



Recensiones

Рецензии

Ch. J. Halperin

FEUDALISM IN RUSSIA, THEN AND NOW: VLADIMIR SHLAPENTOKH'S CONCEPT OF A 'FEUDAL SOCIETY'*

This paper presents a review of Vladimir Shlapentokh, with Joshua Woods, *Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Society: A New Perspective on the Post-Soviet Era* (Basingstoke, UK, 2007)¹. The continuing debate over «Russian» exceptionalism encompasses the issue of whether feudalism existed in early Rus'² as in medieval Western Europe. The 2007 monograph by the prolific student of late and post-Soviet Russian society sociologist

* I wish to thank Christian Raffensperger, Yulia Mikhailova, and an anonymous colleague for reading earlier drafts of this essay and Susan Reynolds for bibliographic assistance and providing copies of two of her articles. Any remaining errors are solely my responsibility.

¹ Page references to this book will be provided in parentheses in the text. For convenience I will attribute the ideas in this book, «with» Joshua Woods, and in his second book, co-authored with Joshua Woods, to Shlapentokh alone. I do not intend thereby to demean Woods' contribution to either.

² The first period of medieval East Slavic history from the ninth century to the Mongol conquest, Kievan Rus' (Shlapentokh does not use the word «Rus'»), should not be described as «Russian» history because it initiated Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian history. The second period of medieval East Slavic history, the Mongol period from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries sometimes labeled the «appanage period» to avoid the issue of Mongol influence on Rus' history, begins as Rus' history, but with the annexation of the future Ukrainian and Belarusian lands by Poland-Lithuania northeastern Rus' becomes Russian history. Late fifteenth-century through seventeenth-century Muscovite history is considered early modern Russian history. I describe all three periods as «Rus'» history to avoid

Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Society: A New Perspective on the Post-Soviet Era*³ applies a model of medieval West European feudalism not to early Rus' but to post-1991 Russian society. This article will not address the accuracy or utility of Shlapentokh's analysis of contemporary Russian society, which some scholars have received favorably (31), a task beyond my competence, or try to present an original analysis of feudalism in early Rus', a task beyond the scope of this article. Rather it will examine how Shlapentokh utilizes West European medieval history to construct his model and how and why he did not take advantage of scholarship on feudalism in early Rus' in doing so. Shlapentokh's book illustrates how the medieval and early modern history of Europe and Rus' can be used — or misused — in a study of the contemporary world.

SHLAPENTOKH'S «IDEAL TYPE» OF FEUDALISM

According to Shlapentokh there are three types of societies — feudal, liberal and authoritarian. Different elements of a society may conform to any of the three models. No one model need monopolize all aspects of a given society (19–33). A society dominated by liberal or authoritarian institutions can still have feudal elements⁴. Shlapentokh is well aware of the variety of definitions of «feudalism» advanced in previous scholarship (24–25). To him the defining characteristic of a feudal society is a weak central government which produces «multiple power centers, a heightened level of lawlessness and corruption, an increased need for private security, and the growing importance of personal relations in politics and the economy» (11–17; the quotation is slightly modified from 3).

Shlapentokh derives his model of feudalism from West European history. He provides historical evidence to demonstrate the presence of each parameter of his model in medieval Western Europe (35–53, 55, 57, 61, 63, 66, 68, 85–88, 134–136, 142, 152, 158, 165, 173–175). Weak central government arose in medieval Europe in the wake of the «fall» of the Roman Empire and the collapse of the Carolingian Empire. Personal relations (kinship, patron-client) played a stronger role in the early Middle Ages than legal or formal hierarchies and facilitated corruption. Corruption continued in 17th- and 18th-century Florence. Weak feudal central governments had to contend with powerful interest groups which limited their authority — feudal lords, wealthy bankers, the Church, cities, universities and guilds. Hobbes presupposed a battle between royal power and feudal lords. From the 8th to the 12th centuries barons sought not only power but money. The natural economy applied only to peasants; sale of office and titles, and forced loans were a common practice among the elite. Only a thin line during the early Middle Ages separated the «nation's» assets from those of the ruler; the entire country was the ruler's domain. Illegality and disorder impaired the security of private property, rendering property rights in the Middle Ages «precarious». Personal relations dominated the economy in the early Middle Ages and even before that in tribal societies. From the 7th to the 9th centuries commendation — attaching oneself to a powerful lord for protection — ran rampant as central authority disappeared, a factor which contributed to the development of serfdom. Local lords relied on knights who used castles to seize property. Being a mercenary became one of the most popular occupations in the Middle

the awkward «Rus' / Russian» history. I refer to «early Rus'» to avoid repeating «medieval and early modern Rus'».

³ This monograph expands Shlapentokh's earlier article: *Shlapentokh V. Early Feudalism. The Best Parallel for Contemporary Russia // Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 48. 1996. P. 393–411.

⁴ *Shlapentokh V., Woods J. Feudal America. Elements of the Middle Ages in Contemporary Society*. University Park, PA, 2011.

Ages, as witnessed by the Hessians or the Papal Swiss Guard. Feudalism lasted in Europe until the establishment of a strong central authority with absolutism in the 17th century.

Medieval Europe was not exclusively feudal. Large landowners and the Church could be authoritarian in dealing with their subject populations. Assemblies of lords or bishops, elections of kings in the German kingdoms of the 6th and 7th centuries, urban self-government in Italian and Dutch cities, and the summoning of the Estates-General in 13th- and 14th-century France constituted liberal elements in medieval society.

Shlapentokh's model of «feudalism» is not purely empirical, it is a Weberian «ideal type», an extrapolation which does not coincide in all its features with any individual medieval West European society. Shlapentokh writes: «A clear distinction must be drawn between the nature of actual societies of Western Europe in the Middle Ages and the feudal model that was invented for the purpose of explaining this period of history» (184). This methodological premise justifies applying a medieval West European model outside the Middle Ages and even outside Europe, including to contemporary Russia.

Shlapentokh is aware that contemporary revisionist specialists in medieval West European history have argued that the differences in practice in so-called «feudal» societies are so great that the concept of «feudalism» is dubious, confusing, ineffective and misleading. Shlapentokh responds that there are sufficient similarities to justify his «ideal type», a heuristic device which permits comparative analysis (24–27). Shlapentokh acknowledges that his definition resonates with the most pejorative connotations of the word «feudal» in popular parlance. Journalists and pundits, uninformed by scholarly research on medieval history, use the word to mean «corrupt, unsavory or backward». However, to Shlapentokh such usage cannot invalidate his scholarly analysis based upon professional scholarship (2, 124, 127).

SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

In a book review J. Song commented that Shlapentokh's negative portray of feudalism in medieval Europe would have been more balanced if he had recognized that the people of medieval Europe during the feudal period still managed to produce such architectural monuments as Gothic cathedrals and literary works as court epics, romances and poetry. Shlapentokh excludes religion and culture from his estimate of the Middle Ages. The result of Shlapentokh's depressingly one-sided, negative definition of feudalism, Song concluded, is a one-sided negative portrayal of feudal society⁵. However, Shlapentokh admitted that no «ideal type» is comprehensive; all «ideal types» omit elements. Implicitly Shlapentokh relegated religion and culture to the non-essential features of feudalism. To Shlapentokh the most important phenomena of feudalism are political (weak central power, multiple foci of power) and social (corruption, crime, and the primacy of personal over «rational» relationships). This judgment was not made in ignorance of scholarship which considers the dominance of religion, specifically the power of the Roman Catholic Church, as a defining element of medieval, feudal society⁶. What Shlapentokh does not fully appreciate is that his

⁵ *Song J.* Review of: Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Society: A New Perspective on the Post-Soviet Era* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), *Choice* (Oct. 2008) (URL: http://www.academia.edu/3791854/Review_of_Vladimir_Shlapentokh_Contemporary_Russia_as_a_Feudal_Society_A_New_Perspective_on_the_Post-Soviet_Era_Palgrave_Macmillan_2007_Choice_Oct_2008 (last visit — December, 13, 2013)). I failed to locate any other book reviews.

⁶ *Shlapentokh V.* *Early Feudalism*. P. 395–396.

selection of the primary attributes of feudalism predetermines his negative evaluation of feudal society.

Shlapentokh never explicitly draws a distinction between a «feudal society» and a «society with feudal elements». I can only infer that the difference between them is qualitative and quantitative. A «feudal society» has more, and more influential feudal institutions than a «society with feudal elements». This vagueness does not affect Shlapentokh's main argument about contemporary Russian society.

Shlapentokh buttresses his case that contemporary Russia is a feudal society by citing assertions by contemporary Russian politicians and political commentators that they perceive contemporary Russian society as «feudal» (31, 124) without noticing that they are by and large as ignorant as the journalists and pundits whose usage of the word «feudal» he discounts.

MEDIEVAL WEST EUROPEAN FEUDALISM

Although Shlapentokh does not say so, the revisionist Western European medievalists whose conclusions he dismisses agree with him on the popular misuse of the word «feudalism»⁷. They are also just as aware as Shlapentokh that there are multiple scholarly conceptions of feudalism. Most revisionist scholarship about feudalism in medieval Western Europe is directed against the political definition of feudalism as a system of fiefs and vassals based upon the fusion of land ownership and public authority, but the revisionists do not neglect the other features of medieval life that Shlapentokh ignores in his «ideal type». The revisionists do not consider serfdom to be the defining characteristic of feudalism as in economic or Marxist definitions. Nor do they extol chivalry, jousting, knighthood or other features of the medieval lifestyle as primary. Finally, they do not reduce feudalism to the generic dominance of a landed military aristocracy over dependant but not necessarily enserved peasants, the essence of social definitions of «feudal society».

In a sense revisionist scholarship about feudalism is irrelevant to Shlapentokh's concept of feudalism because to him which weak central administration need not take the form of fiefs and vassals. But this conclusion would be superficial and misleading if only because the historiography from which Shlapentokh extracts empirical historical evidence of the parameters he attributes to feudal society was overwhelmingly written by adherents of the political definition of feudalism as entailing vassals and fiefs. To a historian the crucial flaw of Shlapentokh's use of these historical studies to construct his «ideal type» is his marginal attention to chronology, both in traditional and revisionist historiography of feudalism.

The revisionist criticism of «feudalism»⁸ concludes that no definition of feudalism fits all cases. In Norman England feudalism served a strong central government. In any event

⁷ Reynolds S. 1) *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted*. Oxford, 1994; 2) *The Use of Feudalism in Comparative History // Explorations in Comparative History* / Ed. by Benjamin Z. Kedar. Jerusalem, 2009. P. 191; 3) *The Middle Ages without Feudalism: Essays in Criticism and Comparison on the Medieval West*. Ashgate, 2012; Cheyette F. 'Feudalism' — A Memoir and an Assessment // *Feud, Violence and Practice: Essays in Medieval Studies in Honor of Stephen D. White* / Ed. by Belle S. Tuten; Tracey L. Billado. Farnham, 2010. P. 119, 122.

⁸ Brown E. A. R. *The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe* // *American Historical Review*. Vol. 79. № 4. October, 1974. P. 1063–1088; Reynolds S. 1) *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted*. Oxford, 1994; 2) *The Use of Feudalism in Comparative History...* P. 191–217; 3) *Afterthoughts on Fiefs and Vassals* // Reynolds S. *The Middle Ages without Feudalism: Essays in Criticism and Comparison on the Medieval West*. Part I. Ashgate, 2012. P. 1–15;

political fragmentation on the continent has been exaggerated; «feudal anarchy» did not exist everywhere all the time. There was no feudalism as a system in early medieval Europe. Homage and fealty did not appear until the late 12th century. Until then the fief was minor and the peasant allod was commonplace. The essential concepts of «feudalism», fiefs and vassals, were invented by late medieval and early modern bureaucrats and lawyers. Practice did not manifest the linkages among these concepts reified by theorists. There were vassals without fiefs; vassals who performed economic, not military or political functions; homage without fiefs; fiefs which did not owe service; service to the lord as ruler, not as the grantor of fiefs; fiefs granted by cities, not «lords»; fiefs without serfs; vassals who were not knights; non-knights who performed military service. These almost infinite combinations and permutations occurred not only in the «heartland» of feudalism, northern France, but also in southern France, Germany, Italy, England, Scotland, Spain, Norway, Denmark, Hungary, Romania, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. There were considerable regional differences not only in France but in Germany and Italy⁹. Historians disagree whether a legal or a sociological definition of feudalism is more productive. In some cases feudalism produced hierarchies of property, in others hierarchies of jurisdiction. The linkages of fragmentation, vassals, fiefs, homage, knights, manors, and serfs were tenuous. Serfdom was not universal. There is no direct connection between the «fall of the Roman Empire» or the fragmentation of the Carolingian Empire and the development of «feudalism». Feudal institutions arose in the late medieval period, not in the early medieval period, and they everywhere changed over time. The feudal model encourages treating any phenomenon which does not conform to it as an «exception». It obscures similarities as well as differences. Most of all it does an injustice to the vocabulary and concepts of the medieval period by projecting late medieval terminology onto early medieval history, and early modern, largely legal, concepts onto all medieval history.

Before Shlapentokh created an «ideal type» of feudalism, Paul Hyams had written that: «Hopefully, social and political scientists will desist at least from their misuse of medieval Europe to validate their models»¹⁰ and Reynolds had observed: «Envisaging [feudalism] as a Weberian ideal type that need not fit exactly is not enough if the ideal type is a mere bundle of characteristics that do not seem to belong together in any coherent way, especially if the evidence for some of them is weak»¹¹. Unlike a generalization, she added, an «ideal type» cannot be verified¹².

The evidence that Shlapentokh adduces to document the features he had identified as feudal is not coherent chronologically. In his monograph Shlapentokh abandoned the chronological limits of «early» feudalism of his previously published article. Consequently

4) Fiefs and Vassals in Twelfth-Century Jerusalem: A View from the West // Reynolds S. *The Middle Ages without Feudalism...* Part III. P. 29–48; 5) Fiefs and Vassals in Scotland: A View from Outside // Reynolds S. *The Middle Ages without Feudalism...* Part IV. P. 176–193; 6) Early Medieval Law in India and Europe: A Plea for Comparisons // *Medieval History Journal*. Vol. 16. 2013. P. 1–20; 7) Fiefs and Vassals after Twelve Years // *Feudalism. New Landscapes of Debate*. Turnhout, 2011. P. 15–26; *Cheyette F.* 1) Introduction // *Feudalism. New Landscapes of Debate*. Turnhout, 2011. P. 1–13; 2) ‘Feudalism’ — A Memoir and an Assessment... P. 119–133.

⁹ *Feudalism. New Landscapes of Debate* / Ed. by S. Bagge, M. H. Gelting, T. Lindkvist. Turnhout, 2011. — Does not contain an article on Rus’.

¹⁰ *Hyams P.* The End of Feudalism? Review of ‘Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted’ by Susan Reynolds // *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Vol. 27. 1997. P. 662.

¹¹ *Reynolds S.* Fiefs and Vassals after Twelve Years. P. 24.

¹² *Reynolds S.* Fiefs and Vassals. P. 12.

in the book «early» and «late» feudalism are now combined. In fact Shlapentokh exceeds the chronology of the Middle Ages entirely. He draws evidence freely from early modern European history, which was post-medieval, as well as occasionally from pre-medieval Europe. This eclecticism impugns how «medieval» his «ideal type» is.

Shlapentokh's «medieval history» is sometimes misplaced, problematic or contradictory. He dates the creation of feudalism in Europe to both the «fall» of the Roman Empire (by which he means the Western Roman Empire, because the Eastern Roman Empire, Byzantium, survived until 1453) and the collapse of the Carolingian Empire, without addressing why feudalism needed to be created twice. The «fall» of the Roman Empire led to the creation of the early medieval Germanic states, tribal kingdoms whose boundaries bore no relationship to the provincial Roman imperial territorial divisions they replaced and whose rulers were unrelated to the Roman authorities they displaced. The Carolingian Empire fragmented into three regions each headed by a different branch of the same Carolingian dynasty. Neither event resulted immediately in the creation of «feudal» societies. Shlapentokh finds feudal elements in clan/tribal societies which were outside the Roman Empire and in early modern Europe as late as the 18th century. In his book he dated to a single century the creation of absolutist states, abandoning his earlier article's more accurate description of the creation of absolutist states as a process which took centuries¹³. The cities, guilds, and banks which limited central authority were late medieval, not early medieval, institutions. Mercenaries have always existed but flourished much more in early modern Europe after the «gunpowder revolution» than even in late medieval Europe. The Swiss guards originated only at the end of the 15th century. The sale of office continued under absolutism, in some countries well in modern times. Sale of title was rare, if not non-existent, during the Middle Ages, especially the early Middle Ages. Hobbes wrote about early modern Europe, not medieval Europe. Early modern client-patronage relationships differed from medieval lord-vassal relationships¹⁴. One wonders how an economy in which private property was precarious could produce bankers prosperous and powerful enough to challenge royal authority. Shlapentokh seems to be unaware that the concept of «absolutism» has been contested¹⁵.

Shlapentokh sees a weak central government as the cause of crime and corruption and the primacy of personal relations over formal relations to compensate for disorder, but this nexus is a logical deduction, not an empirical inference. Strong central governments have never been able to abolish crime or corruption, and personal ties existed in every type of society in Shlapentokh's social theory. Personal ties were at least as strong in early modern Europe as in medieval Europe. A strong local government or effective local social commitment can lower the crime rate.

When Shlapentokh turned to feudal elements in the United States he discarded any theory of historical causation at all. He now declared that feudal elements were universal and could appear anywhere any time, presumably meaning «any time» there is a weak central government, regardless of whether its cause was the breakdown in an empire¹⁶. Extending the feudal «ideal type» to contemporary Russia or the United States entailed drawing

¹³ Compare: *Shlapentokh V. Early Feudalism*. P. 408; *Shlapentokh V., Woods J. Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Society: A New Perspective on the Post-Soviet Era*. Bassingstoke, 2007. P. 173.

¹⁴ *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age, c. 1450–1650* / Ed. by Ronald G. Ash, Adolf M. Birke. Oxford, 1991.

¹⁵ *Henshall N. The Myth of Absolutism. Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy*. London, 1992.

¹⁶ *Shlapentokh V., Woods J. Feudal America*. P. ix, 4.

equivalences which obscure the medieval identity of feudalism. For example the authority of medieval feudal lords rested on military power, that of modern «oligarchs» or politicians upon economic or political power. The conceptual difficulties created by such reasoning are best left to sociologists and political scientists.

A historical «ideal type» might be acceptable to historians even if all of its elements never existed in one place at one time, but if and only if all of its elements existed in different places at the same time. Otherwise the «ideal type» is a-historical. Shlapentokh's «ideal type» of «feudalism» conspicuously fails to meet this standard.

Weak central authority is neither essentially nor exclusively tied to the elements of «feudalism» adumbrated by Shlapentokh. Shlapentokh proposes that feudal elements can be present in non-feudal societies but are «best» explained by «feudalism». But he has not shown that crime, personal relationships, and private security are not just present but significantly stronger in feudal societies than in liberal or authoritarian societies. Empirically the elements of Shlapentokh's feudal «ideal type» are not cohesive.

Shlapentokh calls «feudal» any society with a weak central government, but the institutions characteristic of medieval feudalism were also found in Norman England and Sicily, both strong central governments. These concrete examples are not «exceptions». They suggest that so-called feudal institutions can play different roles in different societies at different times. A monochromatic interpretation of «feudalism» fails to do justice to the malleability of «feudal» institutions. Shlapentokh's «ideal type» of «feudalism» cannot accommodate Norman England and Sicily despite their chronological synchronicity with the period to which Shlapentokh attributes the origins of feudalism.

Reynolds describes the reaction of medievalists to the revisionists' objections to the concept of «feudalism» as a system as «mixed». Even historians who have stopped using the term «feudalism» still seem to apply the concept¹⁷. However the revisionists have successfully criticized the disconnect between the terminology and content of the medieval sources and the presumptions of adherents of the «feudalism» model. But whether the revisionists are correct or not that feudalism as a system never existed in Europe, the data that they, as well as their traditional predecessors and opponents, have accrued in debating the issue undermine Shlapentokh's «ideal type» of feudal society by exposing his violation of historical periodization, chronology, causation, and historical process.

«FEUDALISM» IN EARLY RUS'

Shlapentokh devotes considerably less space to feudalism in early Rus' history than to medieval European feudalism. He discusses only one study of the subject, whose conclusions he does not engage. As a result his scattered remarks scarcely constitute an analysis of feudalism in early Rus'. Relevant studies of feudalism in early Rus', despite or even because they disagree with each other, provide further grounds for questioning Shlapentokh's «ideal type» of «feudalism».

Shlapentokh relies upon the views of Nikolai Pavlov-Sil'vanskii on feudalism in early Rus' and on other Russian historians such as Vasiliï Kliuchevskii on early Rus' history in general. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii argued, Shlapentokh states, that elements of feudalism, defined as political fragmentation, emerged in Kievan Rus'. After the Kievan period boyars became the leading Rus' vassals. The 14th-century Muscovite Grand Prince Ivan Kalita bought cities. Kinship was crucial in feudal Russia until the time of Ivan IV in the 16th century. Feudalism in

¹⁷ Reynolds S. *The Middle Ages without Feudalism...* P. ix-xv.

Russia lasted until Russia became an absolutist state, beginning with Ivan IV. Absolutism in Russia destroyed the feudal system in the 17th century when the ruler's domain disappeared. The tsar's claim to all property in Muscovy superseded that of other owners, leaving private property problematic (27, 87–88, 159). Shlapentokh remarked in his second book that even feudal Rus' had non-feudal elements: the city-state of Novgorod, like other medieval cities, had «an advanced concept of freedom». However the Russian Orthodox Church's strong dependence upon central authority explains why democracy did not develop in Russia as in other countries¹⁸.

These observations are inadequate. «Feudalism» in Rus' cannot have been destroyed in the 17th century if it had already been destroyed in the 16th century. Ivan Kalita purchased principalities or districts, not just cities. Novgorod's devotion to «freedom» is a myth of Imperial Russian historiography. Blaming the dependence of the Russian Orthodox Church upon the state for Russia's lack of democracy is simplistic. The absence of private property in Muscovy has been contested¹⁹. The tsar still possessed his private domain in the 17th century. Shlapentokh sees the collapse of the Soviet Union as precipitating the creation of a feudal society in Russia after 1991. To a historian, the presence of «feudalism» in Russia before 1991 would constitute an important historical precedent for such a development, but this is not Shlapentokh's approach. Although Pavlov-Sil'vanskii did treat political fragmentation as central to «feudalism», neither he nor any other historian who had previously written about feudalism in early Rus' employed Shlapentokh's definition, so it is no surprise that Shlapentokh did not engage them.

Pavlov-Sil'vanskii was the first Russian historian to raise seriously the possibility that feudalism had existed in early Rus'²⁰. Shlapentokh cites Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's 1907 book «Feudalism in Ancient Rus'», a brief semi-popularization of Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's conclusions²¹, but Shlapentokh does not cite Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's unfinished doctoral dissertation, «Feudalism in Appanage Rus'», published posthumously²². Shlapentokh does not do justice to Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's scholarship.

In his shorter work Pavlov-Sil'vanskii argued that early Rus' institutions were identical to feudal European institutions, including fiefs (*pomest'ia*), commendation (*zakladnichestvo*), manors (*boiarshchiny*), and communes (*obshchiny*). Pavlov-Sil'vanskii admitted that the process by which these institutions arose in Rus' differed from that in Europe but insisted that these differences were less significant than the identity of terminology of European and Rus' institutions. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii asserted that the existence of large-scale estates was more important than that of fiefs because the large landowner merged private landownership with public rights, the essence of feudalism. In Rus' feudal property devolved upon ever-increasing numbers of Riurikid princes, whereas in Europe nobles usurped the rights of declining kings and princes; different processes produced the same outcome. Rus' had

¹⁸ Shlapentokh V., Woods J. Feudal America. P. 19 (quotation on cities), 20.

¹⁹ Pipes R. Was There Private Property in Muscovite Russia? // Slavic Review. Vol. 53. 1994. P. 524–530; Weickhardt G. G. Was There Private Property in Muscovite Russia? // Slavic Review. Vol. 53. 1994. P. 531–538 (reprinted: Weickhardt G. G. Early Russian Law. Idyllwild, 2008. Chapter 4. P. 67–76).

²⁰ Свердлов М. Б. Василий Никитич Татищев — автор и редактор «Истории российской». СПб., 2009. С. 6.

²¹ Павлов-Сильванский Н. П. Феодализм в древней Руси. СПб., 1907 (репринт: Павлов-Сильванский Н. П. Феодализм в России. М., 1988). С. 4–149.

²² Павлов-Сильванский Н. П. Феодализм в удельной Руси. СПб., 1910 (репринт: Павлов-Сильванский Н. П. Феодализм в России. М., 1988). С. 152–542.

investiture, homage, and sub-infeudation. Ivan IV's 1556 decree imposing mandatory military service upon all landowners, not just benefice (*pomest'e*) holders, was not feudal because it was not voluntary. Rus' had no stone castles because it had no mountains, but it did have stone kremlins (fortresses) on hilltops above Rus' cities. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii identified three periods of Rus' feudalism: the dominance of the commune to 1169, the dominance of princely and boyar landowning which weakened the commune from 1169 to the middle of the 16th century, and the evolution of an estate monarchy from the mid-16th to the 18th century.

In his unfinished longer work Pavlov-Sil'vanskii adduced massive evidence of the identity not just of terminology but of Rus' and European feudal institutions themselves, including peasant and manorial officials, taxes, and customs. Although peasant communes gradually became dependent upon their lords, Rus' peasants, like European peasants, were not serfs. Fiscal and judicial immunities, patronage (commendation), and boyar service all matched Europe. These institutions arose during the «appanage» period of weak central government as people sought protection. Only the ritual of investiture was lacking in Rus'. Ivan IV's mandatory service for landowners imitated Charlemagne's²³. Fiefdoms and vassalage united the realm by incorporating all nobles into a coherent hierarchy. Ivan IV abolished the appanage-feudal structure when his *oprichnina* destroyed the aristocracy's territorial base²⁴. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii never wrote planned chapters on the fall of feudalism and feudal survivals in Muscovy.

Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's conception of feudalism was a mixture of the political and the social-economic. He dated Rus' feudal institutions to what he called the appanage (*udel'nyi*) period of the 13th to 15th centuries, actually the Mongol period²⁵, to which only some of them belonged. A recent scholar has contested the notion that the commune declined in Muscovy²⁶. Had Pavlov-Sil'vanskii finished his dissertation it would have become clearer if he thought that Muscovy from mid-16th century on was still «feudal»; usually estate-monarchies are assigned to the early modern period. Most evidence on fiefs or benefices (*pomest'ia*) comes from sources after the appanage period²⁷. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii thought that Ivan IV's decree on service was not «feudal» because it was not a mutual agreement as in European feudal service; by the same token the fief system therefore would be equally «un-feudal», a tool of centralization. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii knew that «feudalism» in Norman England also served the purposes of a strong central government but, like Shlapentokh, associated «feudalism» with weak central government. Shlapentokh cites commendation as evidence of the need for private security in the 7th to 9th centuries (173–175) and would not have contested Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's depiction of this institution. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii also knew that Rus' serfdom began to develop at the end of the 15th century and did not achieve fruition until the middle

²³ On different grounds Daniel Rowland advanced the same asynchronous parallel: *Rowland D.* Ivan the Terrible as a Carolingian Renaissance Prince // *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*. Vol. 19. 1995. P. 594–606.

²⁴ In 1565 Ivan created the *oprichnina*, a private appanage, from which he launched a reign of terror. Ivan abolished the *oprichnina* in 1572. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii followed the interpretation of his mentor Sergei Platonov that the *oprichnina* was directed against the princely aristocracy, a theory much endorsed and much contested in subsequent historiography.

²⁵ The title of his 1907 book was ambiguous: the term «Ancient Rus'» (*Drevniaia Rus'*) was sometimes applied to Kievan Rus' alone and sometimes to all pre-Petrine Rus'.

²⁶ Бовыкин В. В. Местное управление в Русском государстве XVI в. СПб., 2012.

²⁷ *Ostrowski D.* 1) The Military Land Grant Along the Muslim-Christian Frontier // *Russian History*. Vol. 19. 1992. P. 327–359; 2) Early *Pomest'e* Grants as a Historical Source // *Oxford Slavonic Papers*. Vol. 32. 2000. P. 36–63.

of the 17th century, again during his estate monarchy period²⁸. Some European medievalists of Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's time also considered the dependency of the peasants upon their manorial lords more important than serfdom per se. Immunities and peasant taxes, too, continued during the estate-monarchy period. How essential serfdom or immunities were to «feudalism» when they were sometimes absent during the medieval period and sometimes present after the medieval period is difficult to determine.

Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's books elicited some agreement but more opposition in Imperial Russian historical circles because he challenged the accepted wisdom that Russia's history was different than Europe's²⁹. Some objected that the presence of feudal elements in Rus' did not constitute a feudal «system», an criticism we shall see again. Even some of his supporters thought that Pavlov-Sil'vanskii had demonstrated not the identity but the similarity of Rus' and European feudalism. For our purposes several considerations are relevant: Pavlov-Sil'vanskii thought that feudalism was a system but never resolved the tension between its political and its economic aspects. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii did not live to integrate the history of period from the mid-16th through the 18th century fully into his argument, leaving open questions to which we cannot supply answers. Finally, although Pavlov-Sil'vanskii attributed «feudalism» to the weakness of central political authority, otherwise his definition of «feudalism» differed from Shlapentokh's. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii identified feudalism with fiefs. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii included in his exposition many political, social and cultural institutions absent from Shlapentokh's «ideal type» and omitted key elements present in Shlapentokh's «ideal type». Pavlov-Sil'vanskii did not identify «feudalism» with crime and corruption. Moreover his presentation lacked Shlapentokh's negative judgmental quality. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii possessed a much more sensitive understanding of «feudalism» as an evolving institution than Shlapentokh, whose «feudalism» is much more a static synchronic system.

The imposition of Marxism on Russian historical scholarship in the Soviet Union mandated a definition of feudalism as a mode of production in a unilineal progression between slavery and capitalism in which large landowners dominated dependent serfs, devaluing the study of political and legal institutions³⁰. By the Marxist criterion Rus' and Russia remained «feudal» until the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, although Soviet historians sometimes had to treat the enserfment of 1649 as the «second» serfdom in order to argue that Rus' peasants were serfs between the 11th and 17th centuries³¹. Western scholarship on medieval and early modern Rus' responded by insisting upon the political definition of feudalism and its inapplicability to Rus'. Three articles present substantial analyses of «feudalism» in early Rus'.

In 1936 A. Miller justified comparing feudalism in England and Rus' because Rus' never experienced Roman law and England erased Roman law during the Anglo-Saxon invasion.

²⁸ *Culpepper J. M.* The Legislative Origins of Peasant Bondage in Muscovy // *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*. Bd 14. Berlin, 1969. P. 162–237; *Hellie R.* Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy. Chicago, 1967.

²⁹ See the following appendices in: *Павлов-Сильванский Н. П.* Феодализм в России. М., 1988. — Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's correspondence with Presniakov, who agreed with him (P. 544–563), Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's correspondence with Georgii Chicherin, who did not (P. 564–573), Boris Dmitrievich Grekov, «N. P. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii o feodalizme v Rossii» (P. 578–586), Sigurd Ottonovich Shmidt, «Sochineniia N. P. Pavlova-Sil'vanskogo kak pamiatnik istorii i kul'tury» (P. 587–599), and S. V. Chirkov, «N. P. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii i ego kniga o feodalizme» (P. 587–599).

³⁰ For an interesting early Soviet assessment of the question see: *Бахрушин С. В.* Вопрос о русском феодализме в научной литературе // *Бахрушин С. В.* Труды по источниковедению, историографии и истории России эпохи феодализма. (Научное наследие). М., 1987. С. 53–80.

³¹ On the Marxist model of feudalism see: *Reynolds S.* 1) Fiefs and Vassals. P. 3; 2) «The Use of Feudalism in Comparative History. P. 209–213.

Consequently landholding in France, deeply rooted in Roman Law, differed significantly from landholding in Rus' and England³². He found parallels between both political and economic (manorial) feudalism in the two countries, albeit with a four-hundred year time lag. Rus' of the 9th to 15th centuries resembled England of the 5th to 9th centuries³³. Miller attempted to explain how feudalism in England led to parliamentarism but in Rus' to autocracy. Feudalism gradually disappeared in England after the Norman Conquest and in Rus' beginning with the reign of Ivan III at the end of the 15th century, a process that was not completed until the accession of the Romanovs at the beginning of the 17th century.

Although Miller considered feudalism as a system with both political and economic features, his argument resonates with some axioms of the medieval revisionists in stark contrast to Shlapentokh's normative «ideal type». Miller argued that feudal institutions could serve both political centralization and political fragmentation and that feudalism differed in different countries in Europe and at different times.

In 1950 Valentine Tschebotarioff-Bill divided medieval and early modern Rus' history into three periods: urban, monetary Kiev (following Kliuchevskii) of the 9th to 12th centuries, the «Tatar Yoke» circa 1240 to 1480, and Muscovite Russia of the late 15th to 17th century³⁴. Feudalism varied from period to period. The Kievan period was not feudal. The period of the «Tatar Yoke» possessed such typical feudal traits as preoccupation with religion, economic emphasis on agriculture, and political decentralization and separatism but still lacked European feudalism's essential feature, serfdom. Muscovite Russia was national in extent but feudal in spirit. Ivan IV achieved victory over the last vestiges of particularism and broke the back of the boyars (following Platonov again) but his *oprichnina* was an instrument of the medieval mentality. Therefore Muscovy did not break free of medieval traditionalism. Moreover, religion and serfdom worked at cross-purposes: religion fostered social cohesion but serfdom produced social disorder, namely the Time of Troubles (*Smutnoe vremia*).

Soviet criticisms of Kliuchevskii's conception of Kievan Rus' as urban and monetary, as if it did not have an agricultural base, apparently had no effect on Tschebotarioff-Bill.

Tschebotarioff-Bill's understanding of the «medieval mentality» or «medieval spirit» is not entirely clear. If Rus' during the «Tatar Yoke» lacked serfdom and therefore «real» feudalism, then serfdom was not an element of its «medieval mentality». If Muscovy was no longer politically decentralized, then it lacked the political decentralization of feudalism during the «Tatar Yoke». Tschebotarioff-Bill was not the last historian to see the *oprichnina* as traditional in some ways. According to Aleksandr Zimin the *oprichnina* was a traditional institution, an appanage; Ivan relied upon a feudal institution as a tool to attack feudal institutional power bases including the appanage system itself³⁵. If according to Tschebotarioff-Bill religion and serfdom were both «medieval» yet contradicted each other, then the medieval period (and feudalism?) were congenitally contradictory, a possibility Shlapentokh excludes. Shlapentokh's «ideal type» is entirely consistent; contradictory elements in medieval Europe or early Rus' were not «feudal» but liberal or authoritarian. Of course, Shlapentokh does not include religion or serfdom in «feudalism».

³² Miller A. Feudalism in England and Russia: Suggestions for a Comparative Study of Early English and Muscovite Political and Social Institutions // Slavonic and East European Review. Vol. 14 (42). 1936. P. 585–600.

³³ Miller A. Feudalism in England and Russia... P. 596. — Contains a typographical error: «1564» in the text should be 1556, as in the pertinent footnote.

³⁴ Tschebotarioff-Bill V. National Feudalism in Russia // Russian Review. Vol. 9. 1950. P. 209–218.

³⁵ Зимин А. А. Опричнина Ивана Грозного. М., 1964.

In Tschebotarioff-Bill's periodization feudal institutions such as serfdom continued unabated during the early modern period, precisely the time when according to Miller they were disappearing.

In 1956 Marc Szeftel published what has long remained the normative article on Rus' feudalism in US scholarship³⁶. Like Tschebotarioff-Bill, Szeftel denied the existence of feudalism in the Kievan period. He explained the linkage of princely service and landholding in Northeast Rus' in practice but not in law by the process of colonization (following Kliuchevskii). The result of political fragmentation was political feudalism, the fusion of public/private authority facilitated by the Mongol conquest. Szeftel concluded that before the triumph of the grand principality of Moscow, the major nexus was not that of lord and vassal because landowners could change lords without sacrificing their estates but that of allodial landowner and dependent peasants (manorialism, closer to the Marxist definition of feudalism). The benefices of the Muscovite period were not based upon mutual agreement as in European feudalism but upon the absolute authority of the ruler, akin to Weber's liturgical (*not* feudal) state. This system was the result of centralization, not fragmentation, and therefore *not* feudal. Chivalry and hereditary office were absent. Feudal immunities and military specialization do not suffice to constitute feudalism. The dominance of religion and agriculture was not the result of barbarian invasions, so despite seeming similarities to Europe, Rus' fell short of feudalism. Only «aspects of feudalism» obtained in Rus'.

While favoring the political definition of feudalism prescribed by the anthology in which he published his article, Szeftel still gave priority to lord-peasant, not lord-vassal, relations in defining feudalism as a system. Szeftel also alluded to Mongol «feudalism», which has only rarely been taken into account in evaluating the evolution of Rus' «feudalism»³⁷. Relying upon scholarship on medieval Europe at the beginning of the 20th century Pavlov-Sil'vanskii had already dismissed Kliuchevskii's contrast between mobile East Slavs and stationary Europeans as out-of-date, but Szeftel still adhered to Kliuchevskii's colonization model. Szeftel took a step backward from Miller's approach and toward Shlapentokh's equation of «feudalism» and a weak central state by insisting that a fief serving a strong central authority was not «feudal». As Shlapentokh sometimes argues, Szeftel insisted that feudalism could only result from a single type of historical causation, the breakdown of central authority, which he phrased as the barbarian invasions of Western Europe rather than the «fall» of the Roman or Carolingian Empires. An agriculturally-based dominant military aristocracy with a dependent peasantry, even with «feudal» immunities³⁸, was insufficient by itself to constitute «feudalism». Although Szeftel alluded to chivalry, absent in Shlapentokh, Szeftel seems to deny that *all* decentralized systems were feudal, the essence of Shlapentokh's «ideal type». In Shlapentokh's terminology Szeftel shifted the classification of early Rus' with only «aspects of feudalism» from the category of «feudal society» like contemporary Russia to that of a society «with feudal elements» like the contemporary United States.

Taken together the publications on «feudalism» in early Rus' discussed here suggest that while none shared Shlapentokh's definition of the «feudalism» «ideal type», some of

³⁶ Szeftel M. Aspects of Feudalism in Russian History // Feudalism in History / Ed. by Rushton Coulborn. Princeton, 1956. P. 167–182.

³⁷ Bold B.-O. Mongolian Nomadic Society. A Reconstruction of the «Medieval» History of Mongolia. New York, 2001; see my book review: Halperin C. J. Review of Bat-Ochir Bold 'Mongolian Nomadic Society. A Reconstruction of the «Medieval» History of Mongolia' // Canadian-American Slavic Studies. Vol. 37. 2003. P. 203–204.

³⁸ See the remarks on immunities: Юрганов А. Л. Категории русской средневековой культуры. М., 1998. С. 171.

his observations were not unprecedented. The distinction between «feudal institutions» and «feudalism» is not his innovation. However, recent studies of crime, and personal kinship and patronage relations in supposedly «absolutist» and «centralized» early modern Russia do not relate those issues to «feudalism»³⁹. Moreover, no consensus has been reached on the definition of «feudalism» even among historians who believed that there was a «feudal system». Historians no more agree on whether the term «feudalism» can be applied outside Western Europe than they do on whether the term «medieval» can be applied outside Western Europe⁴⁰.

CONCLUSION

The argument of Shlapentokh's *Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Society: A New Perspective on the Post-Soviet Era* finesses the question of whether «feudalism» existed in early Rus' or at any time in Russia before the late Soviet period. It is not that Shlapentokh rejects that notion out-of-hand but rather than he sees feudalism in contemporary Russia as a product of the fall of the Soviet Union and therefore sees no need to investigate historical precedents. But de facto Shlapentokh speaks quite emphatically to the question of Russian exceptionalism. By developing a West-European model, an «ideal type», of feudalism and then applying it directly to a period of Russian history, even if a much later period, Shlapentokh discards any assertion of Russian exceptionalism *tout court*. Shlapentokh is not asserting West-European «influence» on Russia but then neither was Pavlov-Sil'vanskii; the issue is only the similarity or even identity of West-European and Rus'/Russian institutions, a matter of parallel development, not borrowing West European institutions. Shlapentokh flip-flops on whether similar institutions must derive from similar causes and Szeftel denies that similar outcomes can be produced by dissimilar causes; both views are inferior to Pavlov-Sil'vanskii's insistence — known to both — that entirely different sequences of events can produce very similar results.

It is noteworthy that to Shlapentokh the similarity of contemporary Russian society to West European feudalism is a «bad» thing because Shlapentokh takes a negative view of «feudalism». Contemporary Russia resembles a «bad» phase of West European history which Western Europe has overcome, which, even worse, implies a negative contrast of contemporary Russia to contemporary Western Europe. The time-lag in Miller's theory might also be invoked as evidence of Russian backwardness but Miller did not conceive of feudalism *per se* as a destructive. Thus studying medieval history becomes a mechanism to comment on contemporary societies.

The problem for historians, especially specialists in West-European medieval history or early Rus' history, is simply that Shlapentokh's indifference to chronology and the absence of empirical rather than deductive linkages among the features of his feudal «ideal type» create an unconvincing model. It is eminently conceivable that weak central government can permit multiple foci of power, crime and corruption, private security and the superiority of personal over formal relationships, but these political and social features need not be connected to

³⁹ On crime: *Kollmann N. S.* Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Russia. Cambridge, 2012. On personal relations: *Crummey R. O.* Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia, 1613–1689. Princeton, 1983; *Kollmann N. S.* Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345–1547. Stanford, 1987.

⁴⁰ The great medievalist Aron Yakovlevich Gurevich wanted to confine the term «medieval» to Western Europe: *Гуревич А. Я.* Из выступления на защите докторской диссертации А. Л. Юрганова (Категории русской средневековой культуры) // Одиссей. Человек в истории. М., 2000. С. 295–302.

«feudalism» and can occur even when there is a strong central authority. Whether Muscovy was a hypertrophic state or not⁴¹, it did have a strong central government which could not eliminate crime and corruption, faced multiple power structures within society, tolerated some forms of private security, and could not have functioned without personal bonds of kinship and patronage. Defining an institution as «feudal» only when it results from a weak central government is not conducive to improving historical understanding of «feudal» institutions, let alone, if one believes it ever existed, «feudalism» as a system. To at last this practicing historian, such a restrictive definition seems dogmatic. Whatever the contribution of Shlapentokh's «feudalism» «ideal type» to sociology or to the study of contemporary Russian society, it simplifies history.

However, Shlapentokh's provocative book-title and book present historians specializing in early Rus' with an opportunity to reconsider the question of «feudalism». I believe that adopting the medieval revisionists' rejection of the reification of «feudalism» as a system facilitates studying supposedly «feudal» institutions more objectively, without preconceptions. Furthermore, studying specific institutions in comparative context should finesse the arbitrary dualism of trying to decide whether early Rus' was or was not «identical» to a «Europe» that never existed, or where early Rus' was «unique». Early Rus' could have had some «feudal» institutions similar to those elsewhere and some which were not; historians do not need to draw holistic conclusions about whether «feudalism» in early Rus' was similar to «feudalism» in Western Europe any more than they need to pigeonhole early Rus' as «European», «Asiatic» or «exceptional». Unbundling feudal institutions, examining them anew in all their flexible and fluid inter-relationships with a firm appreciation of the heterogeneity of their combinations in different regions and at different times in early Rus' should prove very productive and conducive to furthering our understanding of early Rus' history⁴².

Информация о статье

Автор: Гальперин, Чарльз — Блумингтон, Индиана, США, доктор истории, независимый исследователь, chalperi@indiana.edu

Название: Feudalism in Russia, Then and Now: Vladimir Shlapentokh's Concept of a «Feudal Society» [«Феодализм в России, раньше и сейчас: концепция «феодалного общества» Владимира Шляпентоха»]

Резюме: В рецензии подвергается критике концепция «феодалного общества», изложенная в недавно вышедшей книге Владимира Шляпентоха. Он основывается на средневековой европейской истории и сравнивает политический и социальный строй современной России с феодальным обществом. Шляпентох определяет «феодализм» в качестве веберовского «идеального типа», который характеризуется слабой центральной властью, ростом преступности и коррупции, господством личных связей и отношений в политике и экономике. Поэтому, как считает Шляпентох, между этим «феодалным обществом» и современной Россией слишком много сходства. Автор рецензии критикует подход Шляпентоха прежде всего с исторических позиций — он указывает, что его «идеальный тип» основан на внешних наблюдениях над сущностью средневековья, но не раскрывает его глубинного,

⁴¹ *Poe M.* The Truth About Muscovy // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. Vol. 3. 2002. P. 473–486; *Kivelson V. A.* On Words, Sources, and Historical Method: Which Truth About Muscovy? // *Kritika...* P. 487–499; *Halperin C. J.* Muscovy as a Hypertrophic State: A Critique // *Kritika...* P. 501–507.

⁴² See: *Mikhailova Yu.* 1) Power and Property Relations in Rus and Latin Europe: A Comparative Analysis. Dissertation. University of New Mexico, 2014; 2) Lords and Vassals in Rus? Hierarchical Interpersonal Relations among the Princes in Rus in the Light of the Debate on 'Feudalism', paper, Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies Convention. Boston, November 21, 2013.

внутреннего характера. Шляпентох вывел, а не продемонстрировал связь между слабой центральной власти и социальными элементами, которую он определяет как «феодалную». Представляется более аргументированной точка зрения специалистов по средневековой истории, которые оспаривают саму концепцию «феодализма» применительно к Древней Руси. Тем не менее, монографии Шляпентоха должна поощрять специалистов по истории Древней Руси, чтобы провести новые сравнительные исследования «феодалных» учреждений.

Ключевые слова: Шляпентох Владимир, феодализм, «идеальный тип», Павлов-Сильванский Н. П. Литература, использованная в статье

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Information about the article

Author: Halperin, Charles J. — Bloomington, Indiana, USA, Doctor in History, Independent Scholar, chalperi@indiana.edu

Title: Feudalism in Russia, Then and Now: Vladimir Shlapentokh's Concept of a «Feudal Society»

Summary: Based upon medieval European history Vladimir Shlapentokh's *Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Society* defines «feudalism» as a Weberian «ideal type» characterized by a weak central government which produces multiple power centers, increased crime and corruption, private security, and the dominance of personal relations in politics and the economy. This article concludes that his «ideal type» is based too much upon evidence from outside the medieval period. Shlapentokh has deduced rather than demonstrated the connection between weak central government and the elements he identifies as «feudal». Closer examination of the arguments of revisionist medieval historians who dispute the concept of «feudalism» and earlier studies of early Rus' «feudalism», both of which Shlapentokh slights, further impugns the linkages which Shlapentokh posits. However, Shlapentokh's monograph should encourage specialists in early Rus' to undertake new comparative studies of «feudal» institutions.

Keywords: Shlapentokh, feudalism, ideal type, Pavlov-Sil'vanskii

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