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**ROUTINE CORRUPTION IN
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OF CATHERINE II
AND ALEXANDER I**

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ROUTINE CORRUPTION IN RUSSIA DURING THE REIGNS OF CATHERINE II AND ALEXANDER I

This articles uses the account records books from a variety of Golitsyn estates in the late eighteenth- early ninetieth century to assess the level of "routine corruption" in Imperial Russia. The data from these books allows us to identify individual cases of unofficial payments made by the estates and by peasant commune to the district-level officials; to delimit key types of payment situations; and to calculate the overall volumes of payments. The resulting numbers are compared to the overall volume of obligations carried by the serfs to the state and toothier landlords. Our conclusion is that while the routine unofficial payments were ubiquitous and accompanied any interaction with the state, by the time of Catherine II's reign their volume l was quite low and did not put significant burden on the population. Rather, officials made fortunes by extracting unofficial payments in more targeted ways.

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In recent decades, studies of corruption in such disciplines as economics and political sciences have turned virtually into subfields of their own, as scholars use increasingly detailed and voluminous sets of data to explore the factors that affect the levels and types of corruption; the way corruption impacts economic growth; the way it interacts with institutions and culture, etc. One way or another, these studies are premised on the assumption that corruption – the spread of ‘corrupt’ practices, the amounts extracted from the population by the officials – is measurable, be it with the help of specially designed surveys or sophisticated econometric techniques. Even after all the caveats and limitations of such methods are taken into account, these studies still provide an important baseline for thinking about the place that the ‘corrupt’ (or ‘informal’, perhaps) practices occupy in the economy and politics of respective societies and for making cross-country comparisons.³

Historians, of course, are also very much interested in the theme of corruption, yet the idea of actually assessing its levels in the past does not get much traction with them. One reason for this is the ambiguity of the very notion of corruption in history: the lines between the “bribe” and the gift, between the illegal and the customary, etc., were more blurred in the past than they are today, as the very notion of “corruption” arguably only begins to make sense when an official’s persona is clearly separated from his office. Second, don’t we lack the sources to explore bribes in the centuries past on anything like a systematic basis? Even contemporary corruption is hard to measure, as those who engage in illegal practices by definition seek to leave as few traces as possible of their activities. As a result, it would be probably fair to say that most historical works employ such sources as surviving records of investigations, as well as the anecdotal evidence (such as memoirs) to study the mechanics of giving-and-taking on a case-study basis. They also stress the need to explore and problematize the language, the meanings, and the representations of corruption; and to situate seemingly “corrupt” interpersonal relationships and the practices of patronage in the context of pre-modern politics and administration.⁴ This is also true of historical studies of corruption in Russia: while much research has been done lately on the modes of informal relationships, historians shy away from offering estimates of the volumes of extralegal payments and incomes, limiting themselves to asserting their pervasiveness. Our focus in this study is different: rather than looking into the cultural anthropology of giving-and-taking, we are interested in assessing how much was actually given and taken.

³ For reviews of empirical research, see, for example, Jain, ‘Corruption: A review’; Lambsdorff, ‘Causes and Consequences of Corruption’; Aidt, ‘Economic analysis of corruption’. On issues related to measuring contemporary corruption, see Sampford and Shacklock, *Measuring corruption*; Donchev and Ujhelyi, ‘What do corruption indices measure?’

⁴ For discussions of recent historical research on corruption, see, for example, Kreike and Jordan, *Corrupt histories*; Latham, ‘The city has been wronged and abused!’

Indeed, as we consider early modern fiscal-military states and the growth of “modern” administrative institutions, it is surely also important to assess the volume of resources extracted from the population by the officials on top of anything that went into the state coffers. One country where such estimates, whatever their shortcomings, exist, is China in the late Qing era. In particular, scholars are able to draw on the impressionistic assessments produced by the Imperial administration itself as it tried to combat corruption; on the fragmentary data regarding the officials’ expenditures; and on such indirect indicators as the clan records that reflect how much officials of different ranks were expected to contribute to the clan’s treasury. Indeed, the Kangxi emperor himself (1654-1722) was willing to consider a magistrate who imposed a surcharge rate of no more than 10 per cent on the regular taxes an honest official. According to one of his governor-generals, however, the ratio of illegal surcharges to the legal ones ‘had reached as much as 40 or 50 per cent of the regular tax quota’.⁵ More systematically, Chang concluded that around 1873, an average district-level magistrate earned extra-legally 30,000 silver taels a year vis-à-vis his salary of 2,340 taels, i.e. almost 13 times his official income. (Chang stresses that these were the customary levels, acceptable for an ‘incorrupt’ official). From this, Chang estimated that the aggregate extra-legal income of all 23,000 Chinese officials was about 115 million taels of silver, with over half of this amount going to the top 1700 officials. Overall, thus, corrupt income was 18.3 times legal income. Marsh gives a figure that is higher still: according to his estimates, the extralegal income of Qing district-level officials was about 30 times larger than their official salaries. Overall, the aggregate extra-legal incomes of district magistrates (not counting other officials) might have exceeded the annual amount of tax silver received by the treasury itself. Most recently, using more sophisticated econometric modeling, Ni and Van estimate that the officials’ aggregate corrupt income circa 1873 was 14 to 22 times their legal income, and that corruption consumed more than 20 per cent of China’s agricultural output. These estimates are employed in a variety of works to explore state capacity in historical perspective, agency issues, etc.⁶ As China, similarly to Russia, was a large agrarian empire, and as it boasted, unlike Russia, a well-established and well-educated bureaucracy that in the early eighteenth century was sometimes presented by Western European intellectuals as a model to be emulated, these estimates also provide a useful reference point of our own study of Russia.

⁵ Zelin, *The Magistrate’s Tael*, p. 73.

⁶ Chang, *The Income of the Chinese Gentry*, pp. 29-42; Marsh, *The mandarins*, p. 63; Ni and Van, ‘High corruption income’, pp. 317, 329. For broader overviews of bureaucracy, corruption, and attempts at salary reforms in Qing China, see Marsh, ‘The Venality of provincial office in China’; Zelin, *The Magistrate’s Tael*, pp. 41-53; Hickey, ‘Fee-Taking’; Kiser and Tong, ‘Determinants of the Amount’, p. 316; Will, ‘Officials and money in late imperial China’, pp. 29-95. Sng, ‘Size and dynastic decline’.

Is it possible to move beyond the impressionist accounts of rampant corruption in early modern Russia towards operating with actual numbers, however imprecise and preliminary? In this article we use the account books left behind by the magnates' estates and peasant communes to estimate the volumes of 'routine' corruption in Russia in the second half of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century - i.e. in the 'classical' Imperial age starting with the provincial reforms of Catherine II and well into the era of Nicholas I, i.e. before the 'Great Reforms'. These account books are increasingly mined by scholars for information regarding specific instances of corruption and the types and volumes of individual extralegal payments. In our work, however, we move beyond cataloguing individual gifts and bribes and attempt to calculate the total amount of payments made by an economic entity in a given year. This allows us to look into the relative weight of different types of payments; to find out how much was an average peasant likely have to contribute to such payments per year; to compare these amounts to the tax rates; to calculate how much could the officials in an average district (*uezd*) hope to collect from such payments, given the size of the population and the average per capita payment rates; and to compare this revenue to their legal salary.

I.

As in many – probably, most – societies, extralegal payments were central to interactions between the government officials and the subject population in early modern Russia. Initially, as the degree of fiscal centralization was quite low, local communities were officially expected to 'feed' the governors and their staff according to the customary rates (the practice of *kormlenie*); while *kormlenie* implied systematic and semi-formalized mechanisms of apportioning this burden across the entire population of a given territory, there also existed various informal mechanism of negotiating such payments and resisting demands that were deemed widely excessive.⁷ By the end of the seventeenth century, the government was increasingly seeking to limit and regulate such practices. One reason was the competition for resources: the government claimed that extortion undermined the subjects' ability to pay taxes, i.e. diminished the pool of resources available to the sovereign. Another was the perception that accepting payments from the population diminished an official's ability to unwaveringly implement the sovereign's will. Peter I's reign was a watershed in that regard, even though considerable ambiguity remained well into the eighteenth century. On the one hand, from the early 1700s on, the law unequivocally criminalized accepting any and all payments from the subject population, making

⁷ Shveikovskaia, *Gosudarstvo i krest'iane Rossii*, pp. 247-57; Davies, 'The Politics of Give and Take'; Sedov, 'Podnosheniia v moskovskikh prikazakh', pp. 147-8; Sedov, 'Podnosheniia v sisteme voevodskogo upravleniia'; Potter, 'Payment, Gift, or Bribe?'; Enin, *Voevodskoe kormlenie*; Witzenrath, *Cossacks and the Russian Empire*, pp. 122-40. For an overview of literature on *kormlenie*, see Enin, *Voevodskoe kormlenie*, pp. 4-23.

no difference between ‘bribes’ and customary gifts and ‘honors’.⁸ On the other hand, early in Peter’s reign his advisors went as far as attempting to tax the ‘supplementary’ incomes of local officials, thereby legitimizing them; Peter’s successors also abolished salaries for low-level officials altogether, expecting them to be ‘fed’ by the population, a situation that persisted till the reinstatement of salaries in 1763. In fact, vestiges of *kormlenie* are found by scholars not only in Peter’s era, but also as late as 1760s.⁹

Against this backdrop, much of the recent research on informal payments to officials in Russia focused on problematizing the very notion of corruption. Scholars seek to explore the economy of giving-and-taking on its own terms, as well as to go beyond the officially and/or retroactively imposed notions of “bribery” to discover tacitly accepted categories of customary offerings, such as *posuly*, *pominki*, *pochesti*, etc., distinguished by the contemporaries from *vziatki* as such. Other researchers call for viewing early modern corruption not through the normative lenses, as necessarily a societal problem and a sign of immorality, but rather through the functionalist ones, as crucial for the operation of an early modern polity: perhaps, ‘unofficial exchange of favors has contributed fundamentally to the social cohesiveness and viability of political systems where the rule of law has (in)famously failed cooperate?’ They also point out that the boundaries between different categories of giving were fluid and imprecise, allowing the subjects ample opportunities for manipulating them for their own benefit.¹⁰

Certainly, there is plenty of information in these studies regarding the size of individual bribes/gifts; the sources themselves also provide us with some indications of the overall levels of corruption. Thus, we know that according to a complaint from the taxpaying population in the Dvina region, Afanasii Ivanovich Nesterov, their governor in 1670, as well as his successors, extracted from them 2050 rubles a year, which nearly equaled one third of their annual tax quota. That was, apparently, tolerable. In 1679/81, however, Bogdan Ivanovich Ordin-Nashchokin extracted even more, i.e. 2/3 of the tax quota, and this level of extortion was sufficiently high to produce collective protests¹¹. In another case, one P. Piatovo, a sub-governor in Novgorod at the end of the seventeenth century, is cited as adding 10 kopeks and more of ‘processing surcharges’

⁸ Most notably, the decree of 24 December 1714, in *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii* (hereafter PSZ RI I), vol. 5, № 2871. pp. 135-6; Serov, ‘Protivodeistvie vziatochnichestvu v Rossii’; Serov, ‘Vziatkov ne imal, a davali v pochest’; Serov, ‘Petr I kak iskorenitel’ vziatochnichestva’; Redin, ‘Dolzhnostnaia prestupnost’.

⁹ On abolition of *aktsidentsii* (legalized fee-taking by the officials), see the two Manifestos of 15 December 1763, PSZ RI, vol. 16, №№ 11988, 11989, pp. 457-68; on officials’ salaries in the eighteenth century, Troitskii, *Rossiiskii aboliutizm*; on attempt to tax their income, Joukovskaia, ‘Peremeny v fiskal’nom statuse’; on their economic strategies, Joukovskaia, ‘Unsalariated and unfed’. On corruption in the post-Petrine period and early decades of the nineteenth century, see Redin, *Administrativnye struktury i biurokratiia Urala*, 527-55; Redin, ‘Voevodskoe kormlenie’; Pizar’kova, ‘Rossiiskii chinovnik na sluzhbe’; Hartley, ‘Bribery and Justice’; Pizar’kova, ‘K istorii vziatok v Rossii’; Kosheleva, ‘Ot trudov pravednyh’; Grosul, ‘Lihoinstvo est’ tsel’ vseh sluzhashhih...’.

¹⁰ For example, Davies, ‘The Politics of Give and Take’, pp. 39, 42-4; Volkov, ‘Patrimonializm’; Redin, *Administrativnye struktury i biurokratiia Urala*, pp. 555-75; Korchmina, ‘Do not give bribes in honor’.

¹¹ Kopanev, *Krest’iane russkogo Severa*, pp. 201-2.

to each ruble of sovereign's taxes (in addition to other payments he received, of course).¹² Again, this was considered an outrage, well outside the conventions of customary giving. On the other hand, in her study of district-level clerks in provincial Sevsk in the last years of the seventeenth century, Anna Joukovskaia found that the five officials accused by the local community of graft actually extorted an amount that was less than their (unpaid) official salary for the years in question¹³. However impressionistic, these estimates give an overall idea of the situation on the eve of Peter I's reforms. How did it change in the later period, especially after Catherine II made an effort to extend and systematize provincial government?

In this study we turn to the account books produced on large estates in order to assess the level of extralegal payments in the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. It has been known for scholars for quite some time that in the pre-Petrine period large economic units (monasteries, most notably) regularly recorded the payments they made in the course of interactions with state officials – gifts, bribes, etc. – in their accounts just as any other operational expenses. Even though these payments became clearly illegal after Peter I's reign, various estate officials continued to keep such records well into the nineteenth century. The very existence of such records speaks volumes to the normalcy of practice of giving-and-taking in the eyes of the contemporaries. As a rule, most scholars working with these records cite only specific sums received by officials, without putting them into any context.¹⁴ Ours, to the best of our knowledge, is the first attempt to use these data systematically, as well as to look at such payments across a number of decades. Regrettably, we could not extend our study into the first half of the eighteenth century to assess the situation during the supposedly much 'simpler' and rougher Petrine and immediate post-Petrine years, to evaluate the effects of Petrine administrative dislocation, as well as Catherine II's decision to start paying salaries to lower-level officials (although we do have some data from the 1750s-early 1760s, i.e. prior to the institution of salaries).

Some caveats have to be made here. First, while we acknowledge and appreciate important insight offered by recent studies into the cultural anthropology of giving-and-taking and the often subtle and evolving differences between different types of payments, for our purposes here we ignore the distinctions between 'bribes' and all sorts of gifts, legitimate or not. Rather, insofar as all of these payments implied transfer of funds from the pockets of the population into those of the officials, we lump them into a single category of 'facilitation

¹² Sedov, 'Podnosheniia v sisteme voevodskogo upravleniia Novgoroda', pp. 161-2.

¹³ Joukovskaia, 'Unsalariated and unfed'.

¹⁴ Some of the studies using account books to explore corruption are: Shveikovskaia, *Gosudarstvo i krest'iane Rossii*, pp. 247-58; Sedov, 'Podnosheniia v sisteme voevodskogo upravleniia'; Redin, 'Voevodskoe kormlenie v Rossii XVIII v.'; Sokolova, 'Prikhodo-raskhodnaia kniga mirskogo starosty'.

payments' (using this term, hopefully, also allows us to avoid making value judgments on the ethical aspects of such transactions).

Second, due to the nature of our sources (records produced by large provincial agricultural estates) the scope of our study is limited to regular, everyday payments made on the district level. Conversely, we are not able to see many payments that, as we know from other sources, did take place and could actually reach astronomical amounts. In particular, these were the bribes paid to central courts and central officials to settle high-stakes disputes; kickbacks paid to the officials by government contractors, tax farmers, etc.; payments collected from the urban population, including the wealthy merchants, craftsmen etc. In that regards, our study covers only one dimension of the wide universe of facilitation payments – what might be called 'routine' corruption – and, most certainly, seriously underestimates the overall size of the economy of giving-and-taking, or rather, defines the lower boundary for any such estimate. In the conclusion we attempt to compensate for this by using our numbers as a starting point for guesstimating the scale of these other types of extralegal payments and incomes. At the same time, it is precisely the type of corruption discussed here that affected the vast majority of Russia's population, the peasantry, and accounted for the vast majority of interactions between the populace and the officialdom. Rather than establishing the overall amounts extracted by the officials, we seek to determine how heavy was the burden of such payments likely to have been for Russia's peasants.

II.

Our study is based on a set of account books from the Golitsyn estates that cover the period from 1750s-1830s and are preserved at the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (Moscow; hereafter RGADA) and at the Manuscripts Section of the Russian State Library (Moscow; hereafter NIOR RGB). We have used all the complete (that is, covering an entire year) books we were able to identify in these two collections, although there are likely more such books stored elsewhere. The Golitsyns were one of the most prominent aristocratic families in Russia who equally prospered both before and after Petrine reforms. The estates covered by our sample belonged to the members of one of the branches of the family, the descendants of Prince Mikhail Mikhailovich Golitsyn the Junior (1685-1764), the president of the Admiralty since 1749. As of 1733, the prince had 5521 male serfs. Among his children, one of the sons, Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Golitsyn (1723-1807), the vice-chancellor of the Empire, owned over 6,000 male serfs by the early 1780s. The villages covered in our books, in particular, those of Golubei, Bariatinets, and Buintsy, made up about one third of his landed properties in terms of

their peasant population. A.M. Golitsyn never married, and most of his estates were inherited by his younger brother, Prince Mikhail Mikhailovich Golitsyn (1731-1807), a major-general and a chamberlain. M.M. Golitsyn married Anna Aleksandrovna Stroganova (1739-1814) and some of the estates discussed below, such as Vlakhernskoe, came into his possession as her dowry. His son Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich (1772-1821) resided in Italy since 1807, and his estates (as well as their parents' estates that remained in joint property of the heirs) were managed by his brother Prince Sergei Mikhailovich (1774-1859), as were later also those of Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich's two sons, Prince Mikhail Aleksandrovich and Prince Fedor Aleksandrovich, who also resided abroad during the period under study.¹⁵

Put differently, we are looking at account books from the estates that belonged to a closely knit set of owners and, in fact, were often managed from the same center. This might be expected to ensure a reasonable consistency of managerial and record-keeping practices and make the data derived from different books comparable. As the Golitsyns were among the largest landlords during this period, the estate economy and management practices of Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich's heirs have previously attracted some attention from scholars.¹⁶ In particular, as M.F. Prokhorov noted, in the later part of the eighteenth century the Golitsyns strove to maintain tight administrative control over their estates, and their managers made concerted efforts to raise the estates' productivity, for example, by monitoring the prices of agricultural goods in their districts and advising peasants where it was best to sell their produce.¹⁷ Besides agricultural estates, the Golitsyns also had factories of various scale, non-agricultural lands, etc., but these are not considered in this article.

This study is based on 22 account books from 12 different estates in six different (Moscow, Iaroslavl', Smolensk, Vladimir, Orel, Tula) provinces that have been transcribed in their entirety and subsequently coded for different categories of expenses (see Table 1). The books were kept by the estate and communal officials according to the rules and templates set forth in special instructions issued by the landlord and his managers, although the book-keeping practices varied, naturally, over the decades under study.¹⁸ An account book could cover either one year, or a number of years. As a rule, there is a single entry for a given date; however, one entry might include several different payments listed separately. To give an example, the account book for 1759, the earliest in our sample, has 80 entries that list over 110 different payments. At

¹⁵ *Materialy dlia polnoi rodoslovnoi kniaziei Golitsynykh*, pp. 14, 15, 19, 25; Serchevskii, *Zapiski o rode kniaziei Golitsynykh*, pp. 266-73; Nauchno-issledovatel'skii otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki (hereafter NIOR RGB), 'Rodosloviie kniaziei Golitsynykh,' f. 64, karton 2, ed. 2, ll. 47-50 ob., 70 ob.-72, 75-7 ob.; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (hereafter RGADA), f. 1263, op. 1, dd. 6210; 6228, l. 16; *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, pp. 71-4.

¹⁶ Drakokhrust, 'Rassloenie krepostnogo khoziaistva'; Kazarina, 'Krepostnoe khoziaistvo v Tul'skoi gubernii'; Petrochenkova, 'Polozhenie krepostnykh krest'an'; Prokhorov, 'Dokumenty rukopisnogo sobraniia GIM'.

¹⁷ Prokhorov, 'Dokumenty rukopisnogo sobraniia GIM', 238-9.

¹⁸ For an example of such instruction in an account book for 1780, see RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5902, [1.1].

the end of a given year available cash was counted to make sure that it matched the balance on the books; the books were signed by relevant estate officials and also periodically audited by the landlords, who likewise signed them. In the case of the Golitsyns, as a rule, a number of different account books were supposed to be kept on an estate: in particular, there were separate account books for the landlord's money and those for the communal funds. The former reflected the quitrent paid by the peasants and the proceeds from the sale of agricultural and other products, as well as the cash transfers to the landlord's office (his income) and expenditures made on the estate itself (including some of the facilitation payments). Communal funds were the money collected by the peasants from amongst themselves on top of any obligations they bore towards the landlord: these funds were used to pay the poll tax and to cover any expenses on behalf of the commune, including facilitation payments to state officials. These communal accounts were audited by the peasants themselves: elected peasant officials reported on the payments they made at the communal gathering; they were also signed by the landlord.

Table 1.

Estate Accounts Books Used in This Study

	Province	District	Estate	Year	Accounts Type / Estate Owner(s)	Number of Serfs, 'male souls'	Archival Reference
1.	Smolensk	Roslavl'	Bariatinets	1790	Landlord (A.M. Golitsyn)	957	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6057
2.	Smolensk	Roslavl'	Bariatinets	1790	Peasant commune (A.M. Golitsyn)	957	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6057
3.	Smolensk	Roslavl'	Bariatinets	1791	Peasant commune (A.M. Golitsyn)	957	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6059
4.	Moscow	Moscow	Vlakhernskoe	1759	Landlord (M.M. Golitsyn)	152	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 32
5.	Moscow	Moscow	Vlakhernskoe	1764	Landlord (M.M. Golitsyn)	152	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 34
6.	Belgorod	Briansk	Golubei	1769	Landlord (A.M. Golitsyn)	912 ¹⁹	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5900.
7.	Orel	Briansk	Golubei	1789	Landlord (A.M. Golitsyn)	1092	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5909.

¹⁹ RGADA, f., 1263, op. 1, d. 5916.

8.	Orel	Briansk	Golubei	1789	Peasant commune (A.M. Golitsyn)	1092	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5909.
9.	Orel	Briansk	Golubei	1791	Peasant commune (A.M. Golitsyn)	1092	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5910
10.	Vladimir	Pereslavl'	Zinov'evo	1787	Peasant commune (A.M. Golitsyn)	235	RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6402.
12	Tula	Epifan'	Krasnoe (Buintsy)	1794	Landlord (A.M. Golitsyn)	375	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 18, ed. 4
13	Vladimir	Kovrov	Voskresenskoe	1804	Peasant commune (S.M. Golitsyn)	868	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 41. ed. 1
14	Smolensk	Smolensk	Grivu	1813	Landlord (A.M. Golitsyn-son)	?	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 43, ed. 2
15	Moscow	Bogorodsk	Grebnevo	1814	Landlord (A.A. Golitsyna)	1099	NIOR RGB f. 64 karton 41 ed. 8
16	Moscow	Bogorodsk	Grebnevo	1814	Peasant commune (A.A. Golitsyna)	1099	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 41, ed. 8
17	Tula	Aleksin	Shirokonosovo	1819	Landlord (S.M. and A.M. Golitsyns)	263	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 48, ed. 6
18	Tula	Aleksin	Shirokonosovo	1819	Landlord (S.M. and A.M. Golitsyns)	263	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 48, ed. 6
19	Moscow	Bogorodsk	Grebnevo	1827	Landlord (S.M., M.A. and F.A. Golitsyns)	1067	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 42, ed. 1
20	Moscow	Bogorodsk	Grebnevo	1827	Peasant commune (S.M., M.A. and F.A. Golitsyns)	1067	NIOR RGB. F. 64, karton 42, ed. 1
21	Yaroslavl'	Rostov	Puzhbol	1834	Peasant commune (M.A. and F.A. Golitsyns)	288	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 47, ed. 2
22	Moscow	Moscow	Kotel'niki	1834	Peasant commune (S. M. Golitsyn)	315	NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 45, ed. 3

Naturally, dealing with estates that belonged to wealthy and powerful aristocrats has its own pros and cons for our purposes. On the one hand, it is precisely such estates that were likely

to have a sufficiently sophisticated system of estate administration that would produce sources that we need, while small estates might not have had any formal record-keeping practices at all, or their records, such as there were, tended to perish. Additionally, while only a few books typically survived from any single estate, collections such as that of Golitsyns allow us to explore a longer time period by pooling account books from various villages. They also cover a large number of districts across Russia, potentially reflecting variations in economic conditions and administrative customs and practices that existed there. On the other hand, a question might be legitimately asked whether estates such as those of the Golitsyns were shielded from the most blatant abuses by the status of their lords: perhaps, local officials would be less likely to engage in extortion when dealing with peasant controlled by such powerful individuals, as opposed to those belonging to petty, low-ranking nobles? It is equally possible, however, that is precisely such larger estates and wealthier landlords that were expected to contribute more, insofar they had more resources. It might have even been the case that in this economy of gift-giving payments to local officials was seen as a form of a patronage on the part of the magnates. Overall, there is no evidence in the literature or in our own sources that the status and political connections of the leading magnates placed their estates off limits for local officials, or somehow limited the amounts they were expected to pay. For example, in the mid-eighteenth century, estates of the larger landlords were no more likely to underpay poll tax than the smaller one.²⁰

What we can be certain of, however, is that the Golitsyns knew about such payments and often explicitly authorized and even directed them.²¹ As evident from the literature, that was not necessarily the case with all the estate owners. Thus, one landlord could instruct his bailiffs in 1766 that ‘the soldiers and messengers coming [to the village] are not to be given anything, except for giving them a meal, and even that only once; and if they try to seize anything by force, you are to expel them from the village ... and to complain to the governor’. Another landlord prohibited in 1779 to spend his money and grain on gifts to local officials: if the peasants and bailiffs wished to make facilitation payments, they should collect the necessary funds from among themselves. This is, arguably, not an attempt to ban the practice as such, but rather to shift the burden of it onto the peasants’ shoulders. P.B. Sheremetyev, a leading magnate, demanded in 1764, however, that his serfs stop making payments and appeal to him instead in case of any difficulties with the local officials. This did not help, however, and the Sheremetyev account books for 1800 actually list also the payments made by the peasants not only to the crown officials, but also to the landlord’s own administrators. The landlord’s attempt to root out

²⁰ Korchmina, ‘Vliiatel’nye dvoriane’.

²¹ For example, see his letter in Otdel pis’mennykh istochnikov Gosudarstvennogo Istoricheskogo muzeia (hereafter OPI GIM), Pis’mo Alexandra Golitsyna ot 16 fevralia 1812 g. iz SPb, f. 14, d. 53, ll. 46-7.

this practice by raising his managers' salaries (so that they did not need to accept bribes) evidently did not help either.²²

While Sheremetyev's attempt to combat bribery might have reflected his enlightened sensibilities, the Golitsyns were willing to accept the prevalent realities. Prince Sergei Mikhailovich, in particular, explicitly instructed his managers to make facilitation payments when necessary.²³ and even when no direct instructions to that effect survived, the signatures that landlords placed in the account books at the end of each period signaled acknowledgment and approval of payments listed in them. We could also find cases where estate managers pooled resourced with those of other landlords, as, for example, in January 1759, when the Golytsins' managers contributed 48.67 rubles to the overall amount of 118.30 rubles to be distributed on behalf of their master and of Baroness M.A. Stroganova among the officials at the Salt Office and a group of low-ranking guardsmen on the occasion of Christmas.²⁴ In other words, even if the landlords, such as the Golitsyns, had political connections and might have been expected to enjoy privileged status in the eyes of the officials, they still could choose to play the game by the unwritten rules, that is, let their estate managers navigate their relationships with local officials on the basis of facilitation payments. As we shall see below, that included not only small-scale gifts to express respect and smooth out routine interactions, but also much larger direct bribes in the higher-stakes cases of litigations over valuable assets: such cases were apparently decided by local officials not on the basis of the Golytsyns' social and political standing, but on the basis of bribes. Still, there is certainly a possibility that the very nature of our data leads us to underestimate the volumes of facilitation payments expected from an average landlord and peasant commune, and we shall keep this in mind when drawing our conclusions below.

III.

The expenses born and payments made by the representatives sent by the estates and peasant communes to deal with the state officials, including gifts, bribes, fees etc., as well as their travel expenses are reflected in the account books in great detail. Sometimes the entries are really frank, astonishingly so for a modern reader. For example, on 8 August 1789, an account book notes that "in the course of a visit by Aleksei Chesnakov to the town of Briansk on the occasion of presenting to the district court Moisei Galkin, a peasant of the village of Berestka, who cut off his own right index finger in order to avoid military recruitment, the following expenses have been made," and proceeds to list a dozen specific items (see Table 2). As we can

²² Kuznetsov, *Iz perezpiski pomeshchika s krest'ianami*, p. 6; Bulygin, 'Krepostnoe khoziaistvo Penzenskoi gubernii', p. 250; Dennison, *The Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom*, p. 227.

²³ See Pizar'kova, 'K istorii vzjatok v Rossii'.

²⁴ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 32.

see, the commune wanted to officially prosecute one of its members for self-mutilation (an act that surely made the peasants extremely unhappy, since now somebody else among them had to go into the army in Galkin’s stead), and this list allows us to reconstruct the interactions between Chesnakov, commissioned by the commune to represent its interests in this matter, and the district officials in some detail.²⁵ Chesnakov apparently began by establishing rapport with the secretary of the district court: this contact accounts for what was by far the largest item on the list. Notably, rather than making a payment in cash to this important official the peasant representative demonstrated his respect by making a gift of expensive imported liquor. Chesnakov also purchased stamped paper (the only item on the list that was actually required by the law), and hired someone – perhaps, one of the privately practicing scribes who assisted petitioners in producing official documents according to the required style and format, or one of the district clerks themselves – to draft a petition. Every little subsequent step involved small payments to various officials to make the wheels of justice turn with the speed and in the direction desired by the supplicant. After the offender has been officially and “usefully” interrogated and detained, and a copy of the documents has been made (probably, for the commune to keep among its records for future reference, but also for Chesnakov to give an account of his handling of this commission), the interaction ended with a small token of gratitude – ‘a treatment’, which could be either a gift of alcohol and/or food supplies, or a dinner party – for the court clerk and his associates.

Table 2.

Expenses Recorded in the Account Books: An Example

	Expenses, as described in the account book	Amount, rubles
1.	‘French vodka’ for the secretary of the district court	1.46
2.	Stamped paper	0.24
3.	For drafting petition	0.25
4.	To the clerk, ‘for conducting a <i>useful</i> interrogation’ [italicized by us - EK, IF]	1.00
5.	To the priest, ‘for exhorting the peasant [to be truthful] before the interrogation’	0.15
6.	To the soldier, for walking to fetch the priest	0.10

²⁵ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5909.

7.	For making copies of the minutes of interrogation and of the report to the land captain ²⁶ regarding Galkin's detention	0.25
8.	For signing the minutes of interrogation on behalf of Galkin ²⁷	0.05
9.	To the guards at the court	0.04
10.	To the police sergeant who registers detainees	0.10
11.	To the police scribe, for entering the detainee into the registry	0.15
12.	For treating the clerk of the district court and his staff	0.65

The account books list a great variety of situations that involved expenditures related to dealing with state officials. These situations could be grouped into the following broad categories (see Table 3):

- 1) Managing the payment of the poll tax, including both facilitating the process of making regular payments and resolving various conflicts. The amount of poll tax was fixed in proportion to the size of a commune's population during regular 'revisions' approximately once in 15-20 years, and the state officials were held accountable for delivering this amount to the treasury in full. In this sense, they had much less discretion in the matter (for example, to collude with the taxpayers to underreport the taxable base, or on the contrary, to overcharge them). Still, when peasant communes were late delivering taxes, they sometimes paid bribes to officials to avoid punitive measures (most notably, officials could dispatch a military team to "urge" the villagers, who were also to cover the costs of the expedition and maintain the soldiers). Thus, on 2 February 1789, 'the [district] solicitor and the secretary, for purging the record of tax arrears for the estate of Bariatinets and associated villages, received a gift of 2 *shtofs* [2,5 liters] of French vodka'²⁸;
- 2) Managing the drafting of peasants into the army. It was a commune's obligation to deliver a fit recruit, and the recruiting officers had significant leeway in accepting or rejecting a candidate supplied by a commune on medical grounds. This discretion, obviously, created space for negotiation and extortion, and we find the peasants making facilitation payments to military

²⁶ Land captain (*zemskii ispravnik*, *kapitan-ispravnik*) was the head of the crown administration at the district level after Catherine II's 1775 reform, who both presided over the so-called "Lower Land Court" in the district and directed local police. Until 1837 land captain was elected by the district nobility for a term of three years.

²⁷ When a person was illiterate and could not sign a document, as evidently was the case with Galkin, he could summon someone else to write 'I, so-and-so, signed this document on behalf of so-and-so'. This, apparently, also cost money.

²⁸ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 5909.

medics and to the recruiting officers to get the draftees supplied by the commune pronounced fit for service²⁹;

3) Managing various ad hoc interactions, such as the payment made on 17 July 1791 ‘at the district court to the secretary Semen Seleninov for making an inquiry in the archive whether any applications had been made [officially by the estate administrators] regarding various peasants who run away from the Roslavl’ estate since the 4th tax census, 17 of them in total’³⁰;

4) Obtaining auxiliary services related to dealing with the state bureaucracy, such as paying the scribes for composing petitions and making clean copies for submission;

5) ‘Treating’ officials in various contexts (on the estate itself, in their own office, or elsewhere), whether in connection with a specific business, or not. For example, on February 10, 1759, estate representatives bought ‘for Tikhon Pluzhnikov, a secretary at the Landed Estates Office, and scribe Ilia Veshniakov, upon his request, for lunch, 2 [bottles] of white wine, worth 60 kopeks; English beer, 2 bottles, worth 1 ruble; black caviar, 1 pound, worth 9 kopeks; red caviar, 1 pound, worth 12 kopeks; bread, worth 2 kopeks; live fish, worth 60 kopeks; in total 2.43 rubles’³¹;

6) Making gifts to various officials on occasion of state and church holidays. For example, on 1 March 1834, ‘on the occasion of Shrovetide, food supplies have been bought for the district officials’: for land captain, worth 4.5 rubles; for Secretary Osipov, worth 2.5 rubles; for two clerks, worth 3.2 rubles; for scribe Nagorskii, worth 2 rubles; for the deputy from the nobility,³² worth 2.5 rubles; for the postmaster and his assistant, worth 3.4 rubles³³;

7) Covering the travel expenses of estate representatives sent to the district town to deal with the state officials, such as payments for horses, lodging, and food.

As we can see, some of these payments are not easy to categorize unequivocally. For example, how are we to think of the peasants’ decision to hire someone to draft a petition for them? Did they really need this service because they were not sufficiently literate? Were they forced into hiring someone – or perhaps, into hiring a particular person with connections to the relevant officials – for their petition to be accepted? It is hard to be sure. Likewise, should the travel expenses of peasant representatives be counted as a part of facilitation payments? Technically speaking, these moneys did not go to the officials; yet, it is the need to interact with the state that forced the peasants to make such trips. For our purposes we prefer to err on the size

²⁹ When a peasant commune supplied a military recruit to the army, it was also required to provide specified items of clothing and food for his trip to his future unit. As these expenses were mandated by law, they do not fall under the category of facilitation payments and are not included here. Neither are the money often spent by peasants chosen to be drafted on buying or hiring a substitute, as these payments were made not to the officials, but to other peasants.

³⁰ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6059.

³¹ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 32.

³² Deputy from the nobility (*dvorianskii zasedatel’*) was a member of the ‘Lower Land Court’ elected by the local noble corporation (two other members were elected by the state peasants).

³³ NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 47, ed. 2.

of overestimating the volume of facilitation payments, so we treat all the questionable or borderline cases as such.

Table 3.

Different Categories of Facilitation Payments, 1759-1834, rubles

Estate	Year	Account Type ³⁴	Number of Serfs	Military Draft	Poll Tax	Auxiliary Services	'Treatment'	Travel and Logistics	Ad Hoc	Holiday Gifts	Other	Total
Vlakhernskoe	1759	?	152			14.64	37.06	1.09	24.18	72.21	6.87	156.05
Vlakhernskoe	1764	?	152		0.68	55.5	23.07	0.34	55.44		10.88	145.9
Zinov'evo	1787	C	235		5.8		0.36				0.2	6.36
Priimkino	1788	C	1255	5.6	8.2	6.8	30.05	11.9	62.87	3.2		128.62
Golubei	1789	C	1092	80.24	7.05	2.99	12.33	3.75				106.36
Bariatinets	1790	C	957	38.25	7.5	4.11	2	1.79				53.65
Bariatinets	1791	C	957	16.35	4	1.45	20.95	3.8	17.4		2.5	66.45
Golubei	1791	C	1092		3.1	1.31	10,8	3.1	13		0.43	31.74
Voskresenskoe	1804	C	868	18.62	28	0.5	104	2.84	5			158.96
Grebnevo	1814	C	1099			10.4			621.5			631.9
Grebnevo	1814	C	1099	10	60	32.61	202.49	25.1	36.5			366.7
Shirokonosovo	1819	C	263	20.42	10.47		72.61		42			145.5
Grebnevo	1827	C	1084	23.8	37.8	6.2	293.81		32.4			394.01
Puzhbol	1834	C	288		16.42	105.1	80.26		22.58	105.9	4.1	334.4
Kotel'niki	1834	C	315				4.1					4.1
Golubei	1769	L				13.65		2	13.4			29.05
Golubei	1789	L	1092		6.3	3.3		2.05				11.65
Bariatinets	1790	L	957									0
Grivy	1813	L		45.7		77	180.56		535		100	938.26
Shirokonosovo	1819	L	263			43.35	229.07	262.5	1287		2.6	1824.5

Overall, there is a broad pattern as to the way in which certain types of payments were made either from the landlord's, or from the communal funds (Table 3). Generally speaking, in the case of the Golitsyns, the landlord covered larger, one-off payments, especially those related to litigations over land and other assets, as well as to the land surveys – interactions that contributed to increasing (or maintaining) the value of his estate. The peasant commune, on the other hand, was responsible for smaller, but much more numerous and regular payments related

³⁴ C – communal funds, L - landlord's.

to discharging its obligations to the state and managing its routine interactions with the officialdom. For example, in 1814 the estate of Grebnevo paid 54 rubles to various officials on 18 March, 10 rubles on 14 May, and 57.4 rubles on 22 June, all in connection with a dispute with one Okorokov, a merchant, over the Shchelkovo mill. On 22 September, large payments were recorded not in the connection with any specific case, but rather in order to obtain ‘good disposition in affairs’ in general: the district judge got pieces of different cloths worth 96 rubles, and the land captain worth 72 rubles. Earlier, on 20 May, the Grebnevo estate made a large transfer of 122.7 rubles, and on 4 July, of further 119.5 to the central office in Moscow as a reimbursement for expenses made there for securing the titles to certain Grebnevo lands. Thus, facilitation payments related to a specific estate, even if made by the central office, were to be charged to this particular estate, rather than to the landlord in general. As for the communal funds, the peasants of Grebnevo made their largest payment in 1814 in July, when they offered a gift of fruits (cherries, watermelons, melons, peaches, plums) worth 30.75 rubles to the local deputy from the nobility. Other payments were much smaller: the estate was visited by soldiers eight times that year, and on each occasion the visitors got anywhere from 40 kopeks to 1.5 rubles; a team of soldiers sent to the countryside, apparently, to collect medicinal herbs got as much as 10 rubles for not stopping over on the estate altogether. In September, 3 rubles were spent on buying half a liter of vodka on the occasion of a visit to the estate by the local land captain. Money were also spent to ensure the ‘good disposition’ of local officials: Grigorii Grigorievich Telegin, the secretary of the district court, got 13 rubles worth of cloth in April, and 15 rubles in cash in December.³⁵ Overall, throughout the decades under study the estate owners appear to have consistently put the financial burden of maintaining certain types of interactions with the officials onto the shoulders of the peasant commune. On the other hand, this separate accounting of facilitation payments provides no evidence that this landlord was attempting to recoup “his” facilitation expenditures by extracting more from peasants.

The data in Table 3 also reflect the relative weight of different categories of facilitation payments made by estates and the communes. While our coding of individual payments is, unavoidably, imprecise, we can still consider the question of which types of interactions with the state appear to have been more burdensome than the others. Notably, the payments related to discharging two main obligations to the state, the poll tax and the military draft, do not appear to have been the leaders. Rather, the largest type of regular expenses seems to have been the “treatment” for various officials, whether in connection with a specific business or not. This is especially striking if the ‘treatment’ is considered in conjunction with holiday gifts, another

³⁵ NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 41, ed. 8.

types of payment made not to achieve specific outcomes, but rather based on tradition and intended to establish and maintain general rapport. In fact, even in case of the payments related to poll tax our account books most often offer only one vague reason for making them: ‘for being well-disposed’. It seems to indicate that payments were made as a part of a conventional ritual of gift-giving, not for performing any specific service.

IV.

How large were the facilitation payments that the peasants had to bear in their dealings with the state? Our sources allow us to calculate the overall amount of annual payments and the relative shares of individual categories of payments. We also attempt to assess how heavy was the burden. While our understanding of the average annual income of a peasant during this period leaves much to be desired (and given the low level of monetization of the economy any such numbers should be taken very carefully anyway), we can get some notion of the weight of unofficial payments by comparing their volume to the total volume of expenditures made by the peasant communes and to that of the official taxes paid by them. Finally, we can explore the ways the situation changed over time.

Table 4.

Facilitation Payments as a Share of Total Expenditures, %

Estate	Year	Accounts Type	Number of Serfs on the Estate, “male souls”	Total Amount of Expenditures, rubles	Amount of Facilitation Payments, rubles	Facilitation Payments as a Share of Total Expenditures, %
Vlakhernskoe	1759	landlord	152	14589.6	156.05	1.07
Vlakhernskoe	1764	landlord	152	28066.4	145.91	0.52
Golubei	1769	landlord		1953.23	29.05	1.49
Zinov’evo	1787	commune	235	347.25	26.36	7.59
Golubei	1789	landlord	1092	5030.33	9.9	0.20
Golubei	1789	commune	1092	1904.9	106.36	5.58
Bariatinets	1790	landlord	957	2769.99	0	0.00
Bariatinets	1790	commune	957	1821.83	53.65	2.94
Bariatinets	1791	commune	957	905.74	66.45	7.34
Golubei	1791	commune	1092	1388.26	31.74	2.29
Krasnoe (Buintsy)	1793	landlord	375	986.9	11.7	1.19
Voskresenskoe	1804	commune	868	7895.86	158.96	2.01
Grivu	1813	landlord		12653	938.26	7.42
Grebnevo	1814	commune	1099	16769.9	366.7	2.19

Grebnevo	1814	landlord	1099	44126.4	631.85	1.43
Shirokonosovo	1819	landlord	263	3052.16	1824.5	59.78
Shirokonosovo	1819	commune	263	2000	145.5	7.28
Grebnevo	1827	landlord	1084	38557.2	0	0.00
Grebnevo	1827	commune	1084	9298.61	394.01	4.24
Puzhbol	1834	commune	288	7427.53	334.4	4.50
Kotel'niki	1834	commune	315	2100	4.1	0.20

Our key results are reflected in Tables 4 and 5. As we can see from Table 4, throughout the period under study the share of such payments in the overall amount of annual expenditures reflected in the estate and communal accounts (taxes and obligations to the landlord included) remained rather constant, around 1-7 per cent, with one notable exception, Shirokonosovo in 1819 (see below our discussion of this case). Fluctuations appear to be driven by random factors and do not reflect any pattern. Thus, the sharp rise of the share of facilitation payments in 1791 on the Bariatinets estate was largely due to the lower volume overall of communal funds collected by peasants this year, not by the growth of the volume of facilitation payments themselves (compare the volume of communal expenditures for Bariatinets in 1791 and 1791).

Table 5.

Facilitation Payments Per Male Peasant

Estate	Year	Number of Male Peasants on the Estate	Total Amount Collected from Peasants, rubles	Collected from Peasants Per 1 Male Peasant, rubles	Spent on Facilitation Payments, rubles	Facilitation Payments Per 1 Male Peasant, rubles	Deflated by Brzheskii, ³⁶ rubles	Deflated by Mironov(1), ³⁷ rubles	Deflated by Mironov(2), ³⁸ rubles
Golubei	1769	912	4943.36	5.42	29.05	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02
Golubei	1789	1092	4818.9	4.41	116.26	0.11	0.1	0.08	0.04
Bariatinets	1790	957	4684.75	4.9	53.65	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.02
Bariatinets	1791	957	3316.93	3.47	66.45	0.07	0.06	0.04	0.02
Golubei	1791	1092	4808.62	4.4	31.74	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
Grebnevo	1814	1099	60 408	54.97	998.55	0.91	0.23	0.52	0.07
Shirokonosovo	1819	263	4413.51	16.78	1970	7.49	2.01	4.25	0.60
Grebnevo	1827	1084	44 440	41	394.01	0.36	0.1	0.23	0.03

³⁶ Brzheskii, *Gosudarstvennye dolgi Rossii*, pp. 4-5. (Table 14).

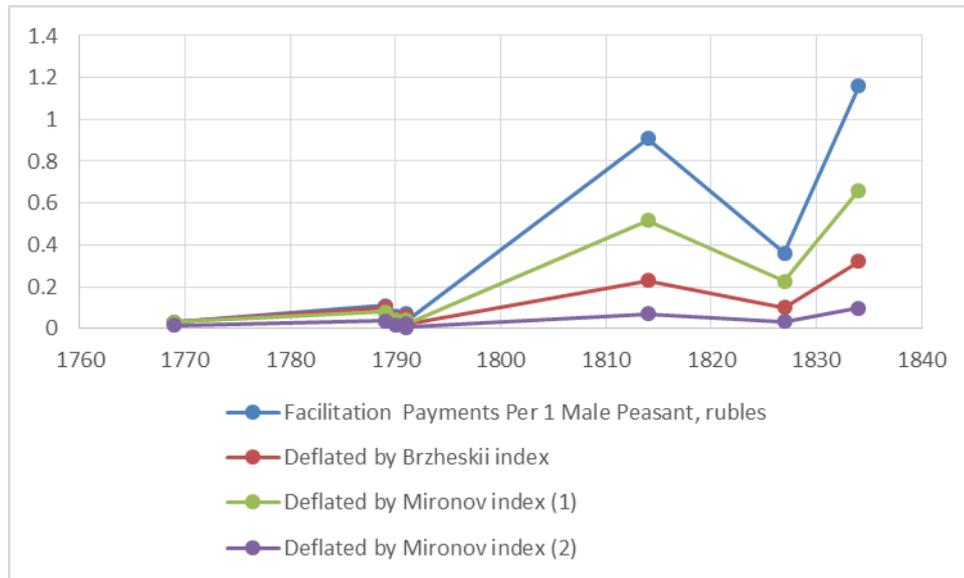
³⁷ Mironov, *Rossiiskaia imperiia*, 3, pp. 181-2, (Table 11.4). General price index, baseline is the 1760s prices.

³⁸ Mironov, *Rossiiskaia imperiia*, 3, pp. 181-2, (Table 11.4). General price index, baseline is the 1700s prices.

Puzhbol	1834	288	7741.44	26.88	334.4	1.16	0.32	0.66	0.10
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Figure 1

Nominal vs. Deflated Per Capita Facilitation Payments in 1760s-1830s³⁹



Of course, such parameter as the share of total expenditures devoted to facilitation payments is rather arbitrary, since the total amount of expenditures made by estates and communes is an arbitrary parameter itself – we do not know why exactly did the peasants choose to collect more or less in a given year. (We know, though, that they normally did few rounds of collecting per year, as required, and also carried over any money left from the previous year). Still, as the total expenditures include also taxes levied on per capita basis, the fact that this share was consistently low is notable by itself. In order to better appreciate the burden of such payment and its fluctuations over time, however, in Table 5 we calculate amount of facilitation payments per male peasant. In this table we use a more limited set of account books, as we only look at the cases where we have *both* communal *and* landlord’s accounts for a given estate for a given year. Notably, the payments in 1769 – i.e. before Catherine II reinstated salaries for low-level local officials – are actually lower than two decades later (although, of course, we can’t make any conclusions about impact of the reintroduction of salaries on the basis of one observation). Overall, as we can see, in the eighteenth century these extra payments never exceeded 11 kopeks per ‘male soul’, that is, *about one-seventh of the annual poll tax rate* for that period (70 kopeks per ‘male soul’), and the median was 6 kopeks, that is, *about 8 per cent of the tax poll rate*. This might appear as a considerable amount of money – except, of course, the real value of the poll tax revenues was rapidly declining during this period, as the government failed to fully adjust its rate for inflation and preferred instead to rely on indirect taxes.

³⁹ 1819 is excluded as an outlier.

In the nineteenth century, however, the situation changes: nominal per capita expenditures on facilitation payments grew by factor of ten. The most notable outlier, the case of Shirokonosovo in 1819, reflects legal disputes the estate was involved in, notably, two lawsuits against certain Reinsdorf, where it felt obliged to spent as much as 1740 rubles on bribes; one of these cases was resolved in the Golitsyns' favor that very year.⁴⁰ Otherwise, the dramatic growth of average, routine expenditures in post-Napoleonic era should not be all that surprising, as *nominal* prices in that period also increased significantly. In Table 5 we adjust nominal per capita expenditures on facilitation payments using the available deflators (based on the silver-to-copper exchange rate and on grain prices). The result is a growth of per capita expenditures on facilitation payments that is significant, yet certainly much less dramatic as compared to the nominal numbers (Figure 1). This growth is broadly in line with the situation in the economy in general.

How heavy was this burden for an individual peasant? As we mentioned earlier, assessing an 'average' peasant' annual income is hard, as the available data is contradictory, and their exact meaning in the context of an economy with very low level of monetization is problematic. On the one hand, the so-called 'topographic descriptions' of individual districts in the Tver' province in the late eighteenth century claim that an 'average' peasant every year earned from 5-6 to 10 rubles (depending on the district) from selling his produce, both grain and other items (cattle, eggs, hemp, homespun cloth, honey, berries, etc.). On the other hand, the author of a 'typical' budget of an average peasant, composed in the 1780s by one of the local officials and quoted by L.V. Milov, claimed that a peasant needed as a minimum 26.43 rubles per year (taxes and dues to the landlord included), and consistently lower income led to economic degradation of the household⁴¹. How to reconcile these vastly diverging assessments is not clear. However, assuming two 'male souls' per household and the median burden of facilitation payments of 6 kopeks, we arrive at anywhere from 2.4 per cent (for the lowest annual revenue of 5 rubles) to 0.4 per cent (for the highest revenue of 26.43 rubles). Note that our median of 6 kopeks includes the money spent both by the commune and by the estate, and thus a part of it came from the quitrent payments and the revenues from the sale of the estate produce. We might speculate whether the landlords factored in the need to make such payments when they set the quitrent rate (i.e. raised it). Still, it means the amounts actually collected from a peasant *in addition* to his other obligations were lower than the median of 6 kopeks per 'male soul'. To sum up, it would probably be fair to assess this burden as low.

⁴⁰ NIOR RGB, f. 64, karton 48, ed. 6.

⁴¹ Milov, *Velikorusskii pakhar'*, 365-7.

Remember also that the last decades of the eighteenth century were a period of raising prices, so much so that the government (which during the first half of century viewed lowering the poll tax by a couple of kopeks as an important political step) now considered it possible to raise it from 70 kopeks to 1 ruble by 1794, i.e. by roughly 60 kopeks per household. Amounts extracted by the landlords grew even faster and vastly exceeded the state taxes, probably by factor of 2 or three.⁴² Again, the amounts spent by peasants per annum on facilitation payments do appear to have been minuscule as compared to the overall volume of their obligations. Whether the peasants themselves considered these payments to be heavy and excessive burden, we at this point are not able to determine.

V.

Finally, how important were these payments in the life of the officials who received them, that is, how do they compare to their official salaries? Let's take as an example one district, Briansk, that seems to be fairly representative of agricultural regions in Central Russia, and where one of the Golitsyns' estates, Golubei, was located. According to the 1786 census, the district had 31,378 male peasants of all categories.⁴³ As we can see from Table 5, peasants here spent anywhere from 3 to 11 kopeks per one 'male soul' per year on all types of facilitation payments at the end of the eighteenth century. In this case, Briansk district chancellery must have collected anywhere from 941 to 3,451 rubles a year from this source. On the other hand, the district administration in Briansk had 57 officials of all levels on its rolls, not counting the lower support personnel, like janitors, etc. (according to L.F. Pissar'kova, the Imperial average was 60).⁴⁴ According to our calculations, made on the basis of the existing organizational charts, their combined salaries add up to about 6,000 rubles a year.⁴⁵ In that case, the sum that the district officials received as facilitation payments from peasant communes would have added anywhere from 16 to 60 per cent to their combined annual income.

To double-check these calculations, let's consider the data from a different estate, that of Priimki in the Rostov district of the Iaroslavl' province in 1788. This estate was also situated in the Central Russia and belonged to the Princes Kurakin, another prominent magnate clan.⁴⁶ During this period Priimki belonged to Princess Agrafena Aleksandrovna Kurakina (1734–1791), and it has likely been managed on her behalf by Prince Stepan Borisovich Kurakin.⁴⁷

⁴² For example, Troitskii, *Finansovaia politika*, p. 143; Mironov, *Rossiiskaia imperiia*, 2, p. 63.

⁴³ Beskrovnyi, ed., *Perepisi naseleniia Rossii*, 21-2.

⁴⁴ RGADA, f. 1261, op. 12, d. 147, ll. 77-80 ob.; Pissar'kova, *Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie Rossii*, p. 428, (Table 39).

⁴⁵ Pissar'kova, *Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie*, p. 457.

⁴⁶ Titov, *Kurakovshchina*.

⁴⁷ *Materialy dlia polnoi rodoslovnoi kniazei Golitsynykh*, p. 19; Titov, *Kurakovshchina*, p. 3.

What's interesting here is that in the case of Priimki, unlike in the Golitsyn records, we do find few instances of peasants interacting with the administrators not only at the district, but also at the provincial level, however limited such interactions might have been. On 1 September 1788, the peasants met the newly appointed General-Governor of Iaroslavl' and Vologda, Evgenii Petrovich Kashkin, en route from Moscow, and made him a token gift of bread and apples, worth 1.2 rubles. On 29 September, the village headman was dispatched to Kashkin with a letter from the landlord (again, probably a formal congratulation with his appointment and safe arrival to his new seat) and made a gift of bread and a sugar loaf worth 4.1 rubles.⁴⁸ It is questionable whether the Governor-General really craved this bread, twenty apples, and sugar; the gift likely had a ritualistic nature and much of it was probably passed on to his domestics and low-level clerks.

What we find is that the Priimki estate, with its population of 1255 male serfs, spent 128.62 rubles on facilitation payments this year. This translates into about 10 kopeks per male peasant, a figure that is within the range of our observations for the Golitsyn estates in the eighteenth century. As the Rostov district, where Priimki was located, had 36,295 male peasants of all categories,⁴⁹ it translates into 3,992 rubles collected from the entire district. As the Rostov district cost the treasury about the same as the Briansk one, that is, 6,000 rubles, give or take, we arrive at a ratio of facilitation payments to official salaries of about 70 per cent, somewhat higher than our estimates for Briask, but not terribly so.

The Priimki records are also interesting because they cite the names of specific officials who received facilitation payments. Out of 128.62 rubles spent on facilitation payments overall, 90.62 went directly to the officials (the rest was spent on logistics etc.), including about 75 rubles paid to specific individuals listed in the records by name. Thus, we can explore the distribution of unofficial incomes within the district bureaucratic hierarchy. As we can see from Table 6, only the top local officials were mentioned by name. Combined salaries of these ten individuals accounted for about 2,350 rubles, or 40 per cent of all the total legal revenues of local officials – yet, they pocketed over 80 per cent of payments made by Priimki to the officials that year, and over the half of all the facilitation expenses made by this estate in 1788. Their receipts from this estate equal to about 3 per cent of their combined annual salaries, and by extrapolating this level of payments to the entire district, we might assume that overall they collected about 2,190 rubles, i.e. came close to something like doubling their salaries from this source only.

On the other hand, the much more numerous – and unnamed – lower personnel (secretaries, scribes, guards, etc.) received in total only 16.67 rubles from Priimki that year. This translates into the meager 480 rubles or so collected by them from the entire district population,

⁴⁸ NIOR RGB, f. 586, karton 1, ed. 2, ll. 107 ob., 109.

⁴⁹ Beskrovnyi, ed., *Perepisi naseleniia Rossii*, pp. 15-6.

i.e. only about 13 per cent of their combined salaries. This sharp inequality in distribution of extralegal revenues is striking, but of course, not surprising; we should keep it in mind when thinking about the possible distribution of other extralegal proceeds the officials might have received. As we can see from Table 6, the striking inequality was reproduced even within the top ranks of the hierarchy: the town commandant (*gorodnichii*) got three times as much as the judge, and the judge almost twice as much as each of his associates. The town commandant, thus, got almost 9 per cent of his official salary worth of extralegal payments from a single estate only, which means that overall he likely received over 200 per cent of his salary worth of bribes and gifts from this source alone. We should also keep in mind that not only the low-level personnel received a minuscule share of payments from the populace, but that even these payments came disproportionately in the form of ‘treatment’, i.e. in kind, rather than in cash. Put differently, a low-level clerk was likely to be invited to partake of drinks bought by peasant representatives, or of small dinners, such as the one offered by Aleksei Chesnakov after he successfully concluded his business with the Briansk chancellery, but this did not help him to maintain his family, to buy new clothing, to educate his children, etc. This observations fits well the picture of the lower officials’ misery, well-established in the literature.⁵⁰

Table 6.

Officials in the Rostov District and Payments They Received from the Priimki Estate, 1788

Office-holders in Rostov (according to <i>adres-kalendar</i>’ for 1788)	Office	Grade on the Table of Ranks, to which this office corresponds	Salary	Payments received in 1788 from Priimki estate	Payments from Priimki as a share of annual salary, %
Ivan Mikhailovich Sukin	Town commandant (<i>gorodnichii</i>)	8	300	26	8.67
Fedor Nikolaevich Terpigorev	Judge (chair) of the district court	8	300	9.1	3.03
Abram Korob’in	Member of the district court	9	250	2.75	1.10
Osip Osipovich	Member of the district	9	250	5	2,00

⁵⁰ Moriakova, *Sistema mestnogo upravleniia*, pp. 185-7.

Iakovlev	court				
Gavrila Vasil'evich Verein	Member of the district court	9	250	4,85	1,94
Aleksei Mikhailovich Posluzhivstev	Land captain	9	250	5,4	2,16
Petr Osipovich Iakovlev	Member of the 'lower district court' ⁵¹	10	200	6,5	3,25
Leontii Gavrilovich Boldarev	Member of the 'lower district court'	10	200	3	1,50
Aleksei Grigor'evich Iumatov	Member of the 'lower district court'	10	200	3,1	1,55
Aleksandr Petrovich Sobolev	District treasurer		150	1,95	1,30
Total:			2350	67,65	2,88
Total (including joint payments⁵²):			2350	73,95	3,1

What about the overall volume of extralegal payments received by officials? Our data allows us to make some estimates that are certainly preliminary and that could be only used as a baseline for further research, as our sources reflect only one source of such income. They certainly must have received additional payments from the peasants who sought to engage in various business and came to interact with the officials on the individual basis, something that is not reflected in our sources, but certainly took place, as well as from the merchants and artisans residing in the district towns. As both the enterprising peasants and the urban population were considerably wealthier than the average peasant, it is not unreasonable to suggest that, with them included, the volume of facilitation payments received by the district officials at least tripled, to about 25 per cent of poll tax revenues from a given district, or about the same amount as the combined salaries of district officials. Here again, while the lower-ranking personnel got only crumbs from this pie of corruption, top district officials – who, as a rule, were retired military officers of noble origin – could certainly aspire to much more. If it was feasible for the Rostov town captain to triple his annual income thanks to facilitation payments received from the districts estates and peasant communes, what would be his income if other categories of payers and other types of were included? An income five times his official salary would probably be a

⁵¹ 'Zasedatel' nizhnego zemskogo suda'.

⁵² Some of the payments could not be assigned to a specific individual: Petr Iakovlev and Boldyrev together got additionally 0.8 rubles, while on another occasion Osip Iakovlev, Petr Iakovlev, Korob'in, Verein, and Iumatov together got 5.5 rubles.

conservative estimate, and ten times a realistic one. One's chances of receiving such income, of course, varied significantly depending on his functional position within the bureaucracy, as well as the socio-economic profile of the district itself.

VI.

Our study is the first ever attempt to systematically assess the burden of routine corruption – or, choosing words more carefully, of unofficial facilitation payments – during Russia's "classical" Imperial age, in the reigns of Catherine II and Alexander I. Drawing on the data from the accounts books from a set of estates that belonged to the powerful Golitsyn family and were scattered across a number of provinces in central Russia, we demonstrate how ubiquitous such payments really were. In that sense, our findings confirm the prevalent stereotypes: every little interaction with state officials involved paying a fee to the clerks, and such fees, although technically illegal, were so common and commonly accepted as to be entered in the account books alongside other operational expenses. On the other hand, our data demonstrates also how rare such interactions actually were in the lives of great majority of peasants; these contacts were also mediated by the estate and communal representatives who conducted business and made facilitation payments on behalf of the entire village. Moreover, such payments as had to be made on such occasions were really small, especially if apportioned on a per capita basis among the entire commune. The few kopeks per "male soul" that the peasant households had to spent on facilitation payments per year were marginal as compared to their overall obligations towards the state and the landlord. Such fees appear to have been largely customary in nature, a part of the traditional economy of gift-giving, demonstrating respect, and maintaining informal relationships ("good disposition"), especially since they often took the form of liquor, foodstuffs, or small banquets, rather than cash. It seems fair to conclude that already by the time of Catherine II's accession routine extortion by state officials was not a major factor that could suppress the peasants' living standards or productivity.

In fact, we would argue that by the end of the eighteenth century the nature of corruption in Russia has changed, as compared to the seventeenth century. For one thing, there are no traces in the Golitsyn account books of the systematic, organized *kormlenie* of the earlier era, and while individual officials did request and receive some foodstuffs, firewood, and similar items every now and then, they did so on ad hoc basis and as supplicants asking for assistance, rather than as masters demanding what's rightfully theirs. More broadly, it appears that by the end of the century the tribute-like extortion from the population in general largely disappeared (at least, in Central Russia). Rather, by that time the fortunes were to be made by officials by dealing with litigants in important cases over valuable assets (as the records from the

Shirokonosovo estate in 1819 indicate) and with entrepreneurs; with contractors and suppliers seeking to sell goods and services to the state; with those seeking to rent crown properties; with the owners of distilleries seeking to minimize taxes, etc. In other words, officials likely switched to making money in more targeted ways and on a transactional basis, charging supplicants for specific favors and benefits. As the economy grew and became more sophisticated in the nineteenth century, these sources of illegal income certainly also grew in importance, thwarting in scale the good old customary fees from the populace. At some level, this shift towards more targeted forms of extortion by officials parallels the state's own gradual shift towards relying on more targeted taxing of enterprises and individual wealthy payers, rather than the population at large.⁵³

Certainly, important caveats have to be stressed. First is the question of the extent to which the Golitsyns' serfs might have been shielded from heavier extortion by their masters' social standing, or by the sheer scale of the estates: it is very possible that serfs on smaller estates of less powerful landlords had to pay higher fees, or had to apportion the same fees among a smaller number of payers. It is also possible that the so-called 'state peasants', who did not have landlords to protect them, also faced higher level of extortion. Second, it remains to be seen how different the situation was in the early decades of the century. Third, numerous criminal cases indicate that there were district governors who for years engaged in much more predatory extortion. Finally, there is anecdotal evidence that there persisted practices superficially similarly to the old *kormlenie*, as the merchants and food vendors in the district towns were obliged to supply the key officials with food and other items free of charge on a regular basis. If this was the case, though, it also fit the pattern of a more targeted extortion, rather than a district-wide system of tribute-collection. All of these issues indicate important avenues for further research, allowing us to step beyond broad anthropological statements on the pervasiveness of informal practices in Imperial Russia. And the key among them, perhaps, is the question of why exactly did the patterns of giving-and-taking evolve, and what exactly were the institutional or cultural mechanisms that prevented officials from extracting more?

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