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# **The ‘Distinction’: Russian Nobility and Russian Elites in the European Context (the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> Century)\***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Historiography for a long time supposed that the Russian nobility, because of its character of service, did not possess a class consciousness, which is expressed in point d'honneur and distinction nobiliaire (Bourdieu 1987). It corresponds to the proclamation opposition ‘Russian-European’, which came from the old theory of Russian special way (Sonderweg). In my contribution, I refrain from proclaiming an a priori incompatibility of the Russian nobility with Western European principles and try to show that the research on the Russian nobility and elites can benefit to be reconstructed within a European conceptual sphere and from using the concepts like ‘Adeligkeit’. The objective of this essay is to put key concepts of European noble habitus to test by the help of three conceptions: ‘elite’, ‘point d'honneur’ and ‘service’ by Russian example.*

While the history of Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is described in terms of Europeanization in the areas of the governmental system, education and everyday life, in scientific tradition the results of this European influence are for the most part judged as not corresponding to European standards: According to this tradition, neither a constitutional state existed – despite the orientation towards the theory and codification of the law according to the European (mainly German) model – nor a bureaucracy in accordance with the Western model, with a delegation of power<sup>1</sup>.

The same applies to the social structure of Russian society: According to historiography, the Russian estates had not even sufficiently developed by the reign of Catherine II, and the nobility did not correspond to the European principle of noble dignity as its members were mere servants of the throne and thus did not have a special noble ethos (Freeze 1986; Jones 1973)<sup>2</sup>. As a result of this interpretation, the mentality of the Russian nobility was portrayed as the mentality of a class of service (*classe de service*), while the European ethos of nobility was based on honour and birth (*l'honneur et la naissance*) (Confino 1993: 48). In the same way, a European 'ethos of service' was denied to the Russian civil servants, who 'climbed' into nobility via Peter the Great's table of rank<sup>3</sup>, because historiography insinuated a 'hypocritical sense of duty and an empty sense of honour' on their part (Torke 1967: 10; Mosse 1988: 286).

This interpretation of Russian history as a special case (*Sonderweg*) apart remains influential, especially regarding the history of nobility and the position of elites, even though the theory has been dismissed (Scott 2000). In the 1960s and 70s, nobility was only a marginal topic in social history, and later European historiography was dominated by questions concerning the labour movement and the history of the lower classes (see Diestelmeier 1978)<sup>4</sup>. In the Soviet Union, studies on nobility were for understandable reasons rare exceptions and a concept of elite in connection with nobility was out of the question, because nobility was studied as a class that had slowed down the development of the country, and in this rigid framework only economic and cultural questions could be discussed (see Korelin 1979; Lotman 1994). This did not change much in post-Soviet times, in which the relationship between elites, patronage and political power was mostly ignored (Le Donne 1993: 166). Several studies have been published in Russia, but the topic is still limited to institutions of the state since (e.g., Shepelev 1999). With the growing interest in the research of nobility since the end of the past century and the revision of the conceptions of the constitutional state, the concept of estates and the absolutist state, historians following European research discovered that not only the Russian conditions failed to correspond to these analytic concepts, but either did the Western European conditions themselves correspond to them, for which these concepts had

been developed in the first place. As an example, the existence of absolutism according to the usual definition was even questioned in respect of France<sup>5</sup>. Similar discussions were put up concerning the existence of estates in their traditional definition (for more detail see Becker 2004, first edition 1985). Taking into account these new findings, the question arises whether the historians researching Russian history have not been deceived too much and for too long by the European myth of aristocracy.

A revision of these rigid definitions as well as a growing interest in the history of nobility with regard to European elites has enabled today's Russian historians to change the viewpoint of research. If it is 'problematic to speak about a German nobility', because this 'German nobility' was differentiated into diverse regional *Adeligkeit*, which nobility is then supposed to be the ideal type and point of reference? Modern historians of nobility agree that in essence nobility has something in common, which remains intact irrespective of its actual social situation and of the respective balance of power: 'the nobility as a *Erinnerungsgruppe*' (Marburg and Matzerath 2001). There exists a specific model of life and culture of nobility, which in analogy to the concept of 'Bürgerlichkeit' has been called 'Adeligkeit', but which does not meet the theoretical requirements of its counterpart: the criticism about this concept is aimed at the fact that 'Adeligkeit' can hardly hold nobility in its entirety<sup>6</sup>. Yet what can be called a great theoretical flaw of the concept proves to be a gain regarding historical studies on Russian history: the Russian nobility with its diversity was not less European than its Western European 'relatives' and thus does not have to remain the inferior pupil of Western Europe. The breaking with the aristocratic myth and with ideal type categories opens the way for finding new points of reference regarding different groups of nobility as well as supranational structures of nobility, which even crossed the Neman river, in order to thus do justice to nobility as a European phenomenon (for the European dimension of nobility see Conze and Wienfort 2004: 8–9).

The development of the Russian research on nobility has little by little made clear (especially in connection to hitherto not used archive material) that regarding its estate structure, Russia had been much nearer to Western Europe than the strict use of rigid definitions of 'absolutism', 'estates' and 'constitutional state' al-

lowed to realize. In a short essay, Michael Confino asked about the difference between the Russian nobility of service and the Western European aristocratic nobility. His finding was that the differences between the continental European nobility and the nobility in England were considerably more pronounced than the differences between the Russian and French nobilities, or the Russian and the Continental one (Confino 1993: 86).

Of course, it would be presumptuous to assume that everywhere within the European area social groups developed in the same way. But nevertheless, the Russian nobility did not differ in structure from the nobility of the rest of continental Europe, as Seymour Becker shows: It united persons with various levels of income and various backgrounds, and was open for persons rising from other classes (Becker 2004: 24). Of course, the Russian nobility did not have the same rights as for example the Polish nobility had, and neither did it have the same economic power as the German nobility, but those are no reasons for separating it from the European nobility. On the contrary, the research on the Russian nobility could possibly enrich the whole European scientific landscape with new aspects.

For a general comprehensive comparison, the topic has not been sufficiently researched, as the attempt of Dominic Lieven shows: In an inevitably superficial comparison of English, German and Russian aristocracy, he had to rely on findings about the best-researched aspect of nobility, the economic situation. His conclusion that many of the estates that had been bestowed on new favourites ended up in the hands of the old aristocracy, is in itself very interesting and useful, but reveals neither those strategies, through which the nobility remained the elite of society, nor their manifold interrelations to aristocratic power (Lieven 1992: 66).

My contribution will not satisfy the high demands of achieving a comprehensive comparison of European nobility. But my objective is to increase the awareness for the fact that the Russian nobility was a part of a comprehensive area that encompassed the German nobility, the French nobility, etc., and which renders the attribution that the Russian nobility was a special case apart obsolete<sup>7</sup>. If we refrain from assuming an a priori incompatibility of the Russian nobility with Western European principles, then we can reconstruct the history of the Russian nobility within a European concep-

tual sphere and profit from concepts like ‘*Adeligkeit*’. In the same way as we can free ourselves from artificial boundaries of ‘Eastern Europe’, we can free ourselves from the likewise artificial boundaries between social life in Russia and in Western Europe: this applies to the concepts of service and bureaucracy as well as the concept of elite.

The position of the Russian nobility as a privileged class rendered it a multi-purpose elite just like in early modern Germany or France: the higher positions in the Russian Empire were reserved for the nobility, at least until the abolition of serfdom, and in many industries until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Werner 1994: 17–32). The identification of the nobility with elite has deep roots in the concept of nobility itself and also in Germany influenced the popular ideas about nobility until late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite all processes of decay and retreat (Conze 2004: 154). The questions about the special noble habitus apply to the Russian nobility in the same way as to the rest of the European nobility: *valeur*, *honneur*, *naissance*, *hérédité*, *service*<sup>8</sup> – these key concepts describe the special identity of a member of nobility, in the East as well as in the West (Confino 1993: 56), and thus constitute a common and mutual European sphere of experience of nobility. The objective of this essay is to put these key concepts of the Russian nobility to test by the help of three conceptions: ‘elite’, ‘point d’honneur’ and ‘service’.

The special position of the Russian nobility is usually ascribed to the immense power of the monarch, who was financially and politically independent of the nobility, as well as to the ranking as the main principle of organisation of nobility (see Troizkii 1974). As a result, the Russian nobility was denied a European *distinction nobiliaire*<sup>9</sup>. But was not the understanding of service as proper for one's noble status a part of the French ethos of nobility? The civil service as a normal practice of noblemen is known also of other European countries, for example of France, where the duty of service was ‘a distinctive privilege and self-esteem of nobility’ (Confino 1993: 56). The dependency on the duty and the king was not at all a characteristic of the Russian nobility alone, and the Russian table of rank did not serve to ease social mobility or to abolish the exclusive status of nobility, but had as its objective the securing of the patronage in the hands of the monarch. By means of the table

of rank, Peter I rewarded his 'new' men with noble privileges: nevertheless, the social rise by the table of rank law only functioned in a limited way even during his life-time<sup>10</sup>. In the time of Elizaveta Petrovna and Catherine II, the process of ennoblement for the most part ignored Peter's table of rank: those who were ennobled were also the men who had never been in a relationship of service, but who were ennobled by the will of the monarch. Some of the noble members of the commission for compiling a statute book already in 1767 pleaded for the complete abolition of the table of rank, because 'noble dignity cannot be received for service but only through birth and by will of the monarch' (Romanovich-Slovatinskii 1912: 44). This shows that the Russian nobility, or at least its head, was conscious of its special position. The noble members of the commission in 1767 called for a differentiation within noble registers of nobility according to classes or categories of nobility, so that the aristocracy could separate from the service nobility. This was put into practice and since then the state took care to strictly divide *noblesse par lettres*, *noblesse de robe*, *noblesse d'épée* and *haute noblesse* ('blagorodnoe rossiiskoe dvorjanstvo') in the Russian registers of nobility (Romanovich-Slovatinskii 1912: 45). The development of the table of rank in the 19<sup>th</sup> century shows that the Russian tsars continually supported the exclusive position of the nobility: the rank that entitled for ennoblement was continually raised in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For those who were not of noble descent, the ennoblement became increasingly difficult to achieve: In order to be ennobled in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, instead of the 8<sup>th</sup> rank, they now had to reach the 6<sup>th</sup> rank of the table. In a case of dispute, the imperial counsel was inclined to refuse claims to noble dignity because 'the more difficult to receive noble dignity, the better for the state' (*Ibid.*: 23).

Discussions about the decline of the nobility in connection with bureaucratization, which were led in fiction and journalism in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have deeply influenced the Russian research on nobility. They have also led to the opinion that the Russian nobility had been established by the monarch (first by Peter I), according to the European model as a class with its own interests and common ideas. The demand of '*point d'honneur*', which was constitutive for the concept of nobility, proved to be

a Western European borrowing in connection with boarding schools for the children of noblemen (compare Soloviev 1858; Romanovich-Slovatinskii 1912: 59–60)<sup>11</sup>. Although the era of Peter the Great undoubtedly marks a turning point in Russian history, it can not be definitely interpreted as a completely new start. The old Moscow elites did not disappear with Peter's takeover: they remained active and, as we already cited from Dominic Lieven, continued to acquire state estates and to play a dominant role in Russia's political and social life<sup>12</sup>. The practices of service and behaviour of the 'modern' Russian state remained for the biggest part attached to the previous epoch. For example, the principle of social organization of the Moscow empire, the *kormlenie* system, according to Brian Davies existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and did not vanish with the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Viewed from today's perspective, the *kormlenie* practice could be interpreted as corruption of the Russian civil service or as a mistake of the 'modern' Russian state, but that would be wrong<sup>13</sup>: The system of patron-client relationships was the central characteristic of Moscow empire and guaranteed in the 16<sup>th</sup> as well as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the leading position of the elites (Ransel 1988: 211). The phenomenon of a country that was organised along personalised networks based on the exchange of goods in early modern times thus is by no means a Russian specialty but the normal case for entire Europe. For Russia, this model continued to be relevant a little bit longer, but this is not supposed to 'enhance the theory of Russian backwardness' (Schattenberg 2006: 26). Although the system is regarded as obsolete for Western Europe, in Russia 'the offices and institutions of state were interspersed and monopolised by personalised networks in a much bigger scale than in England and France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century' (*Ibid.*: 29). The system of patronage survived and functioned on a local level as well as between the higher civil servants in St.-Petersburg. Such an idea about service was, on the one hand, suitable for the practice of noble networks of families and friends, and on the other hand, it secured the top-position of social elites and their protection against the monarch's arbitrariness.

From this point of view it is not surprising that service gained in importance for the noble self-image in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries: the civil service turned into a social capital and a constitutive part of nobility, and so there hardly existed any noblemen who did

not commit themselves for serving the state, at least for a short time span. Also after 1785 no great exodus from the civil service took place (only exception: the military): after Catherine II abolished the service duty of the nobility with her Statute of nobility (*Gramota na prava, vol'nosti i preimuschestva blagorodnogo rossiiskogo dvorianstva*), statistically only few noblemen quitted their offices (Faizova 1999: 108–109). But the importance of service for the Russian nobility does not mean that *l'honneur et la naissance* lost their value in noble self-image. 'A popular set phrase in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature was *Noblesse oblige*', and this was also seen as noble concept of honour (Schmidt 1993: 11). This ideal also gained in importance in other European countries when the pressure of legitimacy increased (see Conze 2005: 189), but the Russian *point d'honneur* was not a mere product of the self-assertion of a nobility under pressure and by that time had had a longer tradition: according to the findings of Nancy Kollmann, already the Moscow Empire was organised from top to bottom according to the principle of honour, and the use of so-called rights of honour was much more widespread in Russian society than it was in Western Europe at that time (Kollmann 1999). Apart from the question whether the principle of honour was also valid for the lower classes of Moscow Russia, Kollmann's essay shows that the Moscow elites had very clear ideas about a specific concept of honour, which contradicts popular stereotypes about a later 'borrowing' of *l'honneur* as a 'Western European fashion' that was not rooted in the Russian tradition.

The possibility of being ennobled on the basis of 'servitude' stirred up the fears of the nobility that thus 'less worthy' persons could gain the patent of nobility and threatened to reduce the class dignity: lower civil servants, whose habitus lacked all refinement, represented the most popular characters in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature. Those fears were closely linked to the process of the state's bureaucratisation, the consequences of which were often exaggerated by contemporaries and also in later historiography. In Russia, even much less civil servants 'per capita' existed than in other national states, a fact which led some historians to claim an 'undergoverned' Russian Empire (Velychenko 2001: 351, 360). Although the Russian state educated civil servants on a large scale, the process did not co-occur with an ennoblement on a respective

scope. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, civil servants with noble descent were given preferential treatment by everyone, even if they did not have the respective knowledge. M. Speranskii tried to abolish this practice with his law of 6<sup>th</sup> August 1809, which planned that every civil servant from the 8<sup>th</sup> rank upwards had to prove his knowledge by a university diploma or the diploma of another educational institution. What a storm of protest this law by a ‘nasty Papist's son’ triggered among the Russian nobility is well-known: in practice, the law was undermined from the beginning and at last was abolished in around 1834. In the provinces, the bureaucratic order went its traditional way: important positions were filled with noblemen by birth, who according to contemporaries' memoirs had only scanty knowledge and even less interest in the office – a fact that the lower civil servants knew how to use for themselves. The spheres of the nobility by birth and the ennobled civil servants remained worlds apart: those who had gained nobility by long service, remained strangers to the world of the nobility, usually avoided the aristocracy's company and felt confined in their circles (see Gloriano 1905: 662, 663).

In the European states, the process of bureaucratization of the state was accompanied by the development of a functional elite that met the new demands of that state. Those changes are traditionally linked to the substitution of imperial servants by civil servants, as well as with the substitution of the principle of estate for the development of an elite by the principles of merit and education. Russian historians of nobility have also observed such processes in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia (see, for example, the application of this well-known hypothesis of the Russian nobility in Kamenskii 2004: 119–120). The new elites recruited their members through a professional education and were meant to take the place of the old elites of estate, the nobility, or to build a new joint elite together with the old elites. It is already commonplace that old elites cannot simply be replaced by new ones, and that the old nobility possessed a great extent of adaptability. As shown by Michael G. Müller, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian nobility had turned into a ‘functional elite that served to support the state’ and had secured its privileges and the top position via its loyalty to the state (Müller 2004: 97).

The nobility in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia (at least until the reforms of the 1860s, but also beyond) possessed sufficient social, economical and cultural capital to maintain its elite position, independently of whether this 'elite' is supposed to formally mean the propertied first five ranks in the Russian table of rank (Kamenskii 2004: 120) or also includes the old nobility that was wealthy and acceptable at court but did not possess such posts. But it seems very exaggerated to speak about an 'overlapping of elites', of which one was determined by privileges of birth, and the other was determined by merit (Kamenskii 2004: 120). It would have taken more than a lifetime to climb the rank from below to the top, and reaching the two top-most ranks was anyway at the mercy of the monarch.

Also concerning the need of the state for educated men, the old Russian nobility kept its supremacy: the possibility of the nobility as multi-purpose elite and its adaptation to the professional education in Russia can be followed via the system of the elite educational institutions for the nobility, which were created analogously to the knight academies and squires' schools. Those institutions took young boys whose families were listed in the sixth or fifth part of the nobility registers. This concerned those families who could prove their membership to the nobility for more than 100 years, *i.e.* since 1785 or beyond, or possessed a respective post. The grammar school system of cadet schools and exclusive boarding schools led to a preference of noble offspring. The principle of an education separated from class was seen as a common strategy of the nobility on the continent to support its *distinction* (Ruffmann 1961: 175). It was exceptional but still possible for some men to become ennobled through long years of civil service and to reach social advancement. Education became one means of advancing one's career, and the old nobility was in the position to make the best use of this possibility (Pinter 1970: 443).

The question for the gap between the principles of service and descent as the two main pillars of nobility can well be illustrated by the example of a boarding school like the Imperial Law School in St. Petersburg, which was founded in 1835. This school took noble children, who were listed in the sixth part of the nobility register, but also children of the nobility of service, whose fathers had the rank of colonel (sixth rank). This school's graduates represented the basis of the new noble administrative elite, which according to the manifesto about the Decembrists 'should lead Russia to perfec-

tion'<sup>14</sup>. Without exaggeration one can say that this school, together with the grammar school of Zarskoe Selo, produced more ministers and higher civil servants than any other educational institution (Sinel 1975: 2).

In the eyes of the contemporaries, the top positions in a governmental system (if one follows the social historians' definition of elite) are linked very closely to the aristocracy, and therefore elite educational institutions (those who secured better posts for their graduates) were generally seen as 'shelters for the aristocracy's offspring' (Archive of Theatre Undated, 229/1). The graduates of the law school thought it necessary to emphasise in their memoirs that 'among us there was hardly any titled nobleman' or 'in our class, there were no titled or wealthy noblemen' (Arsen'ev 1886: 219; Stasov 1880: 1042). Part of the image of the 'modern' civil service was a 'professional' habitus, that the nobility was generally denied (Urbach 2003). A professional education (for example an education in the law with a commitment of six years of service in the ministry of justice) leads to the creation of a new 'social body', which was constructed from the changing 'elite' (Kusber 2004: 7, 15). It would be, of course, an inadequate simplification, to explain this new type of elite as an automatic result of the 'modern' education, but it was also discovered some time ago that institutions of this kind are subject to generation-specific changes concerning ideas about the state and of service. This change has been pointed out by Richard Wortman, whose contribution allows us to understand the graduates of Imperial Law School as a new generation of civil servants who possessed a 'legal consciousness', *i.e.* a new legal way of thinking (Wortman 1976). The pupils of this school profited, at the time of the establishment of schools, from a better quality of education than university students (Baberowski 1996: 34); they were influenced by modern ideas about law and were open regarding the reforms of the 1860s. Nevertheless, bureaucracy usually (and especially in the provinces) worked according to the 'old patron-client pattern' (Schattenberg 2006: 29). On the other hand, the ideas and the curriculum were not the only or even the essential difference between this 'new generation' and the old bureaucrats. Concerning the law school, it seems to be more promising to research the cultural practices or the noble habitus of the law students, instead of their curriculum. It is a recurrent topic in memoirs that graduates

of the law school kept to their own kind in the provinces and distanced themselves from the older and more experienced civil servants, who called them 'greenhorns' (Levshina 2001). They had the personal patronage from a member of the royal family and custodian of the school, the Prince of Oldenburg, who always took care that his *pravovedy* (the pupils of the law school) always got their promotion in rank on time and that they were not deprived of acknowledgement in service (Archive of Russian History 1856: 125). The corporate identity that bound together the graduates also served as a strong distinction in the non-noble surroundings of the office.

It is important to again emphasise that it would be an exaggeration to see the principle of service and the principle of descent as two opposing concepts: rank did not replace descent, but rather was incorporated into the concept of nobility. It could also serve as a *distinction*, as the example of Ivan Aksakov shows who came from a noble family with a long tradition. He complains in a letter to his parents about not reaching the 9<sup>th</sup> rank because of a bad mark and about having to leave school with the 10<sup>th</sup> rank. The parents tried to console him – his older brother Grigorii Aksakov had left school with the tenth rank – and said it was not a catastrophe: The rank did not matter if the person was good enough. Ivan Aksakov answered:

My letter bore not the voice of someone humiliated but of someone indignant... Without meaning it, we judge those who have gotten a nine (without knowing them) better as those who have gotten a ten. But if not only the worthy persons, but every scoundrel has the right of getting a nine, and if I find myself in the same category with *melkopomesnye*, who are very content about 'getting the ten together with Aksakov' – then I want to distinguish myself (Aksakov 1988: 35).

The disappointment of the nineteen-year-old student who did not find his achievements sufficiently acknowledged is easily understandable in itself, but it was no coincidence how he explained his wish for the 9<sup>th</sup> rank. He did not write that he had a right to the best assessment, but he did not want to be put on the same level with the lower gentry (*melkopomestnye*), *i.e.* those who had less than 100 serfs. The complete correspondence between Ivan Aksa-

kov and his parents in his age as a student shows that he saw himself as the best student of his class and also estimated his chances in a realistic way (Archive of Russian Literature and Arts 1838–1847: 28). In his correspondence he neither writes arrogantly nor with exaggerated ambition, and he was not wealthy enough himself for despising the poorer noblemen because of their small properties. But a continuous topic of his letters is his own behaviour and the behaviour of his comrades. During the first months at school he wrote to his parents: ‘Concerning my comrades, I see that not all of them have developed noble feelings and *point d’honneur*’ (Aksakov 1988: 29). From those fellow students he tried to distance himself and strove to befriend the better educated and ‘influential’ students of his class instead (Archive of Russian Literature and Arts 1838–1847: 28). It was no surprise that all those ‘influential’ students, whom Aksakov named in his letters, got the 9<sup>th</sup> rank on completion of their education (Pashennyi 1967: 97–98). Aksakov was so industrious in his last school year that his parents worried about his health, but he succeeded as the last one of his group to leave school with the 9<sup>th</sup> rank.

There is no doubt about the fact that in Russia, rank was a large part of social capital, and for a large number also of economical capital, but its role concerning *distinction* should not be exaggerated. In the end, every nobleman wanted to be a part of a certain group, with rank being the symbol of membership, and merit in service could never replace the idea of noble *point d’honneur* and the affiliation to a closed elite.

The important role of service for the European nobility, the Russian nobility not excepted, has often been noticed by historians, but the Russian ‘special case apart’ influenced research on Russia as well as it influenced some historians who wanted to include the Russian nobility in a common European region, but did not dare giving up the idea of the Russian nobility being a special type of nobility (Ruffmann 1961: 178).

Historiography for a long time supposed that the Russian nobility, because of its character of service, did not possess a class consciousness of its own. Today those ideas, which claimed that zeal and resolute loyalty towards the autocrats were sufficient means for gaining noble privileges, have lost their persuasive

power. There are many research papers that show that service was not a Russian characteristic and that the Russian nobility did not lack a feeling of honour and *point d'honneur*. Especially the existence of Peter's table of rank is responsible for the fact that the Russian nobility was ascribed a special status by historiography, because the table of rank was seen as providing the means of social advancement, which, if one takes the Russian system of patronage seriously, proves to be not that definite. The nobility used it rather as an instrument of distinction that did not question the classical noble habitus (Funk and Malinowski 1999: 37) but strengthened it, which thus shows the adaptability of this habitus. The increasing importance of education for the civil service, which allowed also non-noble men the chance of social advancement, was utilised by the nobility for its own purposes by appropriating education, rank and service as characteristics of distinction.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The theory that Russia lacked a European governmental system has a long tradition in historiography. The best-known publications: Raeff 1975; Wortman 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Here, nobility is interpreted according to the old definition of the statute of nobility (1785): 'Nobility is a result of the capabilities and virtues of those men, who held leading positions in old times and distinguished themselves by their merits, by which they have transformed the service into dignity and have won the title of nobility for their descendants; those will be treated as noblemen who are descendants of noble ancestors or who have been given the title by the monarch in appreciation of their merits' (cited by and translated from Ruffmann 1961: 161–162).

<sup>3</sup> The table of rank was introduced by Peter I and had as its goal the classification of the ranks of the army, fleet, court and civil officials in a common ranking system (Amburger 1966: 54–56).

<sup>4</sup> In social history, studies of nobility as a part of social structure were written, which were influenced by the concept of decline and modernization (for example, Raeff 1966). In the 1960s and 70s, many journals led discussions about nobility with regard to service and bureaucracy (see Bennett 1977; Pinter 1970).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the discussions about absolutism, which according to N. Henshall never existed in its ideal form of a monopoly of power and law by the crown and a high development of bureaucratization (Henshall 1998; Diestelmeier 1978).

<sup>6</sup> ‘...die Adelgesellschaften definierten sich bis zum Ende des Kaiserreichs regional und nicht differenzlos aufgingen in einem “deutschen Adel”. Demnach blieben die Unterschiede in der Selbstwahrnehmung der Adelslandschaften bestehen. Deshalb lassen sich Gruppenbildung und Definition von Adeligkeit immer nur regional beobachten’ (Marburg and Matzerath 2001: 9). For the latest research about the history of nobility, also about the concept of *Adeligkeit*, see Conze and Wienfort 2004. About the usage of the concept of *Adeligkeit* in a historical study see Malinowski 2003.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Auf Grund der von uns durchgeführten Bestimmung von “Adel” als historischer Realität im 18. Jahrhundert glauben wir, den damaligen russischen Adel nicht nur mit der gleichzeitigen alturopäischen Adelswelt konfrontieren, sondern ihn als Sonderform auch in einen gesamteuropäischen Verkehrskreis mit vergleichbarer gesellschaftlicher Höhenlage’ (Ruffmann 1961: 178).

<sup>8</sup> Hier und im Folgenden ich verwende solche Begriffe auf Französisch, die erstens im untersuchten Zeitraum schon auf Französisch geläufig waren, und zweitens sich nicht immer aus dem Russischen ins Deutschen korrekt übersetzen lassen.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of *distinction nobiliaire* refers to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of distinction (Bourdieu 1987).

<sup>10</sup> ‘In Peter's day, however, most of the social mobility that occurred was not the result of the Table of ranks law. Rather, it should be labelled “sponsored” social mobility’ (Bennett 1977: 18).

<sup>11</sup> This view was also inherited by researchers on nobility in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Madariaga 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Brenda Meehan-Waters claims that around 1730, the leading nobility was dominated by old-established Moscow families who managed to win a legitimisation beyond the time of Peter I by *lignage* (Meehan-Waters 1982). Apart from how these families have secured their elite position, here it is only important to show that the old elites did not vanish after Peter I (compare Kivelson 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Susanna Schattenberg has pointed out that one has to consider the *kormlenie* system even if one talks about the Russian civil service in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Schattenberg 2006: 21, 22). *Kormlenie* is a principle when the office was officially regarded as the way of earning the holder's living.

<sup>14</sup> The Manifesto about the condemnation of the Decembrists and the letter to M. A. Balug'janskij (1826) (Shil'der 1903: 459, 704–706).

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