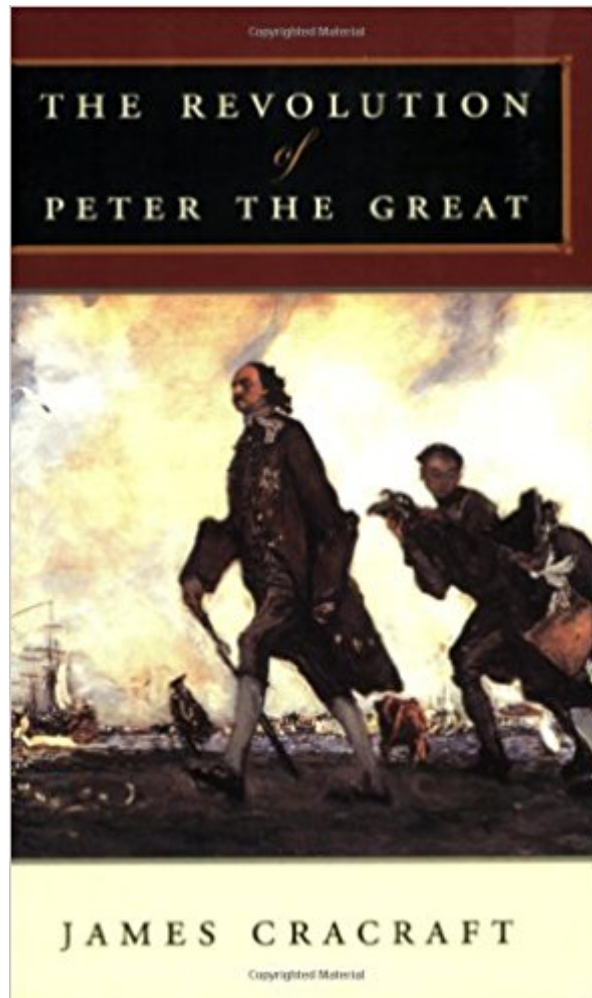




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The Revolution Of Peter The Great



Synopsis

Many books chronicle the remarkable life of Russian tsar Peter the Great, but none analyze how his famous reforms actually took root and spread in Russia. In *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, James Cracraft offers a brilliant new interpretation of this pivotal era. Linking together and transcending Peter's many reforms of state and society, Cracraft argues, was nothing less than a cultural revolution. New ways of dress, elite social behavior, navigation, architecture, and image-making emerged along with expansive vocabularies for labeling new objects and activities. Russians learned how to build and sail warships; train, supply, and command a modern army; operate a new-style bureaucracy; conduct diplomacy on a par with the other European states; apply modern science; and conceptualize the new governing system. Throughout, Peter remains the central figure, and Cracraft discusses the shaping events of the tsar's youth, his inner circle, the resistance his reforms engendered, and the founding of the city that would embody his vision--St. Petersburg, which celebrated its tercentenary in 2003. By century's end, Russia was poised to play a critical role in the Napoleonic wars and boasted an elite culture about to burst into its golden age. In this eloquent book, Cracraft illuminates an astonishing transformation that had enormous consequences for both Russia and Europe, indeed the world.

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Customer Reviews

A scholar specializing in the culture of Peter I's reign, Cracraft has written major works about the period but now presents an introduction. He completely describes Peter's reforms, emphasizing how profoundly revolutionary they were. The reforms were so extensive, both physically and

psychologically, that they altered how Russians thought about the world. Cracraft illustrates the various forms the new ways assumed, going into some detail about how the Russian language changed radically under the influence of an explosion in printing, which accompanied Peter's introduction of Western-style nautical, scientific, and governmental institutions. Cracraft also takes in architecture and visual imagery, laying at Peter's feet the credit for developing creative artists. An admirer of Peter and his achievements, Cracraft nevertheless evenly explains the intense opposition he and they aroused among traditionalists, a conflict that still resounds in Russian history. Essential reading for those seeking the origin of Russia's ongoing friction between Westernizers and nationalists. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Cracraft's interpretive history, grounded in his considerable expertise and reputation, is a welcome addition. His writing is engaging, free of jargon, and very accessible for both students and general readers with an interest in Russia. (Cathy A. Frierson, University of New Hampshire) Essential reading for those seeking the origin of Russia's ongoing friction between Westernizers and nationalists. (Gilbert Taylor Booklist 2003-11-15) This impressive little book [is] at once informative and intellectually interesting. (E. A. Cole Choice 2004-06-01) This book represents a distillation of James Cracraft's magisterial work *The Petrine Revolution*, the three volumes of which cover Russian architecture, imagery and verbal culture. It is firmly rooted in a lifetime of research and a formidable body of sources, but targets the general reader in the form of an accessible, lightly-footnoted interpretative history of the reforms of Russia's most important ruler, who reigned from 1682 to 1725. (Lindsey Hughes Times Literary Supplement 2004-06-11) Anglo-American historians have spent a great deal of effort on Peter and his reign in the last decades, the pioneer among them Cracraft himself. He has used his own work and that of his colleagues with thoroughness and tact to provide his own synthesis of the events and their meaning... Cracraft has succeeded in conveying the latest understanding of Peter's time, one that he himself has been so central in creating, in an elegant and highly readable form. (Paul Bushkovitch *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 2004-07-01)

This was an excellent insight into the world of Peter The Great. I've learned so much about 17th-18th century Russia and I've retained most of the story of Peter. Very well written. Highly recommended!

Fascinating book. Ahead of his time

Excellent book about one of the greatest russian Tzars!!!

James Cracraft's *The Revolution of Peter the Great* provides a concise version of Peter the Great's life. Cracraft utilized both primary and secondary works, but his book does not give us new answers about Peter, rather *The Revolution of Peter the Great* focuses on illuminating the major points of interest during the "Petrine era" (viii). To that end Cracraft relies heavily upon the works listed in "Further Reading" including five of the author's books on Peter (p. 185-186). Cracraft's book excels at providing an interesting and succinct history of Peter the Great and his revolutions. Cracraft took a unique approach to Peter's personal life in his first chapter "Peter and Company." As the title suggests, the chapter provides a quick overview of Peter's life and those who surrounded him. Peter's ascension to the throne, his marriage to Catherine and the crucial moments in the tsar's reign, like his European tour, are covered in first twenty-eight pages. Cracraft closes out the chapter by reiterating that his purpose is not to write a biography of Peter, and while a biography is "helpful," in studying history, "it is not history itself. History is never about one person, however important" (p. 28). The main body of *The revolution of Peter the Great* examines the tsar's major "revolutions." Peter's first reform targeted the military. As Cracraft argues, Russia's army and navy were of great interest to Peter. The war games of his youth intrigued Peter to create a military with the same standards, and armaments as his western neighbors. The "Great Northern War" with Sweden turned his reforms into a necessity (p. 31). While some have called the military advances an economic drain, Cracraft balances the expenses against Russia's long-term economic, political, and diplomatic gains (p. 36). Peter took a hands-on approach to his navy. Cracraft stresses the tsar's naval interests and describes him as "the first Russian in history to master the new nautical science and one of the first, if not the very first, to learn how to build a full-scale sailing ship" (p. 41). The chapter closes with Cracraft mentioning the hideous statue of Peter aboard a ship, which towers above much of the Moscow skyline. Cracraft argues regardless of its aesthetic flaws, the statue reminds us Russia's navy brought the country "into Europe and the modern world" (p. 53). When Peter took the throne he inherited a system of government, described as "an amalgam of monarchical, dynastic, patrimonial, and theocratic elements, an amalgam that itself warns us against classifying the Muscovite polity as modern" (p. 58). Peter reformed the right of succession. No longer would the throne be simply inherited by the eldest son, but rather the ruling tsar named their heir. As Cracraft points out, this allowed women to be named to the throne, like in the case of

his own wife Catherine I (p. 63). Peter opened Russia to the west. For the first time Russian nobility intermarried with the elites of western Europe, and influenced laws in other countries (p. 73). Peter's diplomatic "revolution" brought Russia out of its isolation (p. 74). The revolutionary changes to Russia's military and diplomacy brought about a "cultural revolution" (p. 75). It is surprising that Cracraft uses this phrase, given its many negative connotations in the field of history. Peter's "cultural revolution" focused on "the architectural, the visual, and the verbal" (p. 77). Peter's interest in the west led to his new city of St. Petersburg to be modeled after the Baroque, and Italian Renaissance design. Leaving Moscow behind in the "middle ages" (p. 83). Peter personally learned art techniques and styles during his tour of Western Europe (p. 91). While the printing press arrived in Russia more than a century before his birth, Peter established the first permanent paper mills, reformed the Cyrillic alphabet, and sent emissaries abroad to collect books for reprinting in Russia (p. 98, 99, 109). His reforms were aggressive, but arguably necessary. Many resisted Peter the Great's revolutions. Tsarevich Aleksei, the tsar's son, opposed his father's reforms and died in St. Petersburg's Peter-Paul fortress as a result (p. 114). In 1707 the Don Cossacks led by Kondraty Bulavin rebelled against the tsar's restrictions on Cossack freedoms (p. 117). Reforms to the Church led many in the clergy to oppose Peter; some called him the antichrist (p. 127). Peter brought Russia into diplomatic relations with the rest of Europe. Cracraft points out that theoretically, though absurdly, Russia's involvement in the two World Wars can be blamed on Peter. He does this to illustrate the long-term effects of Peter's revolutions (p. 134). After discussing the city of St. Petersburg, its founding, and its place in Russian history since Peter's death, Cracraft concludes with a historiographical discussion of his work. Cracraft's work is concise summary of his thirty-year career spent studying Peter the Great, and his revolutionary contributions to Russia's government and society (p. 157). St. Petersburg and its Western European style architecture remain today as a monument to Peter the Great's revolution and his ambition (p. 164, 165).

A wonderful book, which I keep citing and to which I keep returning. Written like a novel, not dry at all, this book represents the best type of academic writing. I congratulate the author on such great success and highly recommend the book to all those interested not only in Peter the Great but in Russian history in general.

James Cracraft is the author of several weighty academic tomes which detail the huge impact Tsar Peter the Great had on almost every aspect of Russian life in the early 18th century. This small, extremely accessible publication is a summary of the key themes of his research. Knowing very little

about Peter the Great, I struggled a little to follow where Cracraft was headed at first, but then his clarity of presentation and the extraordinary energy of this amazing historical figure combined for a compelling and extremely informative read. Now that I have my bearings, the next stop is a full length biography of this contradictory man and the fascinating life he led.

This is a great little book that is easy to read and serves as an introduction to the important and dynamic reign of Peter the Great of Russia. Professor James Cracraft's book should be read before reading other books on the reign of Peter the Great in order to get the most out of those other books.

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