

ВРЕМЕНА И ИМЕНА

Civic activity of brothers Jacob and Roman Bruce in the era of Peter the Great

James Manteith

An American writer and translator with Scottish heritage and ties with St. Petersburg examines the role of members of his Bruce clan in forming a transnational Russian society based on foreigners' civic engagement, with resonance for local intellectual life as well as folk and creative culture. Brothers Jacob and Roman Bruce are vivid examples of specialists of non-Russian descent who contributed to Russia's internal changes and evolving foreign policy under Peter the Great. As Scots who found themselves outside the sphere of their motherland's concessions to English power, they manifested qualities of both their native and inherited national characters. Their biographies and achievements, much as Peter's, present combinations and contrasts of virtues within the historical progression of European and world culture. While assessments of such figures may vary in the eye of the beholder, the author argues that these legacies and their traces in cultural memory can inspire to honor precedents of free cross-cultural synthesis and remain open to still-relevant modes of complex heroism.

Keywords: Roman and Jacob Bruce, the era of Peter the Great, Russian culture, Transnational Communication

Гражданская активность братьев Якоба и Романа Брюсов в эпоху Петра Великого

Джеймс Мантет

Американский писатель и переводчик с шотландским происхождением и связями с Санкт-Петербургом

исследует роль членов своего семейного рода Брюсов в формировании транснационального российского общества, основанного на гражданской активности иностранцев, имеющего резонанс для местной интеллектуальной жизни, а также народной и творческой культуры. Братья Якоб и Роман Брюсы являются яркими примерами специалистов нерусского происхождения, которые внесли свой вклад во внутренние преобразования России и внешнюю политику при Петре Великом. Как шотландцы, оказавшиеся вне границ своей родины английской власти, они проявляли качества как своего родного, так и унаследованного национального характера. Их биографии и достижения, во многом как и у Петра, представляют собой сочетания и контрасты добродетелей в историческом развитии европейской и мировой культуры. Хотя оценки таких фигур могут различаться в глазах наблюдателя, автор утверждает, что это наследие и его следы в культурной памяти являют примеры свободного межкультурного синтеза и вдохновляют на всё ещё актуальные формы сложного героизма.

Ключевые слова: Роман и Якоб Брюсы, эпоха Петра Великого, русская культура, транснациональная коммуникация

During my first extended stay in St. Petersburg, early on in my Russian studies, I was surprised to learn of a Scottish role in local history. A new St. Petersburg acquaintance, curious about my ancestry as an American – Scottish and Sicilian, with Scots on both sides of my family – had remarked, "Ah! The Scots have done a lot for Russia." No elaboration followed, and although my connections with Russia would continue to develop, other lines of inquiry felt more urgent than the Scottish subject. Only more than two decades later, back in St. Petersburg as part of a long process of securing a base for ongoing cultural collaboration there, did it occur to me to wonder anew about those mysterious Scots in Russia. Who were

they, and how had they managed? How had they faced their own issues of defining and refining their identities?

To my surprise, I soon discovered that one of my own apparent family clans, the Bruces, had established their line in Russia in the late Muscovy period and gone on to achieve a kind of enigmatic renown. Although my family in the United States had long handed down copies of a genealogical *Book of Bruce* across generation (more recently with a democratic dose of self-irony in doing so), I knew very little about this heritage. Learning of the existence of Russian Bruces led me to look into these matters for myself. In particular, piecing together the story of Russia's two most notable Bruces, brothers Roman and Jacob, I realized that to some extent St. Petersburg, a pivotal city in my own life, owed its existence and some of its character to their efforts.

The tale of these Bruces, as many authors have found, is far from easy to tell, given its scope, complexity and ties with ever-contested historical figures, eras and movements. The Bruce brothers, like their master, Peter the Great, lived on the cusp of coexisting tensions and dependencies: between East and West, and between faith, free thought and reason as transformative forces for their society and world, much as for ours. To pursue my own modest investigation, it proved helpful, in my own mind, to juxtapose the Bruces with the Scottish peace activist Robert Monteith, another of my distant relatives, who had lived about a century and a half later, at the Victorian era's stage in the competition among great empires. Monteith, on whom I'd already written a brief survey [6], had viewed Russia as a primary threat to world stability. His distaste for the country, known to him only from the outside, inspired his advocacy for the creation of institutions and coalitions to mediate and check what he and many others in the West perceived as Russia's intrinsic penchant for expansionism. In contrast, the Bruce brothers, Monteith's earlier compatriots, had contributed to military,

political, technical and cultural advances that had served to consolidate Russia's place as a participant in world civilization, with at least its fair share of the glory and discord generally entailed by such a status.

Whose position was the more honorable? Posing such rhetorical questions properly requires a more than superficial consideration of the forces of ethics and history. In the end, we may find many elements of nobility in the lives of all these individuals, with their own visions of national and international enlightenment amid the usual counterpoints of competition and divisiveness.

Uncannily, as I began to study the Bruce brothers in earnest, attempting to grasp and gauge their accomplishments, yet another phase in a deterioration of relations between Russia and the West lent new intensity to the already perennial unknowns familiar to anyone whose life becomes invested in these ties. As we weather our own times of unrest, the example of these brothers, staggeringly productive throughout lifetimes full of conflicts that in turn seem to defy any objective assessment, may help to frame such moments in light of historical parallels and the potential for individual sublimity – among the treasures we often seek in mining the past for instruction.

Known for his passion for change, the first Emperor of All Russia, Peter the Great, led his realm away from the norms of medieval Moscow and toward a partial conformity with many aspects of the time's modes of civilization in the countries of Western Europe. In these efforts, Peter habitually turned for advice and support to Westerners living either within Russia or beyond its borders. Among Peter's key associates were foreigners of recent Scottish origin, including two brothers, descendants of the noble family of King Robert the Bruce of Scotland (1274-1329).

Robert (1668-1720, Russified name Roman) and James (1669-1735, Russified name Yakov, or Jacob) Bruce grew up in the home of their father, William (early

1620s-1680), in Moscow's Foreign Quarter, a requisite settlement for non-Russians disinclined to convert to Orthodoxy [2, p. 56]. William may have named his sons in keeping with a clan tradition of paying tribute in this manner first to one royal line, Robert the Bruce's, and then to another, the Stuarts', with their line of Jameses either occupying or claiming the throne of Great Britain and Ireland.

William Bruce came to Russia from Scotland in 1647 after the fall of Charles I, King of England, Scotland and Ireland. Varying and perhaps complementary accounts exist as to the reason for his departure. He may have taken part in the royal army's fight against the troops of Parliament during the English Civil War (1639-1660). As a nobleman with monarchic sympathies, he may have wished more generally to distance himself from related troubles that presented added danger for the aristocracy. He may have felt attracted to the opportunities for military specialists on the no-less-troubled European continent in the wake of the Thirty Years' War [18, p. 56; 1; 15]. During William's initial stay in Holland, he was hired as an officer by a visiting representative of that era's Tsar, Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov. When Tsar Alexei condemned the execution of Charles I, English merchants lost the right to trade with and remain in Russia. Unlike the British, the few representatives of Scotland in Russia could stay and continue to try their luck in their new homeland [22, p. 35-36].

Like other Scots, William Bruce distinguished himself in Russia, becoming a highly decorated colonel in his years of military service [3; 4]. His sons furthered his legacy. Already predisposed to Western influences on account of his mother, Tsarevna Natalya Naryshkina [22, p. 44], having been raised in a Western-inclined household, Peter Romanov augmented his ideas about the West among the homes of the Foreign Quarter, where he liked to spend time [8, pp. 284, 286]. Foreigners joined young Peter's "toy army," whose training exercises and mock battles, meant

for the Tsarevich's amusement and education, provided an early impetus for the eventual modernization of Russia's military around the turn of that century. Perhaps initially exposed to the future Tsar through his Foreign Quarter contacts, both Roman and Jacob Bruce – several years older than Peter – took part in his toy army [11]. A seasoned Scottish general in Russian service, Patrick Gordon, also worked with the toy army and possessed a special authority for its participants. After siding with the Tsarevich in his succession conflict with his half-sister, Tsarevna Sophia Alekseevna [12, p. 127], Gordon, the Bruces and other members of the toy army would forever belong to Peter's inner circle of confidants.

Both brothers, clearly gifted, received a fine community-based education in the Moscow foreigners' milieu [3; 10]. Both made significant contributions to Russian political and cultural gains under Peter's rule.

As an assistant to Admiral F.M. Apraksin – another toy army veteran, who went on to serve as one of the founders of Russia's navy – Roman contributed to the capture of the territory of the future St. Petersburg from Sweden and became the city's first chief commandant. Namely he supervised the building of the stone Peter and Paul Fortress, the main bastion to guard the future imperial capital. He also did much else to establish life in St. Petersburg, directing the city's construction during Governor-General Menshikov's frequent absences on military campaigns. Dmitry Fedosov, a contemporary specialist in Russo-Scottish relations who also figures prominently in the similarly devoted Moscow Caledonian Club, ventures to call Roman "basically...the man who built Petersburg" [13]. Roman also helped Apraksin to seize the Swedish fortresses of Vyborg and Kexholm (now Priozersk), further ensuring security from future Swedish attacks on the new Russian capital [10; 18, pp. 63-64].

The achievements of Roman's younger brother Jacob range even more broadly. That Peter entrusted him with

the command of the Russian artillery reflects, along with the Scotsman's practical military experience, his great knowledge of scientific subjects [18, p. 58]. Based on his learnedness, Jacob was summoned to join Peter's Great Embassy of 1697-98, when the Tsar wished him to engage in mathematics during the royal retinue's stay in England. When Peter and his other companions headed back from England to Russia, Jacob received the Tsar's personal permission to stay on to continue his studies in mathematics, physics and astronomy. He returned to Russia a couple of seasons later bearing an abundance of scientific instruments, literature and ideas, including Newtonian physics. In Moscow he founded the first Russian observatory [18, p. 58; 15], based in Moscow's picturesque Sukharev Tower. He also set to work on developing a Russian school of artillery and supported Apraksin's School of Mathematical and Navigational Sciences, also based in the tower. As a result of Jacob's scientific meetings and other activity in the tower, he acquired a popular reputation as a sorcerer. Some also speculate that he may have been among Russia's first Freemasons [14].

Yet Jacob's definite accomplishments alone seem almost countless. These include many translations of European scientific texts, many of them then published in Russia's first state civil printing house, established by Peter with Bruce serving as supervisor [11; 14]. Jacob managed to combine scientific research and translation work with military assignments, continuing to study relevant foreign works in his tent during the Great Northern War (1700-21) and reporting on them to Peter [18, p. 62; 14]. After his move from Moscow to St. Petersburg in 1714, he oversaw the imperial mint and was appointed senator and president of two of the twelve collegia arranged by Peter as institutions subordinate to the Senate: the Collegium of Manufacturing, dealing with industry, and the Berg-Collegium, dealing with mining [18, p. 62-63; 14]. He advised Peter and German polymath Gottfried Leibniz in

their planning for the creation of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences [14]. Fluent in several European languages, he also provided outstanding diplomacy for Russia, including in the peace talks with Sweden at the Great Northern War's end [18, p. 63; 14]. At these same negotiations, he demonstrated an abiding mindfulness of his ties with Scotland and resonance with his father's old causes, trying unsuccessfully to form a Russian-Swedish alliance for another restoration of the House of Stuarts to Great Britain's throne [18, p. 63].

After Peter's death, Jacob devoted himself solely to private inquiry. Not wishing to participate in the struggle for power after the Tsar's passing, he chose to retire from government service the next year, in 1726, at age 57. Thereafter, he lived in seclusion at his elegantly eccentric estate, Glinki, near Moscow, where he also set up an observatory and in the remaining nine years of his life continued to engage in the blend of science and alchemy that persisted in his transitional era [18, p. 63; 17]. At Glinki, rumors about his supposed witchcraft continued to circulate among the local populace, who claimed, for instance, that one summer he had turned the water in one of the ponds into ice, on which his guests proceeded to skate [2, p. 332]. Indeed, creative extrapolation based on knowledge of English ice-storage methods may have enabled Jacob to perform such a capricious feat [5].

For many years, Jacob's public standing was influenced by *Bruce's Calendar* (first published 1709), a pioneering endeavor for Russia. The calendar, devised by Vasily Kipriyanov, the librarian, publisher, cartographer and engraver who founded Jacob's printing house, had a major impact during and after their lifetimes, with new expanded versions released as late as 1875. Famously, each edition contained a plethora of supplementary reference materials, among them astrological and oracular guidance, en-

hancing the aura of metaphysicality that seems to have always surrounded Jacob's name [14].

Tellingly, Alexander Pushkin, in Jacob's small cameo appearance in the unfinished novel *The Moor of Peter the Great*, calls the Scotsman "the learned Bruce, known among the people as the Russian Faust" [21, p. 11]. Pushkin's contemporary Ivan Lazhechnikov, the early Russian historical novelist, echoes this characterization in an unfinished novel, *The Sorcerer of the Sukharev Tower* – another of Jacob's monickers for posterity – with one protagonist wondering whether the "astrologer, magician or, simply, sorcerer, as the people call him, "will "finish his calendar which prophecies a hundred years?" [4, p. 284]. The early 1920s saw the appearance of alternative economist and fantasy writer Alexander Chayanov's novel *The Unusual but True Adventures of Count Buturlin* [16], portraying Jacob as a cunning warlock, and the gathering of numerous "Legends about Count Bruce" by folklorist Evgenii Baranov, bearing witness to Jacob's lasting presence in the genius of the people [7].

The Sukharev Tower was demolished on Stalin's orders as part of an ideologically tinged 1930s urban traffic flow project. As historian Sergei Romanyuk writes, "Architects and engineers proposed designs for a detour around the tower, but Russia's masters had no wish to hear any of this – the issue had nothing to do with designs, but in something more: a desire to destroy the past of the Russian people" [9, p. 226].

Yet the Bruce mystique lives on, inspiring numerous works of imagination and scholarship.

Reflecting on the fruits of the Bruce brothers' endeavors in Russia, it seems evident that both managed to realize their potential as leading members of their inherited society. Their lives comprise a striking passage through a difficult stage of history for both the Scottish and Russian national characters. These organically combined in

the brothers, judging by their ability to find a deep mutual understanding with their compatriots, with Peter and with other representatives of Russia in working for their country's welfare and cultivation. As A. Francis Steuart remarks in *Scottish Influences in Russian History*, a study published in Edinburgh in 1913 in observance of the Romanovs' tercentenary – not long before revolution brought that dynasty to an end – it's worth remembering those who helped to connect Russia's "Byzantine civilization, marred as it was and retarded by the Tartar conquest, with that of Western Europe" [22, p. vi]. Besides this, Roman and Jacob left thought-provoking legacies in their own right.

By the time the Bruce brothers' father came to Russia, Scotland itself had already suffered many centuries of strife, creating a Russian-like lag in the development of its civilization. Historically, a purely positive view of the Scottish national character, shaped by such arduous circumstances, finds it to combine courageousness, love of independence, loyalty to family and home, aspiration for knowledge and ingenuity, and willingness to endure hardships [20, p. 375]. In the perhaps inevitable context of uneven relationships with neighbors and within domestic society, the problem of preserving credible variants of these qualities remained acute for Scotland during the time when the Bruce family was taking root in Russia, much as before and after. Similar issues have typified Russia. Both peoples have experienced the virtues and vices of war and peace.

Clearly, for the Bruces, wars served as a great stimulus for their life's work and as occasions to heighten their adopted homeland's awareness of their abilities. Yet their sensibilities stretched further, interacting with the expanse of civic culture and thriving in that direction as much as practical conditions and obligations allowed. Their lives magnificently reflect the ambiguities of the Petrine era, a time of tense dialectics between the priorities of action and reason, freedom and service, national and

universal ideas. In this sense, the brothers' story could furnish a compelling plot for a novel by another of their great compatriots, the writer Sir Walter Scott, born into affluency in Edinburgh a century after their birth in Russia. As Andrew Hook notes:

“Intellectually [Scott] endorsed and upheld the Scotland of his own day; it possessed the stability and order essential for improvement – the economic, commercial development and cultural advance which Scott respected. But, in comparison with the past, the present was dull and prudential, and perhaps even mean-spirited and materialistic, devoid of color and excitement. <...> [T]he legends, exploits and customs of Scotland's distant and not-so-distant past <...> possessed a magnetic attraction for him. He did all in his power to embrace and assimilate it. In particular what was most striking about it: its warlikeness, its bravery and loyalty, its color, its poetry and passion. All the qualities, in other words, the loss of which was the price Scotland was willingly paying for its entry into the modern, civilized world [19, pp. 14-15].

Such ambivalence toward progress was quite familiar in the context of Petrine Russia. It remains relevant for us as well, left to weigh our attitudes toward the likes of Peter and the Bruces, however our own characters might connect us to civilization.

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