



Information and Empire

Mechanisms of Communication in Russia

1600-1850

EDITED BY SIMON FRANKLIN AND KATHERINE BOWERS



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and Katherine Bowers*



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Introduction

Simon Franklin

The title and subtitle of this book need some decipherment in order to focus and limit expectations regarding its contents. What is here meant by the mundane yet historically slippery word “information”? Within that, what is implied by the phrase “mechanisms of communication” in the subtitle? Easiest to locate should be the “empire” in question: it is Russia. However, the Russian state was formally designated an empire from 1721 to 1917, a period which does not at either end coincide with the chronological boundaries of the present volume, *ca.*1600–1850. This, too, will require prefatory explanation.

The study of information and communication has become central to our understanding of the world in which we live. However, this truism of modernity also has implications for our understanding of pre-modernity. The means and the mechanisms change, but systems of information and communication have always been central to the ways in which humans operate in societies and states. All ages are, in their own ways, “information ages”. Therefore, prompted in part by discussion of the significance of information in the present and future, historians have increasingly turned to investigating the mechanisms, functions and significance of information in the past. Or so it appears. In fact, of course, historians have been doing so for far longer than is sometimes assumed or claimed. The study of information, of its organisation, encoding, storage, retrieval and uses, is integral to well-established fields such as the history of the book, libraries, archives, intelligence and espionage, or structures and methods of governance

and administration. At the more general level, influential modern studies of the social, cultural, economic and political implications of the major pre-modern *technologies* of information—writing and printing—have long been established without necessarily labelling them as such.¹

What is, perhaps, relatively new is the focus on the word and the concept of “information” itself. Often the word provides little more than new packaging for, or a new angle of vision on, quite traditional types of granular study.² More substantive, however, is the foregrounding or upgrading of claims for the importance of information as a key (for some, *the* key) to understanding major cultural phenomena and historical processes. For example, Jacob Soll titles his study of Louis XIV’s Minister of Finances, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–83), *The Information Master*, arguing that Colbert, with his almost obsessive appetite for acquiring and ordering information of many kinds, played an important role in the development of the modern bureaucratic state.³ Similarly, for Edward Higgs the history of the “information state” tracks the ways in which the state has gathered information on its citizens (although Higgs stresses consensual aspects of the process).⁴ By contrast, Steven G. Marks proposes that an “information nexus” was a major factor in the rise of capitalism.⁵ Away from such large-scale conceptualisations, there is also a new interest in the micro-mechanisms and manipulations of information, as, for example, through rumour and gossip.⁶

In the wake of information in history comes the history of information. Does information as such have a history? Does the

-
- 1 Among the seminal works (prompting discussion and modification as well as agreement) see, especially, Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
 - 2 E.g., in a medieval context, Emily Steiner and Lynn Ransom, eds., *Taxonomies of Knowledge: Information and Order in Medieval Manuscripts* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Libraries, 2015).
 - 3 Jacob Soll, *The Information Master. Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), p. 12.
 - 4 Edwards Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
 - 5 Steven G. Marks, *The Information Nexus: Global Capitalism from the Renaissance to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
 - 6 David Coast, *News and Rumour in Jacobean England: Information, Court Politics and Diplomacy 1618–1625* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

accumulation of particular studies feed into a synthetic discipline, a historical phenomenology of information? The transition sounds obvious but is not straightforward. In the first place, no less obviously, if we want to deal with the thing itself rather than with diverse aspects of its functioning, we have to be clearer about what the thing is. The broadest definitions are far too capacious to be historically useful.⁷ Almost anything *can* be deemed a container or bearer of information. Some objects that are deliberately used for information storage are designated through natural metaphors—books have always had leaves, computing now has clouds—but non-metaphorical leaves and clouds, on plants and trees and in the sky, can also be deemed to be rich sources of information, whether for botanists and climate scientists, or for anybody out for a walk or looking through a window. And that is before we begin to think of the almost mythically complex information stored chemically in the double helices of deoxyribonucleic acid. Adding to the potential confusion, there is the contiguous or overlapping but far from identical field of informatics, or information science.

It helps a little, but not enough, to apply a common distinction between information and mere data.⁸ Data simply exist, information is determined by human agency. Information consists of those data or combinations of data which people choose to regard as informative. It is the “deeming” that turns data into information, not any feature of content or mode of organisation. Data become information in the process of being observed. From this point of view, information is something that is created, not just something that is. Information, to put it glibly, is a cultural construct. However, this still does not take us very far from the all-encompassing concept. Is Information History the study of changing criteria of informativeness and/or of the nature and functions and uses of the things deemed to be informative? The scope remains daunting, the opportunities for multi-disciplinary dialogue are legion, and the likelihood of unforced, persuasive theoretical cohesion seems low. It may be no accident that a collection of studies on Information

7 For a succinct overview of a range of approaches to the notion of information see e.g. Toni Weller, *Information History—An Introduction: Exploring an Emergent Field* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2008), pp. 11–22.

8 Here, too, there is scope to make an ostensibly simple contrast complicated: see the discussion of various approaches to information and data in Jennifer Rowley, ‘What is Information?’, *Information Services and Use*, 18 (1998), 243–54.

History, edited by one of the pioneers and advocates of the field, was reckoned by reviewers to be, despite the framing discourse, more like a collection of studies on—once more—information *in* history.⁹ The filter is disciplinary and the argument is circular.

All this is by way of an excuse, not entirely disreputable, for the lack of an overarching theoretical framework, or, if one prefers a more fundamental metaphor, for the lack of a solid theoretical base, for the chapters in the present volume. They are “aspects of...”, “studies in...”. However, to abjure cohesiveness and comprehensiveness is not the same as to accept (let alone justify) randomness or amorphousness. The studies here have a context and focus. While not being consistently or explicitly comparative, they can add to the wider discussion.

The chronological scope of this book reflects, approximately, what tends to be termed Russia’s Early Modern period: that is, the period covering the territorial and institutional expansion of the Muscovite state and its transition to (and the further growth of) empire. Here, too, we enter a potential quagmire of questionable concepts and definitions. The label “Early Modern” is derived from conventional periodisations of the history of Western Europe. As usual, the attempt to apply a West European conceptual template to Russia is problematic.¹⁰ Over the past couple of centuries the pendulum of interpretation has swung several times between emphasis on Russian equivalence and insistence on Russian difference. We cannot here be concerned with the theologies of Russian identity: the extent to which Russia, though individual, was essentially European, or essentially Asiatic, or whether it was entirely distinctive, *sui generis*, a “Eurasian” phenomenon all of its own. Comparative studies of empires have brought a more nuanced appreciation of multiple affinities and differences.¹¹ Notwithstanding, in the present context the principal area of comparison, both implied and, in places, explicit, is Western Europe. Many of the information

9 Weller, ed., *Information History in the Modern World. Histories of the Information Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): see the reviews by Colin Higgins in *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 43.4 (2011), 271, and by Anne Welsh in *Rare Books Newsletter*, 92 (July 2012), 26–27.

10 On approaches to “modernity” in relation to Russia see Simon Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia 1676–1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1–24.

11 See esp. Dominic Lieven, *Empire. The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (London: John Murray, 2000).

structures and practices here explored were to varying degrees expressly derived from West European models. This does not mean that information practices in Russia straightforwardly mirrored their putative prototypes. In several cases the process of “translation” entailed quite radical functional transformations. The mutations of cultural transfer are as informative as the ostensible equivalences.

As an exercise in very crude modelling, we can imagine two types of information flow in relation to the state. One type of information flow involves information gathered to or emanating from the state, the other type involves information travelling between points within the state (or across borders at the non-state level). The first type might be visualised as vertical, or as radial, depending on whether one chooses to see the state as the summit or the centre. The “radial” notion better accommodates cross-border information flow to or from the state, since the relevant lines can simply be continued outwards. The second type—information flow contained within the state—can be seen as lateral, horizontal. Broadly speaking, when Soll discusses information in relation to the emergence of the “modern administrative state”, he is dealing predominantly with vertical or radial flow, whereas Steven Marks’s notion of an “information nexus” in the rise of capitalism is concerned predominantly with lateral flows. Variations in the nature of each and in the balance between the two may reflect and/or contribute to distinctive features of information structures and communicative mechanisms in a given society. Again at the level of very crude generalisation, in Russia the dominant mode was vertical or radial for most of the relevant period. Horizontal information flow, though not entirely negligible, began to develop rapidly only from the end of the eighteenth century.

Some of the nuances and manifestations of this changing relationship emerge from the case studies in the present volume. However, two contextual points should be signalled in advance. One of them relates to space and geopolitical structures, the other relates to technology.

The geopolitical aspect is the formation and growth of the Russian Empire. From the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century Russia was transformed from the moderate-sized, land-locked Muscovite principality into the largest empire on earth, or at any rate the largest to be based on a continuous land-mass, without overseas territories or colonies (except for Alaska). As one would expect in an expanding

state, the same period saw the growth of an administrative apparatus. From the late fifteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century the administrative functions were allocated to chanceries (*prikazy*). Overall a total of some 150 chanceries were founded. Some were short-lived, others became permanent institutions. Over the course of the seventeenth century there was an average of around sixty to seventy active chanceries at any given time. Hardy perennials included those responsible for gathering census data (the earliest of which date from the late fifteenth century) and the Diplomatic Chancery (or “Ambassadorial” Chancery—*posol'skii prikaz*). The chanceries varied hugely in size and in specificity of function. For example, in the late seventeenth century the Apothecary Chancery (*aptekar'skii prikaz*) employed, apart from its medical specialists, just two clerks, while the Service Land Chancery (*pomestnyi prikaz*) employed almost five hundred clerks.¹² In a series of measures between 1717 and 1720 Peter I streamlined the structure of Imperial administration by setting up, in place of the chanceries, a far smaller number of “colleges” (initially nine, then twelve). In 1802 Alexander I replaced the colleges with ministries. The case studies in the present volume consider aspects of the functioning of all three—seventeenth-century chanceries, eighteenth-century colleges, and nineteenth-century ministries—in the dynamics of information in the service of the state.

As regards the *technologies* of information, Russia lacked, or failed to make equivalent use of, some of the tools often associated with the emergence of the empires of Western Europe. In Russia there was no early modern “print revolution”. The complex and far-reaching cultural, economic and social phenomena associated with the proliferation of printing presses across Europe in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries have no equivalent in Russia. Although printed books were imported and used in Russia at least from the late fifteenth century (for example, as sources for the creation of the first full Slavonic text of the Bible, completed in Novgorod in 1499), Muscovite printing did not begin until the 1550s, and it remained sporadic until the early seventeenth

12 See the tables in Peter B. Brown, ‘How Muscovy Governed: Seventeenth-Century Russian Central Administration’, *Russian History*, 36 (2009), 459–529 (pp. 496–501). For an overview of the chanceries see D. V. Liseitsev, N. M. Rogozhin, Iu. M. Eskin, *Prikazy Moskovskogo gosudarstva XVI–XVII vv. Slovar'-spravochnik* (Moscow and St Petersburg: IRI RAH; RGADA, Tsentr gumanitarnykh initsiativ, 2015).

century. However, the disparity of chronology is not the main point. A major factor, perhaps *the* major factor, contributing to the disparities between the spread and impact of print in Russia and in Western Europe can be traced to differences not in chronology but in structure. The extraordinary proliferation of printing presses across Western Europe was market-driven: driven, that is, not by a market for any particular products (few could have afforded Johannes Gutenberg's Bibles, even if they had desired to possess one), but by a market in the technology itself. The skills of printers were available for hire, whether to ambitious patrons or to any client prepared to pay for a job, however small. In contrast, in Muscovy, and in the Russian Empire almost until the end of the eighteenth century, there was a market in some of the products, but not in the technology itself. Presses were subject to financial constraints, but not to market forces. The means of production were in monopoly ownership.

From the mid-sixteenth century until the early eighteenth century there was, for most of the time, just one printing house in Muscovy, owned by the state, subject to a chancery, producing materials almost exclusively for the Church.¹³ Between the 1720s and the 1770s a handful of additional presses were licensed to institutions—the Academy of Sciences, the Holy Synod, the Senate, various cadet corps, Moscow University—but market-driven proliferation only began when the restrictions on ownership were relaxed in the 1780s.¹⁴ The issue here is not censorship. On the contrary, regular and regulated institutions of censorship only developed *after* the end of monopoly ownership.¹⁵ The issue is structural. Although handwriting was, of course, available

13 See e.g. A. A. Sidorov, 'Rukopisnost'—pechatnost'—knizhnost', in *Rukopisnaia i pechatnaia kniga*, ed. by T. B. Kniazevskaia et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), pp. 227–45 (p. 231). For a range of perspectives on early Muscovite printing see e.g. I. V. Pozdeeva, 'The Activity of the Moscow Printing House in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century', *Solanus*, 6 (1992), 27–55; Edward L. Keenan, 'Ivan the Terrible and Book Culture: Fact, Fancy, and Fog: Remarks on Early Muscovite Printing', *Solanus*, 18 (2004), 28–50; Robert Mathiesen, 'Cosmology and the Puzzle of Early Printing in Old Cyrillic', *Solanus* 18 (2004), 5–27. See also the essays in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 51 (2017), 173–408.

14 See esp. Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700–1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

15 On censorship initiatives in the late eighteenth century see Marker, *Publishing*, pp. 212–32; on formal censorship before the mid-nineteenth century see G. V. Zhirkov, *Istoriia tsenzury v Rossii XIX–XX vv.* (Moscow: Aspekt Press, 2001), esp. pp. 7–64.

and not susceptible to the restrictions of monopoly ownership, the lack of a market in the technology of print had implications for the balance between vertical and horizontal information flow in Muscovy and the Russian Empire. In France, for example, nearly six thousand printings of royal acts have been identified from the period before 1600, a substantial proportion of which were produced on the initiative of commercial bookseller-publishers rather than through the royal printers.¹⁶ In Russia before the early eighteenth century the Moscow Print Yard issued just one compilation of laws and just one separate governmental decree (on customs dues), in 1649 and 1654 respectively.¹⁷ In this aspect of its information resources, despite the *leitmotif* of contacts with and borrowings from Western Europe, Russia was generically closer to other empires which had extensive territory without distributed technology, such as the Ottoman Empire or China.¹⁸ Therefore, although several of the studies in the present volume highlight printed materials, the history of print as such does not figure as a major theme.

The case studies in this book mainly consider aspects of the vertical or radial flows of information—information to, from and for the state—although they also explore areas where the balance to some extent shifted, areas in which, rather late in the narrative, patterns of horizontal information flow began to become established. Apart from the direction, the particular focus of the volume is on the means: on mechanisms of communication. Like “information”, the notion of “mechanisms of communication” needs parameters in order to be useful in this context. For the most part, the “mechanisms” here are the institutional and procedural structures through which information was conveyed: the bureaucratic structures charged with the task (chanceries, colleges, ministries), the infrastructural networks set up for

16 Lauren Jee-Su Kim, *French Royal Acts Printed Before 1600: A Bibliographical Study* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of St Andrews, 2008), p. 115 ff.

17 The 1649 *Ulozhenie* and the 1654 *Tamozhennaia ustavnaia gramota*. On the latter see Simon Franklin, ‘K voprosu o malykh zhanrakh kirillicheskoï pechati’, in *450 let Apostolu Ivana Fedorova. Istoriiia rannego knigopechataniia v Rossii (pamiatniki, istochniki, traditsii izucheniia)*, ed. by D. N. Ramazanova (Moscow: Pashkov dom, 2016), pp. 428–39.

18 For the supposition that in China the arrested development of printing with moveable type (and of other technologies) is attributable to the role of the state, see Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Volume I, The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 7–10.

the purpose (postal services), the outward-facing media distributed or displayed for the purpose (newspapers, signboards). The underlying questions are simple. How did the growing state inform itself about itself—its physical and human geography, its economic activities? What mechanisms did it establish, when and how, for the flow of information from beyond its borders? When and how did it develop procedures for projecting information from or about itself, both internally and externally? How and when did autonomous (non-state) means emerge for the communication of information? What was the relationship between institutional structures and more traditional, informal modes of gathering and disseminating information?

The studies in this volume are organised into five sections. *Section I* charts the history of mapping. The first chapter (by Valerie Kivelson) considers the early and often informal attempts at map-making during the period of Russia's expansion across Siberia, and analyses their implications for the way the nascent empire envisioned itself. These were not maps for publication and distribution, but mainly for reconnaissance and intelligence, and to clarify claims to property. The second chapter (by Aleksei Golubinskii) considers the next phase, imperial map-making from the mid-eighteenth century as an official enterprise, using scientific methods and instruments. The central episode, symbolically and practically, was the systematic import, and then the local manufacture, of West European (principally English) geodesic astrolabes (graphometers, semi-circumpherentors), the instruments reckoned essential for the first projected large-scale survey of the empire.

Section II explores the flow of information from and to Western Europe. In Chapter 3 Daniel C. Waugh and Ingrid Maier consider how, over the seventeenth century, a system emerged for the regular import of Western (mainly German and Dutch) newspapers. This was not in order to feed any public demand for the acquisition and dissemination of news, but rather the opposite. As they crossed the borders into Muscovy, the imported papers changed their function and their genre. Instead of broadening access to information, they were narrowly channelled into providing material for intelligence reports for the tsar. In Chapter 4 Maier introduces a case-study in the movement of information in the opposite direction, examining how Western reports of the insurrection,

capture and execution of the infamous Cossack rebel, Stepan (“Stenka”) Razin, were, to an appreciable extent, informed by quite effective Muscovite propaganda.

In *Section III* the focus shifts to internal networks of news and communication. John Randolph examines the development, expansion and thickening, over the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, of Russia’s postal system, by horse relay. Apart from its principal function as the transport network that enabled communication of, and travel on, state business, the chapter highlights an aspect that has tended to receive little attention. The postal relays were supported through obligations imposed on local communities along the routes. There were social costs in the development of an information infrastructure. In Chapter 6 Alison K. Smith picks up the story of newspapers within Russia—that is, of Russian papers designed to disseminate “news”, rather than of foreign papers used as intelligence sources. The chapter highlights ways in which, especially as printing and publishing became more diffuse and more commercially orientated, successive governments tried to maintain the view that newspapers should “play roles in policing information”. In Chapter 7 Daniel C. Waugh steps back from the analysis of formal institutions, networks and publications. What sorts of information did a broader public consider to be newsworthy, and what were the informal means of transmission—including, for example, gossip and rumour—through which such unofficial “news” was disseminated? The chapter concludes with a study of how, once more in relation to the Razin revolt, the government investigation itself relied on such informal sources. Here again it becomes hard to draw a meaningful distinction between news and state information gathering or intelligence.

The three chapters in *Section IV* consider aspects of the bureaucracy as a medium for the gathering and/or dissemination of information. In chronological sequence, Clare Griffin (Chapter 8) shows how the Apothecary Chancery in the seventeenth century, though primarily serving the tsar and his family and entourage, also played a role in the creation and dissemination of medical knowledge in Russia. In Chapter 9 Elena Korchmina turns to the Imperial finances in the mid-eighteenth century. Through a detailed study of sources relating to the collection of the poll tax in the 1730s, she shows that the Imperial government was woefully under-informed about the dispersed processes and details

of collection, but that this does not necessarily imply that Russia was “undergoverned”, since local cash-flows could nevertheless appear to be adequate. The study by Ekaterina Basargina (Chapter 10) is again about the dissemination rather than the gathering of information. Her subject is a remarkable journal, issued by the Ministry of Public Education (or, as one might more tendentiously translate it, the Ministry for the Enlightenment of the People). For a while in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, under the editorship of Count Sergei Uvarov, the *Journal of the Ministry of Public Education* extended its role beyond that of a repository of official information and discussion about education in Russia. Its mission to “enlighten” meant also conveying the fruits of learning, reflecting and publicising the scientific and scholarly preoccupations of the time.

Section V turns from networks and institutions to public space, and asks the question: what kinds of information were communicated through open display in the urban environment? The “public graphosphere” of my contribution (Chapter 11) is formed by the writing visible in the outdoor spaces of the city, from tombstones and inscribed monuments to street signs and shop signs. The chapter surveys the emergence and growth of a public graphosphere in Russia and considers some of the main institutional impulses for its various stages of development from the mute spaces of the later Middle Ages to the relatively dense graphosphere of the mid-nineteenth century. In the final chapter (Chapter 12), Katherine Bowers moves from broad processes to the exploration of a specific graphospheric location at a particular time: Nevskii Prospekt, in St Petersburg, in the 1820s and 1830s. Based on a close reading of a contemporary lithographed “panorama” of Nevskii Prospekt, she sets out on a “virtual stroll” along St Petersburg’s most fashionable thoroughfare, taking in the shop-front information as part of the urban experience.

It would be premature to convert these few case studies into an integrated chronological narrative. Gaps gape. The sample analyses of a few administrative structures for information fall a very long way short of “coverage”. The surveys of postal systems presuppose the existence of the relevant roads, but otherwise lacking is any discussion of the physical infrastructures that enabled (or hindered) the movement of people and hence of information: rivers, roads, eventually railways. Because

of the emphasis on “mechanisms of communication”, institutions for information storage and organisation (archives, libraries) do not figure, nor do changes in methods of recording, storage and retrieval such as the shift from archival scrolls to codices.¹⁹ The history of print is briefly summarised only in these introductory remarks, not backed up with a case study of its own. The history of handwriting—still the most common medium for the storage and distribution of non-spoken information right through to the mid-nineteenth century—is barely mentioned.

Nevertheless, some potential patterns suggest themselves. Until the end of the seventeenth century the organised mechanisms of communication were designed to gather, organise and convey information almost exclusively inwards and upwards to and for the state. This was a principal function of the chancery system. During this period the authorities paid relatively little attention to establishing means for channelling information outwards or downwards, apart from traditional modes of projection through images (as on coins, for example) and public ritual. The only institution with a network or locations and personnel geared to directing verbal messages outwards was the Church. Indeed, the one state chancery whose specific purpose was ostensibly the production and dissemination of information—the Print Chancery (*prikaz knigopechatnogo dela*), in charge of the Moscow Print Yard—in fact operated almost exclusively on behalf of the Church. Chanceries were not hermetically sealed, so some outward and downward seepage did occur, whether from the narratives in the *kuranty* or from the expertise of the doctors at the Apothecary Chancery, for example, but this tended to be a by-product of the institutional structure, not a consequence of consistent policy and focussed efforts. More research is needed on the extent to which the Ambassadorial Chancery engaged in the manipulation of information sent abroad, but Maier’s investigation of the reports of the Razin rebellion raises intriguing possibilities.

Mechanisms to enhance the downward flow of information on the vertical axis from state to people (or, if one prefers, the outward flow on the radial axis) began to be developed from the early eighteenth century: through the institution of an official printed bulletin or state newspaper,

19 See e.g. V. N. Avtokratov, ‘K istorii zameny stolbtsovoi formy deloproizvodstva—tetradnoi v nachale XVIII v.’, *Problemy istochnikovedeniia*, VII (1959), 274–86.

through the prescribed printing and public posting of laws, through the systematic production of engravings illustrating state occasions and achievements, through the lavish staging of public state celebrations along with printed commentaries on their meanings, and more widely with the expansion of print into the non-ecclesiastical sphere (while maintaining a tight control on ownership). As for lateral information flow, structures of communication that had been established in the service of the state—in particular, the postal system—came to serve also as networks linking and serving a wider population. Autonomous structures of communication from and for non-state actors (aside from traditional informal means) developed quite intensively from the very end of the eighteenth century or the turn of the nineteenth century: newspapers whose principal purposes were not linked to official announcements; commercial signage; commercial and provincial publishing.

None of the studies in the present book strays much beyond the middle of the nineteenth century. This cut-off point, *ca.*1850, is not justified with reference to any particular event or set of events that mark a conventional division between epochs. Nor, however, is the break entirely arbitrary. In the first place, the main emphasis here is on emergence and establishment rather than on continuation. In the mid-nineteenth century the empire reached pretty much its maximum size, especially with its expansion into Central Asia. The mechanisms of communication that had accompanied, facilitated and been stimulated by its growth were structurally embedded. Secondly, and more pertinently for the theme of the volume, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century new technologies, structures and mechanisms of communication were emerging, with far-reaching implications: infrastructural innovations such as railways, technical transformations of traditional technologies such as steam-driven rotary presses, plus the fundamentally new technology of the telegraph. Taken together, these phenomena can indeed be seen as providing impetus for a fresh phase in the history of information and mechanisms of communication in Russia, material for a somewhat different volume.

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Information and Empire

Mechanisms of Communication in Russia, 1600-1850

EDITED BY SIMON FRANKLIN AND KATHERINE BOWERS

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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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