European travelers routinely described Muscovy as “barbarous” and “tyrannical” with its people living in “slavish passivity and terror.” So too, Imperial Russia was seen as “backward,” “despotic,” and “expansionist.” These negative images remain strong in historical memory, but how accurate are they? This course seeks to present a more nuanced picture of early modern Russia by exploring the ways state and society actually ‘worked’ on the ground. We begin with the consolidation of the Muscovite state under Ivan III (the Great) (1462-1505), examine the bizarre life and times of Ivan IV (the Terrible), the traumatic Time of Troubles, and a complex set of cultural changes over the course of the 17th c. We then examine the emergence of a powerful empire under Peter I and Catherine II in the 18th c. and the further development of an absolutist monarchy. Topics include the nature of autocratic rule and the development of its theocentric ideology; expansion into the steppe and across Siberia; serfdom; gender and female rule; aristocratic culture and the life of the provincial nobility.

Course Objectives, Expectations, and Requirements

I will expect students to attend all class sessions, to stay current with the readings and be prepared to discuss them. You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during the lecture; active and regular participation in our discussions is essential to the success of the course. Sharpening critical thinking skills through various types of reading and writing assignments and developing confidence in the exchange of ideas in oral form are key goals of the class. This work is designed to be challenging, hopefully fun, but definitely not for those who wish to sit on the sidelines and observe.

I encourage you to meet with me during office hours or by appointment. If you are having trouble with any aspect of the course please see me sooner rather than later.
Papers and Grading

Class participation and attendance 25%
Short analysis due in class on Feb 19 10%
Book Review due in class on March 17 20%
Essay #1 due in class on April 12 15%
Essay #2 due in class on May 10 15%
Essay #3 due no later than 11am on May 19 15%

Credit for the course will not be given if all written work is not turned in.

All written work is governed by the Honor Code, see: http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html [This link will take you to a pdf of student rules and regulations.]

Late paper policy: For an extension to be considered, you must consult me in advance of the due date. Unexcused late papers will be penalized a grade step for each day (24 hours) late, that is, A goes to A-, etc.

All books and articles assigned in this course are available on Blackboard (BB) and/or regular Reserve. The following books have been ordered at the bookstore:

Pavlov and Perrie, Ivan the Terrible, Profiles in Power
Sunderland, Taming the Wild Field, Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe
Kivelson, Cartographies of Tsardom, The Land and Its Meanings in 17th c Russia

A final note: Please turn off cell phones, pagers, beeping watches and the like for the entire class period. Please arrive for the class on time; once class has begun, please refrain from taking breaks and leaving the room.

Approximate schedule of
Readings, lectures and discussions

Feb. 8: Introduction
Feb 10: Rise of the Muscovite Tsardom

Stevens, Russia’s Wars of Emergence, pp. 13-27 [Bb]

Feb. 12 -17 Ivan III and the building of the Muscovite State

Stevens, Russia’s Wars of Emergence, pp. 28-40 [Bb]

Kollmann, “Muscovite Patrimonialism” Cracraft, Major Problems in the History of Imperial Russia, pp. 37-46. [Bb]


Feb 17: Discussion; What does Kollmann mean by “patrimonialism?” What strategies of integration did the Muscovite state employ?

Feb 19: Short essay due in class

Feb. 19-Feb 24: From Ivan III to Ivan IV: Building the Muscovite State


Kollmann, “The Cap of Monomakh” in Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture, pp. 38-41 [While the article has been scanned and posted on Bb, please look at the book on reserve at Mudd for the visual images.]


“The Tale of the White Cowl” in Zenkovsky, ed. Medieval Russia’s epics, chronicles, and tales, pp. 323-332 [Bb]
Feb 24: Discussion: Culture and Ideology at the court

Feb 26- March 3: Economy and Society in the early 16th c.

   The Domostroi, Rules for Russian Households in the time of Ivan the Terrible, Edited and translated by Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, pp. 57-65, 69-73, 80-91.

   Sunderland, Taming the Wild Field pp. 1-top p 25 [This reading provides general background material from ca. 13-late 16th]

March 3: Discussion: Church, State and society by the early 16th c. : Summing up the 1450-1533 period.

March 5-March 15: Muscovy in the Era of Ivan IV (The Terrible, the Awesome)

March 5: Early Ivan
   Pavlov and Perrie, pp. 1-40

** March 8: -- Please note: class from 1-2:30
   Eisenstein, “Ivan the Terrible,” Part I.

March 10: Reform and Empire
   Pavlov and Perrie, pp. 41-106
   Dmytryshyn, “Moscow and the Court of Ivan the Terrible in 1553,” Medieval Russia; a source book, pp. 289-294. [Bb]

March 12 : Crazy Ivan? The Oprichnina
   Pavlov and Perrie, pp 107-207

March 15: Discussion: Evaluating Ivan – sources and historiographical debates. [Bring a draft of your book review to class]

March 17: Book review due in class

March 17-22: Fedor, Godunov and the Time of Troubles


Rowland, “The Problem of Advice in Muscovite Tales about the Times of Troubles,” Russian History, Volume 6, Number 1, 1979 [Bb]

Dmytryshyn, “Bussow’s Account of the Famine in Moscow, 1601-1604” Medieval Russia; a source book, pp. 355-57 [Bb]


March 24-26: Romanov Restoration and Introduction to the 17th c.

March 27-April 4 Break Week

April 5-April 16: Muscovy in the 17th c.

April 5-9 Autocracy and serfdom
   Kivelson, Cartographies of Tsardom, pp. 29-98


April 9: Writing workshop
   I will not be in class today, but would like you to utilize the class session to critique each other’s drafts.

April 12 Essay #1 due in class

April 12-16 Orthodoxy and Empire

   Kivelson, Cartographies of Tsardom pp. 99-214

   Sunderland, Taming the Wild Field pp. 25-35
April 16: Discussion: What was distinctive about Muscovite expansion in the 17th c? How was it understood and justified? [Final essay will draw on these readings, as well as later reading in Sunderland so take careful notes.]

April 19–April 23 The World of Peter Aleksevich

Klyuchevsky, “The Artisan Tsar” in Peter the Great changes Russia, pp.21-39, or Klyuchevsky, Peter the Great, pp. 33-56 [Regular reserve]

Marker, “An Icon of Female Authority: The St. Catherine Image of 721” in Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture, pp.63-66 [While the article has been scanned and posted on Bb, please look at the book on reserve in Mudd for the visual images.]


Sunderland, Taming the Wild Field pp. 35-53

April 23– Discussion: Historiographical debates over Peter. Evaluating the turn to the west.

April 26–April 30: From Peter to Catherine: 18th c. politics and society

“Peter III’s Manifesto Emancipating the Russian Nobility, 1762” in Cracraft, Major Problems in the History of Imperial Russia, pp.151-153. [Bb]

“M. M. Shcherbatov Laments Corruption at Court, 1730-1762” in Cracraft, Major Problems in the History of Imperial Russia, pp. 153-165.[Bb]

[These two readings are scanned together under the title: Major Problems in the History of Imperial Russia]

Freeze, From Supplication to Revolution, pp. 11-31 and 75-86 [Primary documents concerning the nobility and peasantry in the 1760s. These are scanned separately under the titles: Freeze, “Nobility,” and Freeze, “Peasantry.”] Bb

**April 26: Religious world of the 18th c.

Liliana Milkova, from the Allen Art museum, will lead the class today
Meet in Mudd 202

**May 3-14 The Catherinean era**

May 3-7: Nobility and Governance

  Aksakov, *A Russian Gentleman*, pp.1-77 [Bb – scanned as Forward, Fragment I-
  Bagroff, Fragment II-Kurolyessoff]

  Newlin, “Moving Pictures: The Optics of Serfdom on the Russian Estate,” in
  *Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture*, pp. 71-75 [While the article has
  been scanned and posted on Bb, please look at the book on reserve in Mudd for the
  visual images.]

  Raeff, “Home, School, and Service in the life of the 18th c Russian Nobleman,”
  *Slavonic and East European Review*, XL, 95 (June 1962), 295-307. [Bb]

  [Consult, as interests you, Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate* –
  on reserve in Mudd. You may find this helpful for essay #2.]

May 7: Discussion: The 18th c. nobility  [bring a draft of your paper to class]

May 10  Essay #2 due in class

May 10-14  Society and empire

  “An 18th c Russian Merchant Family in Prosperity and Decline,” in Burbank
  and Ransel, eds. *Imperial Russia, New Histories for the Empire*, pp.256-280. [Bb]

  Raeff, “Imperial policies of Catherine II” in Cracraft, *Major Problems in the
  History of Imperial Russia*, pp. 234-243  [This is included in the scan titled: Cracraft,
  *Major Problems in the History of Imperial Russia.*]  [Bb]

  Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*, pp. 55-95

May 14 Last class

Essay #3  due no later than 11am on May 19.