

Calendar Reform under Peter the Great: Absolutist Prerogatives, Plural Temporalities, and Christian Exceptionalism

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Time matters. Not only in its shortness, but also in how it is counted and structured. Intangible and abstract as it may seem, time reaches deep into the ways societies and humans define themselves and conceive of their relationships with the world and with one another. Huge expectations have been latched onto blueprints for calendar reform, which have often accompanied revolutionary times. And yet when implemented, calendar reforms have proven invariably contentious. In England, the switch in 1752 from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar and the change of the New Year from March 25 to January 1, mandated by the Chesterfield Act, incited strong feelings, even though the familiar contention that it provoked riots is probably a myth.¹ More recently, the European Union's consultation about its proposal to abolish Daylight Saving Time generated 4.6 million replies.² The European Commission decided to abolish twice-a-year switches, but did not dare impose upon member states the choice of which time they would prefer. The matter is far from resolved. Any calendar reform thus requires careful legitimation if it wishes to succeed and avoid the need for more brutal methods. This discursive production offers an insight into the deep-seated and consequential identity positions of the many interested parties involved in this process, which makes it well worth studying.

The calendar reforms of Peter the Great, introduced on January 1, 1700, are well known, yet they have produced a surprising amount of confusion and misunderstanding, even on such basic facts as what actually changed, let alone on matters of intentions and outcomes. In this article, I propose first to review the evidence and set the record straight, so far as the available sources allow. Second, through an examination of the New Year celebrations mandated by Peter's edicts, I will explore the legitimating arguments that have been deployed as part of this reform. This will entail an examination of ideas about Russia's relation to western countries; about the position of

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1. See Robert Poole, *Time's Alteration: Calendar Reform in Early Modern England* (London, 1998), 1–17.

2. BBC News, March 26, 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-47704345> (accessed August 31, 2020).

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the Orthodox Church in the polity and the articulation between the civil and religious spheres; about how to manage change and the legacies of the past; and, last but not least, about the preeminent responsibilities, indeed prerogatives of the ruler in these matters. I will suggest that the matter was anything but straightforward, and that as a result of the shifting arguments invoked by Peter and his entourage, as well as the incompleteness of these reforms, the upshot was the enshrining of a regime of plural temporalities that has affected the course of Russia's development and the elaboration of its identities to this day, while leaving it isolated among major European societies. I will also submit that the calendar changes had no truck with the introduction of a secular, modern society, indeed that their legitimation, once it finally settled, harked back to long-standing theological ideas about the time of the Incarnation.

As Russia embarked on a calendar reform in the year 7208 (1699), it faced three issues. Until then, in common with all Christian Orthodox countries, Russia counted years from the notional creation of the world, *anno mundi*, which was thought to have occurred 5508 years (and three months and twenty-four days) before the birth of Christ. This so-called Byzantine era had been generally accepted in the Orthodox Church since the year 691 CE and it is based on calculations derived from the Septuagint.³ The length and internal organization of the year followed the Julian calendar, which Rus' is thought to have adopted at the time of its Christianization in the tenth century.⁴ This meant that the calendar was falling behind the tropical year by roughly three days every 400 years. Since 1492, the beginning of the year was celebrated in Russia on the first of September, as it was in the Orthodox Church elsewhere. This September New Year stemmed from the indiction, the fiscal period for tax collection introduced by Constantine the Great in the fourth century. So the issues were: 1) whether to change the year count, that is adopt the Christian era, 2) when to celebrate the beginning of the year, and 3) whether to adopt the Gregorian calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. The Gregorian calendar is astronomically more correct than the Julian one, albeit not fully precise either. And it was then perceived as an instrument of papal politics to subjugate other Christian denominations. The calendar reforms implemented the first two things, the era and the beginning of the year, which are somewhat interrelated, but retained the Julian calendar.⁵ The changes aimed at introducing a civil calendar distinct from the church calendar, which remained unchanged.

3. For the elaboration of the *anno mundi* era, see Cyril A. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of the New Rome* (London, 1980), 192–93; Marcus Louis Rautman, *Daily Life in the Byzantine Empire* (Westport, CT, 2006), 6–8.

4. S. I. Seleshnikov, *Istoriia kalendaria i khronologiia* (Moscow, 1970), 156.

5. Some historians contend that Peter adopted the Julian calendar on January 1, 1700, which is inexact. To mention just a few, see O.F. Ageeva, *Velichaishii i slavneishii bolee vseh gradov v svete* (St. Petersburg, 1999), 238; John T. Alexander, "The Petrine Era and After, 1682–1740," in Gregory Freeze, ed., *Russia: A History* (Oxford, 1997), 94, 435; Robert Collis, *The Petrine Instauration: Religion, Esotericism and Science at the Court of Peter the Great, 1689–1725* (Leiden, 2012), 473; and James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 127, 170.

This change of policy was announced on December 19, 7208/1699 in an edict that defined its purview and provided a brief rationale for the reform.⁶ This was followed on the next day by another edict, which expanded on the rationale and prescribed how the New Year should be celebrated.⁷ These edicts attributed the calendar reform directly to the will of the tsar, stating that “We the Great Monarch directed to do this. . . .” Contemporaries equally referred to the intentions of the ruler, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, this article will assume that the reforms reflected the will of tsar, and indeed will argue that one of their overriding purposes was the affirmation of the ruler’s control over time. As justification for the reform, the first edict asserted that Peter had been apprized that the Christian era and the January New Year were celebrated “not only in several European Christian countries, but also in Slavic countries that profess the Eastern Orthodox faith, notably among Wallachians, Moldovans, Serbs, Dalmatians, Bulgarians, as well as Circassians subject to the tsar and all Greeks.”⁸ Thus the decrees presented the decision to come into alignment with these peoples as a “good and useful thing” (*dobroe i poleznoe delo*). The intention of the reform was ostensibly stated to be calendar unification with the Orthodox countries that followed the Julian calendar and the Christian era.

The reference to the calendar used by other Orthodox peoples was likely aimed to defuse any potential resistance by religiously-inclined members of the polity, or indeed by the Church, but it was misleading at best. The “Greeks,” that is, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, were then under Ottoman rule. The Ottoman empire used the lunar Islamic calendar for religious matters, counting years from the migration of the Prophet from Mecca to al-Madina. For civil matters such as tax collection, it used a solar calendar mapped on the Julian calendar, but with the same year count as the Islamic calendar. Religious minorities could use their own calendar, even for civil matters. The Patriarchate of Constantinople continued to use the Byzantine era until 1728, when it adopted the Christian era, possibly under the influence of Peter’s reforms. It still uses the September 1 New Year for its ecclesiastical calendar, as does the Russian Orthodox Church.⁹ Bulgarians and some Serbs were then vassals of the Ottoman empire, but Orthodox lands in the Ottoman empire were centralized under the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople, which also took on civil responsibilities, so they retained the Byzantine era.¹⁰ In fact, religious culture in the southern Balkans was undergoing a strong process of Hellenization and Greek

6. All dates in this article follow the Julian calendar, unless stated otherwise.

7. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii: Sobranie pervoe* (St. Petersburg, 1830; hereafter PSZ), vol. 3, no 1735–36, 680–82, at http://nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php (accessed August 31, 2020).

8. PSZ, no 1736, vol. 3, p. 681.

9. John A. McGuckin, “Calendar,” *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity* (Chichester, UK, 2011), 1:95–97.

10. Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago, 2015), 19; and Theodore H. Papadopoulos, *Studies and Documents Relating to the History of the Greek Church and People under Turkish Domination* (Aldershot, 1952), 88, 90.

was its lingua franca, including in church services.¹¹ While Wallachians and Moldovans were never under direct Ottoman rule, Romanian elites were closely aligned with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Hellenization was pervasive.¹² In short, Peter's reforms in fact disrupted calendar unity between Russia and Orthodox populations in the southern Balkans and the Ottoman empire, which had not yet adopted a distinction between civil and ecclesiastical calendars.¹³

Peter must have been aware of the various calendar battles smoldering in central and south central Europe. When the Great Embassy stayed in Vienna in 1698, he met with Patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević, the leader of a group of Serbs who had followed the Austrian army north of the Danube when the Ottomans reconquered Serbia in 1691. These Serbs had been promised freedom of faith, fiscal autonomy, and self-government. According to two charters granted to them by Leopold I, Patriarch Čarnojević, who was also Metropolitan of Karlovci (where they congregated), assumed not only religious, but also civil authority over them.¹⁴ Yet the Austrians quickly violated the terms of these agreements and Orthodox Serbs found themselves under strong pressure to join Uniate Catholics.¹⁵ In his meeting with Peter, Čarnojević explained the Serbs' grievances against Austria and sought Russia's protection.¹⁶ This was confirmed in petitions Čarnojević sent

11. The most important center for religious education was in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, where learning was entirely in Greek. See Ifigenija Draganić, "Greek and Serbian in the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy in the 18th and at the Beginning of the 19th Centuries," in Plamen Mitev, Ivan Parvev, Maria Baramova, Vania Racheva, eds., *Empires and Peninsulas: Southeastern Europe between Karlowitz and the Peace of Adrianople, 1699–1829* (Berlin, 2010), 257–66. Within the archdioceses of Ahris and Pec, Serb and Greek archbishops alternated, and close connections were kept with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. See Athanasios Angelopoulos, "The Archdioceses of Ahris and Pec on the Basis of Patriarchal Acta, edited by K. Delikanos (17th/18th Centuries)" *Balkan Studies* 24, no. 2 (1983): 337–42.

12. Victor Roudometof, "From *Rum Millet* to Green Nation: Enlightenment, Secularization, and National Identity in Ottoman Balkan Society, 1453–1821," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 16 (1998): 11–48, 15. Roudometof argues that until 1821, religious identity entirely superseded any sense of ethnic identity in the Balkans. Dalmatians, also mentioned in the edict, were mostly Catholic and under the control of the Venetian republic. Orthodox populations within territorial control from Venice were under strong pressure to convert to Catholicism. In any case, until Napoleon's invasion in 1797, in the Republic of Venice the New Year was celebrated on March 1. See S. Bogoiavlenskii, "Iz russko-serbskikh otnoshenii pri Petre Pervom," *Voprosy istorii*, 8–9 (1946): 26.

13. Ageeva claims that the reforms were aimed at "underscoring the unity of the Orthodox world," for which there is no evidence whatsoever, neither in intentions, nor in effect, despite the claims made in the edicts. Ageeva, *Velichaishii i slavneishii*, 239.

14. Draganić, "Greek and Serbian in the Ottoman Empire," 257.

15. Uniate churches continued to follow the Julian calendar, but I have not been able to ascertain whether they used the Byzantine or the Christian era. Generally speaking, rites and practices varied significantly among Uniate churches as a consequence of accepting the church union at different times. See Witold Bobryk, "Rite Changes in the Uniate Diocese of Chelm in the 18th Century," in Andzej Gil and Witold Bobryk, eds., *On the Border of the Worlds: Essays about the Orthodox and Uniate Churches in Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period* (Siedlec, Poland, 2010): 171–86.

16. M.M. Bogoslovskii, *Petr I. Materialy dlia biografii*, 5 vols. (Moscow, 2007), 2:569–72.

to Moscow.¹⁷ Peter and the Ambassadorial Chancery (*Posol'skii prikaz*) were hence apprized of the difficult situation of the Serbs living under Austrian control, and Peter had a direct opportunity to inform himself about the confessional and political implications of time-keeping. Indeed, the Russian delegation at the negotiations in preparing the treaty of Karlovci in late 1698 placed confessional freedom for Orthodox populations at the heart of its demands.¹⁸ Incidentally, these negotiations were conducted with dates following the Julian calendar and the Christian era. The Russian delegation congratulated the Austrian, English, Dutch, Polish, Venetian, and Ottoman emissaries on the January 1 New Year (Julian calendar), showing little cultural sensitivity towards calendar differences, but also demonstrating its own flexibility in adopting the January New Year.¹⁹ The Russian delegation also insisted that Ottoman documents dated per the Islamic calendar be translated into the Christian era year count, even though the latter had not yet been introduced in Russia.²⁰ It is thus this diplomatic convention, rather than local civil and ecclesiastical calendars, that was emulated in the calendar reform of 1700.

Reference in the edict of December 20 (no. 1736 according to PSZ) to the “many European Christians” who use the Christian era and celebrate the beginning of the year on January 1 is technically correct, although Russia would not have been in synchrony with them for long. By then most Catholic areas, including the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, followed the Gregorian calendar, so the reforms Peter introduced would not have aligned with them. Protestant areas were also grudgingly starting to contemplate a reform of the calendar. On September 30, 1699, the Corpus Evangelicorum, a self-appointed body that represented the German Protestant principalities at the Regensburg Permanent Diet of the Holy Roman Empire, took the decision to adopt a so called “improved” Julian calendar, which is substantially identical to the Gregorian calendar. The switch was to take place on February 18, 1700, which was to be followed by March 1 (improved Julian style) and thus catch up with the Gregorian calendar. A proclamation about this decision was made in Protestant German lands on the last Sunday of the Advent in December 1699. The Corpus Evangelicorum had already made representations to Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian authorities about this, the last two expressing their willingness to follow suit. In January 1700, the Corpus dispatched letters to the English and Belgian authorities (on January 13, 1700) and to the Swiss Protestant cantons (on January 29, 1700).²¹ Of course they had no reason to notify Russia as it was not following the reformed faith.

17. *Pamiatniki diplomaticheskikh snoshenii s derzhavami inostrannymi*, 10 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1851–1871), 8:305–9.

18. Bogoiavlenskii, *Petr I. Materialy dlia biografii*, 22.

19. *Pamiatniki diplomaticheskikh snoshenii*, 9:417.

20. *Ibid.*, 387.

21. Eberhard Schauroth, *Vollständige Sammlung aller Conclusorum. Schreiben und anderer übrigen Verhandlungen des hochpreisslichen Corporis Evangelicorum*, 3 vols. (Regensburg, 1751–1752), 1:183–93.

Given that there had been no official communication from the Corpus Evangelicorum about its intentions, Peter could not have known about the planned Protestant reform of the calendar.²² Indeed, the first of the two edicts on the new calendar was promulgated on December 19, 1699, one day prior to the public proclamation of the calendar reform in Protestant German polities on December 20. The reform brought Russia into synchrony with Protestant polities in Europe, but only until February 18, 1700, when most of them adopted the so-called improved Julian calendar, which differed from the Gregorian calendar only in some minor respect for the calculation of Easter. Sweden decided to make a progressive transition and to drop the added day in leap years as a way to catch up with the Gregorian calendar progressively, which it started doing in 1700, although rescinded in 1712. Among west European countries, that left England, which until 1752 continued to follow the Julian calendar, but celebrated the New Year on March 25; and Scotland, which also retained the Julian calendar until 1752, but had already adopted the Christian era in 1600.²³ Baron Heinrich von Huysen, who was commissioned by Peter to write a chronicle of his rule, shows subtle and tactful awareness of the situation, noting that “His Majesty deemed it good to introduce the European calendar, counting years from the birth of Christ, albeit following the old Julian style, as there is in Sweden and England, and he did so for coordination (*soobrazovanie*) with the other Christian lands.”²⁴ The inherent contradiction in this statement captures the gap between intention and outcome. In effect, the only major European countries Russia was fully aligned with upon the reforms were Scotland and, after 1712, Sweden. By 1752, Russia would find itself entirely isolated from all non-Orthodox countries. Thus Russia’s time lag with western and central Europe was the result of an unfortunate and serendipitous historical misunderstanding. The attempt to come into alignment with Protestant European countries had been defeated in practice.

What were the effects of the reform? John Perry, the English civil engineer recruited by Peter to develop waterways in Russia, reported that for clerics, celebrating the New Year on September 1 was justified by the notion that the world was created at a time of abundance in nature. He described Peter’s attempts to disabuse his entourage of this notion:

But the Czar (sensible of their mistaken Notion) desired his Lords to view the Map of the Globe, and in a pleasant Temper gave them to understand, that Russia was not all the world; that what was Winter with them, was at the same time always Summer in all those Places beyond the Equator. Besides that, according to the common Way of computing the Termination of the

22. As we will see below, Otto Anton Pleyer, who acted as agent of the Holy Roman Empire in Moscow since 1696, was unaware of the reforms planned in Protestant principalities.

23. For dating in seventeenth-century documents in the British Isles, see <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/record-guides/old-parish-registers/change-in-calendar> (accessed August 31, 2020).

24. Heinrich von Huysen, *Zhurnal gosudaria Petra I s 1695 po 1709g, sochinennyi baronom Gizenom*, in F.O. Tumanskii, *Sobranie raznykh zapisok i sochinenii, sluzhashchikh k dostavleniiu polnogo svedeniia o zhizni i deianiiakh gosudaria imp. Petra Velikogo*, 10 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1787–1788), 3:118–19.

Year, the Seasons are considerably alter'd since the Creation of the World, through those odd Minutes that happen in every Year over and above 365 Days and six Hours: And therefore the Czar, to conform his Countrey to the rest of Europe, so far as in reckoning the first Day of the Year on the first of January, and in dating the Year with other Christians from the Incarnation of our Saviour, he took the following Method.²⁵

There follows a brief description of the reforms which chimes in with what is described in the decree of December 20. What becomes clear from Perry's account is that the reform of the calendar contradicted a literal understanding of the scriptures and undermined religious ethnocentrism. It presupposed modern heliocentric ideas which, to judge from Perry's account, Peter was keen to inculcate in his subjects.²⁶

There were also social and religious implications. The edict of December 19 starts by defining the sites, in terms of genres of texts and places, in which the new calendar must be used. These include all administrative documents, as well as secular places such as fortresses, squares, and towns. By way of regulating a new temporal regime, the edict carved out a civil realm protected from the spiritual authority of the church. From the outset it also envisioned accepting the use of plural concurrent temporalities. Those who preferred to use the Byzantine era were allowed to continue to do so, provided they also wrote the Christian date, "freely next to it" (*sriadu svobodno*), as the decree put it. Peter's own missives to foreign officials likewise show the use of plural dating. If before January 1, 1700 Peter generally indicated dates first *anno mundi*, followed by the same date expressed in *anno domini*, then after the introduction of the new calendar, he reversed the order of these two dates, starting with the new Christian era dating. But he quickly dropped references to the Byzantine era altogether, using his regnal year as a second chronology instead. For example he would sign off on a letter with "Given in our ruling great city of Moscow, in the year 1700 from the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, on the 29th day of February, in the 18th year of our rule."²⁷ Lindsey Hughes pointed out that the church continued to celebrate the beginning of the year on the first of September, and that Peter dispatched secular officials to the church New Year service in the Kremlin, at least in September 1700.²⁸

25. John Perry, *The State of Russia under the Present Czar* (London, 1967 [1716]), 234–35. Ivan Golikov likewise references the belief that God created the world in September. See I.I. Golikov, *Deianiia Petra Velikogo, mudrogo preobrazitelia Rossii*, 15 vols. (Moscow, 2014 [1837]), 2:5.

26. On Peter's interest in astronomy and on the dissemination of heliocentric ideas in Russia, see P.P. Pekarskii, *Nauka i literatura v Rossii pri Petre Velikom*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1862), 1: 281–83.

27. *Pis'ma i bumagi imperatora Petra Velikogo*, vol. 1. (St. Petersburg, 1887), 339. This formula obtains only in formal letters to foreign dignitaries, not across his entire correspondence.

28. Lindsey Hughes, "The Petrine Year: Anniversaries and Festivals in the Reign of Peter I, 1682-1725," in Karin Friedrich, ed., *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Lewiston, NY, 2000), 154. To place this in context, according to *Dvortsovye razriady* (a kind of service record), since he became sole ruler upon the death of Ivan V in 1696, Peter made it a habit to dispatch officials to religious ceremonies in his stead (partly, of course, because he was away), even for important

In short, the edicts on the New Year initially established a civil realm distinct from the church, while allowing the use of over-layered temporalities and the continuance of ecclesiastical chronology.

Something of the same order underpins the actual celebrations mandated by decree. The second edict stipulated that after attending a service of thanks and prayers in church, people, including holy men, should decorate the outside of their houses with greenery, attend the fireworks given on Red Square, congratulate one another with the New Year, and then repair to their own courtyards, where they should light bonfires and shoot from their weapons. The decree specifically addressed how people of various social conditions should act, depending on their means and the weapons they possessed, mandating a sort of collective, trans-social happening. The decree thus juxtaposed a religious component with a somewhat militarized welcoming of the New Year, to which religious figures were expected to contribute.

How the celebrations actually unfolded is a matter of some controversy. Many historians, following the panegyrist Ivan Golikov, who wrote in the 1780s and 1790s, take this edict as a description of what actually happened, which ought not to be taken for granted. Golikov's account is colored by his view of Peter as the tsar-enlightener and his overriding desire to emphasize the Church's consent to the reforms. He starts his description of the reforms with the remark that they were introduced "in accordance with the whole of Europe" (*v soglasie so vseiu Evropoiu*), despite its patent untruth.²⁹ But he also adds interesting details. In his account, the events started with a parade of the regiments stationed in Moscow, who marched towards the Kremlin to the tune of drums and military music. The tsar attended a service in the Assumption Cathedral in the Kremlin, which was officiated by Stefan Iavorskii, the Metropolitan of Riazan', who discharged the service "with full spiritual magnificence" and pronounced a sermon (*predika*) in which he "demonstrated the need and utility of such a reform of the year."³⁰

There are several problems with this account. In January 1700, Stefan Iavorskii was in fact not yet metropolitan—he was no more than a simple bishop—and had not yet arrived in the capital.³¹ According to *Dvortsovye razriady*, the service was celebrated by Metropolitan Trifilii, who represented the Eparchy of Sar and Don and had been acting as the Patriarch's deputy

celebrations such as Easter, Christmas, or the New Year. Peter did not attend a single New Year service in the Kremlin since 1696. The entry for January 1, 1700 is silent as to his presence at the church service. See *Dvortsovye razriady*, 4 vols, (St. Petersburg, 1852–55), 4:1111, at <https://runivers.ru/bookreader/book451004/#page/560/mode/tup—page/548> (accessed 31 August, 2020).

29. I.I. Golikov, *Deianiia Petra Velikogo, mudrogo preobrazitelia Rossii* (Moscow, 1837), vol. 2, 3.

30. Golikov, *Deianiia*, vol. 2, 4.

31. Kiev Metropolitan Varlaam had sent Iavorskii and another bishop to Moscow in early January 1700 with a letter to Patriarch Adrian. See N.G. Ustrialov, *Istoriia tsartvovania Petra Velikogo*, 8 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1858), 3: 540. See also F. Ternovskii, "M. Stefan Iavorskii (biograficheskii ocherk)," *Trudy Kievskoi Akademii*, vol. 1 (1864), 69. Iavorskii came to the attention of Peter in late February when he was asked to deliver the funeral oration at the burial of Aleksei Shein, one of Peter's military commanders. He was ordained Metropolitan of Riazan' on April 7, 1700 (*Dvortsovye razriady*, 4 vols., 4:1127).

before.³² Patriarch Adrian was then ill and tended not to officiate anymore. There is no trace of Iavorskii's supposed sermon on the need and utility of the new calendar in his writings. The view that Iavorskii officiated at the New Year service goes back to the *Zhurnal, ili podennaia zapis'*, which includes this information in its brief description of the new New Year.³³ Contrary to its title, however, this document is not a diary, but a retrospective historical chronicle, developed in the 1720s (and published in 1770) by a group of writers who were commissioned to write a history of the Swedish war. It is thus less reliable than *Dvortsovye razriady* or contemporary correspondence and accounts. What Golikov describes here is an imaginary event marking the church's consent to the use of a secular calendar in civil life different from its own.

A more reliable account of the festivities can be found in Otto Anton Pleyer's relation to Leopold I, dated January 10, 1700. Von Pleyer had been an agent of the Holy Roman Empire since 1696, becoming resident in 1711 once an official embassy was established. He was thus already well familiar with Muscovite culture. He reported that reforms were undertaken "to conform with us Germans," suggesting that he was not aware of the planned calendar reforms in Protestant lands. After describing the greenery and illuminations, he added:

[Peter] himself exhibited beautiful fireworks in the evening and let fire from canons throughout the day, of which there were more than 200 placed in front of the castle, and this shooting from canons and flame throwers, along with the shooting from small guns in all houses and the illuminations and other manifestations of joy lasted for 6 days and nights, which was completed with the usual blessing of the water, or Jordan, on the day of the Three Kings. Standing regiments and newly recruited ones attended these ceremonies, and 12,000 men with clean weapons, new banners and good uniforms were presented, among which the Tsar's personal guard. . . Yet in these ceremonies, the Tsar did not march with the procession, nor was a seat erected for him and the patriarch, but he stood in a regiment with his soldiers in the same dress.³⁴

Pleyer strongly emphasizes the military theme of the festivities and makes it clear that the traditional New Year ceremony on the square in front of the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin—which consisted of the Patriarch blessing the tsar for the New Year, before the numerous public payed their respects to the ruler—had been abolished.³⁵ The mention of the two seats

32. *Dvortsovye razriady*, vol. 4:1111.

33. *Zhurnal ili Podennaia zapiska, blazhennyia i vechnodostoinyia pamiati Gosudaria Imperatora Petra Velikogo s 1698 goda, dazhe do zakliucheniia Neishtatskogo mira: Napechatan s obretaiushchikhsa v Kabinetnoi arkhive spiskov, pravlennykh sobstvennoi rukoi ego imperatorskogo velichestva*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1770–1772), 1:8, available at <https://www.priib.ru/item/408595> (accessed 31 August, 2020).

34. Ustrialov, 648.

35. According to *Dvortsovye razriady*, the last complete performance of this ceremony took place in 1693 in the presence of Ivan V (*Dvortsovye razriady*, 4:821). This is confirmed by Johann Georg Korb, who highlights the changes to the traditional order and the absence of the blessing ceremony on the square. "The absence of the Czar," he writes, referring to September 1, 1698, "for many years had occasioned the intermission of these rites, and, with the new-fangled ambition of our days, they were left unrevived as things worn-out

destined to the tsar and Patriarch references this traditional ceremony on the Kremlin square. Instead, Pleyer foregrounds Peter's self-presentation as a military man whose place is among the troops, which radically upends any traditional performance of hieratic charisma. This is partially confirmed by *Dvortsovye razriady*, which describes the aftermath of the church service in the following terms: "After the singing of prayers, by decree of his Majesty the Tsar and Grand Prince Petr Alekseevich. . . there were regiments of soldiers on Red Square which stood in full uniform and fired from cannons and small weapons."³⁶

Golikov also explained, before describing the New Year celebrations, that Peter had mandated a magnificent ceremony knowing that his subjects "would attribute any change of ritual, so to speak, to the faith" and so he felt it necessary to "present to the eyes of the people such spectacles, which it hadn't seen and which would divert their attention from any other depraved interpretations."³⁷ In fact, fireworks were hardly new in Russia. They had been introduced by Ivan III in the 1470s and had become a regular occurrence at the court of Aleksei Mikhailovich. Peter was in the habit of commissioning extensive fireworks for Shrovetide, and he did so likewise for the celebration of his victory at Azov.³⁸ The celebrations mandated in the New Year decree may not have been as new as they seemed to Golikov.

The festivities lasted until Epiphany or the Three Kings' Day, during which period Peter and his retinue paid visits to his Muscovite subjects. Friedrich Christian Weber, the Hanoverian diplomat who represented British interests at the court of Peter, provided a colorful account of these visits. I quote from the English translation of 1722–23, which came out shortly after the original German edition was published in 1721:

New-Year's-day, which is one of the greatest Festivals with the Russians, being come about according to the Old Style, the Czar repaired to Church at four in the Morning, and officiated himself, beginning the Tunes and reading from the Epistle before the Altar, a Custom he has observed ever since he suppressed the Patriarchal Dignity. Divine Service being ended, the Czar returned to his Residence, and all the Canon of the Fortress were discharged. . . . In the afternoon the Czar with the Russian Nobility began to

and obsolete." Johann Georg Korb, *Diary of an Austrian Secretary of Legation at the Court of Czar Peter the Great*, trans. and ed. Count Mac Donnell, 2 vols. (London, 1863), 1:159–60. The original is in Latin. For a Russian translation, see I.G. Korb, *Dnevnik puteshestviiia v Moskoviiu (1698 i 1699gg)* (St. Petersburg, 1906). Descriptions of the traditional ceremony can be found in G. Georgievskii, *Prazdnichnye sluzhby i tserkovnye torzhestva v staroi Moskve* (Moscow, 1995 [1899]), 221–29 and in Ivan Zabelin, *Domashnii byt russkikh tsarei v XVI i XVII st.* (Moscow, 1895), vol. 1:380–83.

36. *Dvortsovye razriady*, 4:1111.

37. Golikov, *Deianiia*, vol. 4:3.

38. V.N. Vasil'ev, *Starinnye feierverki v Rossii (XVII-pervaia chetvert' XVIII veka)* (Leningrad, 1960), 13–17; Simon Werret, *Fireworks. Pyrotechnic Arts and Sciences in European History* (Chicago, 2010), 105; and Elena Pogosian, *Petr I—arkhitektor rossiiskoi istorii* (St. Petersburg, 2001), 40, 171n11. For a broader discussion of Peter's reforms of official festivities, see Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 2006), 2:21–26.

perform the Ceremony, which they call *Slawen*, that is to say, solemnizing a Festival and giving Thanks to God, which lasted eight Days. This is a Custom which the Czar has not yet thought fit to abolish, and is observed as follows. The Men walk first with a certain Machine of Iron resembling a Kettle Drum, the Sticks with which they beat it, are twisted about with Cloth in order to deaden the Sound. Then comes the Czar with the whole Clergy attended by a great number of Kneeses and Boyars, the whole Company sitting on Sleds and so they go about from Place to Place visiting the principal Men belonging to the Court. When they have entered a House they sing the Russian *Te Deum* and make a new Years Wish, which being ended, the Master of the House presents the Czar, as Head of the Clergy, a handsome Present in Money, and invites the Guests to his Table where they are well entertained: the Company do not tarry above two Hours in one Place, but remove to another, making about five or six such Visits in a Day, which are very profitable to the Clergy on account of the Czar being with them.³⁹

Notable in this account, which refers to the year 1715, are the contention that Peter officiated in church himself, the reference to a custom with traditional, pre-Petrine roots (usually known as *slavlenie*), and the fact that the clergy benefitted financially from it. Peter is here presented as the full-fledged head of the church, who has given a religious dimension to a civil date and to a ceremony that initially was not part of the religious calendar, drafting prelates into an elaborate ritual for which they were rewarded financially. What this rhetoric suggests is Peter's control over the church and his discretion in articulating the relationship between civil and religious life. To judge by this account, the submission of the church seems complete. Peter has successfully taken ownership of the calendar and colonized the unfolding of time as part of his attempt to transform his country. As Baron Huyssen stated, after listing a series of reforms undertaken by the ruler, "Peter was not satisfied simply with changing the calendar, he aimed to improve time in his dominion and to bring about a kind and happy century."⁴⁰

The festival itself amounts to a re-interpretation of the traditional Yuletide practice of *koliadovanie*, which consisted in groups, usually of children or young people, calling houses in disguise to perform various songs or ditties and ask for gifts.⁴¹ While the church generally condemned the Yuletide *koliadovanie*—it was denounced in a decree by Patriarch Ioakim as late as 1684—there is also evidence that the church co-opted it by giving it its own religious and ritualistic meaning.⁴² The traditional *sviatki* (Yuletide) of course kicked off at Christmas, not the New Year, and were performed by youth, so

39. Friedrich Christian Weber, *The Present State of Russia in Two Volumes*, 2 vols. (London, 1723), 1:84–85.

40. Huyssen, 122. On the Petrine appropriation of the regulation of time, see also V.M. Zhivov, "Vremia i ego sobstvennik," in *Ocherki istoricheskoi semantiki russkogo iazyka rannego novogo vremeni* (Moscow, 2009), 54–57.

41. For Yuletide rituals, see N.V. Ponyrko, "Sviatochnyi smekh," in D.S. Likhachev, N.V. Ponyrko, and A.M. Panchenko, *Smekh v drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad, 1984), 154–74; E.V. Dushechkina, *Russkii sviatochnyi rasskaz: Stanovlenie zhanra* (St. Petersburg, 1995); L.M. Ivleva, *Riazhen'e v russkoi traditsionnoi kul'ture* (St. Petersburg, 1994).

42. N.V. Ponyrko, "Russkie sviatki XVII veka," *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* 32 (1977): 84–99.

the practice Weber describes here is quite distinct. Another inspiration, which Weber makes explicit, is the so called practice of *slavlennie*, which also consisted of making the round of houses for donations, but without masquerade and to sing carols or other religious songs.⁴³ In the seventeenth century, however, the practice consisted of deacons, choir singers, lower church officers, and helpers calling on the tsar, tsaritsa, patriarch, and other high officials who would dispense mead as well as a monetary donations as a sign of their munificence.⁴⁴ While there is evidence that the practice of *slavlennie* continued into Peter's time, Weber describes an inversion of the ritual: instead of young people or lower church staff and helpers, the performers here are the higher clergy and nobility, sanctioned by the participation and authority of the tsar, who call on members of the court for sustenance and donations. This marks a reversal of the social dynamic of this ritual, and it is integral to Peter's choreography of power that he cast himself and the upper echelons of his entourage in the role of performers and supplicants, which freed him from the traditional hieratic scenario, while debasing the church and noble elite into an activity they might initially have found unbecoming to their rank.⁴⁵

A related colorful account dated to 1698 casts this practice in a different light and suggests it had existed from the early years of Peter's reign. Johann Georg Korb, who was secretary to the Austrian embassy visiting Russia in 1698–99, begins his description of the New Year celebrations on September 1, 1698 by recalling the solemn ways in which the New Year in Russia used to be greeted. Noting that the New Year had not been performed in the traditional way for a few years, he describes the new proceedings in the following way:

Nevertheless a jolly inauguration of the year took place in a banquet prepared with royal munificence at the house of General-in-Chief Schahin [Shein, A.S.]. A crowd of Boyars, scribes, and military officers, almost incredible, was assembled there, and among them were several common sailors, with whom the Czar repeatedly mixed, divided apples, and even honored one of them by calling him brother. A salvo of twenty-five guns marked each toast. Nor could the irksome offices of the barber check the festivities of the day, though it was well known he was enacting the part of jester by appointment at the Czar's court. It was of evil omen to make show of reluctance as the razor approached the chin, and was to be forthwith punished with a boxing on the ears. In this way, between mirth and the wine-cup, many were admonished by this insane ridicule to abandon the olden guise.⁴⁶

Having thus underscored the farcical and slightly odious tone of the New Year proceedings—in which the tsar again descended from his pedestal to mingle with the people, while some form of coercion and violence is executed through the offices of a court jester—he then describes some pages later the Yuletide ceremony enacted around Christmas 1698, where high Muscovite

43. L.A. Trakhtenberg, “Vseshuteishii sobor’ i sviazannyye s nim prazdnestva Petrovskoi epokhi: Problemy proiskhozhdeniia,” at <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/folklorelaboratory/Trahtenberg.htm> (accessed August 31, 2020).

44. Zabelin, vol. 1:388–90.

45. For evidence that for the faithful, this rite seemed offensive, see the anonymous account in Sergei Al. Belokurov, *Materialy dlia russkoi istorii* (Moscow, 1888), 539–40.

46. Korb, vol. 1:159–60.

officials “shine in sham ecclesiastical dignities,” extracting money from their hosts, while “His Majesty the Tsar played out the role of the Deacon.”⁴⁷

The carnivalesque features of this ceremony, with its reversal of hierarchy, masquerade, and irreverent tone towards the church, place it squarely within the practice of Peter’s Most Comical and All-Drunken Council, through which the ruler affirmed his all-mighty power, in its absolutist prerogatives, including that of parodying the rites of the church and rejecting its authority.⁴⁸ In a sustained analysis of the role of the Most Comical Council in the polity, Ernest Zitser has foregrounded its consent-building import, as it bound the participants in its rituals in a tacit acknowledgment of the charisma of the ruler, who is elected by God as His direct envoy outside the authority conferred by the church. Thus the mocking of church officials in this “sacred” parody and the deliberate undermining of the Muscovite state’s hieratic choreography sidelined the church and affirmed the tsar’s legitimacy as sole ruler unconstrained by tradition, something which Peter kept emphasizing through his willful debasement of the traditional tsarist code of conduct.⁴⁹ While Zitser rightly underscores that this assertion of absolutist charisma transcends the received historiographic narrative of Peter as enlightener, and of his masquerades as a form of state propaganda, it is also the case that these performances, beyond the sheer enjoyment of bawdy revelry, clearly disrupted the legitimacy and centrality of the church, yet without dismissing Christianity altogether.⁵⁰ The juxtaposition of Korb’s earlier account with Weber’s suggests that after the reform of the calendar, New Year, and Yuletide celebrations were merged into one festivity lasting until January 6, building on practices that were already well established and contradicting Golikov’s intimations about the novelty of the proceedings.

Peter’s reform of the calendar was bound to generate resistance. Among traditionalists and especially Old-Believers, these reforms were seen as one more indubitable sign that Peter was the Antichrist.⁵¹ Grigorii Talitskii wrote a pamphlet entitled «O schislenii let» in 1700, in which he calculated on the basis of numerology that Peter the Great was the Antichrist, going so far as

47. Korb, 222–23. The sentence about Peter was characteristically omitted from the English translation.

48. For a lively description of the Most-Comical Council, see Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (New Haven, 1998), 249–57. Hughes dismisses any consistent political or religious ambitions ascribed to the Council, preferring to see it as an occasion for male camaraderie and letting off steam (256).

49. See Ernest Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom: Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great* (Ithaca, 2004).

50. V.M. Zhivov likewise contends that enshrining the principle of “tsarist monarchy” was Peter’s overriding aim in his handling of the church. See V.M. Zhivov, *Iz tserkovnoi istorii vremen Petra Velikogo: Issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow, 2004), 43–53. In his analysis of the Most Comical Council, however, Zhivov subscribed rather to the “propagandistic” narrative: V.M. Zhivov, “Kul’turnye reformy v sisteme preobrazovaniia Petra I,” *Iz istorii russkoi kul’tury*, 5 vols. (Moscow, 1996), 3:528–83. The two are, of course, not mutually exclusive.

51. N.B. Golikova, *Politicheskie protsessy pri Petre 1* (Moscow, 1957), 133. See also “Sobranie ot sviatogo pisaniia ob antikhriste,” in *Chteniia v Imperatorskom Obshchestve Istorii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh* (Jan.–Mar 1863), vol. 1:53.

to agitate for rebellion against the tsar.⁵² He was arrested and condemned to execution in late 1701. Iavorskii was commissioned to write a refutation, which he did not once but twice. His sermon *Znameniiia prishestviia Khrista* (The Portents of the Coming of Christ) pointedly recalled that according to the New Testament it was not possible for humans to predict the end of times.⁵³ And his *Uveshchevanie Talitskogo* (The Exhortation to Talitskii, 1703) was an attempt to force Talitskii to recant his views in public. In a high-risk gamble, it was delivered to him as he was being subject to a particularly cruel form of torture, death by smoking.

In his exhortation, Iavorskii quoted from the New Testament, Acts 1,7: “It is not for you to know about dates and times, which the Father has set within His own control,” blind perhaps to the fact that this remonstrance could equally be directed at Peter. But most of the exhortation consisted of accusations of insubordination, which Iavorskii, by then already locum tenens of the Patriarchal See, thought to counter by marshaling an impressive set of biblical quotations enjoining people to obey worldly authorities. The church’s initial legitimation of the calendar reforms was thus centered on affirming the tsar’s hegemonic power. There are conflicting accounts as to whether Talitskii renounced his views as he was slowly roasting on a public square,⁵⁴ but there is evidence that he remained a hero among traditionalists.⁵⁵ Despite the careful and nuanced introduction of the calendar reform, the full use of the brutal power of the state—allied with the moral authority of the church—was needed to contain discontent spreading among the faithful.

Jelena Pogosjan has demonstrated that starting in 1703, New Year celebrations in Moscow took the form of victory celebrations, which conjured up the military successes of the past year in a summative remembrance. The iconography of triumphal arches erected on this occasion was decidedly secular, displaying such classical figures as Saturn, Fortuna, and the double-faced Janus.⁵⁶ Up to at least 1708, the New Year was presented as the culmination and closure of a series of military victories that had unfolded over the preceding year, while emphasizing the importance of human effort and perseverance. Pogosjan makes the interesting observation that while in his private correspondence Peter referred frequently to Providence and divine dispensation as miraculous explanations for military successes, in the public New Year displays, through fireworks and victory arches, only civilian motives (such as moral qualities or technological inventions) and references to classical mythology were invoked.⁵⁷

Of course, the New Year celebrations continued to contain a religious element, if only because they started with a service in church, including a

52. On Talitskii and his network, see the excerpt from the legal case against him conducted by the Preobrazhenskaia chancery in: G.V. Esipov, *Raskolnich'i dela XVIII stolietiiia*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1861–1863), 1:59–84.

53. Golikova, 134–45.

54. S.N. Vvedenskii, “K biografii mitropolita Stefana Iavorskogo,” *Khristianskoe chtenie* (August 1912): 904–7.

55. *Ibid.*, 906.

56. Pogosjan, *Petr I—arkhitektor rossiiskoi istorii*, 45–66.

57. *Ibid.*, 53.

prayer of thanks for God's divine help in the past year and a request to bless the deeds of the coming year. Robert Collis drew attention to the four New Year panegyrics Iavorskii delivered between 1703 and 1706, in which the prelate marshalled together a sophisticated array of tropes drawn from the Scriptures, Cabbalistic literature, and other mystical traditions, as well as astrology. These sermons extolled the military achievements of the ruler, describing the celestial advances of the chariot of the Russian state rising to heaven. Based on numerological and astrological calculations, they also contained prognostications about further successes to come and walked a fine line between acknowledging God's exclusive command over worldly affairs and human ability to predict the future. Over the years, this religious dimension became in fact stronger.⁵⁸ After 1711, as Pogosjan has shown, the January New Year acquired a different meaning, as at once a natural, ontological, and religious boundary. Increasingly it also took on the meaning of threshold to a new world, especially when the New Year was celebrated in St. Petersburg, where imagery contrasted the demise of the old world with the impending rise of a new one. References to Noah and to the deluge narrative conveyed the notion of a rupture in times and expressed the aspiration to recreate the world on a new basis.⁵⁹ Thus the New Year celebrations drew both on classical mythology and on the scriptures to confer legitimacy to a date that had been introduced by fiat.

This process culminated in a eulogy Feofan Prokopovich gave in the Trinity church in St. Petersburg on January 1, 1725. Reminding everyone of the core absolutist principle that "in middling matters, such as the new year, if the supreme powers establish something, then the conscience of subjects is obliged to obey,"⁶⁰ he proceeded with a brief historical survey, which showed how the calendar changed over the history of Christianity. This allowed him to put forward the case that the September 1 New Year was held by a "weak union" as it rested purely on the memory of Constantine's indiction, a secular (fiscal) matter. Instead, he contended that the January 1 New Year for Christians is about "their own desired year, an adventitious time, the day of salvation, and the year of eternal joy."⁶¹ The January New Year is thus presented as initiating a redemptive transition that heralds the advent of eternity. Referring to a prophecy in Isaiah 61, Prokopovich proclaimed "the auspicious year of the Lord," the year of forgiveness and salvation. As a result of the birth of Christ, "we" (Christians) are "a new creature and the actions of our hearts, which are attached to Christ by love and faith, are a new and living road, which, according to the Apostle, the Lord shows us." Hence, Prokopovich continued,

58. Robert Collis, "Merkavah Mysticism and Visions of Power in Early Eighteenth-Century Russia: The New Year Panegyrics of Stefan Javorskij, 1703–1706," *Russian Literature* 75, no. 1–4 (2014): 73–109.

59. Pogosjan, *Petr I—arkhitektor rossiiskoi istorii*, 76–95.

60. Feofan Prokopovich, "Slovo na novoe 1725 leto, propovedannoe v tsarstvuiushchem Sanktpeterburge, v tserkvi zhivonachal'nye Troitsy, Genvaria 1 dnia 1725 goda," in *Slovo i rechi pouchitel'nye, pokhval'nye i pozdravitel'nye sobrannye i nekotorye vtorym tisneniem, a drugie vnov' napechatannye*, vol. 2:113–125, esp. 116–17. "Middling matters" refers to "things of this world," A.S.

61. *Ibid.*, 117.

when we wish one another a happy New Year, we mean it not in a material sense, but as a transformation into a spiritual temporality. In short, according to Prokopovich, through Peter's decision, Russians embarked on a spiritual teleology that leads to salvation and eternity.

By the standards of European notions of history, there is, of course, nothing new in this conception of the time of the Incarnation. It ultimately goes back to St. Augustine, who in the *City of God* developed the idea that history is an emanation of God's will and that God, as a Person, followed all the stages of life. This personalization of time, implicit in the notion of Incarnation and linked to the introduction of Anno Domini, exerted a profound influence on Christian thinkers throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.⁶² It is part and parcel of Augustine's treatment of time, which he locates in the soul, expressed as memory and expectation. And it is through the soul, as memory of past events and hope for future ones, that the experience of time and contact with God come together, leading to a strong subjectivization of time in which individual and Divine will are interlocked.

Prokopovich's legitimation of the new calendar drew on religious ideas that harked back to early Christian and medieval conceptions of time. In this view of history, what matters in terms of chronology is not the pegging to an external timeline, but the meaning a period derives from its inner relationships. Thus in Petrine New Year celebrations, a calendar year is not primarily a time span, but an internally-coherent and meaningful period placed under the will of God, just like Peter's reign is an integral, thematically unified whole. These conceptual elaborations of time were re-affirmed at precisely the time when the notion of absolute time—a unique, impersonal, abstract, regular, and open-ended chronology reaching both forwards and backwards—was gaining acceptance in west European countries. As Donald J. Wilcox explains, the system of absolute time, based on counting years both before and after Christ, “came into general use only toward the end of the seventeenth century with chronologers such as Isaac Newton. Its usage made possible a new sense of historical narrative, one which conceived of time frames as empty units, which were devoid of particular meaning but which gave substance and form to all events.”⁶³ While Petrine Russia continued to embrace a personalistic and relativistic notion of time as a manifestation of the ruler's control of his (in this instance) dominion, a gap opened up with western Europe, one measured not only in the number of days that separated the Julian and the Gregorian calendars, but also in the underlying conceptions of time. Of course one should not make too much of this difference, as rulers continued to see their reigns as integral wholes across Europe, for example, but the overlaying and mutual reinforcement between a political and a theological justification of chronology begins to mark out Russia among European polities.

Printed calendars which started to be published in 1708 were also drafted into justifying the new era. A calendar of 1709 reminded everyone that “we Christians” begin the church and civil New Year at the birth of Christ, “in

62. Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago, 1987), 119–29.

63. *Ibid.*, 188.

honor of Christ our Savior and His Circumcision,” which is also close to the winter solstice.⁶⁴ Of interest here is the concept of *grazhdanskii god* (civil year), which overlaps entirely with the Christian calendar, yet is mentioned separately. The difference between the birth of Christ on December 25 and the New Year on January 1 is bridged by a traditional theological sleight of hand, which consisted of defining Christ’s circumcision on January 1 as His true birth in God. On its cover the calendar nevertheless indicated both the Byzantine and the Christian eras, using the title of *Christian Calendar or Menology according to the Old Style or Calculation for the Year 1709, or 7217 from the Creation*. The reference to the “old style” means the Julian calendar, a calque from German, from which most calendars were then translated or adapted. The use of German models for these calendars produced odd incongruities: the reference to an “old style” made little sense in Russia (where there was no “new style” yet), while the contention that the civil and ecclesiastical calendars coincided was plainly wrong, as the Russian Orthodox Church continued to use the September New Year, while the use of the *anno mundi* year count in the title represented a local adaption (the German “Schreibkalender” did not use the world era in their titles). And yet despite these incongruities, from the perspective of their users, these calendars introduced new conceptions of time and a new language for them.

The case for the new New Year was made again in a calendar published in Moscow at the end of 1712, *Christian Calendar or Menology, according to the Old Style or Calculation, for the Year 1713 from the Incarnation of the Word of God*.⁶⁵ The matter, clearly, was not yet settled. Here the author argued from the position of cultural relativism that different people use different calendars. “European Christians” (without distinction of denomination) start the day at midnight and celebrate the New Year from the middle of the winter, which goes back to a Roman practice. However, Christians have an additional reason to celebrate the New Year on January 1. This is the time when the “sun of truth, Jesus Christ” started to shine from the heaven and assumed human nature, thus “creating people” as “children of God.” The article thus argued entirely on religious grounds, emphasizing strongly the break between Jewish and Christian practice. But characteristically it failed to mention the Orthodox tradition of celebrating the New Year on September 1, at a time of abundance in nature. Thus New Testament tropological reasoning—Christ as the sun, the Incarnation as a new creation, circumcision as Incarnation—was made to supersede Old Testament literalism. Bit by bit a theological justification for the new New Year was put into place.

Yet calendars published in Russia continued to deploy different temporalities, based on religious, political, ideological, and technological turning points. While they gave pride of place to the complex calculations of the liturgical year, with its various supra-annual cycles such as the indict, one standard rubric in calendars called Chronology calculated the

64. *Kalendar' ili mesiatseslov khristianskii po staromu stilii ili ischisleniiu na leto 1709. Ot mirobytii zhe 7217* (Moscow, 1708).

65. *Kalendar' ili mesiatsoslov khristianskii, po staromu stilii, ili ischisleniiu, na leto ot voploshcheniia boga slova 1713* (Moscow, 1712).

current year from different inception points, which are all presented on one plane, as meriting the same degree of authority.⁶⁶ The calendar for 1719, for example, begins this section in the following way: “In the name of Jesus, this year is counted from the birth of Christ as 1719, from the creation of the world (according to Greek chronographers) 7227, from Noah’s deluge 4985, from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah 3802. . .”, continuing to the coronation of Peter, the birth of Tsarevich Petr, the creation of the fleet, and the victory at Poltava.⁶⁷ It is as if this multiplication of chronologies served to dilute the fundamental conflict between *anno mundi* and *anno domini*, while also foregrounding the intimate relationship between the calendar and state events. While already P.P. Pekarskii had pointed out that these calendars were translated from German, primarily from a model established in Hamburg by Johann Henrich Voigt, they were adapted to local needs in the process of translation, not only in terms of astronomical calculations, but also conceptually.⁶⁸ A comparison with the *Hamburgischer Staats-Kalender* of 1726 indicates that where the original chronology emphasized the founding and construction of Hamburg and the various devastations that have beset it, along with religious events such as the creation of the diocese, the erection of churches and the beginning of the Reformation, the Russian adaptation places much more focus on ancient and Biblical history on the one hand, and on events associated with the reign of Peter the Great and the tsarist family on the other.⁶⁹ Calendars thus became a way to situate the greatness of the Russian state and its ruling family within a political and religious temporal frame that reaches as far back as the notional dates of the Creation, while also suggesting that chronologies are relative and subject to state control.⁷⁰

In summary, the rationalization of the new era changed over time: arising from a failed pragmatic decision, it served for a while the tsar’s ambition to

66. This became a regular section in calendars, starting from one of the earliest calendars printed in Russia, the *Kalendar, ili mesiatsoslov khristianskii, po staromu stiliiu, ili ischisleniiu, na leto ot voploshchenia boga slova 1713* (Moscow, 1712). Peter oversaw very carefully the publication of calendars.

67. *Kalendar’ ili mesiatsoslov na leto ot rozhdestva Gospoda nashego Iisusa Khrista, 1719* (St. Petersburg, 1718), n.p.

68. P.P. Pekarskii, *Nauka i literatura v Rossii pri Petre Velikom*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1862), 1:285–315, 2:331. See also Collis, 468–73. Voigt died in 1691, so despite the title of the calendar for 1715 to which Pekarskii refers, these are calendars written in the manner of Voigt, not composed by him.

69. Year chosen for availability of sources. *Hamburgischer Staats-Kalender, 1726* at <https://tinyurl.com/52wj56b5> (accessed March 8, 2021); *Kalendar’ ili mesiatsoslov na leto ot Rozhdestva Gospoda nashego Iisusa khrista 1726* (Moscow, 1725).

70. Calendars also included repeated explanations about various calendar systems and about astronomical phenomena such as eclipses. Initially, they included a hefty dose of astrological information, and Peter insisted on the inclusion of horoscopic forecasts about the year to come. See V.V. Alekseev, *Mir russkikh kalendarei* (Moscow, 2002), 41. Progressively, under the influence of the Academy of Sciences, which was given monopoly over their publication, these astrological prognostications were first called into question and eventually abolished, but that happened only as late as 1766. Zitser and Collis provide useful background information on the publication of calendars in the Petrine period and slightly beyond, including on their astrological content, see Ernest A. Zitser and Robert Collis, “On the Cusp: Astrology, Politics, and Life-Writing in Early Imperial Russia,” *The American Historical Review* 120.5 (December 2015): 1628–33.

side-line and control the church and affirm his hegemonic powers, until the new calendar was increasingly legitimized as a fundamental religious boundary that initiates a new temporality unique to Christianity, while drawing on long-established ideas about the temporality of the Incarnation. The reform does not sit well within a narrative of secularization. While it seemed initially that Peter aimed to push the church to the side and open up a civil, secular sphere insulated from religious impositions, the church was in fact coerced to lend an overarching spiritual meaning to the civil year count. Similarly, the reform does not support a narrative of modernization, let alone modernity.⁷¹ The future this calendar ushered in was not only decidedly religious, but also quite antiquated, culminating in Prokopovich's idea that the new Christian year was a redemptive road to paradise. Nor can it be deemed a mechanism to order and regulate life, given that it produced a complex tangle of temporalities: Old-Believers rejected the reforms outright and continued to use *anno mundi* and the September 1 New Year; the Russian Orthodox Church accepted *anno domini*, but continued to abide by an ecclesiastical year starting on September 1, while also providing a religious rationale for the January 1 New Year; and civil authorities adopted the reforms, but still tolerated the concomitant use of the old year count.

The calendar reforms ushered in a regime of over-layered, plural temporalities, with little sense of contradiction or even mere incompatibility between its various strands. In a richly argued article, Ernest Zitser described the temporal awareness of Boris Ivanovich Kurakin, Peter's one-time brother-in-law, as defined by a "complex multitemporality" endowed with a certain oppositional valence.⁷² Indeed, even in calendar terms, Kurakin operated with multiple chronologies. His *History of Tsar Petr Alekseevich, 1682–1694*, written in 1727, uses *anno mundi* as the reference calendar, although the introduction is dated in *anno domini*. In other words, Kurakin refused to extend the application of the new era to events preceding its adoption in 1700.⁷³ His travel diaries from 1701–1710 use the Christian era, and while he is in Italy, he dates events according to both the Gregorian and Julian calendars.⁷⁴ The most interesting use of dating occurs in his autobiography, where Kurakin explained that he will count months not from the first day of the calendar, but from his day of birth. It then becomes clear that this count provides simply the structure of his narrative, which is segmented along the years of his life, while each chapter

71. For a sustained critique of long-standing attempts to apply the modernity paradigm to the study of the Petrine period, see Ernest A. Zitser, "Multitemporality and the politics of time in the age of Peter the Great: Rethinking Russia's big bang," in Paul Bushkovitch, ed., *The State in Early Modern Russia: New Directions* (Bloomington, 2019), 269–304.

72. Zitser, "Multitemporality and the Politics of Time," in Bushkovitch, *The State in Early Modern Russia*. Zitser distinguishes between two temporal orientations, the cyclical situatedness within the succession of Christian holy days and the astrologically-interpreted position of the planets on the one hand, and the linear unfolding of the personal chronicle on the other (301–2).

73. B.I. Kurakin, "Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseevich, 1682–1694," *Arkhiv kniazia F.A. Kurakina*, 10 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1890), 1.

74. B.I. Kurakin, "Dnevnik i putevye zametki 1701–1710," in *Arkhiv kniazia F.A. Kurakina*, Vol. 1 10 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1890), 1:101–240.

is then introduced with dates stated both *anno mundi* and *anno domini*.⁷⁵ Within the narrative, however, Kurakin also uses the popular dating according to saints days. So for example, he states: “And in that year I got married in the summer, after Peter’s day, and I recall it was on July 6, and the wedding took place on the day of the Transfiguration.”⁷⁶ The combination of locating his marriage in relation to the saints’ calendar, while the chronological dating requires an effort of memory, captures the ways in which he oscillates between different dating systems. Within his autobiography, he predominantly uses saints’ days to situate events, only infrequently giving the actual dates, while he does the opposite when he is abroad. While a systematic examination of how the Petrine calendar reform was assimilated by various members and groups within the polity is beyond the scope of this article, it is symptomatic that such a highly educated member of Peter’s entourage used plural dating systems, often very deliberately and strategically, and that as late as the 1720s he still operated with the Creation era.

The plural, over-layered temporalities of eighteenth-century elite time, which played fast and loose with binaries such as those between secular and religious, civil and ecclesiastical, old and new, east and west, astrological and scientific, or private and public, proved extremely resilient indeed and fly in the face of attempts to attribute some consistent conceptual and ideological logic to the Petrine calendar reforms. And yet if there is one thing that Peter’s time reform and his shifting rationale for it have established, it is the notion that time is not in any way enshrined in nature, nor even in tradition, but that it is at the discretion of the ruler and administered by the state. The reform thereby unleashed a sense of uncertainty and relativity that immediately became contentious and led to a debate that has gone through various phases over the course of Russia’s modern history and still rumbles on to this day.

By retaining the Julian calendar Peter unwittingly left Russia in an increasingly isolated position among European powers, despite his best intentions. This, too, proved consequential, as in the late nineteenth century Russia’s unique calendar position began to be seen in nationalist quarters as a factor confirming its unique mission in the world.⁷⁷ In 1899, for example, as the Russian Astronomical Society took up the question of calendar reform, Russia’s distinctive temporal standing was construed as a sign of its exceptionalism. Participating in the debates within the Astronomical Society, no less than Dmitrii Mendeleev went so far as to propose a new “Russian style,” more truthful than the Gregorian calendar and to which, in his view,

75. The concurrent use of the two eras in ego documents endured beyond the reign of Peter the Great. One finds it, for example, in G. P. Chernyshev’s autobiographical “Notes,” written in 1738. See Zitser and Collis, “On the Cusp,” 1622n10.

76. B.I. Kurakin, “Zhizn’ Borisa Ivanovicha Kurakina, im samim opisanniaia, (1676–1709),” in *Arkhiv kniazia F.A. Kurakina*, 10 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1890), 1:241–287, esp. 249.

77. See, for example, the statement by V.V. Bolotov, a delegate representing the Orthodox church during the calendar deliberations at the Russian Astronomical Society in 1899: “I think that Russia’s cultural mission in this regard consists of keeping the Julian calendar alive for another several centuries and thereby to facilitate the return of Western societies away from the unnecessary Gregorian reform to the uncorrupted old style.” “Zhurnal vos’mogo zasedaniia Komissii po voprosu o reforme kalendaria, 21.12.1899,” in *Postanovleniia Komissii po voprosu o reforme kalendaria v Rossii* (1899), 34.

the rest of the world was bound to rally, if not immediately, than eventually.⁷⁸ Thus Russia's calendar situation became fodder to those keen to advance a Russian exceptionalist ideology.

The use of plural temporalities continues to this date. With the resurgence of the Orthodox Church, which has never fully accepted the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1918, the country continues to exist in a state of "bi-calendarism."⁷⁹ Whether this is such a unique phenomenon is less clear. Contemporary revisionist literature on time emphasizes the extent to which the unification of the calendar and the abstract regimenting of time never really succeeded as homogenizing projects, as time continued and continues to be embedded in various networks of practice that give it its differential meanings.⁸⁰

78. See D.I. Mendeleev, "Kalendarnoe ob'edinenie," and "Zaiavlenie o reforme kalendaria," *Sochineniia*, vol. 22 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1950), 351–60 and 774–70, respectively.

79. On church resistance to the introduction of the Gregorian calendar after the Soviet revolution, see Gregory L. Freeze, "Counter-Reformation in Russian Orthodoxy: Popular Response to Religious Innovation, 1922–1925," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 2 (1995): 305–39.

80. Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, *Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales 1300–1800* (Oxford, 2009), 65–99.