"WHAT MANNER OF MAN DID WE LOSE?":
DEATH-BED IMAGES OF PETER THE GREAT*

The death and funeral of Emperor Peter I in 1725 provided a fitting grand finale to the so-called Petrine Revolution, demonstrating various aspects of the "modernity" which Peter himself had so actively promoted in his lifetime. The lying-in-state in a hall of mourning (the term itself borrowed: castrum doloris ili pechal'naia zala), the public funeral procession in St. Petersburg, interment in the still unfinished Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul, all broke with tradition in varying degrees. Not the least of the innovations were the images of the newly-dead emperor – paintings, an engraving and a wax model – on which this article will focus. Their creation represented a striking phenomenon in a country where secular portraiture was itself a relatively recent development. They were prompted, as we shall show, both by the specific circumstances of Peter's death and by Peter's own example in a period of rapid cultural change.

We cannot be certain what killed Peter at the age of fifty-two years, seven months and twenty-nine days in the forty second year, seventh month and third day of his reign.1 A description of Peter's death included among Jacob Stählin's "Anecdotes," first published in 1785, cites the testimony of Dr. Paulson, one of a team of foreign physicians who clustered around the sickbed offering modern, but ultimately ineffectual, remedies. Stählin records the recurrence of a disease of the urinary tract and bladder, the final outbreak allegedly triggered by an incident in November 1724 when Peter waded into the freezing Finnish gulf to save the lives of a boatload of soldiers in peril in a storm.2 Official contemporary sources fail to mention the shipwreck incident (now a well-established part of the Petrine myth), but give details of a "blockage of the water" (vodiani zapor) or "difficulty in passing water" (trudnost' v nepriazhenii

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1. Opisanie poriadka derzhannogo pri progrebenii blazhenniia vysokoslavnyia i vernodosstoineishiiia pamiati vsepresveteishago derzhavneishago Petra Velikago (St Petersburg: Senatskaia Tipografiia, 1725; Moscow: Moskovskaia tipografiia, 1726), 33.
