

## **РОДСТВЕННИКИ ПЕТРА III ПРИ ПЕТЕРБУРГСКОМ ДВОРЕ**

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*Аннотация.* Во второй половине XVIII в. представители младшей ветви герцогского рода Ольденбургов – Гольштейн-Готторпы, связанные кровными узами с династией Романовых, начинают приобретать все большую известность в Российской империи. Тема взаимоотношений Петра III и выходцев из этого рода представляет особую актуальность как в контексте изучения внутренней политики императора, так и при рассмотрении проблематики «немецкого засилья» при петербургском дворе в указанный период. В рамках настоящего исследования на основе анализа неопубликованных источников (главным образом, из государственных архивов Австрии и РФ), многие из которых впервые вводятся в научный оборот, дается новая интерпретация этих отношений. В задачи автора входит выяснение следующих вопросов: какую роль играли «немецкие родичи» Петра III в политической и административной системе государства; как повлияло выдвижение представителей одной из линий Ольденбургской династии при петербургском дворе на традиционное отношение к иностранцам в России в рассматриваемый период; отличалась ли кадровая политика императора, отдававшего предпочтение при назначении на ключевые должности в госаппарате «голштинцам», от предыдущей практики российских монархов? Детальный анализ источников позволяет прийти к следующим выводам: немецкие родственники Петра III оказывали значительное влияние на политику петербургского двора, занимая ключевые позиции в военно-политическом истеблишменте Российской империи в начале 1760-х годов, при этом большинство из них не владело русским языком и не пытались адаптироваться к новой для себя культурной среде; поведение некоторых «голштинцев», как и предоставление им преференций за счет членов царской семьи и петербургских вельмож, вызывало крайне негативную реакцию в российском обществе, способствуя росту ненависти к немцам; решение Петра III окружить себя родственниками из Центральной Европы напоминало практику, получившую распространение в период правления императрицы Анны Ивановны (1730–1740), ближайшие доверенные лица которой являлись выходцами из разных германских государств Священной Римской империи.

*Ключевые слова:* Пётр III Федорович, Гольштейн-Готторпы, российский императорский двор, государственная администрация и армия.

**F. Stellner****Peter III's Relatives at Petersbourg Court**

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*Abstract.* The author examines the political history of the eighteenth-century Russian Empire and its relations with members of the royal family from the Holy Roman Empire. Based on the study of unpublished sources, mainly in Austrian and Russian archives, as well as published Russian, British, and French sources, he presents a new interpretation of Peter III's relations with members of the House of Holstein. The research aims to answer the following questions: What role did Peter III's "German kinsmen" play at the St. Petersburg court and in the administrative system of the state? What impact did their actions have on the Russian elite's perception of the Tsar's rule? Did Peter III's personnel policy, which favoured the Holstein dynasty members for key positions in the state apparatus, differ from the previous practice of Russian monarchs? A detailed analysis of the sources leads to the following conclusions: Peter III's Holstein relatives exerted considerable influence on the policy of the St. Petersburg court, occupying key positions in the military and political establishment of the Russian Empire in the early 1760s. At the same time, most of them did not speak Russian and did not try to adapt to their new cultural environment. The behaviour of some "Holsteinites", as well as the preferential treatment they received at the expense of members of the royal family and St. Petersburg nobles, caused an extremely negative reaction in Russian society, contributing to the growth of hatred towards the Germans. Peter III's decision to surround himself with relatives from Central Europe was reminiscent of the reign of Anna Ivanovna, whose closest confidants were of non-Russian origin. On the other hand, Anna Ivanovna's cronies came from different parts of the Holy Roman Empire.

*Keywords:* Peter III Fyodorovich, Holstein-Gottorp, Russian Imperial Court, state administration and army.

Peter III's accession to the throne<sup>1</sup> in 1762 was seamless, for as the grandson of Peter the Great, he based his claim to the throne on the designations of the previous monarch, Elizabeth Petrovna, and on heredity. The Russian elite respected the late Tsarina's choice of heir and made no effort to change it. On the contrary, many Russians looked forward to the fact that after the reign of women, a man, the grandson of the founder of the power and glory of the Empire, would finally ascend the throne.

Soon, however, the Russian elite became concerned about the preference of Holstein-Gottorp dynastic politics over Russian state interests. At the end of the Seven Years' War, for example, the Tsar saved Prussia from a crushing defeat by forming an alliance with it and intending to fight alongside it to regain his ancestral lands in Schleswig<sup>2</sup>. It was also manifested in his summoning and favoring of relatives of the Holstein dynasty, called Holsteins, to the court. The research questions are related to this:

<sup>1</sup> См. Мильников А. С. «Он не похож был на государя...». Петр III. Повествование в документах и версиях. М., 2002; Leonard C. S. Reform and Regicide: The Reign of Peter III of Russia. Bloomington, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Анисимов М. Ю. Российская дипломатия и Семилетняя война. М., 2021.

Did the Russian dynasty differ from other European dynasties in the very small number of its members? Was the informal incorporation of Holstein relatives into the tsarist family motivated by a desire to increase the number of members of the dynasty and thus enable the conduct of effective dynastic policy?

Were the Holsteins genealogically equivalent to the three members of the Tsarist family and other ruling dynasties in Europe and were Holsteins also descended from Russian rulers?

What positions were the Holsteins entrusted with? Is it true that they dominated the most important administrative bodies?

Did Peter III's practice of favoring Holstein relatives differ from the previous practice of Russian monarchs?

### PETER III

In 1762, Elizabeth Petrovna died, and Peter III became the first emperor to ascend the Russian throne while simultaneously ruling a foreign principality, Holstein-Gottorp. The fact that he came from one of the many dynasties of the Romano-Germanic Empire did not make much of a difference, since Ivan VI and Anna Leopoldovna were also of German descent. A number of descriptions and characterizations of Peter III have survived, but the most tendentious, extensive and used by historians was left by his wife in her memoirs. She wrote of him as an alcoholic, almost faithless, infantile dreamer, and uncritical admirer of Frederick the Great<sup>3</sup>.

But Peter III was not a mentally ill man, an immature fool or an illiterate "corporal"; rather, he can be described as a mediocre, withdrawn and emotionally suffering neurotic man on whose shoulders fate had placed more than he could bear. Physically, he resembled his great-uncle, King Charles XII of Sweden, while from his grandfather, Peter the Great, he inherited simple tastes, a penchant for drinking, boundless intimacy, and, like him, "no great lover of ceremony"<sup>4</sup>. With his father, Charles Frederick, he shared an implacable hatred of Denmark and an almost morbid love of soldiering. He received a normal education for his time and condition, had an excellent memory, but could not concentrate for long. He read and spoke Russian and French, although in his immediate "Holstein" environment he preferred German, feeling a direct aversion to Russian customs and culture. One courtier pointed out that the Tsar "loved music, painting and fireworks". Another said of him: "This monarch was naturally eager, energetic, prompt and indefatigable, angry, violent and indomitable"<sup>5</sup>.

### HOLSTEINS

The Tsar did not have to provide for his Russian relatives, as he had none except his wife and son<sup>6</sup>. However, as the Duke of Holstein, he had many impoverished relatives in his extended family. Among his closest male relatives from the Holstein-Gottorp family was the aforementioned member of the Holstein party from the 1840s, a cousin of the Tsar's father, Prince Frederick Augustus of Holstein-Gottorp (1711–1785). Together with his son Peter Frederick William (1754–1823), he refused to return to St. Petersburg and devoted himself to the administration of his principality of Lübeck.

On the other hand, Frederick Augustus' younger brother, also a cousin of the Tsar's father, Prince George Ludwig (1719–1763), sought the Tsar's favor himself, as he had no sufficient income after his

<sup>3</sup> *Воеһте Е.* Katharina II. in ihren Memoiren. Leipzig, 1916. S. 36–38.

<sup>4</sup> *Дашкова Е.Р.* Записки княгини Дашковой / пер. с франц. по изд., сделанному с подлинной рукописи; под ред. Н.Д. Чечулина. СПб., 1907. С. 32; *Штеллер Ф.* Династическая политика в начале правления Елизаветы Петровны // Россия в XVIII столетии / отв. ред. Е.Е. Рычаловский. Вып. 4. М., 2013. С. 90–105.

<sup>5</sup> *Миших Б.-Х.* Очерк управления Российской империи // Перевороты и войны / сост. А.А. Либерман, пер. В.П. Наумов. М., 1997. С. 315.

<sup>6</sup> Peter III treated the descendants of Catherine I's siblings, who came from an uncouth background, very favorably. See: *Искюль С.Н.* Год 1762 // Роковые годы России. Документальная хроника: в 4-х кн. Кн. 2. СПб., 2001. С. 54.

forced departure from the Prussian army and, as a younger member of the dynasty, had no chance of taking over the government anywhere. Knowing the critical state of Elizabeth Petrovna's health and the Tsarevich's imminent accession to the throne, the prince settled in Königsberg. Here, too, after the accession of Peter III, he was met by his aide-de-camp with an invitation to come to the Russian capital<sup>7</sup>. He left immediately. He was followed by his wife, Sophie Charlotte, née Princess of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Beck (1722–1763), and two sons, William August (1753–1774) and Peter Frederick Ludwig (1755–1829).

George Ludwig served as a mediocre commander in the Prussian army until 1761. The tsar is said to have had no illusions about his abilities, telling him, “Uncle, you are not the best general; after all, the [Prussian – F.S.] king banished you!” But his love for his own family was more important<sup>8</sup>. The Prince was described by the historian Herrmann as “insignificant”, and his personal contact with the King of Prussia was a determining factor in why he became the Tsar's favorite relative<sup>9</sup>.

The Tsar granted the prince a substantial income of 48,000 rubles and gave him a palace in the capital, which he had previously bought for 150,000 rubles<sup>10</sup> (for comparison, a doctor at this time had a salary of 300–400 rubles and a governor 2500–6000 rubles).

He also gave him the title of Royal Highness and officially called him his uncle. He also gave him the highest military rank of field marshal, made him commander of the Guards Cavalry Regiment, commander of the Holstein troops in Russia, and a sort of viceroy, ordering the diplomatic corps to report to the prince for an audience before receiving him<sup>11</sup>. In the spring, he appointed him commander of the forces that were to attack Denmark and sent him to take command of the army on its way to Denmark. Before the prince could leave, he was arrested by supporters of Catherine II in a coup d'état in St. Petersburg<sup>12</sup>.

The Tsar wanted to make George Ludwig Duke of Courland, despite the election of Charles of Saxony in 1758, who had won the recognition of both the King of Poland and the Empress Elizabeth Petrovna. Peter III ignored the complaints of the Saxon envoy and deliberately treated him with great disrespect<sup>13</sup>. At the same time, the Tsar summoned the former regent and Duke of Courland, Ernst Johann von Biron, from exile. According to Bilbasov, Biron returned to St. Petersburg, whereupon he was not allowed to go to Courland, and the Tsar proposed that he surrender his rule to George Ludwig in exchange for the return of his personal property and income. In this spirit, the Tsar instructed the envoy in Courland and ordered one of his closest associates to go to the

<sup>7</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 29.1.1762 // Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (hereinafter: HHStA). Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. II. Karton 45. 1761–1762. Fol. 114; *Бантыш-Каменский Д. М.* Биографии российских генералиссимусов и генерал-фельдмаршалов: в 4-х кн. Кн. 1. СПб., 1840. С. 312–313; *Von Alten F.K.* Georg Ludwig, Herzog von Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp. Oldenburg, 1867. S. 193–194; *Fleischhacker H.* Porträt Peters III // *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. 1957. H. 1–2. S. 172.

<sup>8</sup> *De Rulhière C.-C.* Geschichte der russischen Revolution im Jahr 1762: Mit dem Bildniße der Kayserin Catharine II. Germanien, 1797. S. 57; *Masson Ch.F. Ph.* Major Masson's geheime Denkwürdigkeiten über Rußland. Belle-Vue, 1844. S. 58.

<sup>9</sup> *Herrmann E.* Geschichte des russischen Staats, V. Von der Thronbesteigung der Kaiserin Elisabeth bis zur Feier des Friedens von Kainardsche (1742–1775). Hamburg, 1853. S. 252.

<sup>10</sup> *Соловьев Б. И.* Генерал-фельдмаршалы России. Ростов-на-Дону, 2000. С. 125.

<sup>11</sup> While the French and Austrian envoys refused to grant the audience, the Prussian did so immediately. See: Отчет В. Б. фон дер Гольца, 25.2/8.3. 1762 // *Щебальский П. К.* Политическая система Петра III. М., 1870. С. 42–43; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 15.3.1762 // Сборник Императорского русского исторического общества (hereinafter: СИРИО): в 148 т. Т. 18. № 46. СПб., 1876. С. 211–235; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J. Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 15.3.1762 // HHStA, Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fol. 112–113; Bericht an F.C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau, 23.3.1762 // Ibid. Karton 168. 1762. Fol. 17–21; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 14.4.1762 // Ibid. II. Karton 46. 1762. Fol. 31–34.

<sup>12</sup> *Болотов А. Т.* Жизнь и приключения Андрея Болотова, описанные самим им для своих потомков: в 3-х т. Т. 2. 1760–1771. Москва, 1993. С. 152; *Миних Б.-Х.* Указ. соч. С. 316.

<sup>13</sup> *Щебальский П. К.* Вопрос о Курляндском герцогстве при Петре III // *Русский Архив*. 1866. № 3. С. 284–304; *Von Rauch G.* Zur baltischen Frage im 18. Jahrhundert // *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. Neue Folge. 1957. Bd. 5. H. 4. S. 474.

Courland's capital and prepare a new election<sup>14</sup>. He also wrote to the chief representative of the opposition to Duke Charles, Eberhard Christoph von Mirbach, asking for his help in persuading his fellow citizens and Polish and Lithuanian friends that the government should pass into the hands of the able uncle so dear to the Tsar<sup>15</sup>. In preparation for this change, George Ludwig attended mass on Maundy Thursday in the evangelical St. Peter's Church in St. Petersburg, so that the Courland nobles present in the Russian capital could see that, unlike the Catholic Charles, he was a devout Lutheran<sup>16</sup>. The Tsar also managed to incorporate the change on the Courland's throne into the treaty of the Russo-Prussian defensive alliance of 8/19 June, which Russian historians interpreted as a serious threat to Russian positions in the Baltic at the expense of Prussia<sup>17</sup>.

Of the thirteen members of the Holstein-Gottorp family, not counting the six members of the Swedish royal house, seven, or more than half, were at the court of Peter III. There were also members of other lines of the Danish royal house of Oldenburg at the court of Peter III, namely the Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Beck line, from which Prince George Louis's wife, Sophie Charlotte, descended. Her uncle, the mentally and physically decrepit fifty-six-year-old Duke Peter August (1697–1775), had, unlike Prince George Louis, served in Russia since the 1730s during the reign of Anna Ivanovna<sup>18</sup>. His superior at the time said of him that he was fair, but not very talented, and since he did not speak Russian, he was difficult to command<sup>19</sup>. After his participation in the war with the Swedes, Elizabeth Petrovna promoted him, gave him a high position in the War College, appointed him Governor of Estonia, and awarded him the Order of St. Andrew. In January Peter III appointed him field marshal, commander of all regiments in St. Petersburg, Finland, Revel, Narva and Estonia, and governor general of St. Petersburg and Revel.

Peter August became related to the new Russian nobility when he married in 1742 the granddaughter of the first Russian chancellor, Natalya Nikolaevna Golovina (1724–1767). In the first month of his reign, Peter III ordered that Natalya Nikolaevna's estates be taken from her and given to her husband because she had mismanaged their only child, Princess Catherine (1750–1811). The Tsar then placed Catherine in the new Winter Palace and saw to her education<sup>20</sup>. Peter August was also accompanied by his daughter-in-law, Frederika, née Countess Dohna-Schlobitten-Leistenu (1738–1786), who received an annual pension of 10,000 rubles and estates in Estonia from the Tsar and was also accommodated in the new Winter Palace<sup>21</sup>.

Peter August's older brother, the seventy-one-year-old Catholic Charles Louis (1690–1774), head of the Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Beck line and general of Brandenburg, was also promoted to field marshal and invited to St. Petersburg. However, he refused, citing his advanced age. Even his only son, Charles Frederick (1732–1772), did not go to Russia. The members of this family were to receive a year's allowance from the Tsar, but before the fall of the Tsar the matter had not been settled.

<sup>14</sup> *Билбасов В.А.* Присоединение Курляндии // Исторические монографии: в 5 т. Т. 2. СПб., 1901. С. 207–211.

<sup>15</sup> Schreiben Kaysers Peter des Dritten an den Geheimenrath von Mirbach, Starosten von Polangen, Rittern des St. Alexander-Newsky. Ordens, betreffend das kaysersliche Vorhaben, den Herzog Georg Ludewig von Holstein zum Herzog von Curland und Semgallen zu machen // Magazin für die neue Historie und Geographie. 1773. Bd. 7. № 4. S. 243–244.

<sup>16</sup> *Von Alten F.K.* Op. cit. S. 207.

<sup>17</sup> Полное собрание законов Российской империи (hereinafter: ПСЗ): в 33 т. Т. 15. СПб., 1895. С. 1034–1039. № 11566. But there's nothing in it about Courland, because they didn't print the secret supplement. Bilbasov published it. See: *Билбасов В.А.* Указ. соч. С. 209–210; *Щебальский П.К.* Вопрос о Курляндском герцогстве... С. 284–304; *Его же.* Политическая система Петра III. С. 184.

<sup>18</sup> E. Finch-Hatton to W. Stanhope, Baron of Harrington, 8/19.12.1741 // СИРИО. Т. 91. № 85. СПб., 1894. С. 359; E. Finch-Hatton to W. Stanhope, Baron of Harrington, 9/20.1.1742 // Там же. № 96. С. 412–413; Именной, данный Сенату. 28.1/8.2.1762 // ПСЗ. С. 984. № 11419; *Бантыш-Каменский Д.М.* Указ. соч. С. 309–311; *Herrmann E.* Op. cit. S. 268; *Le Donne J.P.* Frontier Governors General 1772–1825. I. The Western Frontier // *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas.* 1999. Bd. 47. H. 1. S. 60.

<sup>19</sup> *Бантыш-Каменский Д.М.* Указ. соч. С. 311.

<sup>20</sup> Именной, данный Сенату. 28.1/8.2.1762 // ПСЗ. С. 984. № 11419.

<sup>21</sup> Her husband and cousin Prince Karl Anton August (1727–1759) fell in 1759. She was probably accompanied by her only son, Prince Frederick (1757–1816).

Peter III considered all Holsteins at the Russian court to be members of his family. Since he was both Tsar and Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, the Holsteins were considered members of the Russian royal family, although they did not officially become Grand Princes and Imperial Highnesses. We can say, however, that the tsarist family unofficially grew from three to twelve members, the monarch, the sovereign, Tsarevich Paul, and nine Holstein princes and princesses: George Louis, Sophia Charlotte, William Augustus, Peter Frederick Louis, Peter Augustus, Natalia Nikolayevna, Catherine and Frederica. For the sake of comparison, let us list the number of members of other dynasties (living at the respective court) in 1762. The Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty had 16, the French 22, the British-Hanoverian 12, the Prussian 13, the Saxon-Polish 17, the Spanish 10, the Danish 9, the Portuguese 9, the Sardinian 24.

During Peter III's reign, there was speculation at court that the Tsar intended to take advantage of Peter the Great's 1722 law, which allowed each monarch to name his own successor. In fact, in his first manifesto, he made no mention of his wife or son. He wrote only of loyalty to the emperor and of a successor chosen and appointed according to the supreme will. Instead of clearly declaring the son the heir and thus consolidating the position of the dynasty, he left room for a series of speculations and fictions<sup>22</sup>. One of these was that he intended to name one of the Holstein princes as successor, the most frequently mentioned being the sons of Prince George Ludwig<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, many documents issued by the Tsar referred to Paul as the tsarevich and heir.

Was the informal extension of the tsarist family through the Holstein princes and princesses genealogically justified? Peter III was a maternal descendant of Peter I and had Romanov blood in his veins. Thanks to his grandmother, a Swedish princess, he was a descendant of the Swedish Palatine dynasty. Of his four grandparents, two were Russian rulers and one was a royal Swedish princess.

But none of the Tsar's relatives had Romanov blood. However, both George Ludwig and Peter August had Rurik blood, as they were 13th-generation descendants of Grand Prince Alexander Mikhailovich of Vladimir of the Tver Rurik line, and 13th-generation descendants of the Halych-Volhynia and Polesie Ruriks. Furthermore, both were descendants in the 20th-generation of the Kiev Grand Prince Vladimir II Monomakh and in the 21st-generation Grand Duke Svatopluk II Izyaslavich.

The family of George Ludwig was more noble than the line of Peter Augustus in the 17th – 18th centuries, because the Gottorp line was older than the Beck line, and because it was more concerned with equal marriage. George Ludwig was descended from the Danish kings in the seventh generation on his father's side and in the fourth generation on his mother's side, and in the sixth generation he was descended from King Charles IX of Sweden. But George Ludwig and Peter August were both descendants of medieval Polish, Bohemian, Hungarian, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Castilian, Navarrese and Leonese kings. In their veins flowed the blood of the imperial families of the Habsburgs, Luxemburgs, Wittelsbachs, Supplinburgs, Saxons, Ottons and the Byzantine Macedonian dynasty.

## HOLSTEINS IN THE ARMY AND ADMINISTRATIONS

Peter III was particularly interested in the military, and it was in the military that he wanted to rely on loyal relatives at the highest level. He appointed five new field marshals, three of whom were his relatives, Duke Peter August, Prince George Ludwig, and Duke Charles Ludwig<sup>24</sup>. Charles Ludwig remained only a titular field marshal, as he never entered Russian service. At the end of January, the Tsar appointed a special eleven-member commission on conscripts, five of whom (two of them

<sup>22</sup> Манифестъ, 25.12.1761/5.1.1762 // ПСЗ. С. 875. № 11390; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J., Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 10.1.1762 // HHStA, Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fasc. 16. Fol. 12–13; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 14.4.1762 // Ibid. II. Karton 46. 1762. Fol. 5–20; *Ransel D.* The Politics of Catherinian Russia: The Panin Party. New Haven, 1975. P. 58–59; *Мильников А. С.* Искушение чудом: «Русский принц», его прототипы и двойники-самозванцы. Л., 1991. С. 65.

<sup>23</sup> *Herrmann E.* Op. cit. S. 253.

<sup>24</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J., Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 1.2.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fol. 55 (annex).

Holsteins) were of foreign origin<sup>25</sup>. The Tsar also appointed a four-man naval commission, with one commander of foreign origin<sup>26</sup>. The Russian army was directed at the highest level by the monarch, Prince Nikita Yurievich Trubetskoy at the head of the military college, and two Holstein princes. Of the remaining surviving field marshals, Count Pyotr Semyonovich Saltykov was entrusted with nothing, Count Aleksander Borisovich Buturlin was sent to Moscow as a governor, the Ukrainian hetman, Count Alexei Grigorievich Razumovsky, courtier and former favorite, was only a titular field marshal, and the influence of the Shuvalov brothers decreased greatly.

The Tsar's decision to abolish the most elite detachment of the Guard, the Personal Centenary, which had helped Elizabeth Petrovna seize the throne in 1741, was undoubtedly meritorious for the sake of consolidating discipline<sup>27</sup>. But in its place he installed a Holstein army that was by no means exemplary. In fact, until 1762, the elite of the officers did not report to Peter's service, because it was not known how long he would wait for the throne. And suddenly, corps led by inferior officers of mostly German origin were favored as the elite. He gave them privileges and honors, which inevitably aroused envy and resentment<sup>28</sup>.

Peter III also reorganized the supreme civil authorities, abolishing the existing key government body, the Conference at the Supreme Court, and creating a new key government body, the Council, which was composed of four foreigners and five Russians. The first two places in the decree were occupied by Holstein princes<sup>29</sup>, who influenced the monarch in matters of the armed forces and foreign policy. This is evidenced, for example, by Chancellor Vorontsov's advice to the Austrian envoy that he preferred to maintain relations with the Holsteins and described his influence on the formation of foreign policy as minimal<sup>30</sup>. But the influence of the Holsteins on the Russian administration was limited, as it was dominated by Russian politicians<sup>31</sup>. Among them was the educated and capable Dimitri Vasilievich Volkov. Empress Catherine II wrote of him: "At the time he was thought to be extremely clever, but as it turned out later, he was quick and eloquent, but unusually reckless"<sup>32</sup>. An adjutant of the King of Prussia sent to the Tsar reported that the Tsar daily discussed affairs of state with Volkov<sup>33</sup>. He was assisted by General Alexei Petrovich Melgunov, who benefited from his knowledge of German and considerable cunning<sup>34</sup>. The field marshal, Count Burkhard Christoph von Münnich expressed similar sentiments: "The opinions of Melgunov, Gudovich,

<sup>25</sup> Именной, данный Сенату. 6/17.3.1762 // ПСЗ. С. 934–935. № 11461 (listed seven members, four of whom were of non-Russian descent).

<sup>26</sup> Именной, данный Сенату. 16.2/27.2.1762 // Там же. С. 910–911. № 11442; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 13.3.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. II. Karton 45. 1761–1762. Fol. 339–344; Материалы для истории русского флота: в 17 т. Т. 10. Документы царствования имп. Елисаветы Петровны с 1741–1761 г. (Продолжение). СПб., 1883. С. 673.

<sup>27</sup> Именной, данный Военной Коллегии. 21.3/1.4.1762 // ПСЗ. С. 945–948. № 11480.

<sup>28</sup> Рапорты бригадира Карла фон Дельвига о состоянии Русско-голландского полка, май 1762 года // Российский государственный архив древних актов (hereinafter: РГАДА). Ф. 203. Кабинет Петра III. № 23 (без страниц); F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 25.6.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. II. Karton 46. 1762. Fol. 199–200.

<sup>29</sup> Именной, данный Сенату. 28.1/8.2.1762 // ПСЗ. С. 893–894. № 11418; *Dassow J. Friedrich II. von Preussen und Peter III. von Russland. Inaug. Diss. Berlin, 1908. S. 26; Amburger E. Geschichte der Behördenorganisation Russlands von Peter dem Grossen bis 1917. Leiden, 1966. S. 64–65.*

<sup>30</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 26.2.1762 // СИРИО. Т. 18. № 35. С. 139–140; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J., Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 26.2.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fol. 100–105.

<sup>31</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J., Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 1.2.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fol. 55 (annex); *Дашкова Е.П. Указ. соч. С. 30.*

<sup>32</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau, 25.1.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. II. Karton 168. 1762. Fol. 86; *Politische Correspondenz Friedrichs des Grossen: 42 Bde. Bd. 21. Berlin, 1894. S. 389; Boehme E. Op. cit. S. 420.*

<sup>33</sup> Bericht von W.F.K. von Schwerin, 10.4.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. II. Karton 168. 1762. Fol. 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Herrmann E. Op. cit. S. 262; Boehme E. Op. cit. S. 415.*

and especially Volkov, who held the post of secretary, controlled the monarch's pen, and was his closest adviser, were, however, far superior to those of the other members of the commission"<sup>35</sup>.

The Tsar entrusted the administration of the Duchy of Holstein-Gottorp to members of the Holstein Court Party. One of its most important representatives was the Tsar's long-time confidant, Lieutenant General Christian August von Brockdorff. He had become so discredited by embezzlement, debt, and intrigue that he had to be dismissed from his Holstein post during the Tsar's reign. This pleased the Tsarina Catherine, who had long hated him, derisively called him a "pelican" and tried to remove him from her husband's entourage<sup>36</sup>. Georg Christian von Wolff was appointed head of the Holstein office<sup>37</sup>. Another favourite of the Tsar was Peter von Bredahl<sup>38</sup>. According to one French diplomat, he was "a gifted and learned man, and the only one of the Holstein courtiers who had learned more than military niceties"<sup>39</sup>. Caspar von Saldern, a Holstein landowner who came to St. Petersburg in 1761 to seek justice from the Duke in a dispute with his neighbor, became the party's main representative. He allegedly tried to win Peter over to a peace settlement with Denmark. The Copenhagen government bribed him and obtained from him, for example, a copy of the plan for preparing Russian troops for war<sup>40</sup>. The inter-war German historian O. Brandt said of him: "It was a kind of Holstein patriotism that made this son of a Gottorp official... an advocate of peace: the unconditional certainty that only then would his many and sorely tried homeland be blessed with peace"<sup>41</sup>.

### RESTITUTION OF SCHLEWSIG

During the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna, Peter III did not hide his disapproval of the anti-Prussian course. As soon as he became a monarch, he changed his foreign policy. He decided to demand from Denmark the return of Schleswig, or "that inch of land", as one courtier mockingly wrote. There was no ally in the war with Denmark other than Berlin<sup>42</sup>. King Frederick II of Prussia immediately accepted the offer, as improving relations with Russia was a political and military necessity at a time when he seemed to be succumbing to the Seven Years' War<sup>43</sup>. The Tsar also officially declared a suspension of military operations against Prussia, recalled the commander in Pomerania, and ordered his successor to sign an armistice and then peace<sup>44</sup>. Peter would have preferred to attack

<sup>35</sup> Брикнер А.Г. Император Петр III (по депешам графа Мерси) // Древняя и новая Россия. 1878. Т. 3. № 11. С. 182; Миних Б.-Х. Указ. соч. С. 316–317. Наумов В.П. К вопросу о роли Д.В. Волкова в государственной политике Петра III // Забытый император. Материалы научной конференции, 11 ноября 2002 г. Серия: «Ораниенбаумские чтения». Вып. 3. СПб., 2002. С. 92–100.

<sup>36</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J., Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 1.2.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fol. 55 (annex).

<sup>37</sup> Bericht von Brockdorff, 1/12.6.1762 // РГАДА. Ф. 203. Кабинет Петра III. № 11 (без страниц).

<sup>38</sup> Штелин Я.Я. Записки Штелина о Петре III, императоре всероссийском // Чтения в Императорском обществе истории и древностей российских: в 218 т. Т. 5. Кн. 4. М., 1866. С. 104.

<sup>39</sup> Фавье Ж.-Л. Записки секретаря французского посольства в С.-Петербурге // Исторический вестник. 1887. Т. 29. С. 402.

<sup>40</sup> Politische Correspondenz... S. 82, 306–307; Hübner E. Staatspolitik und Familieninteresse. Die gottorfische Frage in der russischen Aussenpolitik 1741–1773. Neumünster, 1984. S. 179–180.

<sup>41</sup> Brandt O. Das Problem der "Ruhe des Nordens" im 18. Jahrhundert // Historische Zeitschrift. 1929. Bd. 140. H. 3. S. 558.

<sup>42</sup> Hübner E. Op. cit. S. 176–178; Pommerin R. Bündnispolitik und Mächtesystem. Österreich und der Aufstieg Rußlands im 18. Jahrhundert // Expansion und Gleichgewicht. Studien zur europäischen Mächtepolitik des ancien régime / ed. J. Kunisch. Berlin, 1986. S. 152–153.

<sup>43</sup> Stellner F. Zu den Ergebnissen des Siebenjährigen Kriegs in Europa // Prague Papers on History of International Relations. 2000. Bd. 4. S. 85–98.

<sup>44</sup> Bericht an F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau, 26.1.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. II. Karton 168. 1762. Fol. 82; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J., Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 10.2.1762 // Ibid. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fol. 64–72; Bericht an F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau, 12.2.1762 // Ibid. Fol. 39; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 15.2.1762 // Ibid. Karton 45. 1761–1762. Fol. 206–207; Декларация, 12.2.1762 // СИРИО. Т. 18. № 27. С. 99–100; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 26.2.1762 // Там же. № 39. С. 185–187; Трактатъ. 24.4.1762 // ПСЗ. С. 987–991. № 11516.



Denmark immediately, and he officially spoke of doing so in March, but he had to negotiate Prussian, British, and Swedish aid or neutrality<sup>45</sup>. An alliance with Berlin was concluded in June, the Prussians recognized the Tsar's "legitimate and indisputable" claims in Schleswig and promised to help enforce them<sup>46</sup>.

The peace treaties, the evacuation of East Prussia<sup>47</sup> and Pomerania, brought neither territorial gains nor the desired weakening of Prussia. Russian officers were irritated by the insensitive introduction of Prussian customs and preparations for war with Denmark. Some of the St. Petersburg court and diplomatic corps tried to talk the Tsar out of war. Among this group were Prince George Ludwig, Chancellor Mikhail Illarionovich Count Vorontsov, members of the Foreign College, Caspar von Saldern, who feared opposition from Russian grandees and a palace revolution that would affect their position<sup>48</sup>.

Peter III ignored the advice of those around him and intended to join the troops in Mecklenburg<sup>49</sup>. But he did not have time to do so, as his wife staged a coup d'état in early July without much difficulty<sup>50</sup>. The Tsar gave up and resigned. A diplomat rightly remarked: "This strange revolution, contrary to expectations, has cost little or no blood; all is quiet and orderly, as if nothing had happened"<sup>51</sup>. One of the envoys expatiated on the causes of Peter III's downfall: "The greatest causes of this lord's misfortune are the little respect he has for religion and the clergy, also the order to the guards to join the army, also the preference he gives in all things to the Holsteins over the Russians, and the great influence this house has in all imperial affairs, which, besides the great expense and the expected long campaign ... causes great discontent and murmurs"<sup>52</sup>.

\* \* \*

Peter III's decision to surround himself with relatives from Central Europe was reminiscent of the reign of Anna Ivanovna, whose closest confidants were of non-Russian origin. On the other hand, Anna's coterie came from various parts of the Holy Roman Empire, while Peter III's were members of the Holstein dynasty and politicians and courtiers from the Holstein lands. Unlike the Ancien Régime, there was no favorite monarch, and foreigners did not predominate in leading positions. But Anna Ivanovna, as empress, did not put the interests of Courland above those of Russia, while Peter III acted first and primarily as the ruler of a politically insignificant duchy, not as a European power. He did not hesitate to undo the achievements of the previous monarch (the

<sup>45</sup> George III to Peter III, 23.3.1762 // The National Archives. London, Kew. Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign. SP 78/253. Fol. 55–56. Recording from 30.4.1762; The Devonshire Diary. William Cavendish, Fourth Duke of Devonshire. Memoranda on State of Affairs. 1759–1762 / eds P.D. Brown, K.W. Schweizer. London, 1982. P. 170.

<sup>46</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J., Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 25.6.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fol. 215–216; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 28.5.1762 // Ibid. II. Karton 46. 1762. Fol. 153–156; *Häusser L.* Zur Geschichte Friedrichs II. und Peter III // Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte. 1864. Bd. 4. S. 7; *Leonard C.S.* Op. cit. P. 134–137.

<sup>47</sup> Рапорт Панина о сдаче Восточной Пруссии, июнь 1762 г. // РГАДА. Ф. 203. Кабинет Петра III. № 55 (без страниц).

<sup>48</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 15.3.1762 // СИРИО. Т. 18. № 46. С. 211–235; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 30.3.1762 // Там же. № 52. С. 250–264; F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an R.J. Graf von Colloredo-Waldsee, 26.2. and 30.3.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. I. Karton 38. 1761–1763. Fol. 100–105, 132–133; Отчет о датской армии, 8/19 мая 1762 г. // РГАДА. Ф. 203. Кабинет Петра III. № 76 (без страниц).

<sup>49</sup> F.-C., Graf Mercy-Argenteau an W.A., Graf von Kaunitz, 6.7.1762 // HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Diplomatische Korrespondenz. Russland. II. Karton 46. 1762. Fol. 205–206.

<sup>50</sup> Дудченко Ю.Д. Эпоха дворцовых переворотов // Наука и молодежь: проблемы, поиски, решения. Труды Всероссийской научной конференции студентов, аспирантов и молодых ученых / под ред. С.В. Коновалова. Новокузнецк, 2022. С. 104–108.

<sup>51</sup> Екатерина II сенаторам, 28.6/9.7.1762 // РГАДА. Ф. 10. Кабинет Екатерины II. № 556 (без страниц); *Kleinschmidt A.* Vom Tode Peter's III bis zum Tode Iwans VI. Gesandtschaftsberichte aus dem Haager Reichsarchive // Russische Revue. 1883. Bd. 23. S. 535.

<sup>52</sup> *Kleinschmidt A.* Op. cit. S. 539.

annexation of East Prussia) without achieving his own victories and territorial gains. The desire to fight Denmark for the small northern German territory lost more than half a century earlier seemed misplaced. Of course, it could be argued that the Tsar had to consider his honor and authority as a Holstein monarch, and that an insult to the Duke of Holstein-Gottorp was also an insult to the autocratic Tsar. Similarly, British politicians in the Seven Years' War had to take into account Hanover, where the British king ruled as an elector. But Holstein could not be compared to Hanover, for the loss of Schleswig had befallen the Holstein dukes long before they ascended the Russian throne.

Peter III acted in some ways like Catherine I, who summoned her relatives from Livonia to the court, or like the regent Anna Leopoldovna, who appointed her husband, Duke Anton Ulrich of Brunswick-Lüneburg, as generalissimo and had her brother-in-law, Ludwig Ernest of Brunswick-Lüneburg-Bevern, elected duke of Courland. While Catherine I's relatives were not in a position to occupy more prominent positions, Peter III followed Anne Leopold's example in promoting relatives. For both, kinship was more important than actual talent and experience. In the promotion of George Ludwig, on the other hand, can be seen as an attempt to make use of his military experience and close contacts at the Prussian court and in the Prussian generalship.

Holstein relatives, soldiers, politicians, and courtiers had considerable influence under Peter III and held key positions in the Russian court, administration, and army. Most of them did not speak Russian, nor did they try to adapt to their new environment. Some of them contributed by their behavior to the growing hatred of the Germans. Understandably, they (with the exception of Peter August and his family) could hardly have had more tact and understanding of Russian customs if they had never lived in the country. The Russians would not have objected to paying the Holstein princes out of the duchy's funds and granting them honorary positions at the Kiel court, but their presence in St. Petersburg and their preferential treatment at the expense of members of the tsarist dynasty and Russian grandees aroused very negative reactions. One of the court ladies called them "Holstein parasites"<sup>53</sup>. A Dutch diplomat said of the reaction to their occupation: "In general, the nation is very dissatisfied, both because of the great favoritism shown to the Holstein dynasty and their interference in all affairs of state, and because of the great expense caused by the Holsteins"<sup>54</sup>. The assertion that "all his favorites were stupid or traitors"<sup>55</sup>, is not true, for the Holsteins and Marshal Münnich remained loyal to the end. The Tsar's efforts to rely on loyal relatives bore fruit, but the moment the energetic and unusually capable Catherine II allied herself with key Russian grandees and masterfully exploited anti-Chinese resentments, the Holsteins had no chance of preventing the coup. Catherine II did not repeat her husband's mistake of summoning relatives to the Tsar's court. She solved the Holstein question by forcing her son, the Tsarevich and Duke Paul, to give up the estate. Russia thus bound Denmark, created a satellite in Oldenburg, and focused on expansion at the expense of the Polish-Lithuanian and Ottoman Empires.

The House of Holstein undoubtedly benefited the most of the Central European dynasties from their cooperation with Russia, since at the beginning of the 18th century they ruled only in Holstein-Gottorp, while at the end of the century they ruled in Russia, Sweden and Oldenburg. And the descendants of Peter August now rule in the male line in Norway and Great Britain.

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<sup>53</sup> *Дашкова Е.Р.* Указ. соч. С. 24.

<sup>54</sup> *Kleinschmidt A.* Op. cit. S. 534.

<sup>55</sup> *Фон дер Ассбург А.Ф.* Записка о воцарении Екатерины Второй // Русский архив. 1879. Кн. 1. Вып. 3. С. 364.

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