Popular handicrafts: *(left)* salt dish in the shape of a duck, Vologda Province, early nineteenth century; (right) poultry carrier made of birch bark, Vologda Province, nineteenth century. From *Russkoe narodnoe iskusstvo* (Leningrad, 1959), Table 4.

linking with it the inviolable preservation of patrimonial ownership of the land.

SOURCE: George Vernadsky et. al. (see p. 294) Vol. 2, pp. 552–3.

A Report From the Ministry of Internal Affairs on Serf Disorders (1847)

The disorders on the estates of landlords were more persistent and serious than those of preceding years, although the number of instances was somewhat smaller. In 1845 insubordination occurred on twenty-six estates, in 1846, on twenty-five, and in 1847, on twenty-three estates in sixteen guberniias. The causes of these disorders were: oppression of the peasants and overburdening them with work on the part of the owners . . . but the main reason for the insubordination among the peasants of the landlords was the desire for freedom. . . . The aspiration to acquire freedom, aroused by various absurd rumors, resulted in persistent insubordination and violence among the peasants of the landlords on fifteen estates and prompted more than 11,000 peasants to flee.

SOURCE: George Vernadsky et al. (see p. 294) Vol. 2, p. 561.

LITERATURE

STEVEN L. HOCH
The Peasant Commune

Since the early nineteenth century numerous Russian writers have found special significance in the peasant commune, whose imagined virtues they hoped would permit Russia to emerge from its current sorry state directly into a state of freedom, equality, and spiritual wholeness. Here Stephen Hoch presents a less partisan and more systematic reconstruction of the inner workings of the commune, based primarily upon his examination of estate records. His view paints a considerably less ideal picture of the "real world" of the peasantry, but one that reveals the sophistication and complexity of peasant social life far more vividly than the idyllic images of nineteenth-century Romantics.

That the commune (mir) should be viewed as an institution reflecting intergenerational conflict in Russian peasant society would certainly come as a shock to Herzen, Haxthausen, and those Slavophiles and others who saw it as an indigenous form of socialism. But the commune played a central role in maintaining a patriarchal authority. Yet this was far from its only function. The commune was also one of the key forces holding this little society together. In most instances the patriarchs tried to represent the interests of all the serfs, and obviously not all conflicts were between generations. In addition, the commune addressed the estate management and especially the local government authorities with a collective voice and organization, and this gave the peasants substantial autonomy. In fact the commune provided a social cohesiveness that the household could not give. Patriarchy within the family may well have been inimicable to the young, but patriarchy within the commune often served the common good. While these elders did support individual heads of household in dealing with recalcitrant family members, the patriarchs, who embodied communal wisdom, experience, interests, and action, did much to bind the peasants. . . .

The functions and powers of the Petrovskoe commune were extensive. Besides distributing tiaglo [family teams engaged in field work] obligations and peasant allotments, it assessed, collected, and paid taxes and other money dues, determined many communal expenditures, and petitioned the central estate office in Moscow with its grievances and concerns. The commune also administered justice by adjudicating disputes, conducting investigations, disciplining its members, and providing internal police supervision as required by law. In addition, it elected peasant functionaries, oversaw household divisions, determined who would be recruited into military service, maintained work discipline, fixed the order of field labor (though much was well established by custom) and natural dues, cultivated the communal arable land to provide emergency grain reserves, gave some assistance to the needy, and saw to many of the needs of the parish church and clergy. The commune dealt with numerous local officials, bribing them when necessary and providing them or military troops with transport, food, and billeting.

Before beginning an in-depth discussion of the commune's functions, it would be useful to describe in broad quantitative terms the major age-specific status or generational differences at Petrovskoe to see how they relate to the mir and its role in serf society. First, almost half of the estate population consisted of children under 17. Rarely did serfs marry or carry estate labor obligations before this age. Children worked from a very early age, and they lived in their natal household, unless it underwent division, even if orphaned. All matters of upbringing were handled within each peasant household. There is little evidence that either

the estate or the commune interfered in head-of-household or parent/child relationships until the assuming of corvee [labor services to the landlord] obligations became a concern or unless it was necessary to find orphans a foster home and establish their property rights. The only exception was for household serfs, especially boys, who usually began learning a skill or craft between ages 10 and 12, the estate seeing to their training.

At the other end of the age spectrum were the heads of household. They and their spouses constituted approximately 17 to 19 percent of the total population and, for males, roughly one-quarter of all tiaglos. It is to this group that many of the advantages in this little society accrued. All heads of household participated in village assemblies directly and in estate assemblies indirectly through their representatives. Approximately 40 percent of the male heads of households were no longer assigned full corvée obligations by virtue of their age. Moreover, from the remaining group came all the serf functionaries on the estate, the serf manager, village heads, overseers, drivers, and possibly serf police agents. In 1837, in the only archival listing of these persons, there were forty such serfs on the Petrovskoe estate, slightly more than one-fifth of all working heads of household, and these peasant functionaries enjoyed a variety of work privileges.

About one-third of the estate population fell between the children and the elders. This middle group carried three-quarters of all field-work obligations. From the time of their arranged marriage until their ascension to head of household, a period of rarely less than ten years and of fifteen to twenty-five years for most, these serfs worked but were accorded no privileges on the estate, in the commune, or within their own household. Males who failed to conform to required norms were sent into the army or, in extreme cases, exiled to Siberia. For young adults, flight was the only refuge from submission and exploitation, an alternative that rarely succeeded.

Recruitment, household division, and the maintenance of work discipline gave rise to intergenerational conflict in the exercise of communal authority. And in all matters, those who worked but were not heads of households were excluded from decision making. Yet the generational split in the commune was not so clear as in the household. While this gathering of old men sought to preserve its interests, its fate was tied to that of the young. Moreover, the problems of poverty and social deviance were not simply generational. Therefore a more subtle view of authority is needed for the commune, and its more complex purposes require appreciation. . . .

Maintaining grain reserves in case of crop failure was required by law. In 1820 a document on land usage at Petrovskoe notes that each tiaglo worked an additional half desiatina of land in the spring fields beyond the normal peasant allotment and demesne obligation. It is likely that the grain from this land went for the communal reserves. Similar documents for 1834 and 1849, years after major crop failures, show clearly that the serfs worked a total of 320 extra statutory desiatinas (864 acres) to replenish the emergency stores. Moreover, each year the commune was required to report to the local authorities in Borisoglebsk on the size of the harvest and the status of the reserves.

Assistance to individuals came primarily as land that had been plowed and sowed by the commune. Harvesting, carting, drying, winnowing, and sifting the grain, however, were the responsibility of the needy themselves. It was extremely rare for the estate to relieve adults capable of working from tiaglo responsibilities. In 1837, the only year for which there is such detailed information, out of 715.5 tiaglos on the Petrovskoe estate, 25.5 were exempted from corvée entirely. Most of these, however, had been freed from their labor obligations because their homesteads had burned down in May. Fewer than 1 percent of all tiaglos were exempted that year for reasons of poverty. Similarly, more than thirty years of financial records for the Petrovskoe commune reveal only a handful of exemptions from taxes and money dues approved by the village assemblies because of poverty. . . .

The commune spent most of its funds to pay soul [a poll tax on each adult male], road, bridge, postal, and local taxes and dues to cover the costs of recruitment. All together these averaged 88 percent of total revenues, leaving the commune little to spend for other purposes . . . Moreover, because the commune paid in . . . paper money it had to pay a premium . . . on the money it owed the state. Until the monetary situation was stabilized with the reforms of the late 1830s, the premium fluctuated from eight to eighteen kopecks per ruble, in effect increasing taxes by that percentage. In addition, contact with government officials frequently meant additional payments. Paying taxes in Borisoglebsk always involved gifts of money to the . . . treasurer, . . . clerk, . . . petty officials, . . . and . . . notary. If the district . . . assessor happened to be in the office, he too did not depart empty-handed. In 1820–21 the Petrovskoe commune gave a total of forty-five rubles to officials for accepting its two annual tax payments; by 1838–39 the amount had risen to over one hundred rubles, these bureaucrats not losing in the decline in the value of paper money. During the intervening years, no tax payment was ever made without being accompanied by such gifts. . . .

Quite distinct from these were the bribes. The most common were attempts to prevent inquests into sudden or accidental deaths. In some instances the commune and the estate hoped to cover up the facts of the case, but more often they simply wished to avoid costly and prolonged legal proceedings, which would take up valuable work time. The documents of the Petrovskoe commune are candid. On occasion it bribed the parish priests, who were legally required to report all incidents in which a person had died before receiving the sacraments. . . .

It was cheaper to bribe village priests than local government authorities, but nevertheless most accidental deaths were covered up. Some included peasants outside the estate as victims or witnesses and could not easily be concealed. Also, local officials derived a considerable portion of their income from conducting inquests, and presumably they would have been suspicious of any village or estate that did not report what was considered to be a normal number of cases.

Upon the discovery of a corpse or the occurrence of a death from other than natural causes, the elected police agent of the appropriate village of the estate would inform the district court and have a report sent to the nobility's court assessor requesting an investigation. This petition usually cost no more that two rubles, though it could reach as high as thirteen. The court assessor generally came to the estate promptly, often within a few days, accompanied by a clerk or two, two soldiers, and on occasion the district doctor. Rarely would a second visit to the estate be needed, and it was unusual for witnesses to be summoned subsequently to Borisoglebsk [the district capital] to give further testimony. The was because at every inquest the commune paid the assessor and his assistants to avoid such developments. Sixty-three rubles were "given as a gift to Borisoglebsk district court assessor Sotsyperov in the examination of a dead body . . . , in order to prevent any further troubles." When assessor Spitsyn came to Petrovskoe to investigate both a drowning and the death of a serf in the apiary, wine, fruit liquor, and food were provided at communal expense. In addition, Spitsyn was given over twenty-eight rubles "so as not to conduct any further investigation." . . .

In Russia, peasants were required to fulfill state corvée obligations, essentially repairing roads and bridges. At times the commune of Petrovskoe was able to convert this into a money payment, but often it had to supply the laborers demanded. The officials who assigned the sections of the road to be repaired, as well as the overseers of the work itself, were readily bribed. In fact some of these officials were in such powerful positions that their dealings with the Petrovskoe commune appear to be little short of extortionate. "By order of the Borisoglebsk district chief of police, 407 male workers should be sent to level the steep slope of a mountain on the Kirsanov road near the ravine called 'Bare,' but at the request of bailiff Ivan Ivanov indulgences were made in this, for

which forty-two rubles is given to him, Gospodin chief of police, as a gift.". . . Threatening other estates and communes with having to level the same slope of the mountain probably provided the district chief with a considerable income. Payments were also made to district officials for assigning tracts of road that were close to the estate and for extending the deadline when the work was to be completed. Finally, the overseers of the actual labor were often bribed to allow the commune to send fewer than the mandated number of men.

There were numerous other instances of extortion or bribery. Twenty rubles were paid to the rural assessor so that troops would not be quartered on the estate, and it is hard to believe this official did not make the rounds of neighboring villages. When two counterfeit notes were discovered among those paid as taxes in March 1816, fifty rubles were given to the treasurer "so that this would not lead to further trouble." Forty-two rubles were given to the court assessor when an undocumented person was found residing in Kanin, "for releasing the managers of the estate and other residents of the village of Kanin from major responsibility and judicial investigation.". . .

The only other items of significance in the commune's budget went to cover some of the expenses of the two parish churches at Petrovskoe. As was required by law, the estate provided the clergy with a total of sixty-three agricultural desiatinas (227 acres) of arable land, which the church servitors and their families worked themselves. There is no evidence that the bailiff, the central estate office, or even Prince Gagarin himself was at all concerned with the peasants' spiritual well-being, participation in religious rites, or church attendance. This again may suggest substantial community autonomy, though it more likely testifies to the weakness of Russian Orthodoxy as a religion without content or theology. The serfs themselves did not even care a great deal about maintaining the church. In the village of Petrovskoe, the iconostasis in the church had long since become faded and discolored. There was a bell tower but no bells. The fence around the churchyard had fallen down. The priest and other clerics lived over a mile away from the church, and their household structures were "very dilapidated.". . .

Neither the estate nor the commune had particularly good relations with the parish clergy. The estate was often unwilling to supply the materials and labor needed to keep the churches and the clergy's household structures in repair, and the commune felt quite free to complain to clerical authorities about excessive requisitions and fees asked by the parish priests. For almost five years, from August 1821 until May 1826, the Petrovskoe commune was involved in legal proceedings against one of its priests, Aleksei Polikarpov, who according to the parishioners charged too much for performing occasional religious rites. What began as an argument between Polikarpov and the church elder concluded with the commune's filing a sixty-six page list of grievances against the priest in the Borisoglebsk clerical board and the Tambov clerical consistory. Eventually a new priest was assigned. In 1838 the peasants of the parish of Kanin began similar proceedings against their priest "for various offenses committed by him.". . .

There is little information about the administration of justice and the resolution of disputes among the serfs by the commune. The elders had the right to punish an individual by flogging, though the punishment was supposed to be supervised by the bailiff. A serf bringing a complaint to the elders generally had to accuse someone specifically. Only then would the commune investigate the matter, and only as related to the accused. Guilt was most often established by confession. Falsely accusing someone—that is, casting aspersions on a serf's character—and bothering the elders without sufficient cause were also punished by whipping. The reputation of both parties in a conflict was an important consideration in the decisions taken by the elders and greatly influenced the compensation due the injured party or the punishment imposed on the guilty serf, as the following example reveals:

> On 31 March last year, 1828, near the end of Holy Week, various property disappeared from the storeroom of stableman Ivan Timofeev Akhriapkin and his wife Pelageia Vasileva, in the theft of which was suspected stableman Iakov Grigor'ev, but at that time he did not confess to it. Last 3 February the above-mentioned Pelageia recognized her lost shawl at the home of Fedos'ia Iunova, a soldier's wife from Kanin, and upon investigation it turned out that she had received this shawl from the above-mentioned stableman Grigor'ev for weaving for him six yards of cloth. The following had disappeared from Pelageia:
>
> A new calico dress worth 9 rubles 20 kopecks; a checked gingham dress, 7 rubles 20 kopecks . . . [a long list of stolen items follows] for which Iakov Grigor'ev was beaten with a birch rod and had half his head shaved, and to compensate Pelageia it was ordered to take from him livestock of equal value; and although Grigor'ev ought to pay for the stolen items with livestock of twice the value, since the above-mentioned Pelageia had fornicated with Grigor'ev, for her debauched behavior only equal value was paid up in punishment.

Distributing land and tiaglos, collecting taxes, electing peasant functionaries, cultivating the arable land for the emergency stores and the needy, bribing officials, and determining the calendar of field labor seem to have been fairly routine matters for the commune to administer. Neither the bailiffs' weekly reports nor other documents relating to the commune cite any instances of serious disputes over these issues. Obviously the elders were governed by agricultural traditions and were committed to economic equality among households. In addition, they were in agreement that local bureaucrats should be kept both distant and content.

In contrast, determining who would be sent into the army to fill draft quotas was a highly divisive issue. For a household, the economic costs of losing an adult male laborer were considerable. A household not only lost a work team and an allotment of arable land, it still had a daughter-in-law and possibly infant children to support. Patriarchs saw their security in old age diminished, and if recruitment occurred within a year or two of marriage, they would not even have recovered the brideprice.

Young males viewed conscription as comparable to a sentence of death. At Petrovskoe, some cut off an index finger to avoid recruitment; others drank poison or acid hoping to damage their internal organs. Often those fearing they would be recruited simply took flight. Others tried to escape en route to induction centers. In response, communal assemblies were held in secret, and once a serf was designated for conscription he was placed in leg irons and kept under constant guard. It usually took as many men to transport the recruits to Tambov as there were peasants to be inducted. The commune often bribed army doctors to declare serfs who maimed themselves fit for military service. . . .

Recruitment priorities at Petrovskoe were first to rid the estate of undesirables, and then for households to draw lots if draft quotas were still not filled. "Because of the proclamation of a recruit levy, it has been ordered to elect elders from each village to make according to form a priority list of suspected or known troublemakers," the bailiff wrote in his report of 22 October 1834. In August 1837 the bailiff informed the Moscow office that persons "discovered stealing, remiss in domestic matters, and especially those lazy and without horses" would be given as recruits. This was common practice on many estates. . . .

It was important for patriarchs to be able to coerce younger males dissatisfied with their family situations to work. The heads of households, therefore, also used the threat of recruitment to control laziness, disobedience, and failure to fulfill household obligations. After theft, these were the most common reasons the patriarchs selected individuals for military service. A son or nephew disgruntled about his lack of authority, status, or economic position in the household faced conscription and with it the dispossession of property, disinheritance, and the loss of all future rights and benefits that came with age. Young male serfs were thus under great pressure to conform to the will of their ascendants and to adhere to the norms that patriarchy implied at Petrovskoe. . . .

The commune saw in recruitment a way to rid itself of poorer and less productive households, especially those that were likely to default on taxes and dues. The target of the commune was primarily poorer, smaller households with only one tiaglo, called *odinokie*, especially those in which the head of household was young and inexperienced.

Elderly male peasant with handmade pitch fork, Orel Province, 1860s. From *Neskol'ko narodnykh tipov Rossii*, a collection of photographs by J. X. Raoult, Odessa. Courtesy of The New York Public Library, Slavic and Baltic Division.

Such households did not conform to the patriarchal three-generation, multiple family ideal and had virtually no margin of safety against accident or illness. In these households any mismanagement of household affairs could easily result in destitution. In 1837 the bailiff wrote that frequently "the mir has to pay all the taxes and dues for one- tiaglo households and to fulfill their estate and state corvée obligations." Putting a greater share of military obligations on these households served the interests of the village elders in many ways. It reduced the number of males who would be conscripted from their households, and it reduced the number of young heads of household who might have been a source of envy for other serfs of the same age. Moreover, according to the bailiff, conscription from smaller households did not foster division that undermined patriarchal authority. If anything, at this level, the threat of recruitment induced mergers. For the commune, such a policy provided an alternative for dealing with the poor, reduced the number of households that required communal assistance, and was yet another means of limiting economic differentiation.

In contrast to the commune, the estate was at times reluctant to have the sole male of a household recruited. Such households had often been the recipients of financial assistance from the estate, which would have no way of recovering its investment if these serfs were now conscripted. In 1837, however, after a three-year effort by the estate to reduce the number of households without horses, the bailiff concluded that those still lacking draft animals had only themselves to blame. He asserted that "from obvious laziness they have not come by a horse, regardless of being odinokie." He therefore decided that it would be "useful that the peasants be convinced that recruits will be taken from one-tiaglo households, and thus those without horses would make a greater effort to acquire a horse for themselves." Furthermore, the bailiff noted that by instituting this policy the pressure for larger households to divide would be reduced, and so in time would be the number of one-tiaglo households. All these sentiments were identical to the interests of the serf patriarch. . . .

By providing tax relief or giving over cultivated lands to the needy, the commune did much to ensure the survival of all its members, including the economically weak. The basic approach of the commune, however, was to control access to productive resources. Communal repartitions of arable land and the assigning of labor obligations by tiaglo limited economic differentiation, and they seem to have aroused little controversy among the patriarchs, that is, between households. Institutional forms of assistance to the needy were not used, and direct grants or exemptions to the poor were limited to a very small percentage of the population.

While communal life was certainly not harmonious, in most instances the mir had the serfs' common well-being at heart. The commune served the general good and used its funds to attain freedom from internal deviants and bureaucratic interference, acts the estate found desirable as well. But this does not mean that the commune did not uphold exploitative relationships, only that exploitation did not imply competition between households to subsist or survive. The commune was the instrument of the elders, and they held the power to regulate household division and determine recruitment priorities, decisions that greatly affected the lives of those a generation younger. Even with conscription, where the interests of the estate and the elders were somewhat at odds, the patriarchs at times were successful in getting the bailiff to rid the estate of smaller and economically less viable households. This policy not only reduced socioeconomic stratification but preserved the wealth of the patriarchs. Most often, however, communal actions were of benefit to the estate. But as successful as the patriarchs seem to have been in working with the bailiff for their common advantage, both were in fact confronted by an enormous amount of resistance and noncooperation, which reflect how deep generational status differences were at Petrovskoe.

SOURCE: Steven L. Hoch, *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia: Petrovskoe, A Village in Tambov* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), chapter 4: "Communal Function and Control," pp. 133–59 (excerpted). Copyright © by the University of Chicago Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. (The original includes a great many terms in Russian, most of which have been translated here.)

PETER KOLCHIN

Peasant Patterns of Resistance

By the beginning of the nineteenth century peasant bondage had disappeared from all but a handful of large states. Two of the most glaring exceptions to this pattern were the United States of America and the Russian Empire. In this essay Peter Kolchin describes the contrasting ways in which Russian serfs and American slaves tried to resist their bondage, and he makes some interesting observations about similarities and differences. This excerpt concentrates mostly on the Russian side, but the complete article, as well as the book that followed it, gave equal attention to both nations.