

Honor and Dishonor in Eighteenth-Century Russia

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Nancy Kollmann's book *By Honor Bound* was a pioneering work that introduced to the social history of early modern Russia a new topic—honor and dishonor—and made it possible to see Russian society in a new light. One of her basic conclusions was that while in pre-Petrine Russia honor was for the most part defended as a “collective, family possession,”¹ the Petrine reforms, societal modernization, and changes in the judicial system led to a personalization of the concept of honor and reduced its importance as a tool of social cohesion. Kollmann's book has stimulated several Russian historians to look into the issue of honor and dishonor as well. My own experience with eighteenth-century documents from the town of Bezhetsk has shown that although the word “dishonor” (*beschest'e*) is mentioned in only 15 percent of the cases studied, honor was, in fact, the main motivation for petitions generated by conflict between a petitioner and other individuals. At the same time the percentage of unresolved cases in my database was greater than in Kollmann's, a result suggesting that the meaning of honor/dishonor as a regulator of intercommunity relations was indeed decreasing.²

Olga Kosheleva has also studied cases of honor and dishonor among the first inhabitants of St. Petersburg. The research questions she was trying to answer were the following: “What was the sense of the words they [the litigants] used and what in particular was meant by defending their honor?” Looking for answers to these questions, she tried “to define what particular words and actions were qualified as dishonor.” Kosheleva concluded that “according to the law, abuse was not always considered to be dishonor, and there was difference between the words *branit'* [A.K. ‘abuse, curse’] and *beschestit'*

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¹ Nancy Shields Kollmann, *By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 236.

² A. B. Kamenskii, *Povsednevnost' russkikh gorodskikh obyvateli: Istoricheskie anekdoty iz provintsial'noi zhizni XVIII veka* (Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi humanitarnyi universitet, 2006), 175–76.

[A.K. 'dishonor']. In addition, she argued that despite the Petrine reforms "the traditional system of defense from 'dishonor' was still effectively functioning on all levels of society ... and was still promoting the cohesion of the state and its subjects."³ Later in an article first published in French and then in Russian, she argued that "at the law court ... not all the curse words that had been uttered in the conflicts were put on paper, but only those that treated honor as social status. One would not find such curse words as fool, freak, scoundrel (*durak, urod, podlets*) in the law court minutes, though they surely were used." Kosheleva also asserts that historians should not use honor and dishonor cases for any judgment about the personal dignity of Russian people because "the Orthodox Christian tradition used to take personal dignity for arrogance."⁴

In my opinion, Kosheleva's assertions raise more questions. The words *fool*, *freak*, and *scoundrel* seem to be words of common usage, but how can one be a hundred percent sure that they were really used if we do not find them in the primary sources? The Orthodox tradition indeed considered personal dignity to be arrogance and thus a sin, but do we really believe that it is possible to distinguish the defense of social status from the defense of personal dignity if the litigants do not specify it? In addition, while we are aware that Russian people committed all kinds of other sins, why should they avoid this particular one?

This paper aims to verify certain assertions made by various scholars once again using documents from different archival collections and from a chronologically broader period. For this purpose, I have analyzed all the cases on honor and dishonor found in the Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arhiv drevnikh aktov (RGADA) collections of two town magistracies (those of Vologda and Briansk, towns situated in opposite parts of Russia) and in a number of files from the collection of the Moscow Judicial Chancellery (Moskovskii sudnyi prikaz) that Kollmann also used for her book. Altogether, I have analyzed 197 cases: 46 from Vologda, 55 from Briansk, and 96 from Moscow. These cases cover the period 1703–76.

There are some differences among the files in the three collections that may be attributed to differences in the work of the three institutions. While the Moscow Judicial Chancellery was an institution that specialized in con-

³ O. E. Kosheleva, "Beschest'e slovom' peterburgskikh obyvatelei petrovskogo vremeni i monarshaia vlast'," in *Odissei: Chelovek v istorii*. 2003 (Moscow: Nauka, 2003), 140–69.

⁴ O. E. Kosheleva, "L'honneur et la caution: La confiance en Russie (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles)," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 50 (2009): 361–80; Kosheleva, "Chest' i "poruka"—garanty doveriia v Rossii Srednevekov'ia i epokhi Prosveshcheniia," http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/vortraege-moskau/koseleva_ehre (accessed 18 November 2014).

flict resolution and especially in cases involving honor and dishonor,⁵ the functions of the town magistracies were very different. For them conflict resolution was only one of many responsibilities. Of the 101 cases from Vologda and Briansk we have 9 cases that ended in the reconciliation of the litigants (all from Vologda) and only one magistracy's resolution in the case, also from Vologda, although an investigation was started in many other cases as well. In Moscow 39 of 96 cases (40.5 percent) ended in reconciliation, and in 28 cases the Moscow Judicial Chancellery issued a verdict. Kollmann mentions in her book that very often people did not insist on a verdict, as it was more important for them simply to declare their disagreement with an insult in public. In addition, it is obvious that in some cases we do not find the verdicts as they were probably registered in some other files. At the same time we have a couple of cases from Vologda in which people petitioned about the case again many years after their first petition, thus indicating that they were still waiting for the resolution and considered it probable.

The Vologda collection contains not only petitions on dishonor, which may be found among petitions on all kinds of other issues, but also separate files containing more documents on the investigation of the particular cases. The situation with Briansk is different. We have only petitions and no traces of investigation. The authors of some of the Briansk petitions asked the magistracy to register their petitions for disclosure (*dlia vedoma*) thus making public what had happened, but were going to petition again "wherever it is appropriate" (*gde nadlezhit*). For instance, a retired second major, Ivan Lutovinov, informed the magistracy in 1771 that he had received a lampoon that was "harmful and contradictory to the laws as far as my rank and the gentry's nobility are concerned" (*po chinu moemu i blagorodnosti dvorianstva*). The petitioner attached a copy of the lampoon (a poem of about 40 lines) to his petition and added that he had some suspicions of who the author had been but would share them when the investigation started.⁶ Unfortunately, no traces of the investigation of this case have yet been found.

In many other cases, the petitioners explained that their appeals to the magistracy were measures of precaution, because they were afraid something

⁵ The Moscow Judicial Chancellery was founded in 1714 but its archival collection at RGADA includes documents from the earlier period and from other judicial institutions, such as the Moscow Chancellery of Land Affairs (Moskovskaia kantseliariia zemskikh del).

⁶ RGADA f. 713, op. 1, d. 689, ll. 1–7. The attached lampoon is in no way a poetic masterpiece but is interesting for its author calling Lutovinov "an ordinary layman" because of his poverty, thus insisting that one could not be a nobleman without means for a living. The lampoon seems to have appeared due to a property conflict between Lutovinov and the family of his wife's sister, who was married to a certain local landowner whose name was Adalimov. There is some probability that he was a relative of Ivan Adalimov, a known author of erotic poetry, who could be the author of the lampoon as well.

of the kind or even worse could happen again. For instance, a Briansk merchant, Kuz'ma Kol'tsov, complained in 1752 that he and his wife were abused by another Briansk merchant, Roman Nikitin, while they were visiting artillery captain Ivan Dozorov in the company of other Briansk merchants and clergy. Nikitin called Kol'tsov a cheat, while the latter insisted that he was one of the "good people" of Briansk and had never been involved in any cheating. Kol'tsov also mentioned that he had been aware of the fact that Nikitin had previously attacked some other people verbally and physically and that he was afraid Nikitin would attack him again.⁷

It is interesting that in the same petition Kol'tsov used two verbs to describe the case—dishonor (*obeschstil*) and insult (*oskorbil*).⁸ A year earlier in his other petition he used one more word that was new for the eighteenth-century Russian lexicon. This time a dragoon, Grigorii Maksimov, attacked Kol'tsov's daughter perhaps physically as well as verbally, even unsheathing his broadsword. The dragoon was arrested and the next day Kol'tsov went to see the commander of the regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Iakov Angellar, asking for satisfaction (*o uchinenii satisfaksii*) but was refused.⁹ Kol'tsov was probably more educated than most of his fellow citizens because he belonged to one of Briansk's richest families. In 1765, his brother Ivan appealed to the College of Manufacturing asking to release him from billeting because he owned a rope factory. His opponent, Lieutenant Colonel von Vitten, reported that in fact there had been no factory, but Kol'tsov owned more than 50 serfs whom he was using as though he were a landowner.¹⁰

Many of the cases analyzed here show clearly, as seen in my earlier study of Bezhet'sk, that even when the word *dishonor* was not mentioned in the petition, it was often implied. The Vologda townsman Ivan Trukhin petitioned in 1721 that a certain Ivan Mnomalov had called him a thief and had abused him and his wife, but he never used the word *dishonor*. Trukhin died in 1741, and the following year (twenty-one years after the event had taken place!) his widow wrote another petition complaining that there still was no resolution in the case, this time mentioning that it was all about dishonor.¹¹

Another Vologda widow sent two petitions to the magistracy in 1719 describing two similar cases of abuse, but using the word *dishonor* only in one of them. The aforementioned Ivan Kol'tsov abused the burgomaster of Briansk and his wife in 1747. Kol'tsov came to the burgomaster's residence with several of his servants, called him a *state thief*, said that the burgomaster should

⁷ RGADA f. 713, op. 1, d. 174, l. 25.

⁸ Kollmann mentions that "[d]uring Peter's reign the term for insult began to change: *obida* and *oskorblenie* were used interchangeably with *beschest'e*" (*By Honor Bound*, 235).

⁹ RGADA f. 713, op. 1, d. 162, ll. 1–10b.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, d. 299, ll. 6–60b.

¹¹ RGADA f. 717, op. 1, d. 383.

be quartered, and ordered his servants to beat both the burgomaster and his wife. The burgomaster described all this in detail in his petition to the magistracy but never mentioned the word *dishonor*. What he did mention was that Kol'tsov had also attacked some other members of the magistracy, intending to kill all of them in order to stop the investigation concerning a certain falsified promissory note, and that he told people around that he was ready to pay for dishonor and mutilation if accused.¹² It is quite probable that mentioning or not mentioning the word *dishonor* depended on the scribe who was writing a petition for the petitioner.

Still it is reasonable to suggest that in the eighteenth century the word *dishonor* was gradually becoming a kind of formality, a convention. Whenever an institution began determining a sentence in a case, however, it had to turn to chapter 10 of the 1649 Ulozhenie, which was still the basic law on dishonor and which contained instructions on how to punish the defendants. A soldier's wife, Fekla Osipova, accused a townsman, Aleksei Shumilov, in 1723 without mentioning dishonor in her petition, but it was mentioned in the magistracy's resolution of the case based on the relevant articles of the 1649 Ulozhenie. A year later Fekla informed the magistracy that they had reached reconciliation with Shumilov, this time mentioning that the conflict was about dishonor.¹³

The fine that the offender had to pay depended on the rank (*chin*) of the offended and that is why it was absolutely necessary to mention it in one's petition. When in 1715 the Vologda magistracy was investigating a conflict between a certain Antonida Serebriakova and Grigorii Okonnishnikov, its members specially called for Antonida (the plaintiff) to ask why she had omitted her husband's rank in her petition. The answer was that she had done it by thoughtlessness, since her husband was a son of a sexton.¹⁴ In some cases, however, it was not so easy to define the rank. This was especially true for Moscow as the composition of the population of this city was much more complex than that of Vologda or Briansk. One of the reasons for that was that the reforms of Peter the Great introduced many new ranks and professions, not to speak of many foreigners who now settled in Russia. The documents of the Moscow Judicial Chancellery mention, for instance, tailors and hairdressers as well as people of many other professions, but a profession was not always indicative of rank. A dragoon, Prokofii Ozhegin, petitioned in 1720 that he was living with his wife in Moscow at the residence of a silversmith (*serebriani*k), Petr Nemchinov, and the host's wife had beaten Ozhegin's wife and kicked her out of the house. The chancellery's verdict was in favor of the

¹² RGADA f. 713, op. 1, d. 112, l. 1. The Kol'tsov brothers were active participants in the so-called "Brianskaia smuta." See <http://www.puteshestvie32.ru/content/bryanskaya-smuta> (accessed 12 January 2014).

¹³ RGADA f. 717, op. 1, d. 500, ll. 1–10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, d. 3, ll. 1–7ob.

plaintiff but the case lasted for another fifteen years, because the judges could not find Nemchinov, who had disappeared into thin air. It was discovered that in reality, he was a peasant on quit-rent from the village of Pokrovskoe, which belonged to *Tsesarevna* Elizabeth, but he never returned there.¹⁵ A smelter's widow, Anna Iakovleva, accused another silversmith in the same year of 1720 but was wise enough to mention that she did not know his rank (*neznamo kakovo china chelovek, serebrianik*).¹⁶

In 1765 Major General Medem was notified by the Briansk magistracy that he had to pay an eighty-ruble fine to the 1st guild merchant Ignatii Klimov, whom he had beaten. The sum of the fine was calculated by Klimov himself according to the 1649 Ulozhenie and on the grounds that his grandfather had belonged to the Merchant Hundred (*gostinnaia sotnia*), which he proved with a corresponding charter. Medem did not agree with that assertion, pointing to the fact that while the charter really identified Klimov's grandfather as a merchant, it did not mention to what particular hundred he belonged. In addition, it was not clear whether the privileges of the grandfather were valid for his descendants as well.¹⁷ Medem had come to Russia from Courland only ten years before this case, so it is obvious that he got good advice from some expert in Russian legislation.¹⁸ Unfortunately, there is no evidence of how this case was finally resolved.

Even though the 1649 Ulozhenie prescribed fines for dishonor in accordance with the rank of the plaintiffs, the emergence of new ranks obliged the judges to consider their wages as well, which was not always easy to determine either. The collection of Moscow Judicial Chancellery includes a large file on a case in which the plaintiff was the wife of Ivan Zarudnyi, a well-known Russian architect of the early eighteenth century. Zarudnyi's biographers do not know much about him, but the documents of this file contain some previously unknown details. The case started in 1716 and soon the defendant was sentenced to pay a fine, which had to be calculated according to Zarudnyi's wages. But it was only in 1721 that he was asked about it. The architect declared that in 1704 by the tsar's order he was enlisted in the Kazan' gentry register, and later in 1710 he was given the rank of *superintendentor* with a wage of 300 rubles. In addition, he was appointed the keeper of the globe (meaning the well-known globe that is now at the State Historical Museum in Moscow), for which he was paid an extra 50 rubles a year. To prove all this appeared to be very difficult. Zarudnyi was getting his wages from the Armory, but the officials there failed to confirm it. Zarudnyi then explained that it was the same

¹⁵ RGADA f. 239, op. 1, d. 5759, ll. 1–34.

¹⁶ Ibid., d. 5698, l. 1.

¹⁷ RGADA f. 713, op. 1, d. 337, l. 1.

¹⁸ Johann Friedrich von Medem (1722–85), entered the Russian army around 1755; his daughter was the last duchess of Courland.

wages that had been previously paid to the well-known Aleksei Kurbatov.¹⁹ It took three more years for the Armory to confirm that Kurbatov's wages had really been 330 rubles. As for the globe, several more years were spent on searching for the decree of the Senate by which Zarudnyi had been appointed until he died in 1727 without getting his money.²⁰

A very long story like Zarudnyi's was the usual practice. As soon as the sentence was ready and either the defendant or the plaintiff had to pay the fine, the corresponding institutions did everything they could to make him or her pay. A nobleman, Aleksei Guriev, petitioned in 1731 that twenty-five years earlier the Moscow Judicial Chancellery had investigated a case of dishonor of against his mother, himself, and their peasants. The verdict had been announced in their favor and the defendant, a landowner from the Arzamas region, was to pay a fine. A charter was then sent from Moscow to the Arzamas governor, but the Guriyevs still received no money. On receiving the new petition, the Moscow Judicial chancellery sent another decree to the Arzamas Provincial Chancellery, but the answer was that a few years earlier a fire had destroyed the local archives and they could not confirm that a charter had ever really existed. Nevertheless Moscow officials believed the petitioner and decided to collect the fine, but insofar as the petitioner had no wages of his own, the fine was calculated according to the wages of his father, who had died in 1699 (thirty-two years prior to his son's petition). The Heraldry Chancellery reported that the wages of the deceased had been 112 rubles. But the defendant had also died long before and that is why it was decided to make his grandson, a soldier of the Preobrazhenskii regiment, pay. The soldier appeared to be the owner of a residence in the center of Moscow and the judges decided to confiscate it. But Guriev petitioned again in 1733 and made it clear that he still had not received any money.²¹

Both Nancy Kollmann and Olga Kosheleva mention that one of the most serious insults was to call someone a thief (*vor*), which was a synonym for traitor and a rebel. Nonetheless, the documents I have analyzed, as may be seen from the cases already cited, show that this word was not necessarily associated with dishonor. Two soldiers from Vologda who served at the town magistracy petitioned twice about their conflicts with the local people. In one case, when a townsman cursed them (no particular words are mentioned in the petition), they considered themselves dishonored. When another towns-

¹⁹ The former serf Aleksei Kurbatov (1663–1721) suggested introducing stamped paper as another source of state income to Peter I in 1699. The tsar appointed him first a "profit maker" and secretary of the Armory chamber.

²⁰ RGADA f. 239, op. 1, d. 5582, ll. 1–43. Twentieth-century historians easily found all these documents in the Senate collection at RGADA. See Aleksandr V. Lavrentiev, *Liudi i veshchi* (Moscow: Arkheograficheskii tsentr, 1997), 203–21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, d. 6290, ll. 1–19.

man called them *thieves*, however, the soldiers did not use the word *dishonor* in their petition.²²

In her latest book on crime and punishment in early modern Russia Nancy Kollmann asserts: "Litigations over insult to honor, for example, rarely involved allegations of past corporal punishment as an insult."²³ This is certainly true but I came across one case of this kind in the Briansk collection that seems to be unique. Michael Medvetkov, a townsman from Briansk, accused his fellow townsman Ivan Romanov of abuse and of taking away his money in 1738. In his petition Medvetkov called Romanov "a known thief" (*vedomyi vor*) and Romanov's father a *knutoboets*, i.e., a person punished with a knout. It seems that Medvetkov failed to prove his accusations in court and Romanov petitioned in his turn, asserting that he had never been accused of any previous theft while his father had never been beaten with a knout. Thus, Medvetkov intentionally slandered (*oklevetal*) both Romanov and his father. The defendant explained in his turn that he had really written about Romanov's father as a *knutoboets* because "in years past, but in what particular year, month and date he, the defendant, does not remember, when the commandant of Briansk was Mr. Rzhevskii, the plaintiff's father, Fatei Romanov, was publicly beaten with a knout ... by the executioner Gerasim Seleznev and at the administration of the punishment and while the *ukaz* was being read aloud, the following were present." Medvetkov then named seven people, mostly soldiers, who witnessed the punishment. In addition, he mentioned that Romanov's case was investigated by the scribe Prokofii Maksimov but he, the defendant, did not know whether Maksimov had sent the file to the Briansk archives. He also added that it could be possible that the file perished in the fire that had occurred during the tenure of the commandant, Rzhevskii.²⁴

The most striking thing about this case is that a Briansk commandant, Ivan Rzhevskii, really existed, but in the 1710s (no later than 1718), i.e., at least twenty years before Medvetkov wrote his explanation. It is not surprising that townsmen would remember whether one of them had ever been punished with a knout, but how could one remember so many details about it? Was it because the administration of such a punishment was such an extraordinary event? Or did the memory of the eighteenth-century people work in some other way than it works now? Finally, did Ivan Romanov think that everyone had forgotten about his father being punished or did the ashamed father hide the fact from his son? Unfortunately, we do not have answers to these questions, because the sentence in the case is unknown.

In 1768, when Captain Vasilii Miliutin accused Leontii Maksimov, a tailor who happened to be the menial (*dvorovyi chelovek*) of the widowed princess

²² RGADA f. 717, dd. 132, 135.

²³ Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 212.

²⁴ RGADA f. 717, op. 1, d. 37, ll. 1–6.

Agrafena Boriatinskii, of theft and dishonor, he added that Maksimov had been punished with a knout in 1754. The accusation proved to be true and one of the judges speculated that, "Such publically dishonored (*shel'movannye*) people not only would not be allowed into the law court, but it would not be allowed to visit them, and, in brief, they are to be deprived of the society of good people."²⁵ This kind of judgment was obviously the product of Peter the Great's legislation, which "introduced an explicitly European discourse of shame."²⁶

The 197 cases analyzed here involved all categories of the population. This range gives us a chance to speculate about one of the questions raised by Olga Kosheleva, namely, whether it was social status or personal dignity that was defended in the dishonor cases. Prince Romodanovskii's menial Fedor Fatuev reported in 1708 that a retired soldier, Luka Ivanov, had rented a residence in Moscow that belonged to Fatuev's nephew, promising to behave peaceably (*vesti sebia smirno*). The nephew had also bought the adjacent residence with a kitchen garden and hired a yard-keeper (*dvornik*) who was living there. He had also hired another man to work in the kitchen garden. The soldier proved to be a drunkard who was cursing the uncle, the yard-keeper, and the kitchen garden worker. Fatuev complained that thus all of them were dishonored.²⁷ Was he defending their social status or personal dignity? It seems neither. The word *dishonor* that he used was again just a conventional word, a tool that could help the plaintiff get rid of his nephew's tenant. Similar reasons were certainly those of landowners who complained about their peasants being dishonored by the peasants of another landowner, something that happened quite often.

A very different case happened in 1716, when a nobleman, Michael Temdyev, accused his own serf. The man cursed his master, threatened him with a yoke, and tore his shirt. Temdyev probably had sufficient means to punish the serf himself, but he obviously wished to defend his personal dignity. The court's solution was to punish the defendant with a lash.²⁸ Many years later, in 1771 a noble's servant, Vasilii Solov'ev, wrote in his petition that he had been beaten and dishonored by the serf of another landowner. This time the judges decided that insofar as it was the landowner's responsibility to answer for his men and serfs, the petition should be rewritten, accusing not the serf but his master.²⁹

Michael Isaev, a merchant from Vologda happened to be involved in two cases in 1766–67, both times as a defendant. First, he offended the son

²⁵ RGADA f. 239, op. 1, d. 870, ll. 4–5.

²⁶ Kollmann. *Crime and Punishment*, 263.

²⁷ RGADA f. 239, op. 1, d. 5402, ll. 1–5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, d. 5581.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, d. 922.

and daughter of an active state councilor (*deistvitel'nyi statskii sovetnik*), Vasilii Eropkin (the son himself was a guard lieutenant), calling them both fools when they were crossing a bridge in their carriage and had to stop because of the traffic. The young people were insulted and petitioned to the magistracy for dishonor, defending probably both their social status and personal dignity, though not specifying it in their petitions. The second time Isaev happened to offend Iosif, the bishop of Vologda and Beloozero. Iosif wrote in his petition that Isaev had invited him to visit his house. The bishop accepted the invitation, but for some reason decided to include in his entourage not only some clergymen but also the president and the burgomaster of the magistracy, as well as several army officers and local merchants. When the group arrived at Isaev's residence, its owner appeared to be away and they decided to have a look at a new house that was under construction in the same courtyard. When they entered it, however, Isaev suddenly attacked them with a pole and turned all of them out. The bishop mentioned that by doing so Isaev "destroyed and dishonored" his rank. It is obvious that as the member of the clergy, Iosif knew that as an Orthodox Christian he should defend his rank, but not his personal dignity.³⁰ Later the unlucky merchant asked the bishop to pardon him and was forgiven.

In my opinion the cases discussed here prove once again that the concept of dishonor was still playing an important role in eighteenth-century Russia, at least because conflict resolution was still based on the 1649 Ulozhenie. The litigants manipulated it as an instrument for resolving various kinds of problems they encountered in their daily life, while the meaning of dishonor was gradually changing and becoming more and more personal. A question that still needs an answer is whether, with the composition of Russian society becoming more complex and diverse, the social role of dishonor was still the same as described in Nancy Kollmann's book for the seventeenth century.

³⁰ RGADA f. 717, op. 1, d. 827, ll. 1–37; d. 828; d. 831, ll. 1–21ob.