

**MOSCOW SOCIETY IN THE NAPOLEONIC ERA:**  
**Cultural Tradition and Political Stability**

Alexander M. Martin  
Oglethorpe University



The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research  
910 17<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.  
Suite 300  
Washington, D.C. 20006

**TITLE VIII PROGRAM**

## **Project Information**\*

**Principal Investigator:** Alexander Martin  
**Council Contract Number:** 817-14g  
**Date:** April 30, 2004

## **Copyright Information**

Scholars retain the copyright on works they submit to NCEEER. However, NCEEER possesses the right to duplicate and disseminate such products, in written and electronic form, as follows: (a) for its internal use; (b) to the U.S. Government for its internal use or for dissemination to officials of foreign governments; and (c) for dissemination in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act or other law or policy of the U.S. government that grants the public access to documents held by the U.S. government.

Additionally, NCEEER has a royalty-free license to distribute and disseminate papers submitted under the terms of its agreements to the general public, in furtherance of academic research, scholarship, and the advancement of general knowledge, on a non-profit basis. All papers distributed or disseminated shall bear notice of copyright. Neither NCEEER, nor the U.S. Government, nor any recipient of a Contract product may use it for commercial sale.

---

\* The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract or grant funds provided by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, funds which were made available by the U.S. Department of State under Title VIII (The Soviet-East European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained herein are those of the author.

## **Executive Summary**

Moscow society in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was dominated numerically by the poor, and socioeconomically and politically by a tiny aristocratic elite. However, as this paper argues on the basis of quantitative as well as narrative sources, there was also a small middle class that exhibited the behaviors and values typical of middle classes elsewhere and that helped to catalyze the liberalization of 19<sup>th</sup> century European society. However, Moscow's destruction in 1812 dealt a powerful blow to the middle class's fragile economic base and sense of status security, thereby consolidating support for the conservative ideology advocated by the Russian regime throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Russian Life in the Early Nineteenth Century

Most people in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Moscow were poor. Many of them served wealthy households, where a little of their employers' affluence trickled down to them, but at the price of constant exposure to their masters' capricious, arbitrary power.<sup>1</sup> The others struggled to eke out a living on their own, enduring grinding poverty and daily humiliation at the hands of policemen, petty officials, and the servants of the rich.

Deprivation and existential uncertainty were the lot of the poor throughout the early modern Atlantic world, but several factors aggravated it in Moscow: major cities were vast, and cold; nearly half the inhabitants were serfs; the Westernization of the elite had created an unusually sharp cultural divide between them and the common people; and since many people were transients, with men outnumbering women two to one, much of the population was denied the economic and emotional support of family.

In addition, as European visitors noted sourly, Moscow lacked the public spaces and institutions—public theaters, coffee houses, lending libraries, and so forth—that might have drawn broader social strata into the cultural orbit of the elite. As a result, society was starkly bifurcated between a tiny minority that lived a life of comfort and refinement, and the vast majority that did not. As visitors from abroad observed, the contrast between opulence and squalor, between the arbitrary power of the few and the oppression of the downtrodden masses, was striking even by the standards of old-regime Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Situated between these social extremes was Moscow's small middle class of moderately affluent, non-transient residents. Unlike the aristocracy, they could neither live extravagantly nor exercise significant power over other social groups. However, compared with the poor, their education, financial

---

<sup>1</sup> This project was made possible in part by funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Councils for International Education, and the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: J. Graf von Sternberg, *Reise von Moskau über Sofia nach Königsberg mit einer kurzen Beschreibung von Moskau nebst meteorologischen und mineralogischen Beobachtungen* (Berlin: n.publ., 1793), 4; see also a similar description in F. Raupach, *Reise von St. Petersburg nach dem Gesundbrunnen zu Lipezk am Don. Nebst einem Beitrage zur Charakteristik der Russen* (Breslau: Bei Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, 1809), 68; Louis-Philippe de Ségur, Germaine de Staël, Jacques Ancelot, in *Le voyage en Russie. Anthologie des voyageurs français aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Claude de Grève (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1990), 393, 401, 408.

means, and personal freedom gave them greater latitude to make choices in their material and cultural lives and often exempted them from the everyday indignities inflicted on the poor.

In Russia as elsewhere, the long-term prospects for sociopolitical liberalization and the emergence of a civil society depended heavily on the ability of this middle class to absorb modern values and assert itself as an autonomous social actor. This essay will argue that Moscow's middle class was small and only beginning to assimilate those values in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; that the 1812 invasion by Napoleon dealt a devastating blow to its material well-being and confidence in the stability of the social order; and that the trauma of the war may have strengthened conservative attitudes in the middle class but also left a legacy of bitterness and distrust toward the regime.

Membership in the middle class depended on both legal and socioeconomic criteria. For the most part, the class was drawn from four *sosloviia*: the nobility, clergy, merchantry, and townspeople (*meshchanstvo*); together with smaller groups—guild artisans, foreigners, and *raznochintsy*—they numbered around 82,000 individuals, or about 30 percent of Moscow's population, according to the official population count from the winter of 1811-12.<sup>3</sup>

These four *sosloviia* had in common certain features that were important for a middle class in the European sense. They were rooted in the city and had balanced sex ratios, unlike the peasants who migrated seasonally from the countryside. Being neither serfs nor (in most cases) serfowners, their lives were shaped to a higher degree by interaction with formalized institutions and market forces rather than personalized authority and premodern communal structures. They had a limited freedom to transcend *soslovie* boundaries, since they often married members of other *sosloviia* or changed their own (e.g., when townspeople became merchants or priests' sons entered the bureaucracy); their range of occupational choices and the way they combined “European” and “Russian” cultural influences likewise placed them at the interstices of the *soslovie* system. Yet they lived in a wider society that

---

<sup>3</sup> P. I. Shchukin, *Bumagi, otnosiashchiiasia do Otechestvennoi voiny 1812 goda*, 10 vols. (Moscow: T-vo Tip. A. I. Mamontova, 1897-1908), 4:225-28. On working with pre-reform urban population statistics, see Boris Nikolaevich Mironov, *Russkii gorod v 1740-1860-e gody: demograficheskoe, sotsial'noe i ekonomicheskoe razvitie* (Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1990), 85-93.

remained dominated by aristocratic power and noble-peasant relations whose roots lay in the countryside; this was true in most Russian towns, but especially in Moscow, with its extravagantly wealthy aristocracy and masses of peasant migrants.<sup>4</sup>

However, only parts of these four *sosloviia* could be considered “middle-class” in an economic and sociocultural sense. At the top of the social scale, the elite of the nobility was an aristocracy of rich serfowners, but that stratum was numerically negligible: all nobles together were just over 6 percent of Moscow’s population; of those, only 30 percent were *hereditary* nobles; and half of those 30 percent employed hired domestics, suggesting that they were probably not serf owners.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, wealthy serfowners were a very small minority of the nobility, whereas the “typical” noble was a *chinovnik* with merely personal-noble status or else a hereditary noble of modest means.

At the other end of the scale, these four *sosloviia* included many individuals who were too poor to be middle-class in any meaningful sense. For example, an official study from the 1840s found that only 41 percent of Moscow townspeople were employed in commerce, domestic service, or as artisans or laborers; the remainder had no identifiable occupation at all, instead living hand-to-mouth on the margins of the urban economy.<sup>6</sup> In other words, many townspeople were economically almost indistinguishable from the masses of house serfs and migrant peasants, and the same was true of many guild artisans, poor sacristans and deacons, and government clerks. The “real” middle class therefore represented only a fraction of the 30 percent of Muscovites included in these *sosloviia*.

---

<sup>4</sup> A. I. Kupriianov, “Russkii gorozhanin kontsa XVIII—pervoi poloviny XIX veka (po materialam dnevnikov),” in Iu. L. Bessmertnyi, ed., *Chelovek v mire chuvstv. Ocherki po istorii chastnoi zhizni v Evrope i nekotorykh stranakh Azii do nachala novogo vremeni* (Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2000), 129.

<sup>5</sup> V. Androssov, *Statisticheskaia zapiska o Moskve* (Moscow: v Tipografii Semena Selivanovskago, 1832), 56, 64; see also B. N. Mironov, *Sotsial’naia istoriia Rossii perioda Imperii (XVIII-nachalo XX veka). Genezis lichnosti, demokraticeskoi sem’i, grazhdanskogo obshchestva i pravovogo gosudarstva*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: “Dmitrii Bulanin,” 1999), 1:20, 88, 129-30.

<sup>6</sup> “Meshchanskoe soslovie v Moskve (za 1845),” *Zhurnal Ministerstva vnutrennykh del*, January 1847, 81-85.

## Moscow's Middle Class and the Impact of the Napoleonic War

While government statistics are the main source for studying the *soslovie* breakdown of the population, the present essay will draw on both quantitative and narrative sources to determine the distribution of wealth and material goods in Moscow's middle class. The quantitative source for this essay are the petitions for financial assistance that the government invited Muscovites to file in the aftermath of the 1812 occupation. These documents usually indicated the petitioners' name and social rank, their place of residence, the value of their lost movable or immovable property, and whether they owned property or serf estates outside Moscow; many also provided other personal information or appended detailed inventories of lost possessions. A total of 18,133 petitions<sup>7</sup> were submitted in the summer of 1813 to a government committee that was instructed to review them, and summarize them in a digest (*zhurnal*),<sup>8</sup> in whatever random order they happened to be received.

To gain an overview of the petitions, I studied the 2,000 petition summaries (numbered 12,701-14,700) contained in the one volume of the digest that the archive made available to me; 1,667 of these provide evidence on the petitioners' economic losses.<sup>9</sup> I also reviewed in greater depth another 435 randomly chosen individual petitions, including 95 detailed household inventories.

Judging from a the sample of 2,000, the petitioners were mostly from four of the *sosloviia* discussed earlier: nobles (15 percent), merchants (26 percent), townspeople (31 percent), and guild artisans (6 percent); in addition, 9 percent were soldiers and their wives or daughters, and 13 percent belonged to other categories. Overall, males represented about 63 percent, females 37 percent of the petitioners. Males outnumbered females three to two among nobles (i.e., army officers and *chinovniki*) and townspeople, and five to one among merchants. Among "soldiers," by contrast, females

---

<sup>7</sup> This number is cited in E. G. Boldina, "O deiatel'nosti Komissii dlia rassmotreniia proshenii obyvatelei Moskovskoi stolitsy i gubernii, poterpevshikh razorenie ot nashestviia nepriatel'skogo," in *Moskva v 1812 godu. Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 180-letiiu Otechestvennoi voiny 1812 goda*, eds. E. G. Boldina, A. S. Kiselev, L. N. Seliverstova (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo ob"edineniia "Mosgorarkhiv," 1997), 47. In addition, several hundred petitions were published in Shchukin, *Bumagi*, passim.

<sup>8</sup> Tsentral'nyi istoricheskii arkhiv Moskvy (TsIAM) f. 20, op. 2, dd. 2373-2381a.

<sup>9</sup> TsIAM f. 20, op. 2, d. 2380.

outnumbered males almost ten to one, suggesting that many wives and daughters of soldiers were widowed or lived apart from their husbands; besides, when the petitions were being filed, much of the Russian army was campaigning in Germany. Only the clergy was severely underrepresented, since they had a separate system for assisting the war victims in their midst.<sup>10</sup>

It seems that petitions were submitted by the vast majority of nobles, merchants, townspeople, guild artisans, and soldiers' dependents present in Moscow in the summer of 1813. This impression arises from two observations. First, these five groups were present in roughly similar proportions among the petitioners and in the March 1813 population count.<sup>11</sup> Second, extrapolating from petitions that indicate the number of individuals in the households of various *sosloviia*, it would seem that the total number of people represented by the petitions from the various *sosloviia* was close to 58,000, compared with the total of 69,000 Muscovites who belonged to these *sosloviia* before the war and 30,000 in March 1813.

I assume that the losses reported by the petitioners are broadly accurate. Of course, their claims about lost movable possessions were unverifiable, and they had an incentive to inflate them in order to obtain higher relief payments. However, they also routinely ignored minor items that had little value individually but in the aggregate made up much of their households; the losses reported by many were quite small; and the claims had to seem plausible to the officials, especially when they involved detailed inventories. The poorest and least literate petitioners were probably less motivated to go to the trouble of filing petitions at all, while the richest had been able to evacuate more of their belongings and also owned property outside Moscow; consequently, the information for the mid-range households—who lost virtually all they had owned in 1812 and were anxious to obtain assistance—is probably the most reliable for reconstructing the contents and value of pre-war households.

---

<sup>10</sup> TsIAM f. 20, op. 2, d. 2243, l. 40 ob, l. 92 ob.

<sup>11</sup> For the March 1813 figures, see: Otdel pis'mennykh istochnikov Gosudarstvennogo Istoricheskogo Muzeia (OPI GIM) f. 160, op. 1, d. 202, l. 86.



The economic information provided most consistently in the petitions concerns the value of lost personal possessions (*imushchestvo*, as opposed to real estate or merchandise), included in 1,448 of the 2,000 petition summaries. By that criterion, the poorest fifth of households were worth up to 400 rubles; the second-poorest, up to 800; the middle fifth, up to 1,940; the next, up to 4,600, and the richest, over 4,600. Most were thus clustered in the range of 400-4,600 rubles; the median was 1,300, while the richest 1 percent were worth up to 500,000 rubles. Not surprisingly, this economic differentiation was related to the *soslovie* hierarchy: the wealthiest two-fifths included 79 percent of the merchants<sup>12</sup> and 58 percent of the personal and hereditary nobles, but only 35 percent of the townspeople, 24 percent of the government clerks (*kantseliarskie sluzhiteli*), and a mere 4 percent of the soldiers.

These numbers may overstate the affluence of the middle *sosloviia*, since the petitioners were a self-selected group. A perhaps more broadly inclusive snapshot of the wealth hierarchy (as measured by lost possessions) is provided by the Moscow post office, which obtained reports from all of its 260 employees and compiled them into a digest that estimates the value of the losses suffered by 244 of them.<sup>13</sup> The median for all employees, 350 rubles, was also roughly the median for senior clerks (*kantseliaristy*). Half the employees were army veterans (*invalidy*), letter carriers, doormen, and so forth, whose collective median was only 170 rubles; for the *invalidy*, it was a measly 30. The other half were clerks and *chinovniki*; the median here was only 150 rubles for junior clerks (*kopiisty*) but then rose as one ascended the service ladder, to 620 for officials in rank 14 and 2,600 for those in rank 7; as for the five men in ranks 6 and 5 who reported losses, they had a median of 8,000.

The lower levels of the postal staff, whose households were worth no more than a few hundred rubles at best, are typical of the impoverished lower strata of the government service more generally. Clerks in the Russian bureaucracy were often so poor, they had to sleep in their offices, like those “ragged

---

<sup>12</sup> The data on merchant households are somewhat unreliable, because they do not always distinguish personal possessions from merchandise.

<sup>13</sup> TsIAM f. 20, op. 2, d. 2243, ll. 1-11ob. An additional 24 individuals on this document are identified as “prikomandirovannye inogorodnye pochталiony” or “na sirotskom oklade.”

and unshaven unfortunates” in the Nizhnii Novgorod courts who, as a contemporary recalled, were “dirty and smelly” and “worn out by hardship”; “the bachelors [among them] virtually lived in the clerks’ room, and lay down to sleep on the very tables on which they scratched away with their quills during the day as they copied endless papers.”<sup>14</sup>

Army veterans, like the 38 on the post office’s payroll, often fared little better. For example, hundreds of them manned police guardhouses (*budki*) in Moscow’s streets. A typical guardhouse, measuring a mere 4½ by 7 feet, housed three policemen and sometimes even their families; as dismayed government health inspectors found later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “the police guardhouses are all extremely cramped for the families who live there, are filthy in the extreme, and have neither latrines nor garbage pits.”<sup>15</sup>

The personal possessions of people in this stratum were very modest, as we see from the household inventories of thirteen navy seamen stationed in Moscow. Like many low-ranking government workers, they had long service records—only three had served for less than fifteen years—and nearly all were illiterate.<sup>16</sup> The median value of their possessions was 140 rubles, similar to the lower 50 percent of postal workers. Seaman Nikita Solov’ev, whose possessions were worth 37 rubles, reported having owned only the following items: two linen shirts; a frock coat; two pairs of trousers; two pairs of boots; a sheep-skin coat; a hay- or straw-filled mattress with two pillows; and five rubles cash. (The list presumably did not include whatever he wore or carried with him when he left the city before the arrival of the French army, as well as any petty items of truly marginal monetary value).

---

<sup>14</sup> M. Nazimov, “V provintsii i v Moskve s 1812 po 1828 god. Iz vospominanii starozhila,” *Russkii Vestnik* 124 (July 1876), 114. See also “Imperatorskii Moskovskii universitet v vospominaniiakh Mikhaila Prokhorovicha Tret’iakova, 1798-1830,” *Russkaia Starina* 75 (July-September 1892), 109.

<sup>15</sup> “Otchet sanitarnago vracha, po Miasnitskoi chasti, G. F. Markonet. Za period vremeni ot 20 ianvaria 1879 po 20 iunია 1879,” *Izvestiia Moskovskoi Gorodskoi Dumy*, 17 September 1879, 11. See also: Georg Engelhardt, *Russische Miscellen zur genauern Kenntniss Russlands und seiner Bewohner*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg: bei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ?-1832), 4:117; Engelbert Wichelhausen, *Züge zu einem Gemälde von Moskwa, in Hinsicht auf Klima, Cultur, Sitten, Lebensart, Gebräuche, vorzüglich aber statistische, physische und medicinische Verhältnisse* (Berlin: bei Johann Daniel Sander, 1803), 63.

<sup>16</sup> TsIAM, f. 20, op. 2, d. 2213, ll. 1-10 ob. One could sign his own name, eleven could not, and the thirteenth was not present when the petition was filed on his behalf.

The seaman whose household formed the median, Aleksei Filipov, lived with his wife and two-year-old daughter. Between them, they had owned four sheepskin coats, four cloth military greatcoats, a feather bed with three pillows, three silk scarves, five men's and four women's linen shirts, and 50 rubles cash. Lastly, Denis Tarkhov and his wife, with 461 rubles' worth of possessions, were the most comfortable household in the group: in addition to a greater number of the same items also found in their poorer colleagues' households, they listed three "new" English vests and five "new" linen shirts, a feather bed with four pillows, a relatively cheap (55 rubles) fur coat and a pair of earrings for his wife, and even a mirror.

Somewhere in the high hundreds or low to mid-thousands of rubles, a more substantial kind of prosperity set in. Consider the case of Ivan Mikhailov Alekseev, whose file—which includes his petition, household inventory, service record, and last will—is unusually complete and hence helpful in reconstructing his life and his experience.<sup>17</sup> Born around 1738, he had entered the navy as a boy in 1750, became an officer around 1770, and retired at rank 6 in 1807 after receiving the Order of St. Vladimir 4<sup>th</sup> class. He owned a modest four-room house in an outlying district of Moscow, a house-serf family of three, and reported losing 2,235 rubles' worth of personal possessions during the Napoleonic occupation.<sup>18</sup> He owned no landed serf estate, but then, neither did 99 percent of the petitioners, including 86 percent of those who were hereditary nobles.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> TsIAM f. 20, op. 2, d. 28, ll. 53-61ob.

<sup>18</sup> Because Alekseev's archival file contains his will (written in the summer of 1813), we learn about the possessions that they rescued from the fire and looting. Not much survived: the will lists cash, three icons, a silver cross, two china (*farfor*) plates and four cups, three silver goblets, and two sets of silver spoons, forks, and knives, as well as a few mirrors and some clothes. Otherwise, the entire household had been lost.

<sup>19</sup> Included in this category are petitioners identified as nobles, army officers, or civilian officials above rank 9, i.e., those whose rank automatically made them hereditary nobles. Petitioners were required to report any property they owned outside Moscow; in the case of landed estates, such information could presumably be verified easily against official records.

For income, Alekseev had 170 rubles in annual rental income from his house. This was unusual, for despite the destruction of perhaps 80 percent of Moscow's housing stock in 1812,<sup>20</sup> only 15 percent of the petitioners, including 23 percent of the hereditary and personal nobles, reported losing a house. He also received a pension (a perk awarded to few officials) of 500 rubles a year; in addition, he owned a 1,000 ruble bond from the Moscow Savings Bank and reported having lost 750 rubles in cash. Like many government servitors whose careers progressed slowly, he had married late (his wife was 15 years his junior), and he had two grown daughters whose husbands were civilian officials in ranks 14 and 8. Alekseev was a model of middle-class success—in his naval career, the official recognition symbolized by his St. Vladimir order, his modest financial well-being, and his daughters' marriages. As a literate man who had seen the world—he had served in the Mediterranean in the 1770s—he also had cultural and intellectual horizons broader than most people of his condition.

Alekseev's household inventory portrays a man who was conventionally pious and concerned about the appearance of genteel respectability. The first items listed were five icons, several gold or silver crosses, religious books, and a silver lamp to illumine his icons. In his will, he also left 200 rubles to two churches, "that they may pray for me, my wife, and my other kin," and 100 to his confessor "as a small token of my sincere regard for him, and I beseech him to keep my sinful soul in his prayers."

The four fur coats that he and his wife had owned and that were worth 520 rubles—not expensive for fur coats (perhaps they were old and worn), but nonetheless one-fourth of the total value of the possessions listed in the inventory—were testimony to Moscow's climate, but also to fur's significance as a visible symbol of affluence. He further lists a frock-coat and trousers of English cloth, silk vests, and a pocket watch, all of which helped maintain a respectable public image.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, his and his wife's 62 rubles' worth of *bel'e* (linens) could not have represented more than perhaps a dozen shirts—barely enough for regular laundering. Likewise, the couple's 17 rubles worth of caps and cotton

---

<sup>20</sup> On the damage caused by the fire, see Robert Lyall, *The Character of the Russians and a Detailed History of Moscow* (London: T. Cadell; Edinburgh: W. Blackwood; 1823), 500-01.

<sup>21</sup> The inventory lists no women's dresses; no explanation is given for that lacuna.

stockings could not have represented a large collection. Owning a few conspicuous garments that publicly signaled one's social status apparently took precedence over acquiring the larger number of underclothes required for personal comfort, hygiene, and cleanliness.

The same pattern is evident in the couple's other possessions. They owned at least two linen tablecloths and perhaps a dozen or so linen napkins; tables, chairs, and other pieces of mahogany furniture; a wall clock and three mirrors; and tableware made of china (*faians* and *farfor*) and cut glass, as well as a few silver forks and knives. All of this allowed them to entertain guests in a genteel manner. On the other hand, the inventory does not list a bed frame, mattress, feather bed, pillows, or blankets. These were valuable and bulky items,<sup>22</sup> so the Alekseevs were unlikely to overlook them in composing their inventory, and as an elderly couple who apparently stayed in Moscow during the occupation, they were probably not able to rescue their bed when their house burned in 1812. Besides, since they shared their four rooms with their renters and the three house serfs, they probably had no separate bedroom anyway; most likely, they did not own a feather bed in the first place, instead making do with more spartan and improvised sleeping arrangements.

Because the Alekseev home was so crowded (a small house in an outlying neighborhood was likely to generate 170 rubles' rent only if it housed many tenants), it was probably filthy and smelly as well; such houses tended to be dimly lit, poorly ventilated, and pervaded by the stench from latrines and garbage pits that no one drained unless they overflowed into the courtyard. While the aristocracy around 1812 was not particularly sensitive to hygiene either—journalists had to admonish them gently to wash their hands and faces regularly, and not wear the same shirt for weeks on end<sup>23</sup>—at least, the spaciousness of their homes made the odors less intrusive.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> By comparison, another petition lists “two worn feather beds with pillows” as being worth 80 rubles; TsIAM f. 20, op. 2, d. 2214 (Zhukova, #4468), l. 67 ob.

<sup>23</sup> “Ob odezhde,” *Moskovskii kur'er*, ch. 2 (1805), 201-04.

<sup>24</sup> See the various *otchetny sanitarnykh vrachei* in *Izvestiia Moskovskoi Gorodskoi Dumy*, 1878-80.

The value of their possessions placed the Alekseevs in the second-wealthiest fifth of the petitioners, and they had the unusual advantages of a state pension, rental income, and not needing to rent lodgings. Still, their household was spartan; the elements of luxury it contained were intended not for personal comfort but to uphold appearances and cultivate a traditional piety. The emphasis on appearances was eminently sensible, for two reasons. First, because the city drew multitudes of paupers even while the aristocracy kept the standards for visible wealth high, there was intense pressure for conspicuous consumption among status-conscious members of the middle class as well as people from the lower classes who wished to conceal their social origins.<sup>25</sup> People like the Alekseevs lacked the wherewithal and sophistication to keep up with fashion, but at least they could invest in a few expensive, durable items that signaled social respectability. Second, most of Moscow's upper-class social and cultural life revolved around dinner parties, theatrical performances, etc. that were hosted privately by the nobility and were open to outsiders only if they were appropriately dressed and behaved.

What the Alekseevs apparently did *not* own is as interesting as what they did possess. First of all, no shoes or boots are listed in the inventory, suggesting that they did not own much beyond what they had on their feet when the French arrived. Yet they must have done a good deal of walking, for there is also no evidence of a sleigh or carriage, not to mention horses—otherwise, the Alekseevs would have been able to leave Moscow ahead of the *Grande Armée*. Horses and vehicles were more than mere conveniences or status symbols in Moscow, which by European standards was a sprawling, low-density city; for example, it was three times larger than Paris but had only half the population. Crossing Moscow on foot took three to four hours, and the mostly unpaved streets were alternately dusty, muddy, or icy (depending on the season), making it difficult to walk in comfort and without soiling the clothes and footwear that indicated one's social rank.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> The wretched world of *faux-genteel*, lower-classes Muscovites is graphically portrayed in A. I. Levitov's collection of short stories, *Moskovskii nory i trushchoby* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., St. Petersburg: izdanie V. E. Genkelia, 1869).

<sup>26</sup> According to Wichelhausen's observations, it rained or snowed on two days out of every three between September and April (*Züge*, 121-30).

These discomforts and indignities, as well as the danger from street criminals and Moscow's notorious speeding carriages and sleighs, were aggravated by the pervasive darkness of fall and winter, just when the city's population was largest owing to the influx of seasonal migrants and the social "season" was at its liveliest. The darkness was especially striking outside the rich central neighborhoods. Those areas benefitted from the lights emanating from the large windows of aristocratic mansions, and the authorities favored them in the allocation of street lights as well: thus, the aristocratic Tverskaia section of the city had an average one street light for every 112 feet or so of street, whereas in Alekseev's more plebeian neighborhood (Meshchanskaia section), the average was only about one light per 680 feet.

And even those lights—which in any case burned only a few hours per night, only on moonless nights, and not during the summer—should not be overestimated. Paris used similar oil-burning lanterns, called *réverbères* because of the polished metal from which their light "reverberated": "The *réverbères* never did spread a light that was alive and true," one French writer recalled in the 1840s; "their vacillating flame would often flicker in the wind, which found ways to penetrate through gaps between the poorly fitted glass panes of the lantern; beneath the *réverbère*, a reddish light gave things a mournful appearance without quite allowing one to make them out; and a few steps away, the shadows were all the denser and gloomier."<sup>27</sup>

The distances, climate, and darkness in Moscow made access to vehicles even more important than in large Western cities. However, purchasing and maintaining a vehicle and horses was unaffordable for people like the Alekseevs—just the *upkeep* for a pair of horses cost 300 rubles a year, equivalent to 60 percent of Alekseev's pension. Cab rides were also expensive; as a result, for example, Aleksei Galakhov (the son a serf owner and a student at Moscow University in the 1820s) routinely walked the 3.3 miles to his aunt's house, and back again, because he lacked the money for a cab.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Paul de Kock, *La Grande Ville, nouveau tableau de Paris* (Paris: Maresq, 1844), 1:45, quoted in Simone Delattre, *Les douze heures noires: La nuit à Paris au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2000), 86.

<sup>28</sup> A. D. Galakhov, *Zapiski cheloveka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999), 106.

The pictorial evidence likewise suggests that many people walked and that passenger transport was associated with affluence.<sup>29</sup> Especially for an older couple like the Alekseevs, not having easy access to transportation must have isolated them from upper-class social and cultural life—which was concentrated downtown, took place mainly during the cold months, and lasted into the wee hours of the night—and highlighted the social divide between themselves and the aristocracy.

Gloom and darkness probably prevailed inside the Alekseevs' home as well, for their inventory lists no candlesticks, chandeliers, or oil lamps, suggesting that their indoor lighting was fairly rudimentary. Again, this is not unusual, for bright lights were associated with festive occasions or an aristocratic lifestyle.<sup>30</sup> Conservatives found the democratization of indoor lighting disturbing; as one of them complained, “in all the streets [of St. Petersburg and Moscow] we have restaurants in which the music and lighting make you think they are the houses of great lords. . . . All who habitually frequent these magnificently lighted restaurants disdain the swings and other amusements that Russian merchants used to enjoy twenty years ago; now these are left to the lowest tier of the populace. Perhaps all this is bringing us closer to the customs of London, Paris, and Berlin, but I don't know what we would gain from such a similarity.”<sup>31</sup>

Alekseev was literate, but his inventory lists no secular books, only religious texts. Reading was of course crucial to the middle class's prospects of assimilating the cosmopolitan culture of the elite and contributing to the formation of a civil society. Since Moscow had few *public* theaters, art galleries, coffee houses, and so forth where modern culture was available orally or visually to the general public, print had an especially large significance. Like Western Christians, Orthodox Russians often acquired basic literacy and the habit of reading with the aim of immersing themselves in a limited, unchanging

---

<sup>29</sup> N. N. Skorniakova, *Staraia Moskva: Graviury i litografii XVI-XIX vekov iz sobraniia Gosudarstvennogo Istoricheskogo Muzeia* (Moscow: Galart, 1996), passim; Gordin, *Pushkinskii Peterburg*, passim.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example: A. I. Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, 8 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Pravda," 1975), 4:26, 35; Engelhardt, “Erinnerungen an Petrosawodsk,” in *Russische Miscellen*, 3:177.

<sup>31</sup> “Vypiska iz Ruskoi knigi, nazvannoi: Sobranie otryvkov, vziatykh iz npravstvennykh i politicheskikh Pisatelei, i izdannoi G . . . 1811,” *Ruskoi Vestnik*, June 1811, no. 6, pp. 77-78; the same point is made in *Moskovskii zritel'*, “Smes',” December 1806, 74-75.



body of sacred literature; this formed the starting point for the early modern “reading revolution” that encouraged the reading of a wide, constantly evolving secular literature for private entertainment or self-education.<sup>32</sup> Judging from the literature he owned, Alekseev had reached only the first level (a narrowly ecclesiastical literacy), yet even that seems to have been uncommon among Moscow’s middle class.

Based on 502 petitions reviewed, the incidence of literacy—in this case, the elementary sort involved in writing a formulaic sentence about affixing one’s signature to one’s petition—among the petitioners reflected the wider social hierarchy. It correlated with wealth: in this sample, the median literate petitioner owned possessions worth 2,600 rubles (a little higher than Alekseev’s), compared with only 600 for the illiterate. There was a pronounced gender gap, since males were 86 percent of the literate petitioners but only 23 percent of the illiterates.

As one ascended the economic ladder, illiteracy also diminished more quickly among men than among women. Among households worth up to 850 rubles, fewer than one in twenty women could sign her name, as opposed to over half the men. Between 851 and 2,000 rubles, a fifth of the women and six of every seven men could sign. Finally, in households over 2,000, better than 19 out of twenty men could sign their names but only just under half of the women. Only at the very highest wealth levels—over 10,000 rubles, about 8 percent of all the petitioners—could most women sign their names.

Lastly, literacy correlated with *soslovie*. Among the petitioners from the lower ranks of the army and navy, half of the men and almost all of the women were unable to sign their name. As one rose to higher *sosloviia*, male literacy grew rapidly—seven out of ten townsmen, eight of every ten merchants, and all the personal and hereditary noblemen. For the women, the increase was significant but less striking: almost none of the townswomen and seven of ten merchant women could *not* sign their names, and only among the nobles—particularly the wives or daughters of officials at or above rank 10—did literate women (barely) break the 50 percent barrier.

---

<sup>32</sup> Richard van Dülmen, *Kultur und Alltag in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 3 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1999), 2:188, 3:241; see also the essays in *Lesekulturen im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans Erich Bödeker (Aufklärung: Interdisziplinäre Halbjahresschrift zur Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts und seiner Wirkungsgeschichte, vol. 6, no. 1) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1991).

As for the fact that Alekseev owned a few books but no more, this too is not unusual.<sup>33</sup> Among the poorest 40 percent of the petitioners (up to 800 rubles), only one in 23 listed books; in the next highest 40 percent (up to 4,600, the category that included Alekseev), better than one-fourth did; in the top 20 percent, the share was similar. However, the *value* of the libraries increased dramatically at the top of the economic ladder. Alekseev's books were worth 85 rubles, about 4 percent of his entire household; these numbers were typical of households under 10,000 rubles. Among those over 20,000, by contrast, every library was worth thousands of rubles.

This presumably reflects a fundamental difference in attitudes toward reading: the elite collected large libraries of secular literature, while the middle class owned a few religious texts that were probably read over and over, and perhaps the occasional work of secular literature. In one of his essays, the German-Russian scholar Georg Engelhardt describes a provincial postal station inhabited by a lethargic class 14 official; in Moscow, almost two-thirds of these officials were in the poorest 50 percent of households. He carefully notes the *décor*: spartan furniture; a dull mirror; the official's patent in an old frame; some colorful *lubki*, a flyspecked copy of the postal regulations, and a copy of the church calendar (*sviatstsy*). In addition, well-thumbed copies of novels by Ann Radcliffe and of a ten-year-old *adres-kalendar'* "apparently indicated that their owner had an advanced intellectual education," Engelhardt notes with gentle irony.<sup>34</sup>

### **Religiosity in Russia's Middle Class**

The fact that Alekseev owned religious texts and a substantial number of icons raises the important question of his religious views. Thanks to his will—which makes clear that he considered it important to rescue his icons when his house burned and that he left money to the clergy in hopes that

---

<sup>33</sup> The following discussion is based on a sample of 107 detailed household inventories.

<sup>34</sup> Engelhardt, "Bemerkungen," in *Russische Miscellen*, 4:209.

they would pray for his soul—we know more about the linkage between personal possessions and religious views in Alekseev’s case than for most petitioners.

During this period, Russians and foreigners alike commented on the prevalence of a traditionalistic type of piety in Russia, especially among merchants: everywhere there were churches and chapels, people were constantly crossing themselves in front of icons, etc. And yet, in some quarters this piety seemed to be in retreat: not only did many, “especially in the higher estates” (according to Engelhardt), ignore the saint of the day in selecting a name for their newborn, but G. Lehmann likewise observed that “a small number of rich merchants, who have already modeled themselves entirely after the foreigners in their mores and way of life,” even took liberties with the obligatory Orthodox fasts.<sup>35</sup>

Engelhardt illustrates this cultural transformation with an experience he had in 1812 in Petrozavodsk, where he was once invited to a party hosted by three merchant brothers. The older two had had their younger brother educated at a *gimnazii* and then sent him to work in St. Petersburg. Owing to the great difference between them in age, education, and world experience, the three brothers and their wives offer a striking case study of the progressive cultural *embourgeoisement* of the middle class. The younger man and his wife are dressed more fashionably, exhibit more easy-going and informal behavior, have more elegant furniture in their bedrooms, and so forth.

Among the details Engelhardt singles out is the inversely proportional relationship between icons and mirrors, i.e., between conventional piety and concern about fashion. The youngest wife has a large mirror that can be tilted at different angles and is illumined by two bronze chandeliers, while her oldest sister-in-law’s only mirror is small, cloudy, and hangs in the darkest corner of the room. On the other hand, the youngest wife’s room contains only “one small, gilded saint’s image that, as a barometer of rising enlightenment and declining religiosity, is banished up high to the corner behind the door, so as not

---

<sup>35</sup> Engelhardt, “Erinnerungen an Petrosawodsk,” in *Russische Miscellen*, 3:173; G. Lehmann, “Briefe über Rußland, von einem in Moskwa lebenden Deutschen, an seine Freunde in Leipzig,” in Johann Richter, *Russische Miscellen*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: bey Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1803-04), v. 3, no. 7, p. 86.

to disturb the effect of the colorful English copperplates hung in graceful frames along the walls.” By contrast, the oldest wife has, in the traditional, prominent icon corner of her bedroom, “a large mahogany display case [*kivot*] filled from top to bottom with the most sumptuous saints’ images.”<sup>36</sup>

How widespread was the traditional piety in Moscow’s middle classes? The petitions shed some light on this question because icons are among the possessions most commonly mentioned. A sample of 142 petitions provided complete inventories or at least brief lists that exemplified the sorts of items the petitioners had lost; 91 of these included icons, almost always listing them before any other possessions, indicating their great symbolic importance as well as the financial value represented by their gold and silver ornaments. Not mentioning icons was not necessarily proof that one did not own any, though, for one might have taken them along when leaving the city (suggesting that one did not own very many) or have attributed little importance to them.

The traditional piety reflected in icon ownership was apparently most concentrated in the middle, not the extremes, of the social hierarchy. The share of petitioners *not* mentioning icons is 60 percent in households whose value corresponds to the poorest fifth of all petitioners (up to 400 rubles); the figure then drops to 23-33 percent in the upper four-fifths, but within the top 10 percent (7,700 or higher), the figure rises back to 42 percent. Those who reported owning icons included 87 percent of the townspeople, 70 percent of the merchants, and 56 percent of the nobles: owning icons was thus prevalent in all three *sosloviia*, but its prominence declined as one ascended the social ladder.

Three principal factors made it likely, particularly among officials, that one would *not* mention them: unusual poverty, unusual wealth, and high rank. Poor officials presumably lacked the means to acquire icons in significant numbers; officials of middling rank, like most townspeople and merchants, regarded icons as important elements of a successful household, spent considerable sums on them, and lamented their loss in 1812; and rich officials and those in advanced ranks presumably also owned icons but attributed less significance to them. *Chinovniki* whose households were worth up to a few thousand

---

<sup>36</sup> Engelhardt, “Erinnerungen an Petrosawodsk,” in *Russische Miscellen*, 3:176-79.

rubles had as much of their wealth invested in icons as most merchants and townspeople, but this was not the case among the wealthiest nobles: they accounted for 11 of the 15 richest households, but only four of the top 15 icon collections.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the cultural changes underway in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century might not have shown up in the petitions and inventories. Had the merchant brothers whom Engelhardt met filed an inventory, for example, the differences between the older and younger brothers and their wives would not have been apparent. Dmitrii I. Rostislavov, the son a village priest, describes how his parents' ownership of a few chairs, pewter plates, a samovar, and commercially manufactured cotton textiles were symptoms of a profound shift toward a rationalist view of life, a critical attitude toward the social order and folk customs, and a new emphasis on propriety and decorum; Aleksandr V. Nikitenko suggests that something similar was taking place in his rural serf family.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, reading did not necessarily correlate with book ownership, since people of limited means (even illiterates) would sometimes pool their resources to buy one periodical subscription and later resell "used" issues of periodicals; it was also common to borrow books and make handwritten copies rather than buy them.<sup>38</sup>

### **Education and Russia's Middle Class**

However, there are two main reasons for supposing that the petitions are broadly correct in suggesting the persistence of a widespread cultural traditionalism. First, the authors who report instances of cultural *embourgeoisement*—e.g., Nikitenko, Karamzin, Rostislavov, or Engelhardt—regarded them as noteworthy precisely because of their unusual character. Second, cultural change in the cases mentioned by these authors is generally linked to the transformative impact of formal education on families that had

---

<sup>37</sup> D. I. Rostislavov, *Provincial Russia in the Age of Enlightenment: The Memoir of a Priest's Son*, trans. by Alexander M. Martin (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Aleksandr Nikitenko, *Up From Serfdom: My Childhood and Youth in Russia, 1804-1824*, trans. Helen Saltz Jacobson (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> N. M. Karamzin, "O knizhnoi torgovle i liubvi ko chteniiu v Rossii," in *Vestnik Evropy* 3, no. 9 (May 1802): 58-59; Engelhardt, "Bemerkungen," in *Russische Miscellen*, 4:230-31.

previously known little or no schooling. Such schooling expanded students' intellectual horizons and (except in the ecclesiastical schools) their contacts with other *sosloviia*, but also brought home their society's class hatreds and the authoritarianism and coarseness of its power structures.

This ambiguity is illustrated by Nikitenko's description of the district (*uezd*) school in Voronezh, which he attended at a time when he was still a serf. "The students," he writes, "came from all kinds of families. Often, on the same bench, you would find the son of a secretary, the son of a high official, and the son of a serf; a boy from a wealthy merchant's home . . . could be found by the side of a poor child with an ill-fitting frock coat, full of holes, covering his threadbare linen breeches." Since the school was understaffed, daily homework recitation and enforcing discipline in the teacher's absence were entrusted to students, themselves immature youngsters who often abused their generally unchecked power for personal gain or gratification.

Fortunately however, the teachers demonstrated an "impartial attitude toward the students," there were no "pretensions or jealousy" among the students; in fact, the teachers "treated their pupils with a humanity unparalleled for the times," even though "the community gave them no encouragement, and the compensation they received barely covered their daily bread." ("Most teachers at that time," he adds, were "drunkard[s].") The teachers were "respectable people and intellectually stood far above the positions they occupied," yet they "knew only one way to teach, that is, they forced us to memorize short textbooks."<sup>39</sup>

Nikitenko developed strong intellectual interests while a student at this school, but mainly by reading on his own. His emphasis on the obstacles his school surmounted suggests public education's potential for contributing to the formation of a unified middle class, but also highlights its systemic

---

<sup>39</sup> Nikitenko, *Up From Serfdom*.

shortcomings. Because of these, schools were unpopular. As another former peasant serf recalled, “when I was naughty, Mother often threatened that she would tell Father, and then sweet little me would be sent off to school, and there—they’d beat me.”<sup>40</sup>

In any event, among the social strata discussed here, only the clergy was even beginning to develop a comprehensive system of male education by 1812, and the few available inventories from clerical families seem to suggest that ownership of books was more common among them than in other *sosloviia*.<sup>41</sup> Among the other *sosloviia*, schooling was a haphazard affair. State-run public schools—a hierarchy of parish schools, district schools, and *gimnazii*—were slow to develop: as late as 1830, the city of Moscow had one district and ten parish schools with a total of only 1,189 students,<sup>42</sup> while the city’s *gimnaziia*—the only such school in the entire province—enrolled 500-600 students in the 1820s.<sup>43</sup> The *gimnaziia*’s limited impact on society is reflected in the fact that not a single one of the petitions reviewed for this study makes reference to a person studying there. As for the city’s various other secular schools, their combined annual enrollments were only in the hundreds, so their impact on the culture of the middle class as a whole was limited.

---

<sup>40</sup> L. Checherskii, “Shkol’nye vospominaniia krest’ianina,” *Vestnik Evropy* 5 (August 1870), 503. This episode is from Belorussia in the 1840s. See also S—v, “Vospominaniia o Moskovskom Kommercheskom uchilishche 1831-1838 godov,” *Russkii Vestnik* 36 (November-December 1861), 719-54.

<sup>41</sup> Shchukin, *Bumagi*, 2:142-44, 159-60, 166-67, 3:99-101, 5:200-01.

<sup>42</sup> *Istoriia Moskvy s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ob’edineniia “Mosgorarkhiv,” 1997), 2:158-59; see also Johann Heym, *Versuch einer vollständigen geographisch-topographischen Enzyklopädie des Russischen Reichs nach alphabetischer Ordnung* (Göttingen: bey Johann Christian Dieterich, 1796), 503-04.

<sup>43</sup> N. V. Khristoforova, *Rossiiskie gimnazii XVIII-XX vekov na materiale g. Moskvy* (Moscow: Greko-latinskii kabinet Iu. A. Shichalina, 2001), 41-42; G. Le Cointe de Laveau, *Guide du voyageur à Moscou* (Moscow: de l’imprimerie d’Auguste Semen, Imp. de l’Acad. Impériale méd.-chirurgicale, 1824), 253.

## Quality of Life in Russia's Middle Class

As the petitions make clear, many middle-class petitioners lost all they had owned. But to assess the full gravity of the losses, it is important to have a sense of people's budgets. On the expenditure side, the minimum requirements for survival were food, housing, and heat. The fairly spartan meal plans of Moscow's boarding schools for girls (the Catherine Institute and Alexander School) and the Widow's Home, in the decade after the Napoleonic Wars, reported that feeding one girl or older woman cost between 15 and 50 kopecks per day;<sup>44</sup> at that rate, feeding a family of four cost about 200-700 rubles a year. In addition, most of the middle class evidently rented their lodgings, given that only 11 percent of the petitioners (with a median household value around 4,700 rubles) reported losing a house in the 1812 fire, including 30 percent of the merchants, 25 percent of the *chinovniki* and army officers, and 10 percent of the townspeople. Rents varied greatly: a provincial townswoman charged 10 rubles a year for the right to live in the same room with ten other people and receive a modest supply of cabbage, kvass, and salt; a sacristan rented out a small room in Moscow for 30 rubles a year; and a substantial house—with twenty rooms, a stable, and a carriage shed—cost around 2,000.<sup>45</sup> Rents in the low hundreds of rubles seem to have been common. Finally, one *sazhen'* of firewood—enough to heat a single room for up to 2-2½ months—cost 8-9 rubles in 1800, and nearly twice that by the 1820s.<sup>46</sup> Just the food, rent, and heating fuel for an undemanding family of four thus cost at least several hundred rubles a year.

As for the income side, in the decade before 1812, a provincial official in rank 6 typically earned 600 rubles a year, in rank 7 it was 360 rubles, and in rank 14, 100-200 rubles.<sup>47</sup> (Officials in ranks 6 or below constitute 90 percent of the petitioners who were *chinovniki*.) Clerks often earned under 100, while

---

<sup>44</sup> OPI GIM f. 14, op. 1, d. 4243, 4245.

<sup>45</sup> Rostislavov, *Provincial Russia*, 169; Tret'iakov, "Imperatorskii Moskovskii universitet," 104-131, 124; Raupach, *Reise*, 89-90.

<sup>46</sup> *Moskovskiiia Vedomosti*, no. 11 (Feb. 8, 1800), p. 280; Lyall, *The Character*, 74; Engelhardt, *Russische Miscellen*, 3:117; Wichelhausen, *Züge*, 336.

<sup>47</sup> Heinrich Storch, *Rußland unter Alexander dem Ersten: Eine historische Zeitschrift*, 9 vols. (St. Petersburg, Leipzig: bey Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1804-08), 3:125-31.



only the very highest-ranking officials earned over 1,000. In addition, some officials received supplements to pay for food and housing. Government workers were infamous for their venality, but one suspects that the bribes were modest at the lower rungs of the civil service, where relatively poor members of the public had to pay off swarms of low-ranking officials. Lastly, an official's teenage sons might enter the service as well (usually at the junior level and for low pay), while his wife and/or daughters might contribute to the family budget by doing handicrafts or working in upper-class households. In any event, the family's overall income in most cases probably remained well under 1,000 rubles, which made it a challenge even to pay for food, housing, and heating fuel. The sums left over after paying for necessities must in most cases have been very small indeed.

Estimating officials' incomes is complicated, however, by the fact that men who had left the imperial service continued to use their former service titles even after entering the private sector. For example, Stepan Semenov was in government service as a clerk only from 1792 to 1794; from then on, he supported himself and his family as a hairdresser, yet when he filed his petition in 1813, he identified himself by his former service rank as a retired *gubernskii registrator*.<sup>48</sup> For ex-officials, the principal provider of private-sector employment seems to have been aristocratic households. A glance at the classified advertisements in *Moskovskiiia Vedomosti* for 1800 reveals a motley universe of people seeking administrative, clerical, child-care, or other positions in private homes.

Job seekers variously identified themselves by nationality ("Frenchwoman," "Englishman," "Russian"), *soslovie* ("nobleman," "townsman," "free woman"), parentage ("*iz ober-ofitserov*"), family status ("widow"), or profession ("actor," "hairdresser"); the most commonly cited form of identity, however, was government service rank. Pay varied tremendously. One advertisement from 1800 for a clerk—who was required to be unmarried—offered a 150 ruble salary plus "everything, i.e., clothing and food"; on the other hand, when Nikitenko's father was employed as a steward on a noble estate, he received 1,000 rubles a year. In some cases, husband-and-wife teams sought jobs in the same

---

<sup>48</sup> TsIAM f. 20, op. 2, d. 2214, ll. 118-118ob (no. 4786).

household—he to help run the estate, she to look after the children or keep the mistress company.<sup>49</sup>

Given the diversity of private-sector opportunities, correlating government service rank with occupation and income is fraught with pitfalls.

Trying to estimate the income of the “typical” townspeople or merchant is futile because of the many unknown variables involved. However, by 1812, it cost 478 rubles a year in various taxes to be a member of the third merchant guild, which was evidently beyond the means of the petitioners who were townspeople, and who outnumbered the petitioners from all three merchant guilds put together. As for the merchants themselves, 88 percent of all Moscow merchants in 1811 belonged to the third guild, presumably because they could not afford the 1,495 rubles a year required for membership in the second guild.<sup>50</sup> Since merchant status and membership in the higher guilds were associated with valuable privileges, people most likely rose to the highest rank they could afford. The sums that remained to townspeople and merchants after paying for basic necessities were therefore unlikely in most cases to exceed a few hundred rubles.

The typical middling income thus probably produced no surplus adequate to rebuild the households that had been destroyed and that were mostly valued at thousands of rubles. People’s pre-war possessions had presumably been the fruit of a lifetime of gradual accumulation: icons and (probably) furniture, china, silverware, and other durable goods were handed down through the generations, while linens were often part of the trousseau that a woman made in years of patient labor before her marriage.

Some of the accoutrements of a Europeanized lifestyle could be bought used, and hence at lower prices, but it appears that owing to the differences in culture and taste between social classes, the market for used goods was smaller than in Western European cities.<sup>51</sup> The looting of aristocratic mansions in

---

<sup>49</sup> *Moskovskiiia Vedomosti* (1800): no. 6, January 21, p. 146; no. 35, May 2, p. 899; no. 53, July 4, p. 1274; no. 70, September 1, p. 1565; Nikitenko, *Up from Serfdom*, 54.

<sup>50</sup> In 1811, the third guild had accounted for 88 percent of Moscow’s merchantry; Manfred Hildermeier, *Bürgertum und Stadt in Rußland 1760-1870. Rechtliche Lage und soziale Struktur* (Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1986), 126, 169.

<sup>51</sup> Le Cointe, *Guide*, 299.

1812 occasioned some redistribution of wealth—for instance, the months after the occupation were a good time to buy cheap second-hand (i.e., looted) books—but most likely not enough to offset what the middle class had lost, for many stolen goods apparently ended up in the hands of peasants who kept them for themselves or resold them for low prices at village or small-town markets, and much was taken by Cossacks and the Moscow police; in addition, of course, much went up in flames in 1812.<sup>52</sup>

When those possessions were looted or burned, their owners suffered a devastating dual blow: they lost not only the economic, utilitarian, and sentimental value associated with those objects, but also the ability to demonstrate on the street and in their homes that they belonged to the genteel, respectable part of society. The aristocrat Mar'ia A. Volkova noted in October 1813 that “almost all my acquaintances are now without fur coats. Since it was warm when they left Moscow, they left their fur coats behind in the city, where they disappeared together with many other valuables. . . . The French made off with an unbelievable number of furs; now they have become the booty of the Don Cossacks.”<sup>53</sup> Things naturally were far worse for families of less aristocratic status. Many petitioners reported having become entirely dependent on “benefactors” to provide their sustenance; the retired army captain Petr Baskov and his wife lost an 8,000 ruble household, and still survived by begging in the mid-1820s.<sup>54</sup>

The impression that Moscow's middling strata were only beginning to acquire the attitudes and values of a modern middle class is supported by its members' accounts of the 1812 war itself. As is well known, the writings of Russia's social and intellectual elite reflect an intense, long-standing engagement with the challenge that Napoleonic France posed to their nation and its cultural identity and sociopolitical order. By contrast, the personal accounts left by members of the middle classes suggest that they were unprepared for the war and had little conception of what Napoleon represented.

---

<sup>52</sup> See, for example: “Griboedovskaia Moskva v pis'makh M. A. Volkovoi k V. I. Lanskoii, 1812—1818 gg.,” *Vestnik Evropy* 9, no. 8 (August 1874), 608, 610, 619, 635, 641, 643; no. 9 (September 1874), 117-18, 123-24, 141; Anton Wilhelm Nordhof, *Die Geschichte der Zerstörung Moskaus im Jahre 1812* (Munich: Harald Boldt Verlag im R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000), 246, 253-54, 266.

<sup>53</sup> “Griboedovskaia Moskva” (September 1874), 142.

<sup>54</sup> Shchukin, *Bumagi*, 5:203, 6:97-98.

Outside the war zone, interest in the war was uneven. Rostislavov, who grew up a mere hundred miles east of Moscow, reports all manner of family lore about the late 18<sup>th</sup>—early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but says nothing at all about 1812. Nikitenko mentions the war, but recalls that “many were indifferent to the fate of the Fatherland” in 1812, “including our intimate circle [of educated provincials near Voronezh] and the entire surrounding community”; he considers this “nonchalant attitude” toward the war “startling,” and attributes it to society’s habit of unthinking obedience to an authoritarian regime. By contrast, the merchant’s daughter A. Ia. Butkovskaia—whose home town of Arkhangel’sk had suffered severely from Napoleon’s Continental system—later recalled that even seventy years later, nothing she had ever experienced could compare “with the memory of the glorious year ‘12 and the enthusiasm that gripped adults as well as children.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Conclusion: Traditional Russian Political System Reaffirmed**

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>56</sup> the writings of middle-class Muscovites suggest that they were poorly equipped to make sense of the invasion. Three tendencies characterized their response: a generic xenophobia; revulsion against the Napoleonic army’s habit of desecrating religious shrines; and a sense that the enemy’s greed and indiscipline, together with pillaging by the Russian lower classes, created conditions reminiscent of the *jacqueries* Russia had known in earlier generations.

At the same time, Muscovites were bitter toward their own government, especially Governor-General Fedor V. Rostopchin, whose Francophobic bluster had encouraged a false sense of security as the French approached; the fact that the Russian army and police contributed to the looting only hardened those feelings. Rather than view the events of 1812 through the distinctive lense of the Enlightenment

---

<sup>55</sup> Nikitenko, *Up From Serfdom*, 74-75; A. Ia. Butkovskaia, “Razskazy Babushki,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* (December 1884), 605.

<sup>56</sup> A. M. Martin, “The Response of the Population of Moscow to the Napoleonic Occupation of 1812,” in *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450-1917*, eds. Marshall Poe and Eric Lohr (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 469-89.

and the revolutionary era, most Muscovites relied on traditional stereotypes of the “other”—the foreigner, the heathen, the anarchic rebellion of the poor, and the corruption and oppressiveness of the Russian authorities.

Napoleon himself played an ambiguous role in Muscovites’ imagination, since they viewed him as both a “normal” autocrat and a frightening revolutionary. The venomous disdain that was common among the aristocracy—Volkova called him “Satan,” a “tiger,” the “little Corsican,” and an “infernal monster”<sup>57</sup>—is absent from their accounts; instead, they refer to him respectfully by his title of emperor, and make clear that they expected his officers to be willing and able to restrain their men. Nikitenko later recalled that “the mention of Napoleon’s name evoked awe rather than hate”;<sup>58</sup> Maxim Gorky’s grandfather, a provincial merchant who was a boy in 1812, captured these mixed emotions, and the habit of placing Napoleon in a Russian historical context, when he told his grandson that Napoleon “was a bold man who wanted to conquer the whole world and he wanted everyone to be equal—no lords or civil servants but simply a world without classes. Names would be different, but everyone would have the same rights. And the same faith. I don’t have to tell you what nonsense that is. . . . We’ve had our own Bonapartes—Razin, Pugachov—I’ll tell you about them some other time.”<sup>59</sup> When Gorky’s grandfather expressed these sentiments, sixty years had elapsed since the war, but there is no reason to suppose that his interpretation of events had undergone a fundamental transformation during those decades.

Almost alone among European countries, Russia experienced no bourgeois or *sans-culottes* revolution during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and later Russian writers frequently wrote of the ingrained conservatism of the middle class. Yet that same “conservative” middle class was also one of the seedbeds for the radicalism of the 1860s. This paradox probably reflects the ambiguous impact of the Napoleonic occupation on the Russian and Muscovite middle class. Tracing that impact is difficult because there

---

<sup>57</sup> “Griboedovskaia Moskva,” 598, 625, 652, 657, 660.

<sup>58</sup> Nikitenko, *Up From Serfdom*, 75.

<sup>59</sup> Maxim Gorky, *My Childhood*, trans. by Ronald Wilks (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), 86-87.

seems to be no post-war body of evidence that can be compared directly to the petitions, household inventories, and memoirs to which the Napoleonic occupation gave rise. Nonetheless, it seems that the experience of 1812 had several effects.

First, a middle class that was only just beginning to acquaint itself with modern European thought was confronted with Enlightenment radicalism in its most menacing form—the combination of cultural arrogance, militaristic imperialism, and Jacobin anti-clericalism represented by Napoleon’s rampaging army; these evils, in turn, were linked in the minds of many with the cautious liberalism of Mikhail M. Speranskii and some Russian freemasons.<sup>60</sup>

A more persuasive anti-liberal propaganda could scarcely be imagined, and its impact must have lingered for decades: Dal’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century dictionary defines *farmazon* (a garbled form of *frank-mason*, Freemason) as “pejor. freethinker and atheist” and “strange person,”<sup>61</sup> while an illiterate former Moscow house serf, interviewed sixty years later about a riot she had witnessed in 1812 behind Russian lines, had this to say: “they were all getting drunk, fighting, cursing,” she recalled; “it was a republic all right, absolutely a republic!”<sup>62</sup> In light of its collective experiences and memories, the Moscow middle class must have been broadly receptive to the regime’s anti-liberal ideological stance after 1812.

Second, the disasters of 1812 demonstrated that Russia’s own social order was brittle. Traumatized by that experience, the middle class must have been open to the argument that preserving public order deserved higher priority than almost any other concern in Russian political life. Finally, the regime gave a poor account of itself in 1812. The army had been sent reeling by Napoleon, and several of its leaders were widely suspected of treason. The aristocracy had abandoned Moscow, typically leaving

---

<sup>60</sup> Andrei Zorin, *Kormia dvuglavogo orla . . . Literatura i gosudarstvennaia ideologiia v Rossii v poslednei treti XVIII—pervoi treti XIX veka* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2001), 230-31; A. Iu. Minakov, “M. L. Magnitskii: K voprosu o biografii i mirovozzrenii predtechi russkikh pravoslavnykh konservatorov XIX veka,” in *Konservatizm v Rossii i mire: proshloe i nastoiashchee. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, vyp. 1 (Voronezh: Izdatel’stvo Voronezhskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2001), 61-62.

<sup>61</sup> V. Dal’, *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel’skaia gruppa ‘Progress’, ‘Univers’, 1994), vol. 4, col. 1132.

<sup>62</sup> “Razkaz nabilkinskoi bogodelenki, Anny Andreevny Sozonovoi, byvshei krepostnoi Vasil’ia Titovicha Lepekhina,” in “Razkazy ochevidtsev o dvenadsatom gode,” *Russkii Vestnik* 102 (November 1872), 291.

their serfs to safeguard their mansions while the master and mistress fled to the comfort and safety of their country estate. The governor-general had lied to the people and then not merely abandoned them to their fate but sent arsonists to destroy their city. The army and police had helped to pillage the city instead of protecting it. And lastly, any beginnings of a genuine political dialogue in postwar society were quashed by the authoritarianism of Rostopchin and Alexander I. As for Russia's ultimate victory, the regime's own propaganda explained that it was owed mostly to divine intervention. Surely, Muscovites' suspicions about the regime's essential unfairness, callousness, selfishness, and ineptitude must have been amply borne out by these experiences, and the state's effort to provide financial assistance victims is unlikely to have neutralized these sentiments—according to official statistics, over 18,000 residents of Moscow reported losing movable and immovable property worth 250 million rubles, but in the end, only 696 of them were awarded a total of about 15 million rubles in aid.<sup>63</sup>

The devastation wrought by the “enlightened” Napoleon's army, and the near-collapse of the social order in and around Moscow, left traumatized Muscovites with no alternative to supporting the post-war regime and its anti-liberal ideology. However, the regime's conduct during and after the war helped ensure that no genuine, positive conservative consensus emerged. Instead, the middle class embraced conservatism by default, as it were, and hence remained open to more radical ideas once the trauma of 1812 wore off.

---

<sup>63</sup> TsIAM f. 20, op. 2, d. 2432, ll. 1 ob-2, 445-54 ob; d. 2384, ll. 1 ob-111;