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Russia as Sources for Muscovite History:
A Methodological Guide

Marshall Poe
University of Iowa, marshall-poe@uiowa.edu

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The Use of Foreign Descriptions of Russia as Sources for Muscovite History: A Methodological Guide

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I have written these things and handed them down to the memory of posterity, not only as an ear, but as an eye-witness and that not with any disguise in my description, but openly and freely.

Sigismund Herberstein, 1549¹

Foreign descriptions of Muscovy are paradoxical sources. They provide information on a host of topics poorly attested in Old Russian sources, yet for a number of reasons they are difficult to use with confidence. First among them is the problem of selection. The texts are very numerous and of uneven quality. How is one to choose a manageable subset of trustworthy descriptions? A second issue is bias. It is clear that some of the foreigners were Russophobic, and that even well-intentioned visitors were sometimes partial and confused. How is one to correct for intentional and unintentional distortion? Finally, there is the question of verification. Even the best foreign descriptions are marred by dubious and inaccurate statements. How is one to separate fact from fancy? The following essay provides guidelines for historians facing the problems of selection, bias, and verification when using the foreign accounts as sources for Muscovite history. In the first section, a list of the best foreign descriptions of Muscovy is proposed. In the second section, a method for analyzing the bias of particular authors and texts is offered. In the final section, techniques for verification of information in the accounts are presented.

The Selection of Accounts

The way in which researchers select foreign sources must in the first instance depend on their aims. Most historical projects fall into one of three categories — what might be called event, period, and thematic studies. Event studies analyze short-term occurrences, for example, the founding of the *oprichnina* in 1565. The problem of selection is at its least troublesome here, for there are likely to be very few foreign accounts that speak to such subjects and they can all be examined by the researcher. The chief difficulty is arriving at completeness, because it is not always easy to be sure that all the relevant foreign sources have been found. Period studies focus on longer time-frames, for example, the history of *oprichnina* from its foundation to elimination. Here the problem of selection is proportional to the length of the period under investigation. The longer the period under investigation, the more sources are likely to be available; the more sources available, the greater the necessity of making a reasoned selection. Thematic studies shift the focus of investigation from short- and medium-term events to socio-historical structures obtaining over long periods, for example, political violence at the Muscovite court. Here the problem of selection becomes critical: no historian can be

¹Herberstein (1517-49), 1: 1. All references to foreign accounts in this essay have been abbreviated. For full bibliographic information on original editions and cited texts, see Appendix 1.

expected to review hundreds of foreign accounts, many of which will have nothing useful to relate. In light of the importance of reasoned selection to thematic studies, most of what follows will pertain to them.

The first step in selection is the elimination of derivative texts. These may be divided into two classes, cosmographies and monographic accounts that are full of borrowed material. Cosmographies were collections of short descriptions of countries or regions of the globe. According to Jean Bodin's definition, such books contained "the origins, conditions, changes and fall of not only illustrious peoples, but also of all peoples, yet with a brevity such that one can see almost at a glance what was the established form of each state."² The title of Peter Heylyn's cosmography perfectly captured the elements of inclusiveness and brevity: *Microcosmus, or a little description of the great world* (Oxford, 1621). Naturally, cosmographers could not practically travel to all parts of the earth in search of ethnographic data, so they relied on the accounts of others. Sebastian Münster, perhaps the greatest cosmographer of the era, advised his readers that it was not necessary to "wander all over the world to observe and experience the conditions of countries, cities, rivers, mountains, valleys, and the customs, habits, laws, and governments of men as well as the property and nature of animals, trees, and creatures."³ Münster insisted that one could "find these things in books, and indeed learn and experience more of this or that land than someone who has spent a year and a day in it."⁴ The stock and trade of cosmography, then, was borrowing — the acknowledged or, more likely, unacknowledged appropriation of information from previous works, usually published. For example, an examination of early cosmographies including descriptions of Russia demonstrates that later authors routinely borrowed information from their predecessors, as is suggested in Table 1.⁵

²Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia UP, 1945), 21.

³Münster (1544), *Vorrede*.

⁴Münster (1544), *Vorrede*.

⁵See Marshall Poe, "Muscovy in European Cosmographies, 1504-1544," forthcoming in *Russian History/Histoire Russe*. A list of forty-three cosmographies with information on Muscovy is found in Marshall Poe, *Foreign Descriptions of Muscovy: An Analytic Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1995), 217-18.

Table 1: Borrowing among Early Cosmographies Including Moscovitica

<i>Text</i>		<i>Source</i>
Krantz (1504)	>	unknown
Miechowa (1517)	>	unknown
Boemus (1520)	>	Miechowa (1517)
Pirckheimer (1530)	>	Miechowa (1517) (and Herberstein (1517-49)?)
Münster (1530)	>	Miechowa (1517) and Giovio (1525)
Franck (1534)	>	Pirckheimer (1530) and Boemus (1520)
Münster (1536)	>	Boemus (1520) or Franck (1534)
Magnus (1539)	>	Miechowa (1517) and Giovio (1525)
Münster (1544)	>	Miechowa (1517) and Giovio (1525)

Though most cosmographers were rather crude plagiarists, there are exceptions. Miechowa, for instance, provides unique information on early sixteenth-century Muscovy.⁶ But by and large cosmographies are to be avoided as sources of information about Muscovite affairs, though they are of value to those interested in early European images of Russia.

European interest in Muscovy became so great in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that men who had never been there began to write ethnographic descriptions of the country. For example, John Milton wrote an account of Russia, but it is clear he never traveled to the distant northern kingdom.⁷ Similarly, Jodocus Crull wrote a long book entitled *The Ancient and Present State of Muscovy* (London, 1698), but he in fact had never set foot in Russia.⁸ Both authors traveled to Muscovy in the comfort of their studies and thus simply reported what other, more adventurous men had said. Though such secondhand reports may be of value for those studying the early modern European conception of Russia, they are of little positive value for the Muscovite historian. As in all such cases, it is better to identify the author's (primary) sources and investigate them. While the works of sedentary scholars are generally of dubious value, there are exceptions: Livonians, Poles, and Germans wrote useful histories touching on the reign of Ivan IV, but most never traveled to Muscovy.⁹

Even after completely derivative items such as cosmographical vignettes and books written by stay-at-home scholars have been eliminated, the list of potential foreign accounts remains unmanageably long. A second culling can be reasonably based on the coverage of the text. Here it is useful to further distinguish particular genres. News ephemera (*Flugschriften*, currantos, etc.) offer excellent data about short-term events.¹⁰ They will be useful in event and period

⁶Miechowa (1517).

⁷Milton (1648).

⁸Crull (1698).

⁹On these sources, see Andreus Kappeler, *Ivan Groznyy im Spiegel der ausländischen Druckschriften seiner Zeit. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des westlichen Rußlandbildes* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1972), 37-38, 44-45, 51-53, 69-73, 77-82, 87-91, and 102-4.

¹⁰On these sources, see Andreus Kappeler, *Ivan Groznyy, passim; idem*, "Die deutschen Flugschriften über die Moskowiter und Iwan den Schrecklichen im Rahmen der Rußlandliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts," in *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht 9-17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Mechthild Keller (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987), 150-82; *idem*, "Die letzten Oprichninajahre (1569-71) im Lichte dreier zeitgenössischer deutscher Broschüren," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 19 (1971): 1-30; V. G. Vasilevskii, "Pol'skaia i nemetskaia pečat' o voine Batoriia c Ioannom Groznyy," *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* 261 (1889): 127-68 and 350-91; Inge Auerbach, "Rußland in deutschen Zeitungen (16. Jahrhundert)," in *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht*, 183-95; Aleksandr L. Gol'dberg, "Izvestiia o Rossii v zapadnoevropeiskikh periodicheskikh izdaniakh XVI-XVII vekov," *Voprosy istorii* 7 (1961): 204-207; Martin Welke, "Deutsche Zeitungsberichte über den Moskauer Staat im 17. Jahrhundert," in *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht*, 264-86; *idem*, "Höfische Repräsentation und politische Propaganda — Voraussetzungen eines positiven Fürstenbildes? Hof und Herrschaft der ersten Romanovs in der zeitgenössischen Presse," *Daphnis* 11 (1982): 377-97; *idem*, "Rußland in der deutschen Publizistik des 17.

studies, but of less value for thematic topics. Diplomatic missions produced a lot of written detritus — instructions, descriptions of negotiations, situation reports, contracts with commissaries — all of which were bound to the moment.¹¹ Like news ephemera, these sources will be of value for studies focused on the short and medium term, but not for thematic studies.

Once derivative and ephemeral texts have been eliminated, other considerations come into play. The selection should offer a reasonably representative sample of observations over the entire period, ideally one or two accounts for each decade from 1550 to 1700. In this way, themes can be investigated over time without worrisome chronological breaks. Similarly, the authors should reflect a variety of backgrounds. This will enable the researcher to see variations in descriptions of themes resulting from national, confessional, and occupational factors. Finally, there is the practical issue of accessibility. To save time and effort, the selected foreign descriptions should be readily available wherever possible. The following list represents my best effort to balance all the above-mentioned considerations.

Jahrhunderts (1613-89),” *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 23 (1976): 105-276; *idem*, “Rußland vor Peter dem Großen im Spiegel der deutschen Presse des 17. Jahrhunderts,” *Schriften der Wilttheit zu Bremen* 13 (1969): 105-31.

¹¹On diplomatic sources, see H. E. Ellersieck, “Russia under Aleksei Mikhailovich and Fedor Alekseevich 1654-82: The Scandinavian Sources,” Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1955); Georg von Rauch, “Moskau und der Westen im Spiegel der schwedischen diplomatischen Berichte der Jahre 1651-55,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 34 (1951-52): 22-66.

Table 2: The Foreign Eyewitness Descriptions of Muscovy, 1517-1700

<i>Author/Text</i>	<i>Dates in Musc.</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Drafted/Printed</i>	<i>Pr./Trans.</i>
Herberstein (1486-1566; Imperial diplomat)	3.1517-11.1517 4.1526-11.1526	~1y.5m	Eth.	1517-49/1549	32/7
Chancellor (d.1556; English navigator)	8.1553-3.1554	~8m	Eth.	1553/1589	5/2
Jenkinson (1530-1611; English merchant)	7-1557-7.1558	~1y	Eth.	1557-58/1589	4/2
Taube and Kruse (Livonian nobles)	?1559-8.1571(I) 8.1560-8.1571(K)	~12y.8m ~11y	Hist.	1571/1582	1/1
Staden (1542?-?; German mercenary)	5.1564-1576?	~12y.8m	Eth.	1578-79	n/a
Barberino (1532-1582; Italian merchant)	7.1564-7.1565	~1y	Eth.	1565/1658	2/1?
Schlichting (German mercenary)	11.1564-10.1570	~6y.1m	Hist.	1571	n/a
Horsey (1573-1627; English merchant)	?1573-10.1591	~18y.10m	Hist.	1589-1621	3/1
Printz (1546-1608; Imperial diplomat)	11.1575-2.1576	~4m	Eth.	1578/1668	6/1
Ulfeldt (d. 1593; Danish, scholar, diplomat)	6.1578-11.1578	~6m	DR/Eth.	1579/1608	4/1
Possevino (1533/34-1611; Papal diplomat)	8.1581-3.1582	~8m	DR/Eth.	1586/1586	8/2
Fletcher (1546-1611; English diplomat)	10.1588-8.1589	~11m	Eth.	1588/1589	2/1
Massa (1587-1643; Dutch merchant)	?1600-?.1609	~10y	Hist.	1610-14	n/a
Margeret (1565?-1619; French mercenary)	6.1600-9.1606	~6y.4m	Eth.	1607/1607	2/1
Bussow (?-1617; German mercenary)	4.1601-?.1611	~10y.9m	Hist.	1611-17	n/a
Petrieus (1570-1622; Swedish agent)	12.1601-11.1605 7.1607-4.1608 12.1609-?.1610	~6y	Eth.	1615/1615	2/2
Peyerle (German silversmith?)	3.1606-12.1608	~2y.10m	Hist.	1606	n/a
Maskiewicz (fl. 1580-1632; Polish officer)	9.1609-6.1612	~2y.10m	Diary	1594-1621	n/a
Olearius (1603-71; Holsteinian diplomat)	6.1634-1.1635 3.1636-10.1636 6.1638-4.1639 7.1643-10.1643	~2y.5m	Eth.	1639-47/1647	25/5
Paul (fl. 1636-66; Archdeacon. of Aleppo)	?1655-?.1656	~2y	DR/Eth.	1655-56	n/a
Collins (1619-70; English doctor)	12.1659-?.1669	~10y.1m	Eth.	1661-67/1671	3/2
Krizhanich (1618?-83; Croatia scholar)	9.1647-1.1648 9.1659-11.1677	~18y.7m	Pol. th.	1663-66	n/a
Meyerberg (1612-88; Imperial diplomat)	4.1661-10.1662	~1y.7m	DR/Eth.	1661-63/1663	2/2
Gordon (1639-99; Scottish mercenary)	8.1661-11.1699	~38y.4m.	Diary	1661-99	n/a
Reutenfels (Nephew of court doctor)	?1670-?.1672	~3y	Eth.	1672-80/1680	1/1
Wickhart (Imperial diplomat)	8.1675-11.1675	~4m	DR/Eth.	1675/1675	1/1
Tanner (Polish diplomat)	4.1678-9.1678	~6m	DR/Eth.	1678/1680?	1/1
“Neuville” (French agent?)	7.1689-12.1689	~6m	DR/Eth.	1690?/1698	4/3
<i>Korb (1670-1741; Austrian diplomat)</i>	<i>4.1698-8.1699</i>	<i>~1y.5m</i>	<i>DR/Eth.</i>	<i>1698-99/1700</i>	<i>2/2</i>

Key: y = year; m = month; Eth. = ethnography; DR = diplomatic report; Hist. = history; Pol. th. = political theory; Pr. = printings before 1701; Trans. = number of languages in which the account appeared before 1701.

The twenty-nine texts here offer the best ethnographic information found among the foreign accounts. Their authors generally had wide experience in Muscovy, ranging from four months to thirty-eight years. Though many of them borrowed material from predecessors, none were armchair scholars. After the first half of the sixteenth century, for which we have only Herberstein, the accounts are well spaced: eight for the period 1550-75; five for the period 1576-1600; five for the period 1601-25; one for the period 1626-50 (but it is Olearius); seven for the period 1651-75; and three for the period 1676-1700. The list contains a diverse group of authors. Ten were Germans, five Englishmen, three Poles, two Italians, two Frenchmen, and seven of other nationalities. About half were Catholic and half Protestant, with one Orthodox cleric (Paul of Aleppo). Sixteen of the authors were involved in diplomatic activity, seven were professionals in Muscovite service, and six were merchants or navigators. The accounts are for the most part ethnographies, i.e., systematic reviews of the polity, society, and faith of a given country. Some are hybrids of diplomatic reports and ethnographies, while a few are histories and two are diaries. The list includes the most influential accounts as measured

by frequency of printing and translation. With the exception of Wickhart, all the texts in the list are available in modern editions.

The Problem of Bias

The issue of bias is best approached by posing three questions concerning the author and his evidence. Did the author have the opportunity to witness what he pretends to describe? Did the author have the means to comprehend and portray the same? And, finally, what were the author's motives in rendering a picture of Muscovy?

The first task for any researcher using a foreign account is to substantiate the dates its author was in Muscovy, that is, the chronological limits of eyewitness testimony. This can usually be accomplished by a careful reading of the account (particularly if it takes the form of an itinerary) and by reference to secondary sources. The establishment of dates of residence is important because the foreigners almost always included information in their accounts that occurred before their arrival and after their departure. Herberstein provides a ready example. *Rerum moscoviticarum* begins with a long historical excursus and is peppered with information that relates to the period after the Imperial legate's departure from Moscow in 1526.¹² It is unclear when the treatise was written: Herberstein himself mentions that he worked on it for years after his last Muscovite mission.¹³ The book was first published in 1549 in Latin and then edited, expanded, and translated by Herberstein in 1557.¹⁴ Pre- and post-journey information is not necessarily invalid, but it is less trustworthy than eyewitness testimony or hearsay evidence gathered from contemporaries in Muscovy.

Once the dates of residence have been established, what might be called the conditions of residence must be considered, for these placed limits on what could be seen and heard. Here it is important to distinguish between diplomatic visitors and residents. Ambassadors were tightly sequestered both during their trip from the border to Moscow and while in the city.¹⁵ The Russian authorities were so restrictive that visiting envoys often claimed they were confined like common criminals. As the Imperial legate Printz complained: "It is the custom of this people — unfamiliar with more enlightened laws — to hold the ambassadors of foreign governments almost like prisoners so they will not be able to learn what they are doing."¹⁶ Naturally, envoys held in government apartments had limited opportunities to investigate government life. Nonetheless, the extent to which the authorities succeeded in isolating visitors should not be exaggerated. Some ambassadors (Olearius, for instance¹⁷) were allowed to roam freely in Moscow, and even in cases

¹²Herberstein (1517-49), 1: 7-30.

¹³Herberstein (1517-49), 1: clix.

¹⁴Walter Leitsch, "Herberstein's Ergänzungen zur Moscovia in späteren Auflagen und die beiden zeitgenössischen Übersetzungen ins Deutsche," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 27 (1980): 177-94.

¹⁵On government treatment of foreign ambassadors, see A. S. Muliukin, *Priezd inostrantssev v Moskovskoe gosudarstvo. Iz istorii russkogo prava XVI i XVII vekov* (St. Peterburg: Tip. Spb. T-va Trud, 1909) and Leonid A. Iuzefovich, *Kak v posol'skikh obychaiakh vedetsia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1988), 76-80.

¹⁶Printz (1578), 51. On sequestration, see Herberstein (1517-49), 2: 120-21; Barberino (1565), 2: 13-14, 2: 21; Ulfeldt (1575), 36, 37; Staden (1578), 71; Printz (1578), 51; Horsey (1584-1611), 273; Possevino (1586), 17, 47, 49; Margeret (1607), 42; Peyerle (1608), 212, 214; Massa (1614), 49, 131, 191; Petreius (1615), 284-85, 294; Aleppo (1655), 1: 366, 2: 21, 2: 218, 2: 295; Olearius (1656), 66, 180; Meyerberg (1661), 80-81, 184-85; Reutenfels (1671), 106-7; Wickhart (1675), 71-73; Tanner (1678), 49-50; Neuville (1698), 8, 10; and Korb (1700), 1: 93, 1: 158, 1: 238.

¹⁷Olearius (1656), 180. Also see Meyerberg (1661), 80-82; Neuville (1698), 8; and Korb (1700), 1: 238.

where envoys were sequestered, information could be extracted from guards and government officials.¹⁸ “The scribes in particular are ready to accept pledges or presents,” Olearius explained, “so one may often learn about the most secret affairs and offer to make a disclosure for a certain sum.”¹⁹ Residents were much less restricted. They were for the most part technical specialists — doctors, builders, mercenaries, etc. — who has been recruited to serve in Russia.²⁰ Realizing that its foreign hirelings would not be able to work effectively without general freedom of movement, the government placed few limitations on the activities of foreign servitors. Though they sometimes lived in a “foreign quarter,” by and large European specialists mixed freely with the Russian population and traveled throughout the realm.²¹ In short, residents usually saw much more than visiting envoys.

Even when it seems a visitor had the opportunity to witness an event, judgment as to its validity should be suspended until the credibility of his sources is considered. In many cases this simply involves reading the account carefully, for the foreigners sometimes explain where they received their information with statements such as “I saw this” or “He told me that.” It is difficult to investigate such sources, both because the foreigners are usually vague about the identity of their informants and, when they are exact, evidence about them is unavailable. In any case, the citation of a source adds credibility to the statement. The source of much of the foreigners’ information was, directly or indirectly, the government. Muscovite officials not only limited what the visitors could experience *via* sequestration, but they also presented foreigners with self-serving information. This is most obviously the case with the formal spectacles that punctuated embassies — the reception at the border, procession to Moscow, entry into the city, audience, banquets, and departure. Each of these events was a spectacle of power carefully designed by the court and Ambassadorial Chancellery [*posol’skii prikaz*] to impress visitors.²² Many of the foreigners were highly-placed courtiers in their homelands, and thus it should come as no surprise that they saw through most of these contrivances. Herberstein was the first to comment on the propagandistic intent of Muscovite diplomatic rituals:

¹⁸On rumors passed by guards, see Peyerle (1608), 214-15.

¹⁹Olearius (1656), 226.

²⁰In general, see Muliukin, *Priезд inostrantsev*, 58-169. On the recruitment of craftsmen, scholars, and doctors, see Erik Amburger, “Die Anwerbung von Ärzten, Gelehrten und Lehrkräften durch die russische Regierung von 16. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutsch-russischen kulturellen Beziehungen* (Gießen: Kommissionsverlag W. Schmitz, 1961), 24-52; Erik Amburger, *Die Anwerbung ausländischer Fachkräfte für die Wirtschaft Rußlands vom 15. bis ins 19. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1968); Erik Amburger, *Fremde und Einheimische im Wirtschafts- und Kulturleben des neuzeitlichen Rußland*, ed. Klaus Zernack (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982); and Joseph T. Fuhrmann, *The Origins of Capitalism in Russia. Industry and Progress in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 193-242. On the recruitment of mercenaries and the introduction of new model forces, see Aleksandr V. Borodin, “Inozemtsy-ratnye ljudi na sluzhbe v Moskovskom gosudarstve,” *Vestnik imperatorskogo Obschestva revnitatelei istorii* (1915), no. 2, 185-201; Anatolii V. Chernov, *Vooruzhennnye sily russkogo gosudarstva v XV-XVII vv.* (Moscow: Voennoe izd-vo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1954), 133-98; and Richard Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 167-201.

²¹For an overview of the history of the foreign settlement, see Lindsey A. J. Hughes, “Foreign Settlement,” in MERSH 11: 216-18. There is a large literature devoted to the settlement, though no comprehensive history of it exists. See, for example, Sergei K. Bogoiavlenskii, “Moskovskaia nemetskaia sloboda,” *Izvestiia Akademii nauk SSSR. Seria istorii i filosofii* (1947), no. 3, 20-32; V. V. Nachaev, “Inozemskii slobody v Moskve,” in *Moskva v ee proshlom i nastoiashchem*, ed. Dmitrii N. Anuchin, 12 vols. (Moscow: Obrazovanie, 1910-), 2, *chast’ 2*, 18-43; E. Zviagintsev, “Slobody inostrantsev v Moskve XVII veka,” *Istoricheskii zhurnal* (1944), no. 2; and Samuel H. Baron, “The Origins of Seventeenth-Century Moscow’s *Nemetskaia sloboda*,” *California Slavic Studies* 5 (1970), 1-17.

²²See Iuzefovich, *Kak v posol’skikh obychnykh vedetsia* and *idem*, “Russkii posol’skii obychni XVI veka,” *Voprosy istorii* 9 (1977): 114-26.

For it is the custom amongst these people, that on all occasions when distinguished ambassadors from foreign kings and princes are to be conducted to the court, the lower class of nobles, stipendiaries, and soldiers, assemble together by command of the prince, from the neighboring and surrounding districts. All the taverns and shops of the city are on such occasions shut up, all buyers and sellers are expelled from the market place, and the citizens gather together to the scene of display from all quarters. The result of this is that the power of the prince appears very great in the eyes of foreigners, from such an immense concourse of men as his subjects; while, on the other hand, his dignity is made apparent to all his subjects, when they see such embassies sent to him by foreign princes.²³

Such sophistication was not always evidenced. The court sometimes succeeded in using ceremony to give an impression of overwhelming power. Chancellor was beguiled by the spectacle presented at his first audience: “This so honorable an assemblie, so great a Majestie of the Emperour, and of the place might very well have amazed our men, and dashed them out of countenance.”²⁴ Possevino complained that “when discussing customs that differ greatly from their own, observers [of Muscovy] are inclined to give more credit to appearances than they should.”²⁵ Moreover, positive deception by Russian authorities was neither unknown nor ineffective. Shortly after the unexpected death of Godunov, Shuiskii’s party purged the late tsar’s family and attempted to hide the fact by pretending the Godunovs had committed suicide.²⁶ Bussow and Massa were not fooled, however Peyerle naively reported the official version of events.²⁷

As soon as the question of opportunity has been answered, that of means arises. For even in cases where it is certain that a visitor witnessed or heard something that actually happened, it is not always sure that he was capable of relating it in an accurate manner. Thus when interpreting the foreign accounts, researchers must ask what tools the author had at his disposal in describing Russian life. Here again, the distinction between visiting envoys and residents becomes important. Having remained in Russia for only a brief period, envoys are not likely to have been terribly familiar with the Russian language or Russian ways, and they probably had few Russian contacts. In contrast, having lived and worked in Russia for years, residents often spoke Russian, had an excellent grasp of Russian customs, and knew many Russians well. Some residents bragged about precisely this difference. Isaac Massa, for example, felt it necessary to tell his reader that he was no dilettante when it came to Russian affairs:

I must point out that I know the history in depth, seeing that I have lived in Moscow, the capital of that country, for the past eight years; and being very curious, I was in a position to find out everything in consequence of my relations with a number of nobles and secretaries of the court, whose friendship I continually sought.²⁸

As a rule, then, the testimony of residents is to be considered more reliable than that of envoys. Other biographical considerations also come into play when assessing competence. Generally speaking, the higher the station of an author, the more aware he was likely to be of cultural differences and the better able he was to outline them. Conversely, lesser status usually indicates disinterest in cultural distinctions and their description. A comparison of the works of Fletcher,

²³Herberstein (1517), 2: 123.

²⁴Adams/Chancellor (1553), 255.

²⁵Possevino (1586), 4.

²⁶See Ruslan G. Skrynnikov, *Rossia v nachale XV/II v. ‘Smuta’* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1988), 228-29.

²⁷Peyerle (1608), 173-74; Bussow (1611), 48; Massa (1614), 48.

²⁸Massa (1614), 4.

an academic turned ambassador, and Horsey, a poorly-schooled merchant-adventurer, bears this out.²⁹ The former offers an extensive, highly tendentious, overly-schematized catalogue of Russia's cultural peculiarity (and inferiority). The latter provides a rambling jumble of observations on his life in Russian affairs.³⁰

Simply because an author had lived in Muscovy or was well-educated does not mean that he was capable of precise ethnography. It is certainly the case that the foreigners' perception was skewed by the cultural distance separating Renaissance Europe and Muscovy. Yet it would be a mistake to say that this distance rendered the foreigners incapable of accurately describing Muscovy. First of all, the cultural chasm was not as wide as is sometimes imagined. It is not often remarked amid all the talk of Russian peculiarity that the foreigners traveled between societies that were fundamentally alike. Muscovy was, like virtually every early modern European kingdom, a Christian society in which a monarch and court elite ruled over a teeming peasantry. This is not to deny differences. Muscovy was Orthodox, its monarch very powerful, its elite untouched by Renaissance courtesy, and its peasantry bound to the land. But Russia was not the New World: it was much easier for Fletcher to understand Muscovy in native terms than it was for Captain John Smith to comprehend the North American Indians. Second, while it is true that the foreigners used a vocabulary that distanced Muscovy from parts Western (or "Southern" as they would have said), this does not necessarily mean that their accounts are poisoned by cultural bias. Judgment is, as the foreigners themselves understood, different from description. Many of the foreigners castigated Orthodoxy as "superstition," autocracy as "despotism," and serfdom as "slavery," but nevertheless offered exact information on all three. The visitors' judgments, as Gabrielle Scheidegger has skillfully pointed out, speak to Renaissance mentalities and tell us nothing about Muscovy.³¹

Finally, the author's motive in writing an account of Muscovy should be investigated. The fact of writing itself was unusual: most men who traveled to Russia did not bother to set down their observations for posterity. Those who did had some special purpose in mind. Three such purposes were common: diplomatic reporting, ethnography, and storytelling. Each corresponds to a distinct literary genre — the diplomatic report, the ethnography, and the history. Each genre had its own grammar, and each presents the modern historian with distinct opportunities and difficulties. From the moment of the formation of the early modern diplomatic system *circa* 1500, the drafting of some sort of account of what had transpired during an embassy became an essential part of the ambassador's duty.³² Diplomatic reports were detailed itineraries of an embassy's activities from departure to return. They were intended for the eyes of the sovereign

²⁹For Fletcher's biography, see Lloyd E. Berry, "The Life of Giles Fletcher, the Elder," in *The English Works of Giles Fletcher, the Elder*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 3-49. For Horsey, see Donald L. Layton, "Horsey, Sir Jerome," *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, ed. Joseph L. Wiczyński, 58 vols. (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1976-94), 11: 81-82.

³⁰Fletcher (1591) and Horsey (1584).

³¹Gabrielle Scheidegger, *Perverses Abendland—barbarisches Russland. Begegnungen des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im Schatten kultureller Missverständnisse* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 1993).

³²Medieval ambassadors sometimes wrote reports, but by and large they recited them in conference. See Donald E. Queller, *The Office of the Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967), 103 and 141-42. The writing of after-action reports became more common in the sixteenth century, as can be seen in the famous Venetian *Relazioni*. On them, see Donald E. Queller, "The Development of the Ambassadorial Relazioni," in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. John R. Hale (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 42-43; *idem*, *The Office of Ambassador*, 143 and 183-88.

and thus ordinarily remained unpublished, though there are exceptions.³³ For historians interested in Muscovy proper, the value of diplomatic reports is limited by the fact that they often provide more information on the minutia of travel and negotiations than on Muscovite life. The Imperial envoy Wickhart, for example, explains that he arrived at the Muscovite border on August 17, 1675 and was met with the proper regard by the Russian authorities. He then offers the reader a long list of everyone in the embassy from the ambassador to his lackeys.³⁴ Judging by the contents of pure diplomatic reports, ethnography was not generally seen as within the scope of the genre. Nevertheless, the reports sometimes contain accidental ethnographic information. The Imperial ambassador Tanner was transfixed by a scene he encountered in a peasant hut on the way to Moscow.

I was amazed that in the home of our host, there was a child born not long before who was lulled not in [its mother's] hands, but in cradle hung from the ceiling by four ropes, and who was feed with cow's milk in a barbarous fashion: from above the ropes was affixed a smaller rope with a feeding bottle tied to it, from which protruded a cow's nipple. The mother poured warm milk in the bottle, which flowed through a hole to the nipple, and this nipple, blackened by long use and rotted in half, emitted a heavy smell, was placed in the mouth of the child. Having become used to it, the child placed his mouth [himself] and sucked the warm milk, which was, due to insufficiency, constantly drained to the bottom. We expressed our dissatisfaction with the fact that the nipple from long use emitted a foul odor, and we more than once cursed the mother for her inhumanity, but to this she simply responded that this was their custom.³⁵

Such a report is highly credible because it is unusual within the generic context and is spontaneous. Occasionally extended ethnographic surveys appeared within diplomatic reports, as the instance of Maskiewicz demonstrates. In the course of a standard itinerary of his activities, the Polish officer suddenly introduced not just an interesting vignette, but a full-blown description of Muscovite society.³⁶ Again these brief overviews are to be credited because of their incongruity with the purpose of diplomatic description and their spontaneity: they would seem to be the product of the author's experience and not some more general ethnographic or narrative project. If diplomatic reporting as a genre has a bias, it is the exaggeration of the ambassador's role and the success of his mission. Cognizant of the fact that they were upholding the honor of their master and vying against their peers for preferment at court, the envoys naturally put the best face on their own activities. Herberstein frequently emphasized that he refused to have his sovereign's or his own dignity tarnished by petty Muscovite protocol.³⁷ Possevino celebrated his own diplomatic achievements while omitting events that might have sullied his reputation.³⁸

Like the diplomatic report, the ethnography or "chorography" owes its birth to the exigencies and opportunities of early modern diplomacy.³⁹ Renaissance convention held that it was the duty of any well-traveled man to set down a

³³Possevino (1568), Ulfeldt (1579), Meyerberg (1661), Wickhart (1675), Tanner (1678), Korb (1700).

³⁴Wickhart (1675), 46-51.

³⁵Tanner (1678), 38.

³⁶Maskiewicz (1611), 51-60.

³⁷See Herberstein (1517-49), 2: 112-13, where the ambassador refused to dismount before the officier appointed to receive him at the border so as "not to fail in my duty to my own master, or to compromise his dignity."

³⁸See Graham's comments in his introduction to Possevino (1586), xiii.

³⁹See Justin Stagl, "Das Reisen als Kunst und als Wissenschaft (16. bis 18. Jahrhundert)," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 108 (1983): 15-34; *idem*, "Der wohlunterwiesene Passagier, Reisekunst und Gesellschaftsbeschreibung vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert," in *Reisen und*

description of foreign places for the good of his country. Herberstein himself emphasized the utility of chorography in the dedication to *Rerum moscoviticarum*:

In ancient days, when the Romans sent ambassadors to any distant and unknown country, they are said to have charged them as a duty to commit carefully to writing a description of the manners, institutes, and entire mode of living of the people with whom their embassy brought them in contact; and so much importance was afterwards attached to such descriptions, that upon the termination of an embassy, the ambassador's commentaries were deposited in the temple of Saturn for the instruction of posterity. If this regulation had been observed by men of our own, or recent times, we should perhaps have had more light, and certainly less trash, infused into history.⁴⁰

Though Herberstein's motives in writing his treatise were seemingly selfless, the growth of a market for printed ethnographies doubtless spurred him on, as it did the entire genre. The organizing principle of most ethnographies was what the Renaissance called *methodus*: the arrangement of information into hierarchically-nested categories.⁴¹ A clear example may be found in the schema of topics presented in Fletcher's treatise, with each general header ("Cosmographie," "Policy," "Oeconomie") broken down into numerous sub- and sub-sub headers.⁴² Though eyewitness ethnographies were the product of trips to Russia, they sometimes contain almost no information about the author's peregrinations. The chief advantage of ethnography vis-à-vis other genres of foreign *Moscovitica* is coverage, for ethnographies pretended to be universal accounts of Russian life, short ethnographic encyclopedias. Researchers need not wonder whether a well-articulated ethnography contains information about the Russian army, the rite of baptism, or the condition of women. These topics and many others were standard in the ethnographic template, as can be seen in Table 3, which compares the topics covered by Herberstein, Fletcher and Olearius.

Reisebeschreibungen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert als Quellen der Kulturbeziehungs-forschung, ed. Boris I. Krasnobaev et al. (Berlin: U. Camen, 1980), 353-84; *idem*, "Die Apodemik oder 'Reisekunst' als Methodik der Sozialforschung vom Humanismus bis zur Aufklärung," in *Statistik und Staatsbeschreibung in der Neuzeit, vornehmlich im 16. und 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Mohammed Rassem and Justin Stagl (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1980:), 131-203; and *idem*, "The Methodizing of Travel in the Sixteenth Century. A Tale of Three Cities," *History and Anthropology* 4 (1990): 303-38.

⁴⁰Herberstein (1517), 1: clix.

⁴¹See Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983), 225-69.

⁴²Fletcher (1591), 171.

Table 3: Topics in Herberstein, Fletcher, and Olearius⁴³

<i>Herberstein</i>	<i>Fletcher</i>	<i>Olearius (Book 3)</i>
1. Introductory materials	1. Introductory materials	1. Chorography
2. Chorography I	2. Chorography	2. Economy
3. History	3. Economy	3. Character
4. Government	4. History	4. Domestic life
5. Religion	5. Government	5. Government
6. Domestic Life	6. Judicial administration	6. Rebellions in Moscow and Pskov
7. Military organization	7. Military organization	7. Officials and administration
8. Judicial administration	8. Tatars	8. Judicial administration
9. Economy	9. Northern nations	9. Religion
10. Chorography II	10. Religion	
11. Tartaria	11. Domestic Life	
12. Lithuania		
13. Northern countries		
14. Receiving ambassadors		
15. Itinerary		

The blessing of universal coverage, however, is mixed. While scholars can find anything in an ethnography, they cannot be sure of its provenance. The pressure to describe nearly everything compelled even well-intentioned ethnographers to borrow data from printed sources. Systematic plagiarism had a corrosive effect on the ethnographic tradition, with dubious and out-dated information passing from one treatise to the next simply because its author was esteemed or it seemed somehow to fit the nature of Muscovy. Examples are numerous, but none better than that of the tsar washing his hands after putatively defiling contact with foreign ambassadors, a suborn fiction that made its way from Herberstein to later authors.⁴⁴

Non-fiction tales of the *res gestae* of great men — “histories” as they were then plainly called — were very popular in the Renaissance and, like ethnographies, became more so with the advent of print and the appearance of a market for printed books. Histories were, like diplomatic reports, built around a chronology of events. But unlike their ambassadorial counterparts, they focused on historical principia, not diplomatic minutia. And herein lies their great strength: they provide modern scholars with the first attempt to arrange a series of disparate Russian events into a story about Russia. They are (with some possible Muscovite exceptions) the first histories of Muscovy *per se*. Their significance, particularly for the history of the reign of Ivan IV and the Time of Troubles, is immeasurable. Yet again the blessing is mixed. The authors of Russian “histories” were not content to chronicle events. They wanted drama, and to arrive at it they crafted events around pre-conceived plots. A number of examples present themselves, but perhaps the best is that of the first False Dmitri. In the hands of Bussow and Massa, the events in the life of the Grishka Otrepev became a tragic tale of adventure, hubris, and divine justice. Indeed the transformation of Otrepev’s odyssey into high drama was aided by actual events: he was, after all, a defrocked monk who became tsar and met an untimely death at the

⁴³See Herberstein (1517-49), *passim*; Fletcher (1591), *passim*; and Olearius (1656), 109-286. It is difficult to agree with Richard Pipes’ thesis that Fletcher’s use of the schema “distinguishes [Of the Russe Commonwealth] from all other foreign accounts.” See Pipes’ introduction to *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, ed. Richard Pipes and John Fine (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1965), 23. It is precisely the presence of the schema that indicates its generic similarity to other accounts.

⁴⁴See Herberstein (1517), 2: 125; Possevino (1586), 28, 47; Petreius (1615), 286; Aleppo (1655), 382; Olearius (1656), 63; Meyerberg (1661), 49, 64; Reutenfels (1671), 106-7; and Korb (1700), 2: 24. Iuzefovich argues that the handwashing stories are fiction. See *Kak v posol’skikh obychaiakh vedetsia*, 195-203.

hands of treasonous boyars. But where events did not provide sufficient drama for the tragic plot, Bussow took ample poetic license. Bussow's description of Dmitri's "discovery" provides an example. Otrepev is hired by Prince Adam Wisniowiecki, his future patron. While serving the prince in the bath, he failed to fulfill some minor duty and was slapped. Bussow continues:

Then the youth made an expression, as if he took all this very much to heart, and wept bitterly in the bathroom, saying to the prince: 'If only you, Prince Adam, knew who I am, you would not have abused me and called me a whoreson, neither would you have borne so heavily upon me for such a triviality. But since now I find myself here as your servant, I must bear this with patience.'⁴⁵

As the touching scene concludes, Otrepev "reveals" himself as Dmitri and wins the prince's heart. The event may have occurred as described, but it is hard to imagine how this information made its way to Bussow. Moreover, the scenario's fit with Bussow's literary purpose is very strongly suggestive of fictionalization. The scene becomes easier to comprehend when it is placed in a literary context. Here Bussow used two standard rhetorical techniques to give his story additional drama: *anagnorisis* — the uncovering of a crucial but hidden fact — and *peripatete* — the fashioning of a turning point in a story. Indeed, the deployment of rhetorical forms is routine in Renaissance histories of Muscovy. Hyperbole (the exaggeration of some characteristic), allegory (making a character stand for a moral quality), analogy (patterning an event after a historical scenario), apostrophe (breaking the story to address some person or thing, absent or present), and *paroemia* (quoting proverbs) are common in Bussow, Massa, and others.

It should be pointed out that histories were not alone in dramatic fictionalization. We have seen that the authors of diplomatic reports sometimes altered events to make the actions of their protagonists, the ambassadors, seem more momentous than they perhaps were in fact. Even more startling examples may be found in ethnographies. Renaissance historiography had it that the purpose of history was to delight and instruct.⁴⁶ This is clear in the narratives of the reigns of Ivan IV, Boris Godunov, and False Dmitri. They were intended as interesting homiletic tales, the lessons of which were to be drawn by high-minded readers. The authors of ethnographies often embellished their accounts with fictionalized stories of this type. They are relatively easy to spot because they give the modern reader the impression of slightly too much closure and polish. All of the so-called "Dracula stories" about Ivan IV and other Russian tsars may be seen as variations on this rhetorical form.⁴⁷ They of course originated in contemporary narratives, but migrated to ethnographies in the late sixteenth century. Other stories, such as the tale of the origins of "*Chloppigrod*" may be included here as well.⁴⁸ Pride of place, however, must be given to Fletcher, who turned the genre of ethnography to moral instruction in *Of the Russe Commonwealth*. Instead of supplying a story of good monarchy gone bad, he provided an

⁴⁵Bussow (1611), 28-29.

⁴⁶On the "delight and instruct" trope, see Timothy Hampton, *The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1990), 8-9. The trope is rehearsed, for example, by Reutenfels' seventeenth-century editor. See Reutenfels (1671), 2-3.

⁴⁷See Maureen Perrie, *The Image of Ivan the Terrible in Russian Folklore* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987).

⁴⁸See Herberstein (1517), 2: 27, 2: 32; Fletcher (1591), 186-87; Petreius (1608), 60-61; Reutenfels (1671), 207; and Gordon (1699), 64.

extended synchronic description of an evil kingdom, an “exemplum” or “paradigma” as Renaissance rhetoric might have called it. He so much as says this in his dedication to Queen Elizabeth.

In the manner of their government, your majesty may see both: A true strange face of a Tyrannical state, (most unlike to your own) without true knowledge of GOD, without written Lawe, without common iustice: save that which proceedeth from their Speaking Lawe, to wit, the Magistrate who hath most neede of a Lawe, to restrain his owne iniustice. The practise hereof as it is heavy, and grievous to the poore oppressed people, that live within those Countreyes: so it may give iust cause to my selfe, and other your Maiesties faithfull subiects, to acknowledge our happines on this behalfe, and to give God thanks for your Maiesties most Princelike, and gracious government: as also to your Highnesse more ioy, and contentment in your royall estate, in that you are Prince of subjects, not of slaves, that are kept within duetie by love, not by feare.⁴⁹

Fletcher’s book is at cross-purposes with itself. On the one hand, he is using the form of an objective ethnographic description and aims at empirical truth. On the other hand, he is providing his audience with an inverted, idealized *speculum principis* illustrating a higher ethical truth. Where the two are in conflict, the latter takes precedence. This may have been salutary for Elizabeth, but it hardly serves the purposes of the historian. Table 4 describes the structure, advantages and disadvantages of the genres of foreign Moscovitica.

Table 4: Genres and their Characteristics

<i>Genre</i>	<i>Structure</i>	<i>Advantage</i>	<i>Disadvantage</i>
a. Diplomatic Report:	Itinerary	Spontaneity	Limited ethnographic material
b. Ethnography:	Topics	Coverage	Borrowing
c. History:	Narrative	Coherence	Dramatization

The Problem of Verification

Once the texts have been chosen and the biases of their authors identified, the researcher is faced with the nettlesome task of trying to determine the validity of particular statements in the accounts. The first measure to be taken in pursuit of this goal is to ask whether the passage in question is borrowed. Plagiarized information is suspect because it is not the fruit of first-hand experience and, if the source of the information is old, may reflect a state of affairs long passed. The problem is a difficult one, for the habit of borrowing was almost universal among those who returned from Muscovy to write descriptions of what they had seen, as Table 5 suggests.⁵⁰

Table 5: Printed Sources of the Chief Printed Eyewitness Ethnographies of Muscovy

<i>Account</i>	<i>Sources</i>
Herberstein (1517-49)	> Miechowa (1517), Giovio (1525), Campensé (1524), Fabri (1526), Magnus (1539?), Münster (1544)
Chancellor (1553)	> [Herberstein (1517-49)?]
Jenkinson (1557)	> [Herberstein (1517-49)?]
Barberino (1565)	> [Herberstein (1517-49)?]
Randolph (1568)	> [Herberstein (1517-49)?]
Guagnini (1578)	> [Herberstein (1517-49)?], Schlichting (1571)
Printz (1578)	> Herberstein (1517-49)
Possevino (1586)	> Giovio (1525), Campensé (1524), Herberstein (1517-49)
Fletcher (1591)	> [Herberstein (1517-49)?], Horsey (1584-1621), Hakluyt (1589) Items

⁴⁹Fletcher (1591), 169-70.

⁵⁰See Samuel Baron, “Herberstein’s Image of Russia and Its Transmission through Later Writers,” in *Explorations in Muscovite History* (Hampshire, GB: Variorum, 1991): Essay XIII. Also see Walter Leitsch, “Herberstein’s Impact on the Reports about Muscovy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Some Observations on the Technique of Borrowing,” *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 24 (1978): 163-77.

Horsey (1584-1621)	>	Fletcher (1591), Hakluyt (1589) Items
Margeret (1607)	>	[Bodin? \neg Herberstein (1517-49)] ⁵¹
Petreiis (1608)	>	Miechowa (1517), Giovio (1525), Herberstein (1517-49), [Bussow (1611)]
Massa (1610)	>	[<i>The Legend of the Life and Death of Dmitri</i>] ⁵²
Bussow (1611)	>	
Olearius (1656)	>	Giovio (1525), Herberstein (1517-49), Guagnini (1578), Ulfeldt (1579), Possevino (1586), Petreiis (1608)
Paul of Aleppo (1653)	>	
Meyerberg (1661)	>	Herberstein (1517-49), Guagnini (1578), Oderborn (1585), Possevino (1586), Olearius (1656)
Collins (1667)	>	Thevet (1575) [\neg Herberstein (1517-49)]
Reutenfels (1671)	>	Giovio (1525), Fabri (1526), Magnus (1555), Herberstein (1517-49), Possevino (1586), Bussow (1611), Petreiis (1608), Olearius (1656)
Wickhart (1675)	>	Herberstein (1517-49), Olearius (1656)
Tanner (1678)	>	
Neuville (1698)	>	[Herberstein (1517-49), Avril (1691)] ⁵³
Korb (1700)	>	Wickhart (1675) [Herberstein (1517-49), Olearius (1656)] ⁵⁴

Key: Arrows indicate sources; no brackets indicate that the source is cited explicitly; brackets indicate the source was probably used without acknowledgment.

In order to identify all the borrowed data in the corpus of European *Moscovitica*, one would have to systematically compare all relevant texts. This solution is obviously impractical: even the short list of canonical sources presented in Table 2 above is too long and time too short. Sometimes foreign authors will provide a bibliography or occasionally cite printed texts, in effect offering clues as to the sources of potentially borrowed information.⁵⁵ In such cases (and they are few), some familiarity with the cited texts is warranted. In instances where no sources are cited, a reasonable approach is the comparison of the account in question with the three most influential descriptions of Russia — Herberstein, Possevino, or Olearius. Because these texts were more often printed and translated than any others (see Table 2 above), they account for a good portion of all borrowing. Three provisos are warranted when using this technique. First, once a passage similar to something in Herberstein, Possevino, or Olearius is identified, it should not be immediately concluded that it was taken directly from one of these sources. It is sometimes the case that the information was obtained through one or more intermediaries, who in turn borrowed it from Herberstein, Possevino, or Olearius. And it should also be remembered that Possevino used Herberstein, and Olearius used both Herberstein and Possevino. Second, it should not be concluded that a passage is borrowed solely on the basis of similarity. It may be the case that the author in question saw the same thing as his illustrious predecessors and used similar terms to describe it. Finally, purloined passages are

⁵¹In his introduction to Margeret (1607), Dunning writes (xxv) that “[Bodin’s] popular and influential works were certainly known to Margeret, whose portrayal of Muscovite absolutism echoes Bodin’s ideas.” This is an overstatement. As an educated man, Margeret probably knew Bodin, however his description of Muscovite government is somewhat different from Bodin’s. Bodin classified Muscovy (citing Herberstein) as a seigniorial monarchy, that is, a system in which the king is master of slave-subjects. See Bodin (1576), 201. Margeret, in contrast, simply writes that the Muscovite tsar is “absolute” and that his subjects call themselves slaves. Nowhere does he cite Bodin or offer a formal (Aristotelian) characterization of Muscovite civic culture. See Margeret (1607), 28. If Margeret read Bodin’s description of Russia in *Six Books*, then he knew of Herberstein’s book, for Bodin cites it explicitly.

⁵²*La légende de la vie et de la mort de Démétrius, dernier Grand-Duc de Moscovie* (Amsterdam, 1606). On Massa’s use of this obscure text, see Orchard’s introduction to Massa (1614), xxii-xxiii.

⁵³On Neuville’s use of Avril and Herberstein, see Lindsey Hughes’ introduction to Neuville (1698), xxvii-xxviii.

⁵⁴See the borrowing from Herberstein (1517-49), 1: 32 and 1: 95 in Korb (1700), 2: 155-56. Also see the probable borrowing from Olearius (1656), 177 in Korb (1700), 2: 163-64.

⁵⁵See Herberstein (1517), clx-clxi and Reutenfels (1671), 5-6. It should not be assumed that the bibliographies are exhaustive. Herberstein used sources he did not acknowledge.

not necessarily inaccurate simply because they are borrowed. Researchers must entertain the possibility that the passage was assimilated because it confirmed an impression gathered by the author.

After a passage has been tested for borrowing, its validity must be assessed. This is best accomplished by searching for corroborating or contradictory evidence in other foreign accounts (internal comparison) and in Muscovite sources (external comparison). Corroboration may be of four types, each entailing a different degree of confidence. First, a statement may be both internally and externally corroborated by independent sources. Such propositions have the highest degree of credibility. For example, the Muscovite family presentation ritual, in which the master of a household ceremonially presented his wife and other married women to his guests, is independently attested by numerous visitors and at least one Muscovite source (Kotoshikhin).⁵⁶ A step below dual corroboration are cases in which a fact is corroborated by external sources but not repeated by any foreign account or a fact is corroborated by an internal source but not confirmed by Muscovite sources. Herberstein's detailed description of the registration, remuneration, and rotational service of provincial cavalymen provides an example of the former.⁵⁷ Among foreign accounts, it is unique for its time. There are abundant Muscovite sources, however, that indicate a system such as he described was in place in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.⁵⁸ The latter case is exemplified by two accounts of a peculiar rite performed after the consummation of marriage. Both Barberino and Reutenfels report that the chastity of a bride was signaled to members of the wedding party by a cup filled with wine.⁵⁹ If, after consummation, she produced the "mark of virginity," the cup was presented with a hole in it, allowing the wine to leak out. If she did not, then no wine was spilled. So far as I am aware, this ritual is not reported in Muscovite sources. The least trustworthy evidence in the foreign accounts is neither internally nor externally corroborated. For example, Bussow wrote that Godunov dismissed Turkish ambassadors in 1600 with a gift of a pig-skin coat and a leather pouch filled with pig manure.⁶⁰ Though the passage was borrowed by later authors, it is not independently attested in contemporary accounts.⁶¹ No such incident is recorded under 1600 in Muscovite sources.⁶² Uncorroborated accounts need not be false. Barberino's description of a folk divorce ritual is unique among early modern sources.⁶³ A similar rite, however, is attested by modern ethnographers, suggesting that Barberino may not have been in error.

⁵⁶See Margeret (1606), 31-32; Maskiewicz (1611), 52-53, 57; Massa (1614), 60, 130; Petreius (1615), 307; Olearius (1647), 42, 158, 158, 169; Aleppo (1655), 2: 285-86; Meyerberg (1661), 37; Wickhart (1675), 257-58; Tanner (1678), 101; Neuville (1698), 12; and Korb (1700), 2: 37, 2: 207, 2: 207. Also a lengthy account in Gregorii Kotoshikhin, *O Rossii v tsarstovovanie Alekseia Mikhbailovicha*, ed. Ann E. Pennington (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), 159-60.

⁵⁷Herberstein (1517), 1: 30 and 1: 95.

⁵⁸See Marshall Poe, "Muscovite Personnel Records, 1475-1550: New Light on the Early Evolution of Russian Bureaucracy," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 45 (1997): 361-77.

⁵⁹Barberino (1565), 2: 8 and Reutenfels (1671), 176-78. It is possible that Reutenfels borrowed the account from Barberino. However in light of significant differences between the two descriptions, this seems unlikely.

⁶⁰Bussow (1611), 17-18.

⁶¹Petreius (1615), 161 and Reutenfels (1671), 65.

⁶²Bussow's modern editor, G. Edward Orchard notes that no evidence of a Turkish embassy of 1600 is found in Muscovite sources. See Bussow (1611), 195, fn. 38.

⁶³Barberino (1565), 2: 4-5. The description was borrowed by Guagnini (1578).

Not only can passages be corroborated by internal and external sources, they can also be directly contradicted. Four types of contradiction present themselves, and they too may be ranked by the degree of doubt which they cast on a statement. First, there are propositions that are both internally and externally contradicted. An example is provided by Peyerle's statement that the family of Boris Godunov committed suicide after the tsar's untimely death in 1605.⁶⁴ This was indeed the official version of events and is attested in some Muscovite sources.⁶⁵ But Peyerle's version is contradicted by numerous foreign and Muscovite texts.⁶⁶ Cases of external contradiction are numerous, particularly with dates, names, and the details of Muscovite society that sometimes baffled visitors. More substantive issues were sometimes confused as well. An example is found in Chancellor's claim that daughters could not inherit land, a contention contradicted by many contemporary Russian sources.⁶⁷ The case of wife-beating provides an example of internal contradiction. Herberstein and others pointed out that spousal abuse was rampant in Muscovy, but that beating was seen a sign of love by Russian wives.⁶⁸ Olearius agreed that wife-beating was common, but he "did not find that Russian wives regard frequent blows and beating as a sign of intense love and their absence as a mark of their husbands' indifference and dissatisfaction with them."⁶⁹ Muscovite sources suggest that husbands abused their wives, but are silent on the question of whether women expected and appreciated beatings.⁷⁰ Finally, there are a host of statements that are not contradicted in either internal and external sources, i.e., the logical parallel of uncorroborated propositions. Table 6 summarizes the possibilities for corroboration and contradiction. "A" is a statement of fact and "B" is a statement contradicting "A."

⁶⁴Peyerle (1608), 173-74.

⁶⁵*Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1841-), 14: 66.

⁶⁶See Margeret (1607), 67; Bussow (1611), 48; Massa (1614), 48; and Petreius (1615), 175. S. A. Belokurov, *Razriadnye zapisi za Smutnoe vremia* (Moscow, 1907), 226. On the whole episode, see Ruslan G. Skrynnikov, *Rossia v nachale XVII v. 'Smuta'* (Moscow: Mysl', 1988), 228-29.

⁶⁷See Chancellor (1553), 232 and Adams/Chancellor (1553), 260. On the right of daughters to inherit property, see George G. Weichhardt, "Legal Rights of Women in Russia, 1100-1750," *Slavic Review* 55: 1 (1996), 8-9.

⁶⁸See Herberstein (1517), 93-95; Jenkinson (1557), 446; and Petreius (1615), 323-24. Jenkinson and Petreius likely borrowed this thesis from Herberstein, but at least in the former case this is not certain.

⁶⁹Olearius (1656), 170.

⁷⁰Daniel Kaiser, "The Public World of Private Life: Evidence on Spouse Relations in Seventeenth-century Muscovy." Paper delivered at "Private Life in Russia: Medieval Times to the Present," University of Michigan, October 4-6, 1996.

Table 6: Corroboration and Contradiction

	<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>Muscovite Sources</i>
1. Corroboration		
a. Internally/Externally corroborated	A=A	=A
b. Externally corroborated	A	=A
c. Internally corroborated	A=A	n/a
d. Uncorroborated	A	n/a
2. Contradiction		
a. Internally/Externally contradicted	A vs. B	vs. B
b. Externally contradicted	A	vs. B
c. Internally contradicted	A vs. B	n/a
d. Uncontradicted	A	n/a

A final element of corroboration and contradiction is numerical. As a general rule, the more independent sources corroborating a fact, the higher its probability of being true. For example, many foreigners reported that Muscovites often used proverbs such as “God and the grand prince know,” perhaps indicating popular beliefs concerning the authority of the tsar.⁷¹ Certainly some of these citations were borrowed, but given the volume of the evidence it would seem reasonable to conclude that political proverbs were in wide currency. Conversely, the more sources contradicting a fact, the lower its probability of being valid. Paul of Aleppo offers a long encomium to the Russian elite.

The voivodas of this nation are men learned in general knowledge and in the law; versed in philosophy and the art of reasoning; and lovers of subtle questions and profound disputations . . . Their constant endeavor is to increase in knowledge; for we used to see in the houses of each of them some thousands of large books, and these they love to read much both by day and night.⁷²

This assessment is completely out of step with the opinion of his fellow visitors, the vast majority of whom were shocked by the lack of learning among Russian notables.⁷³ Some of the details of Paul’s observation (such as the presence of books, if not thousands of them) are suggestive, but his general thesis can be dismissed.

Conclusion

The significance of foreign descriptions of Muscovy as historical sources is difficult to overestimate. They shed light on many topics dimly illuminated in indigenous sources. Yet despite their importance, they have been neglected. One of the chief reasons is bibliographic. Until recently, no modern survey of foreign Moscovitica has been available. Now that such a survey exists, problems still remain. The sources are too many, they are in various ways biased, and the information in them is sometimes plagiarized and false. Nonetheless, the difficulties of selection, bias, and verification can be ameliorated, if not completely overcome, with the aid of the techniques outlined above. If they are properly employed, working historians may use the foreign descriptions with confidence.

⁷¹See Herberstein (1517), 1: 32; Chancellor (1553), 232; Ulfledt (1575), 13; Printz (1578), 29-30; Staden (1578), 40; Possevino (1586), 11, 27, 47; Margeret (1607), 24; Bussow (1611), 11, 36; Petreius (1615), 301; Olearius (1656), 147, 174, 176, 214; Meyerberg (1661), 116-17; Collins (1667), 117; Reutenfels (1671), 101, 142-43; Wickhart (1675), 246; Tanner (1678), 74; and Korb (1700), 2: 155.

⁷²Aleppo (1655), 1: 304.

⁷³See especially Bussow (1611), 51-52; Petreius (1615), 178; Massa (1614), 36, 95, 111, 183; Reutenfels (1671), 85; and Wickhart (1675), 244-45.

Abbreviations

This appendix lists the ethnographic, cosmographical, and historical accounts and compendia cited in the text and notes to this essay. In the column on the left, the accounts are listed in abbreviated form beginning with the name of the author and followed by the approximate year(s) in which the item was written. In the column on the right, full bibliographic information on the account is offered in the following form: a) the full name of the author or authors; b) basic biographical data about the author or authors; c) bibliographic information on the first edition, if the account was published in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries; d) a note giving the date in which the account was composed, if it is significantly different from the date of publication or if the account was not published in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries; e) data on the edition cited in the text and notes. For more information on each author, including references to early modern and modern editions, see Poe, *Foreign Descriptions of Muscovy*.

Abbreviations

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