ARTICLES

PETER B. BROWN (West Hartford, Conn., U.S.A.)

MUSCOVITE GOVERNMENT BUREAUS

INTRODUCTION

Historians have traditionally utilized three methods to research the Muscovite chancellery system (prikaznaiia sistema): studying the entire pre-Petrine governmental bureaucracy in relation to its social milieu; investigating individual chancelleries (prikazy); or devising classificatory terms and groupings for these offices. The third way, taxonomy, has always offered valuable potential as a research tool, for perhaps no other system of governmental administration in early modern Europe is so amenable to classification and systematic study as is the Muscovite chancellery system which existed from 1549 to the end of Peter the Great's reign in 1725. The present investigation has three goals: to discuss basic issues governing chancellery classification, to propose a workable classificatory scheme; and finally to list each chancellery and briefly describe its history and most important activities.

The origins of the chancellery system date to the late 1400s when the treasury (kazna) separated from the Grand Court (bol'shoi dvorets). The steady accumulation of new kinds of administrative responsibilities and officials in Muscovy from the late fifteenth until the middle of the sixteenth century resembled similar, incremental transformations that occurred in England, France, Poland, Spain, and other West and East Central European countries in the same period. As was true for the Muscovite Grand Court, the curiae regis of these polities played a major role in supplying cadres of managers to discharge new administrative tasks and to oversee the “paperization” integrally connected with them.¹

In the reign of Ivan III (1462-1505), the consolidation of the newly annexed Novgorodian territories, the creation of a cavalry force compensated with conditional land grants, the compilation of service rosters (razriady), and an increase in royal tax collection induced the formation of an officialdom in the 1490s to supervise these matters. This embryonic stratum consisted of state secretaries (d’aki) whose prior activities as elite administrators at the Muscovite Court and on appanage princes’ estates have been attested as early as the fourteenth century in wills of the grand princes of Muscovy and in other lay documents. The d’aki originally were of slave origin, although free men increasingly joined their ranks after 1450, and these newcomers appear to have supplanted slave d’aki in their entirety as a result of the Chosen Council’s reforms of the late 1540s and 1550s that catalyzed Muscovy’s departmental administrative revolution. The underpinning of the chancellery system from its inception until its demise was formed by the state secretaries and their assistants, the “clerks” (pod’achie).2

During the rule of Vasilii III (1505-33), discrete departments—in the main staffed by state secretaries—emerged to manage treasury, diplomatic, military registration, felony prosecution, and service land matters. These institutions were doubtless “chancelleries” in all but name by the late 1530s, but royal advisers did not formally designate them government bureaus until the 1540s and 1550s, when the term izba (“administrative office,” literally “chamber”) was introduced and quickly gained currency as an appellation explicitly designating a permanent government bureau with a fixed location and discrete division of labor.3

The Muscovite chancelleries were unique in their total domination of government bureaucracy and also in their structural uniformity. The chancellery system made its formal debut in 1548 and 1549 with the establishment of three administrative offices, followed by the creation of seven more in the 1550s. In the late 1560s officials began using the term prikaz/chancellery, which by the 1590s had replaced the older izba/administrative office. The


3. This meaning of izba probably existed before the 1540s (Leont’ev, Obrazovanie prikaznoi sistemy, p. 261). Its first usage, though, is attested in a document of 1542 regarding a royal audience for some Lithuanian diplomats (Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva, 148 vols. [St. Petersburg-Petrograd, Moscow, Iur’ev: Russkoe istoricheskoe obshchestvo, 1867-1916], LIX, 148). A. A. Zimin in his article “O slozhenii prikaznoi sistemy na Russi,” in Doklady i soobshcheniia instituta istorii AN SSSR, 3 (1954), 164-76, explains how izba used in an institutional context became popularized during the time of the Chosen Council to refer to the new chancelleries.