Local government and administration

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There were two important developments affecting local government in the period 1613–89. The first was the spread of the town governor system of local administration. In the sixteenth century annually appointed town commandants (godovye voevody) with some civil as well as military authority had been found in some districts on the southern and western frontier. But by the 1620s most districts were under commandants turned town governors (gorodovye voevody), with staffs of clerks and constables, and exercising authority over the guba and zemskii elders, fortifications stewards, siege captains and other local officials. Responsibility for most aspects of defence, taxation, policing, civil and criminal justice, the remuneration of servicemen and the regulation of pomest’ė landholding at the district level was now concentrated in the town governors’ offices. The second development was the increasing reliance of town governor administration on codified law, written instructions and regular reporting and account-keeping. This enhanced central chancellery control over local administration and partly compensated for the avocational nature of town governor service.

The spread of town governor administration

The universalisation of gorodovyi voevoda administration had been a response to the breakdown of the political order in the Time of Troubles. On the one hand, the spread of town governor administration across the southern frontier in the late sixteenth century had helped to fuel the Troubles: mass discontent with the heavy burdens of defence duty and agricultural corvée on the ‘Sovereign’s tithe ploughlands’ had led to the overthrow of several southern frontier town governors and placed much of the south in the hands of the First False Dmitrii and successor insurgents. On the other hand, after the disintegration of Tsar Vasiliii Shuiskii’s regime in 1608 the tasks of defeating the rebels and foreign invaders and re-establishing strong central authority fell by
default to other town governors, notably P. P. Liapunov of Riazan’ and D. M. Pozharskii of Zaraisk, who had the military experience and political connections to lead the governors and lesser officials of the towns of the north-east into forming an army of national liberation and a provisional government. In coalition with certain boyars and cossack leaders Pozharskii’s army drove the Poles from Moscow (1612) and restored the Russian monarchy under the new Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich (1613). It was natural that the new Romanov monarchy should see its continued survival in the utmost centralisation and militarisation of provincial government – the logical agents of which were the town governors, appointed by and accountable to the central chancellies, selected from the court nobility, and given broad authority over district military, fiscal, judicial and police affairs. Upon Tsar Michael’s accession his government was supposedly deluged with collective petitions from the provinces, ‘from many towns, from the dvoriane and deti boiarskie and various servicemen and inhabitants’, begging that town governors be placed in charge of their districts, for ‘without town governors their towns would not exist’. Whether these petitions really represented local will or its ventriloquism by the central government cannot be determined, but three days later the central government authorised the general restoration and expansion of town governor rule, to all districts in need of town governors. Whereas town governor administration had been confined mostly to the western and southern frontiers before the Troubles, it came to prevail throughout the centre and north as well by the 1620s. By 1633 there were 190 governors’ offices, and 299 by 1682.

After 1613 most of the local administrative organs common before the Troubles were liquidated or were absorbed into town governor administration. The title of vicegerent (namestnik) was still used at court as a ceremonial honorific, but vicegerents no longer governed in the provinces. The fortifications and siege stewards declined in number and became subordinate officials (prikaznye liudi) of the town governors’ offices. Customs and tavern administration remained in the hands of elected community representatives or tax-farmers, but they came under the supervision of the town governors, who supervised their operations and gave them quarterly or annual accountings. District-level and canton-level elected zemskii offices for tax collection and justice continued to exist in the north, but most of them were subordinated to the town governors, so that zemskii officials no longer dealt with the chancelleries

1 P. Ivanov, Opisanie gosudarstvennogo razriadnogo arkhiva (Moscow: Tipografia S. Silivanskogo, 1842), pp. 156, 209.
2 N. F. Demidova, Sluzhil'ia biurokratiiia v RossiII XVII v. i ee rol’ v formirovaniil absolutizma (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), p. 31.
directly but only through their local governor; the more important kinds of court cases traditionally heard in the district-level zemskii court were now held in the governor’s court, which also became a court of second instance over those matters still heard in zemskii courts; and the tax-collection activities of zemskii officials were subject to especially tight control from the governor’s office, for the governor had the authority to beat zemskii officials under righter (pravezh), that is, in the stocks, for any tax arrears or irregularities and the tendency was towards requiring zemskii collections to be turned in to the governor’s office.

For some time the guba constabulary offices for policing and investigating felonies were permitted greater autonomy, for Moscow saw some advantage in keeping the defence of the community against banditry and violent crime in the hands of elected community representatives – especially as those elected as chief constables were supposed to be the communities’ ‘best men’, ideally prosperous dvoriane or dei boiarstkie, reporting their investigations directly to the Robbery Chancellery (Razboinyi prikaz) at Moscow for pronouncement of verdict. Besides reducing the need to send down special inquisitors from Moscow, this would have the advantage of shifting blame for policing failures from state officials to community representatives. Moscow’s preference for the continued independence of the guba system was indicated in the 1649 Ulozhenie and 1669 New Decree Statutes as well as in a 1627 decree that announced that guba chief constables should be elected in all towns. But this came up against fiscal and manpower concerns: maintaining guba offices cost the community additional taxes, and in wartime prosperous dvoriane and dei boiarstkie were needed in the army, not at home performing constabulary duties which could be assumed by the town governors or, in worst cases, by inquisitors from the Robbery Chancellery. The guba system was therefore not expanded; the town governors increasingly sought to subordinate the guba officials de facto; and in 1679 all guba offices were closed.3

Enhanced control through improved record-keeping

Town governor administration operated under closer central chancellery control than had vicegerent administration in the previous century because the town governors’ offices were held to higher expectations of written reporting

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and compliance with written instructions. The town governors were guided in their general or long-term responsibilities by written working orders (nakazy), and in more particular and non-routine matters by decree rescripts from the chancelleries; they were expected to submit frequent reports, even if all they had to relate was their progress in implementing relatively routine directives; and they had to maintain an increasingly wide range of rolls, inventories, land allotment and surveying books, court hearing inquest transcripts and account books for various indirect and direct revenues. Inventories of the archives of governors’ offices generally show a significant increase in the rate of record production, especially from mid-century. This reflected the increasing demands upon the governors’ offices by the central chancelleries, but also the demands upon them from the community in terms of litigation and petitioning of needs and grievances.4

Because the primary purpose of the governor’s office was to gather and systematise information to facilitate executive decision-making in the central chancelleries and duma, the clerical staffing of the governor’s offices was a crucial concern. It was the governor’s clerks (pod’ichie) who produced, routed and stored all this information and kept order in the town archive and treasury. The clerks also performed important tasks in the field – supervising corvée, conducting obysk polling at inquests, conveying cash to and from Moscow, or surveying property boundaries. In some districts the governor’s clerical staff was too small, too inexperienced or too poorly remunerated to maintain the flow of information required by the chancelleries. The smaller governors’ offices might have only one or two clerks in permanent service and so be forced to turn over some tasks to public notaries or even press passing travellers into temporary clerical service. In the 1640s the clericate of the provincial governors’ offices officially numbered no more than 775, slightly fewer than the number of clerks staffing the central chancelleries.5 However, the total clerical manpower at work in provincial administration may have been significantly larger because this total does not include the clerks serving in the customs, liquor excise, guba and zemskii offices. Furthermore, the small clerical staffs of the smaller governorships could be compensated for by making these governorships satellites of the larger offices found in the bigger towns of the region or the capitals of regional military administrations (razriady). The


5 Demidova, Sluzhilata burokratijia, p. 37.
larger governors’ offices came to have nearly as many clerks as some Moscow chancelleries and to imitate chancellery internal organisation by distributing them among bureaux (stoly, ‘desks’) for specialised functions under the general direction of an experienced senior executive clerk. In the 1640s the Pskov governor’s office had twenty-one clerks and by 1699 it would have fifty-four clerks, some of whom had thirty or forty years’ experience.6

The demand for clerical manpower in the provinces after the end of the Troubles had made it necessary for Moscow to give its town governors a free hand in appointing clerks and to accept as eligible men of all kinds of backgrounds: church clerks, the sons of priests, servicemen, merchants’ sons, the sons of taxpaying townsmen and state peasants and déclassé itinerants. After about 1640 this was no longer affordable, for taxpayers or servicemen enrolled as clerks thereby left the tax and military service rolls. The central chancelleries therefore began tightening their control over the appointment of clerks (eventually all appointments would be controlled by the Military Chancellery). The chancelleries moved towards standardising clerical pay rates, and they gradually reduced the range of social estates and ranks eligible for clerical appointment. Cossacks and musketeers were forbidden to take service as clerks; by the 1660s–1670s it was the rule that deti boyarskie could be appointed as clerks only if they had retired from military service, lacked the pomest’e lands to render military service or had not yet received formal initiation into military service. By the end of the century not even this was permitted: now no candidate could be appointed whose father had been registered in military service or on the tax rolls; only those whose fathers had been clerks were allowed to continue clerking in the governors’ offices.

Thus the clericate became a closed hereditary corporation. Although this probably had the effect of slowing the growth rate of the provincial clericate, it had the advantage of improving clerical training and esprit de corps and making clerical service a life profession. Local clerical ‘dynasties’ emerged, with clerks accumulating decades of experience in the local governor’s office and passing their training on to their sons, some of whom eventually worked their way up into the clericate of the central chancelleries. There was increased likelihood that clerical dynasties would tend to conduct themselves as local elites and exploit their neighbours, but clerical dynasties at least were motivated to attend closely to apprentice training out of self-interest.7

6 V. A. Arakcheev, Pskovskii krai v XV–XVII vekakh: Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo (St Petersburg: Russko-Baltiiskii informatsionnyi tsentr BLITs, 2003), p. 310.
7 As there were no universities or academies to train clerks, all clerical training had to be obtained through apprenticeship within the chancellery or governor’s office.
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Local government in reconstruction and reform

The spread and systematisation of town governor administration was crucial to Patriarch Filaret’s reconstruction programme (1619–33): the town governors helped reassemble and update chancellery cadastral knowledge, review the monasteries’ fiscal immunities, return fugitive townsmen to the tax rolls, introduce new extraordinary taxes for military exigencies, suppress banditry and rebuild the pomest’e-based cavalry army by expediting response to petitions for entitlement award and land allotment.

In the period 1633–48 policy was made by the succession of cliques led by I. B. Cherkasskii, F. I. Sheremetev and B. I. Morozov. They gave priority to accelerating colonisation of the southern frontier and eliminating the tax-exempt social categories and enclaves in the towns. Town governor administration played an essential role in both projects.

The years 1648–54 saw town governor authority used to implement several important reforms strengthening the southern frontier defence system: the completion of most of the Belgorod Line; levies into the newly revived foreign formation infantry and cavalry regiments; the subjection of southern service-men to the grain taxes (quarter grain, siege grain etc.) previously paid only by peasants and townsmen; and the laying of foundations for the vast Belgorod regional military administration (Belgorodskii razriad), which subordinated several town governors’ offices in the south to the senior commander’s office at Belgorod, not only for mobilisations and joint military operations but also for review of judicial, fiscal and land allotment matters. An equally significant reform in this period affected civil and criminal justice in governors’ courts across the realm: the Ulozhenie law code (1649) greatly expanded and standardised instructions for investigations and hearings in the local courts and streamlined and further centralised judicial administration by giving the duma functions of an appellate court and by further concentrating the supervision of criminal justice matters in the Robbery Chancellery. The Ulozhenie also ended the time limit for the recovery of fugitive peasants, thereby completing the process of peasant enserfment, and provided instructions for the governors’ offices to enforce enserfment by conducting mass dragnets of fugitive peasants and townsmen as well as holding hearings for fugitive remands. The fact that the zemskii sobor was no longer convened after 1653 may testify to the centre’s confidence in town governor administration by this point: apparently the flow of information from governors’ reports and accounts and community petitions was now considered regular and reliable enough to support decision-making in the duma and chancelleries without any need to supplement
it by periodically assembling representatives of the estates to solicit their views.

During the Thirteen Years War expenditure on army pay (particularly upon the more expensive foreign formation regiments, which accounted for some 75–80 per cent) increased enormously, exceeding a million roubles annually by 1663, about four times what army service allowances had totalled in 1632.\(^8\)

The sharp rise in tax rates and infantry levy quotas in the war years was all the harder to bear because grain taxes and infantry conscription no longer fell only upon men of draft (tiaglye liudi) traditionally defined, and because ruinous inflation had resulted from the government’s decision to debase coinage. The governors’ offices came under great pressure to keep cash, grain and manpower resources flowing while at the same time policing against desertion, taxpayer flight and riot. To tighten central control over their accounting and policing two new chancelleries with broad investigatory powers were created: a Privy Chancellery (founded in 1654) and an Auditing Chancellery (founded in 1656). A second great regional military administration was also established at Sevsk to further co-ordinate resource mobilisation and military operations on the southern frontier.

The Andrusovo Armistice (1667) did not lead to any significant relief from high grain taxation and infantry conscription rates. It remained necessary to garrison eastern Ukraine, to keep Moscow’s puppet hetmans Mnogogreshnyi and Samoilovich in power and hold Hetman Doroshenko at bay; it was also necessary to defend against the Crimean Tatars by reinforcing the Belgorod Line and sending troops down the Don to assist (and control) the Don cossacks; and in 1674 a Muscovite army had to take the field in western Ukraine to defeat Doroshenko, who was now actively supported by Ottoman forces. The defeat of Doroshenko led immediately to the first Russo-Turkish war (1676–81), which depopulated much of eastern Ukraine and deterred the Ottomans from invading western Ukraine but also revealed the need to reform Muscovite military and fiscal practices. More regional military administrations were therefore formed (the Riazan’, Tambov, Kazan’, Smolensk and Vladimir razriady). A new Iziuma Line was built to extend the southern frontier defence a further 160 kilometres southward and shield military colonisation in Sloboda Ukraine.

In 1678–80 six new foreign formation cavalry and ten new foreign formation infantry regiments were created, while the number of southern servicemen in the traditional formation cavalry was reduced by limiting eligibility to

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Prosperous men holding at least twenty-four peasant households and therefore presumably able to maintain themselves in service from their *pomest’ia* alone, without cash allowances. To meet the higher costs for new foreign formation troop pay, a major reform of state finances was undertaken. It started with a new general cadastral survey (1677–9), the first since 1646; led to the decision (1679) to shift to the assessment of direct taxes by household, thereby abandoning the old method of assessing by *sokha* (i.e. by area and productive capacity of cultivated land); saw the amalgamation of a number of minor direct taxes into a single ‘musketeers’ money’ tax for the army; and culminated in the founding of the Grand Treasury and the production of the first rudimentary state budget (1680). The simplification of direct taxation enhanced central chancellery control and permitted a further division of labour over fiscal matters at the local level, with the town governors’ offices made responsible largely for recording and actual collection of taxes left to elected community representatives.

Efforts at bureaucratic rationalisation

Over the course of the seventeenth century *voevoda* administration came to display more of the characteristics of rational bureaucratic organisation. It was already significantly differentiated: official duties were distinguished from the pursuit of personal interests, it being an already long-established principle that the governor’s office (the *s”ezzhaia izba*, assembly house) was separate from his residence (*voevodskii dvor*) and that he was forbidden to hold documents or the town seal at the latter; and there was some formal division of labour, at least within the larger offices – horizontally, in the form of discrete clerkships or even bureaux with specialised functions, and vertically, with supervising signatory clerks, document clerks and secretaries reporting in turn to the governor. By mid-century it had even become the tendency to rename the governor’s office a *prikaznaia izba* in recognition that its organisation was increasingly resembling that of a small chancellery. Office work was subject to various integrating mechanisms promoting standardised practice: there was a comprehensive and fairly consistent repertory of routines for handling incoming business, recording expenditures and services performed and reporting up important information and unresolved business; and although there was as yet no uniform written General Regulation covering all aspects of office work, that sphere of activity where written regulations were most necessary – the administration of justice – had finally received a comprehensive code of procedures with the promulgation of the *Ulozhenie*. Surety bonding,
oaths of conduct, annual and end-of-term audits and investigations went some way towards tightening constraints over the conduct of governors and their staffs. To enhance co-ordination and compensate for the limited effectiveness of central control mechanisms, most executive decision-making was removed from the governors’ offices and located above them in the chancelleries, with ultimate executive policy-making removed to an even higher level, above the central chancellery bureaucracy, in the duma counselling circle.

But in one important respect voevoda administration resisted full bureaucratic rationalisation. Although clerical staffs were expanding and office work undergoing further regulation in the governors’ offices, neither process was sufficiently advanced to fully compensate for the fact that the organising link between the central and provincial clericates – the gorodovye voevody – were not themselves career administrative specialists. Those appointed as town governors were court notables serving only avocationally, without any special training for the task, as an occasional respite from their field army and court duties. There was no Muscovite noblesse de robe, trained in the law and seeking promotion to nobility through the path of judicial and administrative service, from which to draw in filling town governorships.

This by itself presented an obstacle to further centralisation of command-and-control, as avocational administration by notables is generally thought to have been slower, less precise, and less unified than fully bureaucratised administration, being ‘less bound to schemata and more formless . . . and also because it is less dependent upon superiors’.9 Notables were more inclined to ignore bureaucratic rules and abuse their authority because they were not permanently subordinated to bureaucratic superiors, had not internalised a bureaucratic ethos of impersonalised objectivised service to the organisation and its larger mission, and meanwhile claimed social status above that of professional bureaucrats. And in Muscovy the problem was further exacerbated by the fact that town governor duty carried less honour and less remuneration than other forms of state service and so was less likely to be sought by notables pursuing promotion and influence at court.

There were various reasons to seek appointment as a town governor. It offered a rest from the rigours and risks of campaign duty, which is why measures had to be taken in wartime to tighten the Military Chancellery’s control over appointments lest the provincial governors’ offices become havens for shirkers. Those appointed to certain distant towns were immune from

lawsuit for the duration of their terms. Governorships ‘in array’ (v razriade – as when one was appointed to govern a larger town with some authority over the governors of nearby lesser satellite towns) offered the opportunity to demonstrate higher mestnichestvo precedence over certain other nobles. Many seeking governorships were probably drawn by the opportunity to collect ‘feeding’ income in kind and cash (kormlenie, see below) to supplement their regular annual bounties from the sovereign’s treasury.

Petitioners for appointment therefore usually cited as grounds their need for relief: they had been on campaign duty for many years with no real respite, held inadequate service lands, had fallen into debt and so sought governorships ‘for their poverty’.10 There were at any time many metropolitan nobles feeling themselves in need of relief, so there were usually multiple candidates available to take over vacant governorships. The chancelleries therefore had some choice as to whom to appoint – indeed, probably greater choice than in appointments to army commands, which were by nature ‘in array’ and therefore more subject to mestnichestvo precedence considerations.

But these motives for seeking appointment all treated town governor duty as merely avocational, a temporary surcease from the proper vocations of a metropolitan nobleman, duty in the field army and in the court. The Muscovite state service system had traditionally valorised field army and court duty over administrative duty in the provinces, so that rank promotions and raises to service bounties were much more often awarded for the former than for the latter. When town governors did see raises or royal gifts in honorarium, it was less likely to be as a reward for governor duty than part of a general distribution of largesse across the entire upper service class in commemoration of a special event such as a great military victory or the birth of a tsarevich. Nor was town governor duty as good a path to rank promotion or political influence as army and court duty, which were more visibly meritorious – performed in proximity to the sovereign and one’s fellow nobles – and did not require long absence from the circles of gossip, counsel and patronage at court that were so important to career advancement. Strictly speaking, town governor duty was not even routinely formally remunerated; it did not ordinarily carry its own salary precisely because it was considered a respite from vocational service. A notable appointed to a town governorship was usually expected to live off the annual zhalovanie bounty he already received in accordance with his rank

Whatever feeding arrangement he could negotiate with those he governed was his own concern, unless the chancelleries received complaint that he was extorting too much of it.

Therefore, although governorships were reserved for servitors of Moscow rank, that is, members of the metropolitan nobility, and the governorships of especially important towns like Novgorod and Astrakhan’ might go to the elite of duma rank, the vast majority of governorships were given out to the middle and lower Moscow ranks; and while examination of service career patterns shows many metropolitan nobles taking turns at town governor duty, it presents few instances of them specialising in it. Those serving as town governors did so only avocationally, and most of them only on infrequent occasions, with little or no prior experience. There was little opportunity for them to familiarise themselves fully with bureaucratic routines and norms, and little reason for them to internalise a professional bureaucratic ethos.

Fortunately there were mechanisms partly compensating for the avocational character of town governor service.

While the discipline of career bureaucratic service was largely alien to the Muscovite metropolitan nobility, the discipline of general state service was not. Since the mid-fifteenth century the metropolitan nobility had been liable for compulsory life service to the sovereign — if not so much for provincial administrative service, certainly for court service and especially service in the field army. The Muscovite notable therefore differed from the Western European notable in accepting to a far greater degree the notion that rank and entitlements derived from service to the sovereign (even if town governor duty was not the preferred service track for winning them); more importantly, even while he was resting from campaign duty by feeding in the provinces as a town governor he remained under a military discipline which provided penalties for malfeasance.

In districts where the governor’s office had direct responsibility for tax collection as well as tax recording the governor could be held accountable to the central chancelleries for any arrears or deficits caused by unfair or negligent collection measures as well as by embezzlement. Even for minor deficits he could be fined, deprived of rank, subjected to corporal punishment, imprisoned or exiled. When such irregularities had been caught at Moscow during

11 In some instances notables appointed to hard postings — governorships in underdeveloped regions far off in Siberia — did receive special maintenance subsidies out of the treasury, usually in grain or spirits, but these were only in supplement to their regular service bounties.
examination of records submitted from the governor’s office, the task of exacting the missing sum and imposing a fine or other penalty was entrusted to chancellery clerks and constables sent down for the purpose. In general, though, irregularities were not so easily discovered this way because until late in the century most chancelleries were not insistent that governors regularly send in full copies of their income and expenditure books (the Military Chancellery, for example, began requiring this only from 1685); they only required regular submission of short summaries (smety) comparing the current year’s balance with that of the previous year and brief projections (pomety) of revenue and expenditure for the coming year. This may be why, when chancellery officials were sent down to exact arrears and deficits, it was sometimes to several districts in succession, arrears and deficits having been found to have accumulated undetected for some time across a broad region. In 1646, for example, the Ustiug Territorial Chancellery authorised that 35,000 roubles of missing revenues be exacted from the governors of several districts in its jurisdiction.\footnote{12}{P. P. Smirnov, Posadskie liudi i ikh klassovaia bor’ba do serediny XVII veka, 2 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1947–8), vol. ii, pp. 37–8.}

The chancelleries recognised that central control could not rely entirely on quarterly or annual account submissions and therefore they continued to place greater reliance on subjecting outgoing governors to end-of-term audits by their replacements. The outgoing governor was required to give his replacement full assistance in conducting a general inventory and audit. This could take many days to complete, as it involved inspections of fortifications and troops, counting and weighing cash and grain stores, examining s’ezzhaia izba logbooks and archive inventories, reviewing income and expenditure accounts and conducting interrogations into expenditures that appeared to lack authorisation from Moscow. In some cases the centre expected this audit to assess the profitability of the outgoing governor’s administration compared to previous governors’ terms, in which case a profit report (pribyl’naia kniga) as well as audit report had to be prepared. The outgoing governor was not allowed to depart until the chancelleries had received these audit results and ruled on whether he had to pay any fines, make restitution of missing funds, or pay any damages to local inhabitants. Fines of a hundred roubles or more were common enough; restitution of missing funds sometimes was ordered at double rate, to the total value of thousands of roubles.

The end-of-term audit was also recognised as an opportunity for the inhabitants to file complaint against the outgoing governor and ask his replacement to
begin an investigation. In the Siberian towns the opportunity to file complaint was an especially important supplement to other central control measures and was accompanied by a special ritual: each new governor was under instruction to invite community representatives to a *bienvenue* feast, ply them with food and drink – expressly identified as largesse provided by the tsar himself, not by his governor – and then read them the ‘sovereign’s declaration of vouchsafe’ (*gosudarevo zhalovannoe slovo*), an address promising them the new governor would protect them against extortion and oppression and investigate whatever complaints they chose to bring against the outgoing governor.

The chancelleries sometimes sent down from Moscow special inquisitors (*syshchiki*) to investigate specific complaints of corruption or abuse of authority made in collective petitions from the community or in denunciations by associate governors, clerks or other subordinate officials. The inquisitors made audits, took witness testimony, polled the community by *poval’nyi obysk*, reported up, and then implemented whatever penalty Moscow decreed. A good number of inquest records have been preserved, especially from Siberia, and some are quite long and painstaking and produced verdicts giving victims of governor corruption meaningful relief. But when victims failed to get redress they charged the inquisitor with failing to take particular crucial testimonies or misrecording or forging testimonies. In other instances inquests dragged on for years without result.

The struggles against governor malfeasance therefore had to employ preventive measures as well. The tendency over the course of the century was towards standardising the length of town governor terms – to two years in most towns under the authority of the Military Chancellery, with extensions of one or two years for merit or upon the petition of local inhabitants unwilling to risk possibly greater exploitation under a new governor. Besides providing more appointment opportunities to nobles seeking respite from army and court duty, appointing for shorter terms gave governors less time to build local clientage machines and drive their districts to revolt with their extortion and oppression. Governor terms in the larger and more strategic towns, in territorial *razriad* capitals and in distant Siberian towns were usually longer, to provide greater continuity in frontier defence and diplomatic operations and to reduce opportunities for governors homebound from Siberian posts to smuggle contraband furs in their baggage.

To check abuse of power it was also frequent practice to appoint to the larger towns and *razriad* capitals a senior governor and one to three associate town governors (*tovarishchi*) or secretaries on instruction to operate collegially,
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‘acting together as one, without dissension’.¹³ Actual procedures for collegial decision-making were not spelled out (and so may not always have been observed in practice), but it was usually stipulated that the senior governor could put his seal on official acts only in the presence of his associates, that court cases had to be heard by senior governors and their associates together and resolved by unanimous verdict and that a senior governor or one or more of his associates had the right to challenge other kinds of decisions reached unilaterally without consultation.

An especially important means of minimising opportunities for governor malfeasance was sharpening the division of labour between central and local government. Maximum separation of policy-making from policy implementation was sought, with the former centralised in the chancelleries and duma at Moscow and the latter left to the town governors. Governors were forbidden to set entitlement rates on their own initiative, without express authorisation from Moscow. Even many routine expenditures could not be made without prior chancellery authorisation. The 1670s saw efforts to remove the governors’ offices further from the business of collecting taxes and entrusting collection to elected elders and deputies. In most capital criminal cases sentence of death could be made only by the Robbery Chancellery, and the governors of middling and smaller towns were usually restricted from hearing civil cases over a certain rouble value. Some of these restrictions were routinised in governors’ working orders, while others were imposed in particular circumstances, by special decree. The centre reserved for itself practically any decision which, if left entirely up to the governor’s discretion, might become a tiagost’, that is, a ruinous burden on the community. The exceptions were matters requiring immediate local response, such as military emergencies. Working orders tried to specify such circumstances in advance and instruct governors that in responding to these exigencies they could consider themselves free to act ‘according to the matter at hand, and as God so enlightens them’, provided they make immediate report to Moscow afterwards.

The practice of concentrating executive decision-making in the central government did not much reduce the range of tasks the governor was responsible for implementing – he still investigated and heard court cases and carried out sentences on them, even if the sentence was pronounced at Moscow – so it could be said the governor was still expected to be omni-competent even

if forbidden opportunities tempting him to assert omnipotence. Centralising
decision-making at Moscow of course had the disadvantage of encouraging
prevarication among the town governors, who instead of acting in timely
fashion would write repeatedly to Moscow asking for further clarification as
to what they were supposed to do. But the sacrifice of speed to central con-
trol was exactly the kind of cost an autocracy was willing to pay, preferable
to accepting increased abuse of authority, the higher price that would have
attached to entrusting greater discretion to the governors.

Given that executive decision-making was increasingly concentrated at
Moscow, ever greater emphasis had to be placed on the reportorial function
of the s’ezzhaia izba clericate. The governors and their clerks had to make
more frequent and detailed reports to Moscow and submit extracts from or
copies of their account books. More attention was given to documenting other
matters in which the chancelleries had shown less interest in the first half of
the century: keeping accurate trial records and obyysk polling records, updating
prisoner lists, inventorying confiscated property, compiling logs of interroga-
tions of travellers and new settlers, issuing travel passes (now detailed enough
to serve almost as passports) and submitting more informative protocols on
the elections of customs deputies and jail guards. Ideally, the increased flow
of information from such record-keeping would support the centralisation of
decision-making at Moscow, making it more realistic and proactive; any con-
tradictions or omissions discovered in audits and record checks would expose
instances of governor malfeasance; and by making information-gathering and
reporting the primary function of the s’ezzhaia izba some further devolution
devolution of district-level administrative authority from the governors to their clerks
could be expected, thereby partly compensating for the governors’ compara-
tive inexperience.

The results of this push for greater documentation from the governors’
offices were mixed. There was clearly a great increase in the volume of
s’ezzhaia izba record production after mid-century, especially in the larger
towns; some of it was in response to the chancelleries’ increased demands for
documentation, but some of it was also in response to expanded grievance
and need petitioning from the local population. There are some signs already
by the 1660s that the flow of information to Moscow had so expanded as
to exceed the processing capabilities of certain chancelleries. This was dealt
with by restructuring higher administration, in three ways: by forming new
territorial razriady so that financial accounting and supervision of judicial mat-
ters could be undertaken at the regional level, by razriad commanders stand-
ing between the town governors and the central chancelleries; by further
subordinating other military-function chancelleries to the great Military Chancellery, so as to streamline and improve co-ordination of military administration; and by creating a Privy Chancellery and Auditing Chancellery to gather intelligence on commanders and town governors, conduct audits of the governors’ offices and other chancelleries and investigate malfeasance and red tape.

On the other hand many s”ezhaia izba and guba, zemskii, customs and excise offices were not up to the chancelleries’ demands for fuller, more reliable and timelier reporting and accounting. They fell months or years behind in submitting annual accounts, failed to record important information like vacant entitlements or property boundaries, or miscounted when tallying servicemen or cash and grain reserves. Governors blamed these failures on clerks who were ‘drunkards and brawlers . . . stupid and unable to write’. The clerks in turn could complain of the unreliable information provided by the lower prikaznye liudi and elected officials, who were often outright illiterate (at Kazan’ in 1627 the fortifications steward, one of the two musketeer captains, the customs chief, one of the two tavern chiefs, one of the two zemskii elders and eighteen of the nineteen customs and tavern deputies were illiterate). We also find instances of governors accused by their own clerks and other subordinates of seriously neglecting their responsibilities.

A large part of chancellery communications to the provinces therefore comprised warnings and rebukes about delays or errors in submitting annual accounts. The chancelleries obviously could not afford to rely entirely upon official reporting and accounting to catch error, and certainly not to expose abuse of authority and corruption in local administration. B. N. Chicherin and other liberal historians attributed the persistence of error and malfeasance to the underdevelopment of bureaucratic rationality in central administration, to the centre’s inability to articulate a General Regulation and enforce it through regular control mechanisms. Actually, the central chancelleries had developed and were continuing to develop a wide range of measures to enhance central control and combat malfeasance. The system’s real weakness was at the local level, and derived from cadre inadequacy rather than insufficient attention to central control measures: the centre still did not receive enough reliable and timely information because most districts

15 S. I. Porfir’ev, Neskol’ko dannykh o prikaznom upravlenii v Kazani v i 627 g. (Kazan’, 1911), P. 4.
had too few experienced clerks, and too often inattentive as well as inexperienced governors; and for lack of revenue the centre was unable adequately to remunerate either governors or clerks, thereby giving them greater reason to embezzle and especially to prey upon the community through bribe-taking, extortion and excessive feeding.

The political economy of corruption

The practice of permitting officials in the provinces to take part of their remuneration in the form of feedings in cash and kind collected from the communities they governed had not actually been abolished everywhere in the reform of 1555–6. Only certain cantons and districts, mostly in northern Muscovy, appear to have availed themselves of that reform by purchasing their removal from vicegerent jurisdiction and the right to elect their own zemskii officials in exchange for quit-rent payments, equivalent to the old feeding norms, paid into the central chancelleries. The military exigencies of the Livonian war and Troubles discouraged the further expansion of zemskii self-government: it was more important to free up the middle service class for campaign duty and to militarise local government in the frontier districts by expanding the powers of their fortifications stewards or placing them under annually appointed commanders or town governors. In fact the practice of feeding enjoyed a revival from the 1570s. Vicegerents and feeding obligations were now officially restored in certain towns and districts which had gone on feeding quit-rent just a few years before. Shares of feeding quit-rent revenues from particular regions were officially awarded to certain powerful boyars (the Shuiskiis, Boris Godunov). In most instances, however, the revival of feeding was not officially decreed but privately arranged between officials and the communities they governed, the feeding rates set by custom and negotiation. The centre now exercised less direct control over feedings than before, since feeding arrangements were no longer defined by charter or revenue list as those before 1556 had been. A 1620 decree attempted to criminalise feeding but quickly proved unenforceable, above all because of the treasury’s continued need to keep down costs for salary remuneration; so the central government thereafter had to content itself with threatening penalties upon officials convicted of illegal exactions, without any clear identification in the law of what constituted these. 17 Determining what was an acceptable feeding rate and what was an illegal feeding

exaction was left up to the community; the central government did not intervene unless it received complaints of extortionate feeding demands so heavy as to leave the community with too little to meet its tax obligations to Moscow.

Because feeding transactions were no longer regulated by charter or revenue list one can only guess as to the spread and scale of feeding of town governors and their staffs in the seventeenth century. Anecdotal evidence from investigation records and the expenditure books kept by zemski officials in the north suggest the practice was common there and the amounts involved often considerable. If Moscow’s toleration of feeding was only tacit, it was not much concealed. It was not unknown for a servitor to petition for appointment as town governor on grounds he needed feeding income (‘I beg leave to go out and feed’) and to request posting to a particular district on the basis of its feeding yield. Upon completing his term as town governor of Kostroma, one Moscow dvorianin complained his appointment had yielded him far less than the 500–600 roubles’ feeding previous governors had received; Moscow agreed to find him another appointment after its investigation confirmed that the 400 roubles of feeding he had received at Kostroma had been with community consent: ‘He took what they brought him, and plundered no one.’

Many other town governors and prikaznye liudi did plunder the communities in their charge, using their power to quash petitions and order jailings and beatings of community representatives in order to extort wildly excessive feedings. This appears to have happened on such a scale as to suggest the town governors treated feeding as a strategy of semi-feudal rent-taking – further evidence that feudal techniques of governance had not been fully supplanted by state bureaucratic techniques.

But there may have been a second reason for the persistence of feeding: the possibility that communities were unwilling to demand its outright abolition or at least a return to its charter regulation because feeding could be turned to some community advantage under the right circumstances. Feeding deliveries were made in the name of the entire community (as what Marcel Mauss called ‘total prestations’) and were conducted with some ceremony as gestures of obsequy towards the person of the receiving official. Feeding payments not fixed by charter but ‘negotiated’ between community representatives and the receiving official, arranged at sufficiently generous rates and delivered on time in a confident and ungrudging spirit, could therefore be represented as community gifts and used to partly disarm the official (countering his demand that

he be dealt with solely as an outsider present in impersonal superior official capacity, responsible only to the central government), to take his measure (gauging the limits of his greed and his readiness to bargain), to familiarise him (drawing him into a kind of honorary kinship with the community) and finally to obligate him (first in a general sense, and later, at the right moment, to specific favours reciprocating the community’s hospitality). The favour sought might be permission for a delegation of petitioners to travel to Moscow, or the governor’s favourable report upon the community’s petition of need, but occasionally it could go as far as requesting that fines or corporal punishment be mitigated or the collection of tax arrears be postponed. In the latter instances there was the danger that feeding was suborning officials, undermining chancellery control over them. But because the centre had decided to tolerate feeding remuneration freely offered, the only means it had of counteracting this effect was to engage in its own kind of ritual gifting to the community past the suborned official. Thus the ritual of the sovereign’s vouchsafe had the purpose of using gift prestation to re-establish direct personalised reciprocity of trust between sovereign and subjects and to reassert the autocracy’s claim that all bounty issued from the sovereign, not from his officials, who merely distributed it on his command.

The same expenditure concerns that left the central government unwilling to suppress feeding complicated its struggle against bribery; and because tolerance of feeding permitted open collective gift prestation to officials, it was harder to ban outright other more private and particular forms of gifting that could be used to camouflage bribery. Black corruption – obvious embracery and extortion – could be prosecuted, but a large sphere of activity taking the forms of grey and white corruption (purchasing influence and services through tips, gratuities, honorances and feeding prestations) escaped regulation.

The government’s commitment to struggle against bribe-taking and bribegiving in its courts had already been proclaimed in the 1497 Sudebnik, although it took longer for the law to specify penalties and extend them to judges of the highest rank. The 1550 Sudebnik had got around to specifying punishments for litigants caught bribing judges or witnesses and for bailiffs, clerks, and secretaries falsifying bonds and court transcripts for bribes; and the 1649 Ulozhenie finally prescribed punishment for witnesses who perjured themselves for bribes (knouting) and for judges who convicted the innocent or exculpated the guilty for bribes (judges of duma rank were to be deprived of rank, while those below duma rank were to be knouted). By that point it could be said that Muscovite law clearly forbade bribes of embracery (posuly). The bribe of embracery aimed at establishing a relationship between giver
Local government and administration

and recipient which was prejudicial to state interests and to the interests of the community; it purchased influence or judgements which were denied to others and adversely affected others; and it enabled the bribe-taking official to abuse for his own gain the authority delegated to him by the sovereign, thereby defaming the reputation for impartiality of the sovereign’s justice. By these tests, nearly any gift offered or accepted in the courts could potentially result in embracery if complaint of it had been made. Hence the law was most explicit in condemning bribery in judicial settings.

The law also made it a crime for officials to extort illegal payments (vziatki or nalogi i nasil’stvo). There were frequent complaints, especially in Siberia, of governors unjustly imprisoning and tormenting innocent men in order to extort ransoms, and the cash value of some of these ransoms was considerable – 20 or 30 roubles or more. If subjects were willing to press a charge that they had been victims of such extortion it was possible to convict a governor and get him deprived of rank or knouted and forced to make restitution to the victims and pay a fine to the treasury.

But there were also various common gift transactions which had the effect of bribes, purchasing some form of official influence yet falling short of obvious discriminatory embracery and deriving from no obvious extortion. The law continued to recognise petitioners’ rights to offer officials earnest money and gratuities (pochesti, pominki) to expedite processing of their requests or express their thanks for a service performed. Earnest money and gratuities were in fact such widely accepted income for officials that clerks working in particular chanceries which traditionally handled a heavy load of court cases or petitioners’ requests were usually given lower salary entitlements on the assumption they were better positioned to supplement their pay with gifts. Naturally these clerks came to expect particular gifts for particular services rendered, that is, came to set their own schedules of fees, and such fee-charging in turn received legitimation by analogy with the kormlenie feeding tradition; it even came to be known as ‘feeding from services’ (kormlenie ot del).19 Only in one context did the Ulozhenie equate the acceptance of gratuities with the crime of bribe-taking: when a commander discharged troops from service in exchange for gratuities.

This meant it was easy enough, even in a judicial setting, to disguise a bribe as an innocent gratuity provided both giver and recipient connived to support the illusion; and even if such a transaction left an injured party, he might find

19 Demidova, Sluzhilaia biurokratiia, pp. 141–2.
it difficult to demonstrate the bribe had purchased a judgement that would not have otherwise been forthcoming.

Muscovite law was not unique in struggling to maintain some distinction between innocent gift and corrupting bribe; this problem persisted elsewhere in early modern Europe, especially wherever officials depended at least in part upon fees and gratuities for remuneration. On the one hand, Moscow could not afford to ignore the problem of corruption, as it undermined central control and bureaucratic discipline and discredited the sovereign’s claim to offer his subjects protection and redress; therefore there was some chance that community complaints against particularly egregious official corruption could bring about special investigations. On the other hand, Moscow recognised the remuneration of its officials depended partly upon feeding prestation, earnest money and gratuities, so it could not afford a policy of aggressive ‘zero tolerance’ prosecuting any kind of gifting on the grounds that it had the potential to encourage embracery or extortion; therefore Moscow continued to receive collective petitions complaining that its central chancelleries and governors’ offices in general remained too easily bribable by ‘strong people’, and foreign observers (Olearius, Mayerberg, Perry) continued to consider the selling of verdicts common practice in Muscovite courts.

The community’s attitude towards bribery in the governor’s office may have been ambivalent. Much of the time, when bribery worked against their own interests, they would have had cause to decry it; but, as with feeding, there would also have been opportunities to exploit it. Whether bribery damaged or served community interests depended on the structure of the local market for bribe-subornable government services. If the governor and his staff set cheap enough rates for their own subornment and bribes could be tendered at low risk, the bribe economy underwent some democratisation and those of modest means and status could purchase some of the favours connected elites enjoyed as a matter of course. Where the risk of bribe-giving was greater and bribe prices were higher, only the wealthier strong men of the community were likely to be able to purchase services – which they might use to prey upon their weaker neighbours. Under some circumstances the community could counter the bribes tendered by local strong men by increasing the value of the community’s own collective prestation of kormlenie; otherwise the community’s only resort was to petition the central chancelleries for an investigation.

Travel to Moscow to present a petition in person was generally restricted to those given travel passes by the governor; some chancelleries held audiences for petitioners only at Christmas time; and after 1649 it was illegal to bypass the chancelleries by trying to petition the tsar directly. But the centre could
not afford to deny its subjects altogether the right to petition against local strong men or malfeasant officials. The tsar owed his subjects some defence against official malfeasance. This was not seen as limiting his autocratic power, but rather as strengthening it, for by eliminating malfeasance by officials who defied his will he reinforced and re-legitimated his power as autocrat and ultimate source of all justice and bounty. This was another indication of the transitional character of the Muscovite state in this period: when techniques of bureaucratic centralisation failed it, it freely reverted to traditional centralisation techniques invoking the personal patriarchal authority of the tsar. Therefore the sovereign’s vouchsafe invited subjects to voice complaints against their outgoing governor; governors caught quashing petitions against themselves could be prosecuted for crimes against the tsar; and petitioners charging their governor or his staff with abuses betraying the sovereign’s interest (gosudarevo delo) could circumvent their governor and come to Moscow without his pass to petition the chancelleries in person.