

The Soviet paradigm for the study of the troubles of the early seventeenth century emerged as a counterpoint to the pre-Soviet one. In place of the traditional patriotic interpretation, which privileged the narrative of national liberation as a prelude to the accession of Michael Romanov, Soviet historians, viewing the period through the lens of economic determinism, tended to focus on the series of peasant rebellions that took place during these years.<sup>1</sup> The main ideologist of this approach, M.N. Pokrovskii, believed there was no room for nationalism in the Soviet understanding of history. Accordingly, he downplayed the role of foreign interventionists and the mass national movement that revolted against them in 1613.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the different weight Russian historians put on foreign intervention does not correspond to two distinct Imperial and Soviet eras. In the second half of the nineteenth century, several serious scholars, notably Sergei Platonov, began to question the traditional patriotic reading of the Troubles, leaning closer to Pokrovskii in their assessment of foreign involvement. Likewise, in the 1930s, the growth of Soviet patriotism heralded a fusion of the class war narrative with that of national unity against external threats to Russian sovereignty. Broadly speaking, the term ‘foreign intervention’ revolves around two historiographical issues. One is the provenance of the two False Dmitrys and the extent to which they were supported by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The other is the question of how far a sense of national pride and solidarity in response to Polish and Swedish incursions allowed for the restoration of order in 1613. The purpose of this essay is to illustrate why certain historians in both eras pay more attention to this factor than others. I argue that what they share is a common bias against the Poles, which must be situated in the context of prevailing attitudes towards Poland.

Nikolai Karamzin and Dmitry Ilovaiskii stand out as proponents of the patriotic conception of the Troubles. They contend that the principal cause of the turmoil was foreign interference in Russia’s domestic affairs. More specifically, they consider Poland-Lithuania to have been the main source of the pretenders’ campaigns and the popular rebellions they inspired.<sup>3</sup> Karamzin’s narrative is clear: though Boris Godunov’s paranoia generated fear and resentment among a broad cross-section of Russian society, the threat to autocracy did not come from within. When the first pretender, a monk named Grigory Otrepiev, appeared as a

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<sup>1</sup> V.G. Vovin-Lebedev, ‘Obraz polskich interventov v Sovetskoi istoriografii Smuty i ego razrusheniye’, *Historyka Studia Metodologiczne*, XLIII, (2013), p.135.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Chester S.L. Dunning, *Russia's First Civil War: The Time of Troubles and the Founding of the Romanov Dynasty* (Philadelphia, 2001), p.5.

servant in the household of Adam Wiśniowiecki, the Polish nobleman immediately spread the word about the miraculous salvation of Ivan IV's son and heir. Subsequently, a group of Jesuits lobbied Sigismund III to assist the impostor in a bid to politically weaken and subjugate Russia to Rome's spiritual authority. The invasion force, raised by the influential magnate Jerzy Mniszech, consisted of a mixture of Poles and a 'lowly mob' of vagrants, scoundrels, and brigands. If noble-minded Russians joined the pretender, it was only because his network of spies had deceived them into believing that this was indeed the rightful heir to the Russian throne.<sup>4</sup> When the Polish conspiracy finally came to the attention of the patriotic masses, they united against their foreign enemies in a moment of unparalleled national heroism.<sup>5</sup> They did not fear autocracy, Karamzin argues, but only autocracy in the hands of a foreigner.<sup>6</sup>

Ilovaiskii's narrative is even more emphatic in exposing the intrigue which he deems to be at the root of foreign intervention.<sup>7</sup> In a chapter entitled 'Polish Machinations', he talks of a 'devilish plan' to undermine Muscovy on the part of 'our Polish enemies', accusing three families in particular of laying the groundwork for the pretenders' campaigns, namely the Sapiehas, the Wiśniowieckis, and the Mniszechs.<sup>8</sup> His argument transcends Karamzin's in several ways. Firstly, he claims that voluntary support for the impostors could not have been created in Russia itself, alleging that the bulk of their armies consisted of Don and Zaporizhian Cossacks lured by generous rewards.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, where Karamzin acknowledges the involvement of a handful of 'turncoat' boyars, Ilovaiskii insists there is no evidence to suggest the Russian aristocracy was aware of the conspiracy before it surfaced, let alone hatched it.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, he raises doubts as to the Muscovite identity of False Dmitry I, asserting that he was not the monk Grigory Otrepiev, but a polonised member of the west Russian *szlachta*.<sup>11</sup> Clues as to his anti-Polish disposition can also be seen in his study on the collapse

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<sup>4</sup> N.M. Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva Rossiiskogo: v 12 tomakh (St Petersburg, 1816-1829)*, vol.11, pp.5-20.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Pipes (Ed.), *Karamzin's Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia* (Harvard, 1959), pp.115-118.

<sup>6</sup> J.L. Black, *Nicholas Karamzin and Russian Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto, 1975), p.117.

<sup>7</sup> Ilovaiskii, *Smutnoe Vremya*, pp.1-10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.238.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in which he writes scathingly of a Polish ‘national type’.<sup>12</sup>

Their views on Poland are not contained to their academic works. Ilovaiskii was one of the first to articulate the theory that the revolutionary movement of the 1880s was an instrument of Polish and Jewish conspirators.<sup>13</sup> Karamzin, meanwhile, was well-known for his anti-Polish sentiment – according to Alexander Herzen, it was this that he did most to instil in contemporary Russian thinking.<sup>14</sup> He believed Poland had always coveted Russian lands and applauded Catherine the Great for ending the Polish threat through her leading role in the eighteenth-century partitions. In addition, as Alexander I’s official historiographer, he was a vocal opponent of the constitution awarded to the newly formed Kingdom of Poland in 1815 and consistently advised against Polish autonomy on the grounds that a strong Poland presented a danger to Russian sovereignty.<sup>15</sup> He was by no means alone in this thinking; the same suspicion and antipathy imbued the works of a great many Russian conservatives, including Katkov, Kavelin, Polevoi, and Ustrialov.<sup>16</sup> They mirror a wider development by which the uprisings of 1830 and 1863 confirmed the tsarist regime’s distrust of the native Polish elite, resulting in intensified Russification policies which aimed to remove traces of Polish political and cultural influence across the Western Borderlands.<sup>17</sup>

Yet it is important to be aware of a handful of Imperial-era historians – notably Mykola Kostomarov, Vasily Kliuchevskii, S.F. Platonov, and Sergei Soloviev – who spurned the traditional patriotic approach and kept foreign involvement in the background of their studies. Taking into account the *longue durée*, they argue that the Troubles ultimately stemmed from a combination of poor socioeconomic conditions and elite discontent at the heavy-handedness of Ivan IV and his successor, Godunov.<sup>18</sup> They explain that the extinction of the Rurik

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<sup>12</sup> A.N. Shakhnov, “‘...V moikh rabotakh nichego ne mozhet ystaryet’”: D.I. Ilovaiskii’, *Istoriya i Istoriki*, no.1 (2007), p.3.

<sup>13</sup> O.V. Budnitskii, *Evrei i russkaya revolyutsiya* (Moscow, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Black, *Nicholas Karamzin*, p.86.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.

<sup>16</sup> George Vernadskii, *Russian Historiography: A History*, ed. Sergei Pushkarev, trans. Nickolas Lupinin (Belmont, 1978), p.101.

<sup>17</sup> Andreas, Kappeler, ‘The Ambiguities of Russification,’ in David Fox et al. (Eds.), *Orientalism and Empire in Russia* (Bloomington, 2006), p.230.

<sup>18</sup> See N.I. Kostomarov, *Smutnoe vremya Moskovskogo gosudarstva v nachalye XVII stoletiya 1604-1613* (St Petersburg, 1883-1884), vol.1;

Vasily Kliuchevskii, *A Course in Russian History: The Seventeenth Century* (London, 1994);

S.F. Platonov, *The Time of Troubles: A Historical Study of the Internal Crisis and Social Struggle in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Muscovy*, trans. John T. Alexander (Lawrence, 1970);

dynasty and the issue of pretendership that followed served to unleash this pent-up disaffection with the autocratic system, which the Poles and Swedes merely took advantage of. It was only in 1612, they argue, that the Russian people put aside their differences in order to expel the foreign invaders – and even then, there were considerable social tensions.<sup>19</sup> This raises the question of why nineteenth-century Russian historians came to such different conclusions.

The most convincing answer lies in the fact that, while Karamzin and Ilovaiskii made no effort to disguise their personal beliefs, Kostomarov, Kliuchevskii, Platonov, and Soloviev consciously eschewed patriotic bias in the pursuit of objectivity. Indeed, something that the latter group have in common is a nuanced approach which recognises the confluence of a variety of factors besides foreign interference. This is evident in their careful periodisation of the Troubles (most separate the period into three consecutive stages: the dynastic, the social, and the national), their close examination of sources, and their ability to distinguish truth from propaganda.<sup>20</sup> Inspired by the methodology of the St. Petersburg School, all four collected extensive historical materials, evaluated their trustworthiness, and established causal relationships between historical facts. This approach led them to the following conclusions: that the pretender arose from a ‘nest’ of discontented boyars hoping to oust Godunov; that, until 1609, Poland’s involvement was restricted to military adventures on the part of a few opportunistic noblemen; and that the first Dmitry’s reign was not characterised by total submission to the Poles and their Catholic agenda.<sup>21</sup> Given the complexity of the Troubles, it is essential that historians acknowledge the impracticability of presenting coherent, catch-all explanations. Platonov does just this when he writes in the preface to his work: ‘The author wished to remain only a chronicler of the epoch, leaving the reader free to

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Sergei M. Soloviev, *History of Russia: vol. 14*, trans. G. Edward Orchard (Boston, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> Kostomarov, *Povest' ob osvobozhdenii Moskvy ot Polyakov v 1612 godu i Izbranie Tsarya Mikhaila* (St Petersburg, 1884), p.12.

Kliuchevskii, *A Course in Russian History*, p.53.

Platonov, *The Time of Troubles*, p.44.

Soloviev, *History of Russia*, p.129.

<sup>20</sup> Rady, Martyn, *The Tsars, Russia, Poland, and the Ukraine* (London, 1990), p.53.

<sup>21</sup> N.I. Kostomarov, *Kto byl perviy Lzhedmitrii?* (St Petersburg, 1864), pp.12, 15, 45.

Kliuchevskii, *A Course in Russian History*, pp.30, 51.

Soloviev, *History of Russia*, pp.51, 72, 73.

Platonov, *The Time of Troubles*, pp.66, 70, 81.

interpret the facts presented'.<sup>22</sup> It is precisely because of its depth and objectivity that Platonov's study remains one of the most authoritative and widely cited to date.<sup>23</sup>

It should be said that many of the historians in question are known to have had strong personal biases.<sup>24</sup> Soloviev, for instance, was deeply conservative and displayed marked animosity to Poland, which he considered a traitor to the Slavic family and a hotbed of Catholic fanaticism.<sup>25</sup> Yet he consistently downplays the role of Russia's foreign enemies and was one of the first historians to use the term 'peasant war' in relation to the period. As George Vernadskii observes, Soloviev, though a Great Russian patriot, did not feel obliged to flatter his countrymen, instead allowing himself to be guided by the evidence before him.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, Karamzin and Ilovaiskii let their patriotic, conservative outlook inform their interpretations of Russian history, believing they had a duty as historians to shape their nation's self-consciousness.<sup>27</sup> Even in his own time, Karamzin drew criticism for emphasising entertainment value over scholarly rigour.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it is historians like him who inspired Marcia Morris's remark that 'Russians have been less willing than many peoples to draw a sharp line between historiography and imaginative literature'.<sup>29</sup> While there may be some truth in this, we should not allow it to obscure the achievements of the historians just mentioned. Overall, the level of emphasis that Imperial-era historians placed on the issue of foreign intervention depended on their own historiographical approach, be it subjectivist or objectivist.

In the Soviet Union, the Marxian approach to history became the new orthodoxy. Consequently, the objectivity of historical research was denied, and like all sciences, history was treated as a weapon in the revolutionary class struggle.<sup>30</sup> According to John Barber, by the 1920s, most Soviet historians adhered to the notion that they had a role to play in the

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<sup>22</sup> Platonov, *The Time of Troubles*, p.xvii.

<sup>23</sup> Robert O. Crummey, *The Formation of Muscovy 1304-1613* (London, 1987), pp.205.

<sup>24</sup> Vernadskii, *Russian Historiography*, pp.94-137.

<sup>25</sup> G. Edward Orchard, 'Introduction', in Soloviev, *History of Russia*, p.xvii.

<sup>26</sup> Vernadskii, *Russian Historiography*, p.97.

<sup>27</sup> Shakhanov, '...V moikh rabotakh', p.7.

Black, *Nicholas Karamzin*, p.121.

<sup>28</sup> Mazour, *Modern Russian Historiography*, p.72.

<sup>29</sup> Marcia A. Morris, *Writing the Time of Troubles: False Dmitry in Russian Literature* (Boston, 2018), p.xviii.

<sup>30</sup> Paul H. Aron, 'M.N. Pokrovskii and the Impact of the First Five Year Plan on Soviet Historiography', in John Shelton Curtiss (Ed.), *Essays in Russian and Soviet History, in Honour of Geroid Tanquary Robinson* (Leiden, 1963), p.294.

construction of Communism through their works.<sup>31</sup> Initially, this translated into a rejection of the patriotic approach to history in favour of a new one guided by the principles of Socialist internationalism.<sup>32</sup> In the context of scholarship on the Troubles, this trend is most evident in the works of Pokrovskii. Inspired by Engel's study on the sixteenth-century peasant uprisings in Germany, he argues that the events of this period brought about a transition from feudalism to capitalism, presupposing the equivalence of Russia's historical development with that of Germany.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, he claims that the appearance of the first pretender was linked exclusively to internal, not external events, and that, if the Poles did provide support, it was only because they recognised that he already had a mass following in Muscovy.<sup>34</sup> The reason for his popularity, he contends, lies in the fact he was a revolutionary 'cossack tsar', whose goal was the establishment of a primitive form of democracy; those who argue otherwise are, in Pokrovskii's eyes, bourgeois falsifiers with a vested interest in covering up the radicalism of the impostor and his supporters.<sup>35</sup> Pokrovskii's anti-patriotism is clear in his assertion that the final stage of the Troubles cannot be called a national liberation struggle because the boyars and merchants who stoked the rebellion did so out of fear that close links with Poland would threaten their monopoly on merchant capital.<sup>36</sup>

In the 1930s, we see a decisive shift away from this interpretation. As Trotsky's ideas about world revolution being the end goal of history gave way to a new, isolationist form of Soviet patriotism, the theories of the Pokrovskii School were no longer acceptable and historians began to revive the pre-revolutionary emphasis on foreign intervention.<sup>37</sup> Another important transformation during this decade was the increased involvement of the Communist party in intellectual life.<sup>38</sup> Since historical truth was now dictated from above, the change in state ideology naturally left a clear mark on historiography, not least of all the works of A.I. Kozachenko and A.A. Savich. In 1939, they were each commissioned to produce a study that reassessed the origins of the False Dmitrys and the role of Poland-Lithuania in their campaigns.<sup>39</sup> Reflecting a broader trend by which the pretenders began to be viewed

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<sup>31</sup> John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis 1928-1932* (London, 1981), p.144.

<sup>32</sup> George M. Enten, Tatiana Gorn, and Cheryl Kern, *Soviet Historians and the Study of Russian Imperialism* (Philadelphia, 1979), p.15.

<sup>33</sup> Dunning, *Russia's First Civil War*, p.7.

<sup>34</sup> M.N. Pokrovskii, *Russkaya istoriya v samom szhatom ocherkye* (Moscow, 1923), p.47.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>37</sup> Vovin-Lebedev, 'Obraz polskikh interventov', p.137.

<sup>38</sup> Barber, *Soviet Historians*, p.144.

<sup>39</sup> Vovin-Lebedev, 'Obraz polskikh interventov', p.137.

exclusively as foreign stooges, they make the case that the Troubles resulted from a joint Polish-Jesuit conspiracy.<sup>40</sup> In both works we encounter the traditional stereotype of the Polish gentry as devious arch-manipulators. For instance, Kozachenko devotes considerable attention to the argument that the Poles had long sought ways of enslaving the Russian people and annexing territory to the east.<sup>41</sup> He accuses the Polish government of closely monitoring Russia's internal affairs by way of an extensive spy network, which identified the appearance of the first impostor as an opportunity to subsume Muscovy into the Commonwealth.<sup>42</sup> The espionage trope reappears further on when he alleges that Marina, the First Dmitry's Polish wife, was given explicit instructions from the Polish king and his Jesuit advisors to spy on Russia with a view to helping the *szlachta* seize power.<sup>43</sup> Without a shred of evidence, he even suggests that the pretender spoke Polish more fluently than he did Russian, something that no historian of this period – not even Ilovaiskii – would corroborate.<sup>44</sup>

Savich identifies a clear motive for this conspiracy, namely the 'traditional and tendentious' refusal of the Poles to recognise the Grand Duke of Muscovy as the rightful ruler of the Russian lands.<sup>45</sup> In his critique of previous historians' works, he berates the likes of Pokrovskii and Platonov for discounting 'irrefutable' evidence regarding the role of the Polish parliament and gentry.<sup>46</sup> It transpires that what he considers irrefutable are the contemporary accounts of the Russian people, who, he claims, 'perfectly understood the essence of unfolding phenomena'.<sup>47</sup> In this respect, he fails to distinguish between truth and propaganda in the tradition of Platonov and Kostomarov. Moreover, both Savich and Kozachenko differ from their pre-revolutionary counterparts in their complete disregard for the realities faced by Poland-Lithuania at this time: as Norman Davies points out, the state's limited resources and finances, in conjunction with overwhelming opposition in the *Sejm* to full-scale invasion, militated against Polish involvement.<sup>48</sup> The state-endorsed patriotic interpretation is especially clear in the fact that they frame the militias that liberated Moscow

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<sup>40</sup> A.A. Zimin, 'Nyekotorie voprosy istorii krest'yanskoi voiny v Rossii v nachalye XVII vyeke', *Voprosy istorii*, No.3 (1958), p.99.

<sup>41</sup> A.I. Kozachenko, *Razgrom pol'skoi interventsii v nachalye XVII vyeke* (Moscow, 1939), p.23.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>45</sup> A.A. Savich, 'Pol'skaya interventsia nachala XVII v. v otsenkye M.N. Pokrovskogo', in B. Grekov, S. Bushuyev et al. (Eds.) *Protiv istoricheskoi kontseptsii M.N. Pokrovskogo* (Moscow, 1939), p.16.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland: Volume 1: The Origins to 1795* (Oxford, 1981), p.455.

in 1613 as a ‘national army’ which succeeded on the back of a wave of popular patriotism.<sup>49</sup> During the same period, their academic colleague, Yevgeny Tarlé, was compelled to change his approach to the War of 1812 to fit a similar nationalistic narrative.<sup>50</sup>

While there may appear to be a tension between this emphasis on foreign intervention and the continued necessity of declaring the period a ‘peasant war’, historians overcame this problem in several ways. In some cases, they simply ignored evidence of lower-class support for the pretenders.<sup>51</sup> Others, like I.I. Smirnov, contend that False Dmitry I manipulated the ‘tsarist psychology’ of the peasant masses – in other words, they supported him out of a naïve faith in the socio-utopian agenda of the ‘good tsar’.<sup>52</sup> Some, including I.S. Shepelev, even managed to weave the narrative of national liberation into that of the class struggle, declaring that the expulsion of the Polish interventionists was as much about patriotic self-sacrifice as it was anti-feudalism.<sup>53</sup> The notion that the Russian boyars collaborated with the *szlachta* in order to protect their shared class interests actually reinforced the Marxist interpretation of the Troubles.<sup>54</sup>

To make sense of this historiographical transformation, it is necessary to address the hostility of the Soviet authorities towards Poland during this period. In 1937, at the height of the Great Terror, Nikolai Yezhov issued order No. 00485 for the liquidation of the ‘Polish diversionist and espionage groups and organisations of the Polish Military Organisation (POV)’.<sup>55</sup> Poles were blamed not only for the 1933 famine and the failure of collectivisation but also the weakening of Soviet power on the international stage.<sup>56</sup> The false belief that Poland had signed a secret codicil with Germany — dressed up as a non-aggression pact — justified the persecution of over a hundred thousand Soviet citizens of Polish origin.<sup>57</sup> Bearing in mind the strong influence that the state exerted on historiography in this decade, the fact that the studies just mentioned were commissioned at a time of rampant anti-Polish hysteria can

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<sup>49</sup> Dunning, *Russia’s First Civil War*, p.404.

<sup>50</sup> Mazour, *Modern Russian Historiography*, p.208.

<sup>51</sup> Skrynnikov, *Sotsial’no-politicheskaya bor’ba*, p.10.

<sup>52</sup> Maureen Perrie, *Pretenders and Popular Monarchism in Early Modern Russia: The False Tsars of the Time and Troubles* (Cambridge, 1995), p.247.

Smirnov, I.I., *Vosstaniye Bolotnikova 1606-1607* (Leningrad, 1949), p.83.

<sup>53</sup> Mazour, *The Writing of History in the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1975), p.113.

<sup>54</sup> Rudolf Schlesinger, ‘Recent Soviet Historiography. II,’ *Soviet Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1950), p.310.

<sup>55</sup> Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner: People’s Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1895-1940* (Stanford, 2002), p.95.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010), p.91.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

hardly be deemed coincidence. According to Anatole Mazour, antipathy towards Poland had ended by 1948, when Soviet historians were told to stress the ‘fundamental similarities’ between Poland and Russia in a mark of post-war friendship.<sup>58</sup> Be that as it may, Chester Dunning provides evidence of the fact that, as late as the 1960s, Soviet historians continued to regard Dmitry as a stooge of feudal Polish interventionists.<sup>59</sup>

It is essential to draw attention to the anti-Polish bias that pervades the works of nineteenth-century conservatives and their Soviet successors. Only through an awareness of the political and historiographical trends that informed their approach to the period can academics seek to amend their interpretative flaws. To a large extent, this has already been achieved: beginning with R.G. Skrynnikov in the late 1980s, new sources and understandings — as well as a relaxation of ideological constraints — allowed for a wave of new interpretations, most of which reject the patriotic bias of earlier studies and re-evaluate the extent to which foreigners instigated and propelled the Troubles.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, there is still a need for more focused studies dedicated to shattering the deep-rooted myths and misinterpretations that surround the issue of foreign intervention.

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<sup>58</sup> Mazour, *Modern Russian Historiography*, p.222.

<sup>59</sup> Dunning, *Russia's First Civil War*, p.9.

<sup>60</sup> Maureen Perrie, ‘The Time of Troubles (1603–1613)’, in M. Perrie (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia* (Cambridge, 2006), p.410.

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