Seventy-five years after his death, Kliuchevskii still captivates us. A man with a profound sense of irony, he would surely appreciate his standing and reputation today. Although his works are dated in some respects, they are still fresh and fascinating. His writings are remarkably free of doctrinaire pronouncements; yet many of his views still hold historians of Russia prisoner. All his readers, like his listeners in his own day, are well aware of the brilliance of his literary style: the powerful stream of his words tends to sweep aside our doubts and questions. To put it simply, Kliuchevskii is still the single most influential historian of Russia.

To point to the most obvious example, Kliuchevskii's work on the boyars, Russia's political and social elite, remains the beacon guiding his successors. The boyars occupied a central place in his life as a scholar. Work on his doctoral dissertation and greatest monograph, Boiarskaia Duma drevnei Rusi, took up almost all of the 1870s. The final product fully justified Kliuchevskii's efforts, for, in it, he displayed an imposing command of the sources and examined his subject in a remarkably broad chronological and thematic framework. Ranging far beyond the limits implied by its title, his study described not just the Boyar Duma or royal council as such, but the broad pattern of Russia's social and political development from Kievan times until the reign of Peter I as seen from the perspective of its ruling elite. Moreover, the history of the boyars as a social group, the highest stratum of the Russian


nobility, became a central theme in *Istoriia soslovii v Rossii* and the second and third volumes of his *Kurs russkoi istorii*. In these works, published over the nearly thirty years between 1880 and 1908, Kliuchevskii’s basic approach and interpretation remained remarkably consistent. When *Boiarskaia Duma* appeared in print, he was already a mature scholar who had successfully assimilated the influences of his mentors in the juridical school of Russian history, Solov’ev and Chicherin, and the broader intellectual currents of his formative years, the early 1860s. The positivism, scientism and concern for social issues, prevalent in his milieu as a student, led him to strive for a "scientific history" and to center his attention on the history of Russian society, not of the state as his revered teacher, Solov’ev, had done. Thus his dissertation gave heavy emphasis to the boyars as an evolving social and political elite as well as to the Boyar Duma as an institution. At the same time, Kliuchevskii remained, in many ways, a disciple of Solov’ev and Chicherin, not least because he studied society through the lense of juridical and institutional categories and legal documents. The central definition underlying *Boiarskaia Duma* is a case in point: his work rests on the assumption that the members of a particular institution collectively formed the ruling group in society. More broadly speaking, much of the subtlety and ambiguity in all of Kliuchevskii’s work arises from the continuous tension between his determination to study social developments and his devotion to legal history.