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The Public Face of Private Life: the  
Family-Presentation Ritual in Muscovite  
Russia

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## **The Public Face of Private Life: the Family-Presentation Ritual in Muscovite Russia**

Marshall Poe

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This essay concerns a common rite of conviviality among the seventeenth-century Muscovite elite — the presentation of dependent female family members (wives, married daughters, servants) to guests during banquets.<sup>1</sup> This ritual stands at the nexus of private and public life in Muscovy, for while it occurred within the confines of the home it was designed to offer strangers an idealized representation of domestic relations. The first section below points out that indigenous Muscovite sources for private life, banquets, and the family-presentation ritual are problematic, and then goes on to argue that foreign accounts provide good (though neglected) information on these topics. The second section continues this line of argument by substantiating the credibility of the foreign descriptions of the family-presentation ritual. The third section surveys the descriptions themselves and variations among them. The final section offers an interpretation of the symbolism of the family-presentation ritual and its meaning for the Muscovite elite.

### **Sources for the History of Private Life: Muscovite and Foreign**

It is perhaps not sufficiently appreciated that exploring the history of “private” life in traditional societies such as Muscovy is very difficult. This is not because there was no distinction between the public and private spheres. Muscovite legislation, like that of any well-organized, marginally literate society, distinguished the household — the epitome of private life — from other sodalities such as the state, economic enterprises, and religious communities. The problem is not so much conceptual as empirical. A review of the existing indigenous sources reveals that for the most part they consist of the administrative jetsam produced as various authorities — particularly officialdom and the clergy — attempted to regulate affairs within the household according to some ideal. Examples include secular legislation, clerical regulations, all manner of advice, and trail records. Even wills and testaments, which it must be said are in some sense “private” records, performed a public function. Indeed official sources provide a window on private behavior, but only insofar as it touches on (and usually violates) public mores. Not only does this mean such sources transmit (particularly with legislation) a skewed picture private life, but also that they miss entire swaths of what must have been common private experience because they did not raise eyebrows in government offices or clerical courts. A certain amount of ground can be gained by exploring personal letters, autobiographical writings, or literary representations. These sources, however, are few and not terribly rich.

An example of the difficulties facing the historian of Old Russian private life is the banquet. It must be imagined that Muscovites, as people everywhere, gathered to enjoy one another’s company over a meal, particularly in connection with religious events, but at other times as well. Yet Muscovite sources — official and unofficial — offer little information about what went on at such affairs. Legislative sources are relatively silent on the topic. The massive *Ulozhenie* of 1649, with almost 1000 articles, contains but one reference to what might be a private banquet, and that in connection with

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<sup>1</sup>So far as I am aware this is the first extended treatment of the family-presentation ritual. It has, however, been noted in N. S. Kollmann, “The Seclusion of Elite Muscovite Women,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 10: 2 (1983): 172.

illicit drinking.<sup>2</sup> Chancellery documents, particularly petitions (*chelobitnye*) and trial transcripts (*sudnye spiski*) with long narrative sections, provide more information. But they too are laconic and focused on moral transgressions. An example is supplied in a complaint brought by two officers against the erstwhile *voevoda* Bogdan Aprelev in 1660. Aprelev is accused of enriching himself at royal expense while his minions starve. “We,” the aggrieved parties complain, “are dying of hunger and wandering from house to house . . . , [while] Bogdan lives at ease with his wife in Smolensk and invites many guests to frequent banquets (*piri*).”<sup>3</sup> The *Domostroi*, Muscovy’s only *Hausväterbuch*, contains copious pronouncements on the responsibilities of hosts and guests alike. But the value of the book for historical purposes is reduced by its thorough-going moral pedantry. Its perspective is that of a churchman who, one imagines, had little experience with the actual affairs of households or, if he knew something of them, wanted them reformed. If propriety is maintained at banquets, the *Domostroi* intones, angels will appear. “But if [the attendants] indulge in rude and shameless conversation, indecent filthy words, laughter, various amusements, harp playing, disparate music, dancing, clapping, jumping about, all kinds of games, and devilish songs . . . the angles of God will flee the banquet . . . and devils will appear.”<sup>4</sup> The pious author suggests inviting a priest to check such wayward activity. Doubtless the debauchery here described took place. And it is equally undeniable that priests were invited (especially on feast days and weddings) to the table. But these slim facts do not go very far in filling in the picture of conviviality in Muscovy. Some little progress in this direction can be made by looking at banquets in literature. To give just a few examples, the tales of “Misery-Luckless-Plight,” “Savva Grudtsyn,” and “Peter and Fevronia” all contain references of visits, feasts, dinners, and banquets.<sup>5</sup> But the information supplied is, from a social historical point of view, meager and hardly surprising. The author of “Misery-Luckless-Plight” offers a cautionary tale of drunkenness at feasts but goes no further in telling us what went on at them. Personal letters (*gramoki*) — private sources par excellence — provide almost no guidance.<sup>6</sup>

In sum, official sources provide some information on banquets, but not from the point of view of participants. Unofficial sources, while having the desired subjective point of view, are few and laconic. There is, however, a third source for the history of banquets (and private life generally) that offers both depth and subjectivity — the accounts of foreigners who visited Muscovy. Traditionally these sources have been viewed with scepticism by historians. It is often said that just as their authors were inexperienced, biased, and ignorant, so too are their accounts incomplete, skewed, and inaccurate. The advantages of foreign testimony are less frequently pointed out, but in the case of the history of conviviality easily enumerated.

First, while it is true there were many things visiting foreigners did not experience, the ways of Russian hospitality cannot be counted among them. In the course of their journeys visitors were invited to many banquets, both official and private. And, given that they took it as their task to survey Russian customs for their countrymen, the foreigners took

<sup>2</sup>The *Muscovite Law Code (Ulozhenie) of 1649*, R. Hellie trans. and ed. (Irvine, CA: Charles Schlacks, 1988), chapter 25, article 10.

<sup>3</sup>*Akty Moskovskogo gosudarstva*, N. A. Popov ed., 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1890-1901), 3: no. 37. Incidentally, this is the only text among the 2585 documents from the Moscow Desk (*moskovskii stol*) of the Military Service chancellery (*razriadnyi prikaz*), 1571-1664, printed in AMG that mentions private banquets.

<sup>4</sup>*Domostroi*, ed. V. V. Kolesova, (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1990), 44.

<sup>5</sup>See “Povest’ o gore-slochastii” in *Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi. XVII vek. Kniga pervia*, ed. L. A. Dmitriev and D. C. Likhachev (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988), 29 and 32; “Povest’ o Savve Grudtsyn,” *idem*, 42; “Povest’ o Frole Skobeeve,” *idem*, 63.

<sup>6</sup>See S. I. Kotkov, ed., *Gramotki XVII-nachala XVIII v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), with 528 late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century letters, and S. I. Kotkov, ed., *Pamiatniki delovoi pis’mennosti XVII veka. Vladimirskii krai.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), with 68 seventeenth-century letters.

great delight in offering in-depth ethnographic vignettes of Russian dining — the only such descriptions that survive. Second, while it is true that the foreigners were biased, in light of the fact that we know what their preferences were (they detail them in their writings), it is a relatively simple operation to distinguish judgment from observation. Many did not like the food they were served, but this did not prevent them from describing what was on the table. Finally, some of the data they provide is indeed inaccurate or outdated due to “borrowing” from older authors. This, however, is not an insurmountable obstacle because there are tried and true methods for separating the wheat from the chaff. Information in a given account can be compared with that found in indigenous sources and other foreign accounts. Where we find general agreement in the former case this may be taken as a confirmation of accuracy. Where we find agreement in the latter case, once borrowing has been ruled out, the same judgment is indicated, the confidence of which rises with each independent confluence of data.

### The Authenticity of the Sources

For the purposes of this essay twenty-nine accounts by foreigners who had visited Muscovy were surveyed.<sup>7</sup> Nearly all of the foreigners reported attending public and/or private banquets, however only twelve of them (1606-1700) left descriptions of the family-presentation ritual. Table 1 lists them by date of drafting.

**Table 1: Foreign Accounts of the Muscovite Family-Presentation Ritual**

<i>Written</i>	<i>Printed</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
1607	1607	Jacques Margeret	1565?-1619	French mercenary
1610-12	n/a	Samuel Maskiewicz	fl. 1580-1632	Polish statesman
1609	1612	Isaac Massa	1587-1643	Dutch merchant
1615	1615	Peter Petreius	1570-1622	Swedish diplomat
1639-47	1647	Adam Olearius	1603-71	Holsteinian diplomat
1655-56	n/a	Paul of Aleppo	fl. 1636-66	Secretary to Patriarch of Antioch
1661-63	1663	Augustin von Meyerberg	1612-88	Imperial diplomat
1671	1680	Jacob Reutenfels	unknown	Polish agent?
1675	1675	Carl Valerius Wickhart	unknown	Imperial diplomat
1678	1680	Bernard Leopold Franz Tanner	unknown	Polish diplomat
1689	1698	“De la Neuville” (psuedonym)	unknown	French agent
1698-99	1700	Johann Georg Korb	1670-1741	Austrian diplomat

The full titles, together with the relevant excerpts, are provided in appendix 1.

In determining the credibility of the accounts we must begin by asking whether successive accounts borrowed information from their predecessors. There can be little doubt that the first four descriptions of the ritual were produced independently of one another and any previous accounts. Margeret’s portrayal is the first available, so he could not have

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<sup>7</sup>Sigismund von Herberstein; Richard Chancellor (2 texts); Raffaele Barberino; Anthony Jenkinson; Albert Schlichting (2 texts); Heinrich von Staden; Daniel Printz von Buchau; Jacob Ulfeldt; Jerome Horsey; Antonio Possevino; Giles Fletcher; Samuel Maskiewicz; Hans Georg Peyerle; Jacques Margeret; Isaac Massa; Konrad Bussow; Peter Petreius; Adam Olearius; Paul of Aleppo; Augustin von Meyerberg; Samuel Collins; Jacob Reutenfels; Carl Valerius Wickhart; Bernard Leopold Franz Tanner; “De la Neuville”;

plagiarized it. Maskiewicz's work is a diplomatic report and shows little or no evidence of borrowing, and certainly not from Margeret, whose work he more than likely did not know. Massa in all likelihood knew Margeret personally (he mentions him in his book), but not his work.<sup>8</sup> In any event his description is much more elaborate than Margeret's and therefore could not have been based on it. Petreius's book is heavily reliant on a number of previous works (M. Miechowita, P. Giovio, S. von Herberstein and K. Bussow<sup>9</sup>), but none contain descriptions of the ritual in question. Olearius read very widely when drafting his treatise and cites a large number of sources, among them Petreius.<sup>10</sup> But his account is not borrowed: it is both fuller than Petreius' and, if Olearius is to be believed, based on personal experience in May, 1634 and sometime in 1643. Though he mentions being warned about the ritual before he observed it, it is hard to imagine Paul of Aleppo was familiar with the Western literature of Muscovy. Moreover, his account is of such specificity that it is difficult to suppose that it was borrowed. The accounts of Meyerberg and Reutenfels are more suspect: both knew Olearius' book and neither claims personal experience, though it should be said that both include details absent in Olearius.<sup>11</sup> Wickhardt, Tanner, Neuville and Korb probably knew Olearius (though they do not name him), but all claim personal experience.<sup>12</sup> In sum, with respect to influence the descriptions may be broken down into two classes, pre- and post-Olearius. Those written before 1647 are free of noticeable contamination; those after may have been influenced by Olearius but show signs of being based on first hand experience. None of the descriptions is a direct borrowing.

The credibility of the foreign descriptions of the family-presentation ritual is further enhanced by what is perhaps the sole description of the rite by a Russian. It is found in Gregorii Kotoshikhin's *O Rossii v tsarstvovanie Alekseia Mikhbailovich*, drafted in 1666. Kotoshikhin served in various low-ranking offices in the Diplomatic Chancellery from shortly after 1645 to 1664. As early as 1663 he was passing information to the Swedes and in 1664 he fled to Poland. He entered Swedish service in 1665.<sup>13</sup> One hesitates to call *O Rossii* an indigenous source in light of the fact that it was written at the request of the Swedish crown and in accordance with a state-descriptive literary genre absolutely foreign to Muscovite consciousness. Despite its literary form, Kotoshikhin's work is that of an insider with almost twenty years of service at the center of power. In this light it is difficult not to credit his account of life among the boyars. Kotoshikhin's description of the family-presentation ritual is generally consistent with those found in the travelers' accounts. It is reproduced in appendix 2 below.

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Johann Georg Korb; Patrick Gordon. For full citations, see M. Poe, *Foreign Descriptions of Muscovy: An Analytic Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1995).

<sup>8</sup>See I. Massa, *A Short History of the Beginnings and Present Origins of these Present Wars in Moscow under the Reign of Various Sovereigns down to the Year 1610*, trans. and ed. G. E. Orchard (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1982), 83-84 and 117.

<sup>9</sup>On these works, see Poe, *Foreign Descriptions*, 60-1, 66, 148.

<sup>10</sup>See *The Travels of Olearius in Seventeenth Century Russia*, trans. and ed. S. Baron (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1967), 14, 112, 134, 170, 259, 260, 289, and 326.

<sup>11</sup>Meyerberg and Reutenfels cites Olearius. See Meyerberg, "Puteshestvie v Moskoviiu Barona Avgustina Maierberga," trans. A. N. Shemiakin and intro. O. M. Podoiskii, ChOISR (1873), bks. 3-5:117, 164 and 400; and Reutenfels, "Skazanie sviatileshemu gertsogu toskanskomu Koz'me Tre'emu o Moskovii," ChOISR (1906), bk. 3: 6

<sup>12</sup>Korb cites Wickhart. See Korb, *Diary of an Austrian Secretary of Legation at the Court of Czar Peter the Great*, trans. and ed. Count Mac Donnell, 2 vols. (London, 1863; reprint, London, 1968), 2: 39.

<sup>13</sup>On Kotoshikhin's biography, see G. Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii v tsarstvovanie Alekseia Mikhbailovicha*, ed. A. E. Pennington (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), 1-7.

### The Family-Presentation Ritual

All the extant description of the family-presentation ritual describe the same basic rite. In the course of a meal, the master of the household ceremoniously calls certain female members of his household, dressed in all their finery, into the dining room and presents them to his guests, who in turn are invited to kiss them and accept a toast of vodka from their hands. The women then depart. There are, however, variations. The accounts disagree as to when the ritual took place during the meal, and whether it was exclusively performed during dinner. Table 2 outlines these differences.

**Table 2: When and Where did the Presentation Occur?**

<i>Account</i>	<i>When Presented</i>
Margeret (1600-06)	[unclear when and where]
Petreius (1602-11)	after meal
Massa (1606)	[unclear, but perhaps not during a meal]
Maskiewicz (1610-12)	[unclear when and where]
Kotoshikhin (1630-67)	before (wife) and mid (other married female kin) meal
Olearius 1 (1634)	[unclear, but perhaps not during a meal]
Olearius 2 (1656)	after meal
Olearius 3 (1656)	[unclear when and where]
Aleppo (1656)	before meal
Meyerberg (1661)	after meal
Reutenfels (1670-72)	[unclear when and where]
Wickhart (1675)	[unclear when, but during a meal]
Tanner (1678)	[unclear when, but during a meal]
Neuville (1689)	[unclear when, but during a meal]
Korb 1 (1699)	after meal in her chambers
Korb 2 (1699)	[unclear when and where]

Two conclusions seem warranted: the ritual generally took place at some time in the course of dinner (but with no strict rule as to when) and it could be used on any occasion in which guests visited, whether dinner was presented or not.

Another interesting variation found among the descriptions concerns those presented. Table 3 describes this.

**Table 3: Those Presented at the Family-Presentation Ritual**

<i>Account</i>	<i>Presentees</i>
Margeret (1600-06)	wife
Petrieus (1602-11)	wife, daughters, virgins, attendants
Massa (1606)	wife
Maskiewicz (1610-12)	wife, children
Kotoshikhin (1630-67)	wife, married daughter, daughters-in-law, other married female kin
Olearius 1 (1634)	wife, relative, attendant
Olearius 2 (1656)	wife
Olearius 3 (1656)	women
Aleppo (1656)	wife, daughters, small sons
Meyerberg (1661)	wife, attendants
Reutenfels (1670-72)	wife, attendants
Wickhart (1675)	wife
Tanner (1678)	wife
Neuville (1689)	wife
Korb 1 (1699)	wife
Korb 2 (1699)	wife, daughters

All the accounts agree that the wife was presented: she, as the most important person in the household next to the master, was a necessary part of the ritual. Kotoshikhin points out that she was presented first, before other female kin. Judging by the accounts, the presentation of married female relations, female attendants, and small sons would seem to have been common but discretionary: the master might or might not choose to bring them out. Only Petrieus mentions marriageable girls participating in the rite and his testimony is strongly contradicted by Kotoshikhin's statement that maidens were never presented to the public among the boyars.

Those who reported the family-presentation ritual are divided as to whether the guests were invited to kiss married women and where, as can be seen in table 4.

**Table 4: The Kiss**

<i>Account</i>	<i>Where kissed?</i>
Margeret (1600-06)	[unclear/no kiss mentioned]
Petreius (1602-11)	kiss
Massa (1606)	[unclear/no kiss mentioned]
Maskiewicz (1610-12)	kiss
Kotoshikhin (1630-67)	kiss
Olearius 1 (1634)	kiss on the lips
Olearius 2 (1656)	kiss on the lips
Olearius 3 (1656)	[unclear/no kiss mentioned]
Aleppo (1656)	kiss on the lips
Meyerberg (1661)	kiss on the lips
Reutenfels (1670-72)	kiss on the cheeks
Wickhart (1675)	kiss on the face
Tanner (1678)	kin on the lips
Neuville (1689)	[unclear/no kiss mentioned]
Korb 1 (1699)	[unclear/no kiss mentioned]
Korb 2 (1699)	kiss

It would seem that the kiss itself was an optional part of the ritual: showing married women was apparently considered by some honor enough. When a kiss was invited, it was likely on the lips, something that shocked the foreigners but was in keeping with Muscovite customs.

Less variation among the accounts is seen in absence or presence of an offer of spirit by the married women, as is seen in table 5:

**Table 5: Was Spirit Presented?**

<i>Account</i>	<i>Spirit presented?</i>
Margeret (1600-06)	[Unclear; none mentioned]
Petreius (1602-11)	Yes
Massa (1606)	[Unclear; none mentioned]
Maskiewicz (1610-12)	[Unclear; none mentioned]
Kotoshikhin (1630-67)	Yes
Olearius 1 (1634)	Yes
Olearius 2 (1656)	Yes
Olearius 3 (1656)	Yes
Aleppo (1656)	Yes
Meyerberg (1661)	Yes
Reutenfels (1670-72)	Yes
Wickhart (1675)	Yes
Tanner (1678)	Yes
Neuville (1689)	Yes
Korb 1 (1699)	Yes
Korb 2 (1699)	Yes

The offer of a glass of spirit by the women would seem to have been an almost universal part of the ritual. The fact that Margeret, Massa, and Maskiewicz do not mention such a presentation is perhaps explained by the brevity of their descriptions. It is interesting to note that Massa reports being presented an “embroidered handkerchief.”

### **The Meaning of the Family-Presentation Ritual**

What was the meaning of the family-presentation ritual for Muscovites? Superficially, it probably had little significance beyond an expression of hospitality *po moskovski*, a desire to honor guests while allowing everyone in the divided house to meet, if only briefly. Like prayers, greetings, and toasts, the rite was simply “what one did” at banquets in order to set the right tone. No one (outside the foreigners) likely thought much about what the specific moments in the ritual meant and it would be a mistake for us to attribute any such exegesis to the participants. To them it probably “felt right” simply because it was consonant with the basic patterns of Muscovite domestic life. The boyar was in charge of the household, and thus he served as impresario. Women were secluded, so they had to be “brought out” by the master. They were (at least symbolically) servants within the household, thus they presented tokens of affection (the kiss and vodka) to the honored guests who stood in the master’s place. The women themselves served as his gift to them. Yet the women were also highly honored: in the Kotoshikhin’s accounts they receive deep bows while rendering giving only slight bows in return.

Despite the fact that more often than not the ritual was simply a conventional expression of hospitality, deeper meaning can be gleaned, particularly within the context of Muscovite politics. Much of the lives of the seventeenth-century Russian magnates was consumed by the struggle for honor (*chest’*), which in turn produced the tangible rewards

of preferment at court. Given the fact that relative status was carefully tracked and regulated by the court and boyars alike, no public action vis-a-vis other notables was without wider implications for the honor of everyone in the system. In this light it is obvious that an invitation to dine privately — like a military appointment or favor from the tsar — was a highly charged event in the life of the elite. Asking a fellow courtier to dine was, at least in some cases, an aggressive act, for it smacked of alliance-building and perhaps the de-stabilization of the balance of honor among all the clans. If the invitation to dine was itself an effort to overcome suspicion and build bridges between families, the ritual of family-presentation was its most powerful moment. It worked to transform competition into trust, creating the grounds for unified activity. The power of the ritual was drawn from its use of women as tokens of honor. Marriage played an important role in the political life of the elite, for it was one of the primary mechanisms by which alliances were forged between competing families. Women were seen as key resources in this game. They were, therefore, closely guarded within the family and not often allowed to move in public where their worth might be diminished by dishonorable conduct. The family-presentation ritual systematically violated the rule of seclusion in that it involved the display of women to a very select “public.” In presenting his married women, the master of a household demonstrated his high regard for his guests: he was willing to entrust them — if only symbolically — with his clan’s most precious assets. In accepting this gift, the guest signified his willingness to lay down his arms and work with the master of the household, for the symbolic gift of the women entailed definite responsibilities for the recipient. In this sense the family-presentation ritual mimics a marriage between boyar families, substituting symbolic for actual exchange.

## Appendix 1: The Family-Presentation Ritual in Foreign Accounts of Muscovy

**Jacques Margeret** (1565?-1619; French mercenary), *Estat de l'Empire de Russie et Grand Duché de Muscovie*. Paris, 1607.

Cited text: *The Russian Empire and the Grand Duchy of Muscovy*, trans. and ed. C. S. L. Dunning (Pittsburgh, 1983), 31-32

[General Description based on experience in Muscovy, 1600-1606.] “Russian women are held under close supervision and have their living quarters separate from that of their husbands. One never sees them, for to present their wives is the greatest favor that Russian men extend to one another (except to close kin). Even if someone wants to marry, he must talk to the kinsmen of the girl, who, if they are content to enter into alliance with the prospective bridegroom, allow one of the suitor’s most loyal kinsmen or friends to go see the girl and to make his report. On the basis of this report the marriage is contracted.”

**Samuel Maskiewicz** (ca. 1580-1632; Polish statesman, diarist), “Dyaryusz Samuela Maskiewicza.” Cited text: “Dnevnik Maskevicha,” in *Skazaniia sovremennikov o Dmitrii Samozvantsse*, trans. and ed. N. Ustrialov, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1869), 2: 52-53.

[General Description based on experience in Muscovy, 1610-12.] “Rooms for women are built in the back of houses, and although they may be entered from the court by a stairway, the key is always kept by the master so that one can get into the rooms only through his chambers. They allow no men in these rooms, including household servants. The court behind the women’s quarters is surrounded with a palacade so high that not even a bird can fly through them. Here the women stroll. If the master is pleased with a guest he brings out to him his wife and children: one must without fail kiss them as a greeting — without this it would be uncivil.”

**Issac Massa** (1587-1643; Dutch merchant), “Een coort verhael van beginn oospronck deser tegenwoordige troeblen in Moscovia, totten jare 1610 int cort overlopen ondert government van diverse vorsten aldaer.” Written 1610-14. Cited text: *A Short History of the Beginnings and Present Origins of these Present Wars in Moscow under the Reign of Various Sovereigns down to the Year 1610*, trans. and ed. G. E. Orchard (Toronto, 1982), 130.

[May, 1606? Massa meets a wounded soldier who is employed as an icon painter in Moscow. He gives him a gift of some engravings, and the painter is very grateful.] “He found this present so agreeable and astonishing that he did not know what he could offer me in return to express his gratitude. ‘Ask me whatever you want,’ he said, ‘and I will give it to you. And if I can render you some service by my credit at the court of Moscow, do not hesitate to ask.’ In his enthusiasm, he called his wife and showed her to me. This lady gave me an embroidered handkerchief. The greatest honor the Muscovites think they can do any one is to show them their wives, who live secluded in private apartments where nobody can see them.”

**Peter Petreius** (1570-1622: Swedish diplomat), *Een viss och egentelich Beskriffing om Rysland* (Stockholm, 1615). Cited text: “Historien und Bericht von dem Grossfürstentumb Muschkow . . .” [Leipzig, 1620 edition] In *Rerum rossicarum scriptores exteri*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1851), 1: 307-8.

[**General description based on experiences from 1602-11.**] “They [women] are not allowed to dine with men, whether they be alone or in company, but instead they take their meals apart in their chambers and rooms with their attendants. No man is allowed to enter but the young boys who are to wait on them. [Header: Women are respectful to Visitors] When a man has guests, and the meal is at an end, the wives with their daughters, maidens and maids enter in the best jewelry and dress, present themselves to the guests, kiss them, and give them from their own hand a glass of spirit, mead or beer, with also the daughters and maidens do, and then they return to their chamber.

**Paul of Aleppo** (Assistant to the Patriarch of Antioch), No title: Travels to Muscovy, 1655-56. Cited text: *The Travels of Macarius Patriarch of Antioch. Written by his Attendant Archdeacon, Paul of Aleppo, in Arabic*, trans. F. C. Belfour, 2 vols. (London, 1829-36), 2: 285-86.

[Easter Sunday (April, 1656), Paul of Aleppo is invited to dine with the Voivoda of Bolkhov.] “On this day, I was invited by the Voivode to accompany the imperial Dragomans to his house; where he made us drink two rounds of cups of wine and spirits, whilst he stood up, and we were sitting. After the Muscovites have served their guests, it is usual for them to give the jar and goblet to the guests in turn, to pour out for them, the hosts; as was now done by the Voivode, at the present entertainment. And now I have to mention a strange thing, which I witnessed on this occasion; a thing which we had been told of, but which we would not believe. I saw it, however, with my own eyes; and it was this. After the table was set, and we had taken our places at the board, the Voivode called in his wife; who came in her finest dress, with her daughters and little boys, bowing her head to us as she entered, and saluting us. Then the Voivode placed her in the middle of the room, and begged us to go and kiss her on the mouth with the holy paschal kiss, in the virtue of which they have the highest faith, accompanied by the words ‘Christos Voskros.’ The Dragomans, to set me the example, went first, and, having kissed the lady on the mouth, repeated the words: and then they nodded to me to come forward, and they retired each to his place: but I was become like a mute statue, and was melting away in a fever of bashfulness. In vain the husband urged me vehemently: I still held back; until at length they got the Dragomans to prevail on me to go and kiss the lady, by representing to me, that otherwise the Voivode, her husband, would be seriously affronted. Overcome with shame, and pushed forward with some violence, I advanced to the lady, and kissed her mouth; and shy kissed mine, saying, ‘Christos Voskros.’ I was, as it were, without sight or sense, so great was my confusion amidst a scene I had never before witnessed: though we had been told, but I would not believe it, that not only on this day of Easter, but whenever they received a stranger as a guest at their house, they always presented their wife before him, to be kissed by him on the mouth,

and by all present; that the husband glories in this; and that it is not possible for any one to omit kissing her, unless he wishes to be turned out of the house. On retiring to my place, I bowed my head to the lady; and all the company bowed to her at the same time. Afterwards, she took a vessel of spirits and some cups, and served us to drink, twice round; and then she sat down with us to table: such is the custom here. At the end of the repast, we drank some cups to the health of the Voivode, and to the health also of his lady: and we wiped the cup each time to our lips; for whoever does not so wipe the cup, is esteemed by them a declared enemy, as not having drunk the health of the master of the house, but having done it defectively.”

**Adam Olearius** (1603-1671; Holsteinian diplomat), *Ausführliche Beschreibung der kundbaren Reys nach Muscow . . .* (Schleswig, 1647). Written 1639-47. Cited text: *The Travels of Olearius in Seventeenth Century Russia*, trans. and ed. S. Baron (Stanford, 1967), 2.

[May 30, 1634. The embassy, traveling through Swedish territory on its way to Novgorod, is hosted at the estate of a certain Nikita Vasil'evich.] “Before we left he brought his wife and one of her relatives to meet us; both had young, lovely faces and were richly dressed. They were accompanied by an ugly attendant, the better to emphasize their beauty. Each lady had to sip a cup of vodka in honor of each of the ambassadors, then hand it over and bow to him. The Russians consider it the greatest honor they can pay a guest to show him in this manner that he has been agreeable and welcome. Where friendship and intimacy are very great, the guest is permitted to kiss the wife on the mouth, of which more will be said below.”

Idem, 158-59

[1643. Olearius dines with Count Lev Aleksandrovich Shliakhovskii [born ‘von Slicks’], a Protestant who fled Catholic oppression in 1640 and entered Russian service. He converted to Orthodoxy.] “The highest mark of respect and friendship they show a guest at a feast or in the course of a visit, to convey that he is welcome and that they approve of him, is as follows. After the guest has been fed, the Russian has his wife, richly dressed, brought out to the guest to present him with a cup of vodka from her own hand. Occasionally, as a mark or particular favor to the guest, he is permitted to kiss her on the mouth. This great honor was rendered me personally by Count Lev Aleksandrovich Shliakhovskii, when I was last in Moscow, in 1643. After a sumptuous dinner he called me away from the table and the other guests. He ushered me into another room and said that the greatest honor and favor anyone can be given in Russia is for the mistress of the house to come out and render homage to the guest as to the master. Since I, as an aide of His Excellence the Prince of Holstein, was dear to him, to show his respect and reverence for the many kindnesses the prince had extended him at the time of his persecution and migration (of which more below), he wanted to do me this honor. Then his wife came forth. She had a very lovely, but berouged face, and was dressed in her wedding costume. She was accompanied by a maid who carried a bottle of vodka and a cup. Upon her entry she bowed her head first to her husband and then to me. Then she ordered a cup of vodka poured out, took a sip, and handed it to me to drink, repeating this procedure three times. Then the count invited me to kiss her. Since I was unaccustomed to such honors, I kissed only her hand, but he insisted that I kiss her

mouth. Accordingly, out of respect to a higher ranking personage, I was obliged to adapt myself to their custom and accept this honor. Finally, she handed me a white satin handkerchief, embroidered with gold and silver, and embellished with a long fringe. The wives and daughters of the magnates present such handkerchiefs to a bride on her wedding day. Attached to the one given me was a little paper on which was inscribed the name of Streshnev, the uncle of Grand Princess.”

Idem, 169

[General description based on experiences in 1634 and 1643?] “Because they [elite women] are mistrusted, they are rarely allowed out of the house, even to go to church. These customs, however, are not strictly observed among the common people. At home the women go poorly attired except when they appear, at the order of their husbands, to render honor to a strange guest by sipping a cup of vodka to him, or when they go through the streets, to church, for example; then they are supposed to be dressed gorgeously, with their faces and throats heavily made up.”

**Augustin Freiherr von Meyerberg** (1612-88; Imperial diplomat), *Iter in Moschoviam . . . ad Tsarem et Magnum Ducem Alexium Mihalovicz, Anno M.DC.LXI* (n.d., n.p.) Cited text: “Puteshestvie v Moskoviiu Barona Avgustina Maierberga,” trans. A. N. Shemiakin and intro. O. M. Podoiskii, ChOISR (1873), bks. 3-5: 37.

[General description based on experiences in 1661.] “The wife of the master [of the house] always comes into the dining room [dressed] in the most elegant kaftan and in completely feminine attire, accompanied by two or more female servants. She presents the most esteemed in the company a glass of vodka, having wetted the very edge of her own lips. While he is drinking, she quickly removes to her room, dresses in another kaftan, and immediately returns in order to fulfill her obligation to another member of the party. Having completed this ritual with the rest of the guests, she then stands near a fore wall. Standing with eyes downturned toward the floor and her arms at her sides she patiently gives her mouth to the kisses of the party members, who approach her according their estate and reeking of the disgusting smells of everything they have eaten and drunk. By the way, at [Dumnyi Dvorianin Afanasii Levrent’evich Ordyn-] Nashokin’s banquet nothing of this sort transpired. His wife did not come to us.”

**Jacob Reutenfels** (Polish agent), *De rebus Muscoviticis ad serenissimum Magnum Hetruriae Ducem Cosmum tertium* (Padua, 1680). Written 1671. Cited text: “Skazanie sviatileishemu gertsogu toskanskomu Koz’me Tret’emu o Moskovii,” ChOISR (1906), bk. 3: 148.

[General Description based on experiences from 1670-72.] “When they wish to show particular kindness to a stranger, who is enjoying their favor, husbands and fathers sometimes direct their wives or daughters, dressed in their most valuable clothes and surrounded by many servants, to present themselves to the gaze of the guest and to carry to them a silver goblet of vodka, and then they most eagerly invite the guest, as a pledge of friendship, to kiss

his wife. Having bowed, he must move toward her — standing still — and give her a light kiss, not on her mouth, nor on the lips, but on both cheeks, and then move away from her in the same fashion.”

**Carl Valerius Wickhart** (Imperial diplomat), *Moscowittische Reijs-Beschreibung* . . . (Vienna, 1675). Written, 1675. Cited text: original, 257-58.

[General description based on experiences in 1675.] “When they invite a stranger to dine with them, the wife adorns herself in her best ornaments and jewels, and so made up, she amicably receives the arriving guest with a kiss on the face and, by her own hand, a cup of spirit. After the cup is drunk, he must thank the hostess with a kiss in turn because of the honor she had done to him. This happened to me twice in Moscow, but both times the old women were so drunk from spirit that they were hardly able to stand.”

**Bernard Leopold Franz Tanner** (Polish diplomat), *Legatio Polono-Lituanica in Moscoviam* . . . (Nuremberg, 1680 or 1689?) Cited text: “Opisanie puteshestvia pol’skogo posol’stva v Moskvu v 1678 g.,” ChOISR (1891), bk. 3: 101.

[General description based on experiences in 1678.] “Entertaining us quite often at dinner, they observed the following custom. They do not admit their wives to banquets to banquets, unless the esteemed guests or close friends ask [to see them.] Then the wife appears with dressed in her best clothes with her hand behind her back and stands by the stove. The guests then approach her with a greeting, one after another, holding, like her, their hands behind their back. Their lips are extended to one another, kiss with them, and by this means they declare their favor and friendship. Having been kissed, she carries a cup of vodka to whomever [kissed her] and then departs. The husband then gives permission [to the guests] to speak and converse further as they want with his wife, even when he is not present.”

**“De la Neuville”** [pseudonym]. *Relation curieuse, et nouvelle de Moscovie* . . . (Paris, 1698). Written, 1689. *A Curious and New Account of Muscovy in the Year 1689*, ed. and intro. L. Hughes, trans. J. A. Cutshall, *SSEES Occasional Papers* 23 (University of London, 1994), 12.

[August/September, 1689. Neuville is invited to diner by Andrei Artamonovich Matveev.] “Three days after this banquet, Matveev invited me to dine at his house, where I was very properly entertained. The whole meal consisted (because of their Lent, which had begun the day before) of fish from the Caspian Sea and the Volga which are brought alive back up the river to the stoltitz. To do me greater honor, he called his wife and presented her to me. I greeted her in the French manner and she drank a cup of vodka to my health, passing the cup to me so that I might do likewise. She is the only woman in the country who uses no rouge and has never painted herself. She is also quite pretty.”

**Johann Georg Korb** (1670-1741; Austrian diplomat), *Diarium itineris in Moscoviam . . .* (Vienna, 1700 or 1701). Cited text: *Diary of an Austrian Secretary of Legation at the Court of Czar Peter the Great*, trans. and ed. Count Mac Donnell, 2 vols. (London, 1863; reprint, London, 1968), 2: 37.

[July 23, 1699. After a banquet with elaborate entertainment at the boyar Lev Kirilowich Naryshkin's estate on the way back to Vienna.] "As the rain drove us from this most pleasant exercise, we retired again to the apartments of the Boyar. Nareshkin, taking the Lord Envoy by the hand, led him to his wife's chamber to salute and be saluted. There is no higher mark in the highest degree whom the husband invites to embrace his wife, and to receive the extreme compliment of a sip of brandy from her hand."

Idem 2: 207-8

[General description based on experience in 1699?] "Those of any dignity or honorable condition are not urged to be present at banquets, nor do they even sit at the ordinary table of their husbands. They may be seen, nevertheless, at present when they go to church or drive out to visit their friends; for there has been a great relaxation of the jealous old rule which required women only to go out in carriages so closed up, that the very use of eyesight was denied to these creatures made bond-slaves. Moreover, they hold it among the greatest honors that can be paid if a husband admits his guest to see his wife or daughters, who present a glass of brandy, and expect a kiss from the favored guest; and, according to the manner of this people, duly propitiated with this, they withdraw in silence, as they came. "

**Appendix 2: Kotoshikhin's Description of the Family-Presentation Ritual**

G. Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii v tsarstvom Alekseia Mikhailovicha*, ed. A. E. Pennington (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), 159-160.

“There is this custom. Before dinner they order their own wives to come out and hail [*chelom udarit*] the guests. And when their wives arrive and stand in the chamber or room, where the guests are eating in the place of honor, the guests stand at the door, and the wives bow slightly [*malym obychaem*] to the guests and all the guests bow deeply [*v zemliu*]. Then the master of the house hails the guests and bows deeply in a similar fashion, [asking] if the guests would be pleased to kiss his wife. First, at the request of the guests, the master kisses his wife. Then, one after another, the guests bow deeply to their wives and, having moved toward them, they kiss [them], and having kissed them, move away, again bowing deeply. And she, whom they kiss, bow slightly to the guests. And then the master's wife begins to carry to the guests goblets of spiced vodka twice or three times distilled with herbs. These goblets hold a quarter of a *kvarta* or slightly more. The master of the house begins to hail the guests and bow deeply, no matter how many guest there are, a bow for each guest, [asking] if the they would be pleased to drink the vodka presented by his wife. First, by the request of the guests, the master commands his wife to drink the vodka and then he drinks himself. They carry [the goblets] to the guests, and before drinking the vodka the guests bow deeply, [then] drinking and returning the goblets. And whoever does not drink vodka, he is given instead Burgundy or Rhine [wine], or some other drink by the goblet. After drinking, the wife of the master, bowing to the guests, goes to her own chambers [*pokoï*] to the [female?] guests and the female boyars, to the wives of the guests. Neither the wife of the lord nor any of the guests' wives, except at weddings, mix with the men, unless they be very close relatives. When they [men and women] eat together, strangers are never present. By this custom at dinner with a variety of dishes the master and guests drink vodka by the goblet, Burgundy, Rhine wine, sweetened beer and plain, and various sorts of mead. At dinner, when the dish of round pies is brought out, before these pies come the wives of the master's sons and his married daughters, or the wives of other relatives. And the guests, having arisen and approached from behind the table to the doors, bow to the wives, and the husbands of these wives in similar fashion bow and hail, [asking] if the guests would kiss their wives and drink vodka from them. The guests, having kissed the wives and drunk the vodka, sit back down at the table and the wives return from whence they came. They do not bring out their virgin daughters, nor do they show them to anyone. These daughters live in distant, separate chambers.