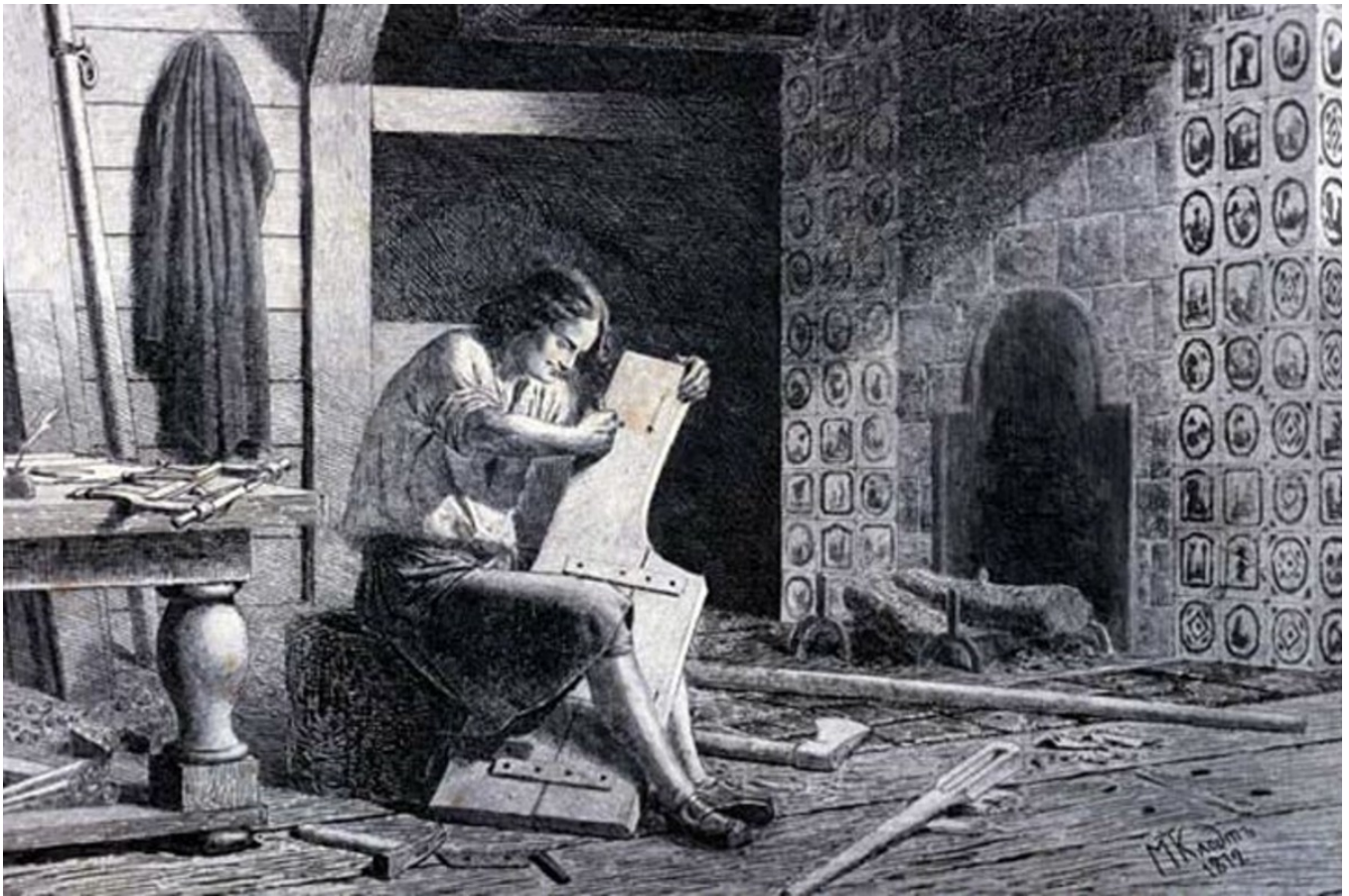


Petro Primo special project: Peter's teachers

In the last issue of Petro Primo, telling about the role of Peter I in the development of education in Russia, we mentioned that the Tsar himself loved to learn and did it through his entire life, mastered different crafts, personally drew drawings, made schemes, plans; he, it seemed, was interested in absolutely all the sciences. And he was a very diligent student. And who were the teachers of the Russian autocrat? Who gave him the knowledge which his soul and inquiring mind craved?

This week, Russia celebrated Teacher's Day. And in today's issue of Petro Primo we will tell you about Peter's teachers.



When the future emperor was five years old, chicaner Nikita Zotov was appointed as his mentor. Under the guidance of his first teacher, the Tsarevich learned to read and memorize, mostly religious texts — the Horologion, the Psalter and the Gospel. Nikita Zotov tried to give his pupil a general educational knowledge of history, told about the deeds of Russian princes and tzars, the battles, showed picture books depicting European cities with beautiful buildings and ships.

The first teacher for the life term entered the circle of Peter's entourage, accompanied him on military campaigns and made a pretty good career. In 1695,

he was the head of the tsar's campaign office at Azov; since 1701 he headed the Inner Office and Pechatny Prikaz (the governing body of the Russian state administered by the state seal holder). Despite the serious position of the clerk in the Boyars' Council, which Nikita Zotov got in the 1680s, he did not shun the merry fun of his pupil and was an active participant of the jovial fun and play (as «prince-pope») in «the most madcap and all-drunken council». In 1711, the Emperor granted Nikita Zotov and all his descendants the title of Count for his faithful service.

But back to Peter's childhood. From an early age he was extremely inquisitive, simply irrepressible child. He wanted to know everything and be able to do everything. Instead of toys, he was given tools; at age 11 he got a workbench and lathe, and by the age of 15, he was proficient in fourteen different trades. Naturally, the boy could not remain indifferent to the art of war. He mastered the skills of an artilleryman and the wisdom of fortification under the guidance of Captain Fyodor Sommer during training with his mock regiments in Preobrazhenskoe and Semyonovskoe villages.

And then Peter met Franz Lefort, who became his close friend and teacher — not so much in science as in life. During the Trinity Stay, Lefort became vitally needed to Peter as a clever mother to a child: Lefort could understand his wishes from the word go, guarded him against dangers, taught him to see the advantages and disadvantages, and, it seemed, he himself warmly loved him, was constantly near the tsar not in order to ask for something, as the boyars would do — melancholy banging their forehead at the Tsar's feet, begging for more villages and people, but for the common cause and common pleasures for both of them. Elegant, chatty, good-natured, like the morning sun in a window, he appeared — with bows and smiles — in Peter's bedchamber, and so with merriment, joyful concerns, and happy expectations — the day would begin. Peter loved in Lefort his sweet thoughts of foreign lands, beautiful cities and harbors with ships and brave captains, smelling of tobacco and rum, — everything that since childhood he had dreamed of in pictures and printed sheets brought from abroad.



Peter I got greatly attached to Lefort, often visited him at his home in the German Sloboda on the outskirts of Moscow, where hired German officers lived. And there he met many people from whom he got the essential knowledge for himself. For example, the Dutch engineer and merchant Franz Timmermann taught him how to use an astrolabe, did geometry with him, and taught him fortification work. Peter's hyperactivity sometimes prevented systematic education — he lacked patience and assiduity, he reacted to everything new, wanted to learn and try everything. So one day, in Izmailovo, in one of the barns, he saw [an English boat](#) and decided to have his own fleet. Of great importance for Peter the Great himself and for his transformations in Russia was his acquaintance with the great German scientist Gottfried Leibniz. They first met in 1696, during the tsar's Great Embassy to Europe under the name of Peter Mikhailov. During the trip, the tsar studied various crafts and met prominent people, including Leibniz, who then was already famous.

A new meeting took place in 1711. Leibniz managed to see in Peter the Great an enlightened monarch. The emperor and the scientist began a correspondence, Peter listened to the advice of Leibniz, invited him to the service in Russia as a privy counselor of justice. But Gottfried Leibniz never arrived, although he worked for Russia while in Germany. He proposed interesting projects to Peter on the unification of the churches, on shipping, and on geography. But the most important advice of the scholar, embodied by Peter, can be considered the establishment in 1724 of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences.

Peter the Great had extensive but haphazard knowledge, and he was always burdened by the fact that he could not learn properly as a child. That is why with such energy he established schools in Russia, striving to educate his subjects of all estates.

You can learn more about Peter the Great on the portal of the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library.

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