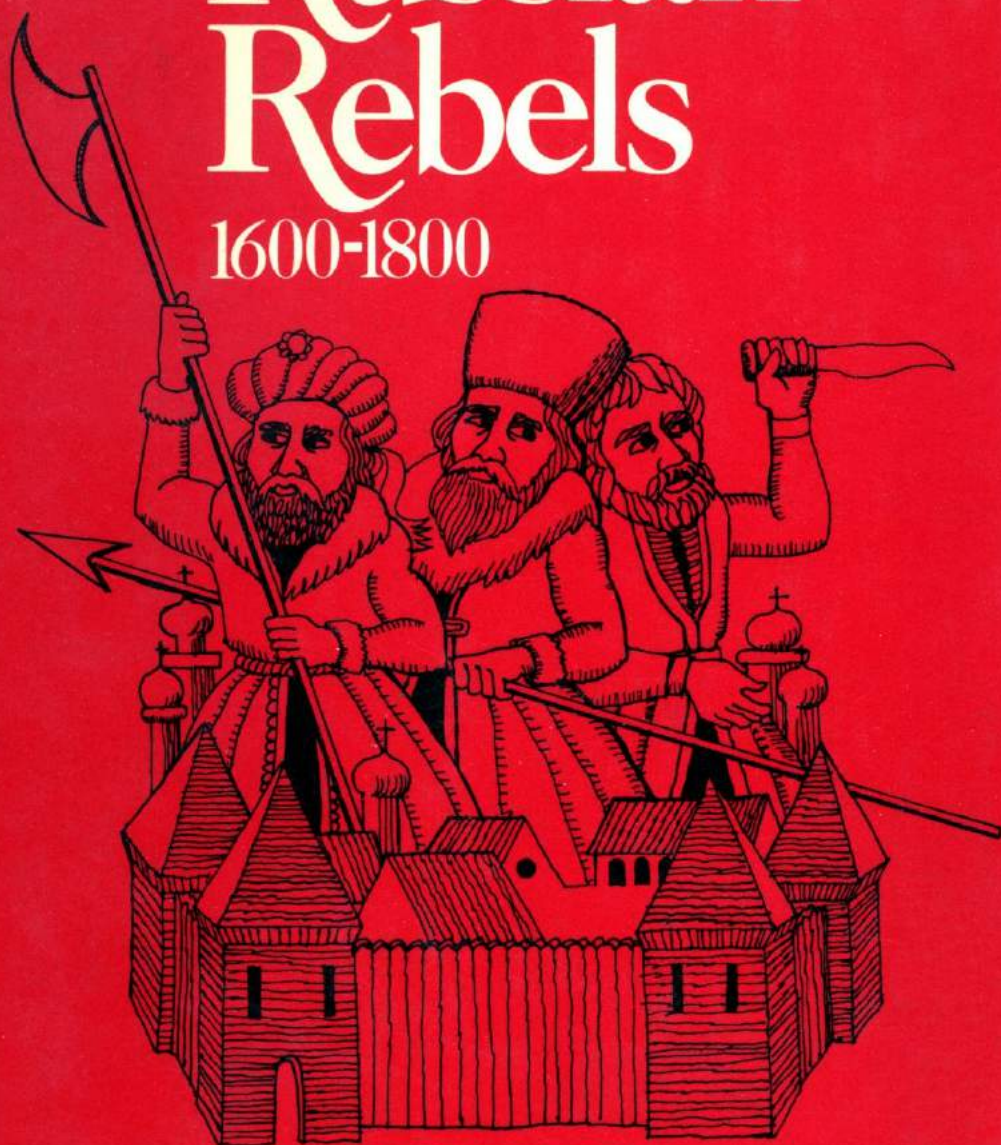


Russian Rebels

1600-1800



Paul Avrich

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Russian Rebels 1600-1800

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"Russian revolts, senseless and merciless." Such was Pushkin's description of the Russian peasant rebellions. But there was also much romance and legend accrued to the deeds of the charismatic figures who led the revolts: Ivan Bolotnikov (1606–1607), the iron fist of the pretender czar Dimitri; Stenka Razin (1670–1671), who lost the capture of Moscow by delay to collect more booty and glory; Kondrati Bulavin (1707–1708), an illiterate Cossack whose efforts on behalf of his fellow tribesmen were rewarded by his being beheaded and cast into the Don; and, finally, Emelian

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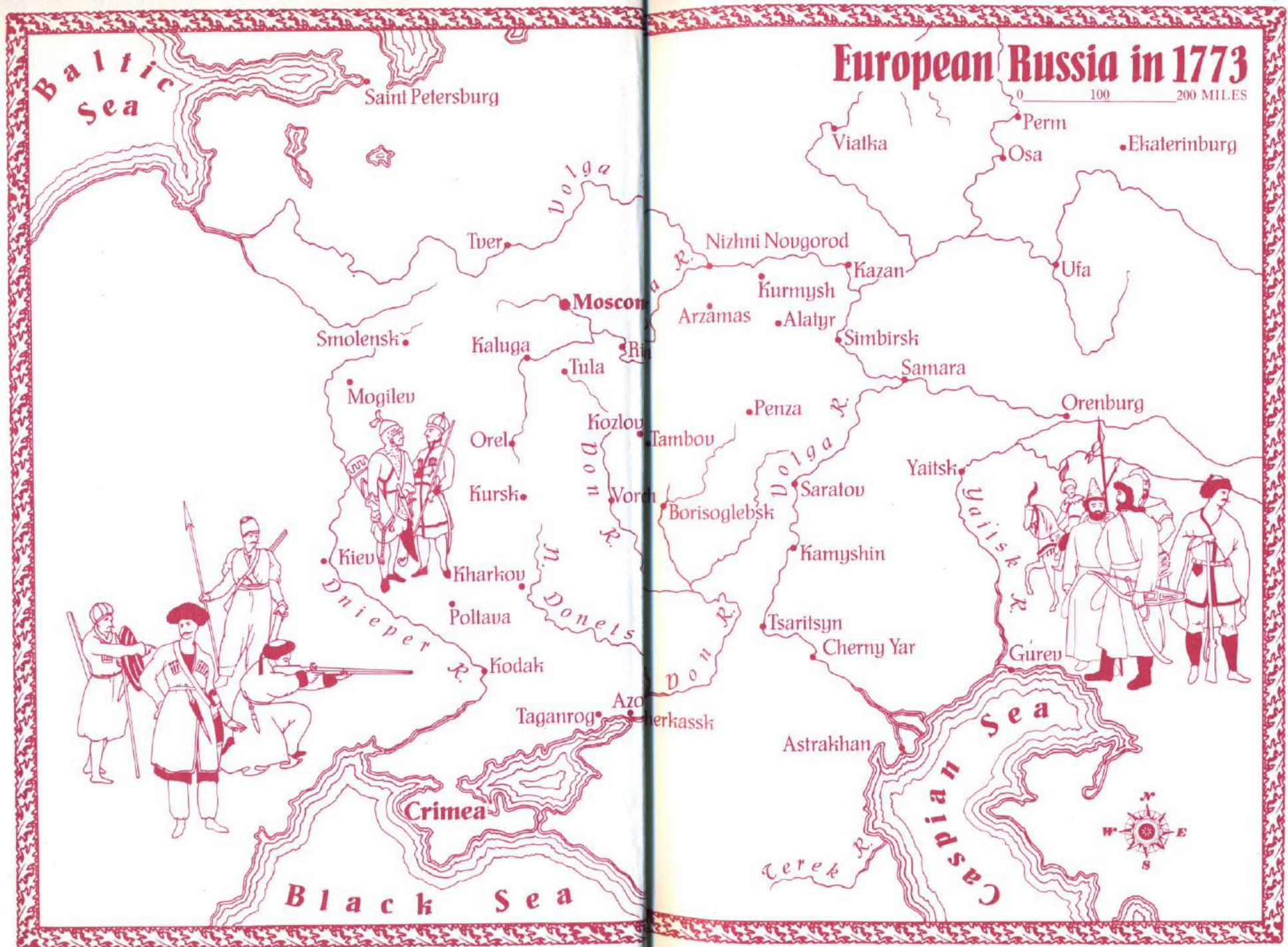
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Russian Rebels, 1600-1800

Russian Rebels

1600–1800

PAUL AVRICH

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FOR *Ina, Jane, and Karen*

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P. H. A.

New York
January 1972

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Introduction

NOTE: In transliterating Russian words and proper names, I have followed the Library of Congress system in the footnotes and bibliography but have modified this in the text for the sake of readability. Similarly, I have modernized the spelling of quotations from early English sources, and have adopted the common short forms of the names of Cossack towns: for example, Yaitsk for Yaitskii Gorodok and Panshin for Panshinskii Gorodok, or Panshinskaia Stanitsa.

"RUSSIAN REVOLTS, senseless and merciless." Such was Pushkin's description of the four great rebellions, led by Bolotnikov, Razin, Bulavin, and Pugachev, which shook the Russian state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whirlwinds of death and destruction, they originated in the southern borderlands and swept across the open steppe into the Russian heartland, sending a thrill of terror through the landlords and officials in Moscow. Each time the violence spread with appalling swiftness, as tens of thousands of Russian peasants and townsfolk, joined by native tribesmen from the Volga and the Urals, rallied to the rebel standard, only to be crushed by government troops as they approached the centers of state power.

The four revolts, spread out over two centuries, were extremely complicated episodes with many disparate features that cut across social and political lines. They combined Cossack insurrections with urban risings, peasant jacqueries, anticolonial resistance, religious and sectional conflict, and political intrigue. Yet they all had much in common. In each case it was a Cossack from the Don who took the lead. In each case the line between banditry and rebellion was exceedingly thin. In each case the rising was directed not against the tsar but against the nobility and bureaucrats and the innovating state which they administered. Each originated in the southern frontier. Each occurred during or soon after a major war, when the burden of taxes and recruitment was heaviest and social dislocation most severe. Each was marked by savage violence and immense human suffering. In each, moreover, religious and social myths played a key part in inciting the rebellion. The lower classes were hungry for a messiah, and the ground swell of popular support that arose about the rebel leaders owed much to the belief that the promised savior had arrived to punish the wicked and purge the land of sin and suffering. All the leaders appreciated the power of propaganda, and

they spread their "seditious letters" as far and wide as circumstances allowed. But the revolts were diffuse, elemental, and destructive. They lacked a coherent program and a coherent organization and, faced with regular military formations, were suppressed with great bloodshed. The leaders, in every case, were victims of betrayal. And similar legends grew up around them after their death.

Given the immense scope of the four rebellions and their jarring impact on Muscovite society, it is not surprising that they should have inspired an extensive body of literature, in Russia if not in the West. No less a writer than Pushkin thought Stenka Razin "the one poetic figure in Russian history" and collected poem cycles dealing with his exploits. Pushkin became interested in Pugachev as well, so much so that he made him the subject of a famous novel (*The Captain's Daughter*) and journeyed to the Urals to gather material for a history of his rebellion. In 1834, when Pushkin's history was finished, Tsar Nicholas I personally acted as censor and ordered the title changed from *A History of Pugachev* to *A History of the Pugachev Rising* on grounds that "a criminal like Pugachev can have no history,"¹ but the work, in somewhat truncated form, was allowed to appear in print, and it became the starting point for all subsequent explorations of the subject.

Since Pushkin's time there has been a steady stream of literature on the four risings. Yet there are still important areas about which little is known, so that the historian who undertakes to investigate them today is faced with a difficult task. Even the most fundamental questions, such as the motives and social composition of the rebels, remain in dispute. The label "peasant wars," appropriated from Friedrich Engels' study of the great jacquerie in sixteenth-century Germany, did not come into vogue until after the Bolshevik Revolution. Before then, scholars were sharply divided over which social group constituted the driving force of the rebellions. A number of nineteenth-century historians, including Sergei Soloviev, assigned a dominant place to the Cossack legions of the southern frontier who, deprived of their traditional areas of plunder when the Turks sealed off the Black Sea, shifted the direction of their predatory attacks to the east and north, with Moscow as the ultimate target. The peasants, in Soloviev's

estimation, played a significant but secondary role. For Soloviev, indeed, these were not "revolts" at all, but "raids" or "mutinies" launched by marauding freebooters in search of new territories for pillage and adventure.

Like Soloviev, Nikolai Kostomarov emphasized the role of the Cossacks in his history of Razin's rebellion, which, for all its romanticism, remains the most readable and imaginative treatment of the subject. But where Soloviev's sympathies clearly lay with the government and with the victims of rebel fury, Kostomarov sided with the Cossacks, who, it seemed to him, were far less interested in booty than in staving off Muscovite encroachments upon their cherished "liberties." The son of a serf-girl from the Ukraine who became a professor at Kiev University (rather than Moscow where Soloviev taught), Kostomarov was an ardent champion of Ukrainian autonomy and a member of the "federalist" school of historians, for whom Soloviev's exaltation of the centralized Russian state was anathema.²

Another prominent member of the federalist school whose background may have disposed him to favor the rebels was A. P. Shchapov, a native of Siberia and a professor in the Volga city of Kazan, the heart of an ethnically diversified region that saw some of the worst rioting in the days of Razin and Pugachev. Just as Kostomarov viewed Razin's uprising as a chapter in the age-old struggle in Russia between the decentralist and centralist traditions, Shchapov saw the *Pugachevshchina* as a conflict between the "antistatist, democratic, regional spirit of the masses," on the one side, and the ever-expanding power of the central government, on the other.³ On the question of who revolted, however, Shchapov parted company with his fellow federalists and joined a group of eminent scholars—Platonov and Kliuchevsky among them—whose interpretation of the risings was tinged with populist sympathies. For these historians the outbreaks of Bolotnikov, Razin, Bulavin, and Pugachev were not mere Cossack mutinies but broad and shapeless revolts of all the have-nots in Russia, embracing Cossacks and impoverished noblemen as well as primitive peasants, brigands, vagabonds, and the flotsam thrown up from the lower depths of the towns, all of them pitted against the landlords and officials who thrived on their misery and enslavement. "Bolotnikov," as Kliuchevsky put it in his tantalizingly

brief account of the first great rebellion, "summoned to his standard all who desired to attain freedom, distinction, and wealth. For such folk the Pretender was the real tsar, although in the eyes of the more respectable citizens he was only the embodiment of lawlessness and disorder."⁴

Broadly speaking, then, Russian historians before 1917 treated the mass revolts either as Cossack outbursts which happened to touch off sporadic and uncoordinated peasant disturbances, or as all-encompassing, elemental risings of the downtrodden and dispossessed—"social discord between the depths and heights of society," as one writer expressed it in 1906, when Russia was undergoing an upheaval of even greater proportions.⁵ Soviet scholars, however, have rejected both interpretations as "pseudo-scientific." Since 1917, as a leading Soviet authority on Pugachev has observed, "the young Soviet historical science has waged a relentless struggle with the landlord and bourgeois historical science. Soviet historians have deeply studied the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and have striven to build their research on the foundations of historical materialism."⁶

The first fruit of these efforts was the new label "peasant wars," derived, as we have noted, from Engels' famous work on sixteenth-century Germany. For Soviet specialists Russian history was more or less a recapitulation of what had already taken place in central and western Europe a century or two earlier. Accordingly, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Russia, like Germany before it, was passing through the feudal epoch of history, and the risings of Bolotnikov and his successors, far from being mere "adventures of brigands," as Soloviev and Kostomarov portrayed them, were class struggles of the peasants to throw off the "yoke of feudalism."

Though the doctrinaire approach of these Soviet scholars leaves something to be desired (terms like "merchant capital" and "feudal mode of production" are freely applied to historical settings in which their relevance is dubious), their mastery of primary sources is matched only by the very greatest of their nineteenth-century forebears, and they provide a wealth of information without which it would be impossible to analyze the social composition of the rebellions. Who then were the insurgents? First place, in initiative if not in numbers, must be assigned

to the Cossacks, who in every case provided leadership, organization, and a military ability which the other rebels lacked. Skilled horsemen and sailors, masters of sword and rifle, they combined an indomitable energy with a resourcefulness and love of adventure that was rare among the inhabitants to the north. Moreover, less dependent on the seasons which governed the rhythms of peasant life, they could plunge into action when the villagers were busy with planting, harvesting, or marketing their crops. And if many of the Cossack insurgents were themselves runaway serfs, Razin, Bulavin, and Pugachev all came from established families of several generations' residence, as did most of their lieutenants.

The Cossacks provided not only military leadership but a spirit of equality and justice and a model of independence, of a free and untrammelled life, that posed a serious challenge to the centralizing autocracy. But as they swept north their preponderance dwindled as a mass of new adherents streamed to their flag. Serfs, tribesmen, and urban poor "went Cossack" by the thousands—but Cossack in name only, with self-styled *atamans* to lead them. Of these recruits, of course, the peasants were the most numerous. Razin's revolt, in fact, was the largest jacquerie in Europe in the seventeenth century, just as Pugachev's was the largest in the eighteenth before the French Revolution, so that the label "peasant wars," however imprecise, does in fact convey something of the nature of the risings. More than that, many of the other participants—the lesser Cossacks, the lower clergy, the traders and craftsmen of the towns, the Volga boatmen and Urals foundry workers—were themselves essentially peasants, only recently uprooted from the soil, who retained their rural habits and grew much of their own food. Moreover, the majority of tribal adherents—the Mordva, Mari, and Chuvash, if not the Bashkirs—were also agriculturalists, in contrast to the nomadic Tatars and Kalmyks who often opposed them. On the other hand, the differences among the insurgents, religious, national, and social, must not be overlooked. Nor must the fact that in two of the revolts the peasant component was small: in Bolotnikov's only the Komaritskaya peasants were involved in large numbers, and in Bulavin's the jacquerie encompassed only the districts of Kozlov and Tambov, which were adjacent to Cossack territory. More

important, in none of the risings did the peasants themselves take the initiative. The spark was provided, rather, by rebellious Cossacks or townsmen or by a pretender or other "outside agitator" who promised liberation.

But to call the risings either Cossack mutinies or peasant jacqueries, to the exclusion of other important elements, would be misleading. A contemporary Soviet scholar is on the right track when he notes in all the rebellions a "confusion of the interests of various classes."⁷ The point is well illustrated by Stenka Razin's ecumenical battle cry, "For God and the Prophet, for the Sovereign and the Cossack Host!" The four revolts, as this slogan suggests, were phenomena of such bewildering complexity that no single formula can apply with any precision. The populist historians who saw the risings as amorphous struggles between the have-nots and the haves perhaps came closest to the true picture. One is confronted by a jumble of economic, political, social, religious, cultural, and sectional conflicts, compounded by simultaneous foreign wars and by an endless series of adventurers and intriguers lurking in the background. Cossacks of the steppe fought against the central government, poor Cossacks fought rich Cossacks, rising gentry clashed with declining boyar aristocracy, national minorities attacked Russian colonizers, Old Believers resisted the new faith, serfs rose against landlords, village went against town, periphery against center. Symbolic of the confusion was the bizarre spectacle of the runaway slave Bolotnikov fighting side by side with his former master, a prince and boyar, against the Muscovite government.

The aim of this book is to unravel the tangled story of the four revolts, to examine their nature, course, and outcome, and to analyze their ultimate historical significance. Who were the rebels? What were their motives, social origins, and modes of behavior? What did they want and what did they achieve? Such are the questions this work will try to answer. Comparisons between the revolts will be made throughout the text, and especially in the concluding section of each chapter, while a final chapter will evaluate the overall significance of the revolts and their impact on the subsequent history of Russia. In particular, an effort will be made to determine the extent to which they foreshadowed the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, which so profoundly affected the course of contemporary history.

This volume, however, is a general history of a very complex phenomenon. It makes no claim to be definitive. On the contrary, there is much work for future scholars to do—indeed each of the four revolts, to say nothing of the sporadic urban risings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, deserves an independent study of its own, and it is hoped that this book will stimulate further research into the subject. For Western scholarship of early modern Russia, particularly of its social history, is still in a rudimentary stage. And those who have examined the Russian revolutionary tradition have tended to focus upon the political and intellectual movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on the revolutionary groups and parties, to the neglect of the peasantry and urban poor, one anonymous generation after another, "plundered, profaned, and disinherited," in Edwin Markham's phrase, who grew up, suffered, and died, then sank into oblivion, forgotten by posterity.

There are a number of reasons for this neglect. For one thing, peasants and artisans, "the poorest and most numerous class," as Saint-Simon described them, have left few records behind for scholars to examine. Even when literate, which was rare, they kept no diaries but have remained nameless, undocumented, and obscure, so that their aims and attitudes must be gleaned from sketchy government reports and other, often biased, fragments of evidence. Moreover, as Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, most professional historians are educated townsmen with a strong rationalist bias who have made insufficient efforts to understand people so unlike themselves.⁸ In recent years, however, a number of outstanding scholars, Hobsbawm himself among them, have shown a proper appreciation of the role of spontaneous mass movements in shaping history. From the work of Hobsbawm, George Rudé, E. P. Thompson, and also of Barrington Moore, who recently investigated the relationship between modernization and agrarian revolt, we are coming to understand that modern revolutions, like those of the past, have been largely spontaneous, driven by mass movements of urban and rural laborers, and in spirit predominantly anarchistic. No longer can these primitive, inarticulate, and often irrational groups be written off as fringe elements to be ignored by the historian. They lie, rather, at the very root of social change.

I Bolotnikov

1606—

1607

BOLOTNIKOV is, with the possible exception of Bulavin, the least well known of the four rebel leaders whose activities make up the contents of this book. Yet from the little we know of him he was an impressive figure, endowed with considerable personal magnetism, as well as a gift for military leadership and an extraordinary ability to command the devotion of the lower classes. He was the first of Russia's great social rebels; the first, that is to say, whose rising was not only a political rebellion against the Muscovite government but also a social rebellion against the system of bondage and exploitation. His was the first mass movement to combine a peasant uprising with widespread urban insurrection, the first movement from below bent on overturning the existing social order, even if it was not at all clear what was to take its place. Moreover, his rising in many ways set the pattern for future mass upheavals in the tsarist empire. The object of this chapter is to examine this first of Russia's "peasant wars," its origins, its rise and fall, and its ultimate significance in Russian history.

1. The Time of Troubles

"God hath a great plague in store for this people." Such was the gloomy prediction which Jerome Horsey, England's chief commercial agent in Moscow, entered into his notebook near the close of the sixteenth century.¹ A few years later, Tsar Fyodor, the last scion of the Rurik clan, was dead, and Muscovy was plunged into a chaos of famine, rebellion, and war known in history as the "Time of Troubles." Horsey, a seasoned observer of Russian affairs, blamed the gathering crisis on the misdeeds of Fyodor's infamous father, Ivan the Terrible, whose cruelty had bred "a general hatred, distraction, fear, and discontentment throughout his kingdom."² Nor is there any reason to challenge this indictment. During a long and brutal reign ending in 1584, Ivan had undermined the traditional order of the Muscovite state, leaving his subjects restless and disaffected. By the turn of the century Russia was ripe for a major upheaval. Ivan's "tyrannous practice," to quote the prophetic words of Giles Fletcher, "hath so troubled that country, and filled it so full of grudge and mortal hatred ever since, that it will not be quenched (as it seemeth now) till it burn again into a civil flame."³

The chief victims of Ivan's tyranny were the aristocratic boyars, the hereditary princes of the land, who had been waging a long but unsuccessful struggle to maintain their ancient privileges against the expanding claims of the throne. Assisted by the *oprichniki*, his agents of death and destruction, Ivan subjected the boyars and all others whom he considered disloyal to a campaign of terror. Thousands of his enemies, both real and imaginary, were flogged, tortured, and executed. Princely families were evicted from their ancestral estates in the Muscovite heartland and scattered along the southern frontier, where, Ivan believed, they would present no further obstacle to his autocratic ambitions. Boyar lands were confiscated and parceled out among the rising class of service gentry, who allied themselves with the tsar in his struggle against the entrenched power of the aristocracy.

In this way Ivan created a lasting foundation for the growth of Russian absolutism. The old society of semi-independent principalities, on the wane for more than a century, was dealt a blow from which it was never fully to recover. In its place there arose a centralized autocracy buttressed by a growing class of military landholders whose tenure depended on their loyal service to the crown. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that the once awesome power of the aristocracy had been completely eliminated. The boyars, though fatally weakened, retained a sense of pride in their exalted lineage and clung to the hope that their ancient privileges and independence would ultimately be restored.

The landed magnates were by no means the only victims of Ivan's violent reign. On the shoulders of the ordinary citizens fell the heavy burdens of taxation and troop levies to sustain the Livonian War, which dragged on for twenty-five years without securing Ivan's coveted foothold on the Baltic. Reduced to privation and despair, large segments of the population abandoned their native districts and fled across the Oka River to the sparsely occupied steppe in the south or else made for the fertile lands of the Volga basin, which had been opened to colonization by Ivan's conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan. By the end of Ivan's reign the stream of uprooted humanity, swelled by homeless victims of the *oprichnina* and of periodic invasions by the Crimean Tatars, had reached alarming proportions. The old settled regions in the center and northwest were rapidly being depopulated. "Many vil-

lages and towns," noted Fletcher in 1590, "stand all uninhabited: the people being fled all into other places by reason of the extreme usage and exactions done upon them."⁴

The rising tide of fugitive peasants and townsmen at length drove the government to act. Although colonists were needed to strengthen Muscovy's hold on its newly acquired territories in the south and east, the depopulation of the heartland was depriving the state of its taxpayers and, worse still, was creating a shortage of agricultural labor which threatened the new class of service landowners with ruin. Thus crown and gentry worked hand in hand to curb internal migration. Desperate expedients were introduced in an effort to bind the peasant to the land and to his master. A notorious example was the so-called forbidden years, during which the right of departure was suspended. Such measures, however, were never completely successful. The dream of land and liberty continued to draw swarms of refugees to the open frontier, beyond the reach of landlords and government officials, where they hoped to live out their lives in justice and tranquillity as they imagined their ancestors had done in an earlier age.

The wholesale depletion of the center augured ill for the future stability of the Russian empire. Deprived of much of their labor force, the service gentry were left in an extremely precarious condition. As a result, they squeezed everything they could from their remaining serfs, which only drove an ever-increasing number to flight. For the villagers who stayed behind, the burdens of labor, taxation, and recruitment soon reached the breaking point. In the last decades of Ivan's rule serious rioting erupted in central Russia, where bands of peasants and highwaymen attacked monasteries and private estates in search of grain, booty, and revenge.⁵ Even more alarming, however, was the situation in the borderlands. Here the way had been cleared for a full-scale civil war against the Muscovite center. Ivan's expulsion of the boyars, together with the swelling exodus of peasants and townsmen, had concentrated along the southern frontier a throng of desperate men nursing sundry grievances against the crown and its supporters. "All the state hath he sundered in twain, as it were with an axe," wrote one of Ivan's contemporaries, "and

this division, methinks, was the forerunner of all the dissensions by which the land is vexed to this day."⁶

Only a single spark was needed to set off a general conflagration. Yet it was not until the turn of the century, some fifteen years after Ivan's death, that the spark occurred, ironically at a time when the decline of the center seems to have been reversed and Muscovy was beginning to show signs of economic recovery.⁷ In 1598 Tsar Fyodor, Ivan's last surviving son, died without heirs, bringing to an end the Muscovite branch of the Rurik dynasty. The nation was at once plunged into confusion. Throughout the realm men felt a sense of loss, for in the popular mind the tsar was the personification of the state, the protector of the people, the anointed mediator between man and God. "Without the tsar the land is a widow," went an old Russian proverb. "Without the tsar the people is an orphan."⁸ In the eyes of his subjects the sovereign was the sole embodiment of law and justice, the "central knot" of the kingdom, as the historian Kliuchevsky put it, without whom all order must fall apart. Nor could the new ruler, Boris Godunov, fill the gap, however able and conscientious he might be. To the mass of ordinary citizens an "elected tsar" like Boris (or like Vasili Shuisky after him) must have seemed "something akin to an infringement of the laws of nature."⁹

Before the nation could recover from this unprecedented shock, a new catastrophe struck, causing fresh ferment in every corner. In the autumn of 1601, severe frosts and heavy snows caused disastrous crop failures throughout the land. During the next three years Russia lay in the grip of famine and pestilence. Godunov provided what relief there was, but grain hoarding and profiteering by landlords and merchants went largely unchecked, provoking much bitterness among the hungry and destitute, who attributed their plight to the absence of their legitimate tsar-protector. According to foreign witnesses, Muscovites were reduced to eating grass, birch bark, dogs and cats, and, when there was nothing else, even the corpses of their relatives and friends.¹⁰ Some say that more than 100,000 were buried in the capital alone. Starvation and plague wiped out whole villages, and countless peasants, cast adrift by masters who were unable

to feed them, flocked to the towns or roamed the countryside in search of food. The population, in the words of a contemporary chronicle, "threw itself from fear and horror into woods and swamps."¹¹ Fugitives in greater numbers than ever streamed to the southern frontier. Everywhere the roads were strewn with corpses.

The Time of Troubles had begun. In the absence of their natural sovereign, what the Russian people had endured for so long became unbearable, and they lashed out in a destructive fury against the emerging social order. There ensued a dozen years of chaos during which the very survival of the state seemed in doubt. In the early stages, social opposition took the relatively mild form of brigandage. With the authority of the state disrupted, bands of marauders sprang up in every quarter, playing havoc with the lives and property of the rich and powerful. Pleasant woodlands became the haunts of desperate men ready to swoop down on the granaries of monasteries and estates whenever the opportunity presented itself. Banditry of this sort, rooted as it was in social and economic discontent, constituted a distinct species of revolt. An indefinable borderland existed between criminal activity and rebellion, and the label "brigand," which the Russian government attached to dangerous rebels from Bolotnikov to Pugachev, was as much a reflection of this fact as it was a term of abuse.

The first important social rebel during the Time of Troubles to earn the title "brigand" was a certain Khlopko, about whom little is known other than that he bore the nickname "pigeon-toed" (Kosolap). In September 1603, during the height of the famine, Khlopko collected a band of slaves and peasants and headed for Moscow with the object of murdering the wealthy and seizing their food and possessions. As he approached the capital, however, he was met by a large government force commanded by Ivan Basmanov, one of Godunov's ablest officers. A fierce struggle took place, with heavy losses on both sides. Basmanov was killed and Khlopko, himself gravely wounded, was taken prisoner and carried off to Moscow, where he either died from his injuries or was executed. At the tsar's orders Basmanov was buried "with honor" in the great Trinity Monastery of St. Sergei.¹²

This fleeting episode, while interesting in its own right, takes on added significance when seen as the first of a series of rebel assaults on the Russian capital. Khlopko's movement, as a number of Soviet scholars have suggested,¹³ represents the beginning of a great wave of social protest which did not recede till 1613, with the accession of Tsar Michael, the first ruler of the Romanov dynasty. Khlopko, in other words, claims our attention primarily as the forerunner of the two pseudo-Dmitris and of Bolotnikov, figures who also rose from obscurity to challenge the occupant of the throne. In fact, there is reason to believe that after their defeat by the government the survivors of Khlopko's band fled to the southern frontier and became eager recruits for these more formidable "brigands" who took up the standard of rebellion soon after.

Khlopko's successor, the False Dmitri, made his appearance the following year. Dmitri enjoyed enormous advantages over his hapless predecessor. He was not only very able and intelligent but also received extensive support from the Poles, who sought to exploit the distress and confusion in which Russia found herself. More than that, by calling himself the "Tsarevich Dmitri" he was able to capitalize on the longing of the Russian people for a "born tsar" to rescue them from their misery. The populace yearned for a messiah to restore a lost era of freedom and happiness. Ever since the famine had struck three years before, rumors had been afloat that a legitimate sovereign, with unbroken links to the Rurik clan, was still alive. Now, in the autumn of 1604, the rumors assumed tangible shape. The Tsarevich Dmitri, it was said, son of Ivan the Terrible and rightful heir to Muscovy, was on his way from Poland to reclaim the throne of his forefathers.

Actually the real Dmitri had died as a child in 1591, perhaps by stabbing himself while in the throes of epilepsy.¹⁴ It was widely believed, however, that he had been murdered by the henchmen of Boris Godunov, who was hungry for the throne. According to the new rumors, Dmitri had miraculously escaped the assassin's knife and was returning to Moscow to deliver his subjects from their afflictions. The story at once gained widespread acceptance. This was partly because of the mystery which surrounded Dmitri's violent and untimely death; but the main reason was that the people wanted desperately to believe it—so

desperately, in fact, that Muscovy during the Time of Troubles spawned at least a score of impostors. When men are miserable, Kliuchevsky observed, the way opens up for a pretender. And from the time of the first pseudo-Dmitri, pretendership became a "chronic malady" of the Russian state.¹⁵

The False Dmitri's campaign against Moscow originated in October 1604 in the inflammable borderlands of the southwest. The effects of the great famine had not yet worn off. In the town of Putivl, later to serve as Bolotnikov's base as well, a ragtag army of malcontents—political exiles, runaway peasants and slaves, Cossacks, petty service men, vagrants, urban poor—flocked to the Pretender's banner. Though their goals were disparate, Dmitri's followers made common cause against the emerging order of autocracy and serfdom, the untamed frontier rising in a fury of revolt against the centralized power of the Muscovite heartland. As the Pretender advanced toward the capital, gathering fresh adherents as he went, Godunov's forces deserted in droves, unwilling to oppose the "true sovereign," who promised to free his supporters of "all taxes and impositions" for ten years.¹⁶ Such promises proved enormously effective. Dmitri's agents galloped from village to village and town to town as far as Moscow itself, disseminating their "seditious leaflets" over vast stretches of the country. A wave of rebellion and mass hysteria engulfed the whole area from Putivl to the Oka River at the very edge of the Muscovite center.

In April 1605, at the height of the crisis, Tsar Boris suddenly died, his spirit perhaps broken by the impostor's astonishing success. By June his young son Fyodor had been deposed and murdered at the instigation of the boyars, who had never reconciled themselves to the rule of the upstart Godunovs. Tsarevich Dmitri was then installed on the throne, while the old nobility awaited the moment to reassert their vanishing authority. Dmitri's rule was brief. In May 1606, barely eleven months after his triumphant coronation, the Pretender fell victim to a plot hatched by a prominent and ambitious boyar named Vasili Shuisky. Shuisky and his accomplices, at the head of an unruly mob, forced their way into the Kremlin on the pretext of preventing the Poles from "killing the boyars and our tsar."¹⁷ In the melee Dmitri was hacked to pieces. His remains were then burned and

the ashes fired from a cannon in the direction of Poland from which he had come. Then, in a noisy demonstration organized by the plotters, the mob proclaimed Shuisky tsar, the fourth ruler to occupy the Russian throne in little more than a year. It seemed, for the moment at least, that the aristocracy's dream of restoring their ancient rights and influence had been realized. But the boyars, as a modern historian has remarked, soon discovered that "it was easier to conjure a ghost than to get rid of one."¹⁸

2. Bolotnikov

No sooner had Tsar Vasili ascended the throne than fresh rumors began to circulate that the "Tsarevich" was still alive. Dmitri, it was said, had been spirited away to safety and another man butchered in his place. Sophisticated observers of the Muscovite scene "did not believe" this tale, noted a Polish visitor in his diary.¹⁹ But the ordinary citizen, whose hopes had been stirred by the Pretender, was convinced it was true and yearned for Dmitri's speedy return. Shuisky took immediate steps to scotch the rumors before they could touch off a renewed crisis. A barrage of government charters was launched into every corner proclaiming that the Pretender and the real Tsarevich were both dead and that Vasili Shuisky was now the legitimate ruler of Muscovy. When this failed to halt the whispering, Shuisky persuaded the church to canonize the child Dmitri as a martyr and thus block any further attempts to invoke his identity. In June 1606 his body (rumored to be in a marvelous state of preservation, as befits the corpse of a saint) was disinterred from its resting place in Uglich and brought to Moscow for all to see. From the gates of the capital a solemn procession, headed by Shuisky and his boyar associates together with church dignitaries bearing icons and crosses, escorted the coffin to the Kremlin, where, at the conclusion of an elaborate ceremony, everyone repeated the oath of loyalty to the new tsar.²⁰

As an added precaution, Shuisky adopted the tactic earlier employed by Ivan and Boris of banishing potential opponents to the frontier, entrusting some with responsible positions in local

government. This, as it turned out, was a shortsighted expedient. True, there was little else one could do with unreliable persons at such a dangerous moment, short of exterminating them. But to pack them off to the incendiary borderlands spelled trouble of the worst sort. Indeed, it was Grigori Shakhovskoi, one of the first to be exiled by Shuisky, who triggered the rebellion of which Bolotnikov was shortly to assume leadership.

Shakhovskoi, though he bore the title of prince, was in fact a minor nobleman who had cast his lot with the False Dmitri in hopes of achieving the prominence which his undistinguished birth had denied him. Eventually he became one of the Pretender's closest associates. Yet Shuisky now appointed him military governor (*voevoda*) of Putivl, the very town from which Dmitri had launched his revolt against Moscow. Whether Shakhovskoi had won Shuisky's confidence or whether Shuisky simply wanted to get rid of him is not clear, though the latter seems more likely. At all events, from the moment he arrived in Putivl, Shakhovskoi began to incite the populace against the tsar, whom he denounced as a traitor and an assassin responsible for the taking of Dmitri's life. Shakhovskoi's words had a profound effect. Putivl, an ancient town famous for its historic role in Prince Igor's twelfth-century campaign against the Kumans,²¹ cherished its glorious past and deeply resented its new role as a mere frontier outpost of Muscovite expansion. Its population, swollen by fugitives from central Russia, had been among the first to rally to Dmitri's flag in 1604, and many regarded him with lingering affection. Thus, when Shakhovskoi told them that Shuisky's plot had failed, that the tsarevich was safe in his former Polish sanctuary and would soon reclaim his throne from the boyar assassins, they "listened to this news with great rejoicing."²² Refusing to swear allegiance to Shuisky, they took a new oath to Dmitri instead. Other towns in the neighborhood quickly followed suit. Before long the tidings of Dmitri's miraculous escape spread throughout the entire Slobodskaya Ukraina (as southwestern Russia was then called) and once more the area flared up in revolt against Moscow. In Putivl, the base of the new rising as of the old, Shakhovskoi set up a "great council" to supervise rebel operations. Local officials who remained faithful to Moscow, and government emissaries who had recently arrived to administer an oath of loyalty to Shuisky,

were put to the sword. In the words of a contemporary chronicle, the "spilling of Christian blood" had begun.²³

Meanwhile, as Shakhovskoi promoted insurrection in Slobodskaya Ukraina, his principal confederate, Mikhail Molchanov, was on his way to Galicia to drum up Polish support for a new march on Moscow. Molchanov was a clever adventurer of gentry background, who shared his comrade's ambition and taste for political intrigue. Well-educated and fluent in Polish and Latin, he had hoped to win a place of influence in the court of Boris Godunov. For unknown reasons, however, he fell out with the tsar and was imprisoned on charges of practicing witchcraft. In revenge, he took part in the murder of Godunov's son Fyodor, and afterward, like Shakhovskoi, joined the entourage of the Pretender. But when Dmitri was slain and Shuisky installed in his place, Molchanov fled the capital and made for Putivl and the Polish frontier. As he went, he spread the word that the tsarevich had been spared by the grace of God, and he urged his listeners to help oust the boyar usurpers who had tried "to murder their prince and then to choose a new king without making them acquainted with the causes of deposing the first nor asking their consent in the choice of the latter."²⁴

No sooner had he arrived in Sambor, Galicia, at the castle of the pseudo-Dmitri's patron, George Mniszek, than Molchanov received an urgent appeal from Shakhovskoi to return to Putivl in the guise of the slain tsarevich. The rebellion, it seems, had gathered momentum more rapidly than had been expected, and the time was already ripe for a new pretender to appear at the lead. Molchanov, however, was no more eager to assume the role than Shakhovskoi himself appeared to be. He protested that he was too well known in Moscow to pass himself off as Dmitri and that he did not look at all like the slain impostor. Indeed, when he halfheartedly tried out the part in Sambor, nobody would believe him. A poor likeness, however, was seldom enough to deter a would-be pretender, and one may safely assume that Molchanov, mindful of Dmitri's fate, feared the consequences of failure. In any event, matters took a new turn when a stranger named Bolotnikov appeared in Sambor and accepted Molchanov's claim to be the "Tsar Dmitri."

Though information about Bolotnikov's past is scanty, we

know enough to gain a fairly vivid impression of his character. A slave of Prince Andrei Teliatvsky, who will himself figure prominently in our story, Ivan Isaevich Bolotnikov ran away as a youth to the bands of Cossacks that roved the open frontier between Muscovy and the Crimean khanate. John Merick's narrative of the rebellion refers to Bolotnikov as "an old robber or borderer of the Volga."²⁵

It hardly seems a mere coincidence that Bolotnikov and his successors—Razin, Bulavin, and Pugachev—should all have spent their formative years in the untamed steppe of the south, with its long tradition of rough-and-ready democracy and heroic adventure. As a haven for the dispossessed, the steppe posed a continual challenge to the unfolding Muscovite order of serfdom and autocracy. In this no-man's-land between the Dnieper and the Urals, Bolotnikov and his heirs nurtured their taste for an untrammelled life and the restlessness which drove them to seek adventure wherever they might find it. The Cossacks, moreover, had a military capacity and fighting spirit which the mass of peasants and townspeople lacked, and so they often took the lead in the risings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

At some point in his Cossack career, Bolotnikov fell into the hands of one of the raiding bands of Crimean Tatars that periodically swept across the steppe "as wild geese fly, invading and retiring where they see advantage."²⁶ Sold into slavery, he worked for some years as a helmsman on a Turkish galley. Then, in the midst of a sea battle, he was liberated by German ships and taken to Venice, where he began the long journey back to Muscovy. Passing through Poland, he learned of the ferment in his homeland and apparently was attracted to Sambor by rumors that the deposed Tsar Dmitri had found sanctuary there. Thus the stranger who now confronted Molchanov was a seasoned warrior who had tasted both the abject servility of the bondsman and the unbridled freedom of the open steppe. Contemporaries depict him as tall and powerfully built and as an intelligent and energetic leader. His years as a Cossack and a galley slave had made him a skilled and courageous fighter, qualities for which he was to be praised by friend and foe alike.²⁷

Molchanov must have recognized in Bolotnikov a remarkable

and useful man. Identifying himself as Tsar Dmitri, Molchanov presented his visitor with a saber, a fur coat, and a small sum of money and directed him to proceed immediately to Muscovy and open the way for his return to the throne. Whether Bolotnikov believed that he had actually spoken with the real tsar or whether he wished to satisfy his own lust for high adventure is not clear. Perhaps the quest for adventure led him to dismiss any doubts he might otherwise have entertained as to "Dmitri's" true identity. At any rate, during the ensuing years of rebellion, Bolotnikov consistently acted in Dmitri's name and, until the end, behaved as though he firmly believed that he was serving the rightful sovereign of Russia. On the other hand, Shakhovskoi and Molchanov plainly intended to treat Bolotnikov in the same way that Shuisky and the boyars had treated the False Dmitri—as an instrument to launch themselves into power and then to cast aside once he had outlived his usefulness.

In June or July of 1606 Bolotnikov arrived in Putivl armed with a letter from Molchanov identifying him as a faithful servant of Tsar Dmitri. The letter asked that he be furnished with every means of support. Shakhovskoi, eager for a commander to lead the march on Moscow, gave Bolotnikov a warm reception. He evidently agreed with Molchanov's high opinion of the newcomer, for according to a German observer named Conrad Bussow, he appointed Bolotnikov commander-in-chief (*Bolschoi Woywoden*) of the insurgent army and entrusted him with an initial force of 12,000 men.²⁸ These included a large part of the local garrison, of which Shakhovskoi, as *voevoda* of Putivl, was in command, augmented by fugitive peasants, impoverished townsmen, Cossacks, slaves, brigands, and drifters of every description who had flocked to Putivl to join the rebellion. Yet for all its motley character the rebel army was a force to be reckoned with. Its ranks were filled with desperate men who had nothing to lose. More than a few were veterans of Khlopko's and the False Dmitri's earlier campaigns against Moscow, and their fighting spirit was now revived by the news that the "true sovereign" was alive, and by the appearance of the remarkable stranger who had come to lead them in his name. Muscovy seemed to be witnessing a repetition of the popular ground swell which nearly

two years before had carried the False Dmitri to the capital and deposited him on the throne. With Dmitri dead, however, it was his phantom that rode at the head of the new rebellion.

Once Bolotnikov arrived on the scene, the flames of revolt spread swiftly. By midsummer at least a dozen towns of the southwestern frontier had gone over to the insurgents, and bloodletting and destruction devastated the area. The local residents, according to a contemporary chronicle, began to "seize the *voevodas* and throw them into the dungeons; they destroyed the houses of the boyars and robbed them of their possessions, and their wives and children they took for themselves."²⁹ In the midst of this violence Bolotnikov began his march to the north. Following the trail of Dmitri the Pretender, he led his army through the Komaritskaya district, a densely populated agricultural region situated on the divide between the Desna-Dnieper and Oka-Volga basins, across which lay the quickest route to the capital. His initial object was Kromy, an ancient town (mentioned in the chronicles as early as 1147, the same year that Moscow itself first appears) which, having fallen into obscurity with the decline of Kiev, had recently regained a certain measure of importance when a fort was constructed there to guard against invasions by the Crimean Tatars. This town, one of the first to go over to the rebels, formed a strategic gateway between Slobodskaya Ukraina and central Russia.

In an effort to stop the revolt before it ignited the heartland, Shuisky dispatched to Kromy a large force commanded by Prince Yuri Trubetskoi. Trubetskoi, driving back a column of insurgents who came out to meet him, placed the town under siege. For a moment it appeared that the rising might be nipped in the bud, but the situation changed when Bolotnikov arrived with his main army. Though they outnumbered the rebels by a wide margin, Trubetskoi's soldiers showed little inclination to fight. Petty servitors, they were unwilling to risk their necks for the "boyar tsar," and when the enemy approached they broke ranks and headed for home. News of their defection traveled quickly and shattered the morale of a second government force under Shuisky's brother-in-law, Prince Ivan Vorotynsky, who had meanwhile invested the nearby town of Elety, where the False Dmitri had left a cache of weapons and supplies the year before.

On first contact with the enemy, Vorotynsky's regiment melted away, and he himself, according to a contemporary source, "barely managed to flee to Moscow."³⁰

From that moment the rebellion spread like wildfire. As Shuisky's forces disintegrated through mass desertion, the rebel army was swollen by a flood of new adherents anxious to serve the "true tsar." Between Kromy and Tula the unexpected appearance of retreating government troops set off a chain of local uprisings. Town after town throughout south-central Muscovy, spurred by the news of Bolotnikov's early success, "kissed the cross" for Tsar Dmitri.³¹ It was as though the defeats of Trubetskoi and Vorotynsky were a signal awaited by every disaffected group to rally to the rebel standard.

3. The Towns

Although Bolotnikov's movement is often described as a "peasant war," in fact relatively few of his followers came from the countryside. Information is rather sketchy, but it seems clear that the rural population in Russia was not to play a major insurrectionary role until the revolts of Razin and Pugachev. It is also worth noting that those peasants who did join Bolotnikov did not as a rule come from the central regions, where serfdom was already well established and where the villagers lived in the deepest misery and oppression. They came, rather, from the Komaritskaya district in the southwest, a black-soil area rich in grain, beeswax, honey, flax, and hemp, where the peasants, though hard hit by the great famine, were comparatively well-off and still strong enough to array themselves against the approaching menace of bondage. In 1604 the Komaritskaya peasants had fought savagely for the False Dmitri, who had promised them a remission of their dues and of their recruitment quotas. In reprisal, Tsar Boris's armies had laid waste the countryside, leaving behind a smoldering desire for vengeance against the central government. Thus when Bolotnikov, flourishing the banner of Dmitri, launched his drive on the capital, the Komaritskaya populace flocked to him in considerable numbers.

But it was the towns that supplied the bulk of Bolotnikov's supporters and constituted the main theater of rebel activity. From available tabulations it appears that at least fifty cities of varying size and strategic importance went over to Bolotnikov's side, while dozens more remained in a state of unrest bordering on open insurrection.³² The reasons for this are not hard to discover. As we have seen, Ivan the Terrible's wars and reign of terror had left the towns of Muscovy in a condition of acute and unprecedented distress. In the central and northwestern regions, where the development of handicrafts and trade had been seriously disrupted, the number of taxable households had fallen drastically, and in some cases whole cities were desolated, their inhabitants having run off to the frontier.³³ Beyond the Oka, however, the situation was becoming as desperate as that farther north. During the famine of 1601–1603, the sudden influx of hungry fugitives from the central districts had transformed such towns as Tula, Orel, Kromy, and Putivl into tinderboxes. A mass of destitute peasants, slaves, beggars, thieves, and other human debris crowded into the *posads* (taxpayers' quarters), aggravating the plight of the local artisans and small traders, who were already near the brink of starvation.³⁴

The whole urban population was in constant flux. Each week saw the arrival and departure of rootless and destitute men who could find no secure place in a society where traditional ties were disintegrating. Anxiety and despair were endemic. To complicate matters, a large segment of the townspeople, particularly in the borderlands, consisted of petty service men—Cossacks, cannoneers, watchmen, gatekeepers, musketeers—whose reliability in times of stress was dubious. These men were recruited largely from the *posad* and shared its dissidence and propensity for violent outbursts. Thus it is small wonder that during Bolotnikov's march on Moscow, "many cities were taken."³⁵ As hotbeds of disaffection and as military, administrative, and financial outposts of the central government, the towns presented logical targets for frontal assaults by the insurgent forces. The rebels, often with the aid of the local inhabitants, would breach the citadels, throw open the jails, plunder the arsenals and treasuries, burn the tax rolls and title deeds, ransack the houses of the wealthy, and murder all who stood in their way.

Amid all this devastation, Bolotnikov had remarkable success in winning the loyalty and devotion of his ragged army. No doubt his courage and resourcefulness inspired confidence, but more important, he had sprung from the same social depths as his adherents and was able to articulate their grievances and aspirations. As "Dmitri's" commander-in-chief, he promised his followers freedom and land, honor and riches. All their woes he blamed on the landlords and officials who, he said, sucked the blood of the poor. In the words of Patriarch Hermogen, Bolotnikov's agents "disseminated their thievish letters in the towns . . . ordering the brigands to commit every wicked act from murder to plunder and to kiss the cross to that dead scoundrel and impostor, the unfrocked monk [pseudo-Dmitri], proclaiming the cursed one to be alive."³⁶ Under Dmitri's banner, Bolotnikov transformed the Time of Troubles into a social rebellion of the poor against the rich. His was a cry of vengeance for the have-nots—slaves, vagabonds, Cossacks, peasants, and the flotsam thrown up from the lower depths of the Russian towns—against those that thrived on their misery and enslavement.

Yet, for all its social content, the revolt did not divide Muscovite society strictly along class lines. On the contrary, a very complex struggle was unleashed, pitting men of the same class against each other and bringing men of different social position together to attain a common goal. Thus, while the lower classes predominated, a substantial part of the rebel army consisted of lesser noblemen bent on unseating the boyars and elevating their own rank and station. Like the common folk, the service gentry had fallen on hard times, and they too attributed their plight to the machinations of the boyars. In the scramble for labor caused by the mass flight of peasants to the frontier, the gentry found themselves losing out to the surviving boyar magnates, who were able to offer their tenants greater security and better conditions. As a result, more than a few impoverished landowners sank into the ranks of the peasantry, while others eked out a precarious existence by borrowing heavily and increasing the obligations of their serfs. Many were ruined outright during the great famine at the beginning of the century.

With Shuisky's rise to power, the minor nobility, who were striving to maintain their recently won social status against the

resurgent claims of the boyars, saw their worst fears realized. For them the rule of Vasili Shuisky and his aristocratic clique represented a disastrous throwback to the old landed oligarchy, a radical departure from the pattern set by Ivan the Terrible and his predecessors, of which they, the service gentry, had been the chief beneficiaries. The "boyar reaction," they feared, meant nothing else but the triumph of the genealogical principle over the principle of merit; it would bar from advancement in the civil and military hierarchies everyone whom Shuisky and his coadjutors took to be of lowly birth.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the guiding spirits behind Bolotnikov's revolt, Shakhovskoi and Molchanov, should have been service noblemen. Nor is it surprising that among the first to join them were the gentry of Tula, Riazan, Putivl, and other towns beyond the Oka River, where the peril of Tatar raids had bred a truculence like that of the Cossacks who roamed the neighboring steppes. It was a squire from Tula, Istoma Pashkov, who seems to have led the rebel detachment that put Prince Vorotynsky to flight at Elets in one of the earliest engagements of the uprising.³⁷ And no less important to the rebel cause was the militia of Riazan commanded by Prokopi Liapunov, the descendant of a line of boyars who had sunk to the level of service gentry.

So it happened that gentry and rabble, for all their divergence of outlook and aims, were thrown together by their common determination to dislodge Tsar Vasili and his princely regime. Landowners rubbed shoulders with bondsmen—or, to be more precise, landowners and bondsmen marched in parallel columns as two distinct but synchronized movements, intending to strike in unison at the gates of the capital. The alliance, however, was founded on shifting sand; where the gentry were bent on preserving the new order of serfdom and autocracy from a boyar restoration, the commoners, like the boyars themselves, were struggling to recover the ancient liberties of which they had been deprived by the rise of the service nobility and the centralized state. The gentry, as Platonov remarked, had entered into an agreement with "their social adversaries."³⁸ And such an agreement could not be of long duration.

4. Moscow

The rebels marched on Moscow as two separate armies, reflecting the broad social gulf which divided them. Yet they marched under the common banner of Tsar Dmitri, who had entered the capital in a blaze of triumph little more than a year before. Within both insurgent groups, hopes were high that Dmitri's success could be repeated. The left wing (both geographically and socially), led by Bolotnikov himself, followed the road from Kromy to Kaluga, intending to proceed from there to Serpukhov and Moscow. The right wing, under Istoma Pashkov and joined later by Liapunov and his Riazan militia, advanced on the capital by way of Tula (Pashkov's native city) and Kolomna. Numbering between 50,000 and 100,000 men, of whom the gentry constituted a small but powerful and well-equipped minority, the two forces expected to converge on the city and, in a joint assault, overwhelm the defenders, whose ranks had been depleted by mass desertion.

Meanwhile, Shuisky made a desperate effort to mobilize fresh troops to meet the impending onslaught. In a widely distributed charter the tsar appealed to his subjects to rally against the evil brigands who had "troubled many towns, wrecked and plundered churches, torn out icons and altars and gospels, smashed holy images of the Lord and trampled them under foot, murdered noblemen and merchants and townsfolk and taken their wives and daughters for their pleasure."³⁹ Though these words would seem better calculated to inspire terror than loyalty, Shuisky succeeded in collecting a new army to do battle with the advancing rebel columns. As the staging area for the government's forces the tsar chose the town of Kaluga, the hub of a defensive system along the upper Oka, and he appointed his brother Ivan Shuisky commander-in-chief. The appointment, however, was not a wise one. A man of mediocre gifts of mind and character, Ivan Shuisky lacked his brother's shrewdness and tenacity. Though his staff included Princes Yuri Trubetskoi and Ivan Vorotynsky, who were experienced in combat with the rebels, their regiments had been vanquished the previous month at Kromy and Elets, and this time they would fare no better.

On September 23, 1606, Bolotnikov's army reached the con-

fluence of the Oka and Ugra rivers, a few miles below Kaluga. At this spot Ivan Shuisky chose to make his stand. The two armies joined in combat, but after a long and bloody battle Shuisky's men broke ranks and fled in disorder, while Bolotnikov's forces emerged intact and were able to continue their northward trek virtually unopposed. "The boyars who were defeated on the banks of the Oka," wrote a visiting merchant from Augsburg, "were compelled to fall back on the capital, in which there arrived each day thousands of wounded, slaughtered, and maimed."⁴⁰ Bolotnikov hurried on to Serpukhov, the last important town on his route to Moscow, and occupied it without a struggle. The capital, only twenty miles away, was seized with panic and confusion. For Vasili the end seemed near. As a final expedient, he ordered his brilliant young nephew, Mikhail Skopin-Shuisky, to head off the retreating remnant of his brother's army and take effective command. Skopin-Shuisky managed to rally the demoralized troops at the Pakhra River, twelve miles south of Moscow, and in the government's first major victory stalled Bolotnikov's advance for a full three weeks, preventing him from linking up with Pashkov and mounting a concerted attack on the capital. Through this delay Shuisky's government won a desperately needed respite in which to regroup its battered forces.

In the meantime, Pashkov's column had made steady progress along its easterly route, encountering no serious resistance until Kolomna, the last government stronghold before Moscow. After a fierce struggle Kolomna was taken, and in reprisal the town was subjected to an orgy of looting, burning, and killing. When the rebels had satisfied their thirst for vengeance, they moved on to the village of Troitskoe, where government troops under Prince Fyodor Mstislavsky and Dmitri Shuisky (a second brother of the tsar) tried to block their advance. By now, however, Pashkov's army had been strengthened by the arrival of the Riazan militia, and an unequal contest took place in which "the brigands slaughtered and dispersed the boyars."⁴¹ Mstislavsky and Dmitri Shuisky turned tail and fled, allowing the insurgents to advance to the very outskirts of Moscow. In early October Pashkov made camp at the village of Kolomenskoe, within easy striking distance of the capital. While awaiting Bolotnikov's arrival, he began the

long siege (October 7–December 2, 1606) during which the fate of the rebellion was decided.

Shuisky's most serious problem during this critical period was the unreliability of his military personnel, from infantry and cannoneers to their gentry and boyar commanders. Men of every rank fled with their families to safer locations outside the capital. Owing to combat losses and mass desertion, in the succinct words of the chronicle, "Tsar Vasili in Moscow was left with few men."⁴² Undaunted, Shuisky mobilized whatever resources he could find. "Shuisky," writes Kliuchevsky, "though small of stature, plain of exterior, and short of sight, was nevertheless no fool."⁴³ Under his capable supervision Moscow girded itself for the coming attack. Improvised fortifications were hastily thrown up around the city. A new oath of loyalty was administered to the populace. Men and boys were conscripted for immediate service. To Shuisky's brother Ivan fell the task of raising fresh troops from the towns, monasteries, and estates remaining outside the orbit of rebel control. And although Ivan's emissaries got a cool reception, enough men were mustered to offer the besiegers serious resistance.

The tsar divided these forces into two separate units. The main body entrenched itself at the southern end of the city, behind the wooden walls built by Ivan the Terrible to withstand the recurrent raids of the Crimean Tatars. Meanwhile, a mobile detachment of picked troops under young Skopin-Shuisky launched hit-and-run attacks against the rebel bases at Kolomenskoe and Zaborie. By this strategy Bolotnikov and Pashkov were held at bay for several weeks, during which they prepared their forces for a major assault on the capital.

The key to Moscow's fate lay in the hands of its lower-class inhabitants. For several months the city's poor had been greatly agitated by rumors of Tsar Dmitri's return. Now, as the siege wore on and food supplies dwindled to precarious levels, their patience was running out. Everywhere, noted a Polish observer, "there was hunger, alarm, and great disquiet," as Muscovites witnessed a grim repetition of scenes from the famine of 1601–1603. Many dropped in the streets from lack of food; others, afflicted with headaches, coughing fits, and cracking limbs, "died

from these ailments, while the living bore their suffering with patience, awaiting their salvation from God."⁴⁴ At any moment, it seemed, the growing unrest might erupt into open rebellion. For who, asked the historian Soloviev, would go hungry for Shuisky?⁴⁵

Throughout the siege Bolotnikov and Shuisky competed for the allegiance of the Muscovite mob. Bolotnikov's most effective weapons were the "thievish letters" which his fifth column smuggled into the capital and distributed in the lower-class districts with telling effect. Although the actual leaflets have not been preserved, something of their contents is known from references in contemporary chronicles, as well as in John Merick's narrative and in the charters of Patriarch Hermogen. Issued in the name of Tsar Dmitri, they called on the people to "seize Moscow, destroy the houses of the magnates, the powerful, and the well-born, and take their wives and daughters for yourselves."⁴⁶ The fullest description is given by the Patriarch in a letter to Metropolitan Filaret written in November 1606: "The rebels stay in Kolomenskoe near Moscow and write their cursed leaflets, ordering the boyars' slaves to kill their masters, promising them their wives and estates, urging them to massacre all the merchants and to seize their goods, and summoning them to the rebel camp to be given the rank of boyar, *voevoda*, chamberlain, or state secretary."⁴⁷

In October and November 1606, manifestoes of this sort aroused new hope among the Muscovite poor and fanned their hatred of the wealthy and powerful. So alarmed was Shuisky that he had all the scribes of the Moscow area rounded up and their handwriting compared with the handwriting on the leaflets, but to no avail. Failing in this, he spared no effort to counteract the effects of the propaganda on the uneasy populace, calling on the church to assist him. "The grand princes," wrote a Polish visitor, "ordered the people to visit the churches and pray before the Blessed Virgin and the Archangel Gabriel and beg with tears for their assistance against the enemy." Special services were conducted in which bishops and priests admonished their parishioners not to "betray themselves into the hands of the wicked brigands and blood-poisoners," and on one such occasion Archpriest Terenti of the Annunciation Cathedral in the Kremlin described a dream

in which the Holy Spirit appeared to him and damned the rebels as heretics, while promising salvation for Tsar Vasili's loyal supporters.⁴⁸

Shuisky's chief ally in these endeavors was Patriarch Hermogen, an old man of eighty and former Metropolitan of Kazan, whom the tsar had raised to his exalted position only a few months before. Despite his advanced age, Hermogen proved himself one of the most energetic figures on the government's side during these troubled times. Several years later, in 1612, he was to die a martyr's death in prison at the hands of the Polish invaders. Now, describing the rebellion as the work of "Satan and his demons," he appealed to the Orthodox to rally behind the tsar. Vasili, he declared, was "in truth the holy and legitimate and genuine Christian tsar."⁴⁹ Rumors persisted, however, of the imminent return of the "real sovereign" to his rightful place on the throne. According to Conrad Bussow, a delegation of ordinary Muscovites even went to the rebel camp in Kolomenskoe and asked to see Tsar Dmitri "with their own eyes." Bolotnikov dispatched an urgent message to Shakhovskoi to send "Dmitri" to the capital without delay, since the people were ready to swear allegiance to him if he appeared in the flesh.⁵⁰

By the middle of November the mob, which had adopted a wait-and-see attitude, was ready to cast its lot with the rebels. Angry crowds gathered before the Kremlin to shout their disapproval of Shuisky's government. According to a German witness, a full-scale insurrection would surely have broken out within the capital but for the unexpected news on November 15 that Liapunov and his Riazan militia had forsaken their allies and gone over to the tsar.⁵¹ This windfall, together with the arrival of badly needed reinforcements from the Smolensk area and from the towns of the Northern Dvina, ended all further prospects of rebellion in Moscow and marked a sharp turning point in Shuisky's fortunes.

What had prompted Liapunov to defect? The underlying reason, it appears, was the incompatibility between the service nobles and their plebeian confederates. Through the adherence of the gentry the rising lost whatever lower-class homogeneity it had originally possessed. It was under the walls of Moscow that Liapunov and his fellow squires realized that an unbridgeable gulf

separated their own rebellion from that of the common folk. Bolotnikov's manifestoes bore eloquent testimony to the social character of his movement, and the gentry began to fear for their own lives and property. However jealous they might be of the aristocracy, they now felt their common links as landowners and noblemen and desperately strove to stem the popular tide that they had helped to set loose. As Merick noted, "the nobles and better sort of citizens, perceiving in what extremity they were, employed all their credit and means to assist the emperor."⁵² Shuisky, for his part, was ready to meet the lesser nobility halfway. To Liapunov, for example, he offered higher rank, a seat in the boyar council, and a large purse of silver. In effect, the "boyar tsar" had been compelled to modify the aristocratic nature of his regime and to restore, at least in part, the alliance between gentry and crown forged by Ivan the Terrible and his predecessors. The result, in Platonov's words, was a "breakup of the rebel mass into the social elements of which it was composed."⁵³

Liapunov's desertion had immediate and profound repercussions. Not only did it deprive the insurrection of its most formidable warriors, but it also aroused wide dissension in the rebel camp, thereby preparing the way for further defections. As a result, the balance of strength rapidly shifted in Shuisky's favor. Reinforcements continued to pour in from Smolensk, Rzhev, Volokolamsk, Mozhaisk, Viazma, and Dorogobuzh, and from the commercial settlements along the Northern Dvina. Moreover, many towns which earlier had turned a deaf ear to Ivan Shuisky's recruiting sergeants eagerly sent additional troops to the capital.

A glance at the map (see endpapers) reveals the sectional character of the conflict. Roughly half the territory of the realm refused to accept Shuisky's rule. Opposition was concentrated in the south and along the middle and lower Volga from Nizhni Novgorod to the river's mouth at Astrakhan. The center and north, by and large, continued to support Moscow. In a rough way this corresponds to Ivan the Terrible's division of the land into the *oprichnina*, in which he settled his loyal supporters, and the outlying *zemshchina*, to which he banished his opponents. Toward the end of Ivan's reign, when the center fell into decline, the balance of strength began to tip to the peripheries, which,

thronged with fugitives and malcontents of every type, rose to challenge Moscow's authority.

Bolotnikov's revolt, like Dmitri's before it, was a major episode in this sectional war of the frontier against the heartland. The inhabitants of the steppe, with their rough-and-tumble independence, lashed out against Moscow's efforts to bring them to heel. In the ensuing struggle the trading communities along the Northern Dvina and upper Volga rushed to defend the capital, with which they had strong regional and commercial ties. It seems likely, moreover, that a nationalist element was also involved, for the population of these northern regions was of the same Great Russian stock as Moscow, in contrast to the mixed Cossack, Tatar, Ukrainian, Polish, and tribal inhabitants of the southern borderlands. Significantly, the same towns of the north were to form the backbone of the national army which expelled the Poles from Moscow a few years later, bringing the Time of Troubles to an end. By the same token, it was the strong hostility of Smolensk and its neighbors toward the Poles that brought them in against Bolotnikov, whose imaginary "Tsar Dmitri" was tainted with Polish support.

If the rebellion was to have any chance of success, then, Bolotnikov had to stop the flow of men and supplies through Moscow's northern gates, which opened onto the region furnishing Shuisky with his strongest support. So far, as Merick noted, Moscow was only half besieged, "the other part of town I know not through what blindness left open to take in forces and victuals." On November 26, Bolotnikov attempted to "block it up."⁵⁴ With a large force he set out along the banks of the Moscow River to the northern end of the city, intending to seal it off from the outside. Shuisky marshaled every available unit to head the rebels off. By now the government could again boast a formidable army. In addition to Skopin-Shuisky and his crack cavalry, there were also Liapunov's militia, a contingent of musketeers (*streletsy*) from the commercial towns linking central Muscovy with the White Sea, and a powerful regiment from the Smolensk area under the able command of Ivan Kolychev, who, fresh from lifting a rebel siege at Volokolamsk, had raced to Moscow when he heard that the besiegers intended to "kill the tsar and boyars."⁵⁵

Shuisky's impressive army assembled in Red Square to hear Patriarch Hermogen intone a prayer for victory. Then its helmeted horsemen rode off to the clanging of bells in the towers and cathedrals of the Kremlin. That evening—it was November 26—the rebels were intercepted at the northern suburb of Krasnoe Selo. A fierce battle began which continued through the night and into the next morning. Blood flowed freely, and the battlefield was thick with dead and wounded from both sides. Then, by an act of treachery, Bolotnikov's fate was sealed. At the height of the struggle Istoma Pashkov "went over with all his service gentry to Tsar Vasili."⁵⁶ Pashkov, like Liapunov before him, apparently experienced a moment of truth in which Shuisky seemed a lesser evil than Bolotnikov. His decision no doubt was strengthened by a handsome reward of rank and riches held out to him by the tsar. Perhaps, too, as Bussow suggests, he was jealous of Bolotnikov's title of "great *voevoda*," which Shakhovskoi had bestowed on the former slave back in Putivl.⁵⁷ But more important, Pashkov had come to realize that his plebeian comrade-in-arms was a graver menace to his class and to the social order which had evolved over the last two centuries than was the boyar oligarchy headed by Shuisky.

Pashkov's defection dealt a severe blow to the rebel cause. "The enemy," reported Merick, "being abashed at the departure of one of their chief leaders [were] all divided amongst themselves."⁵⁸ Aside from a battered collection of townsfolk, slaves, and peasants, only a hard core of serving men remained loyal to Bolotnikov,⁵⁹ and Shuisky's forces had little difficulty in putting them to flight. At a single stroke the initiative had passed to the government. Seizing the offensive, Skopin-Shuisky, on December 2, led a confident army against the rebel strongholds of Kolomenskoe and Zaborie. Bolotnikov mustered his weary followers and advanced to meet them. At the village of Kotly, midway between Kolomenskoe and Moscow, the two forces locked horns in a terrible struggle which cost the insurgents 1000 dead and more than 20,000 prisoners. With Skopin-Shuisky hot on his heels, Bolotnikov beat a retreat to Kolomenskoe and hastily dug in against his pursuers. Rather than storm the rebel bastion and risk heavy casualties, Skopin-Shuisky launched a merciless cannonade which lasted three days without letup. Finally Bolotnikov's redoubt was

set ablaze, forcing him and a tattered remnant of his once enormous army to flee toward the south, the direction from which they had come. Skopin-Shuisky then made directly for the second rebel camp at Zaborie, a few miles away, where the demoralized defenders surrendered without a fight. Eventually they were given as slaves to the boyars and gentry who had proved in combat their loyalty to the tsar. A different fate, however, awaited those who had been captured in battle. Each night they were taken out by the hundreds and slaughtered "like oxen" and their bodies shoved beneath the ice of the Yauza River.⁶⁰

Thus the siege of Moscow was lifted, and—among the upper classes at least—there was great rejoicing. In every church, recorded a Polish witness, thanksgiving prayers were recited and bells pealed forth their triumphant message, "for such was the custom."⁶¹ For valor in battle Skopin-Shuisky and Ivan Kolychev were elevated to the coveted rank of boyar. Tsar Vasili at once issued charters proclaiming that the revolt had been crushed and the country saved from disaster. Yet, for all the jubilation and excitement, the situation remained precarious. Vast stretches of the south remained in rebel hands, and each week brought news of fresh risings along the Volga. Moreover, Bolotnikov himself was still at large. And the ghost of Dmitri continued to haunt the land.

5. Kaluga and Tula

Bolotnikov's defeat at Moscow had shattered the backbone of his movement. Nevertheless, in widely scattered areas outside the main orbit of the revolt, disturbances occurred long after the siege of the capital had been lifted. In early December the north-eastern towns of Viatka and Perm, in the foothills of the Urals, rose against the central government on the premature news that Tsar Dmitri had "arrived at Moscow with a great quantity of men and taken it." In the northwest, at the medieval city of Pskov, "much blood was spilled" as a result of false rumors that Shuisky planned to make a deal with the hated Swedes.⁶² More serious still was the situation on the Volga. Conquered by Ivan

the Terrible in the middle of the sixteenth century, the Volga basin had been opened to a tide of Muscovite colonization, to which the local tribes had never reconciled themselves. For a whole year following Shuisky's accession to the throne, violence raged unchecked over a large swath of territory from the bend of the river to its mouth at the Caspian. During the winter months Mordva beekeepers and peasants joined dissident Russians in besieging Nizhni Novgorod, the main administrative center of the middle Volga. Serious rioting, in which Russian peasants fought side by side with Mordva, Mari, Chuvash, and Tatars, spread to Arzamas and Alaty, and the inhabitants of nearby Sviazhsk swore an oath of fealty to Tsar Dmitri, which they renounced only when the Metropolitan threatened to place the town under interdiction. Finally, at the mouth of the Volga the *voevoda* of Astrakhan, Prince Ivan Khvorostinin, playing a role analogous to that of Shakhovskoi in Putivl, incited a rebellion in Dmitri's name which took the government several months to put down.⁶³

These risings were in every case spontaneous affairs without direct links to Bolotnikov and his movement. Yet the participants undoubtedly knew of Bolotnikov's activities, and they shared his hatred of the Muscovite government, as well as a common desire for local autonomy as against the autocratic system that threatened to engulf them. Shuisky faced a very difficult task in bringing these far-flung eruptions under control. To meet his pressing need for funds, the tsar extracted large sums from merchants and monasteries—the rich Trinity Monastery was tapped no less than three times in a six-month period—as well as from his boyar associates. In an effort to preserve the allegiance of his troops, he compensated them for injuries suffered on the battlefield and promised a bounty for every rebel killed or captured. Officers who distinguished themselves in combat were rewarded with land and money and were allowed to claim for their own the rebel slaves and peasants whom they took prisoner, a practice which sometimes embroiled them in disputes with the legal owners.⁶⁴

Beyond this, Shuisky took steps to curb the flight of peasants and townsmen, which continued to deprive the state of taxes and recruits while serving to perpetuate social unrest. By a decree of March 9, 1607, he extended the period for recovering runaway peasants from five to fifteen years. Local officials were directed

to carry out periodic searches for fugitives, and landlords caught harboring them were fined and subjected to public flogging. This measure was intended as a sop to the service gentry, who suffered most from peasant flight and whose support, so crucial during the Moscow siege, the government was bent on consolidating. A genuine aristocratic reaction had proved impossible to achieve. Irresistibly, Russia was carried along by the powerful tides of absolutism, state service, and peasant bondage. The old order of decentralization and boyar independence was lost forever. Distinctions between noblemen of birth and noblemen of service were gradually becoming blurred, as both groups were bound together in a mutual alliance with the crown for the purpose of keeping the lower orders in check.

The immediate task before Shuisky was to track down and annihilate Bolotnikov's bedraggled forces, who meanwhile had retreated to Serpukhov, some twenty miles southwest of the capital. Finding the town short of food and supplies and its citizens none too happy at the appearance of his hungry army, Bolotnikov continued to retrace his steps, hoping to meet a friendlier reception farther south. This, at last, he found on the Oka River at Kaluga, whose inhabitants eagerly accepted him as the authentic representative of Tsar Dmitri. And just in time, for a few days later his pursuers, led by Dmitri Shuisky, arrived in force and mounted a savage attack on the city. Bolotnikov was ready for them, and after a furious battle Shuisky was forced to withdraw with heavy casualties to await reinforcements. These arrived in due course, equipped with battering rams and siege guns. Yet the rebels fought back with reckless courage and, despite a murderous bombardment, the walls could not be breached. "Much blood was spilled," says the chronicle, "but Kaluga was not taken."⁶⁵

In Moscow, Bolotnikov's stubborn resistance provoked renewed alarm. Shuisky, though still confident of victory, grew anxious and impatient; and when a Baltic adventurer named Friedrich Fiedler offered to go to Kaluga and murder the rebel chieftain, the tsar eagerly accepted, furnishing him with money, a horse, and the promise of a large estate with an annual subsidy once the deed had been accomplished. But when Fiedler arrived, says Conrad Bussow, who happened to be in Kaluga during the siege, he at once revealed the whole plot and was handsomely rewarded by

a grateful Bolotnikov.⁶⁶ Meanwhile the besiegers tried a new tactic. Next to Kaluga's walls they constructed a high tower from wood that neighboring peasants had been ordered to cut. Their plan was to set the tower ablaze when the wind was blowing in the direction of the town and thereby produce a general conflagration. During the night, however, in a daring maneuver, the defenders tunneled under the walls and planted kegs of powder at the base of the tower. When these were ignited there was a great explosion, and the tower burst into flames and collapsed, killing everyone on it. This new setback convinced the Muscovites that there was no easy way to capture the town, so they proceeded to impose a total blockade in the hope of starving its population into submission. Before long Kaluga lay in the grip of hunger, and its inhabitants were reduced to eating their horses and oxen. Yet Bolotnikov and his followers, for all their anxiety over dwindling food and munitions, showed remarkable fortitude, and the siege was to take nearly six months to run its course.⁶⁷

At this point a new pretender enters our already overpopulated story, a certain Ileika (or Ilya) Gorchakov from the town of Murom. By an interesting coincidence, his name carried heroic associations, for Ilya of Murom, according to ancient epic, was a warrior who served "the Christian faith, the Russian land, the city of Kiev, the widows, the orphans, and the poor." The present Ilya of Murom, however, was of a different stamp. The illegitimate son of a cobbler, he was no less typical than Bolotnikov himself of the bandit-Cossack element in the revolt, the restless drifters cut loose from insecure social moorings to seek their fortune in brigandage and adventure. As a youth Gorchakov had left his native town to find work in the busy *posad* of Nizhni Novgorod. But he soon tired of the humdrum life of a shop assistant and signed on as cook of a merchant vessel plying the Volga route between Nizhni and Astrakhan. Once in Astrakhan he jumped ship and fled to the Cossack community on the Terek River, where he sold himself into slavery to a service nobleman named Grigori Elagin. It was on the Terek that Gorchakov began to call himself "Tsarevich Peter," the nonexistent son of Fyodor Ivanovich, last tsar of the Rurik line, whose death in 1598 had precipitated the troubles in which Russia now floundered. "Petrushka" (a diminutive of Peter) attracted a band of

300 Cossacks, slaves, and *streltsy*, pillaged the bazaars and palaces of Astrakhan, then made his way up the Volga and across the steppe to Putivl, where Shakhovskoi had sent for him.⁶⁸

During the long and fruitless siege of Moscow, Shakhovskoi had begun to cast about for a new instrument with which to realize his ambitions. Bolotnikov's campaign had been losing momentum, and no new Dmitri had appeared to give it a boost. Thus, hearing of Gorchakov's exploits in Astrakhan, Shakhovskoi summoned him to his headquarters, spreading the word meanwhile that the dead daughter of Tsar Fyodor was really a boy named Peter, who had miraculously survived and would soon be in Putivl to ride with him against the boyars. Fantastic though this story was, it nevertheless secured Tsarevich Peter a considerable following. By the time he reached Putivl his band of desperadoes had swelled into a small army some 4000 strong, which might have been even larger had the new impostor been more amply endowed with personal magnetism. But Petrushka lacked Bolotnikov's sympathetic qualities and gifts of character. He was a coarse and bloodthirsty brigand with a virulent hatred of the upper classes. On his way through the Slobodskaya Ukraina he put the nobility and officials through excruciating tortures, dangling them by their heels or nailing them up by their hands and feet before they were shot to death or thrown from bridges and watchtowers into the moats below. When he arrived in Putivl he murdered the former *voevoda*, a supporter of Shuisky, and "shamefully took his daughter to bed."⁶⁹

Petrushka and Shakhovskoi, having collected a force of 30,000, set out to the north to combine with Bolotnikov in a fresh campaign against Moscow. Alarmed at the appearance of a new pretender, Vasili issued a charter proclaiming that

the Great Sovereign and Tsar and Grand Prince Fyodor Ivanovich, of blessed memory, autocrat of all Russia, had no sons (there was one daughter, the Tsarevna and Grand Princess Feodosia, who by God's wish did not survive her childhood, but aside from the one daughter Tsar and Grand Prince Fyodor Ivanovich of all Russia had no other offspring). The bandit Cossack Ileika, who calls himself Tsarevich Peter, is the slave of the service nobleman Grigori Elagin, and his mother and wife and sister, all of lowly stock, are still alive.⁷⁰

At the same time Shuisky ordered reinforcements to Kaluga to prevent Bolotnikov's allies from liberating his beleaguered army.

This, of course, was exactly what Shakhovskoi intended to do. While proceeding to Tula, which now replaced Putivl as headquarters of the revolt, he detailed a dissident boyar and fellow supporter of the False Dmitri, Prince Vasili Masalsky, to relieve Bolotnikov. On February 11, 1607, Masalsky was just a few miles from Kaluga when catastrophe overtook him. On the banks of the Vyrka River, a tributary of the Oka, his detachment was caught off guard by a fierce onslaught by government troops. What followed was a massacre rather than a battle. The rebels lost most of their men and all their standards and supply wagons. In despair, a group of survivors sat down on some powder kegs, set them alight and blew themselves sky high. Masalsky himself fell mortally wounded on the battlefield and was carried off to Moscow, where he died. According to Isaac Massa, a Dutch merchant in Moscow who left a valuable account of the rebellion, the victors raced back to Kaluga and shouted the news of their triumph to the rebels inside, demanding that they now surrender, but Bolotnikov laughed defiantly and swore to remain loyal to the true sovereign, Dmitri.⁷¹

It was nearly three months before a second relief force was dispatched to Kaluga. Ironically enough, it was headed by Bolotnikov's former master, Prince Andrei Teliatvsky, an able officer of boyar rank who, like so many of Bolotnikov's noble supporters, including Shakhovskoi, Molchanov, and Liapunov, had sided with the False Dmitri two years before; indeed, it was he who brought Dmitri the invitation to take the throne after Fyodor Godunov's murder. Thus it is not surprising that he should now oppose the man responsible for Dmitri's downfall. Shuisky, moreover, had banished him to the southwest to serve as *voevoda* of Chernigov, just as his confederate Shakhovskoi had been banished to nearby Putivl.⁷²

In early May Teliatvsky reached the village of Pchelnia, just south of Kaluga, where a large government force attempted to block his path. After a savage struggle the Muscovites were driven off, leaving thousands dead on the battlefield, among them their commander, Prince Andrei Cherkassky, as though in payment for Masalsky's death on the Vyrka. After six terrible months

the siege of Kaluga had been raised, and Bolotnikov was able to join his associates in Tula.

With memories of Bolotnikov's siege still fresh, Moscow was seized with panic at the thought of a new attack. To forestall this, Shuisky laid plans for an immediate march on the rebel bastion of Tula. At Serpukhov fresh regiments were collected from every corner, and the town soon echoed to the sounds of wagons and hooves, drums and trumpets. The size of Shuisky's army was awe-inspiring, contemporary estimates being as high as 150,000 men.⁷³ The tsar himself was nominal commander-in-chief, but he had enough sense to place his gifted nephew, Skopin-Shuisky, in effective charge. In early June, as the troops made ready to depart, Patriarch Hermogen prayed for God's assistance

against the enemies of Christ's cross, the traitors, brigands, robbers, thieves, boyars' slaves, and Don and Volga Cossacks, who, having forsaken God and the Orthodox Christian faith and forsworn their oaths of loyalty, are defiling the churches of God and spilling Christian blood without stop and plundering estates and violating women and children. Aiming to destroy forever our Orthodox Christian faith and holy churches of God, they draw to themselves faint-hearted men, declaring that the dead scoundrel and unfrocked monk is still alive and calling him Tsarevich Dmitri.⁷⁴

As Shuisky's army rumbled toward Tula, Bolotnikov and Teliatvsky assembled some 30,000 men and hurried north to intercept it. The bizarre spectacle of the runaway slave riding side by side with his former master, a prince and boyar, is symbolic of the complexity of the rebellion and of the general confusion of the times. When they reached the Vosma River, below the town of Kashira, the rebels ran into a large advance body of Muscovites, and they joined in furious combat. Men flung themselves at one another, and the dead began to pile up. The climax came when a contingent of 1700 insurgents dug themselves into a narrow ravine and fired with murderous accuracy at the government troops. In an effort to dislodge them, Bolotnikov's former allies from Riazan mounted their horses and charged the ravine. At great cost they scattered the enemy, whose powder gave out during their frantic resistance. The rebels were rounded up and cut to pieces on the spot. Everything now went badly for the remainder of the insurgents, whose morale had been shaken by the

disaster that had befallen their comrades. After a day of carnage, in which Bolotnikov and Teliatvsky lost half their men and an immense quantity of equipment, the rebels fell back in disorder toward Tula. Four miles above the town, on the banks of the Voroniia River, Bolotnikov and Teliatvsky rallied their forces for another stand. But, following an unequal trial of strength with their pursuers, they abandoned the field and withdrew, utterly disheartened, to the shelter of the city.

At the end of June Tsar Vasili arrived at the gates of Tula with the main body of his huge army. Although he outnumbered the rebels by five to one, the reduction of the city was not an easy task. Tula boasted a fortified citadel of stone surrounded by an outer ring of wooden walls, which afforded its inhabitants considerable protection from intruders. At Shuisky's approach alarm bells sounded in every quarter, putting the defenders on the alert. Deploying his artillery on two sides of the city, the tsar's nephew, Skopin-Shuisky, opened the attack with a prolonged bombardment followed by an infantry assault in mass formation. Behind the walls, the rebels fought with everything they had to repulse the enemy, while working feverishly between assaults to repair their damaged defenses. Through it all, noted a Dutch merchant named Elias Herckman, Bolotnikov proved himself a brave and worthy commander.⁷⁵ For six weeks the pattern of bombardment and attack continued with ceaseless monotony, yet Shuisky's army achieved very little, and an increasing number began to desert for home.

At this point a petty nobleman from Murom named Ivan Krovkov came forward with a bold plan. His idea was to dam the Upa River, which flows through the city, and flood Tula's stubborn inhabitants into capitulation. Shuisky at first was skeptical, but when Krovkov persisted, offering his life if the plan should fail, the tsar gave his assent. Thus, in early August, a dam was built from sacks of earth on the Upa just west of Tula, and Krovkov's expectations were fulfilled. Much of the city was quickly inundated. Townsfolk had to get around on rafts or in small boats. Supplies of arms and powder fell to dangerous levels. Food became scarcer than ever. According to contemporary observers, men ate dogs and cats and carrion in the streets, and

many died from hunger and exhaustion.⁷⁶ The strain began to tell on the defenders' nerves, occasionally breaking out into open quarrels and mutual accusations. For a growing segment of the population surrender appeared to be the only course.

In desperation Shakhovskoi sent message after message to Poland, begging George Mniszek to send a new tsarevich "from his pretender factory" without delay.⁷⁷ To the surprise of many, in July 1607 a second Dmitri did in fact make his long-awaited appearance near the Polish border. And two months later, having attracted a swarm of enthusiastic supporters, he began to march on the town of Briansk, intending to proceed from there to Tula and Moscow. Had the new pretender succeeded in joining forces with Bolotnikov and Shakhovskoi, their repeated promises of his arrival would have been realized, and this in turn might have produced a ground swell of support that could have altered the destiny of the rebellion. Thus Shuisky had to act quickly to end the stalemate at Tula. Rejecting an offer of help from the Swedes, the tsar, it appears, entered into direct negotiations with the rebel leaders. According to a number of sources, he offered to spare them and grant them "full liberty" if they surrendered immediately.⁷⁸ Other accounts deny that such overtures were made and insist that the weary townspeople themselves handed over the ringleaders. In any case, on October 10, 1607, after four months of hardship, Tula opened its gates to Shuisky's army, thus terminating the last siege of the rebellion.

Shuisky, exulting in his hard-won victory, issued a triumphant proclamation to his subjects: "By the grace of God, the treasonous men in Tula, Prince Andrei Teliatvsky and Prince Grigori Shakhovskoi and Ivashko Bolotnikov and all the Tula folk, have taken the oath to the Great Sovereign and Tsar and Grand Prince, Vasili Ivanovich. Acknowledging their misdeeds, they have kissed the cross, and the same is true of the slave of Grigori Elagin who calls himself Petrushka."⁷⁹ That same day Bolotnikov and Petrushka were brought to Shuisky's headquarters, where the angry soldiers cursed them for the death of their comrades, brothers, and sons. Then, if Bussow and Herckman are to be believed, the following exchange took place between the tsar and his adversary:

Shuisky: Are you the bandit and traitor who rose against his Sovereign and tried to defeat him, believing that you yourself could thus attain the heights of state power?

Bolotnikov: I have been true to the oath which I gave in Poland to the one who called himself Dmitri. Whether or not he was Dmitri I cannot tell, as I had never before set eyes on him. I served him faithfully, but he abandoned me, and now I am here at your mercy and under your power. If you wish to kill me, here is my own saber. If you wish, on the other hand, to show me clemency, according to your promise and oath, then I shall serve you as truly as I have served till now him who has forsaken me.⁸⁰

Those, however, who had put any faith in Shuisky's clemency were doomed to be disappointed. From the tsar's camp at Tula Bolotnikov and "Tsarevich Peter" were conveyed under heavy guard to Moscow, where they underwent the grueling interrogations and tortures to which rebels and serious criminals were invariably subjected. In February 1608 Petrushka was taken to the Danilov Monastery outside the capital and hanged. The following month Bolotnikov was exiled to Kargopol, a small town in northern Russia some thirty miles beyond Beloozero. On his way he passed through the Volga city of Yaroslavl, where, according to a Polish eyewitness, the local nobility were indignant because he was traveling without chains. "Soon I shall put you yourselves in chains," he scowled, "and sew you into bearskins."⁸¹

It was an idle threat, however, for when he reached his destination his eyes were put out, and then he was drowned. Much more fortunate was his former master, Prince Teliatvsky. It seems that he died a peaceful death a few years later, having been neither punished nor deprived of his rank or property, which lends support to the theory that he had made some sort of deal with Shuisky.⁸² As for Grigori Shakhovskoi, whom Busow calls "the instigator of this whole war," he was banished to a hermitage in the frozen north, from which he soon escaped to try his luck with the new pretender.⁸³ The Second Dmitri had in the meantime collected a large army (which included many survivors of Bolotnikov's ill-starred campaign) and was threatening the capital from the western suburb of Tushino. After another long and difficult struggle, Skopin-Shuisky, aided by the same northern towns which had earlier defeated Bolotnikov,

dispersed the new insurgents, whose leader was afterward murdered. The people of Muscovy now set their hopes on the gifted young hero to succeed his aging and childless uncle and bring an end to the chaos that for a decade had afflicted the land. But suddenly Skopin-Shuisky died, and there followed two more years of suffering and confusion, during which Tsar Vasili was dethroned and the Poles occupied the Kremlin. Only in 1612, when the invaders were driven out and a "true tsar," Michael Romanov, was found, whose birth could be linked with the extinct line of sovereigns, was a measure of tranquillity finally restored to the troubled realm.

6. Conclusion

The revolt of Bolotnikov thus passed into history. But it had set the pattern for a series of mass risings that convulsed the Russian state during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bolotnikov himself never enjoyed the hero worship that Razin and Pugachev were to enjoy, and his revolt left a shallower imprint on popular memory than those of his successors. Yet he was an impressive figure in his own right. He had a sincerity and simplicity of character that, while exposing him to the machinations of men far shrewder than himself, won him a widespread following. Moreover, with his Cossack upbringing, his gifts of military leadership, his personal magnetism, and his ultimate martyrdom, he was the original prototype of the Russian rebel-hero.

Bolotnikov's revolt, like those that followed, was an extremely complicated affair which, for all its class savagery, cut across recognizable social categories. It combined a peasant jacquerie with urban insurrection, sectional warfare, Cossack adventurism, anticolonial resistance, status rivalry, political intrigue, and sheer banditry. So far as one can generalize, the rising was a shapeless outburst of the have-nots in Russia, embracing Cossacks and impoverished noblemen as well as peasants, slaves, brigands, and townsfolk, against the Muscovite order. Its immediate causes—

the extinction of the ruling dynasty and the famine which followed—differed from those of later upheavals. But the long-range causes were much the same: the growth of an oppressive centralized autocracy; the ceaseless wars, with their attendant burdens of taxation and recruitment; the progressive loss of land and personal freedom; the notorious venality of public officials; and, the result of all these, a vast floating population, rootless, disoriented, and desperate, bereft of its traditional anchors of family, village, and occupation, yet without any new anchors to take their place.

In such times of social dislocation the Russian people lived in a state of high emotion bordering on mass hysteria. Credulous townsmen and villagers were more receptive than ever to myths, rumors, and seditious propaganda. They listened eagerly to the firebrands and missionaries who were able to translate their inarticulate hatreds and hopes into a more or less coherent vision. During the Time of Troubles a number of myths arose that were to live on for centuries to come, kindling mass rebellion when social tensions became unbearable. Such, for instance, was the myth of a conspiracy of the boyars to remove the sovereign so they might suck the blood of the common folk without his interference. To the poor the wealthy aristocrats were the authors of all the miseries with which they were afflicted. The boyars, in their eyes, had ceased to be human beings and had become the incarnation of evil, monsters endowed with infernal powers, onto whom the downtrodden projected all that they feared and hated. If Russia was to be purged of suffering, then these malevolent interlopers who disrupted the ancient bond between the people and their sovereign had to be stamped out. A related myth was that of the "true tsar," born of the Rurik line, whom the wicked boyars had plotted to eliminate. Somewhere, it was rumored, he lay in hiding, awaiting the proper moment to exterminate his enemies and restore a golden past in which the common folk were justly treated and lived as free townsmen and peasants. These myths were widely and persistently believed, opening the way to fantastic intrigues and impersonations. The plethora of pretenders spawned during the Time of Troubles attests to the unshakable faith of the people in a messianic tsar who would someday deliver them from their tormentors.

Once stirred to act by rumor or calculated propaganda, the lower classes revealed the full extent of their destructive capabilities. Bolotnikov's revolt served as a grim warning that the passivity of the masses could, by the right kind of agitation, be swiftly transformed into a paroxysm of burning, pillage, and slaughter. But in the end his rising was doomed to fail, for the vague myths which united its adherents in a loose coalition were no substitute for an effective organization and a coherent revolutionary program. What is more, the motley rebel army, for all its destructive fury, was an unequal match for the better organized and equipped—if not always reliable—regiments of the government. The rebellion, as a result, ended in bickering and treachery followed by merciless repression.

Ironically, it was partly because of Bolotnikov that the main thrust of Russian history during the preceding centuries—the thrust toward serfdom and autocracy—was able to reassert itself. Faced by a common danger from the lower classes, Shuisky and his gentry opponents were driven into an unforeseen alliance, thus hastening the process by which the boyars and petty landholders were eventually fused into a single class of service noblemen. As a result, the Muscovite order, though it had nearly fallen apart during the Time of Troubles, managed not merely to survive but to emerge with greater vitality than ever. The development of serfdom proceeded apace. The autocracy resumed its insatiable accumulation of power. The middling elements of society, most notably the service landowners, emerged victorious over both the lower orders and the old aristocracy. The boyar renaissance had been nipped in the bud, while the peasants, Cossacks, and urban poor were to see their remaining liberties whittled away by the expanding state and its gentry supporters. The sacrifices of Bolotnikov and his followers had been in vain. But they had left behind an example to inspire others.

II Razin

1670—

1671

When I studied Ustryalov and Karamzin, it always seemed strange to me why in their histories one does not see rural Russia, a history of the masses, the so-called simple, dark people. Must the majority remain inaudible, passive, and outside of history?

—A. P. SHCHAPOV,
populist historian

1. Days of Shaking

The advent in 1613 of Tsar Michael, the first of the Romanov line, marked the end of the Time of Troubles. Russia had weathered one of the worst crises in its history and was not to experience another of comparable magnitude till war and revolution brought the monarchy to dust three hundred years later. But the violence which had plagued the country since the extinction of the Rurik dynasty was by no means over, for the Time of Troubles had rocked the Muscovite order to its foundations. The scars of war and insurrection were visible everywhere. Vast stretches of fertile land, left untilled for years, had reverted to wilderness and waste. In hundreds of towns, once-flourishing markets had closed down, and handicrafts and commerce were at a near standstill. Whole districts were deserted, their inhabitants having perished or fled to safer locations in the southern steppes or along the Volga. Foreign troops still occupied a broad swath of territory on Muscovy's western frontier. The empire's treasury was empty and its administrative machinery a shambles.

Small wonder that the country remained in the grip of insecurity and discontent, for the Time of Troubles had bred a spirit of lawlessness that was difficult to extinguish. In the south unruly Cossacks flouted the authority of the new government, and elsewhere, too, bands of armed marauders continued to roam the countryside, looting and burning whenever the occasion offered. These highwaymen, organized in Cossack style with an elected *ataman* at their head, ambushed traveling merchants or swooped down on defenseless estates and towns, often with the connivance of the local poor, who gave them shelter and alerted them to approaching danger.¹ Their ranks were replenished by desperate men cut adrift from their native habitats during the decade of troubles, men whose lawless escapades were deeply rooted in social and economic discontent and who, like the followers of Khlopko and Bolotnikov, refused to consider themselves criminals. "Neither thieves nor brigands we," they sang, "but brave and stalwart men."²

So long as the disorders persisted, the recovery of the country, on which depended the fate of the new dynasty, was inconceivable. At times, indeed, the operations of these Cossacks and

outlaws—in seventeenth-century Russia the terms were virtually synonymous—assumed the proportions of a full-fledged rebellion against the local *voevoda* or against the crown itself. Accordingly, the authorities bent their efforts to subdue the brigands; and after a decade of sporadic but serious fighting, Muscovy at last settled down to a more tranquil existence in which the wounds of the past could begin to heal. Markets reopened for business; workshops again hummed with activity; more and more land was returned to cultivation; and for the first time in a generation the population showed signs of a slow but steady increase. At the same time, the state administration was renovated and strengthened, so that by the end of Michael's reign (1645) Muscovy had regained a measure of political stability.

Yet beneath the surface the effects of the troubles still made themselves felt. For the government took no steps to eliminate the underlying causes of the crisis with which the century had begun. Punitive measures merely drove the opposition underground, where discontent continued to rankle, while on the lower Volga and in the "wild fields" of the southern frontier banditry remained endemic, threatening to flare up at any moment into open revolt. Stability, moreover, was purchased at the expense of popular freedom. Following the lines laid down by Ivan the Terrible, Michael and his heir Alexis (1645–1676) strove to concentrate administrative and military authority in their own hands, or in the hands of their appointed officials. After the chaos that had plagued their predecessors, a centralized autocracy seemed to them the sole guarantee of order, on which depended the state's very survival. Only a strong monarchy, they insisted, could furnish adequate defense and administrative efficiency for the vast Russian empire, with its flat open plains and disparate and far-flung population. Thus bit by bit the Romanovs strengthened their power. The ancient boyar council gradually slipped into oblivion, a fate shared by the Zemski Sobor, the rudimentary national assembly which had chosen Michael as sovereign. At the same time, local initiative was everywhere stifled. Organs of self-government succumbed to the authority of the *voevoda*, whose rule bore down heavily on the local inhabitants. "The horse loves oats," went a popular saying, "the earth manure, and the governor tribute."³

The result was that a century which had opened with a decade of near anarchy saw the progressive subjugation of the Russian population. The government, determined to prevent its restless citizens from escaping the burdens of taxation and military service, evolved a rigidly stratified social system which fettered every man to his place of residence and inherited occupation. At the same time, an impassable barrier was created between the nobility, who owned the land in return for rendering service, and the lower classes, who cultivated the soil, furnished recruits, and replenished the coffers of the government. These arrangements were systematized by the Law Code of 1649, which divided the Russian population into fixed hereditary categories whose interests were subordinated to the military and fiscal needs of the state. Peasants were tied to the land, and townsmen were frozen into the occupations of their fathers and forbidden on penalty of death to move to new locations. This was done not only to insure an uninterrupted flow of tax revenue into the treasury but also to halt the perpetual wandering of the people, which grievously undermined social stability. For the same reasons, the state removed any time limit for the recovery of runaway peasants and imposed heavy penalties on landlords found guilty of harboring them. By this action the institution of serfdom was consecrated in the highest law of the land. At the same time, peasants and other citizens were prohibited from selling themselves into slavery, for the government needed the taxes from which slaves were exempt. As the century advanced, more and more slaves were entered on the tax rolls, so that the distinction between slave and serf, like that between boyar and service nobleman, was gradually obliterated.

The chief beneficiaries of the Code of 1649 were the service noblemen, on whom the crown relied both for its own protection and for the defense of the realm. By shouldering the burden of military and civil service in an age of continuous warfare and expansion, the small and middling landowners acquired a dominant position in Russian society. A growing proportion of the tsar's edicts was designed to satisfy their needs and interests. In particular, the service gentry gained increasing administrative powers on their local estates, where they gradually reduced their peasants to chattel. And as the gentry's ambitions were realized,

such grievances as they may once have harbored against the throne evaporated. Hereafter they were to remain the bulwark of the Romanov regime. Even during the most critical periods their loyalty seldom wavered. Accordingly, though they had played a prominent role in Bolotnikov's rebellion, only a small number were to join forces with Razin, and fewer still with Bulavin and Pugachev, so that over the next hundred years mass upheavals in Russia took on a progressively sharper class character.

The peasants meanwhile resisted enslavement as best they could. Since land was abundant and labor scarce, their natural tendency was to run off to the steppe or to the fertile Volga valley, or across the Urals into Siberia, where colonization had begun toward the end of the sixteenth century. Under Michael and Alexis, in spite of severe punishment, flight remained their chief means of protest. To escape the tax collector and the recruiting sergeant, whose visits were becoming more and more frequent, peasants in growing numbers abandoned their villages and took to the road, often making their way to the Cossacks or to the bands of armed marauders who continued to rove the countryside. "Don't pay your dues," went a peasant saying. "Run off to the Volga, to the brigands or the boatmen."⁴

Peasant migration received a strong impetus in 1654 with the outbreak of war with Poland, and soon after with Sweden, which dragged on a dozen years and took a very heavy toll. Tax levies and military call-ups rose sharply, disrupting economic recovery in mid-course and greatly intensifying popular unrest. The exodus of peasants to the frontier swelled to flood tide. Often the runaways absconded with the grain, livestock, and personal belongings of their masters, many of whom had been summoned to the Polish front. Title deeds were destroyed, and nobles who had not gone to war sometimes found life more hazardous on their own estates than in combat with the enemy. Cases of serfs murdering their masters, though still rare, were on the rise, the victims being predominantly small proprietors who were notorious for their brutality.⁵ Meanwhile, the large secular and ecclesiastical lords continued to entice and even abduct peasants from the estates of the petty landowners, who petitioned the tsar to assist them in recovering the fugitives.

Anxious to placate its servitors and in critical need of men and

revenue to prosecute the war, the crown launched a series of organized manhunts into the black-soil regions adjoining the Volga and the southern prairie, which attracted the bulk of the runaways. In 1658 special officials were appointed to conduct search operations. Landlords who sheltered runaways risked floggings and heavy fines and were made to surrender four peasants of their own for every fugitive found in their possession. The recovery of serfs thus became a function of the state rather than a private concern of the masters. During the first half of 1662, search parties in the middle Volga districts of Arzamas, Alatyr, and Kurmysh, areas which in Razin's time were to become hotbeds of rebellion, netted no less than 5000 fugitive serfs. Some 3000 more were rounded up three years later in the Tambov region, another future Razin stronghold.⁶ Government posses encountered fierce resistance, in reprisal for which new settlements were put to the torch and runaways were beaten with the knout and then put in irons and taken back to their legal owners. Nevertheless, the flight of the villagers showed no signs of slackening. For punitive policies alone offered no solution; they merely drove a large segment of the population outside the pale of law and order, creating an eager reserve for future rebellions. Recovery expeditions were to continue for the next hundred years, figuring prominently in the risings of both Razin and Bulavin.

Razin's revolt, however, was more than a response to government recovery operations. It was the culmination of a great wave of violence which swept the Russian empire in the middle decades of the century. This was indeed a time when social upheaval engulfed the whole European continent, from France, Portugal, and Ireland to Hungary, Russia, and the Ukraine, a phenomenon which some historians interpret as a general crisis with deep-seated spiritual as well as political and economic causes.⁷ In several countries, including Russia, outlying regions rebelled against the center to resist crushing tax burdens and infringements of local liberties. Everywhere there was discontent with the growing state edifice, which existed primarily for making war. Everywhere outbursts were directed more against unpopular governors, ministers, and bureaucrats than against the monarchs they served. Everywhere there was a drift of people from village to

town, a sharp rise in the cost of living, and a widening gulf between the rich and the poor. Peasants and craftsmen were further squeezed by the exploitation of landlords and merchants and by rising taxation to feed the expanding state machine. The result was widespread poverty, dislocation, and popular resentment, which found expression in mass revolts and millenarian religious movements. An apocalyptic wave swept much of the continent from the Atlantic to the Urals. "These days are days of shaking," declared an English preacher during the Puritan Revolution, "and the shaking is universal." In nearly identical language, after the Moscow "salt rebellion" of 1648, an angry commoner from the *posad* warned the boyars that more violence was yet to come "because the whole world is shaking." "The times are bad," he said, "there is great shaking, and the people are troubled."⁸

In Russia, where the church was torn by a great schism both social and spiritual in character, apocalyptic feelings were intense and widespread. Religious dissenters regarded Patriarch Nikon as Antichrist and Tsar Alexis as the Beast of the Apocalypse prophesied in the Book of Revelation and believed that the end of the world was at hand.⁹ And if the bulk of the people continued to distinguish between the well-meaning sovereign and the "wicked boyars" who kept him under their spell, a growing number began to criticize Alexis himself for bowing to the wishes of his advisors. "The sovereign," it was said, "is a young fool and looks on everything through the eyes of the boyars Morozov and Miloslavsky. They dominate everything, and the tsar, though he knows what is going on, keeps quiet, for the Devil has taken away his understanding."¹⁰

During Alexis' reign popular outbursts occurred more frequently and on a larger scale than ever before. The chief causes have already been indicated. By the middle of the seventeenth century the Russian empire had become a vast armed camp, overburdened with taxation and military recruitment and living under the harsh regimentation imposed by an increasingly centralized and bureaucratic regime. The government was not only engaged in continuous warfare on its western frontiers but was simultaneously extending its commitments in the south and east, where a line of fortified outposts was steadily being pushed farther

and farther into the steppe and beyond the Volga into the Ural mountains and Siberian forests. As a result, the human and material resources of the country were being strained to the limit; indeed, such protracted warfare and intensive colonization would have drained the wealth of nations far more prosperous than Muscovy, which had yet to recover fully from the Time of Troubles.

When violence erupted, it began in the towns rather than in the rural districts. As in Bolotnikov's day, the peasants, for all their hardships, remained passive until stirred to rebellion by neighboring urban disorders. In the towns of Russia the *posads* were overflowing with potential insurgents. Mingled with the tradesmen and artisans, who themselves eked out a precarious existence, was an assortment of unstable elements—beggars, thieves, casual laborers, drifters—who lived in a state of unrest and were forever on the edge of violence, ready to fall on the privileged inhabitants of the citadel, outside of which they camped, in sight of the golden domes. Lacking even the meager security of the soil and the village community, the residents of the *posad* were dependent on a fluctuating market for their daily bread and were directly exposed to the arbitrary and contemptuous treatment of urban officialdom. They formed a kind of pre-industrial *Lumpenproletariat*, impoverished, rootless, overburdened with taxes, and resentful of government monopolies on alcohol, salt, and other basic items of consumption. Their plight was aggravated by competition from markets and workshops maintained by monasteries and private estates, and by the tax privileges granted to foreigners and to the affluent Russian merchants (*gosti*) who handled the tsar's own commercial dealings. Moreover, the *streltsy* and other minor servitors were also allowed to carry on trade without paying taxes, placing ordinary civilians at a considerable disadvantage. All these factors conspired to keep the inhabitants of the *posad* on the margin of subsistence. Only a slight deterioration in their economic situation might menace their very survival. Thus it is hardly surprising that they should possess a more volatile temperament than their rural counterparts and should be the first to rebel in times of abnormal tension. Any sudden misfortune, such as famine or war, might provoke them into a frenzy of violence against their real or imaginary

tormentors. For the most part their political attitudes were conservative; ardent defenders of the tsar, they were always ready to take up arms against his alleged enemies, the "traitorous boyars." But in moments of extreme stress the urban poor could become a vicious, uncontrollable mob, beating at the palace gates to demand relief from their sovereign.

But their outcry was seldom heard. The government, in constant need of funds, continued to levy inordinate taxes on the towns, the "fifth money," a special assessment imposed on artisans and traders, being a notorious example. On top of this the merciless exactions of corrupt administrators made life difficult to bear. Thus in 1648, when the already onerous salt tax was quadrupled, revolt broke out in Moscow, the mob venting its worst fury upon foreigners and state officials. According to a Dutch eyewitness, the commoners petitioned Alexis

concerning the intolerable great taxes and contributions, whereby they were overburdened for some years . . . so they with their wives and children are thereby ruined; besides which the great oppressions which the boyars did lay daily upon them, and that they were not able to hold out any longer. Yea, they desired rather with their wives and children to undergo a present death than to suffer any longer in such a transcendent oppression.

When their appeals went unheeded, the *posad* folk proceeded to sack the foreign quarter and the houses of boyars and merchants, and "all the stately and precious things they found they hewed in pieces with axes."¹¹ Fires broke out throughout the city, and soon half of Moscow lay in ashes. The *streltsy*, called into action, turned a blind eye to the rampaging crowd. For even though they enjoyed tax advantages over the civilians, their wages had fallen into arrears, and to a certain extent they shared the rebellious outlook of the lower classes from which they originated.

From Moscow the rioting spread swiftly. Town after town broke out in revolt. Even such conservative northern communities as Ustiug, Solvychegodsk, and Yaroslavl rose in protest against the government's fiscal and administrative abuses; and insurgents in the remote Siberian town of Tomsk declared their intention to "start a Don [that is, a Cossack republic] on the upper Ob."

In 1650 violence against the "boyar traitors" and their "German friends" flared up in Pskov and Novgorod, where ancient memories of independence and popular rule had been kept alive through nearly two centuries of Muscovite domination.¹² After days of savage fighting each of these risings was put down, and on the surface at least, quiet prevailed in the towns for the next dozen years. In 1662, however, the protracted war with Poland and Sweden brought on a fiscal crisis of greater dimensions than any in the past. To satisfy the mounting demand for funds, the treasury minted low-grade copper coins in identical size and shape to the silver pieces in use at the time, and a wild spate of money speculation ensued during which unscrupulous men hoarded the available supplies of silver and flooded the market with counterfeit copper coins. The result was a ruinous inflation which threatened the whole monetary system with collapse. As prices skyrocketed, the desperate residents of Moscow renewed their violence. Seditious leaflets appeared on the walls of churches and public buildings demanding the severest punishment for boyars, merchants, and officials who had seized the opportunity to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor. As in 1648, fiscal agents were savagely beaten and homes of the wealthy pillaged. The rising reached a climax when an angry mob marched on the tsar's suburban palace at Kolomenskoe, the village from which Bolotnikov had directed his siege of the capital sixty years before. When the sovereign emerged, one of the protestors clutched at his robes, and the others clamored for the heads of the profiteers. Troops were rushed in, and a wholesale massacre took place. According to a contemporary estimate, 7000 lost their lives in the disorder and twice as many suffered the knout or branding or amputation of arms and legs.¹³ Thousands more were deprived of their property and banished to the garrison towns of the middle and lower Volga, where a few years later they would furnish eager recruits for Razin's campaign against Moscow.

In 1667 the prolonged war with Poland was finally brought to an end. Nearly a fifth of the Russian population had fallen in combat or died from the ravages of famine and plague. Widespread disorders, particularly in the towns, had compounded the government's difficulties. But the greatest rebellion was yet to come. For the war had increased the regimentation of Russian

life and sharpened the edge of discontent. All the ingredients for a mass upheaval—bondage, bureaucratic despotism, spiritual crisis—had steadily accumulated. All, that is to say, save one: the appearance of a charismatic leader to rally the people to his banner.

2. Razin

It is not hard to explain why each of the four great revolts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should have been led by a Don Cossack or, in Bolotnikov's case, by a slave who ran off to the Cossacks and spent his formative years among them. The Cossacks were distinguished by an aggressive nature and a fighting capacity all but unknown among the mass of ordinary villagers and townsfolk to the north. Descended of fugitives from Muscovite oppression, they cherished their freedom and independence and felt a strong sympathy for the inhabitants of the heartland, where the last vestiges of personal liberty were being torn up by the roots. It was this sympathy, combined with an unquenchable thirst for excitement and adventure, which thrust them into the vanguard of every major upheaval in Russia over a 200-year period. Until the nineteenth century the Cossacks were the very symbol of popular freedom, audacious rebels who rejected domination from every source. "Warrior muzhiks," Alexander Herzen christened them, "knights-errant of the Russian common people."¹⁴

More than anything else the Don Cossacks prided themselves on their autonomy and self-rule. True to their libertarian spirit, they recognized no authority but that of their own general assembly, or *krug*, which gathered periodically in the Cossack capital of Cherkassk, situated on a large fortified island in the lower Don. Presiding over the *krug* was the elected chieftain of the Host, the *voiskovoi ataman*, assisted by a body of elected elders, under whose guidance the assembly meted out justice and decided on matters affecting the community as a whole, such as the admission of new members and the organization of military campaigns or expeditions of plunder. Questions of local concern were dealt with by the individual Cossack villages—there were some

fifty in Razin's time, strung out along the Don and its tributaries—which had their own assemblies, *atamans*, and elders on the model of Cherkassk. Cossack government thus took the form of a rough-and-ready folk democracy which, though tempered by the oligarchic propensities of the elected officials, who tended to dominate the proceedings of their respective assemblies, stood in marked contrast to the increasingly centralized and bureaucratic despotism of Muscovy. By setting an example of autonomy and self-determination, imperfect though it might be, the Cossack "republic" on the Don presented a challenge the Romanovs could not long afford to ignore.

Independent and headstrong plainsmen, the Don Cossacks resented government interference in their affairs and resisted all attempts to control them. They refused to pay taxes to Moscow—indeed, they expected to be rewarded for patrolling the frontier, acting as guides, and other services. Nor would they humble themselves before Russian landlords and officials. Symbolic of their autonomy was the fact that their relations with the tsar were conducted through his foreign office, the Posolski Prikaz, which sought to preserve amity with the raucous horsemen, on whom the crown relied for border defense against the Crimean Tatars and other warlike tribes. In return for this service the Cossacks received an annual subsidy (*zhalovanie*), partly in money and partly in food and military supplies, especially powder and lead. Periodic delegations were sent from Cherkassk to Moscow to negotiate the amount of the *zhalovanie*; and on special occasions, such as after a victorious campaign, extra subsidies of cloth, grain, and wine were dispatched to the Host to be distributed among its members.¹⁵ The whole question of *zhalovanie*—how much would be paid, how often, and to whom—was a thorny one which figured largely in the frequent Cossack mutinies against the state. The payments fluctuated widely according to the condition of the treasury, falling off sharply in times of war when available funds were earmarked for the regular army. And with warfare being almost continuous in the mid-seventeenth century, the cry for *zhalovanie* went up frequently among the Cossacks, becoming a major source of friction between Cherkassk and the central government.

To demand higher subsidies, however, was to risk government intervention in Cossack affairs, which the Host tried desperately

to avoid. One of the chief preoccupations of the Cherkassk leadership was to keep the Muscovite system, which was drawing nearer and nearer with the advance of colonization and the fortified frontier, from penetrating their domain. As a precautionary measure, extensive agriculture was forbidden within the territory of the Host, for agriculture was inevitably linked with serfdom and government controls. They would guard the borders of Muscovy, the Cossacks declared, in return for "the waters and grasses but not for estates."¹⁶ Farming, in their eyes, was a menial occupation unworthy of a warrior and plainsman. The settled life of the peasant they held in great disdain. Restless adventurers, they refused to be fettered to the plough like beasts of burden, but rather preferred to roam the prairie without trammels of any sort:

Not with the plough is our dear, glorious earth furrowed,
Our earth is furrowed with the hoofs of horses;
And our dear, glorious earth is sown with the heads of Cossacks.

They feared, and feared rightly, that the introduction of agriculture on a significant scale would lead to the disruption of their ancient "liberties" and of their traditional way of life.

Shunning the plough, the Cossacks won their livelihood by netting fish in the Don and its tributaries, hunting the abundant game of the steppes, and herding cattle, horses, and sheep. In some districts salt extraction and beekeeping were important occupations, while Cossacks of a more predatory stamp pillaged merchant convoys on the Volga and outfitted small fleets of shallow-draft longboats (*strugi*) for hit-and-run raids against Tatar settlements and Turkish and Persian towns on the coasts of the Black and Caspian seas. In exchange for their fish, animals, and booty, the Cossacks imported grain from the black-earth provinces of south-central Muscovy, especially from the regions of Tambov and Voronezh on the upper Don, to which the traders from Cherkassk carried, along with their goods, a message of liberty and self-rule.

Yet, for all their efforts to ward off agriculture, the Cossacks were fighting a losing battle. Apart from being menaced by the relentless advance of Muscovite colonization, they were inundated by runaway peasants who brought their rustic occupations with

them. The untamed prairie, as we have seen, was a traditional sanctuary from the thrall of serfdom and autocracy; and the territory of the Don Cossacks was particularly tempting because anyone who reached its borders was considered a free man. "From the Don no one is handed over," was a basic Cossack axiom. Nor would the search parties from Muscovy dare venture into the southern no-man's-land in defiance of this injunction. Small wonder that after the Code of 1649 and the outbreak of war with Poland the influx of runaways into the Don area assumed the proportions of a flood. By 1670, the year in which Razin launched his rebellion against Moscow, the population of the Don region had jumped to 25,000, three times what it had been when Alexis mounted the throne a generation before. Thus, ironically, the wedge that enabled the Muscovite system to penetrate the Don was formed by the runaway peasants themselves, for it was only a matter of time before landlord and tax collector would follow in pursuit.

The influx of refugees had a profound effect on the character of the Don community. As the century wore on there developed a growing cleavage between the old-time Cossacks, who lived mainly downstream in the vicinity of Cherkassk, and the new peasant fugitives, who settled along the upper reaches of the river and along its northern tributaries, nearer the areas from which they had fled. The downstream Cossacks, whose ancestors had arrived on the Don generations before, were known as the "house-owning" (*domovitye*) element. It was they who enjoyed the best fisheries and hunting preserves, who owned extensive herds of livestock, and who carried on a lively trade both locally and with the market towns to the north. It was they who dominated the local and central *krugs* and furnished the *atamans* and elders who managed the affairs of the community. And, finally, it was they who received the much-coveted *zhalovanie* from Moscow and, in contrast to the disgruntled upstream fugitives, enjoyed reasonably good relations with the central government. Over the years they had lost their taste for plunder and adventure. Abandoning their seminomadic ways, they built flourishing towns on the lower Don and began to adopt a more settled existence, making more and more compromises with their Muscovite neighbors, on whom they relied for grain and subsidies.

The newcomers, by contrast, known as the "naked" ones, the *golytba* or *golutvennye*, without land or property of their own, were the lawless and discontented, the rootless and desperate men whose mentality differed sharply from that of their prosperous and settled downstream neighbors, for whom circumstances often compelled them to work as hired hands. They, of course, received no subsidies from the government from which they had fled and which they hated with an abiding passion. Memories of the knout, of forced recruitment, of unbearable taxes were still fresh. And now, arriving on the Don, they found that their troubles were not over. For their membership in the community had to be passed upon, after a long waiting period, by the general assembly in Cherkassk, which was controlled by the Cossack establishment. Even worse, they were prohibited from earning their traditional livelihood by cultivating the soil. Little wonder their resentment was bitter. They were forever in a condition of ferment and unrest. And as their numbers increased, so too did the antagonism between the new and the old, the poor and the rich.

In effect, then, a miniature sectional conflict was developing on the Don between its upstream and downstream inhabitants. So long as the newcomers remained disorganized, the elders were able to control them and to retain their monopoly of power. It fell to Razin to alter the situation. It is not surprising that the elders, in the words of a government report of 1669, should have "strongly lamented his return to the Don,"¹⁷ fresh from a triumphant campaign of plunder on the Caspian. For under Razin's dynamic leadership the disorganized rabble became a serious threat to the Cherkassk establishment; and as a result, the "house-owners" threw in their lot with Moscow to help crush his insurrection, just as the service gentry had turned against their social inferiors in Bolotnikov's day. Thus the government was once again to benefit from internal divisions among its opponents—this time, indeed, to the extent of bringing the Don Host under its control. Hereafter the downstream Cossacks, like the minor nobility, were to remain loyal servants of the sovereign and were to betray Bulavin as well as Razin into his hands.

In the meantime, the plight of the upstream newcomers had become acute. Denied both their traditional agricultural pursuits

and a share of government subsidies, they cast about for a means of survival. At length, finding no alternative, they resorted to expeditions of piracy. These were sponsored by the downstream Cossacks, who though themselves no longer active participants in the quest for booty, were ready to supply boats, weapons, and supplies in return for a share of the proceeds. For more than a century Cossacks had been launching raids down the Don and into the Black Sea, penetrating as far as the shores of Anatolia. In these maritime adventures they showed extraordinary courage and ingenuity, striking with lightning speed at the coastal settlements of the Turks and Crimean Tatars, then escaping in their light and maneuverable *strugi* before any effective force could be collected against them. Their predatory activities, however, were sharply curtailed when the Turks built fortifications at the mouth of the Don to block their passage. In 1642 the Turkish bastion of Azov was reinforced after an army of Don Cossacks seized it by storm and held it for five years, until Tsar Michael asked them to withdraw. Cossack excursions into the Black Sea became still more hazardous in 1660, when the Turks bolstered their defenses at the mouth of the Don with a garrison of 5000 troops and as an added precaution stretched thick iron chains across the river between the watchtowers on either bank.¹⁸

Thereafter Cossack raids on the Black Sea were few and far between. Deprived of their traditional areas of plunder, the marauders shifted the direction of their attacks to the east, sailing down the Volga into the Caspian. Not that Cossack raids in these waters were anything new. In fact they had been occurring since the late sixteenth century, after Moscow's conquest of the Volga basin. In 1636, when Adam Olearius, secretary of an embassy to Muscovy from the Duke of Holstein, began a trip down the Volga, the *voevoda* of Nizhni Novgorod warned him to stay on the alert for Cossack pirates, "a barbarous and inhumane people, and more cruel than lions."¹⁹ On his way down the Volga Olearius saw gallows on a hill near Tsaritsyn which were used to hang Cossack buccaneers who crossed over from the Don at a point above the town where the two rivers bend sharply toward each other, forming an easy portage. A few years later, during the 1650s and 1660s, Don Cossacks took to plundering merchant vessels on the Volga from a fortress near Panshin,

at the bend of the Don between its Tishina and Ilovlia tributaries. Often these raiding parties would winter on the Yaik River, east of the Volga, and when spring arrived would sail into the Caspian in search of further loot, a pattern which Razin was to follow on the eve of his great rebellion. Before long, however, even these easterly waterways became more difficult of access, for the tsar, while encouraging raids against the Turks and Tatars on the Black Sea, frowned on this shift of operations to the Caspian, a Persian lake. Moscow wished to protect its flourishing commerce with the Middle East and valued its good relations with the shah, a potential ally against their common Turkish adversary. Moreover, the appearance of predatory Cossacks on the Volga posed a threat to local Russian trade between Nizhni Novgorod and Astrakhan. For these reasons the government branded the new expeditions "piracy" and took urgent steps to prevent them.

With their marauding operations hampered on both the Black Sea and the Caspian, the upstream Cossacks found themselves in a desperate economic situation. Compounding their plight was a severe food shortage throughout the Don territory. "In many Don settlements," reads a government report, "runaway peasants have come from neighboring areas with their wives and children, and as a result there is now great hunger on the Don."²⁰ Owing to the war with Poland, food shipments from Tambov and Voronezh were being diverted for military use; this, coupled with an increased demand on the Don created by the influx of refugees, caused the price of grain to skyrocket. Upriver, the "naked" population was faced with starvation.

During the summer of 1666, in the twelfth year of the Polish war, hunger and privation called into being a movement of protest among the upstream Cossacks led by an obscure freebooter named Vaska Us. As the forerunner of Razin, Us played a role akin to that of Khlopko, whose ill-starred campaign against Moscow in 1603 anticipated the more formidable revolt of Bolotnikov three years later. Unlike Khlopko, however, Us was destined to survive defeat and become one of Razin's principal lieutenants. The plan he conceived was to ride with his followers to the capital and ask the tsar to admit them into government service, in return for the *zhalovanie* which had hitherto been denied them.

Collecting a band of 500 men, Us rode north to Voronezh, where he was joined by 200 additional volunteers who arrived on foot or in small boats. From Voronezh they proceeded toward Tula, the town in central Muscovy where Bolotnikov had made his last stand sixty years before. "Oh Us, Us, came into Rus," begins a folksong which tells of his invasion of the Russian heartland. By the time Tula was sighted more than 2000 peasants had flocked to his company, attacking and plundering the neighboring estates and sending the landowners and their families scurrying to the safety of the town. The Tula *voevoda* hastily mobilized his gentry militia and sent an urgent call for help to Moscow. In response the tsar dispatched a large force led by Prince Yuri Bariatsky, an able commander who was later to oppose Razin as well. But now his task was simpler. Hearing that troops were on the way, Us's following disintegrated, the peasants scattering to their villages and the Cossacks to their sanctuary on the Don.²¹

Us's brief adventure was only a foretaste of what was to come. Less than a year was to pass before the same *golytba* who had followed him to Tula rallied to a far abler leader in a fresh quest for booty and excitement. Their new *ataman* was Stepan Timofeevich Razin, born of an established Cossack family in Zimoveiskaya Stanitsa, an old settlement on the lower-middle Don within the immediate orbit of Cherkassk. Razin, then, was not himself a destitute fugitive from Muscovite oppression. Indeed, his godfather was none other than the *voiskovoi ataman*, Kornilo Yakovlev, who would later turn against him when he challenged the house-owning oligarchy from which he himself had sprung. It is worth noting that Frolka Razin, Stenka's younger brother and fellow rebel, was one of the signatories of a letter from Yakovlev to the tsar promising to punish Vaska Us for his unsanctioned escapade into the heartland,²² which suggests that, at this point at least, Frolka was a loyal member of the establishment.

The same was true of Stenka. We first hear of him in 1652, when, as a young man of twenty-one or twenty-two, he made the long pilgrimage to the Solovetsky Monastery on the White Sea, traveling by way of Moscow, which he saw for the first time. It was a tradition among the Don Cossacks to visit the famous shrine and pray to its founders, Saints Savva and Zosima, whose remains were widely credited with miraculous powers. Six

years later, in 1658, young Razin made his second visit to Moscow as a member of a Cossack delegation sent to negotiate the annual *zhalovanie*. In 1661 the *krug* in Cherkassk entrusted him with another important mission: to negotiate an alliance with the Kalmyks against the Nogai Tatars, fierce vassals of the Turks who launched frequent raids of plunder from their base on the lower Volga. Later the same year we find Razin again in Moscow, reporting to the Posolski Prikaz on the success of his mission to the Kalmyks and receiving permission to make a second pilgrimage to the Solovetsky Monastery.²³ Beyond his diplomatic assignments, Stenka, as an able-bodied Cossack, performed his share of military duty. In 1663, for instance, he took part in an expedition against the Crimean Tatars launched jointly by the Don and Zaporozhian Cossacks, in which they liberated some 350 prisoners seized by the Tatars during their periodic forays into the steppe.²⁴

Clearly, then, Razin was no "naked" newcomer athirst for revenge against Moscow. He had served the Host with distinction and had won its trust and respect. Why then should he come forward as the *ataman* of the poor and raise a revolt in their name? The reasons remain obscure. Yet often throughout history rebel leaders have come from comfortable backgrounds; indeed, this would seem more the rule than the exception. Seldom have the oppressed themselves led the way, but rather those who have been aroused by their suffering and degradation. It is significant, in this connection, that Stenka was not the only member of his family to take up the insurrectionary torch. During his rising both his uncle and brother headed large rebel detachments, and even his mother, Matryona, was to be captured and executed by government troops after participating in a bloody battle on the Northern Donets River at the height of the revolt.

But their motives are shrouded in mystery. Some sources relate that Razin, after his own capture, cited the execution of his elder brother as the reason for his rebellion.²⁵ In 1665, so the story goes, Stenka's brother, who commanded a detachment of Don Cossacks on the Polish front, asked for leave to go home during a lull in the fighting. When his superior, Prince Yuri Dolgoruky, denied the request, Razin left anyway, only to be overtaken and brought back to his camp, where a furious Dolgoruky ordered

him hanged as a deserter. It was this act which supposedly kindled within the Razin family a desire for revenge against the Muscovite aristocracy. The story, however, cannot be supported by any documentary evidence. Indeed, the very existence of an older brother is in doubt. Contemporary records mention several Don Cossacks named Razin,²⁶ but none who fits the circumstances in question.

For a more convincing explanation of Stenka's rebellious career one must turn to the nature of the man himself. By all accounts he was a born leader, a Cossack of striking personality and appearance, endowed with charismatic powers to influence the behavior of others. Jan Struys, a Dutch seaman who saw Razin in Astrakhan in 1669, describes him as "a brave man as to his person, and well-proportioned in his limbs, tall and straight of body, pock-pitted, but only so as did rather become than disfigure him, of good conduct, but withal severe and cruel."²⁷ Stenka was then about forty years old, a seasoned warrior whose determination, resourcefulness, and restless energy are traits on which all contemporary sources agree. He was also a man of strong, at times ungovernable, passions. According to an anonymous English mariner from the *Queen Esther*, docked in Archangel at the time of Razin's rebellion, "nothing but his malicious and rebellious temper hath impelled him to this infamous undertaking," the execution of his brother being merely a pretext to escape the same fate.²⁸

That Razin was capable of sudden changes of mood, particularly when under the influence of alcohol, is attested to by his contemporaries. At times his bouts of drinking brought on paroxysms of violence which claimed innocent lives. Yet among the rootless inhabitants of the frontier he acquired an aura of benevolence and magical prowess that survived long after his death. He had an instinctive understanding of simple men, and his ability to incarnate the popular ideal of the deliverer was unsurpassed by any other rebel leader. At some point in his life he evidently conceived a hatred for men of privilege and authority and turned his truculence and pent-up energies against them. At the same time, he accurately gauged the mood of the lower classes, the castaways of the Don and the Volga, and knew that they were ripe for revolt. Nikolai Kostomarov, in what remains

after more than a century the most imaginative treatment of the great rebel, admirably evokes Stenka's magnetic qualities, his

enormous will and impulsive activity . . . now stern and gloomy, now working himself into a fury, now given up to drunken carousing, now ready to suffer any hardship with superhuman endurance. There was something fascinating in his speech; reckless courage was written in his coarse and slightly pock-marked features. The crowd sensed some supernatural strength in him, against which it was useless to struggle. They called him a sorcerer; and in fact there was in his soul some dreadful and mysterious darkness.²⁹

3. The Caspian

Such was the man who in April 1667 launched his first adventure as leader of the dispossessed. Winter had passed and the ice was vanishing from the rivers, which again became populated with merchant caravans and Cossack longboats. At the villages of Panshin and Kachalin, where the Don bends toward the Volga, Stenka collected a band of upstream Cossacks, hungry for plunder and excitement, and fitted out a fleet for an expedition into the Caspian. Such excursions, we have seen, had been taking place for nearly a century but never on so large a scale or under such capable leadership. Razin's plan, in brief, was to sail down the Volga to its mouth, follow the northern shore of the Caspian as far as the Yaik, and spend the fall and winter upriver, in the town of Yaitsk, to which a group of dissident Cossacks had invited him. Yaitsk would serve as his base for raids into the Caspian the following spring.³⁰

Moscow, however, got wind of the scheme, doubtless from Cossack loyalists in Cherkassk, and attempted to forestall it. Orders went out to the *voevodas* of Astrakhan and Cherny Yar to reinforce the garrison at Tsaritsyn and to block Razin's entry into the Volga. But the *voevodas* failed to respond. For Razin, as yet unrenowned, seemed merely another Cossack pirate with a long line of forebears and presented no unusual danger. Nor, in case of serious trouble, were they eager to deplete their own forces. So they deferred any action until it was too late. Mean-

while, the Tsaritsyn *voevoda*, Andrei Unkovsky, sent an emissary across to Razin's headquarters to propose negotiations, to which Stenka replied with a threat: should Unkovsky attempt to stop him, he would attack Tsaritsyn and burn it to the ground. Amid growing alarm, Moscow turned to the Cossack establishment and directed Ataman Yakovlev to prevent Razin from leaving the Don. But again no action was forthcoming, for Yakovlev had no quarrel with his godson, who had yet to challenge his authority. Indeed, by diverting the restless *golytba* to the Volga and Caspian, Yakovlev might have hoped to prevent an attack on the downstream communities over which he presided. Nor was the *ataman*, as protector of the Host's independence, prepared to truckle to the commands of the Muscovite authorities. It was only later, when Razin became a threat to the Cossack oligarchy, that he would take active measures to curb him.

In the meantime, Razin and his party, which numbered nearly a thousand, had left their camp for the Volga. The Cossacks were in luck, for they arrived just in time to intercept a large convoy of trading vessels owned by the tsar, the patriarch, and a merchant named Vasili Shorin, one of the opulent *gosti* whose homes had been ransacked in the Moscow riots of 1662. Aside from a rich cargo of merchandise, the convoy was carrying a group of political prisoners to exile in Astrakhan and Terki, and so was guarded by a contingent of *streltsy* who, but for the element of surprise, might have offered serious resistance. Attacking from ambush, the Cossacks quickly overwhelmed all opposition. Those who resisted were thrown into the Volga, while the rest were invited to join Razin's company. "Go wherever you please," he told them. "I shall not force you to join me, but whoever chooses to come with me will be a free Cossack. I have come to fight only the boyars and the wealthy lords. As for the poor and plain folk, I shall treat them as brothers."³¹ These words, if indeed spoken, reveal that even at this early stage Razin's movement displayed that peculiar mixture of brigandage and revolt which characterized all the mass uprisings of the period. At first, to be sure, piracy was the dominant element; but the latent forces of insurrection were not slow to emerge, so that what began chiefly as an expedition of plunder was soon to be transformed into a full-scale social rebellion with immense and far-reaching consequences.

The convoy once subdued, Razin's flotilla, laden with booty and prisoners, sailed down the Volga unopposed. Surprisingly, as it passed Tsaritsyn, the guns of the fortress remained silent. Perhaps Unkovsky, mindful of Razin's warnings, feared for the safety of his city if he should open fire. Or possibly, as a recent authority suggests, his gunners sympathized with the Cossacks and refrained from loading their weapons.³² At any rate, Stenka's boats were able to pass safely downriver. And with this episode was launched the myth of his invulnerability. Thereafter he was to enjoy the reputation of an invincible warrior endowed with supernatural powers and immune to bullets and cannonballs, a reputation that won him many supporters and survived in song and legend even after his execution.

From Tsaritsyn Razin proceeded down the Volga toward the Caspian. Just below Cherny Yar, the next government strongpoint, he encountered and routed an armed flotilla sent against him, then, passing Astrakhan, sailed through the mouth of the river and into the open sea, heading eastward toward the Yaik. A series of *streltsy* detachments was sent in pursuit, but there was disaffection among them because of irregular pay, besides which many of the troops, coming from the same lower-class background as Razin's men, had no desire to oppose them. The first detachment to overtake Razin, on the northern coast of the Caspian, defected in a body. The second, which caught up with him at the mouth of the Yaik, mounted an attack but was easily overcome and its officers put to death. Thus in July 1667 Razin's band arrived outside the town of Yaitsk in full force. But the city, surrounded by a thick stone wall and defended by a garrison of 500 *streltsy*, was not an easy target. Stenka, rather than squander the lives of his men, resorted to a simple ruse, the first of many he employed with great success during his campaign. In the guise of pilgrims, he and 40 of his men approached the main gate and asked for permission to pray in the town cathedral. Once inside, they overpowered the warders, opened the gates to their comrades, and occupied the town without a struggle. The garrison commander and 170 of his troops who refused to join the intruders' ranks were slaughtered on the spot.³³

In keeping with his plan, Razin spent the fall and winter in Yaitsk, preparing for the campaign ahead and rebuffing further government expeditions sent to stop him. The largest of these,

some 3000 strong, arrived in February 1668, but the men as usual proved reluctant to fight and failed even to breach the Cossack defenses. In the meantime, a messenger came with a pardon from the tsar if Razin would give up his adventure and return to the Don, but Stenka stalled by demanding a second document to confirm the original. Soon afterward a team of negotiators arrived from Saratov, only to be arrested and to have the officer in charge drowned in the Yaik.

With the arrival of spring Razin was ready to embark for the Caspian. In March 1668 some 30 *strugi*, each mounted with light cannon and holding 40 to 50 men, set sail down the Yaik, leaving behind a small force of *streltsy* defectors to guard the town. These, however, were quickly overwhelmed by a new government expedition, put in irons, and banished to Kholmogory on the White Sea. Razin was thus cut off from his base of supply. But by now he had already begun what a contemporary called his "furious inroad into Persia."³⁴ In their fast and maneuverable longboats the brigands ravaged the coast of Dagestan from Derbent to Baku, "plundering and sinking all the small shipping, wasting and depopulating the cities and villages, and using the people very inhumanely."³⁵ At Baku alone the raiders made off with 150 prisoners and 7000 sheep. Not until Resht did they encounter serious resistance; but there, after celebrating their triumph in the usual drunken orgy, some 400 Cossacks were slaughtered by Persian troops in a surprise attack. With the Persians in hot pursuit and his men badly in need of a respite, Razin sent a delegation to the mountain capital of Isfahan with a request for permanent sanctuary, promising to enter the "eternal bondage" of the shah in return for a grant of land.³⁶ While the talks were still in progress, Razin and his band, having recouped their strength, mounted a new series of raids along the southern coast of the Caspian. Disguised as merchants, they landed at Farahabad and for several days innocently traded in the market place until, at a prearranged signal from their leader, they fell upon the townsmen and plundered their houses and shops. The next day the Cossacks returned for a repeat performance. At length, laden with booty and captives, they took to their ships and continued their raids eastward along the Caspian shoreline.

When cold weather set in, the Cossacks made camp in the

swampy forests of the Mian Kaleh Peninsula between Farahabad and Astrabad. There they spent a hard winter, withstanding repeated attacks by Persian forces. Lacking food and fresh water, their numbers were gradually reduced by starvation and disease. When spring came, however, the Cossacks felt strong enough to establish a new base on an island in the Caspian, from which they attacked Turkmen settlements on the eastern shore. But their days in the Caspian were numbered. The Turkmen put up a fierce resistance, killing hundreds of Cossacks, among them Razin's ablest lieutenant, Serezhka Krivoi. A greater threat presented itself when the Persians collected a large fleet with 3700 troops under the command of Menedi Khan and sent it to destroy the intruders. In June 1669 a great battle took place in the Caspian, but the heavy Persian galleys proved no match for Razin's *strugi*, and the Cossacks won a stunning victory. When the fighting was over, only three Persian vessels remained afloat. Razin had seized thirty-three cannon and numerous prisoners, including Menedi Khan's son. His reputation now acquired new glory, and songs were sung comparing him to the legendary hero Ilya Muromets. But his victory was achieved at great cost. Five hundred Cossacks had been killed, many more were wounded, and hundreds were deathly ill, "all sick and swelled" from drinking the salty water of the Caspian when their supply of fresh water ran out.³⁷ The Cossacks had had their fill of adventure. They were weary and longed to return to the Don and divide up their rich booty. So, the following month, Razin left his island camp and, covered with fame and riches, headed toward the Volga and home.

4. Astrakhan

In August 1669 Razin and his followers were approaching the mouth of the Volga when they carried out their final act of piracy in the Caspian. They encountered two Persian merchantmen, boarded them and seized a rich cargo, including a gift of thoroughbred horses from the shah to Tsar Alexis. Thus Razin was not surprised when some hours later his lookouts sighted a

fleet of Russian warships approaching at top speed. The ships had been dispatched by Prince Ivan Prozorovsky, the new Astrakhan *voevoda*, who, informed of Razin's approach, ordered his able assistant, Prince Semyon Lvov, to intercept him. But Razin chose not to fight. Instead he directed his vessels to turn about and make for the open sea. Badly outnumbered, short of provisions, his men ridden with disease and weary from their long campaign, he did not want to risk defeat and the loss of his hard-won loot. Prince Lvov, for his own part, had no desire for an armed contest with the hardened marauders and sent a courier in a fast boat to overtake Razin with an offer of peace. The Cossacks were told that they could return to the Don unmolested and under full pardon from the tsar if they would surrender their heavy guns and larger vessels and restore the Persian goods and thoroughbreds seized at the Volga estuary; in addition, they were also to return their Persian prisoners from the battle in the Caspian as well as the *streletsy* who had defected or fallen captive on the Volga and the Yaik two years before.³⁸

Razin agreed to these terms, though it is doubtful that he intended to abide by them. His flotilla rode into Astrakhan harbor to the salute of cannon and church bells, and the brigands, "in very costly attire and with great pomp," made a triumphal entry into the city.³⁹ Sharing out their booty in equal portions, they carried on a lively trade in Astrakhan's bazaars, while Razin, it is said, scattered Persian coins to the friendly populace who thronged the streets. Already surrounded by legend, he was greeted not as a pirate but as an invincible warrior fresh from a victorious campaign. The townsfolk called him *batko*, their dear father, the title earlier bestowed on him by his Cossack followers. Prince Lvov entertained Razin as his own house guest, and a lasting affection grew up between the two men, for which Lvov, it will be seen, would have reason to be thankful at a less cordial moment.

Stenka, aware of his immense popularity, thought it necessary to carry out only a small part of the bargain he had made with the *voevoda*. Contrary to the agreement, he kept all his ships and most of his cannon, insisting that they were needed to get safely past the Tatars on the way back to the Don. He also kept the Persian horses and refused to give up the *streletsy*, who, he main-

tained, had joined him voluntarily, so that to surrender them would be to violate the Cossack rules of sanctuary. He did, however, surrender his Persian captives, including the son of Menedi Khan, whose fleet he had annihilated in their Caspian encounter. According to Jan Struys, there was also a daughter whom Razin kept as his concubine and later threw in the Volga when her presence upset the camaraderie of his men (it was forbidden by Cossack custom to have women along on expeditions). "The lady was of an angelic countenance and amiable," wrote Struys, "of a stately carriage of body, and withal excellently well qualified as to her parts, being of singular wit and always pleasing in her demeanor towards him when he was in the heat of fury, and yet at last became the instance of his cruelty."⁴⁰ The beautiful princess, however, was probably a figment of Struys's imagination. Other witnesses, while confirming the existence of a son (of which we know from official documents), are silent about a daughter.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Struys's account gave rise to a legend, celebrated in one of the most popular of Russian folk-songs, in which the Persian princess sows discord among Razin's followers, whereupon her lover consigns her to a watery grave in the Volga.

When Razin reneged on their agreement, the *voevoda* made no move to enforce it, for which he was later castigated by the tsar. Prozorovsky knew that, quite apart from the civilian population, even his *streletsy* were in sympathy with the Cossacks and could not be trusted in any armed engagement. Moreover, there are indications that he had been placated by a handsome gift of Cossack booty. Thus when Razin left Astrakhan in September 1669, he carried away his treasure largely intact, as well as a reputation for defiance which warmed the hearts of the destitute, who saw him as their avenger. On his way to the Don he stopped briefly in Tsaritsyn for a last round of excitement before returning home. Entering the city unopposed, his men broke open the jail and let out the prisoners. Andrei Unkovsky, the same *voevoda* who had failed to block Razin's passage two years before, fled through a window of his house but was promptly caught, dragged through the streets by his beard, cursed and humiliated, but at length allowed to purchase his freedom.

Razin then departed and crossed over to the Don. With some

1500 followers he made camp on an island near the village of Kagalnik and fortified it with earthen ramparts to which he transferred the cannon from his ships. From Cherkassk, a two days' journey downstream, he sent for his wife and children and brother Frolka, who spent the winter with him in relative tranquillity. Meanwhile, his reputation had swelled to godlike proportions. Stories of his exploits echoed up and down the Don, and the landless and destitute flocked to his camp, hungry for loot and drawn by the hope of new adventure. Throughout the Don valley, according to a contemporary report, there was hunger and "great poverty."⁴² Even some of the house-owning Cossacks joined Stenka's ranks, their *zhalovanie* having dwindled to a mere trickle; and by the spring of 1670 his following had swelled to some 4000 men nursing strong grudges against Moscow and Cherkassk. The Cherkassk elders felt themselves threatened, for Kagalnik had become a rival fortress populated by desperate men over whom they had no control. The existence on the Don of two island strongholds symbolized the growing cleavage between the "naked" and propertied elements. What was emerging, as we have seen, was a miniature sectional conflict similar to that which divided the country as a whole. Now the upstream poor could boast of their own army, their own *krug*, their own *ataman*; and the authority of Cherkassk hung in the balance. For Moscow, too, the swelling host of disgruntled Cossacks had become a force to be reckoned with. The government, having looked askance at Razin's escapades in the remote Caspian, would hardly tolerate his unruly band on the upper Don, within striking distance of Muscovy itself.

Moreover, Razin's movement had undergone a change. His following, as one historian put it, had been transformed from a *shaika* into a *voisko*, that is, from a gang of pirates into a rebel army.⁴³ From 1667 to 1669, during his campaign on the Volga, the Yaik, and the Caspian, plunder had been the overriding object. Yet even then social rebellion was never far beneath the surface, for it was poverty and dislocation that had made the upriver Cossacks hungry for loot and adventure. The social implications of Razin's actions had already manifested themselves in his murder of officers and bureaucrats and in his declared intention to fight "only the

boyars and wealthy lords" but not the poor, whom he welcomed as brothers. He showed little respect for governmental authority. Even before his return to the Don, a foreigner in Astrakhan noted that Razin was "a discontented person and one of great power . . . bearing a sovereign awe among [his followers]."⁴⁴ His dramatic success on the Caspian surely strengthened his self-confidence and sense of power, as did the aura of invincibility which now surrounded him. Impressed, moreover, by the weakness of the Russian administration in Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan, he began to conceive a plan against the government itself, a plan to master the Volga, along which, so he hoped, a mass of discontented townsmen and peasants would rally to his banner as he moved upriver toward the capital.

Stenka's first move, we learn from the English narrative, was to attack the official church within the Don territory, "driving away many priests and hindering divine service, and intruding himself in church affairs." His object, according to reports reaching Moscow, was to banish regular priests from the Don and live "without marriage, thereby forcing true Christians to violate and defile God's teaching."⁴⁵ But still more dangerous, from the point of view of the government, were his efforts to forge an alliance with the Dnieper and west Ukrainian Cossacks and create a "great Host, stalwart and menacing, of the Don, the Yaik, and Zaporozhie,"⁴⁶ an echo of Bogdan Khmel'nitsky's appeal for a united Cossack republic throughout the south. Owing to deep-seated rivalries, however, nothing came of these overtures, except that a number of Zaporozhian Cossacks went over to Razin of their own accord in defiance of their *ataman's* orders.

The tsar was of course greatly alarmed by these developments. In December 1669 he sent an envoy to Cherkassk, Gerasim Evdokimov, to demand that Ataman Yakovlev restrain the would-be rebels. Two years before, it will be recalled, Yakovlev had refused to act against Razin. This, however, did not imply any disloyalty to Moscow. Yakovlev, indeed, was a veteran of several campaigns on behalf of the tsar. An intelligent and capable leader, deeply respected by his fellow Cossacks, he was torn between his duties to Moscow and his determination to preserve the autonomy of the Host. But if he had earlier turned a blind eye to his godson's

transgressions, now that Stenka, at the head of an organized *golytba*, posed a threat to the Cherkassk oligarchy, he was ready to act.

Thus when Evdokimov arrived, Yakovlev gave him a cordial reception. A *krug* was at once summoned, and Evdokimov, in the name of the tsar, promised a full resumption of the annual *zhalovanie* as soon as Razin had been dealt with. In the midst of the proceedings, however, Stenka himself burst in and turned the meeting into a bedlam. He angrily accused Evdokimov of being a spy for the aristocracy rather than a true representative of Alexis. "Who sent you," he demanded, "the Great Sovereign or the boyars?"⁴⁷ Seizing the unfortunate envoy, his men beat him savagely and threw him in the Don to drown. When some of the elders protested, they were killed on the spot, and Yakovlev was threatened with the same punishment if he dared to interfere. When news of Evdokimov's murder reached Moscow, the enraged tsar immediately cut off the remaining *zhalovanie* and ordered the *voevodas* of neighboring districts to sever all supply routes to the Don. Razin had meanwhile left Cherkassk and returned to his camp. By killing Evdokimov he had taken his first step of open rebellion. He now declared his intention to march on Moscow and deal with the boyar traitors. Yakovlev, for his part, fished Evdokimov's body from the Don and gave it an honorable burial, a token of his collaboration with the government against the rebels.

In March 1670, with the arrival of good weather, Razin mobilized his army for the new campaign. Nearly 7000 Don Cossacks, augmented by a few hundred Zaporozhian volunteers, gathered at Panshin near the crosspoint to the Volga, from which Razin's first expedition had been launched three years before. Stenka summoned a *krug* and in a dramatic speech proclaimed his ambition "to go from the Don to the Volga and from the Volga into Rus against the Sovereign's enemies and betrayers, and to remove from the Muscovite state the traitor boyars and Duma men and the *voevodas* and officials in the towns . . . and to give freedom to the common people." Characteristically, he did not attack the tsar himself, but only his underlings. It was because of their treachery, he said, that the people were hungry and oppressed and that the Cossacks were receiving no *zhalovanie*. "I will not raise

my sword against the Great Sovereign," he declared, unsheathing it from his scabbard. "I would rather cut off my own head with it or be drowned in the river." The Cossacks shouted their agreement: "We are ready to serve and die for the House of the Blessed Virgin and for the Great Sovereign. But the boyars have barred our way to the sea and the Volga, and we have thus become naked and hungry. And now we shall go to the Volga against the boyars and *voevodas*, so that the boyars and *voevodas* do not starve us to death."⁴⁸

The rebels left Panshin in mid-April and soon reached the Volga above Tsaritsyn. Among Razin's lieutenants was Vaska Us, who in 1666 had been the first to lead the *golytba* into Muscovy. Now Stenka, barred from the Black Sea by the Turks and from the Caspian by the Persians, was following Us's example. At Tsaritsyn the old *voevoda*, Andrei Unkovsky, had meanwhile been replaced by Timofei Turgenev, who was nervously awaiting a detachment of Muscovite *streltsy* sent to reinforce his garrison after the murder of Evdokimov. Razin, for obscure reasons, left Us in charge of the siege while he himself galloped off with a party of Cossacks to raid a Tatar settlement to the south. When he returned three days later (with a herd of Tatar horses and other booty), he was delighted to find the city already in Us's hands. It had been taken in typical Cossack fashion, "by perfidy and deceit," in the words of a contemporary.⁴⁹ Us, having learned that reinforcements were on the way from Moscow, sent agents to spread the rumor in the town that the troops were coming not to drive away the Cossacks but to punish the inhabitants for supporting them. The townspeople—whether because of this deception or from fear of reprisals if they resisted—opened their gates to the rebels. The *voevoda* with the gentry and a small group of loyal soldiers barricaded themselves in one of the watchtowers of the citadel and put up a fierce resistance, but the tower was taken by storm, and the defenders, with the exception of Turgenev, were butchered on the spot. Turgenev was led about the town in cruel mockery, pricked with lances, and finally speared like a fish and thrown into the Volga.

The rebels had been in Tsaritsyn for several weeks, celebrating their victory by plundering the houses of the merchants and nobility, when their scouts reported the approach of the government

flotilla containing the regiment of *streltsy* sent to defend the city against the Cossacks. Its commander, Ivan Lopatin, had no inkling that Tsaritsyn already lay in rebel hands, and a few miles above the town the flotilla was ambushed from both banks of the river. The *streltsy* put up a stiff fight and cut their way through a swarm of Cossacks, expecting to find shelter in the town. But to their horror, when they reached its walls they were greeted with a murderous cannonade and, after a brief battle with heavy losses, were forced to surrender. All the officers, including Lopatin, were immediately drowned in the Volga. Of the 400 surviving troops only a handful voluntarily joined the insurgents—the Moscow *streltsy* being more reliable than their provincial counterparts—while the rest Razin “took with him against their will” as oarsmen for his Volga campaign.⁵⁰

In Tsaritsyn, self-government was inaugurated in the Cossack manner, complete with a town assembly, an elected *ataman* (for which post Razin nominated a trusted companion), and several elected elders to assist him. Razin detailed a few hundred Cossacks to defend the city against further government interference and sent another detachment upstream to capture Kamyshin, for which another ruse was employed: the Cossacks disguised themselves as a Muscovite relief force, entered the town unopposed, and overwhelmed its small garrison. Razin then held a *krug* in Tsaritsyn to determine the next move. Opinion was sharply divided. Some wanted to sail down the Volga and seize Astrakhan, while others favored making straight for Moscow “to annihilate the traitor boyars.”⁵¹ After a heated discussion the former prevailed. Some historians consider this a fatal mistake. Soloviev, for one, contends that Razin, had he immediately marched north instead of giving the government time to gather its forces against him, would have had Moscow at his mercy. Bulavin and Pugachev were to face a similar choice, and they too would decide to consolidate their hold in the peripheries before heading for the capital. Nor is this surprising. For it was in the border areas that government control was weakest and that the insurgents enjoyed their strongest support. Whenever the risings approached the heartland, they tended to lose momentum as the sectional balance tipped against them.

Yet, fatal or not, their decision afforded the crown a badly

needed respite; and Alexis made the most of it. His first move was to mobilize the service gentry of the central districts and middle Volga and to strengthen the garrisons at Tambov, Voronezh, and other key strongpoints along the defense perimeter between Moscow and the steppe. The *voevodas* of these towns were ordered to stop fugitives and vagrants from joining the rebels. Hundreds were intercepted and slaughtered between the Don and the Volga by loyal Kalmyk tribesmen, who at the same time seized the opportunity to raid Cossack settlements in the upper Don valley and make off with livestock and property. Nevertheless, during the summer of 1670 an increasing number continued to get through on foot or in small boats, including several hundred Cossacks from the Dnieper, whose military talents were a particularly welcome asset to Razin's motley army. The tsar, forced to redouble his efforts, enlisted the aid of the church in winning the allegiance of the population, and ecclesiastical charters were sent to every town and village denouncing “the bandit Stenka Razin who has lost his fear of God and forsaken the holy Orthodox and apostolic church and utters abusive words against our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵²

In the end, however, it was military might that proved decisive. As the century advanced, Russia had been moving in the direction of a standing army, conscripted for life and drilled on western European lines. The Time of Troubles had demonstrated the need for a drastic modernization of the armed forces; and though it would take a Peter the Great to whip a genuine standing army into shape, much of the groundwork was laid by his father Alexis, during whose reign Russia's fighting force, spurred by incessant foreign wars and domestic upheavals, doubled in size from 50,000 to 100,000 men.

Yet at the time of Razin's outbreak on the Volga it was still in a rather primitive state. One disaffected nobleman, Grigori Kotoshikhin, called the cavalry a “shameful thing to behold” and likened the infantry to a “herd of cattle.”⁵³ The backbone of the infantry, the *streltsy* musketeers, formed by Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century, was stationed in the capital and in the garrison towns strung out along the Muscovite defense perimeter in the south and east. In most cases they lived with their families in a special quarter on the outskirts of town, just beyond the

posad, from whose population they originated and whose grievances and instability they tended to share. Their weapons—the sabers and halberds, muskets and battle-axes in use for nearly a century—were outmoded, and the reliability of the men was poor. During a campaign their one desire was to return home; and it was by no means uncommon for them to abandon the field in the midst of battle, only to be hunted down, beaten with the knout, and returned to duty. In peacetime their way of life was barely distinguishable from that of their *posad* neighbors. Given a house with a small plot of land, they grew their own vegetables and often kept domestic animals. To supplement the *zhalovanie* which they, like the Cossacks, gatekeepers, and other petty “men of service,” received from the tsar, they were permitted to engage in handicrafts and small trade without paying taxes. They could also make alcoholic beverages for their own consumption, a privilege of which they availed themselves often, much to the detriment of military discipline. Men of volatile temper, they often clashed with their officers—noblemen whose status they envied or, in a rising number of cases, foreigners who aroused their powerful xenophobic feelings. Their principal grievance, however, was the irregular receipt of their *zhalovanie*. Low pay and mounting arrears were a constant source of friction, precipitating frequent outbursts of mutinous violence. As we have seen, during the riots and insurrections which plagued Alexis’ reign, the *streltsy* would often stand idly by or even join the urban poor in their looting and destruction. And they were especially untrustworthy in the garrison towns of the lower Volga—Tsaritsyn, Cherny Yar, Astrakhan—to which many had been reassigned after the Moscow riots of 1662.

Such was the opposition Razin faced when, in June 1670, he left Tsaritsyn and headed down the Volga. His army now numbered more than 7000 men, some traveling in *strugi* and some on foot or horseback along the flat meadow side of the river. Their immediate objective, Cherny Yar, was the only important government stronghold between Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan; and it did not prove hard to take, for on Razin’s approach the local *streltsy* rose in mutiny, slaughtered their officers, and opened their gates to the rebels, to whom they defected in a body. A new challenge presented itself when the Astrakhan *voevoda*, Ivan Prozorovsky,

sent Prince Lvov with 2600 *streltsy* to intercept the insurgents. The two armies met below Cherny Yar, but Lvov’s men refused to fight. Instead they arrested their commander and sent a delegation to Razin with an offer to help him “kill the masters, *voevodas*, officials, and other ranks of noblemen.” Their proposal was promptly accepted, and a special *krug* was held at which Stenka welcomed them into his army. Hitherto, he said, they had been “fighting for the traitors,” but now they would be “fighting with his Host for the Sovereign.”⁵⁴ When he finished speaking, according to Ludwig Fabritius, a young Hollander serving as one of Lvov’s officers, the Cossacks and *streltsy* “began embracing one another and swore with life and limb to stand together and to exterminate the treacherous boyars, to throw off the yoke of slavery, and to become free men.” The *krug* then considered the fate of the officers, many of whom, like Fabritius and his stepfather, were foreigners. Their strange talk, newfangled methods, and efforts to impose discipline were bitterly resented by their charges, who wanted to kill them outright. Though Razin objected that “there must be a few good men among them who should be pardoned,” the troops were adamant; and in the end all the officers were put to death except Fabritius, whom a sympathetic soldier helped to escape, and Prince Lvov, whom Razin personally spared over the objections of the men, who cried for his blood along with the rest.⁵⁵ Razin’s leniency was not out of character: except when inflamed by drink he was never as bloodthirsty as his followers. In this case, though, he had a special motive for intervening, for he had developed a strong liking for his former Astrakhan host and thought he might prove useful in the coming assault on the city.

Astrakhan, Moscow’s “window on the East,” was a place of great wealth and strategic importance. Situated at the gateway to Persia, it was Russia’s chief entrepôt of trade with the Orient. In its crowded bazaars gathered merchants from many lands, attracted primarily by the flourishing commerce in silk. The city was famous too for its excellent fish and caviar; the mouth of the Volga abounded with sturgeon, herring, and carp, while perch and pike were also plentiful. Salt was extracted in great quantity from the surrounding marshes, and if grain, the staple of the Russian inhabitants, was in scarce supply, the area was rich in wild-

fowl and fruit. The town itself, "with its many towers and lofty piles of buildings," presented a noble sight, as Razin had observed after his Caspian adventure the year before. Small wonder, then, that he and his followers, now 10,000 strong, should choose "to go to Astrakhan and rob all the merchants and traders."⁵⁶

But the town was no easy target for plunder. Like Cherkassk and Zaporozhie, it stood on a strongly fortified island, at the center of which was the citadel, encircled by a high stone wall with six gates and ten watchtowers and surmounted by four or five hundred brass cannon. Stationed in the fortress was a garrison of 6000 *streltsy*, whose chief mission was to keep the neighboring Kalmyks and Nogai Tatars at bay. Thus, barring treachery from within, Astrakhan was well situated to withstand a siege by even the most powerful enemy.

Treachery, however, was an ever-present danger. The town had a history of internal upheaval dating from the Time of Troubles, when its lower-class inhabitants launched "Tsarevich Peter" on his violent career, a history that was to continue into the next century, the last important eruption occurring on the eve of Bulavin's revolt in the reign of Peter the Great. It will be recalled, moreover, that when Razin returned from Persia the previous summer, the townsfolk had greeted him as a savior and called him their "dear father," an epithet normally reserved for the tsar. The bulk of the population came from a background similar to that of the Cossacks and nursed similar grievances against the gentry and officials. Indeed, the whole atmosphere of the place was restless and predatory. More than a few political dissidents had been exiled there by the tsar. Worse still, the *streltsy* were unreliable. Though reinforced when Prozorovsky took up his duties as *voevoda*, the garrison had lost several detachments to Razin on the Yaik two years before, and the defection of Lvov's contingent at Cherny Yar had had a devastating effect on morale. Pay, as usual, was badly in arrears, and at a time when grain prices in the city were abnormally high owing to Razin's seizure of a supply convoy on the Volga. The *streltsy* in any case displayed a strong tendency toward brigandage, that curious blend of piracy and rebellion of which the Cossacks were the outstanding practitioners. They too longed for a share of plunder and adventure. In contrast to their Moscow counterparts, they were

separated from their kin and lacked the stabilizing influence of family life and peaceful occupation. And their poverty, like that of the lower classes in general, contrasted sharply with the wealth of the local merchants, with their flourishing shops and sumptuous houses.

Prince Prozorovsky had no illusions as to the reliability of his garrison, and to defend his city he relied mainly on the foreign officers of the sailing ship *Orel*, which lay at anchor in Astrakhan harbor. The *Orel*, the first ocean-going vessel in Russian service, had been constructed on the Oka River the previous year and sailed down the Volga to Astrakhan, arriving there in August 1669, on the eve of Razin's return from Persia. Its Irish commander, David Butler, had collected a European crew in Amsterdam, among whom was Jan Struys, whose description of Razin was quoted earlier. By Butler's account, Prozorovsky now invited him to dinner, showered him with gifts, and commissioned him a lieutenant colonel in his service.⁵⁷ Thirteen guns were removed from the *Orel* and installed atop the walls of the citadel. With an English colonel named Thomas Baily, Butler made the rounds of the city, inspecting the artillery and fortifications, with particular attention to the Voznesensky Gate, the main entry to the town, through which the Cossacks were expected to attack. Apart from the officers of the *Orel*, Prozorovsky pressed into service a Persian envoy in Astrakhan, who obtained the rank of colonel as well as an opportunity to settle accounts for Razin's humiliating attacks on the Caspian.

To boost the morale of the residents, Metropolitan Iosif organized processions with crosses and the icon of Our Lady of Kazan, one of Russia's most venerated religious treasures, and at each of the town gates, which had been buttressed with heavy blocks of stone, the Metropolitan intoned a prayer for victory. Prozorovsky, to placate the *streltsy*, paid them part of their arrears from a fund raised by the Metropolitan and the Trinity Monastery. But this only whetted their appetite for more and further undermined the *voevoda*'s waning authority. Razin, whose success depended on the extent to which he could fan popular discontent, meanwhile smuggled agents into the town "to stir up the soldiers against the governor."⁵⁸ Equally effective was his ability to implant terror in the hearts of the citizenry. The fear

of reprisals gripped the entire population, and especially the *streltsy*, who trembled lest they should share the fate of their obdurate comrades whom Razin had massacred in Yaitsk three years before after capturing that city. Stenka's fifth column had done its part to create this atmosphere of terror mingled with excitement at the prospect of his arrival. In both the garrison and the *posad*, as Butler noted, there was "whispering and murmuring against the governor."⁵⁹ An apocalyptic frenzy had seized the city, whose inhabitants looked for signs which, according to the prophetic tradition, would herald the approach of the millennium. Men reported a strange shaking of the earth beneath their feet, and it was said that the night before Razin's coming an eerie ringing of bells sounded from the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin. To a superstitious people these omens betokened imminent redemption. According to Struys, a crowd gathered in front of the town hall and shouted to the officials inside: "Now, now the times begin to alter. It will be our turn next to lord it. You villains come out and show yourselves to the world."⁶⁰

The following day the rebel flotilla sailed into Astrakhan harbor. Razin sent two of his men, a dissident priest and a household servant of Prince Lvov, to the *voevoda* to demand his surrender. Prozorovsky responded by throwing the priest in the dungeon of the Trinity Monastery and beheading his companion outside the town walls, in full view of the rebels, whom the grisly act aroused to a dancing fury. Razin decided to attack that very night, while the lust for revenge remained acute. When darkness fell he sent a small detachment to feint an assault on the Voznesensky Gate, while the rest of his army attacked in strength on the opposite side of town. The plan was a total success. Attacked from the rear, the defenders were seized by panic and began to massacre their officers. Meanwhile the insurgents, aided by sympathetic townsmen, clambered over the walls on ropes and scaling ladders and alighted inside the citadel. Prozorovsky and his brother, who had been awaiting the rebels at the Voznesensky Gate, rushed to the other side and headlong into a swarm of attackers. The *voevoda*, though gravely wounded, managed briefly to escape, but his brother was seized and shot on the spot, and he himself was soon captured. Resistance in the fortress was quickly overcome, except for a small group of Circassian tribes-

men who barricaded themselves in a watchtower and began to fire on the rebels. "When they ran out of ball," recalled Ludwig Fabritius, "they used copecks, so that afterwards many copecks were cut out of the villains by the surgeons."⁶¹ But their supply of coins was soon exhausted, and the defenders were cut down as they tried to flee.

Razin, in the words of a government report, fell on Astrakhan "like a wolf falling on the Christian flock."⁶² Once in his hands the town was given over to plunder. The rebels confiscated the government treasury and pillaged the cathedral, the bazaars, and the houses of the wealthy. Then, in accordance with Cossack tradition, they divided up the loot in equal shares. Official documents were burned, and the insurgents toasted their victory in the usual debauch, followed by a long orgy of bloodletting. The *voevoda*, still bleeding from his wounds, was tortured at great length, then cast down from the high tower in the middle of the fortress. After this, says an eyewitness report, "they slew the clerks and officials, the colonels and *streltsy* captains, the Moscow gentry and Astrakhan gentry—all of them they slaughtered."⁶³ Persian and Armenian merchants were butchered together with their Russian counterparts. According to witnesses, a river of blood flowed past the cathedral toward the town hall. Prozorovsky's two sons, aged eight and sixteen, were dangled by their heels all night. In the morning the older was cut down, tortured, then thrown from the ramparts, "which was the death his father suffered."⁶⁴ Atrocities of this sort were commonplace. The *voevoda*'s secretary was hung by the rib on fleshhooks and tortured to death. The Persian envoy whom Prozorovsky had commissioned met a similar fate, and Razin also hanged the son of Menedi Khan, whom he had released the previous year as part of his bargain with the *voevoda*, but who for unknown reasons had not yet returned to his homeland. The dead were collected—there were 441 in all—and buried in a common grave at the Trinity Monastery. Fortune, however, smiled again on Prince Lvov, who, still in Razin's good graces, was merely placed under house arrest. Prozorovsky's younger son was returned to his mother "beaten half dead," and both were put under guard in Lvov's palace. David Butler, after a long ordeal in rebel hands, succeeded in escaping to Persia, where he set to paper the horrible scenes

he had witnessed. His ship, the *Orel*, was destroyed during the assault.⁶⁵

Though over 400 dead seems a grim enough figure, the toll might have been heavier but for Razin's intervention. Most of the victims fell during the storming of the city, and only 66, it appears, in the massacre that followed. Stenka himself, it has already been noted, was not a bloodthirsty individual, and during his month-long reign in Astrakhan he succeeded in imposing an impressive degree of discipline within his army. "Although this brigand tyrannized in such an unheard of manner," observed Fabritius, "he nonetheless insisted upon strict order among his men."⁶⁶ Under his supervision a Cossack-style regime was established on the model of the Don Host. The Astrakhan population was divided into thousands, hundreds, and tens, with a town *krug* and elected officers, though Stenka himself picked the *ataman* (Vaska Us) and his chief lieutenants. At the first session of the *krug* the townsmen swore an oath "to stand for the Great Sovereign . . . and to serve him, Stenka, and his Host, and eliminate the traitors."⁶⁷ But after Razin's departure discipline quickly fell apart. The upper classes suffered appallingly at the hands of the Cossacks and the mob. Murder became rampant, the victims including the Metropolitan and Prince Lvov, while the widows and daughters of slain merchants and officials were taken by the rebels as their "wives." Razin in due course would learn of these atrocities. For the moment, however, his thoughts were turned in another direction, up the Volga toward Moscow.

5. The Volga

It was on July 20, 1670, that Razin began his ascent of the Volga. His army numbered some 6000 stalwarts, the others having remained in Astrakhan or absconded with their loot. Half his men sailed in a fleet of 200 *strugi*, barges, and smaller craft, while the rest went on foot and horseback on the flat bank of the river. In Cherny Yar and Tsaritsyn they were greeted as heroes and attracted a swarm of new adherents. By mid-August thousands more had flocked to the horsetail standard of the rebel movement.

The town of Saratov, having risen on Stenka's approach, was occupied without a struggle. Next came Samara. Here too the gates were opened by the inhabitants, who had risen as the Cossacks approached and massacred the loyalists, including the *voevoda* and all his officials. The way had been prepared by an advance guard of agitators who preceded Razin into the garrison towns and aroused the lower classes against the authorities.

Once again, as with Bolotnikov, the main base of popular support, at least in the early stages, was not the countryside but the town. Nor, we have seen, is this hard to understand. Herded together in appalling conditions, the residents of the *posad*—traders and artisans, *streletsy* and watchmen, porters and servants, vagrants and barge haulers—were far more susceptible to revolutionary propaganda than their rural cousins scattered over wide areas and cushioned by traditional ties to the land and the village commune. The urban poor suffered not only from economic hardship but also from the psychological effects of disorientation, the result of their displacement from the village, to which, for all its poverty and frustrations, they longed to return. So it was that town after town rose in revolt at Razin's approach. The pattern was everywhere the same. Emissaries arrived with leaflets proclaiming that Stenka was "going to Rus to establish the Cossack way there, so that all men will be equal."⁶⁸ Roused by this message, the town-folk would rebel, overthrow the authorities, and welcome the Cossacks with bread and salt. Officials were executed, property confiscated, prisons thrown open, taxes abolished, records destroyed. Then, amid general rejoicing, the old administration was replaced by Cossack self-rule, complete with *krug* and *ataman* (usually hand-picked by Razin) and elected elders.

As he moved upstream, Razin bent every effort to win the support of the peasantry. His messengers roved the countryside disseminating their inflammatory proclamations—"seditious letters," the authorities called them—with remarkable effect. "Stepan Timofeevich is writing to all you common folk," reads one of these leaflets. "Whoever wants to serve God and the Sovereign and the great Host, as well as Stepan Timofeevich" come join us and help "eliminate the traitors and the bloodsuckers of the peasant communes."⁶⁹ In the words of a contemporary chronicle: "The bandits and insurgents with their satanic enticements stirred

up the God-fearing against the boyars. Alas and alack, father went against son, brother against brother, and friend against friend, slaughtering each other with their weapons . . . and the bandits told the people: We are going to kill the boyars and let you have a privileged life for many years." ⁷⁰

Vast stretches of the Volga valley were lit by the fires of insurrection as thousands of peasants heeded Razin's call. Manor houses went up in smoke; title deeds were destroyed; landlords fled to nearby towns, only to be slaughtered there by bands of invading Cossacks. On some estates the peasants seized their masters and brought them to the rebels to be killed. Elsewhere they sent delegations to the Cossacks to ask their help in meting out justice, or taking up their pitchforks and axes, carried out the grisly deed themselves. "The peasantry," wrote Struys, "who indeed are very tyrannically dealt with throughout all the Emperor's dominions, here found an occasion to be revenged of their liege-lords, and to show their manhood brought the heads of their lords and threw them at the feet of a provost or executioner thereto ordained, who gave them a reward for their pains." ⁷¹ Yet for all the bloodshed this was a mere foretaste of what the nobility were to experience a century later, during the rebellion of Pugachev. In Razin's time the peasants, though they burned and looted with little restraint, generally shrank from murder. Most of the killing was done by the urban mobs and by Stenka's own Cossacks, some of whom, having fled to the Don from these very same districts, were paying off old grudges against the local officials or landlords.

Additional recruits were drawn in large numbers from the non-Russian peoples of the Volga, who yearned for relief from increasing Muscovite intrusions into their territory. These tribesmen—notably the Mordva, Mari, and Chuvash—were mostly peasants whose lands had been confiscated by Russian gentry and ecclesiastics and by Tatar princes (*murzy*) who had submitted to baptism and, like other nobles, were granted estates in return for service. In some areas, moreover, the tribes were subjected to a campaign of Christianization. During the 1650s, for example, the Archbishop of Riazan had baptized thousands of Mordva by force, for which he now paid with his life.⁷² For these reasons Razin's emissaries had little difficulty in stirring the natives to

revolt, and they streamed to his banner by the thousands. The rebellion, as in Bolotnikov's time, spread through the tribal districts of Alaty, Arzamas, Kurmysh, and Kozmodemiansk, but on a vaster scale than before. Mordva and Mari delegations came to the towns to ask for Razin's manifestoes and to invite the Cossacks to their villages to visit destruction upon the nobility. Besides these settled Finnish peoples, a sprinkling of seminomadic Bashkirs, Kalmyks, and Tatars could also be found within the rebel ranks. But the Bashkirs, who had rebelled against Moscow in 1662 and were to play a major role in the *Pugachevshchina* a century later, lived mostly in the Urals, remote from the area of Razin's movement, and so did not participate in any real strength. The Kalmyks and Tatars, moreover, were traditional rivals of the Cossacks and for the most part remained loyal to the tsar. This was especially true of the Edisansky Tatars, whose settlements below Tsaritsyn Razin had raided in the spring, and still more of the Tatar *murzy*, who often held estates in Mordva districts and whose interests conformed in most respects to those of their Russian counterparts. The Russian gentry, incidentally, did not, as in Bolotnikov's revolt, make common cause with the rebels. The feuds which divided the landed classes during the Time of Troubles had long since evaporated; more than that, the Code of 1649 had removed the gentry's principal grievances, and their ties with the throne were more firmly cemented than ever. But Razin, determined to win as many adherents as he could, and particularly adherents with military ability, instructed the peasants to leave unmolested any landlords who might be willing to join him.⁷³ Such efforts, needless to say, had little practical result, and in the end only a handful of noblemen were to acclaim the rebel cause.

It was the urban and rural poor, as we have noted, from whom Razin won his largest following, that vast floating population of the Don and Volga valleys—Cossacks and *streltsy*, peasants and tribesmen, convicts and vagrants—who lived on the edge of starvation and responded eagerly to revolutionary agitation. Among the first to join were the Volga boatmen who pulled the barges from Astrakhan to Nizhni Novgorod and whose life, says their proverb, was one of "toil and drudgery till they dig your grave." ⁷⁴ Women, too, took an important part, not only as camp

followers and nurses but as disseminators of propaganda and even, in a few cases, as commanders of rebel detachments. Razin's own mother is a case in point; but the most remarkable of these Amazons was a widow from Arzamas—described by some as an apostate nun—who dressed in men's clothing, led a force of 7000 partisans, and fought "bravely in this war" until captured and burned as a rebel and witch.⁷⁵

An essential place in the rising was occupied by the lower clergy, an astonishing number of whom sided with the insurgents, some doubtless out of fear but the majority from genuine sympathy with Razin's cause. At one point defections became so numerous that Patriarch Ioasaf issued a circular to every parish, urban and rural, cautioning the priests "not to be allured by the enticements of the bandit and traitor Stenka Razin and his comrades."⁷⁶ But his warning went largely unheeded. For the priests, coming of peasant stock, shared the poverty of their parishioners and their grievances against landlords and bureaucrats. They were able, merely by greeting the rebels with the traditional bread and salt, to draw whole villages and towns into the rebellion. There were many, however, who assumed a more active role. Some conducted prayers and religious processions for a rebel victory, while a few took command of guerrilla bands and plunged into the thick of the fighting. But the most critical function of the clergy was to write "seditious letters" for the predominantly illiterate Cossacks. The authorities, alive to the effects of this propaganda, took strong measures to stop it. There are many cases on record of priests, monks, and sextons being tortured, banished, and even executed for putting the inarticulate yearnings of the lower classes into a simple but vivid language that all could understand.⁷⁷ What is more, the presence of so many clergymen lent an element of religious fanaticism to the rebellion, in the same way, as will be seen, that the Old Believers were to inject a millenarian strain into the rising of Pugachev.

Even more than in Bolotnikov's day, rebel propaganda played a crucial role in winning popular support. Razin's seditious letters circulated in nearly every corner of the land, penetrating beyond the Urals into Siberia and even into the northern forests of Karelia. In the Volga area they were so numerous that a government commander was able to send a whole sackful to Moscow for the

tsar's personal examination.⁷⁸ A few had already reached the capital through Razin's agents and sympathizers, with the result that "men began to speak openly in his praise, as if he were a person that sought the public good and the liberty of the people." The tsar, adds the English narrative, from which the preceding words are quoted, "was necessitated to make a public example of some to deter the rest." For instance, one old Muscovite, "being asked what should be done in case that Stenko should approach the city, answered that the people should go and meet him with bread and salt, which among the Russians is a token of love and friendship. For which this man was taken and hanged."⁷⁹

What message did the propaganda contain that made it so effective? Most important was Razin's general promise of deliverance from the landowners and bureaucrats. "Everywhere he promised liberty," says the English narrative, "and a redemption from the yoke (so he called it) of the boyars or nobles, which he said were the oppressors of the country."⁸⁰ Beyond this, a few variations were included to meet the special grievances of different groups. Thus while one leaflet, addressed to the Russian peasants of the Kozlov district, declared that the rebels stood "for the House of the Blessed Virgin, for the Great Sovereign, for the good father (*batiushka*) Stepan Razin, and for the whole Orthodox Christian faith," a similar proclamation to the Kazan Tatars substituted Mohammed for the Blessed Virgin: "This is our watchword: For God and the Prophet, for the Sovereign and the Host."⁸¹ A constant feature was Razin's claim to be defending the tsar against the machinations of his advisors, in keeping with the widespread belief that the misery of the people was the work of treacherous bureaucrats who kept the sovereign in ignorance while exploiting his subjects for their own gain. The chief villains remained the "boyars," a catchall embracing the whole nobility from small gentry to landed magnates and state officials. Alexis, it was said, even if he knew of their deception, might not be willing or able to act; for "God is high in the heavens," went the proverb, "and the tsar is far away." To compensate for this, there emerged in the popular mind the image of a substitute tsar, an ideal ruler, just and merciful, who lived close to his subjects, listened to their complaints, and acted to relieve their suffering.

It was Razin, of course, who now filled this role, even though