvorianin* Nepliev, 1705, RGADA f. 210, op. 7A, kn. 93, l. 187; Case of Offenses against Komaritskaia Canton Residents Committed by Sevsk Clerk Lazar’ Shagarov and His Companions in 1706, RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 39, d. 53, ll. 88–88 ob. (hereafter Offenses against Komaritskaia Canton Residents).

³⁷ Documents Regarding the Collection of Judicial, Stamp, and Horse-Sale Taxes, 1705, RGADA f. 210, op. 6E, kn. 42, ll. 679–86 ob.; Receipt and Expenditure Books of Sevsk Governor’s Office, 1715–16, RGADA f. 1157, op. 1, d. 21, l. 1; Case of an Anonymous Letter Regarding Levies on Residents Taken by Clerks Who Were Collecting *obrok* Rent in Sevsk, 1706, RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 37, d. 2; Inventories of Judicial Cases That Various Clerks of Sevsk Governor’s Office Had in Their Possession, 1700, RGADA f. 210, op. 6E, kn. 42, ll. 98–904 ob.

³⁸ Sevsk Inventory, 1731, RGADA f. 210, op. 7A, kn. 65, d. 8, l. 744.

duration and the size of the compensation were coordinated with the village community. Though the clerks had to work long hours, their pay was low.³⁹

Working for the tsar and his official representatives was called “work on order” (*prikaznaia rabota*), usually translated as “office work.” One of the main types of “office work” for clerks was “working with money” (*rabota u deneg*), which included the collection of the tsar’s taxes and various duties, writing up financial reports, and so on. Some of these tasks could not bring any revenue to the clerks: they were called “disinterested” duties (*beskorystnye dela*) and clerks considered them a heavy obligation. When they fulfilled such duties, they petitioned without hesitation for a remuneration, just as they did for regimental service.⁴⁰ By contrast, “interested” tasks (*korystnye dela*) were perceived by clerks as a privilege worth seeking out.

“Working with money” took place either in Sevsk’s offices—where people came, more or less willingly, to make payments—or in the district villages, where clerks drove without prior notice to collect them. At the canton office in Sevsk, clerks could earn revenue for carrying out inventories when the population delivered provisions and materials in accordance with a decree. Clerks took a small remuneration (ranging from a half kopeck to three kopecks) from each cart, as they said, “for paper,” “for storage,” or “for honor” (*v chest’*).⁴¹ At the Sevsk governor’s office, clerks working at the receipts and expenditure department (*denezhnyi stol*) could profit from the procedure of receiving money from the population, but only if a clerk had a good relationship with his superiors and commanded the respect of local inhabitants.⁴² For instance, Lazar’ Shagarov, initially an ordinary clerk of Cossack origin, managed the receipts and expenditure department so well that in a few years he became a prominent local entrepreneur and was able to lay a financial foundation for the next three generations of his family. Indeed, Lazar’ earned such a reputation among the populace that he became a character in local criminal folklore.⁴³

³⁹ Sevsk district, Receipt and Expenditure Book of Collections from Residents, RGADA f. 210, op. 22, d. 126, ll. 5, 18.

⁴⁰ Investigative Case in Sevsk Regarding the Submission of Petitions from Komaritskii Dragoons, 1677, RGADA f. 210, op. 14, Stolbets 302, ll. 1–5 ob.

⁴¹ Offenses against Komaritskaia Canton Residents, ll. 13, 13 ob., 14 ob., 15, 129 ob.–30 ob.

⁴² Sevsk district, Receipt and Expenditure Book of Collections from Residents, 1670–73, ll. 2 ob., 3 ob., 8 ob.–9, 16 ob., 17, 18.

⁴³ On Lazar’ Shagarov’s fortune and reputation, see A. M. Dubrovskii and A. A. Ivanin, *Sevskii uезд vo vtoroi polovine XVIII veka: Poseleniia, zemlevladienie, krest’iane i zemlevladel’tsy* (Lokot’: n.p., 1994); *Neizvestnye pis’ma russkikh pisatelei kniazuiu A. B. Kurakinu (1752–1818)*, ed. P. A. Druzhinin (Moscow: Truten’, 2002), 132 nn. 2–3; Sviatskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk gorodov*, 63–64.

Some clerks preferred stealing from the state treasury rather than from private individuals. In 1694, the expenditure clerk Oksen Ozarov, who was probably dissatisfied with his 6 rubles' remuneration, purchased on behalf of the Sevsk governor's office batches of tallow candles and paper for sums that increased month by month to total the unusually large sum of over 160 rubles.⁴⁴ Curiously, the purchase of candles peaked in the summer, the time of year with the most daylight hours. Moreover, the major suppliers turned out to be former Sevsk musketeers of the same name, Iakov and Petr Ozarov. Unlike other suppliers, the brothers Ozarov did not have to sell their goods on credit: their relative paid them on delivery.⁴⁵ It is logical to assume that the grateful merchants gave some of this money as a kickback to Oksen and to his superior, the secretary Andrei Afonas'ev.

The duty of collecting money in the district was seen by the clerks as an opportunity "to feed" directly from the villagers. This happened not only in Sevsk but across many regions of the Muscovite state.⁴⁶ Sevsk clerks competed for the lucrative task of driving to the Komaritskaia court canton.⁴⁷ The largest investigation to take place in Sevsk during the reign of Peter I was initiated in response to an anonymous letter from the canton peasants who complained of the clerks' ruthless and arbitrary behavior in the villages. Initial testimonies obtained in 1706 during an inquest (*poval'nyi obysk*) involving several thousand people ultimately remained unconfirmed by the results of cross-examinations (*ochnye stavki*). To a historian, however, the testimonies appear plausible, since similar statements were repeated by residents across dozens of villages.⁴⁸

It appears from this inquest that clerks' most common practice in collecting taxes in the district of Sevsk was to take "levies" (*vziatki*) in cash and kind, "for travel" (*ezd*), "for delivery" (*otvoz*), "for paperwork" (*rabota*),

⁴⁴ The amount of Ozarov's salary comes from Receipt and Expenditure Books of Sevsk Governor's Office, 1693–95, ll. 486–89.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 532–68 ob.

⁴⁶ The Swedish prisoner of war and officer Carl von Roland left a colorful description of the expeditions of secretaries and clerks: Carl von Roland, "Souvenirs de captivité en Russie et des guerres de Charles XII," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 3 (2006): 635.

⁴⁷ Documents Regarding the Collection of Judicial, Stamp, and Horse-Sale Taxes, RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 37, d. 12, ll. 14 ob.–15; Interrogation in the Military Chancellery of Grigorii Shagarov, Clerk of the Sevsk Governor's Office, *ibid.*, viazka 55, d. 2, ll. 1–2 ob.; Report of Leontii Tikhmenev, Komaritskaia court canton, Sevsk district, *ibid.*, viazka 1A, d. 57, ll. 1–3.

⁴⁸ Case of an Anonymous Letter Regarding Levies on Residents Taken by Clerks Who Were Collecting *obrok* Rent in Sevsk, 1706, 200 ll.

and “for waiting” (*pozhdan'e*).⁴⁹ It is important to note that in this context the word *vziatka* (meaning literally “that which has been taken”) should not be translated as it usually is, as “bribe,” for these payments were not intended to be or conceived of as corrupt. Typically, clerks prudently took levies before the collection of the tsar’s taxes, so that if there was not enough money, the shortage came at the expense of the Treasury and not of the clerks’ personal compensation.⁵⁰ The size of the monetary levy was usually 2–3 percent of the given tax (for example, 2–3 altyns for 3 rubles).⁵¹ However, there were some unusually greedy clerks who took “as much in rent [*obrok*] as for delivery.”⁵² Some clerks asked for labor services instead of monetary levies.⁵³ Judging by the testimonies, the villagers protested not against the levies per se but only against excessive amounts, and they distinguished between levies and swindles (as when clerks gave taxpayers incorrect payment receipts, which allowed them to conceal some of the money).⁵⁴

I have analyzed the inquest materials of 1706 to estimate the amount of levies and have obtained a surprising result. Three hundred people testified that in 1697–98, five clerks—Lazar’ Shagarov, his three sons, and a nephew—took levies totaling roughly 120 rubles.⁵⁵ This is a relatively large sum, but let us take into account that the clerks collected 60 rubles a year, while they were entitled by the tsar to a remuneration of 84 rubles which, as we already know, the Treasury did not pay. In two years, Lazar’ levied around 50 rubles (while his entitlement rate was 40 rubles annually); Grigorii obtained about 15 rubles (his rate was 8 rubles a year); Vasilii and Ivan took 25–30 rubles

⁴⁹ Villagers who had no ready money for payments asked clerks not to subject them to *bastinado* (*pravezh*) and would house and feed them for several days while they waited for the money to be raised.

⁵⁰ Offenses against Komaritskaia Canton Residents, l. 130 ob.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 7–132.

⁵² *Ibid.*, l. 125 ob.

⁵³ Villagers “transported pine lumber for house construction” or “worked at the construction of watermill dams for three days in a row” (*ibid.*, ll. 128, 129 ob.).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 124 ob.–26 ob. Similar practices are attested elsewhere: Davies, *State Power and Community*, 176.

⁵⁵ According to the inquest materials cited above, Lazar’ Shagarov alone took 36 rubles from 197 people; Lazar’ with his sons took 16 rubles from 105 people; Grigorii Shagarov alone took 4 rubles from 55 people; Grigorii with his brother Ivan Shagarov took 3 rubles from 7 people; Grigorii with his brother Vasilii Shagarov took 16 *cheti* of wheat from 16 people; Grigorii with his relative Stepan Shagarov took 2 rubles from 11 people; Vasilii alone took 23 rubles from 175 people; Vasilii with Ivan took 5 rubles from 24 people; Vasilii with Stepan took 2 rubles from 9 people; Stepan alone took 4 rubles from 25 people; Ivan alone took 26 rubles from 106 people; 72 other people said that the Shagarov took from them “as much in rent as for delivery,” which is impossible to quantify.

each (their rates were 15 rubles a year); and Stepan collected less than 10 rubles (his rate was 5 rubles).

This information completely contradicts an entrenched belief among historians about clerks' "naked plundering of the people."⁵⁶ It seems that Shagarov and his associates limited their unauthorized levies to match their individual "entitlement rates to the sovereign's remuneration." They acted as if they were searching for ways to legitimate the *vziatki*-levies in the eyes of the government, distinguishing them from *vziatki*-bribes.

This hypothesis finds confirmation in a 1708 request from Ivan Shagarov, Stepan Shagarov, and Il'ia Makov to the Military Chancellery.⁵⁷ According to their statement, the three clerks took 5 kopecks from each household for themselves while collecting 11,400 rubles for soldiers in the Komaritskaia court canton. The Military Chancellery ordered this money to be confiscated as an unauthorised levy. In their request, the clerks asked the chancellery to overturn this order, developing an elaborate argumentation against it. First, the 5-kopeck levy was a long-established tradition, followed by all tsar's agents before and after them without any punishment from the government. Second, the population gave the money voluntarily, by collective decision. Finally, the money obtained in this way enabled the clerks to cover the expenses of tax collection, which the state did not provide: "bad" coins had to be replaced, the tax money had to be properly packed and sent to Moscow by hired transport, the stamp tax was to be paid, and so on—the clerks submitted a list of expenses totaling 150 rubles. Besides, the clerks themselves had to pay taxes newly imposed on them by Peter I, and they pretended to have no other resources to meet them than prestations from the population. In sum, the authors of the request argued that given the current organization of tax collection, the confiscation order issued by the Military Chancellery against them was unfair and contrary to the tsar's interest. This request appears, indeed, to have been an explicit statement that levies had nothing to do with bribes and a demand that the clerk's right to collect them be officially recognized.

Bribes proper, of course, also existed. A potentially profitable type of office work was filling in paperwork for officials who conducted military recruitment and censuses, although under these circumstances, bribes were fraught with risk. Attempts to defraud the sovereign were treated by the government with less tolerance than cheating private individuals. Thus just one charge that the "well-off, robust, and familial" residents had given bribes to evade military service was enough to cause both the colonel conducting recruitment and the clerk to be fired, be stripped of their ranks, be punished

⁵⁶ A. A. Preobrazhenskii's phrase, quoted in Davies, "The Politics of Give and Take," 52.

⁵⁷ RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 48, d. 124, ll. 2–5 ob.

with the knout, have their belongings confiscated, and be sentenced to serve as soldiers in a regiment.⁵⁸ The severity of the punishment is explained in part by the fact that recruiters had received remuneration in advance specifically to prevent bribery.⁵⁹

The majority of clerks in the Sevsk governor's office were engaged in filing and collecting the tsar's taxes for judicial documents, investigative cases, and petitions. In 1700, 50 clerks who lived in Sevsk (out of 70) had in their possession about 5,000 cases from the previous 30 years.⁶⁰ Clerks were supposed to collect unpaid tsar's taxes totaling 5,905 rubles in most of those cases.⁶¹ It would not be far-fetched to assume that a significant portion of arrears was in fact kept by the clerks "for honor." After all, "disinterested" work on trial transcripts was viewed as supernatural selflessness not only by the clerks but also by their superiors.⁶²

For town-square clerks, the primary type of work was the drawing up of deeds. My calculations show that between 500 and 1,000 deeds were registered annually in Sevsk in the first quarter of the 18th century.⁶³ In the second half of the 17th century, the lion's share of the market for town-square services belonged to town-square clerks (they were called *d'iachki* at that time).⁶⁴ In the 1690s, more than 50 town-square clerks were active in Sevsk.⁶⁵ Forty of them collectively petitioned the town governor to prohibit any additional individuals from drawing up any kinds of deeds.⁶⁶ Thus, on average, each town-square clerk drew up, by the most modest estimate, 10–20 deeds per year. Establishing a deed was not limited to writing up the original document. It required the participation of witnesses and sometimes of guarantors. The clerks in the Sevsk governor's office and, especially, town-square clerks

⁵⁸ Inventory of Investigative Cases from the Department of the Clerk Oksen Ozarov, 1703, RGADA f. 210, op. 5, spisok 76, d. 7, ll. 321–22.

⁵⁹ Case Regarding Soldier Recruitment in the Towns of Belgorod and Sevsk Regional Command, 1703, RGADA f. 210, op. 21, d. 2157, ll. 6 ob.–21.

⁶⁰ Inventory of Cases in the Possession of Various Clerks of the Sevsk Governor's Office, with Notations about the Collection of Taxes from Those Cases, 1700, RGADA f. 210, op. 6E, kn. 42, 963 ll.

⁶¹ Documents about the Collection of Court Taxes, 1705, RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 37, d. 12, l. 14 ob.

⁶² Sevsk Revisory Book, 1694, RGADA f. 210, op. 6G, kn. 23, d. 12, l. 287 ob.

⁶³ Sevsk Deed Books, 1701–25, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, dd. 9905–38.

⁶⁴ During the first half of the 17th century, the deeds business in Sevsk was leased from the state by illiterate peasants who hired scribes (M. B. Bulgakov, *Organizatsiia melkikh otkupov v Rossii pervoi poloviny XVII stoletiiia* [Tiumen': Tiumenskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1997], 64).

⁶⁵ Muster List of Clerks of Sevsk Governor's Office, 1690, RGADA f. 210, op. 6G, kn. 20, d. 14, ll. 450–52.

⁶⁶ Sevsk Revisory Book, 1696, RGADA f. 210, op. 7A, kn. 65, d. 3, ll. 373 ob.–74 ob.

frequently assumed both roles, and still more often they signed documents for illiterate parties. For some town-square clerks, certainly, providing these small services was an important additional source of income.

From 1701 on, town-square clerks faced the fiercest competition from a new kind of clerk, the deeds clerks (*pod 'iachie krepostnykh del*), who received from the government an exclusive right to provide the service of writing deeds and recording them in the books.⁶⁷ There were only two resident deeds clerks in Sevsk during Peter's reign. It must be assumed that a substantial portion of original deeds continued to be drawn up by town-square clerks before they were brought for registration to the deeds office, where the deeds clerks simply affixed their names to the original deeds and copied them into a book of records. Otherwise, it is impossible to explain why the number of town-square clerks in Sevsk did not diminish after the reform of 1701 but instead noticeably increased (during the 1706 muster, 77 people were registered).⁶⁸

Not all clerks engaged in providing town-square services with the same frequency and regularity. Approximately half of all clerks and two-thirds of town-square clerks passed at least once in their lives through a period of relatively high activity in town-square business (I define this as no less than ten services per year during several consecutive years). The level of town-square activity and the level of individuals' financial well-being appear to stand in inverse correlation to one another.⁶⁹ Thus the richest clerks appeared in the town square only when it was necessary to provide services to their relatives or friends. Clerks of middle and lower income worked in the town square more often. But almost no one tried to live exclusively on the earnings brought by working in the town square or at the horse market (*konskaia ploshchadka*). The only exception is a town-square clerk named Fedor Zotov *syn* Deviatnin, who had no known source of income other than town-square services and was constantly listed among the poorest clerks. He far surpassed his colleagues in the number of town-square services provided. Even performing one service every three days (his maximum pace), however, did not guarantee a living wage, and Deviatnin was obliged to abandon the rank of town-square clerk.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ A. V. Zhukovskaia [Anna Joukovskaia], "Ot porucheniiia k uchrezhdeniiu: A. A. Kurbatov i 'krepostnoe delo' pri Petre I," *Ocherki feodal'noi Rossii* 13 (Moscow: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2009), 314–76.

⁶⁸ Muster of Sevsk Clerks, 1706, RGADA f. 210, op. 6G, kn. 32, ll. 317 ob.–18.

⁶⁹ In assessing the financial well-being of clerks and town-square clerks, I rely on a database of Sevsk clerks I compiled. Some of the sources used to create it are quoted in footnotes to this paper. Particularly important are the tax rate lists of clerks of the Sevsk governor's office and town-square clerks that were compiled in 1706 by elected clerks of both corporations on the basis of the property status of each member (RGADA f. 210, op. 6G, kn. 32, ll. 34–35, 39–41 ob.).

⁷⁰ For an evaluation of the subsistence level in Russia, see L. V. Milov, *Velikorusskii pakhar' i osobennosti rossiiskogo istoricheskogo protsessa* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), 487–88.

Though the information provided is insufficient to allow an estimate of Sevsk clerks' revenue from clerical activities, it shows clearly that the majority of these men managed to earn a more or less decent living off their clerical work, notwithstanding the absence of the tsar's remuneration.⁷¹ Nevertheless, many of them thought it necessary to diversify their revenues. Let us now turn to those sources of income that were independent of clerks' status and official duties.



The record books of deeds make it possible to describe in considerable detail the trading and entrepreneurial activities of Sevsk's clerks and town-square clerks. The most frequently practiced activity was the watermill business, which can be explained by the general economic makeup of Sevsk district.⁷² Besides being useful for the production of felt cloth and seed oil, mills were primarily used for threshing and grinding grain, which was supplied in large quantities by the Komaritskaia court canton. Sevsk's mills were operated exclusively on water power and varied extraordinarily in size of production capacity, from very small, designed to satisfy the needs of one family, to fairly large, serving an entire village. Mills were especially appealing due to the possibility of setting up fisheries next to them. Any person, whatever his financial status, could participate in such an enterprise, since numerous small mills required minor capital investments and large ones often were jointly purchased and run. Moscow chancelleries granted rights to operate mills and fisheries for limited terms in exchange for *obrok* rent. Precise data about the profitability of Sevsk mills are impossible to establish, but the operation of mills was certainly one of the most lucrative types of local entrepreneurship, judging by the vigorous competition for their leasing and high purchase prices: some transactions ran as high as 50, 100, even 240 rubles.

After the publication of the decree of 21 January 1704 ordering the "general re-leasing of mills to the highest bidders,"⁷³ the residents of Sevsk district were seized by entrepreneurial fervor. In the course of that year, the major occupation of the governor's office became holding auctions for the

⁷¹ Moscow chancelleries' prices for ordinary clerical services were discovered by Sedov, but they are not a priori applicable to Sevsk ("Podnosheniia v moskovskikh prikazakh XVII veka," 139–50).

⁷² A. V. Demkin, *Gorodskoe predprinimatel'stvo v Rossii na rubezhe XVII–XVIII vekov* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2001), 80.

⁷³ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii* (St. Petersburg: Tipografia II Otdeleniia Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva Kantseliarii, 1830), 4:240, no. 1959.

leasing of mills.⁷⁴ The main participants in the auctions were Komaritskaia canton residents and Sevsk townsmen and clerks. In most cases, the bid (*naddacha*) more than twice exceeded the initial annual rent, clear evidence of the fierceness of competition.⁷⁵ As a rule, Sevsk clerks were tough rivals: bidding against Komaritskaia canton residents and Sevsk townsmen in 27 auctions, clerks won 21 times.

Clerks took leases not only on mills, fisheries, and shops but also on more expensive facilities such as the Sevsk horse market. For example, middle serviceman Fedosei Kremenev (a former clerk) and Vasilii Shagarov, a clerk from the Sevsk governor's office, received the right to collect taxes from the sale of horses for two years after having paid a very large rent to the Treasury in the amount of 531 rubles. The volume of sales was high, due to the almost constant presence of cavalry and the economic demands of the Komaritskaia court canton.⁷⁶

The abundance of grain in Sevsk district incentivized the local population to set up vodka production, which was one of the most profitable traditional trades in Russia.⁷⁷ The right to distill alcohol was granted to any category of the population. For those who wished to engage in this trade, it was enough to ask the secretary to “brand the cauldrons” (*zakleimit' kazany*—that is, to mark the equipment used in vodka production as proof of having paid the applicable taxes). Self-produced drinks (*pit'ia*) were made by dozens of townsmen, musketeers, priests, and clerks and by hundreds of Komaritskaia canton residents. Since the direct sale of alcohol was prohibited, however, legal commercial production was possible only for the purpose of wholesale distribution to state taverns; otherwise, distillation was limited in volume to personal consumption by families. According to the law, the headman and the stallman from the liquor office were required to buy alcohol “from public sales.” On closer examination, however, they appear to have set the price by agreement with the largest suppliers, and the price did not vary based on the batch size, the time of year, or other circumstances. The major suppliers were not townsmen but prominent Sevsk clerks. For instance, in 1723, the liquor office bought 1,532 buckets of “single” and “double distilled alcohol”; it paid 679 rubles for 1,177 of those buckets (76.8 percent), which were supplied by

⁷⁴ Sevsk Record Book of Deeds, 1704, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9913, 278 ll.

⁷⁵ During one of the auctions, the rent increased from 24 kopecks to 16 rubles (*ibid.*, l. 339).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 194–94 ob.; Book of Tax Collections on Horse Sales, 1720–21, RGADA f. 954, op. 1, dd. 4 and 12.

⁷⁷ M. Ia. Volkov, *Ocherki istorii promyslov v Rossii: Vtoraia polovina XVII–pervaia polovina XVIII vv. Vinokurennoe proizvodstvo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), 89, 92.

three clerks and three former clerks who had risen to the rank of secretary. In contrast, townsmen sold only 355 buckets (23.2 percent).⁷⁸

Some clerks supplied meat from their farms, fish from their fishponds, and vegetables from their gardens to their very own shops and taverns, thereby competing directly with Sevsk's townsmen. The profitability of such enterprises varied. For instance, the clerk Ivan Pogorel'tsev rented out his tavern "with kitchenware" for the decent price of 12 rubles per year. By contrast, the clerk Andrei Sudeikin complained that "during the period of *miasoed* [when Orthodox Russians are allowed to eat meat] he collects from the butcher shop 1 altyn per week," while the fish shop brings "1 altyn or less."⁷⁹ He gained the meager sum of about 2 rubles per year from both shops.

To operate the mills, distilleries, shops, taverns, arable lands, and other enterprises belonging to clerks, numerous workers were required. It was possible to hire a miller who worked on a commission, which depended on earnings he generated at the mill. Thus, in 1705, the clerk Danila Ignat'ev *syn* Savishchev signed a contract with "the Cherkess Ivan Mel'nik" and promised him a "fifth share of the revenue."⁸⁰ It was also possible to hire workers and pay them several years in advance, which was considerably cheaper (that is, if they did not flee from the owner before the expiration of their contract).⁸¹ The typical payment for long-term employment was 1–2 *chekhi*—approximately 1 ruble in silver—per year.⁸² Most of Sevsk's clerks, however, used even cheaper labor by exploiting their insolvent debtors, registering them at the deeds office "for residence in the courtyard or wherever ordered."⁸³ The close proximity of Sevsk to the populous Komaritskaia and Krupetskaia court cantons had a positive influence on the entrepreneurship of clerks. Numerous peasants became impoverished in the early 18th century due to the rise of fiscal and service demands and ceased plowing their lands, thereby guaranteeing the low cost of physical labor on the local market. Clerks also purchased serfs and serf children without land and settled them on their own arable lands or at their mills.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Record Book of Customs Duties, 1723, RGADA f. 1417, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 422–28 ob.

⁷⁹ Employment Contract, 1703, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9909, ll. 73–73 ob.; Testimony, 1706, RGADA f. 210, op. 6G, kn. 32, ll. 46 ob.–47.

⁸⁰ Contract Record, 23 May 1705, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9916, ll. 62 ob.–63.

⁸¹ Sevsk Deed Book, 1702, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9906, ll. 140–41.

⁸² *Chekhi* are local silver coins. For calculating the exchange rate of the *chekh* to the ruble, I use the decree of the State Armory from 1700, according to which in towns where *chekhi* were in circulation, the stamped paper should have been sold at 1.5 times the price in Moscow (RGADA f. 396, op. 2, d. 986, ll. 39–39 ob.).

⁸³ Sevsk Deed Books, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9911, ll. 658 ob.–59 ob.; d. 9906, ll. 10–11, 45 ob.–46 ob., 151; d. 9909, ll. 167 ob.–69 ob.; d. 9916, l. 9.

⁸⁴ Sevsk Census Books, 1711, RGADA f. 1209, op. 1, d. 1089, ll. 21–21 ob.

Sevsk's books of deeds overflow with loan records of all kinds (indentured labor loans, mortgages, loans under surety), and in most of the contracts Sevsk's clerks appear as the lenders. Often large sums of money were involved. For instance, in 1714, the clerk Vasilii Shagarov provided loans, backed by nine promissory notes, totaling 782 rubles.⁸⁵ Not every loan deal was a usurious operation in the technical sense of the word, but there is no reason to assume that lenders did not expect compensation of some kind.⁸⁶ I have mentioned workers who labored without wages for clerks to pay off loans. There are also references to real estate that was transferred to clerks as loan collateral. Even when loaned money did not bring interest or collateral guarantees, the creditor could count on the debtors' benevolence in times of need. One Sevsk resident who was struck by misfortune and sickness, without family to help him, turned to and found shelter "at his debtors'.⁸⁷ Debtors constituted an important part of the creditor's social capital.

The entrepreneurial sources of income of the Sevsk clerks and town-square clerks in the late 17th and early 18th centuries can be summarized as follows. Seventy clerks disposed of various sources of income from different enterprises: 41 individuals had one or more grain mills, 41 owned serfs and peasants, 20 owned arable land, 16 held fisheries, 13 owned distilleries, 12 held shops, 5 managed taverns, 3 had mills that made seed oil or felt, 1 owned a timber forest, 1 ran a commercial bathhouse, 33 loaned money on many occasions with interest or with collateral, and 4 held leases on various facilities. Only 10 of the 70 clerks had no source of income other than earnings from their clerical activities. A significant number of clerks combined incomes from several enterprises. As for the 75 town-square clerks, their enterprises were less varied and less numerous: 14 held one or more grain mills, 5 owned serfs, 3 owned distilleries, 2 held arable land, 2 had fisheries, 1 ran a tavern, 1 owned a granary, and 8 loaned money on many occasions with interest or with collateral. Some individuals had several sources of income simultaneously or in succession, but 55 of 75 town-square clerks had no real properties or contracts valuable enough to make the expense of registering them at the

⁸⁵ Sevsk Deed Book, 1714, RGADA f. 615, op. 1, d. 9924, ll. 38, 58 ob., 61 ob., 98 ob.–99, 102, 102 ob.–3, 110, 111–11 ob., 122. Considering the amounts and the duration of loans, it cannot be assumed that Shagarov reinvested the same money several times.

⁸⁶ N. B. Golikova, "Rostovshchichestvo v Rossii nachala XVIII v. i ego nekotorye osobennosti," *Problemy genezisa kapitalizma: Sbornik statei*, ed. S. D. Skazkii (Moscow: Nauka, 1970); N. I. Pavlenko, "O rostovshchichestve dvorian v XVIII v.: K postanovke voprosa," *Dvorianstvo i krepostnoi stroi Rossii XVI–XVIII vv.: Sbornik statei, posviashchennyi pamiati A. A. Novosel'skogo*, ed. Pavlenko (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 265–70.

⁸⁷ Regarding the violence committed by Vasilii Golovlenkov against the Cossack Mikhail Ermakov, 1702, RGADA f. 210, op. 8, viazka 55, d. 606, l. 1833 ob.

deeds office worthwhile. Thus it must be assumed that the vast majority of town-square clerks lived primarily on income from the deeds services they provided. Finally, it is important to note that the entrepreneurial activities of clerks and town-square clerks were not very different from those of Sevsk's townsmen.⁸⁸

From a local point of view, the position of clerks in Sevsk was an enviable one. They were unburdened with imposts (*tiaglo*) that the townsmen had to pay, much less subjected to "disinterested" office work than the servicemen were to service, and could easily become useful to the authorities (*nachal'nye liudi*), thereby gaining powerful protection. Sevsk clerks were in the privileged position of being able to tap almost every economic resource offered by the local market.



Several conclusions may be drawn from the information presented above. As sources of income, clerical activities—including office work—and entrepreneurship were equally important in the lives of Sevsk clerks. It is quite possible that in other regions with a similar socioeconomic makeup, clerk-entrepreneurs also dominated. Do the facts confirm the intuitive idea that effective administration depended most heavily on the most professional clerks, those who were the least involved in business? The Sevsk example points to the contrary. Strict specialization of an individual in clerical work correlated with relative poverty and could even lead to disqualification. Moreover, the formation of clerical dynasties (children and grandchildren becoming clerks in the same town) is observed only among wealthier families who did not specialize in clerical work but exploited a complex network of economic resources. Clerk-entrepreneurs were the most successful in securing positions in the local administrative apparatus. This phenomenon must surely have influenced the development of the administrative system after Peter I. How it did so is a topic for a separate study.

The evidence presented above also raises questions about the social (self-) image of clerks. Certainly, legal status (rank) and the possession of special clerical skills, as well as their application in practice, must have defined an individual's social identity. But so, too, would the economic behavior of that individual. In making use of local material resources, Sevsk clerks resembled other groups of the population. Historians of the 16th century have made similar observations about clerks in their period; the tendency appears to

⁸⁸ A. V. Demkin (*Gorodskoe predprinimatel'stvo*, 79–89) uses the same source that I do—Sevsk deed books, 1701–11—to study the Sevsk townsmen's economic activities.

have persisted.⁸⁹ Broad and varied entrepreneurial activities would also have strengthened clerks' regional identities by strongly connecting them with their town and district. Indeed, clerks such as Lazar' Shagarov and his three sons behaved like prominent "Sevsk town dwellers" (*sevskie zhiteli*) as well as governor's office clerks. If anything, their connection with Sevsk may have been stronger than that of the most rank-and-file townsmen engaging in minor trade. From this point of view, Sevsk was not at all unique.⁹⁰

The case of Sevsk shows that the rank of clerk during Peter I's reign encompassed a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds and profiles. One set of highly prized archival documents—the administrative documentation of rank management—appears to militate in favor of the view that members of the clerk rank constituted a sharply defined social group. Chancellery paperwork can, however, be misleading. Chancellery officials quite consciously reduced the multifaceted nature of the individual to the singularity of his rank. In this way, the real social heterogeneity of clerks took on a fictional uniformity. Chancellery officials were guided by two practical reasons. On the one hand, the government needed to precisely identify the people from whom it demanded office work. On the other hand, some of these individuals turned to the government for confirmation of their status, using state-defined categories of rank or official function appropriate to the circumstances. Important as they may have been, these needs and practices do not mean that clerks adopted these forms of self-identification to the exclusion of others.⁹¹ To put it bluntly, we face historical sources that look as if they were sociological descriptions but are actually instruments of management, sources that simultaneously reflect, distort, and fashion reality.⁹²

Rank (*chin*), in contrast to sociological categories of group analysis like class, is an "honest" historical notion. Nevertheless, it is by no means a panacea. The massive use of anachronistic concepts, such as class, *soslovie*, and professional group has introduced distortions that cannot all be fixed

⁸⁹ Demidova, *Sluzhbilaiia biurokratiia*, 192; Sergei Bogatyrev, "Localism and Integration in Muscovy," in *Russia Takes Shape: Patterns of Integration from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Bogatyrev (Helsinki: Academy of Sciences and Finnish Letters, 2005), 94.

⁹⁰ See similar conclusions derived from sources on the town of Viatka: Dmitrii Redin, "Integratsiia chinovnichestva v provintsial'nye gorodskie elity: Rossiia, pervaiia chetvert' XVIII v.," *Cahiers du monde russe* 51, 2–3 (2010): 281–302.

⁹¹ Nancy Shields Kollmann, "Concepts of Society and Social Identity in Early Modern Russia," in *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Samuel H. Baron and Kollmann (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 34–51.

⁹² Janet Martin, "Mobility, Forced Resettlement, and Regional Identity in Muscovy," in *Culture and Identity in Muscovy*, 448–49.

by appealing to rank.⁹³ Some of the best current historiography on *ancien régime* Russia uses rank as its principal instrument for the description of social stratification, thus running the risk of reifying status groups that were constructed by contemporaries for objectives of service management.⁹⁴ When dealing with the category of rank, we should systematically juxtapose it with social practices, training ourselves to maintain a diachronic perspective. That, in turn, would allow us to take into account the perpetual labor involved in the construction of group identities.

This is the method I have put into practice in the present article. My conclusion is that, when it comes to studying Peter I's administration, the rank of clerk does not serve as a "useful approximation" of historical reality but rather screens it.⁹⁵ If one aims to study the history of the scribal profession as a sociocultural phenomenon, the rank of clerk might be the best choice. But for the study of the state administration, we should keep in mind that clerk and middle/lower administrative agent are two categories that only partially overlap; we have to exclude a segment of clerks, probably a significant number of them (by identifying those who did not participate in office work), and integrate large numbers of elected officials of various denominations (town and peasant headmen, village elders, swornmen, stallmen, etc.)—especially those who, like the town mayors in France nowadays, transformed their short-term charge into a permanent career. Without systematically drawing these representatives of the "secondary elites" into the picture, we will never be able to write a bottom-up history of governance in Russia.⁹⁶

The Sevska case adds elements to still another important historiographical discussion: the one about the traditional practices of remunerating officials—

⁹³ Michael Confino, "The *Soslovie* (Estate) Paradigm: Reflections on Some Open Questions," *Cahiers du monde russe* 49, 4 (2008): 681–99.

⁹⁴ The very useful collective monograph on the long history of the Russian governing elite is constructed by ranks: A. P. Pavlov, ed., *Praviashchaia elita Russkogo gosudarstva IX–nachala XVIII v.: Ocherki istorii* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2006). Rank is largely used to structure a lively representation of "types of Muscovites" for an audience of "undergraduates and readers of history everywhere" in Donald Ostrowski and Marshall T. Poe, eds., *Portraits of Old Russia: Imagined Lives of Ordinary People, 1300–1725* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2011).

⁹⁵ The expression "useful approximation" was initially used to qualify the category of *soslovie* and belongs to Robert E. Johnson, "Paradigms, Categories, or Fuzzy Algorithms? Making Sense of *Soslovie* and Class in Russia," *Cahiers du monde russe* 51, 2–3 (2010): 461–66.

⁹⁶ The expression "secondary elites" comes from André Berelowitch, "Les élites rurales russes à l'époque moderne: XVIe–XVIIe siècles," in *Les élites rurales dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne*, ed. F. Menant and J.-P. Jessenne (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2007), 259–70. For an interesting recent contribution on the functioning of secondary (Cossack) elites, see Witzenth, *Cossacks and the Russian Empire*, 34–61.

“feeding,” perquisites, levies, and so on.⁹⁷ In the Urals, as Redin states, access to “feed” by officials of all ranks from governor to clerk promoted the development of social unity, even though the right to “feeding” remained tacit. On the contrary, in Sevsk, this type of access to collective payments by the population did not unite local officials but demonstratively set the clerks apart from the higher ranks. The tsar granted the right to collect prestations exclusively to the town governor and secretaries, and by explicitly regulating the amount of these payments he de facto transformed “feeding” into “sovereign’s remuneration” (ignoring the fact that it was paid directly by the communities). By contrast, the levies that clerks imposed on the population, without being absolutely prohibited by the government, were never really authorized. Levies, then, appeared in the eyes of local residents as a tangible juridical and symbolic mark, or stigma, that put clerks in a semiofficial position, unlike governors and secretaries. In this context, the clerks improvised a system of self-regulation, as the case of the Shagarov family attests, setting their official “entitlement rates to sovereign’s remuneration” as the maximum limit of levies each clerk would collect. Sevsk clerks who proceeded in this way apparently believed that the tsar should treat them on an equal footing with their superiors, and they expressed their pretensions quite openly, as we can see from the 1708 request. Men like Lazar’ Shagarov and his relatives no longer depended on clerical revenues for their financial well-being. Their struggle was not to acquire more money but to enjoy full-fledged membership in the tsar’s service, for which the sovereign’s remuneration was perceived as an indispensable attribute.

As I have noted, the village population protested not against the practice of raising levies but against excessive amounts raised when these became financially unbearable. The amount corresponded to the total entitlement of the clerks whom the governor sent to the district for tax collection. Levies became too burdensome because there were too many clerks, because their entitlement rates were too high, or both. It follows that the responsibility for the financial problems of the population did not lie entirely with the clerks but for the most part with the central government—because the control of promotion to clerk rank and of entitlement rates had slipped from the hands of the Military Chancellery into those of the town governor and the Sevsk army group commanders. The local authorities probably never dreamed that they were acting against their sovereign’s interest when they appointed new clerks and liberally distributed symbolic additions to their entitlement rates,

⁹⁷ Sedov, “Podnosheniia v moskovskikh prikazakh XVII veka,” 139–50; Davies, “The Politics of Give and Take,” 37–67; Witzentrath, *Cossacks and the Russian Empire*, 122–38; Redin, *Administrativnye struktury i biurokratiia Urala*, 518, 527–55.

for they knew that the tsar had stopped paying the clerks. Although this policy secured clerical services “to conduct the tsar’s affairs without delay” without cost to the state, it nonetheless proved harmful by contributing to the impoverishment of the population and provoking taxpayer unrest.

When Peter I became interested in reorganizing the civil service from the 1710s on, one of his most modern ideas was to introduce regular salaries for the entire hierarchy of civil servitors, to criminalize all forms of “feeding” and levies, and to adopt, instead, the Swedish institution of *accidentier* (perquisites that Swedish clerks received from clients according to official tariffs established by the government).⁹⁸ The Russian government’s awareness of the fiscal problems provoked by “feeding” practices was certainly the main reason for these reforms. But it was not the only one. As the Sevsk case suggests, clerks may, at this time, have exerted considerable pressure, insisting on a fuller and more explicit legitimation of their service status. The spirit of Peter I’s reforms indicates that the tsar might have been intellectually ready to recognize these claims, even though in practice, as we know, they were not realized. Clerks had to wait for Catherine II’s reign to see their right to a state salary fully established.

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⁹⁸ Claes Peterson, *Peter the Great’s Administrative and Judicial Reforms: Swedish Antecedents and the Process of Reception* (Stockholm: Institutet för rätthistorisk forskning, 1979), 103–4.