



# Information and Empire

Mechanisms of Communication in Russia

1600-1850

EDITED BY SIMON FRANKLIN AND KATHERINE BOWERS



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1600–1850

*Edited by Simon Franklin  
and Katherine Bowers*

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# 7. What Was News and How Was It Communicated in Pre-Modern Russia?

*Daniel C. Waugh*<sup>1</sup>

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Increasingly those who study the mechanisms for the spread of news in Europe are moving away from an emphasis on what, it has been argued, was a principal “modernising” medium in the pre-modern era, the printed newspaper with its ostensibly secular emphasis and focus primarily on political and economic news.<sup>2</sup> There is a huge, largely uncharted territory of manuscript news. Some of the most widespread conveyers of news were the brochures and pamphlet separates, whose focus often was the paranormal and the sensational, and underlying even the sober printed newspaper reports was a great deal that had first been transmitted orally and might well be categorised as unverified rumour. Public display—festivals, religious and political ceremonies, theatrical events—are among the means by which even the illiterate could be informed. A critical component in the shaping and transmission of

- 
- 1 This chapter was written with support provided by The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (Riksbankens jubileumsfond, project no. RFP12–0055:1) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (grant RZ-1635–13), the latter for work in the National Archives (London). Any views, findings, or conclusions expressed in this chapter do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
  - 2 For a recent and balanced treatment of the development of news media in Europe, see Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014).

news was oral communication, and it seems very likely that, even over centuries in the pre-modern era, the way that operated changed little.

My goal here is thus to look beyond the *kuranty*, the Muscovite compilations of translated news from foreign sources (much of it from printed newspapers) about which Ingrid Maier and I write in Chapter 3. With rare exceptions, the information the *kuranty* contained was not deliberately circulated to the public, and, one might suggest, that public (however we might define it) probably would have shown little interest in what were largely accounts of foreign places and events whose relevance for domestic concerns would have been difficult to ascertain. What other kinds of news were there in Muscovy, and how was it transmitted? If the *kuranty* were for the privileged few of the court elite, was that same elite interested in other kinds of news, and what was news for broader segments of the population? My *a priori* assumption here is that “news” is information presumably of potential or actual current interest for its recipients either because it was new to them and/or because it related to matters that they might have perceived affected their daily lives or professional activity. That is, news is something that may relate to ordinary experience, but has some element of novelty, and possibly would have some consequence requiring action. As the evidence discussed here suggests, specifically with regard to this last point, we may wish to classify a lot of news as “transactional” in that it pertained to the immediate personal or economic concerns of individuals.

If some news is thus highly personal and relevant mainly for its immediate consumer and perhaps his close associates, is it also possible to distinguish different categories of news, which might have had broader relevance for a community or social group? As an astute anonymous reviewer of this essay wondered, is there not some danger that my approach might produce “an undifferentiated notion of ‘news’ that is so broad and all-inclusive as to risk obscuring, rather than illuminating the issue at hand”? That is, should we not need to distinguish clearly between various kinds of “information”, including but not limited to rumour and intelligence gathering, and determine how the relationships between them changed over time? The discussion that follows will demonstrate that indeed there are differences in the way “news” was acquired, the purposes to which it was put, and the

degree to which what was “news” may not fit any formal analytical category but rather may be a moving target reflecting the changing perceptions of its consumers and creators. We are confronted with a picture of complexity in which the boundaries between one type of news and another are permeable. This will be evident especially in the final section here, when we shall see how oral testimony, some of it easily characterised as rumour, passes through institutionalised mechanisms of intelligence gathering and verification, and enters the written record. When this material ceases to have current relevance, it arguably might cease to be “news”. But short of that, the information may continue to operate as news, communicated in part orally, in part in writing, in part in public performance and symbol. If ideally news should be factual, in our own times we have ample evidence that this may not necessarily be the case. News may still contain rumour, may be based on contrafactual invention, be communicated (and in the process distorted) for purposes of propaganda, and so on.

I can, then, only offer a very preliminary inquiry to determine where we might locate information about “news” in its many manifestations in Muscovy. Much more study will be needed to clarify distinctions and trace transformations. I have deliberately not attempted to provide a review of the methodological literature on studying news, a task for which I have limited enthusiasm even though I recognise it will be necessary if the questions raised here are to be pursued in greater depth. Perhaps most importantly, there is an increasingly significant body of analysis on rumour which I have not yet explored in order to deal as fully as I would have wished with that aspect of my topic.

The road to uncovering evidence about oral transmission of news lies through the written record, several genres of which are treated here: certain kinds of missives (*poslaniia*, *gramotki*), reports and orders (*otpiski*, *ukazy*) communicated by or to government officials, chronicles (*letopisi*), and accounts about miracle-working icons. For communication networks, customs records (*tamozhennye knigi*) are invaluable, since they closely track frequent merchant travel, even if they are silent on what news those travellers may have carried. Some of the written record is disappointingly opaque on the subject of news. To some degree, then, we may have to relax normal rules for source-based historical argument and indulge in a certain amount of imaginative reconstruction of the

scenarios in which news spread. While the focus here will be on the seventeenth century, some of my examples are earlier. And my use of the term “Russia” (instead of Muscovy) in part reflects the inclusion of evidence from Novgorod when it still was independent, and from border regions that may have been in the process of being incorporated into Muscovy but were hardly Russian in any ethnic or linguistic sense.

## Private Letters

There is still a great deal to learn about literacy in Russia, even though we have some idea of the varied levels for different social groups.<sup>3</sup> Even those with no formal literacy could ask someone to write for them or read to them a written message. Keeping this in mind, the substantial amount of private communication in seventeenth-century Russia is a logical place to start if we wish to learn what might have been news. Most letters follow a standard format with a salutation and an exchange of sentiments about the health of both the writer and the addressee. Sometimes the writer merely asks that he or she be kept informed of the addressee’s well-being. Letters often include concern for relatives, information about deaths and funerals or about marriages. A certain Ganka Iakovlevich Tukhachevskii wrote to his (rich?) brother about his ill son’s disappointment at not being able to see his uncle when the latter’s servant informed the family after a church service that the uncle would be visiting in a neighbouring village.<sup>4</sup> It seems that such short personal messages were mainly a way to maintain family communication. Even highly placed members of the Russian elite (e.g. Prince Vasiliĭ Vasilevich Golitsyn) engaged in such correspondence.<sup>5</sup> In an expansive moment, presumably to impress his father, Golitsyn’s son Aleksei wrote on 1 September 1677, “You should know, my lord

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3 See, for example, Gary Marker, ‘Literacy and Literacy Texts in Muscovy: A Reconsideration’, *Slavic Review*, 49. 1 (1990), 74–89.

4 *Gramotki XVII-nachala XVIII veka*, ed. by N. I. Tarabasova, N. P. Pankratova and S. I. Kotkov (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), no. 140, p. 79.

5 For a summary on Golitsyn’s correspondence, see Lindsey A. J. Hughes, *Russia and the West, the Life of a Seventeenth-Century Westernizer, Prince Vasily Vasil’evich Golitsyn (1643–1714)* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1984), pp. 12–13; for a selection of his personal letters, see *Moskovskaia delovaia i bytovaia pis’mennost’ XVII veka*, ed. by S. I. Kotkov, A. S. Oreshnikov and I. S. Filippova (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), Section 1, pp. 16–35.

father, that I was in attendance on the procession to Kolomenskoe with the sovereign and on the name day of Tsarevich Ioann Alekseevich met his majesty face to face and attended the feast, whereas there were few (other) gentlemen of the bedchamber present".<sup>6</sup> News, then, in the first instance might be narrowly personal, conveyed for the most part by private messengers, though individuals in government service took advantage of opportunities to use official networks. In one unusual case of correspondence between Fedka Zinovev and Fedot Tikhonovich Vyndomskii in 1697, an annotation indicates that one letter had arrived "through the post at the post court", where it was picked up and then delivered.<sup>7</sup> The instructions were that the delivery was to be via the Novgorod residency (*podvor'e*) in Moscow.

A great deal of correspondence was what I term "transactional", in that, following the opening sentiments, the letters would shift to some specific business between the correspondents.<sup>8</sup> This might involve asking someone for financial assistance or intercession on behalf of the writer or someone connected with him. A missive might introduce an agent travelling on behalf of the writer, for whom accommodation was being sought. Letters could involve specific economic interests—peasant villages owned by one of the parties, the shipment of goods, the management of resources. A husband sends his wife instructions about brewing beer, an archbishop writes from Vologda to order bells for a newly constructed church since none are to be had locally.<sup>9</sup> At the very end of the seventeenth century, there is a remarkable set of long letters between Klement Prokofevich Kalmykov, a member of the *gostinnaia sotnia* (one of the privileged corporations of merchants), and his agents on the Volga concerning very substantial business operations.<sup>10</sup> So here too we have a kind of news, specific to the individuals involved.

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6 *Moskovskaia delovaia i bytovaia pis'mennost'*, Section 1, no. 9d, p. 26.

7 *Gramotki*, no. 172, p. 99. The following letter, no. 173, was also delivered by the post.

8 Note, here I am not including petitions (*chelobitnye*) and a number of other formal genres of documents submitted to or generated by the bureaucracy, even though the issues they raise undoubtedly could have been "newsworthy" to the circles of those who generated or read them. For military governors' reports (*otpiski*) and the instructions sent to them though, see the final section below.

9 *Moskovskaia delovaia i bytovaia pis'mennost'*, Section 1, no. 17v, p. 39; *Gramotki*, no. 462, p. 285.

10 *Gramotki*, pp. 176–248.

It is rare to find in such correspondence other kinds of news such as a report on the taking of Azov in July 1641 and the decision to release the Turkish captives to go home. Some 500 Arians and a certain foreigner Iakushka, described as a traitor, who was with them, were turned over to the Don Cossacks; the traitor was then crucified.<sup>11</sup> In autumn 1696, a Petrushka Lvov, writing to Gavriil, the Archbishop of Vologda and Beloozero, prefaced the substance of his letter, which dealt with attacks on Lvov's peasants by those under Church jurisdiction, with the following news:

In addition, lord, you should know that the pious sovereign Tsar Peter Alekseevich arrived in Moscow on 27 October. And the infantry and Don Cossacks were left at Azov and the *voevoda* (commandant) left there was Akim Iakovlev syn Rzhevskoi from among the *stol'niki*. And my friends write from Moscow that they expect instructions to all about their service and a campaign to be mounted beginning on 1 March or earlier.<sup>12</sup>

Two letters by Gavrilko Ivanovich Snarskii to his parents include some details of the campaign in which he was participating in the border region near Pechory not far from Pskov.<sup>13</sup> A distinctive feature of these letters is that in part they are written in Polish, and the parents' home address is in the Belsk *uezd* of Dneprovskaiia *volost'*—that is, presumably somewhere on the Western frontier where the family may well be Belorussian. The father Ivan Aleksandrovich was a high-ranking court official (a *stol'nik*).

In one instance, the bulk of a message from Mishka Prokofev, writing from Moscow to his employer, the *stol'nik* Andrei Ilich Bezobrazov, describes a major fire:

I inform you, my patron, that on 13 October in the fourth hour of the end of the night a fire began in the *Belyi gorod* [one of the central areas of Moscow—DW] behind the sovereign's large stable in the parish of the Church of the Miracle Worker Antipii. It broke out in the courtyard of

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11 The letter, written from Moscow on 1 August by one Nikishko (Nikita) Druzhinin, is to an addressee whose name has not been preserved, which makes it difficult to explain the possible context for the inclusion of the news about Azov; see *ibid.*, no. 47, pp. 37–38.

12 *Ibid.*, no. 476, p. 292.

13 *Ibid.*, nos. 224, 225, pp. 120–22, written on 21 September and 15 October but the year not specified. There are several additional letters in this series, apparently from the father's personal archive.

*dumnyi dvorianin* (conciliar lesser noble) Semen Fedorovich Tolochanov, and from that fire the roofs of seventeen churches began to burn, and among them in two churches people of various strata burned. Five hundred and four homes burned and twenty-six courtyards were destroyed, fifteen monastic cells on church grounds, two hundred and thirty-eight shops in the marketplace and in the same market area eight trading houses, and bathhouses burned. It was impossible, lord, to put out the fire by any means due to a great storm, and had the wind not subsided, I expect it would have been a lot worse.<sup>14</sup>

As we shall see, the frequent fires which devastated the largely wooden Russian towns were certainly a subject of news that must have been of great concern for all social strata. One might assume that this particular fire affected the economic interests of Bezobrazov.

In examining such correspondence, so far I have not come across any communication of news about unusual weather (unless the subject is merely when the first shipping can move after the ice on the river melts), paranormal events, or supposed miracles connected with a local cult. Some letters by supplicants mention that the writer's circle is starving, but that is not an indication of some larger famine affecting a region and may simply be a rhetorical device to elicit sympathy.

Correspondence, then, in the first instance seems to have been for practical purposes focussed on immediate concerns. If this were our only source, it would be tempting to suggest that news in any broader sense simply was of very little interest to most writers. Indeed, what we know about Patrick Gordon's correspondence suggests that a lot of it stuck closely to personal and family matters.<sup>15</sup> Yet in his case there is ample evidence that he was a voracious consumer (and active disseminator) of news, notably in his correspondence with the important state secretary and postmaster Andrei Vinus.<sup>16</sup> Gordon's personal letters on private and family matters seem by and large simply not to have been the

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14 *Pamiatniki russkogo narodno-razgovornogo iazyka XVII stoletii (Iz fonda A. I. Bezobrazova)*, ed. by S. I. Kotkov and N. I. Tarabasova (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), no. 147, p. 84.

15 A Scottish mercenary in Russian service, Gordon compiled a distinguished record of military service, undertook diplomatic missions, and advised the young Tsar Peter I. For more information about Gordon, see Chapter 3 of the present volume.

16 See my 'The Best Connected Man in Muscovy? Patrick Gordon's Evidence Regarding Communications in Muscovy in the 17th Century', *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, 7. 2 (2014 [2015]), 61–124. On his interaction with Vinus, see esp. pp. 106–09.

occasion for conveying other kinds of information, which perhaps should not surprise us.

Amongst the Russian elite in pre-modern Russia, personal family letters might be only part of the correspondence carried on by an individual who had official or business obligations. Of course it can be difficult to draw a line between the private and family- or clan-oriented concerns on the one hand, and that which related to public or official function on the other. A lot might depend on a particular individual's education and outlook. Vasili Golitsyn's correspondence is a case in point. Posted to the South in the campaigns of the mid-1670s, he corresponded about family matters but also received and acted on a request from A. I. Bezobrazov that he use his position to help retrieve the latter's peasants who had fled to territories under the jurisdiction of Cossack Hetman Ivan Samoilovich.<sup>17</sup>

Golitsyn, well known as a prominent "Westerniser" in late seventeenth-century Muscovy and ambitious for his own career, was certainly interested in all kinds of news. Not only his family but also his stewards or other employees in Moscow clearly had instructions to keep him informed of the latest business at court when he was off on campaign. There are several long letters from Matiushka Boev to Golitsyn, which passed on details about events in Moscow and about what the Russian commander in the Chyhyryn campaign of 1677, Grigorii Grigorevich Romodanovskii, had reported to the tsar.<sup>18</sup> Since his role in that campaign had been eclipsed by Romodanovskii's, Golitsyn felt that he had been slighted when the rewards were handed out. Reports transmitted in this fashion were not official, such as the formal dispatches that military commanders and governors were expected to submit with some regularity to a central office in Moscow, even if some of the content might be similar. Later, in the 1680s, when on a mission in Western Europe, Patrick Gordon was formally instructed to send regular reports to Golitsyn. Was Golitsyn a special case? Based on the isolated examples quoted above, we might at least hypothesise that many others would have been receiving in their correspondence news that was not merely "transactional". We might hypothesise that important merchants in Northern Russia, like the Fuggers (the German

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<sup>17</sup> *Pamiatniki*, no. 22, pp. 19–20; no. 88, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> *Gramotki*, pp. 128–133.

merchant and banking family) in the West, had an active interest in international news which might affect their business. Since some of the news translated for the *kuranty* arrived in Moscow via the White Sea and the commercial highway that ran South through Velikii Ustiug, Vologda and Iaroslavl, it is easy to imagine how the foreigners who brought it might have communicated it to the Russian merchants with whom they interacted.

## Evidence from Chronicles

To broaden our perspective on what might have been news, let us now examine evidence from what may at first seem an unlikely source, the chronicles. Chronicles, after all, were often compiled well after the events they record, and there is a somewhat mistaken impression that their regular compilation died out before the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> If our interest is the concerns of ordinary people, not just a small literate elite, the chronicles may seem to be a rather imperfect window through which to find evidence of news. Their focus often is on princely politics, births and deaths in the ruling families, high-level ecclesiastical affairs (but also the building of churches), invasions or military campaigns. It is not as though such information would have been deemed totally irrelevant to the daily well being of ordinary people, but one has to imagine that the news of very specific local consequence may have been deemed more important. The chronicles of Novgorod and some other places in the Russian North are known for the abundance of such local reporting. Of course, one challenge in assessing chronicle entries is to determine when and how the information they contain became known in the place where the chronicle was compiled or how current it was when recorded. Even though my main focus in this chapter is the seventeenth century, by stepping back to a specific example from a much earlier source, we can see the potential for locating information about what was news and how it was transmitted. Later and better

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19 Taking note of this, Malte Griesse dismisses the chronicles as a useful source for the kind of analysis about revolts highlighted in several essays in the stimulating volume *From Mutual Observation to Propaganda War. Premodern Revolts in Their Transnational Representations*, ed. by Malte Griesse (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), p. 14.

documented examples may help us to interpret the earlier evidence and may also suggest that in important ways the subject of the news and mechanisms for its transmission changed little between the periods we artificially label as “medieval” or “modern”.

My example is from the so-called Novgorod First Chronicle, where the entry for the year 6898 (1389–90) opens with political and local church news and then reads:

The same autumn there was a great plague in Novgorod; all this came upon us because of our sins; a great many Christians died in all the streets. And this was the symptom in people: as death approached, a swelling would appear, and death came within three days. Then they erected a church to St. Afanasii in a single day, and Bishop Ioann, Archbishop of Novgorod, consecrated it, with all the abbots and priests and with the synod of the Cathedral of St Sophia; so by God’s mercy, the intercession of St Sophia, and the blessing of the bishop, the plague ceased.

The same winter the Church of St Dmitrii in Danislav Street burned down, and all the icons, and books and all the church stores, and a great many goods burned, for the fire took hold rapidly.

In the year 6899 [1390–91]. There was a fire, which burned from Borkova Street up to Gzen [Brook], and on the other side from Mikitin Street to Rodokovichi: eight wooden churches burned down and three stone churches were partially burnt, and fourteen men, women and children perished, on 5 June, the day of the holy Martyr Dorofei. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of the same month, the day of the holy Martyr Ulian, a fire broke out in Prussian Street at the Church of the Presentation of the Holy Mother of God, and the whole of the Liudin Quarter burned up to St Alexei. Seven wooden churches burned down, and four stone churches were partially burnt.<sup>20</sup>

Surely much of this is eye-witness reportage, either directly by the writer or recorded from someone else’s testimony, even if transmitted through a later manuscript. There is little here to distinguish the descriptions of the fires from that in Mishka Prokofev’s letter quoted earlier, a report that clearly must have been written down very soon after the fire in Moscow. Nor do the Novgorod reports on the plague and fires

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20 *Novgorodskaia pervaiia letopis’ starshego i mladshego izvodov*, ed. by A. N. Nasonov (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1950), pp. 383–84. The translation is largely mine, though some parts follow *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016–1471*, tr. by Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes. Camden Third Series, vol. XXV (London: Camden Society, 1914), pp. 163–64.

differ significantly from what one might find in European manuscript newsletters or in a printed seventeenth-century German newspaper whose priority was to publish news as quickly as possible about a recent occurrence. Sir Peter Wyche, the English resident in Hamburg, was the regular informant for Sir Lionell Jenkins, the Foreign Secretary in London. In June 1680, Wyche included information about plague in Eastern Europe in more than one dispatch, and in his letter of 15 June, news of a fire that had gutted the centre of Stralsund. While he himself apparently did not subscribe to such beliefs, he passed on information about “superstitious feares” that such events engendered.<sup>21</sup> Fires in Russia did make the news in the West, especially if they occurred in locations where foreign interests were affected. One such report, about a fire in Arkhangelsk in 1695, was translated or at least summarised in the *kuranty* in Moscow, the news having originated in Muscovy, been printed in a yet unspecified Western newspaper, and then come back to Russia.<sup>22</sup>

It does not take much imagination to place oneself in Novgorod in those two years the chronicle covers and reconstruct how the news might have spread quickly throughout the city about the threats to life and property, or how the construction and consecration of churches would have involved a lot of people who would walk away from the consecration ceremony and perhaps later say something about it to those not present whom they might meet at the market. These are specific reports on the fires and plague, life-threatening events which surely would have been of great concern to Novgorodians.

Ideally we would be able to find documentation clearly labeled as eyewitness testimony for analogous events of such crucial local interest. In fact, there is at least one unusually revealing source about what happened when a fire broke out on 17 May 1646 in an area of Moscow called Kulishki in the house of Uliana, the widow of an under-secretary Ivan Eremeev Fustov.<sup>23</sup> The district administrative office (*Zemskii dvor*) investigated to determine whether or not Uliana was responsible by

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21 NA (National Archives, London), State Papers 82/16, fols. (printed numbering) 128v, 130v, 135v.

22 S. M. Shamin, *Kuranty XVII stoletia. Evropeiskaia pressa v Rossii i vozniknovenie russkoi periodicheskoi pechati* (Moscow-St Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2011), p. 192, no. 130.

23 *Moskovskaia delovaia i bytovaia pis'mennost'*, Section 3, no. 1, pp. 125–27.

having left unattended a lighted stove in the living quarters of the home. The sworn testimony of several individuals was taken (“[name] said, having sworn an oath by kissing the cross”), most of them government clerks in various departments, as Kulishki seems to have been their home. As professional scribes, most submitted their testimony in their own hand. Interestingly, the surviving record includes no testimony from Uliana herself. The assembled depositions (*perechnevaia vypiska*) were then submitted under the signature of a state secretary and sent to the *Zemskii dvor* on 26 May, only nine days after the fire.

Under-secretary Ramashko Protopopov of the Great Revenue Chancery (*Bol'shoi prikhod*) recorded that he was at home asleep, and “when the fire began on Kulishki and I heard the bell of St Nicholas the Miracle Worker, I raced over to it”. He could not say whether Uliana had lit the fire but knew that she was out visiting. A *zhilets* (the designation for a lower service rank) Ivan Samoilov syn Savin, who also wrote down his own testimony, indicated simply that he saw the fire but had no idea whether she had started it. An under-secretary of the *Zemskii* chancery, Mikiforko Vyrshin, confirmed that Uliana had been visiting at the home of the secretary Timofei Golosov. Vyrshin was at his office at the time, whence he rushed home to find his barn afire. “And at that moment Semen Stepanov, the son of the sexton of St Nicholas Podkopaev, told me, Mikiforka, that the fire had broken out atop the upper story under the roof of the home of Uliana, the widow of under-secretary Ivan Eremeev, and when he, Semen, had run up to her home, at that moment the roof took fire, and he Semen poured water on the fire and broke the lock of the upper chamber”. The Siberian Chancery under-secretaries Eufimka and Vikulka Panov reported: “I, Eufimka, was at that moment attending evening vespers in the Church of the Miracle Worker St Nicholas Podkopaev, and just then a man on a horse raced up and yelled out that there was a fire in Kulishki, and in an instant I leapt out of the church and ran up to her house where already the entire upper story was aflame. I, Vikula, had gone into town and had almost reached the Frolov Gate when the alarm was rung. Seeing that there was a fire in Kulishki, I raced over [to it]”.

Under-secretary Petrushka Koludarov of the *Novgorodskaia chet'* (an office with fiscal responsibilities) was at work. On his way home, he stopped at the home of the secretary Timofei Golosov, since his mother

was visiting there, and they had left in their own home their neighbour Arinka. He did not recall exactly when they got home but went to bed only to be awakened when the neighbour Arinka “cried out that next to our house, the home of Uliana, widow of Ivan Eremeev, was burning, and I, Petrushka, jumped up...and I, Petrushka, splashed water [on the fire], and I do not know what caused the fire, but on that day the widow Uliana was home in the morning and then went to visit at Timofei Golosov’s in the afternoon”. However, he could not say whether she had lit the stove before going. Two other clerks testified simply that they knew nothing about the cause of the fire. Under-secretary Smirnoi Bogdanov of the Foreigners’ Chancery (*Inozemskii prikaz*) explained his ignorance by the fact that he was not at home but at work where “I heard from people” about the fire. Finally, the icon painter Senka Stepanov reported that he had been at the home of Prince Semen Pozharskii, and as he was leaving “he heard a racket and saw smoke and ran up just as his widow’s [place] went up...and the chamber was locked, and having raced up, they broke the lock and poured water on the fire. But at that moment the widow Uliana was not home and was over at the secretary Timofei Golosov’s”.

All in all, this is a remarkable record of how news spread, unique perhaps in that it is largely the reports of witnesses who wrote down their accounts within days of the actual event (most of the reports seem to have been written on 20 May). Although populated with literate officials, Kulishki otherwise probably was typical of almost any neighbourhood in Moscow or any small town in Russia, where everyone seems to have known everyone else, and many people interacted socially. In such a neighbourhood, oral transmission of news, rumour and gossip might have been quite normal even if not in moments of crisis. The first knowledge of the fire for some was from their direct observation, but in other cases because they heard the alarm or someone told them. The written documentation came soon after, preserving a directness and immediacy that the report in the Novgorod chronicle fails to convey, even if it may have likewise been recorded from eyewitness testimony when the event was still news. True, the requirements for bureaucratic paperwork in mid-seventeenth-century Moscow likely had advanced considerably over those in fourteenth-century Novgorod, but what

was newsworthy, and the role of oral transmission at the moment it happened, surely must be similar in both cases.

What I have seen of the still largely unpublished later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Novgorodian chronicles indicates that analogous reportage of local events was an ongoing preoccupation of the compilers, as many of the manuscripts evidence a continual process of record-keeping by different scribes, marginal additions, and the like.<sup>24</sup> Possibly our analogies here would be with some of the larger printed compendia of news published in the West, starting with the volumes sold at fairs in the late sixteenth century,<sup>25</sup> and then in the era of the periodical press, evident in the consecutively paginated numbers of newspapers which might be bound into annual volumes. Some publishers would also bring together at the end of a year a large volume containing such reports, which are generally included in any analysis of news in early modern Europe.

If Novgorod even in its decline after its incorporation into Muscovy continued to be well connected to news networks and retained a remarkably vibrant tradition of chronicle-writing well into the era when, so we are told, the genre was dying, what about a more remote location? My main example here will be Khlynov (re-named Viatka in the late eighteenth century; now Kirov), North of Kazan as one heads up river into the Urals, the town which in later perceptions was the quintessential provincial backwater of Russia. As near as we can tell, regular recording in writing of news and historical information in Khlynov began only around the middle of the seventeenth century.

As in Novgorod, churchmen in Khlynov were the primary recorders of the news in the local chronicles.<sup>26</sup> Key roles in the development of chronicle writing in Khlynov were played by the town's first bishop,

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24 See S. N. Azbelev, *Novgorodskie letopisi XVII veka* (Novgorod, 1960), some of whose observations I have confirmed in a (granted, cursory) examination of one or two of the manuscripts in the collection of the Russian National Library in St Petersburg.

25 See Esther-Beate Körber, *Messrelationen. Geschichte der deutsch- und lateinischsprachigen "messentlichen" Periodika von 1588 bis 1805* (Presse und Geschichte—Neue Beiträge, Bd. 92) (Bremen: Edition lumière, 2016).

26 For details of the rather complicated history of the compilation and interrelationship of those texts, readers are referred to my book, Daniel C. Waugh [D. K. Uo], *Istoriia odnoi knigi. Viatka i 'ne-sovremennost' v russkoi kul'ture Petrovskogo vremeni* (St Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003).

Aleksandr, appointed in 1657, and by a sacristan Semen Popov, whose father had also served as a sacristan in the main cathedral. Popov was obviously well connected in the community, with access to libraries and to the local chancery; he served for a time as one of the newly created Petrine *burmistry*, the officials in charge of local tax collection. Events of “all Russian” significance were the context for and background to his inclusion of events of local interest, one of them involving the history of the venerated miracle-working icon of St Nicholas Velikoretskii (about which more below). That Popov may have viewed the chronicle information, or at least some part of it, as “news” would seem to be confirmed by the fact that over a period of more than a decade at the beginning of the eighteenth century, he assiduously collected and preserved in chronological sequence copies made from the published Petrine newspapers (*Vedomosti*) and other reports about the ongoing events of the Northern War. The boundaries between keeping a historical record and keeping a record of current events surely were permeable.

For the late seventeenth century, there was a particular focus in the Khlynov chronicles on the Romanov succession and births, deaths, and marriages in the royal family. There is good reason to think that at least some of the information in such entries derived either from the writer having witnessed the celebration of the events in the local cathedral and/or from having accessed the decrees sent from Moscow with the news and the indication that it was to be celebrated locally. Such official commemorations surely would have served to disseminate the news to a broader public. Apart from news of the royal family, another item of “national” significance was an entry encapsulating the history of Stepan Razin, from his rise to his execution by quartering in Moscow. One might imagine that the ultimate source for this compact (single paragraph) treatment was some official communication circulated from Moscow.

Local reportage understandably included the installation of a new bishop. When Iona was appointed bishop in August 1674, a musketeer arrived ahead of him in town with a missive from the new appointee conveying the news, and then a service was celebrated on its receipt. Apart from such items, as in the Novgorod case, the local chronicles included information about natural or manmade disasters:

In the year [6]175 [1667] on the twelfth day of the month of July there was in the town of Khlynov frightful thunder and lightning, and on account of the lightning the monastery stable and all the horse tack burned.

In the year [6]179 [1671] on the sixteenth day of June the Dormition Cathedral of the monastery took fire from lightning and on account of that, the entire monastery burned on 16 June at the thirteenth hour in daytime, and the bells melted.<sup>27</sup>

It is likely that the source for these two entries was a record kept in the monastery, though of course the events would have been witnessed by many and undoubtedly not readily forgotten.

Destruction caused by storms was also news elsewhere in Europe. One of Peter Wyche's reports to London in 1680 from Hamburg told of the damage caused by an unusually severe hailstorm in a nearby town:

The memory of Men cannot second it, it hath scarce left a Tile on the roofoe of any house, or a paine of Glasse in any Window in the Towne, which looks as desolate, as if it had past through the hands of an unrulely Army. The Corne thereabouts is soe platted, that it lyes as if t' had beene mowed. The Poultrely, some Sheepe and Young Cattell were struck dead, and one relation saith, there were Haile Stones of a Pound and a halfe.<sup>28</sup>

Even though chronicle entries about newsworthy events such as bad weather or disastrous fires are quite common, we should not necessarily expect that a chronicle account would retain the immediacy of an eyewitness report. For example, in the Ustiug chronicles of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, entries about fires, which sometimes include a long list of villages and even precise numbers of houses burned, may but transmit a dry bureaucratic assessment by some junior clerk who walked through the ruins.<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to tell how accurate such reporting was, especially if, in some cases, such accounts of disasters keep company with entries about unnatural occurrences and sentiments about divine dispensation. In context then, what we might have is less the keeping of the news and more the combination of entries that reflect a particular providential stance

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>28</sup> NA, SP 82/16, fol. 148v, Wyche to Jenkins 23 July 1680.

<sup>29</sup> *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, vol. 37, *Ustiuzhskie i vologodskie letopisi XVI–XVIII vv.* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1982), pp. 124–25.

of the writer/compiler. Typically, the other local entries would concern the appointments of prelates or building of churches, but in the case of the appointments as reported in the Ustiug chronicles, it seems we are not dealing with an immediate record but rather a retrospective entry which would also summarise how long the bishop served, where he went if he left and when he died.

The chronicle notes, which Semen Popov was keeping in the beginning of the eighteenth century, included an entry for 1637 about a particularly warm spring when the planting was done early; later in that year, the river froze only four days after Christmas. He brought together the information about the appointment of the first three bishops of Viatka, Aleksandr, Iona and Dionisii. While he recorded few entries on local events other than those pertaining to the Church, an event in the neighbouring town of Slobodskoi clearly must have been in the news: "In [6]204 [1695] on 21 December in Slobodskoi while on the way to the monastery, seven people were bitten by a wolf, and two of them died". Now that surely was news to make the local population sit up and take notice!

## Paranormal Events

Despite the common perception that, on the cusp of the modern era, rational and scientific thought was taking hold in Europe, the line between a natural phenomenon and the paranormal or possibly divinely inspired occurrence was blurred in popular belief in the seventeenth century. Unusual natural events—whether simply bad weather, an outbreak of infectious disease, or astronomical phenomena such as an eclipse, a meteor shower or the appearance of a comet—were newsworthy in part precisely because they inspired awe and speculation about divine intervention in human affairs. In the Russian tradition, as is well known, heavenly signs had long been recorded in the chronicles, often, it seems, retrospectively inserted (and sometimes thus misdated) as portents of some coming disaster which might be attributed to human sin and divine retribution.

Stepan Shamin has effectively summarised Russian responses to direct sightings of, or news about, comets in the last third of the seventeenth century, all of which in one way or another interpreted them

as portents of some impending catastrophe.<sup>30</sup> The comet that appeared in 1680 was news everywhere in Europe. Sir Peter Wyche in Hamburg wrote about it in some detail in his reports to London. As a corresponding member of the Royal Society he recorded serious observations, and even though he clearly did not believe popular superstition as to what it meant, he reported on the widespread speculation that the comet inspired.<sup>31</sup> Reports about it apparently continued to appear in the West well after it had come and gone. The news of this particularly brilliant comet made it into Semen Popov's Khlynov chronicle and the translated *kuranty*, and was invoked in verses by Evfimii Chudovskii as foretelling the death of Tsar Fedor Alekseevich.

Popular belief in miracles continued to be widespread throughout Europe, with miraculous cures occupying a prominent place. Within Russia, news of miraculous healing most commonly was associated with some holy relic. Particularly venerated was the object understood to be the robe of Christ, sent as a gift to Moscow from the Shah of Persia in 1625, and then "tested" for its efficacy. When it produced the anticipated miracles, it was installed with great ceremony in the Cathedral of the Dormition in the Moscow Kremlin and a service for its annual commemoration printed.<sup>32</sup> Its acquisition and installation surely were newsworthy events, in the same way that the bringing to Moscow a few years ago of the relic believed to be the right hand of John the Baptist was newsworthy and inspired Muscovites to queue for its veneration.<sup>33</sup> Among the holy objects most commonly associated with miraculous cures were particular icons and the relics of saints.

An example is the miracle-working icon of St Nicholas Velikoretskii (so named for having been found in a village near Khlynov on the

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30 Shamin, *Kuranty*, pp. 216–25.

31 NA, SP 82/16, Wyche to Jenkins, 23 November; 10, 28, 31 December; 7, 4, 21 January.

32 See Daniel C. Waugh, 'The Writings about the Translation of the Savior's Robe to Moscow in 1625: Materials for Further Study', Appendix I B in Edward L. Keenan, *The Kurbskii-Groznyi Apocrypha: The Seventeenth-Century Genesis of the 'Correspondence' Attributed to Prince A. M. Kurbskii and Tsar Ivan IV* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 142–47, 226–29; S. N. Gukhman, "'Dokumental'noe" skazanie o dare shakha Abbasa Rossii', *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, 28 (1974), 254–70.

33 Nick Paton Walsh, 'Hand of John the Baptist in Russia', *The Guardian*, 9 June 2006, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/10/russia.religion>. As I saw from a tour bus that drove by the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, the line of those wishing to worship at the relic extended around the block.

Velikaia river, whose history provides some insights into the ways news spread in Russia.<sup>34</sup> Its discovery, veneration and the miracles attributed to it were items of news that undoubtedly would have had great significance both for the Church hierarchy and ordinary believers. A peasant reported its miraculous appearance to the church authorities, who removed it to the provincial capital. On two occasions the icon was taken off to Moscow, where it received national recognition before returning to become the local palladium in Khlynov. Those who prayed before it reported miraculous cures; it was the focal point of an annual procession around the lands of Viatka. Some 220 healings were attributed to the icon prior to the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>35</sup> There are analogies here with the accounts about the miraculous healings reported at the North German Protestant spa of Hornhausen, published accounts of which were translated for the Muscovite *kuranty*.<sup>36</sup> Of course there is an important difference too, in that the fame of Hornhausen, while undoubtedly spread by word of mouth, was also disseminated in published brochures and leaflets. As a result, many of the European elite patronised its healing waters. In the case of the icon of St Nicholas, there are relatively few manuscripts about its history, and the record of these healings, appended to the tale of its founding and installation, is even more rare.

Clearly the local authorities, ecclesiastical and secular, played a role in spreading the fame of the icon, presumably both because of religious conviction and because of the economic benefits the icon could bring to

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34 For details of its history, see Daniel C. Waugh, 'K voprosu o datirovke Velikoretskogo krestnogo khoda', *Gertsenka: Viatskie zapiski*, 6 (2004), 129–36; Waugh, 'Religion and Regional Identities: The Case of Viatka and the Miracle-Working Icon of St. Nicholas Velikoretskii', in *Die Geschichte Russlands im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert aus der Perspektive seiner Regionen*, ed. by Andreas Kappeler, Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte, 63 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), pp. 259–78; Waugh, 'Mestnoe samoznanie, religiiia i "izobretenie" regional'nogo proshlogo', *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, 57 (2006), 350–58.

35 In the absence of a full critical edition of the text that includes all the miracles, my observations are based on the rendering (some is quotation, some is rephrasing) in Stefan Kashmenskii, 'O chudotvornoi Velikoretskoi ikone Sviatitelia i Chudotvortsa Nikolaia', *Viatskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti*, Otdel dukhovno-literaturnyi, 1875, no. 9, 286–94, no. 10, 311–27, no. 11, 359–71, no. 12, 379–93, no. 16, 495–510, no. 17, 523–38; 1876, no. 9, 256–62; and on A. S. Vereshchagin's sometimes indecipherable notes from the manuscript in GAKO (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Kirovskoi oblasti), coll. 170, descr. 1, no. 270.

36 See Waugh and Maier's chapter in this volume, esp. the references in note 30.

those who promoted it. The earliest itinerary of the annual procession of the icon in the Viatka lands was a relatively short one, but then over time, the routes were expanded, with every iteration then generating news and expectations along its path. Reports about miraculous cures surely have to have spread in the first instance by word of mouth, although with the bureaucratisation under the Synod in the eighteenth century, church authorities began to issue explicit instructions to prepare for the icon's arrival on its route.

The written record occasionally describes the reception of the icon with great public ceremony and the witnessing of the miraculous cure, not only by a priest, but also by local secular officials or members of the elite and in some cases by a large crowd. The visual and performative would have contributed to the spread of news. On 28 September 1614, the icon was welcomed in Kazan by the citizens of that town and the church hierarchs in a public ceremony, when it was placed (temporarily) in the main cathedral. When a miraculous cure occurred there the next day "archpriest Iakov began to pray to the assembled [...] and offered up praise". Before it left the city, another miracle occurred

before the assembled clergy and the boyar Prince I. M. Vorotynskii, before the commandants and a great multitude of people. And the boyar and all the people having witnessed this... offered up praise... and thus they accompanied the icon from the city of Kazan to the imperial city of Moscow.

It arrived in Cheboksary, where it was met by "all the people". When it finally arrived back in Khlynov at the end of August 1615, it was met by the church hierarchs, commandants F. A. Zvenigorodskii and V. T. Zhemchuzhinov, secretary M. Ordintsov, and a large crowd. A few years later, one of the recorded miracles occurred during the public reception of the icon back in Khlynov on its return from the annual procession to Velikoretskaia.<sup>37</sup>

For the most part we can but speculate how those not resident in Khlynov would have heard about it and come to the town to seek a cure. As discussed below, the towns of the Russian North were well connected. Moreover, some copies of the Khlynov icon were deposited

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<sup>37</sup> Kashmenskii, 'O chudotvornoi Velikoretskoi ikone', 1875, no. 16, 501–02.

in churches in other locations, one in the Cathedral of the Intercession on the Moat, popularly known as St Basil's, in Moscow's Red Square. One can envisage a "catchment area" centred on the location of the icon at any given moment. Its central point would be Khlynov, soon expanded into the area adjoining the route of the annual procession to Velikoretskaia and back. As the route of that procession grew, the catchment area would eventually include much of the Viatka region. Certainly the history of this one icon is not unique in Muscovy. In all such cases, oral testimony must have been the first method to communicate the news about the miracles, even if then entered in a written record.

In the seventeenth and especially in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Church authorities tried to control such manifestations of popular piety. It seems to have been a losing battle, however. An entry dated 24 February 1714 near the end of one of the late Novgorod chronicles relates how a widow in Kargopol witnessed that an icon of the Kazan Mother of God in her home began to weep.<sup>38</sup> She told the local priest, who took it off to his church, installed it, and performed the appropriate prayers. At the hour when, according to the Gospels, Christ had breathed the last on the Cross, the icon began to weep again "in the presence of all the people". Over the next days, further such incidents occurred, "and this miracle was witnessed by many citizens". The icon then was sent to Novgorod, where it was responsible for many miraculous cures. Somewhat less than a year after its miracles had first been reported, it was returned to Kargopol.

Analogous examples can be found in accounts about locally venerated saints, whose cults became embedded and who attracted widening circles of devotees. Certainly the local parish or a regional centre of a bishopric or important monastery provided a focal point where people gathered on a regular basis and shared all kinds of news or rumour about events, near and far, and gossip (another kind of news) about their neighbours. Another opportunity for the exchange of news could have been the ongoing interactions amongst merchants or the annual fairs which were so important for bringing together people from distant towns.

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38 RNB (Russian National Library), Collection of M. P. Pogodin, no. 1411, fols. 314(315)-315(316).

## Connectivity in Northern Russia

It is important to remember that despite the low density of population in the Russian North, the region was well connected via the river routes and in certain instances by roads. The seventeenth-century customs registers (*tamozhennye knigi*) kept in the major towns such as Velikii Ustiug and Solvychevodsk testify to the regularity and rapidity of communication involving merchants from distant locations. Beyond the official horse relays and foreign post then, there were networks that communicated news that merit further study.<sup>39</sup> Each entry in the registers identifies the traveller by his town or region of origin. To take one year (September 1, 1634–August 31, 1635), of a grand total of 433 individuals, the merchants who bought and sold in Velikii Ustiug registered as living in other towns or regions, included 66 from Solvychevodsk, 31 from Totma, 13 from Vaga, 9 from Kholmogory, 8 from Viatka, 30 from Vologda, 147 from Galich, 29 from Moscow, 18 from Iaroslavl, 8 from Kazan.<sup>40</sup> In 1642 P. D. Gogunin, from Solvychevodsk, came to Ustiug four times, a high number, whereas the most normal pattern might be a single annual visit. A second type of evidence is the indication of whence came the individual arriving in Ustiug (irrespective of his home town). As far as I know, this evidence has yet to be systematised. The impression is that the most common routes were those connecting Ustiug with Vologda, Kholmogory and Solvychevodsk. Lalsk, to the North of Khlynov, was an important stopping point on the way to the Urals. Vaga is on the list too, as the location of an important annual trade fair. Since the registers tell

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39 In particular, I have drawn on *Tamozhennye knigi Sukhono-Dvinskogo puti XVII v.*, comp. by S. N. Kisterev and L. A. Timoshina, Vyp. 1 (St Petersburg: Kontrast, 2013); and *Tamozhennye knigi Moskovskogo gosudarstva XVII veka. Tom 1. Severnyi rechnoi put': Ustiug Velikii, Sol'vychevodsk, Tot'ma v 1633–1636 gg.*, ed. by A. I. Iakovlev (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1950). For details about their contents and observations about the challenges in studying them, see A. Ts. Merzon, 'Ustiuzhskie tamozhennye knigi XVII v.', *Problemy istochnikovedeniia*, 6 (1958), 67–129.

40 A. Ts. Merzon and Iu. A. Tikhonov, *Rynok Ustiuga Velikogo v period skladyvaniia vserossiiskogo rynka (XVII vek)* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960), pp. 224–31. They also tabulate percentages for a later period, pp. 635–39. Ideally one might map the “connectivity” of Velikii Ustiug by plotting the locations from which the visitors came. One should note that the dramatic map Merzon and Tikhonov provide (foldout, following p. 240) illustrates not the human connections but rather the source of the products which came to the market in Ustiug.

us of both arrivals and departures (recording payment of a departure or arrival tax and duties on goods that were being carried), it is possible to determine in some cases the travel time, or, if a merchant arrived and stayed on for a few days, the duration of the round trip that would have brought him back to his departure point.

In the very small sample I have tested, for December 1634 there were fourteen departures or arrivals in Ustiug, eight on the route to Solvychegodsk, three on the route to Vologda, two the route to Iaroslavl and one from Sysola. The *iaroslavtsy* Roman and his brother Petr Oglodaev were involved in several of these trips, Roman having arrived in Ustiug from Vologda apparently at the beginning of September. He went to Solvychegodsk on 5 December, while there (on 12 December) sent goods back to Ustiug, paid for other goods on 19 December and arrived back with them in Ustiug in what would appear to have been a very fast trip over the distance of seventy-seven versts (approximately eighty-two kilometres) on 21 December. When his brother Petr arrived in Ustiug from Iaroslavl on 30 December, he immediately packed up and went on to Solvychegodsk. Two days later on 1 January, Roman shipped off to Iaroslavl the goods obtained in Ustiug. On 6 January in Solvychegodsk, Petr Oglodaev was in a group which paid for a large convoy of goods being sent on some forty-five sledges (these probably belonged to several different merchant houses), though he himself stayed on. One of Roman's agents came from Solvychegodsk to Ustiug on 17 January. On 19 January, Roman reported in Ustiug that he had received a shipment from his brother on two sledges, and the following day Petr himself returned. Two days after that Roman left for Iaroslavl with three sledges, and on 10 February, Petr followed on seven of them.

The evidence from the customs registers would seem to suggest some seasonal patterns of greater or less communication. Clearly there was a navigation season before the rivers froze. Once they were solidly frozen, they provided highways for most of the sledge traffic (in a few instances, roads through the woods and swamps were used).<sup>41</sup> In the seasons between the two best suited for travel, there might be

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41 In 2003 I was with a group that drove from Lalsk to the ferry landing where one then took the boat to Ustiug. In one or two places in this now sparsely populated area with its decaying villages, the dirt road showed stone paving that we were told by our local historian-guide dated back even as far as the seventeenth century.

less traffic, since boats might not risk the remains or the onset of the winter ice, and a good hard freeze or two would be needed to firm up the surface for safe travel. My sampling shows relatively few entries for September-November, substantially more for December-March, but fewer again after spring arrived. Possibly, of course, other registers would fill gaps here, as little of what I have seen so far relates to major boat traffic even in the season when it was possible. Other factors in the frequency of travel might include the nature of the goods to be moved—products were seasonal and may have had limits on the time they could be stored. Yet another consideration was the nature of the market, since there was, for example, a focus on travel to seasonal fairs. So one should not expect here a kind of predictably regular schedule of departures or arrivals such as became the feature of the Western postal networks. Communication would be opportunistic.

Granted, what we learn for Velikii Ustiug, a major node, cannot necessarily be generalised for the smaller, less frequented or less accessible towns. However, we see how the communication of news without significant delay would have been possible quite apart from any government-sponsored initiatives or institutions such as the official horse relay system. Of course the registers tell us about goods carried, not stories told or packets of letters. Even if we may never be able to correlate particular arrivals with the receipt of certain news, we should at least consider systematising the evidence of the registers to develop a much more concrete idea than we have had previously regarding the actual communications networks. Where people travelled, they brought with them more than the customs registers record: as our next section will demonstrate, those who travelled on private business in Muscovy might in fact have important news to communicate.

## Oral Testimony and Written Reports

For my concluding example I have chosen to focus on reporting about the rebellion of Stepan Razin, who is the subject, with a different emphasis, of Maier's Chapter 4 in this volume.<sup>42</sup> As is well known, the rebellion

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<sup>42</sup> See also her article co-authored with Stepan Shamin "'Revolts'" in the *Kuranty* of March-July 1671', and André Berelowitch, 'Stenka Razin's Rebellion: The

had major implications not only for the stability of the Muscovite state but for all of those who lived in the areas directly involved or in the path of the rebels and the government forces sent to defeat them. What seemed initially to be but another example of Cossack piracy on the lower Volga and Caspian Sea exploded with the seizure by the rebels of Tsaritsyn (now Volgograd) in mid-May 1670, the taking of Astrakhan near the mouth of the river on 22 June, and further successes. The turning point came when they failed to take Simbirsk. While the analysis which follows here includes some material from the reporting about Razin prior to his taking of Tsaritsyn and later into autumn, the focus will be on the news about his movements and successes between about mid-May and mid-July.

The rebellion was indeed a news sensation and as such has left a much richer body of documentation than have other examples examined above. In fact, it is possible here to probe deeply into the way the different “categories” of news appeared, intersected and spread—in short, to appreciate the complexity of what we may hope eventually to unravel if we are to gain a full understanding of what news was in Muscovy. My emphasis will be on information in the dispatches sent to Moscow by its military governors and others in the South and in the responses sent back from the central government.<sup>43</sup> On the face of it, this was just government-sponsored intelligence gathering, hugely informative about the processes by which news was collected, communicated and checked for accuracy. Importantly, the evidence documents the role of ordinary individuals in the reporting of news and the relationship between their oral testimony and written communication. The way in which the news then was manipulated and in specific instances publicly broadcast is an

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Eyewitnesses and their Blind Spot’, both in *From Mutual Observation to Propaganda War*, ed. by Malte Griesse, pp. 181–203, and pp. 94–124 respectively. Berelowitch, pp. 99–106, provides a good compact summary of the rebellion’s history, and, *passim*, offers some astute observations about the domestic accounts.

43 I am relying on the extensive collection of documents in *Krest’ianskaia voina pod predvoditel’stvom Stepana Razina. Sbornik dokumentov*, comp. by E. A. Shvetsova, ed. by A. A. Novosel’skii *et al.*, 4 vols in 5 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1954–1976), esp. vols 1, 2. 1 and 2. 2. The editors’ notes make clear that the collection does not include all of the relevant material; they have selected from among many documents which may simply repeat what is in the ones they publish, or contain information they deemed peripheral. To a certain degree, the selection undoubtedly was influenced by the prevailing Marxist interpretations of the rebellion.

essential part of this history. It was difficult enough to separate truth from unverified and in many instances inaccurate rumour, but even when some accurate understanding of events had been achieved, that in turn might be deliberately distorted and communicated as “news”.

Several government departments were involved in news acquisition: the Chancery of the Kazan Court (*Prikaz Kazanskogo dvortsa*), which had under its purview the middle Volga region; the Military Service Chancery (*Razriadnyi prikaz*), to which Muscovite military governors reported and from which they received their instructions; the Ambassadorial Chancery (*Posol'skii prikaz*), charged with foreign affairs and involved here especially because of its concerns about relations with Persia, the Crimea and the Turks as well as the Cossacks of the lower Don; rarely, the tsar's Privy Affairs Chancery (*Tainyi prikaz*), which was responsible for bringing important matters directly to the attention of Aleksei Mikhailovich. Within the Military Service Chancery were separate desks for the affairs of various commands, for example, that at Belgorod, on one of the primary defensive lines in the South. Coordination of the various departments occurred in meetings of the tsar with his boyars and key departmental secretaries.

The seriousness of the Razin rebellion is underscored by the regular annotations on the news reports coming to Moscow that they had been read to the tsar and the boyars. Often those annotations then indicate an immediate decision taken in response to the latest news (e.g.: “Order that the Voronezhian and Nizhnii Novgorodian be interrogated in the Military Service Chancery”).<sup>44</sup> Orders sent from Moscow frequently summarised the news about Razin (to underscore the importance of the order now being issued), with a specific citation of the date and source of a report, and might include the phrase “on the basis of that news”.

The annotations also regularly include the indication of when a particular report was received and who had brought it. The messengers were varied—musketeers (*strel'tsy*), horsemen (most frequently called *striapchei koniukh*), townsmen (*posadskie liudi*), sometimes accompanied by the individual who had first brought the news in order that he be interrogated again in Moscow. The urgency of rapid reporting from the military governors was constantly stressed.<sup>45</sup> The institutionalised

44 *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 1, no. 154, p. 217.

45 *Ibid.*, no. 116, p. 170.

service of the horse relays (*iamskaia gon'ba*) seems to have been largely irrelevant, since it was slow. For the express couriers, horses were provided by emergency transport (*zavodnye podvody*), obtained in the first instance on demand from small Cossack detachments posted in various places. One order sent back from Moscow to Korotoiak, a key border town in the Don region, travelled as follows: "This was sent with a boyar son with Ivan Shatskii on 1 August to the village of Moloda, and from that village, horsemen posted to the [Cossack] detachment were ordered to speed to Korotoiak".<sup>46</sup> There is no indication that the absence of any more formally organised communications network caused delays. Messages from any of the major military outposts in the South might take a week or less to reach Moscow, though the news they contained often was much older.

While the Muscovite bureaucracy required written communication, the ultimate source of the news about Razin was oral testimony. Once the seriousness of the rebellion became apparent, Moscow issued strict orders to interdict any and all passage into territories under the control of or potentially loyal to the rebels. Anyone coming from the rebel areas was to be closely interrogated and the results sent on immediately to Moscow. A typical report might include only the results of a single interrogation of an informant, though there also could be several interrogations of individuals who had arrived in a group. The informants thus included a lot of townsmen or those engaged in economic activity for some noble or the church who had gone down the Volga or Don for legitimate business (the fisheries on the Don frequently are mentioned). Some individuals had arrived at Tsaritsyn unaware that it was in rebel hands, to be greeted by confiscation of their goods, abuse, imprisonment or execution. While there, they conversed with their captors, from whom they learned details of the recent events and speculation about what Razin's next moves might be. Typically,

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46 *Ibid.*, no. 165, p. 229. An instruction from the Ambassadorial Chancery to the military governor in Voronezh on 8 July 1670 specified that any news be sent to Moscow by express courier (*ibid.*, no. 38, p. 194). In his message to Moscow of 29 July, the commandant in Voronezh reported the results of an interrogation, and indicated he was sending the informants on to Moscow by the horse relays, whereas his report was being taken separately (and presumably much more rapidly) by a horseman first to Elets. The annotation made in Moscow on its arrival on 3 August indicates that from there it had been carried by *striapchii koniukh* Ievko Voronin (*ibid.*, no. 166, p. 231).

one or more of these captives then managed to escape across the steppe to the Don, where often they were met with suspicion by the Don Cossacks, some of whom were reported as being sympathetic to Razin, others loyal to the tsar. In the Cossack communities, they then heard more talk about the news, at least some of which probably derived from missives Razin was sending in order to recruit adherents. Eventually the informants made their way North, where they were immediately interrogated at the nearest Russian outpost. Captured rebels and their sympathisers were subject to brutal interrogation, presumably under the assumption that they had insider information. Once tortured and interrogated, they were summarily executed, hanged after their limbs had been cut off.<sup>47</sup>

The local officials conducting the interrogations had often quite specific instructions.<sup>48</sup> A standard list of questions about Razin's whereabouts and the disposition of various forces had the potential, of course, to skew or ignore the information provided by the informants. Informants identified themselves, and explained why they had gone where they did, how long they were there, and under what circumstances. The testimony specifies who told them (*skazal; skazyvaiut*) a particular item of news or, somewhat more vaguely (there seems to have been a clear distinction), who said what (*govoril*) or what they heard (*slyshali*). Sometimes the particle *de*, indicating reported speech, is added. Occasionally there is an indication of particular confidence in something the informant heard (*a slyshno de podlinno*); occasionally too the informant indicates he actually saw something (*videl*). Where an informant did not know the answer to a question that had been posed, generally the response was what we assume was a quite honest: "I had no genuine information"; "and we do not know that [...] they did not hear that either"; "they had no knowledge of that". In a few instances, we learn specifics about deliberate efforts to obtain information by sending an agent who might have personal connections (*po družbe taino*) among the Cossacks, friends who then could elicit the intelligence in the enemy camp.<sup>49</sup> One of the longer reports was obtained from merchants who found themselves trapped in Tsaritsyn with the rebel Cossacks and there

47 For examples, see *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 2, nos. 19, 20, 33, 35, pp. 24–29, 42–47.

48 E.g., *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 1, no. 129, p. 181; no. 109, p. 161.

49 *Ibid.*, no. 179, pp. 244–46.

had repeated conversations with them, learning, among other things, about the missives Razin had sent them with news of his successes and instructing his forces in Tsaritsyn to set out up river to Kamyshenka. Of course by the time that information was recorded in Tambov on 13 July, it would have already been too late to save Kamyshenka, to which the rebels had set out nearly a month earlier.<sup>50</sup>

Assessing the accuracy and value of the news so reported was a major concern of the Muscovite officials; even for modern historians, it can be difficult to determine where the informants out of ignorance or through deliberate deception may have garbled some part of the news. The frequency with which news began to arrive in from the South is impressive. However, since informants often arrived back in a Muscovite town only after a rather long peregrination, reports might be substantially dated and might keep coming in long after the events had occurred and perhaps had been well documented in other sources. On 13 August, a Cossack from Voronezh, Timoshka Savostianov, who had previously been interrogated on 7 August in Voronezh, reported at the Military Service Chancery in Moscow how he had been fishing on the Don and arrived at the town of Piat Izb (“Five Huts”).<sup>51</sup> Some twenty of Razin’s followers showed up there, having left Astrakhan four weeks earlier following its seizure by Razin. By the time of his interrogation in Voronezh, Timoshka’s memory of his conversation with the rebels was three weeks old. It had taken him some two weeks travelling secretly at night from the Don just to reach the Russian border post. The news of Astrakhan’s fall on the night of 21 June thus was nearly two months old by the time it arrived in the Kremlin, delivered there by Timoshka himself. As it turned out, Timoshka’s was one of the first reports Moscow received on the event. Curiously, when the government was issuing important new commands in response to receiving this news, it cited not Timoshka’s report, but one received eleven days later on 24 August from a minor noble (*syn boiarskii*) and resident of Astrakhan who somehow had escaped the city after, apparently, having witnessed the

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50 *Ibid.*, no. 150, pp. 209–12.

51 *Krest’ianskaia voina*, vol. 2. 1, no. 8, pp. 15–16; for the Voronezh commandant’s report, no. 7, pp. 14–15.

events first-hand.<sup>52</sup> This may have been a matter of wishing to present only reliable eyewitness testimony (though the two accounts seem to have differed little in their essentials), but perhaps, too, the government was reluctant to cite a report that might have been doubted, coming from an *ataman's* son and ultimately originating in what the rebellious Cossacks told him, however accurate it may have been.

The consistency of many of the reports regarding the details of Razin's successes is striking. Yet one cannot simply assume mutually supporting accounts are independent confirmation of accuracy, since the informants may well have heard the same stories from the same individuals with whom they had talked, and it is possible, given the way in which news was being manipulated by both the rebels and the Muscovite authorities, that certain standard accounts that were widely distributed then became part of a master narrative. How well this fact came to be understood in Moscow can be seen in an instruction sent from the Military Service Chancery to the important regimental commander in Belgorod, Grigorii Grigorevich Romodanovskii, on 24 September 1670.<sup>53</sup> He was to send on to Moscow "only the most believable individuals, who would relate concerning any news only the truth, with no embroidery, and who were eyewitnesses to it. And people who had not themselves seen it, and who undertake to tell re-told tales should not be sent to Moscow", because, "as you yourself know [...] much that is bad comes from news that has been embroidered or is false".

Oral transmission, of course, is fraught with other problems, in that memories may be flawed both on the part of those talking and on the part of those later reporting the conversations. One remarkable string of reports would have to give us pause about news that then arrived in Moscow on 21 July in a report from the *dumnyi dvorianin* (conciliar lesser noble) Iakov Timofeevich Khitrovo, commandant of the important post of Tambov.<sup>54</sup> Agents (loyal Cossacks, *stanichniki*) he had sent off to Penza to gather information returned to Tambov on 17 July (probably the day he wrote to Moscow), bringing with them a written report from another commandant in the town of Lomov. In it, this commandant

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52 *Ibid.*, no. 17, pp. 23–24; also, for a subsequent citation of the same report a few days later, *Ibid.*, no. 19, p. 26.

53 *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 2. 2, no. 36, pp. 47–48.

54 *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 1, no. 156, p. 219. An analogous but shorter string of "nested" reports is in no. 178, pp. 243–44.

related how he had received a report on 5 July from a commandant in another town, Insar, basing his information on a report from Saransk, which in turn related the arrival there on 29 June of people who were fleeing Saratov. They had reported in their interrogation having gone to Saratov to buy horses, encountering there fishermen who had come up the Volga, whence they had met musketeers who told them about how the Razin forces had taken the town of Komyshehenka and burned it, killing its commandant. The musketeers had fled the disaster. Now the Razin forces, they indicated, were heading up the Volga to Saratov. So here we have a chain of information relayed in part through accidental encounters: musketeers on the Volga → fishermen on the Volga → fugitives from Saratov on the Volga → report from Saransk → report from Insar → report from Lomov → report to Moscow from Tambov. This is not news once or twice removed, but seven times removed from its source some weeks earlier. It is not as though Khitrovo was lax in his attempts to learn the news. He quizzed his agents on their return from Lomov, who reported that in the market there the local residents told everything about Razin—in other words, probably rumour, guesswork, market gossip—how he was heading to Saratov, how he had in fact not been at Astrakhan but instead after his victory at Chernyi Iar had headed toward Saratov. On hearing this, Khitrovo sent the same agents to Penza and Saratov to obtain more news, and he was now awaiting their return. Moreover, Khitrovo had sent some twenty of his loyal Cossacks off to Tsaritsyn to gather intelligence, but they had been captured by Razin's men and were being held in Tsaritsyn. The Russian military authorities were not just waiting for information to come their way but were actively engaged in intelligence missions into rebel-held territory.

By 30 July 1670, Moscow had been deluged with reports about Tsaritsyn and Chernyi Iar; on that single day several more arrived, three from the diligent commandant Mikhail Oznobishin in Korotoiak. That tested the patience of the tsar, despite the fact that he had made it clear he was to be kept informed. In the annotation to one of Oznobishin's reports is the remarkable indication Aleksei Mikhailovich had heard quite enough and knew the basic facts:

The great sovereign listened to this report and it was read to the boyars.  
And the great sovereign disposed and the boyars confirmed [the order]:

write to Korotoiak to Mikhail Oznobishin and to Voronezh to Boris Bukhvostov, that in the future concerning the treason of the bandit Stenka Razin and his robber Cossacks, how they went from the Don to Tsaritsyn, and concerning the surrender of the town of Tsaritsyn, and how he went from Tsaritsyn to Chornyi Iar, they should not write to the great sovereign on such matters, inasmuch as the great sovereign has been informed by many reports regarding the one and all. Rather, having strenuously undertaken by all means to obtain news, they should write to the sovereign what other news in the future is obtained concerning this bandit and continue to exercise great vigilance in those towns. Also when news is obtained about the arrival of military men, they should write the sovereign about it immediately.<sup>55</sup>

This instruction notwithstanding, similar reports continued to arrive over the next month and more.

Care was taken to check the stories of those who were suspected of having willingly collaborated with the rebels. Of particular interest was a priest from Kursk, Nikifor Kolesnikov, who had arrived on the Don after spending some time with the rebels in Tsaritsyn.<sup>56</sup> He then fell into the company of some musketeers who had managed to escape after the debacle at Tsaritsyn. The group made its way to the important frontier post of Belgorod, where they were interrogated, the musketeers accusing Kolesnikov of having collaborated with the rebels. When the report of the interrogation reached the Kremlin, it ordered Prince Grigorii Romodanovskii to send on to Moscow as quickly as possible the musketeers and the priest, the latter “chained and under guard”. The priority given to the case may well be explained by the fact that in his earlier career, Kolesnikov had ministered to some of the tsar’s regiments. Two of his sons had for some eight years worked as clerks in the Service Estates Chancery (*Pomestnyi prikaz*), the older, Naum, having been sent off with an embassy to Persia in 1669 which Razin’s troops had then detained in Astrakhan on its return. Naum therefore had his own account to tell about the rebels, independently of his father. Kolesnikov’s interrogation in Moscow on 4 August provided one of the

55 *Krest’ianskaia voina*, vol. 1, no. 157, p. 220.

56 *Ibid.*, nos. 130, 134, 171, 182, 183, pp. 182–84, 187–90, 234–38, 240–52; notes pp. 276–77, 281–82. As the editors note, on p. 276, Kolesnikov is referred to in the documents as Mikifor (Nikifor) Ivanov; his surname Kolesnikov was established on the basis of records concerning his sons.

most detailed eyewitness accounts about what was going on inside the Razin camp, including the discussions at the Cossacks' council (*krug*) in which they were deciding on their next movements.

The documents about the Razin rebellion suggest that in response to the crisis, the Muscovite government very quickly was able to improve its intelligence network by tightening border controls and by issuing to all its provincial commanders the strictest instructions about the gathering of information and instructing all those under their jurisdiction to do the same. Typical was the order sent on 13 July 1670 to Grigorii Romodanovskii, who was only one of several dozen recipients of the same instruction.<sup>57</sup> There were but few incidents where violations of the border blockade and/or failure to broadcast locally the tsar's order were reported.<sup>58</sup> Most of the commanders, recognising the urgency of the situation, seem to have been zealous in carrying out their orders.

As the reports accumulated, the officials in Moscow then were tasked with collecting the dispatches into single documents. In one of the earliest such examples (February 1670), the assignment was given to the Ambassadorial Chancery, which was to solicit a set of reports that had been sent to the Chancery of the Kazan Court.<sup>59</sup> The resulting document was a veritable chronicle quoting reports beginning with 1667 and ending in early 1670. The stated purpose of the collection was for it to be sent on by the Ambassadorial Chancery to the loyal Don Cossacks to warn them about Razin and (presumably) to call for their continued loyalty to Moscow in the face of this threat. Another factor here seems to have been the petition by Persian merchants who had been robbed by Razin that the tsar reimburse them for their losses. Presumably a compendium of information was needed to check their claim. That the compilation of such summaries was in the first instance somehow connected with foreign policy concerns seems to be confirmed when another summary was drawn up in the autumn of 1670, apparently with the intention that it be communicated widely in Novgorod (a significant centre for foreign merchant activity and the dissemination of news that

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57 *Ibid.*, no. 149, pp. 208–09.

58 *Ibid.*, nos. 117, 126, 175, pp. 170–71, 177–79, 240–41.

59 The instruction is *ibid.*, no. 105, pp. 133–34; the compendium from the Office of the Kazan Court is no. 106, pp. 134–56.

might go abroad).<sup>60</sup> As Maier and Shamin have suggested, something like that latter compendium could have been a source for a report that made its way into a Dutch newspaper and which was very dated by the time it appeared.<sup>61</sup>

Mere compilation of what were supposed to be accurate and carefully vetted intelligence reports was one thing, but there the matter did not rest. As is well known, the Muscovite government was very concerned to control the news about Razin for foreign consumption, wishing to undercut any idea, such as that being spread in certain foreign news accounts, that he was a serious problem and a major threat to the state. For internal consumption, the goal in manipulating the news may have been more complex. On the one hand, there would have been every reason to reinforce the impression that the tsar's divinely sanctioned government was in control. On the other hand, it was essential to undercut any possible sympathy for Razin by portraying him and his actions as quintessentially evil and out of control.

In issuing orders about vigilance, intelligence gathering, recruitment, and the assembling of supplies and transport, the government followed its usual procedure of explaining in a preamble why the particular order was being given. There is a certain progression in such preambles, with some of the earlier instructions citing more than one report. As events unfolded, the tendency was to focus specifically on the most recent news, an indication of the urgency now felt in the Kremlin and the rapidity with which decisions were being made in response to new information. Thus, once the taking of Tsaritsyn was history, the taking of Astrakhan might be cited; as events moved on in 1670 and some of Razin's followers were captured and interrogated, what they related might be cited.<sup>62</sup> As the news became more alarming in 1670, the Kremlin was not content simply to quote the reports but began to re-write them, adding horrific details and rhetoric to convince those who would read or hear the reports that Razin was truly godless and an instrument of the

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60 *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 2. 1, no. 277, pp. 339–42.

61 Maier and Shamin, "'Revolts' in the *Kuranty'*", p. 198.

62 *Ibid.*, no. 1, pp. 7–8. The orders to Grigorii Romodanovskii sent from Moscow on 26 August cite a report received in Moscow on 24 August about the fall of Astrakhan'. A change in Romodanovskii's previous orders regarding the disposition of his troops was a response to some of the new information obtained from captive Cossack rebels: *Ibid.*, no. 53, pp. 66–68, dated after 10 October 1670.

Devil, a threat to both the state and the Church. What had originated as news, necessary for the government to formulate an effective response to a growing crisis, morphed into ideologically charged propaganda. There is some reason to think that the news, so transformed into propaganda, then may have come full circle, when those providing testimony adopted some of the same rhetoric in describing the rebels. The tsar's admonitions to Grigorii Romodanovskii cited earlier testify to a recognition that recycled "news" might feed upon itself and prove to be worthless (which would be true even if the message was one the government had tried to shape).

As we know, Razin too was engaged in the same kind of propaganda war, sending messages to potential supporters about his victories and trying to induce them to join in what he alleged would be an attempt to end the injustices inflicted by the boyars in Moscow. Among the rumours was one that Razin intended to restore Patriarch Nikon as head of the Russian Orthodox Church, an idea that probably originated in the fact that Razin does seem to have contacted the deposed Patriarch (who, however, refused to be drawn in).<sup>63</sup> Once afoot, such rumours could escalate: a peasant testified on 7 September that Nikon was already on his way down the Don to join the rebels.<sup>64</sup> We have to imagine that a good deal of what various Cossacks told the individuals who then were interrogated as they came across the border back into government-controlled territory was simply repetition of what Razin had summarised in his own missives.

The Razin materials thus provide vivid evidence of how both sides attempted to influence public opinion, and in the process engaged actively in the dissemination of "news", however distorted some of it may have been. It was not merely a matter of sending letters or commands, but involved the often explicit instruction that they be read aloud to audiences assembled specifically for that purpose. Such occasions were orchestrated performances, from which there was every reason to think the listeners would take away and spread the information to those who had not been present. There were several

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63 *Ibid.*, no. 22, p. 31; note on p. 552. A similar report is in no. 29, pp. 43–44, which, however, relates some apprehension among Razin's followers as to what the future may hold.

64 *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 2. 2, no. 19, p. 25.

kinds of situations where such public proclamation could occur. One of the earliest examples, composed in Moscow on 28 May 1670, was sent to Grigorii Romodanovskii, indicating that on its receipt, he was to inform the Belgorod administrator, a *stol'nik* Petr Skuratov, and that he in turn was immediately to distribute to "all towns, to the military commanders and government officials" copies of this decree certified by scribal signatures. All those officials were in their turn to call together all of the military and ordinary residents of their respective towns and read to them aloud the sovereign's decree.<sup>65</sup> The annotations indicate that copies of the document were to be distributed to several Moscow offices.

The regional commandants who received such orders dutifully responded about how they had carried them out. At some point in the first two weeks of June (the exact date has not been preserved; the report was received in Moscow 13 June), the commandant in Kozlov, Stepan Ivanovich Khrushchev, reported:

And in accordance with, lord, thy great sovereign's order and thy great sovereign's missives, I, thy servant, in Kozlov, having gathered the people of Kozlov, thy great sovereign's military and civilian inhabitants of all ranks, read to them thy great sovereign's beneficent word and thy great lord's missive about the bandit and about the apostate and traitor about the Don Cossack Stenka Razin and about all of his banditry. I ordered that all this be read aloud. And in Kozlov district, lord, I sent to all of the detachments and villages and hamlets verbatim copies of thy great sovereign's missive. And I ordered, lord, that in the villages and hamlets copies of thy great sovereign's missive be read aloud to all the people, in order that they, the people of Kozlov, the people of all ranks, know about his, Stenka's, banditry and treachery and, keeping in mind the holy conciliar and apostolic Church and thy great sovereign's sworn oath on the cross, and their nature and service and blood, and for thy great sovereign's reward for their service, and the eternal honour of their ancestors, so that no one join in his banditry.<sup>66</sup>

Some commandants went one step farther and had the tsar's orders read aloud on more than one occasion.<sup>67</sup>

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65 *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 1, no. 111, p. 162.

66 *Ibid.*, no. 114, p. 167.

67 *Ibid.*, no. 142, p. 200.

The public reading of decrees seems to have been a common phenomenon and would have served to disseminate news even if only of the kind I have termed “transactional”.<sup>68</sup> A recruitment order issued in Moscow on 22 August was read aloud from the porch of one of the chambers in the Kremlin palace to an audience that included both palace and court officials, lesser nobles and various ranks of the army.

It was not enough merely to paint the rebels in dark colours by rhetorical excesses. Also important was to demonstrate to the public the inevitable and grisly fate of those who would question royal authority. Of course there was a long history of this in Muscovy, well before the *Sobornoe Ulozhenie* (law code) of 1649 elaborated on the seriousness of impugning the authority and honour of State and Church. If we believe all the lurid accounts passed down mainly through foreign sources, Tsar Ivan IV did not hesitate to orchestrate the most horrific public executions. As Nancy Kollmann has stressed in her recent book, though, we should not generalise from such examples that justice in Muscovy was uniformly arbitrary and harsh.<sup>69</sup> Traitors, pretenders, and others who seemed to threaten the ordained political order were a special case that justified summary justice. And yet there were procedures to be followed: formal interrogation, even if under torture; for many, review of the testimony and evidence in Moscow even if it had first come to the attention of provincial authorities. The tendency seems to have been not to believe professions of innocence by those who claimed to have “served” the rebels under duress.<sup>70</sup> Once the decision came down, at least nominally from the highest secular authority, the tsar himself, punishment was swift. The government clearly wished to have a crowd attend the public dismemberment and/or hanging of the rebels, and

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68 Concerning the public reading and posting of decrees, see Simon Franklin, ‘Printing and Social Control in Russia 2: Decrees’, *Russian History*, 38 (2011), 467–92 (esp. pp. 473–75).

69 Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

70 There was a progression in the level of suspicion as the rebellion took a more serious turn. An annotation to a document of June 1668 indicated: “And if they say that they are good people and have not participated in banditry, release them under collective guarantee” (*Krest’ianskaia voina*, vol. 1, no. 75, p. 110). However, by July 1670, orders ran: “And as for those who undertake to say that they were with the bandit Cossacks unwillingly, after they have been tortured, hold them closely guarded and in prisons under strong guard” (*ibid.*, no. 144, p. 203).

prior to their execution, a formal, rhetorically-charged document listing the charges against them was read.<sup>71</sup> The remains then were displayed in a prominent place (e.g. those of the Cossack Fedka Ageev hung on the Iauza Gate in Moscow through which ran the road to Vladimir). Razin's execution then, the descriptions of which circulated outside of Muscovy and presumably with the encouragement of Muscovite officials, was certainly not the first or last of such spectacles.<sup>72</sup>

If ritualised public executions were intended as a moral lesson and deterrent to keep the population at large from straying in their loyalty, there also were ceremonies intending to convey a more positive message that successful service in suppressing the rebellion brought its rewards. In September 1670, the security of the upper Don region came under threat, with some of the local population throwing their lot in with the rebels. Quick action, in part by loyal local forces and backed up by a detachment sent by the Belgorod regiment's commander Grigorii Romodanovskii, saved the threatened towns. In recognition of this, the Military Service Chancery sent a commendation to Romodanovskii, his troops, and the others who had been involved.<sup>73</sup> The Tsar's emissary, Mikhail Bogdanovich Prikonskii, was to travel to Romodanovskii's regiment without delay, and having arrived, to send a message to Romodanovskii to assemble his "comrades" and soldiers in the tent which had been erected for the occasion. Once they were all there, he was to read aloud the citation, first of all to Romodanovskii, then in a separate speech to all the ranks of the infantry and cavalry. After addressing them, he was to commend aloud Gerasim Kondratiev, a colonel from Suma, and lastly, in yet another address, to commend a colonel from Ostrogozhskii for his having rejected the overtures of the rebels and having captured a number of them. These final two received material rewards from the tsar, since they apparently had not previously been in government service and on the state payroll. For the rest, the reward was just the recognition and praise from the ruler, not a trivial reward of itself.

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71 For examples, *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 2. 2, no. 33 (esp. pp. 44–45), and nos. 42, 43 pp. 53–56.

72 See Kollmann, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 289–302.

73 *Krest'ianskaia voina*, vol. 2. 2, no. 51, pp. 63–65.

## Conclusion

The Razin materials underscore how news in Russia in the seventeenth century was not a commodity only of the elite, and how, along with the government, the broader public (however we might wish to define it) played an active role in the reporting, consumption and transmission of news. While we presented earlier a somewhat speculative scenario about how the normal interactions along the Northern river routes could have contributed to the dissemination of news, in the South during the Razin rebellion we have very explicit evidence concerning the way in which those who travelled on personal business could and did acquire information and passed it on. Granted, its transmission there, both stimulated and hindered by the crisis, was often considerably delayed. There is no reason to think that what individuals reported in interrogations was in any way confidential: not only had they learned of it from others' oral reports (whether or not the information was accurate, of course, is another matter), but they surely then passed on what they knew to others with whom they interacted. Much of the news seems to have derived from what was "common knowledge" amongst both the adherents of Razin and those in the communities that felt threatened by him. Of course, in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, any amount of distortion and rumour might spread. Certainly, before the rebellion reached crisis proportions, people were still travelling on their daily business. The Volga and the Don were busy thoroughfares, connected in various directions; not the least of those connections was that between the two river basins. Even when the events triggered by the rebellion interdicted many of the normal routes of travel and commerce, in the process creating shortages of food and other goods, individuals could find their way across the steppe, make contacts in the communities that they encountered, obtain transport, and eventually arrive at a border post if they chose to go North. A great deal of other evidence from the files of the Military Service Chancery concerning other regions and times reinforces this picture of the role ordinary people played as reporters of and consumers of the news. Moreover, the Military Service Chancery was by no means the only department which collected the

news in Moscow. To assess all the evidence effectively is going to take a lot more work.<sup>74</sup>

Possibly a good starting point for a broader overview would be to examine the way news spread during the Time of Troubles at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>75</sup> In the various efforts to restore control over the central government and drive out the occupying Poles, the leaders of the Russian forces circulated letters outlining the history of the troubles to date and calling for people to join in the movement to re-take control of the country. Once it became possible to elect a new ruler, the call went out to all the provinces to send their representatives to the Assembly of the Land. Even before the Troubles had ended, various accounts representing different positions on what was happening were compiled and circulated. Rumour was rife.

To conclude then, when we look beyond the *kuranty*, we discover a whole new world of news in Muscovy, of news consumers and news purveyors. In the foregoing review I have selected but a few of the ways we might learn more about how well connected and well informed Russians were. In saying this, I am not suggesting that information which would interest a broad spectrum of Muscovite society is necessarily analogous to what might have interested a similarly broad segment of society in Western Europe. However, it may well be that broadening the perspective on what was news in the West will reveal closer analogies than we so far have imagined.

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74 The potential value of analysing the reports of military governors was first underscored in the nineteenth century by N. Ogloblin, 'Voevodskie vestovye otpiski XVII v. kak material po istorii Malorossii', *Kievskaiia starina*, 12 (1885), 365–416. For some observations about the processes of news acquisition and transmission through Kiev, see Waugh, 'The Best Connected Man in Muscovy?', esp. pp. 114–21. Of particular importance for learning about the acquisition of foreign news and the ways in which it was used by the government is evidence about intelligence operations, where the Muscovite government had agents embedded at other courts. There is some very interesting information about one such agent in K. A. Kochegarov, *Rech' Pospolitaia i Rossiia v 1680–1686 godakh. Zakliuchenie dogovora o Vechnom mire* (Moscow: Indrik, 2008).

75 On the Time of Troubles, one can consult Chester S. L. Dunning, *Russia's First Civil War: The Time of Troubles and the Founding of the Romanov Dynasty* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Maureen Perrie, *Pretenders and Popular Monarchism in Early Modern Russia: The False Tsar of the Time of Troubles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). A useful documentary collection is *Pamiatniki istorii Smutnago Vremeni*, ed. by A. I. Iakovlev (Moscow: N. N. Klochov, 1909).

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# Information and Empire

Mechanisms of Communication in Russia, 1600-1850

EDITED BY SIMON FRANKLIN AND KATHERINE BOWERS

From the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century Russia was transformed from a moderate-sized, land-locked principality into the largest empire on earth. How did systems of information and communication shape and reflect this extraordinary change?

*Information and Empire* brings together a range of essays to address this complex question. It examines communication networks such as the postal service and the circulation of news, as well as the growth of a bureaucratic apparatus that informed the government about its people. It also considers the inscription of space from the point of view of mapping and the changing public 'graphosphere' of signs and monuments. More than a series of institutional histories, this book is concerned with the way Russia discovered itself, envisioned itself and represented itself to its people.

Innovative and scholarly, this collection breaks new ground in its approach to communication and information as a field of study in Russia. More broadly, it is an accessible contribution to pre-modern information studies, taking as its basis a country whose history often serves to challenge habitual Western models of development. It is important reading not only for specialists in Russian Studies, but also for students and anyone interested in the history of information and communications.

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