Patron-client relations were probably a central feature of Russian life throughout history, but their character and style become visible only in the eighteenth century. Before that time, historians can observe the fundamental bonds of family and kinship but not the more flexible links of patron and client that must have supplemented family ties. Russians did not send the kind of messages that would reveal patron-client links, and they failed to analyze these essential social bonds. One looks in vain among Muscovite writings for a critical stance toward patronage or even a conscious description of its workings. As independent an observer as the Balkan cleric Jurij Krizanić, who sojourned in Russia at the middle of the seventeenth century and assiduously dissected many aspects of the country’s political and social life, did not single out clientage as an ill in need of correction. This practice was evidently a fact of life that everyone took for granted. An epistolary tradition would have brought patron-client relations into clear view, as happened in the eighteenth century, but Muscovites did not commit their thoughts and acts to paper in this fashion and did not exchange letters in sufficient volume to provide a basis for analysis of patronage. What evidence there is for the period before 1700 must therefore be found in other sources.

Pre-Petrine Evidence

On the surface – which is all that can be seen – kinship was the principal bond of Muscovite high politics. In earliest times boyar clans formed the building blocks and worked out a shifting hierarchy among those closest to the grand prince and a much less rigid ranking of the remaining clans, which may have built a consensus among themselves to check the ambitions of the mightiest families. This is the view of Nancy Shields Kollmann in her recent analysis of court politics in the fourteenth century. She identifies the hallmarks of the politics of that era as “continuity, personal acquaintance and affinitive principles of grouping such as kinship and marriage links.” In ad-

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1 See, for example, his book Politika, ed. M. N. Tikhomirov (Moscow 1965).
2 The boyar clan and court politics: the founding of the Muscovite political system, in: Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique 23/1 (Jan-Mar 1982) 18.
dition to a common concern about the power of the leading boyar clans, the lesser clans must also have built bonds among themselves through networks of reciprocal aid and patronage, but these links can only occasionally and vaguely be glimpsed, and the extent to which patron-client relations developed beyond kinship groups is largely a matter of speculation. It should be recalled, however, that this was a period of relatively weak central power. The armed forces consisted mainly of levies of boyars and their retainers. The various clans therefore ran large autonomous operations that had much room for the attachment of personal servitors and clients.

A residue of this type of clientage can be seen at the court in Lithuania of the Russian prince Andrei Kurbskii, who fled Ivan the Terrible's tyranny in the mid sixteenth century. Kurbskii employed a corps of retainers and officials, and he distributed lands and spoils to his followers from Russia on evidently much the same basis as he had done earlier in Muscovy. Perhaps Kurbskii's flight was motivated in part a desire to preserve these older autonomous arrangements from the increasing intervention of the state in the private domain.

Another clue to patron-client relations in Muscovite times can be found in the institution of suretyship. This means of insuring contracts, payments of debts, performance of duties, public service obligations, return of travelers, appearance in court and other acts and arrangements was widely used in early Russia. At first suretyship fell primarily on members of a family, a circumstance that reinforces the importance of kin ties in earliest times. As Muscovy grew so too did the role of suretyship, which came to extend beyond the family and even the clan. Since in some types of suretyship the bond was compulsory, debate continues on just what this relationship implied about pre-existing ties among the persons involved. Still, it stands to reason that those who undertook to guarantee the loyalty of a servitor or who pledged to see that litigants appeared for trial were persons with some leverage or dependence on the principals and therefore either patrons or clients. Here would be a logical starting point for further investigations of patron-client bonds in Muscovy.

The consolidation of the autocracy in the sixteenth century changed the relationship among the leading families noted earlier in Nancy Kollmann's formulation. No longer was the grand prince simply first among equals in a cluster of rustic clan chiefs. He had become a mighty sovereign whose power was undergirded with an imperial ideology that anointed him the God-crowned successor of Roman and Byzantine emperors. The heads of boyar families, though still wealthy and influential, no longer enjoyed the kind of autonomy that could threaten the prince or provide a sphere for a status in statu. By this time, boyars were even under obligation to serve the tsar of Muscovy, and they had become another rank of state servitor. Patron-client relations

3 These arrangements are spelled out at length by Inge Auerbach, A. M. Kurbskij. Leben in osteuropäischen Adelsgesellschaften des 16. Jahrhunderts (Bausteine zur Geschichte der Literatur bei den Slawen, Gießen 1985).

accordingly shifted from the rustic patrimonial setting of autonomous or semi-autonomous clans to an integrated patrimonial regime ruled by a single head and deploying relatively unified military and administrative operations. In other words, a shift occurred from what might be called pure patron-client relations to those deployed through positions in the military or civil administrative hierarchy. The resources available for distribution were those associated with the office, be they goods or control of jobs. For this reason, although loyalty remained focused on an individual, clusters of kin and clients could grow up in particular offices or regiments. Likewise, since the position of any patron was ultimately at the mercy of the supreme ruler and could thus be scuttled by intrigue, whimsy, or a change of ruler, patrons even at the highest levels of civil or military service needed to build links to other groups in order to have networks large enough to warn them of impending changes or to provide them with protection when a sudden change occurred.

The content and style of the relationships is difficult to gauge, and it seems that kinship continued to be the most important bond in Muscovite times. Nevertheless in a recent study of boyars in the late Muscovite period Robert Crummey asserts that the undeniably important ties of blood and marriage "may well pale in significance before those of patron and client". Although personal correspondence was not common in those days, the few surviving pieces contain traces of patron-client relations. Prince V. V. Golitsyn's mother intercedes with her son on behalf of an artillery officer who was tardy in reporting for duty. Courtiers write to leading Duma members simply to remind them of their existence and to reassure them of their loyalty. Other letters requesting help come from people going to unfamiliar postings or stuck in a difficult situation. They need an introduction to facilitate their work or assistance in escaping an unwanted assignment or heavy debt. Some letters are meant to advance a client to a new job in someone else's area of responsibility. In short, patronage is tightly interwoven with state service, to which everyone is obligated. While it is hard to attribute to this scanty evidence of clientage the importance Crummey gives it – indeed in another monograph he is himself more tentative about evidence of patron-client relations – it seems likely that these recorded instances were typical of a much wider pattern of behavior.

The few examples of patron-client relations observable in seventeenth-century sources make clear that these ties bore a close resemblance to those that can be examined in greater detail later. They were largely defensive and may have been ubiquitous. There was no effort to legitimate them, since they were imbedded in the patrimonial style of governance. The model was the family or a family estate writ large, and the relations of personal or family loyalty and mutual assistance operated naturally. The cosmic imagery of a patriarchal God caring for his children was strongly reinforced by a corresponding image of the tsar as the loving father who was personally invol-

5 Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia, 1613–1689 (Princeton 1983) 103.
ved with the fate of all his subjects. This notion had substance in regard to the highest officers in both central and territorial governance. Not until the last years of the Muscovite era did the tsar abandon the practice of giving personal, individualized instructions to his subordinates in the provincial administration. Ordinary people were commonly referred to as “orphans”, symbolically without families of their own they were the subject of the loving concern of their tsarist father or his surrogates.

The Eighteenth Century

Patronage relations came under criticism by articulate members of the nobility for the first time in the eighteenth century. Contributing most directly to the critical stance was the state’s decision to adopt rational legal organization as part of a conscious modernizing enterprise forcefully imposed from above. This decision was symbolized by Peter the Great. Although his predecessors in the seventeenth century showed the way, Peter was the first to galvanize efforts to establish a rational order in Russian administration. He replaced the ancient council of boyars with a Governing Senate whose membership was appointed by the emperor without regard to social origin. The Senate was to function as overseer of the state administration on the basis of a legally defined jurisdiction and competence. Then he threw out the dozens of Muscovite administrative departments (prikazy), with their multitude of confusing and overlapping spheres of action and revenue sources, and substituted nine collegial boards. Activities of the collegia were regulated by and coordinated with those of the Senate and subordinate bureaus according to procedures defined in the General Regulations of 1720. Provincial administration likewise underwent a major reorganization. This reform, at least on paper, established uniform regulations for all provincial bureaus.

These changes made a striking contrast with the traditional patrimonial system based on personal delegation of authority. In addition, Peter revamped the entire reward and recruitment structure. State officials were to receive salaries instead of land grants or payments in kind for their service. Both salary and status were to be determined by one’s place on the Table of Ranks, a device Peter created by borrowing the Muscovite practice of ranking according to heredity and then shifting it to the bureaucratic principle of merit. Henceforth, through meritorious service a commoner could advance up the ranking table to a point where he automatically acquired the privileges of hereditary nobility.

The crowning achievement of Peter’s efforts to implant legal relations in Russian administration was to be the creation of a code of laws. The tsar devoted twenty-five years to this ambitious and ultimately unsuccessful enterprise. From 1700 to 1725 he

8 S. F. Platonov, Lektsii po russkoi istorii (St. Petersburg 1901) 374.
9 On the central government, see Peter B. Brown, Early Modern Russian Bureaucracy: The Evolution of the Chancellery System from Ivan III to Peter the Great (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago 1978); on local government, Claes Peterson, Peter the Great’s Administrative and Judicial Reforms: Swedish Antecedents and the Process of Reception (Stockholm 1979) chpt 3.
organized three separate commissions to work on the task. When the last one met in 1719, Peter, desperate for success, simply ordered the members to translate the Swedish code, amend it to fit Russian conditions, and complete the job within a few months. Not surprisingly, this method created more difficulties than it resolved. The traditions and concepts informing Swedish law had so little in common with Russian conditions that amendment proved at least as troublesome as producing an entirely new code. Six years later when Peter died, the commission was still struggling to shape the foreign code into a usable instrument for Russian jurisprudence.

Several of Peter’s other efforts shared a similar fate. Failure was most evident in his provincial reforms. Just two years after Peter’s death, local administration returned to the seventeenth-century system of military governors exercising undifferentiated executive, judicial, and police authority. A recent quantitative evaluation has shown that the Table of Ranks worked better than previously believed in advancing commoners, but enlistment of children of the elite at birth or soon after and the action of patronage allowed the leading families to monopolize the higher ranks. In regard to the Governing Senate, which Peter had instituted as the depository of state law and highest judicial instance, even before his death the tsar complained about the persistence of traditional vices. The senators, he noted sadly, were merely “playing [with the laws] as with cards, lining up one suit to another” while in fact they “strive mightily to place mines under the fortress of justice.” Even the most merciless beatings and threats failed to uproot abuses in which the tsar’s most trusted lieutenants helped themselves or their clients to public resources. Peter moaned that even his closest associate, Aleksandr Menshikov, wallowed in lawlessness: “His mother conceived him in sin and he is ending his life in knavery; if he doesn’t straighten up, he’ll be missing his head.”

Despite setbacks, Peter achieved some important changes. If he failed to establish the substance of legal relations, he at least implanted an aspiration. Through ukases and manifestos he projected the new values of open and orderly administrative procedure, functional division of responsibility, and hierarchical subordination. In the institutions of the Senate and central collegia he embodied the pretense of rationality and legal system. With these models to look to, the Russian elite of the eighteenth century began to recognize the new value as superior to traditional ways. At the same

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10 V. N. Latkin, Zakonodatel’nye komissii v Rossii v XVIII stoletii (St. Petersburg 1887) 20–38.
12 S. M. Troitskii investigated the social background of over 5,000 bureaucrats at mid century and found that roughly one-third were of non-noble origin. Sotsial’nyi sostav i chislennost’ biurokratii Rossii v seredine XVIII v., in: Istoricheskie zapiski 89 (1972) 295–352. An argument for persistence at the top posts can be found in Brenda Meehan-Waters, Autocracy & Aristocracy: The Russian Service Elite of 1730 (New Brunswick, NJ 1982).
13 Quoted in I. I. Ditiatin, Ekaterininskia kommissiia 1767 g. “O sochinenii proekta novogo ulozheniia” (Rostov on Don 1904) 41–44.
time, predominantly Western educational institutions (also introduced by Peter) gradually deepened and fortified these values to the point that articulate members of the elite felt compelled to attack the traditional system of personal relations with the bribery and toadyism that sustained it.

Fortifying this criticism was the belief that the standards for it existed in Russian society as native Russian values. Russia was not some primitive community, wrote one critic, for it has always had courts to render justice. What seemed to be needed was better laws. The rulers and leading thinkers had the idea that good laws or consistent laws would end abuses. Peter did not complete a legal code, but his successors did not abandon the goal. Throughout the century monarchs and ministers made repeated efforts to compile a systematic code, and they regarded the absence of "fundamental laws" as a great misfortune for government and society. The most impressive effort was Catherine II's Legislative Commission of 1767. Although more aware than her predecessors of the difficulty in achieving a unified code for the empire, she was determined to do it if she could. No one seemed to grasp clearly that good laws in themselves would do little to improve justice and governmental efficiency so long as people continued to organize themselves in patronage groups and to make these groups the prime focus of their loyalty.

The critics understood that the leading institutions served the interests of personal favorites and their clients, and this situation was regarded as deplorable. A good analysis was provided by Nikita Panin at the beginning of Catherine II's reign. In speaking of one of the most powerful institutions, the general procuracy, he noted that in Empress Elizabeth's reign "in the first period of office Prince Trubetskoi was general procurator by virtue of court favor ... and consequently did not enforce the laws in good order but could and did everything and, we daresay, arbitrarily corrupted everything; in the later period he himself became the toady of favorites and minions." The favorites and their clients turned the regular administration to their own partisan purposes, Panin continued, which meant that they enriched themselves at state expense and appropriated offices and patronage to provide for one or another personal clique. "Illegally and without cause they intervened in matters concerning inheritances and the splitting up of private properties that they had put under seal; they confiscated from one and gave to the other ... The most important duties and offices were transformed into ranks and rewards for favorites and flatterers; favor and seniority became everywhere the basis for assignments; nothing was left to talent and merit. Arbitrarily and by means of court intrigue everyone was grabbing and taking possession of the section of government he expected to be of greatest convenience in defeating his rival or for combining with others against a third." In short, Panin complained, "government busi-

15 See, for example, Petr Shuvalov's comments in Latkin, Zakonodatel'nye kommissii, 82; Denis Fonvizin and Nikita Panin's in E. S. Shumigorskiy, Imperator Pavel I, zhizni i tsarstvovanie (St. Petersburg 1907), appendix 1–35.
17 Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva [SIRIO], 7 (St. Petersburg 1871) 204.
ness was determined by the influence of individuals rather than by the power of state institutions. Panin’s reference to the seizure of state offices for use by particular patronage clusters was an important observation that told something about how leaders of these groups sought to use and especially to sustain their grip on power. Daniel Orlovsky, in a recent article on the late nineteenth century, wrote that “proximity to the tsar or court was no longer enough for sustained political influence. One needed a power-base in the ministerial bureaucracy, and this implied the need for allies within one’s own institution as well as within others that had key domestic responsibilities.”

Except for the size and shape of the institutions in question, the situation was little different in the eighteenth century. Personal favorites of the ruler might be discovered and elevated spontaneously as in the cases of Aleksandr Menshikov, Ivan Dolgorukii, Ivan Shuvalov, Grigorii Orlov, Grigorii Potemkin, A. S. Vasil’chikov, and others. But unless they attached themselves to a court party with a solid institutional base and with extensions through clients to other areas of government, they remained suspended in a void and could be eliminated. Aleksandr Menshikov’s personal proximity to Empress Catherine I did not save him from disgrace and exile when his enemies succeeded in cutting away his institutional base through establishment of the Supreme Privy Council. Ivan Shuvalov in Empress Elizabeth’s reign secured a more solid position by buying into personal networks established among powerful families in the Senate.

The same was true of the Orlov brothers during the first decade of Catherine II’s reign. Seeing a challenge from established groups to their “accidental” rise, they wisely called on the services of the earlier deposed but highly experienced statesman A. P. Bestuzhev-Riumin, and they were aided in establishing this combination by the empress herself who, wanting to play the role of supreme integrationist, understood the importance of balancing one clientele against another. This meant building viable groupings that could compete effectively. Grigorii Orlov then became head of a military office (the artillery department) and his relatives and clients were installed in positions that allowed them to serve as a check on opposing patron-client clusters. In fact, as John LeDonne points out in a recent study, Catherine had to balance off the interests of three or four family clusters in high politics.

The case of Grigorii Potemkin proved to be exceptional. Instead of attaching himself to an established or resurgent clientele, this man of extraordinary talent and per-

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18 SIRIO, 7:206, 209. An excellent example of the role of powerful individuals was the independence of the War Collegium when it was under the direction of the influential favorite Count B. C. Münich. This subordinate institution received the right not to execute Senate decrees it found in conflict with imperial ukases. Its reports and promotion proposals went directly from the collegium to the empress, bypassing the Senate and the Cabinet, and it even made dispositions altering foreign policy without consulting the Foreign Affairs Collegium. V. G. Shcheglov, Gosudarstvennyi Sovet v Rossii, vol. 1 (Moscow 1892) 624–25.


sonal magnetism virtually built his own network of clients and his own institutional base. He brought along to St. Petersburg loyal friends and associates from his military service in the south and installed them in key posts. Potemkin’s early appointment by the empress to a high position in the War Collegium, it is true, aided the consolidation of his influence. Yet he quickly abandoned those duties and his role in the imperial bedchamber in order to rule over the vast territory of New Russia in the south, where he surrounded himself with his relatives and friends. The recent victories over the Turks created this unusual opportunity, but it also required an unusual person to take advantage of the situation and turn himself into a potentate in the south while maintaining the personal attachment to the empress and the clientele in the capital that made possible his continued personal domination in New Russia.

Favorites who were unable to build an institutional base and clientele network or to attach themselves to and thereby serve the interests of established networks soon fell into obscurity. Personal talent and political acuity were the keys. There was nothing automatic about the influence of favorites. To be successful over a period of time, they had not only to satisfy the emotional needs of the monarch but also to exhibit skill as a partner in a powerful or potentially powerful clientele network that could protect them from subversion by opponents.

Even while prudent monarchs understood the need to work through clientele groups, the rulers themselves were among the most vigorous opponents of patronage and bribery. They realized that the patronage hierarchies below interfered with their control of the state machine and effective articulation of their own power. Catherine II waged a major campaign against graft and personal favoritism in the first years of her reign. Looking at the Senate, the depository of law, she noted that it “often promulgate[d] laws, dispensed ranks, titles, money – in a word – nearly everything, and restricted other judicial offices in [the exercise of] their laws and prerogatives.” The arrant dependence of lower officials on the powerful men above, she noted, had caused such servility in the lower offices that they had completely forgotten the regulations by which they were to make representations against Senate ukases not in conformity with the law. “The slavishness of persons working in these [lower] offices is indescribable, and no good can be expected from them so long as this evil is not stamped out.”21 In result, Catherine remarked sadly at another point, “justice was sold to the highest bidder, and no use was made of the laws except where they could benefit the most powerful”22. The empress was describing the workings of tenacious patron-client relations.

At the time of Catherine’s accession, she promised to correct this situation by enacting statutes that would compel government “to carry on its activity within its power and proper bounds, so that in the future every state office would possess its limits and laws”23. But this intention, even if she had carried it out (which she did not), would merely have reinforced the pretense of system. Without a corresponding change in the

21 Ditiatin, Ekaterininskaia komissiia, 42.
22 Catherine II, in: Sochineniia imperatritsy Ekateriny II, ed. A. N. Pypin, 12, pt. 2 (St. Petersburg 1907) 567.
23 V. A. BiI’basov, Istoriia Ekateriny II, vol. 2 (Berlin 1900) 91.
officials’ practice of organizing themselves in informal hierarchies, the pretense of law could in the short run do as much to facilitate abuses as to diminish them. As one of Catherine’s advisers pointed out, this condition had in the reign of Empress Elizabeth allowed a mere secretary (Dmitrii Volkov) “to perform the functions of a prime minister under the pretext of operating an administrative system that did not exist”.

Criticism of favoritism and patronage grew even sharper after the 1760s when popular nongovernment journals began to appear in print. Although this criticism emanated mostly from a handful of nobles educated in the Western spirit and usually identified as “liberals”, it was not confined to the left end of the political spectrum. The ultraconservative social critic Prince M. M. Shcherbatov was likewise among the discontented, although his solution aimed at a kind of rustic utopia in which everyone knew and kept to his place. And the rulers and their supporters in the press continued at intervals to attack abuses. Hence articulate Russians, political leaders and leading publicists alike, were nearly unanimous in their disdain for the methods that they themselves had to employ daily in order to survive and achieve success. The stress here must, of course, be on articulate. In the rare instances when evidence appears on the attitudes of rank and file nobles, as in the cahiers of the Legislative Commission of 1767, they express a preference for the personal or familial nature of authority and thus reveal that, in spite of criticism from on high, patron-client relations stood at the foundation of society. But even in the case of these expressions in favor of personal authority, the assumption seemed to be that this type of authority would remove abuses.

For the officials who experienced the conflict between the new value of legality and the persistence of traditional modes of organization the tension may have been personally painful, but when viewed in the larger context of Russia’s development it was by no means a negative phenomenon. It acted as a creative force in the growth of Russian administration.

First, it served as a spur to action. The assumed existence of a legal rational framework imposed standards incompatible with the prevailing pattern of organization in patronage groups. The legally instituted standards called for promotion by merit (Table of Ranks), administrative rationality (Senate and subsidiary organs operating according to legally established procedures), and judicial due process (Reforms of 1775). In other words, the normal patterns of patronage and bribery belonged to the area of criminal behavior. Since the persistence of these informal mechanisms forced administrators charged with accomplishing practical ends to engage in patron-client relations, they were bound to suffer many of the insecurities associated with criminal behavior.

The effects were both good and bad from the point of view of government action. Insecurity provided an incentive for effective work, but it also caused officials to expend

24 From Panin’s memorandum on the state council (1762), in: SIRIO, vol. 7, 207.
26 See discussion of this issue in Wilson Augustine, Notes toward a Portrait of the Eighteenth-Century Russian Nobility, in: Canadian Slavic Studies 4, no. 3 (Fall 1970), esp. 384–86.
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time and energy in building and maintaining client networks that could protect them from subversion by legal action. These networks were useful in expediting tasks of government as well, yet to the extent that they were effective they reinforced reliance on informal rather than formal legal means and delayed the implantation of modern standards.

A second circumstance mitigated some of the effects of insecurity. In practice, prosecution was infrequent. So long as a patronage hierarchy carried out its tasks without producing disruption, the central authorities had every reason to protect it for the services it performed. Moreover, the groups themselves, especially those in the central government and at court, constituted social power. They were often broad family alliances that extended their tentacles into many areas of government and society. Personal and kinship loyalties made the groups difficult to penetrate. Even in the absence of material sanctions from, for example, a group in decline, personal allegiances were frequently strong enough to cause members to scuttle their own careers in preference to switching loyalties and bringing down on their heads the hostility of the group. These conditions made it difficult for a ruler to uncover abuses or to determine the validity of accusations brought against officials. Disrupting a patronage group usually meant accepting the word of an outside plaintiff, or of representatives of a competing network in a subordinate position, over that of the government's highest officials backed by friends and relatives in many areas of the administration and society. Action against prominent members of the group also ran the risk of weakening a mechanism which, however unsanctioned, was the only one the ruler had to carry out his commands. An attack on one member of a network could produce resistance up and down the line, from superiors who relied on his services and from demoralized subordinates who depended on his protection. It required great determination for a monarch to try and root out abuses.

When Catherine II at the outset of her reign decided to punish offending officials, she found that her only means of compelling the Senate to convict was to appear personally at its deliberations. The senators were in no mood to point the finger, because they understood how vulnerable they themselves were. The patronage hierarchies reached to the highest echelons of administration. Much to her dismay, Catherine's close supervision revealed that one of the biggest grafters was her own procurator general. Therefore, to reform meant to court disaster. Energetic rulers who set out to cleanse their administrations of graft and personal influence peddling soon discovered that insofar as they achieved success, they did so at the risk of undermining the instruments of their own power. Wise rulers learned to respect these limitations and adjust their expectations to reality. Those more daring or foolish, like Peter III and Paul I, enjoyed but brief and stormy careers cut short by assassination.

The obstacles to exposure and prosecution did not provide foolproof protection to the patronage groups and their participating officials. Occasionally, they still found themselves in serious trouble, which usually occurred when an important superior fell victim to a court intrigue or was caught by a major shift in government policy. At these times the full force of the law was brought to bear against officials who had done no more than engage in normal modes of political and social organization.

The banishment of the Dolgorukii family when it became caught in a change of regime in 1730 was described in the painful memoir of the young woman who, despite the counsel of her family, remained faithful to her betrothal to the favorite Ivan Dolgorukii even as his fate was being sealed. She had become engaged while Ivan was the favorite of the young Tsar Peter II, and she reported that she suddenly enjoyed unusual respect. "Everybody sought my favor and solicited my patronage. Just imagine, to be a girl of fifteen and so fortunate." The serving people in her household gave praises to God and proclaimed that "she will restore her family and raise her brothers to their father's estate". The death of Peter II soon after brought equally sudden changes in the other direction. "I knew enough about the customs of our country to know that when Emperors fall, all favorites follow", she confessed, but she somehow did not expect the consequences to be as sharp as they were. "Where had all the former seekers of my patronage and friends gone? They were all hiding, and even my relatives started to keep their distance; everyone abandoned me to please new favorites." Most instructive was the method used by the new favorite, Ernst-Johann Biron, to persecute the Dolgorukii. Biron "began by calling in the very people who had been our friends ... questioning them about the kind of life we lived and whether we had ever offended anyone or taken bribes ... Dissatisfied with this, he had it announced that anyone could, without danger to himself, submit a petition directly to the empress charging that we had abused somebody." This pattern of using legal mechanisms to resolve struggles between the "ins" and "outs" of the family and patronage hierarchies was repeated throughout the century.

A notorious case of a somewhat different kind involved Cabinet Minister Artemii Volynskii, who in 1739 attempted to replace the ruling clique of Baltic Germans with his own leadership and personal following. The attempt failed, and unfortunately for Volynskii and his clients, the threatened Germans, shaken by the challenge, reacted with unwonted severity and refused to limit prosecution to the usual issues of graft and patronage abuse. To these they added charges of high treason, and extended the penalties to horrible tortures and capital sentences. All those associated with Volynskii and his reform plans shared in his disgrace. More to the point were the accusations leveled against Empress Anne's favorite Ernst-Johann Biron two years later when he

32 Ibid., 45.
33 Ibid., 51.
34 Iu. V. Got'e, 'Proekt o popravlenii gosudarstvennykh del' Artemiia Petrovicha Volynskogo, in: Dela i Dni 3 (1922) 1-31.
fell from power. His judges denounced him for “always maintaining Bestuzhev in favor and bringing him into the Cabinet of Ministers with great contempt and slander toward the former ministers”\textsuperscript{35}. The client in question, A. P. Bestuzhev-Riumin, himself had to face charges of seeking out and accepting Biron’s patronage. The court’s list of accusations against Bestuzhev included the following:

\begin{enumerate}
\item While in Copenhagen [as ambassador], he had corresponded with Biron and at the time of his first return trip to St. Petersburg sought him out so that he might receive through him the Order of Alexander Nevskii and an increased salary, which he in fact received. When he was again sent to Copenhagen, Biron promoted him to privy councilor and furthermore promised to promote him to Cabinet Minister and to obtain a pardon for his father;
\item on an order from Biron he attempted to persuade the Danish court to give [Biron] the title of Illustrious Prince;
\item after Bestuzhev’s second return trip to Petersburg Biron promoted him to Cabinet Minister\textsuperscript{36}.
\end{enumerate}

For these crimes both men were deprived of their goods and sent into exile.

Similar, if in some cases less severe, fates befell leading hierarchies that were supplanted by changes in regime or major policy shifts in 1727, 1730, 1758, 1762, and 1781. Members of formerly powerful groups were hauled before a court and indicted for favoritism and patronage abuses\textsuperscript{37}. At the very least they received punishments of demotion, honorable exile, or service in some post distant from the capital.

A noteworthy feature of all these indictments and legal proceedings was that, while pretending to encourage legal standards, they may well have had the opposite impact. Contests for personal influence were the trigger for the legal actions. Since a recently victorious personal or kinship group employed the legal mechanism to remove a competitor and solidify its own position, the action could scarcely represent more than a superficial endorsement of legal system. One could argue that the effect of these actions was to reinforce the practice of patronage and favoritism in government, for the pretense of law and system was turned into an instrument for continued abuse and would not therefore have made people feel more secure in the protection of the law. They would have all the more reason to rely upon personal connections for security. Still, the maintenance of the pretense was important over the long run as a model of system that could be appealed to and learned from and that could eventually contribute to a belief in the efficacy of legal relations.

The vitality of patron-client relations in Russia can be explained by some positive aspects that have not yet been mentioned. First, patronage groups performed indispensable functions not provided by other institutions. They facilitated a degree of social mobility. This can be seen most clearly at the upper reaches of the state hierarchy. Rulers usually chose their favorites from among the middle gentry and raised these happy individuals and their families to unexpected heights of titled eminence and wealth. A list of only the most noted of each reign included Aleksandr Menshikov

\textsuperscript{35} Solov’ev, Istoria Rossii, vol. 11, 39.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 38–40.
\textsuperscript{37} R. V. Otchinnikov (ed.), Krushenie ‘poluderzhavnogo vlastelina’, in: Voprosy istorii 9 (Sept. 1970) 94–95; D. A. Korsakov, Sud’ nad Kniazem D. M. Golitsynym, in: Drevniaia i novaia Rossiia 10 (1879) 20–62; Herbert Kaplan, Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years’ War (Berkeley 1968), esp. chapter 7; on the change in 1781, in which the dispersal of the Panin hierarchy was handled with a minimum of indictments, see Griffiths, Rise and Fall, 560–69.
(son of a stable tender), Ernst-Johann Biron (minor gentry of Courland), A. G. Razu-
movskii (son of a registered Cossack), A. I. Shuvalov (son of a Petrine arriviste), and
Grigorii Potemkin (minor gentry of Smolensk province). Catherine II's favorites from
Orlov forward, including Vasil'chikov, Zavadovskii, Potemkin, Zorich, Korsakov,
Strakhov, Lanskoi, Mordvinov, Ermolov, and Zubov, were all from the poorer gentry,
and before being raised by the empress they scarcely had the means adequate to sup-
port themselves in the guards. 48

But not only these persons profited. In the train of each favorite came a large num-
ber of additional families who through friendship with the principal also increased
their fortunes and the opportunity to rise even higher by gaining entree to the persons
and places that counted the most. In view of the number of favorites rewarded by em-
presses Elizabeth and Catherine, the aggregate social and economic mobility provided
by this factor was not trivial. One historian has reckoned it as the principal contribu-
tion to capital accumulation among the leading families of the empire. 39

Furthermore, established aristocratic clans drew into their patronage networks able servitors from
the lesser nobility and from commoners. The Panin-Kurakin group, to cite one promi-
nent example, was responsible for raising a number of well-known commoners,
including diplomats I. M. Simolin and A. S. Stakhiev, as well as two leading ministers,
D. M. Troschchinskii and State Secretary M. M. Speranskii. 40 The famous radical A. N.
Radishchev got his start with the Vorontsov family. The foreign minister of late Cath-
erinian times, A. A. Bezborodko (of the Ukrainian lesser gentry), came along in the
baggage of Potemkin. This co-optation of able low-ranking men had two important ef-
fects. It infused new blood and thus kept the patronage system from rigidifying, and it
further contributed to system maintenance by reinforcing the myth that anyone could
rise if his good deeds and ability came to the attention of the sovereign.

Farther down the governmental and social hierarchy political patronage provided a
livelihood and a measure of dignity for retired servicemen. Those without a pension or
sufficient estate to live decently could acquire one by becoming a provincial voevoda
(military governor). It was important to find the right patron and to be able to bribe
key officials of the Heraldry (the government appointments office). “There were many
applicants and few vacancies, but an appointment was well worth waiting for. It guar-
anteed a reasonable income of 600 rubles a year and opened possibilities to supple-
ment it with the many favors which were the perquisites of an official position. The
voevoda was lodged in government quarters, and if there were none in the town, he
was allowed three rooms in a private home.” 41

38 A. Romanovich-Slavatinskii, Dvorianstvo v Rossii ot nachala XVIII veka do otmena krepost-
nogo prava (St. Petersburg 1870) 161.
39 Ia. L. Barskov, Pis'ma imp. Ekateriny II k gr. P. V. Zavadovskomu, in: Russkii istoricheskii
zhurnal 5 (1918) 240–41.
40 Hassell, Vicissitudes, 114–15.
41 LeDonne, Ruling Russia, 46.
bility, men who on retirement from military service had few options and in the worst cases would even have had to go to a monastery for support. As clients of local officials, however, they could receive a regular salary as officers in the provincial police and live in dignity. The most significant factor in the vitality of patronage was undoubtedly the continuing insecurity of the elite. This insecurity had existed in Muscovite times when the fury of an Ivan IV or the violence of the mob could bring ruin. But a new element was added by Peter I's assertion of legal order and the demands he imposed at the same time for modernizing the country. This produced a creative tension that was both a cause and an effect of the dynamic development of the Russian state, and it could have acted only after the pretense of legality had been established. With no method of resolving this tension, short of the leadership's abandonment of its commitment to remold society in a modern image, patronage groups served as a needed cushion between the superhuman goals the leadership defined for the country and the all-too-human materials set in motion to achieve them. Patronage networks functioned as a protection for the basic values of personal security, career, and status, which were not protected by constitutional guarantees and were continuously threatened by competition from other power seekers and by the violence of the modernizing enterprise on which the state was embarked. These informal groups interfered with that enterprise by placing entrenched personal networks in the path to its fulfillment, and yet they also served as the principal means of articulating and executing the ruler's goals. Destroying them would only have increased insecurities and fragmented society further, possibly paralyzing the ruler's ability to act at all.

Hence, the persistence of the mediating networks of patronage, even while they constituted an embarrassing anachronism to some social critics and a hindrance to the rulers, nevertheless also served important interests of everyone. Until some new institution emerged that could facilitate government action while providing a reasonable measure of personal security the increasing demands on the participants in the modernizing enterprise would tend to reinforce rather than remove the influence of patronage groups.

Varieties of Patron-Client Links: A Style Sheet

The values and principles underlying the patronage bond come to light clearly in a document of the age, the first Russian letter-writer. This handbook provides an excellent view of the rituals and unspoken assumptions governing formal social relations among the educated populace of imperial Russia.

Letter-writers appeared in large numbers in eighteenth-century Europe. For nearly two hundred years they had been coming out in England, France, and Germany in increasing quantity and variety. Their history may be traced back to the Latin formula-

\[42\] LeDonne, Ruling Russia, 101.
ries and etiquette books of the Italian Renaissance. In each country the appearance of these guidebooks seems to have been associated with two phenomena: the growth of a general postal system and a period of expansion and prosperity giving rise to upward social mobility. The letter-writer—like other handbooks of the time on science, art, and history—was designed as a shortcut to learning and polish for those who had achieved prosperity or new position without a commensurate level of culture. The first Russian letter-writer followed this pattern. Although appearing much later than its European counterparts, it came at just the time one would expect, in the reign of Catherine II when the civil administration expanded to three times its previous size. Many new officials from the lower nobility and commonality were for the first time taking positions in the state service and must have found a concise guide to proper style very useful.

The value of the letter-writer for the historian lies in its lack of concern for the quality of social relations. As a practical guide, the manual had no interest in criticizing social relations. It accepted them as given. The editor sought only the improvement and refinement of the prevailing style. For this reason, the letter-writer is more useful than authentic correspondence in illuminating the mores of the era. Being designed as models, the letters in the handbook had to reflect typical generalized patterns. As Charles Haskins has noted in reference to form letters from an earlier period, "the hundreds of student letters which have reached us in the manuscripts of the Middle Ages have come down through the medium of collections of forms or complete letter-writers, shorn of most of their individuality but for that very reason reflecting the more faithfully the fundamental and universal phases of university life." The same could be said of the Russian letter-writer's faithfulness in representing the quality of formal social relations among the eighteenth-century Russian servicemen.

The Russian manual, produced in a compact duodecimo format, first appeared in 1788 as one of the earliest publications of the later wealthy and renowned Glazunov brothers publishing firm. The Glazunovs specialized in the printing of belletristic and historical works aimed at the educated elite. The firm made a wise choice in selecting the style manual as one of its first efforts. Judging from its publication history, the work enjoyed great popularity. A second edition came out within a year of the first, and a third, slightly expanded edition followed in 1793.

The large body of literature available on letter-writers has remained entirely in the province of literary scholars tracing the origins of the epistolary novel. Some examples are: Katherine Hornbeck, The Complete Letter Writer in English, 1568–1800, in: Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, 15, nos. 3–4 1934; François Jost, Essais de literature comparée (Fribourg and Urbana 1968), esp. 11819; Reinhard Nickisch, Die Stilprinzipien in den Deutschen Briefstellern des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts (Göttingen 1969).


Svodnyi katalog russkoi knigi grazhdanskoj pechatii XVIII veka 1725–1800, vol. 2 (Moscow 1964) 417. Unfortunately, the pressrun is not indicated on any of the editions.
One important difference between the Russian letter-writer and the European model after which it was patterned revealed the different shape of the two societies. European letter-writers were usually directed at the rising bourgeoisie. This early Russian manual, while including several items of interest to merchants, allotted much more space to matters concerning noble servicemen. In Russia, where the bourgeoisie was little developed, the servicemen provided the natural market for the manual. Many of them in the late eighteenth century still had a relatively low level of culture and were often only semiliterate. They could well use a manual that would help their correspondence make the right impression on a superior, and it was for these servicemen that the book was designed. Of the 84 examples of written style presented in the book, less than a third (27) were devoted to technical questions, and these would have interested nobles as well as merchants. Among the examples were letters of credit and exchange, payment orders, travel permits, and internal passports, also specimens of affidavits, leases, a will, and a number of contracts relating principally to the transfer of serfs. The content of most of these form letters reveals that they directly concerned the interest of nobles, since they refer to serfs and populated estates, the ownership of which was the exclusive privilege of the nobility.

The largest part of the letter-writer, the remaining two-thirds, was taken up with communications passing among the elite of serving nobles. Significantly, 60 percent of these examples (34 of 57) dealt directly with the attainment, maintenance, and loss of patronage connections.

Preceding these samples of written style were two introductory sections. The first presented comments on various types of letter-writing: business letters, letters of recommendation, of advice, of thanks, and others. The quality of advice can be judged from this comment on letters of courtesy: “Letters containing mere politeness are more difficult than other types, since for the most part they have nothing of substance to convey. It requires some imagination to fill them up. The usual expressions are so commonly known that no one dares to use them any longer. However, propriety demands that we write something. Thus, it is necessary to apply our wits.” However trivial the content of these letters, the editor was in no doubt about their importance; he devoted the longest section of his introduction to this type of letter. And with good reason. These empty communications played a vital ritualistic role in the prevailing system of social relations; they maintained interactions among the members of patronage groups and strengthened cohesion and morale within these elemental building blocks of society.

The second introductory section provided a brief list of proper titles to be employed in salutations and complimentary closings of letters to persons of various ranks in the state service. The reader then arrived at the substance of the manual, the samples of proper written style for typical communications of the day.

A considerable range and variety of patron-client letters were presented. Among the 34 samples devoted exclusively to these matters, the largest number belonged to three

68 Pis'movnik soderzhashchii raznye pis'ma, prosheniia, zapiski po delu... (St. Petersburg 1789) 12–13.
categories: requests for jobs and job transfers (7 letters), requests for outright grants in aid (5 letters), and requests for intervention and protection in court cases (5 letters). Several others represented appeals for patronage protection without specifying the precise nature of the favor required. But more important than any particular request was the action of the patron-client link, which bore common characteristics in all the letters.

In patronage groups, powerful persons bestowed favors or advanced requests from a subordinate client to be promoted to a higher rung on the patronage ladder. In this way the superior maintained the respect and gratitude of the subordinate so vital to the continuation of services required by the superior. The subordinate, who through bribery or particular services manipulated his patron, came to expect these benefits. This expectation derived from the subordinate’s belief in his patron’s power and personal influence; the subordinate relied explicitly on the assumed and somewhat mysterious power of his protector. While this understanding was seldom expressed openly, it ran through nearly all the style manual’s letters in subtle yet unmistakable terms.

A modest expression of the dependency relationship may be observed in this first letter, in which a patron requests the placing of a client in a new position.

Anyone else would consider my boldness inexcusable; but Your Excellency will of course not count me guilty in consideration of the fact that, despite [my boldness], I have reserved my most dutiful esteem for the merits and virtues of your person. In such hope I venture to request most humbly of Your Excellency to take the bearer of this [letter] Major I. under your protection and place him in the vacancy now opening at N. Knowing your discernment in evaluating persons, gracious lord, I can firmly assure you of his abilities and of his complete gratitude to you as his true benefactor; wherefore with great confidence in entrusting him to your favor and with deepest respect I remain always …

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More often, in making a request, a client recorded some specific instance of his worthy services. Or at the very least there was a clear statement of the dependency relationship, as with the following introduction in a request for protection in a court case. The petitioner began: “If you respect my humble request as much as I have respected your orders, then I may rely fully on receiving your help in a court action I am now engaged in with a noble living in my area.”

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Occasionally a letter could be quite direct without ritual bows to services previously performed. This was the case in the following letter, which shows a patron appealing to a third party for action on his client’s behalf. The example is revealing also for its attitude toward legal justice (pravosudie); it was something employed to victimize people, and a patron was therefore duty-bound to protect his clients from its depredations. The letter makes clear that it was not only among court parties that legal action was used in this way.

I am altogether certain that you have a humanitarian spirit and a charitable heart, which sympathizes with human need, gives aid to the unfortunate and protects and frees them from misfortune. For this reason I present you with an instance in which you might easily display this virtue and demonstrate it by action. It is well known to you that a certain P. K. is leading a miserable existence in the city of N. I won’t explain his case; you yourself have a clear idea of it. It only re-

49 Pis’movnik, 83–85.
50 Ibid., 164–65.
mains for me to remind you of his distress which has long since deserved to be an object of your charity. I ask sincerely that you would rescue this man, whom a certain person has made a sacrifice to legal justice and severity, from the ominous situation now threatening him.

More often the examples given in the letter-writer showed a subordinate appealing to a superior, and these letters bore two characteristics. They were exceedingly deferential and contained more or less subtle reminders of the superior's obligations.

Among the most candid were petitions from widows and dependents of former servicemen. Since the deceased subordinate could manipulate no longer, the desperate petitioners had to spell out the superior's obligations in detail in order to obtain his essential support. The following sample and two other poignant letters from widows included in the manual indicate that even after Catherine II's provincial government reform of 1775, which established local organs for the protection of widows and orphans, dependents continued to rely on the favor of powerful persons in order to receive survivor benefits. These appeals would usually go to the dead man's former chief, as in this letter to a brigadier.

In my present extremity, I make bold to approach you as my sole protector. Extend a helping hand to an unfortunate widow deprived of subsistence by her husband's death, [a man] who sacrificed his life for the fatherland in pursuit of his duty and your orders. Take pity, kind sir, on my distress, remembering my husband's devotion to you; as he lay dying he pronounced your name as his true benefactor. And if in thinking of his survivors he went to the grave with this hope in you, would you leave his poor widow and children to perish? I enclose my petition to His Excellency Count N. Be my protector. Testify to my husband's service and with your characteristic firmness in defending truth and acting for the unfortunate, present my husband's debts. Kind sir, his service and death in the war ... your protection, my misfortune, my three children, are they not sufficient to obtain for me some charity, with which I might provide my unhappy family sustenance, and without which in all honesty I must perish.

Another letter represented the appeal of a subordinate who had lost his patron's favor and was desperately trying to regain it. As in the case of the widow, this model letter conveys the painful insecurity of the Russian serviceman. Even with all the usual benefits granted on retirement, the less exalted servicemen seem to have had difficulty holding body and soul together without additional protection and benefaction of a powerful patron.

Most Excellent Count ... Upon entering my position in 1759, I had as my sole object the advancement of the work and I eagerly tried to perform my duties with precision and to gain your favor. For 20 years I enjoyed it before all my fellows, and this was my sole priceless reward. Being fair in all matters, Your Excellency will grant me justice in recognizing the zeal with which I was always attached to your person and my perfect gratitude for your graciousness toward me, for I never dared trouble you by asking any special reward for myself even when you may have encouraged me by lavish praise.

Having relied solely on your favor, my family and I hoped to be honored by your protection forever. But to my misfortune I was suddenly deprived of it when Your Excellency decided to entrust my post to another. Although ... released with all the benefits that could be expected, I remain anxious and plagued with doubts about whether I had given you cause to be displeased.

51 Ibid., 71-73.
52 V. Grigor'ev, Reforma mestnogo upravleniia pri Ekaterine II (St. Petersburg 1910) 271-75, 283-87.
53 Pis'movnik, 68-70.
with me. For this reason I most humbly beg Your Excellency to return to me, a decrepit of man, your eminent patronage; without it, Most Excellent Count, shall I, burdened by a numerous family, continue to suffer want from which only you can rescue me.

Instead of the considerable rewards that your generous intercession has brought to others, to me it would be a priceless treasure if you but restored your eminent favor, whose beneficent result would reinforce my strength exhausted by the burdens of age and bless me and my poor family; accepting it we shall praise you as our benefactor.  

This letter did not stand alone in the manual as evidence of the impoverishment of state servicemen. A large number of the model letters involved cases of threatened destitution. The appearance of these letters reflected a crisis for the lesser servicemen, who in the late eighteenth century were suffering from the ravages of inflation and the costs of meeting the social demand to maintain a Westernized lifestyle.

The manual also included letters from people in trouble with the authorities. One striking example concerns a retired staff officer who was arrested while on a visit away from home. He was appealing to a titled superior: “I served honorably all my life, possessing the rank of staff officer, and now owing to the petition of the provincial registrar N., based neither on law nor decency ... I have been held under arrest for nearly a half year, and the first month I was treated as severely as if I were a common criminal.” During this time the local authorities made no effort to bring the case to trial. The imprisoned man failed to obtain even a temporary release, despite the offer of two officers to stand surety for him. The registrar, in cooperation with the provincial chancery, refused to settle the case until the prisoner paid what the registrar demanded.

One might wonder at the inclusion of this letter in a style manual, but a closer look at provincial government in eighteenth-century Russia would dispel doubts about its usefulness. The arbitrariness of local officials was notorious. And little wonder. In the absence of a systematic code or a belief in the efficacy of legal norms and with central government unable to exercise close control over its agents, the power that those agents necessarily possessed could be employed for their own personal ends. Consequently, innocent citizens often found themselves at the mercy of avaricious local authorities or any powerful person who could buy the authorities’ cooperation. Faced with this situation, a Russian appealed not to a legal system that did not operate, but as

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54 Ibid., 63–67.
55 Among such letters were: two letters requesting job transfer or release from service due to debts incurred from the high cost of living in St. Petersburg (53–57, 57–60); request to patron to help pay large personal debt (74–78); petitioner who served in military and civil bureaucracies has lost villages due to debt (103–7); additional examples (115–19, 153–55, 162–64, 167–68, 168–70, 186–88). On the nobility’s economic position, see Arcadius Kahan, The Costs of ‘Westernization’ in Russia: The Gentry and the Economy in the Eighteenth Century, in: Slavic Review 25, no. 1 (March 1966) 40–66.
56 Pis’movnik, 78–83.
57 In fact, European letter-writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently included a model letter to a friend in prison. The letter usually conveyed condolences and bore an assumption of the imprisoned person’s guilt. For an English letter of this type, see Hornbeak, The Complete Letter Writer, 88. The modification that took place in the Russian example is revealing. The letter was from an imprisoned man and carried a presumption of innocence.
The local dynamics are revealed in the actual case of a soldier by the name of Alekseev who was assaulted by a certain Major Mordvinov in Novgorod province. Alekseev obtained a judgment against his attacker for 50 rubles in damages. Instead of receiving payment, he got a surprise visit from the angry major and several of his fellow landlords, who treated the unfortunate Alekseev to a merciless thrashing for the audacity of filing a complaint against their friend. Alekseev then appealed to the Senate in St. Petersburg, which ordered the Novgorod chancery to levy a second fine on Mordvinov and 10 rubles in damages on all participants in the beating. The Senate further directed its Novgorod office to report promptly on its action. Weeks went by with no report. The Senate issued another order. Finally it became apparent that the Novgorod chancery was sabotaging the Senate’s decision. When nearly a year passed since the first judgment against Mordvinov, Senate officials realized that the provincial authorities in Novgorod were beholden more to criminal elements among the local nobility than to their own superiors in St. Petersburg. As a last resort the Senate paid Alekseev directly for the damages and withheld that amount from the salaries of the Novgorod officials. Had Mordvinov enjoyed connections at court or in the Senate, the brave Alekseev could surely have expected more grief for his effort to win legal redress. Alekseev’s case, however, demonstrated the limits of the action of a purely local patron-client network.

The letter-writer contained examples of more fortunate occasions. In a society where patronage made careers while the bureaucratic principle of advancement by merit, however firmly expressed in law, remained a pious counsel of perfection, a young man had to know how to make the proper contacts. A letter-writer was therefore scarcely complete without examples of introductory letters to potential patrons. The manual recommended the following approach:

Dear Sir, The respect and devotion I feel toward worthy persons moves me to write you, even though I do not have the honor of knowing you personally. Your good inclinations and sincere feelings have made your name known to all, and this fact compels me to seek a correspondence with you ... Do not refuse this wish. Do not give as a reason my lack of acquaintance with you and be assured that I am moved to it for no other reason than respect and love of virtue and merit; giving you full justice in this, I desire to possess sincere friendship and acquaintance.

The manual then offers a proper reply to this request.

Dear Sir, You anticipate me in what I have for long sincerely wished, having known of you by reputation from my truest friends. Your proposal gives me the fullest satisfaction and for this reason I all the more gladly promise you my friendship, which you may be assured I shall endeavor to preserve eternally by showing you my sincerity, kindness and sincere benevolence, with which being now filled, I have the honor to be ...

An exchange of this nature created a patronage alliance beneficial to both persons. The first writer found a new patron, and the second was pleased to take on obligations to someone he expected to be useful as a client. It was doubtless far more common to

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59 Pis’movnik, 97–100.
make such connections through informal face-to-face contacts. In this regard the Freemasonic lodges, which grew up rapidly in the 1770s and 1780s, played an important role. The model letters document the initiatory ritual that cannot be captured in its most typical form.

These examples from the first Russian style manual show Russian social relations in an instructive phase. The manual reveals the transferral of habits and associations characteristic of the face-to-face informal relations of previous eras to a society in which written communication had become increasingly important. The letters capture not only the undiminished vigor of the patronage system but, more interesting, the ritualistic forms of various types of patronage relations. The publication of the letter-writer testifies to a growing literacy among the elite, which is usually correlated with a greater involvement in and reliance on legal relations, but the content of the model letters makes it clear that the earlier style had not yet been altered in the direction of legal relations. Despite legal proscriptions and the moral sanction of enlightened social critics, patronage remained the foundation of relations among the Russian servicemen. Until Russian society could provide more than a pretense of legality to protect the values of property, status, and personal security, the patronage system would continue to fulfill this essential function.

60 See, for example, Ivan Elagin's explanation of why he first joined the Masons. Zapiska I. P. Elagina: novye materialy dla istorii masonstva, in: Russkii Arkhiv 2, no. 1 (1864) 93–110.