

Edward L. Keenan

Muscovite Perceptions of Other East Slavs before 1654 — An Agenda for Historians

It is the objective of the present brief essay to draw attention to certain aspects of Muscovite perceptions of other East Slavs, and of the nature of the shared historical experience, that seem to me still poorly understood even by specialists and usually misrepresented in the general literature. I offer what follows as an “agenda,” both as a means of indicating that what I shall have to say is not the finished result of systematic researches on the various matters treated, and in order to imply that historians have—or should have—tasks of understanding before them that must be accomplished if they are better to comprehend the reality of Moscow’s attitudes toward other East Slavs in the period before roughly 1650. I must apologize for the scrappiness of the list; what I offer is intended not as a comprehensive new understanding but rather as a cluster of puzzled observations.

My puzzlement arises from the observation that, contrary to the expectations generated by the commonly accepted notion of a shared East Slavic cultural development leading, in early-modern times, to the “emergence” of the three fraternal nations, our sources seem to reveal a *greater* “cultural distance” between Muscovites and other East Slavs in, say, 1600 than was the case a century earlier *or* later. And when I observe that, surprisingly, Muscovite elites in the latter part of the sixteenth century appear to be poorly informed, and unconcerned, about the dramatic national-cultural struggles taking place in non-Muscovite East Slavic territory. And when I consider the evidence that, in particular, the confessional polemics and politics that are so passionate and all-embracing for Orthodox citizens of the Commonwealth seem to have had little resonance in Muscovy, especially in court circles. And, finally, when I find that the serious and profound Muscovite awareness of both confessional and East Slavic national-historical matters that is characteristic of the latter half of the seventeenth century bears the mark of a *new* development, involving new actors, new texts, new languages, and new conceptual categories.

I shall turn in a moment to a more detailed discussion of the reasons why I question generally accepted notions about how well Muscovites understood other East Slavic societies and how much they cared about them. But first let me pose the larger problem differently in a series of questions that would seem to constitute the minimum agenda for those who would either reject or embrace the views I put forth below.

How did sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Muscovites— particularly those actively engaged in politics¹—conceive of their relationship to other East Slavs? How much contact and social interchange was there among East Slavic elites? What was the “quality of communication” as measured by the ease and efficiency of linguistic and cultural mutual comprehension? How did Muscovite politicians react to the information that they *did* obtain from their East Slavic neighbours, and what attitudes or considerations determined their reaction?

These plain questions, fundamental to an understanding of Muscovite policies vis-à-vis the non-Muscovite East Slavic lands, seem never to have been addressed with appropriate specificity. It would appear that the explanation for this oversight lies in the fact that they are questions about how Russians of the period perceived their Ukrainian and Belorussian contemporaries, whereas historians have been primarily concerned with Muscovite military and diplomatic (including ecclesiastical/diplomatic) activities, or with treatments of the East Slavic, primarily Kievan, historical tradition, as transmitted in the shared chronicles and certain other works. But did Muscovite politicians read their own chronicles? Did they understand them? What did they make of them? How, in particular, did they conceptualize the Kievan period and later events in Ukraine and Belorussia in relation to their own Muscovite history? We know, for example, that Ukrainian historical consciousness as concerns the Kievan past developed in unexpected ways and not without significant periods of interruption in the tradition²—what of the Muscovites?

Our response to these questions must depend in part—particularly as concerns interpretation—on the answer to another deceptively simple question: How did leading Muscovites—members, let us say, of the most eminent political clan—see *themselves*? That is, how did they construe their own history and, in particular, how did they conceptualize their own society? Did they, for example, think of themselves as part of a “nation”? How was that “nation,” if it existed for them, defined?

Finally, we may ask whether, and how, the answers to these questions would change if we were to pose them with regard to different stages of Muscovite cultural history—1550, 1600 and 1650, for example. In what follows, I shall stress the earlier period first, moving gradually to the later.

I have already indicated my consternation at the apparent contradiction between what I see in the sources and certain widely accepted views on the subject; I should begin, perhaps, with a characterization of these views that will necessarily be brief and schematic, but not, I hope, unfair. In enumerating the following points that I think we must consider most critically, I do not intend to imply that I think accepted views utterly erroneous and pernicious, but rather to point out that they are, in many cases, insufficiently justified by the sources or are, to some extent, based upon what I think to be anachronistic modes of understanding.

I think it quite questionable, to begin, that Muscovite politicians during most of the early period of Muscovite expansion possessed a culturally innate and spontaneous awareness of a shared East Slavic heritage and tradition, powerful enough in itself to make them irredentists and—to use a graceless term—“pan-rus’ists” as regards East Slavic lands to the west. I think it by no means demonstrated—and perhaps indemonstrable—that the noble cavalymen who made decisions in the Kremlin about military and foreign-policy matters were, in framing their approach to relations with the Commonwealth, critically influenced by what we would now call religious, historical, or ethnic considerations. I think it quite unlikely that many—if any—of them had any extensive understanding of contemporary cultural and social process in the other East Slavic lands. I doubt that most of them—and at the beginning *any* of them—could “understand,” i.e., interpret and respond to, the remarkable dynamic of renaissance of Orthodox—and non-Orthodox—culture that was taking place among non-Muscovite East Slavs in this period.

It is probably most appropriate to begin consideration of the range of problems I have raised by dealing with the self-conception of Muscovite politicians, and with the obvious but necessary caveat that one must be cautious in applying modern conceptual categories to the study of pre-modern mentalities. Muscovite politicians did not, at the end of the sixteenth century, think in terms of “nation” as we have come to construe that term since the eighteenth century. (Indeed, I would argue that they had no equivalent term in their lexicon.)³ And since, for example, these noble cavalymen appear not to have considered particularly significant, as determinants of their status of self-conception, the bonds of religion and vernacular speech that linked them to the great mass of Russian agriculturalists, it seems highly unlikely that they were particularly sensitive to the importance of their lesser similarities to Ukrainians and Belorussians as representatives of a more inclusive ethnic or religious category. To be sure, Muscovite elites perceived that other East Slavs—particularly “Lithuanian” noblemen to whom some of them were related by remembered ancestry—were more like them than, say, Englishmen or Persians, but it is very difficult to extract from the record evidence that Kremlin courtiers responded to “Lithuanian” East Slavs in some way that was functionally different, or as different as we would expect, from their treatment and perception of, e.g., Swedes, Poles or even Cherkessians.

Further—even if we must acknowledge that sixteenth-century Muscovites had some operative sense of, let us say, *svoi* vs. *chuzhoi*, I think it very possible that they had so little information about other East Slavs in the middle of the sixteenth century that they were unsure to which category “Lithuanians” should be assigned.

In order to understand how these systems of perceptions operated in the later sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries, we must begin by recalling that the culture areas of which we speak were, in several critical respects, significantly

more “distant” from one another, and more different from one another, than they had been in earlier centuries, or than they became in more modern times. There is something counter-intuitive about such a conclusion; we tend to think in vaguely evolutionary terms about the history of the East Slavs, about the “emergence” of the modern Ukrainian and Belorussian and Russian nations from a common source, and the like. But the fact of the matter is that an enormous share of what is now “common” to these communities is the result of relatively modern processes: the growth, migration and convergence of populations; the spread of Muscovite political and social institutions; improved communications; various waves of educational standardization; and others. To be sure, these processes of assimilation were greatly facilitated by the existence of shared traditions of religion and culture, and they drew much of their formal aspect from the common heritage, but these facts should not obscure the differences and discontinuities of the pre-modern period.

Centuries of separate development had produced, by the early-modern period, significantly divergent cultures and institutions in several East Slavic lands. These may, for the sake of brevity, be typified by the purely linguistic differences between, let us say, the vernaculars of Lviv, Polatsk and Moscow as of 1550, when these differences were still unintermediated by bands and pockets of bilingualism and by the learned diglossia of education and communications.⁴

Perhaps even more significant regional variation was produced, toward 1600, by the differential impact on the separate East Slavic regions of the various influences of Balkan, Bohemian and Polish high cultures, and of social structures and political institutions of these neighbouring societies.

Indeed, it might be argued that the period between the middle of the sixteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth was the time of greatest differences between Muscovy and other East Slavic societies as regards social and political structures. Both before and after, for various reasons, Muscovite elites and other social groups had more in common with their cousins, but in this period, from the Union of Lublin until Pereiaslav, very clear differences separated them. One need only consider, for example, the differences between Muscovy and the commonwealth as regards the role of the royal establishment, the legal status and corporate self-conception of the nobility, the position of townsmen, or the relations between church and state in order to become aware of these distinctions. All these differences made it difficult for Muscovites to understand, let alone to identify themselves with, the legal and political struggles of other East Slavic elites, or to comprehend adequately the significance that the notion of a “national” culture was beginning to have in these struggles.

Moreover, even *within* these culture areas significant—and growing—distinctions among social groups meant that the idea of “nationhood,” which we apply so automatically today, meant very little; more, certainly, among the

Orthodox population of the Commonwealth than in Muscovy, but less even there, I think, than we might assume. In Muscovy itself, status and self-perception were still determined, as they had been for centuries, almost exclusively by heredity; among other East Slavs these critical aspects of self-awareness were shaped by a combination of heredity, an increasingly complex social reality, and the legal systems of a determinedly supranational Commonwealth.

Finally, in approaching the problem of how Muscovites perceived their distant cousins in the western regions of East Slavic settlement, we must distinguish quite precisely among the attitudes of several distinct groups: the court, which we must divide into the grand-princely establishment and the oligarchy of boyar clans; the amorphous but increasingly important service gentry; the Church, which we must separate into metropolitan and parochial groups; and others. Of these others—the great bulk of the population—we have, of course, little account.⁵

One may well ask why, if Muscovites—and, in particular, Muscovite politicians—were so distinct from the dynamic events and processes that were changing the life of other East Slavs in the late sixteenth century, historians have typically assumed that they were well-informed and concerned about them. I would suggest that the answer is that historians have extracted modern meanings from pre-modern sources. Let me elaborate, very schematically.

Kievan and Muscovite chronicles are, of course, the progenitors of modern historiographic tradition, and they are the sources to which historians of Muscovy must inevitably return. In particular, the Primary Chronicle, which describes events of the Kievan period, often forms the introductory or earliest part of even very late Muscovite chronicles. This fact has led historians to assume that Muscovites in general, and not only chroniclers, read, studied, and were moved by the tale of the common East Slavic Golden Age of Volodymyr and his immediate successors.

But, while there is no denying that these Kievan annals were copied and incorporated into all manner of Muscovite historical compilation, before we assume that Muscovites—and in particular the Muscovite secular elite—drew from these annalistic accounts some compelling sense of historical East Slavic unity, we must consider two aspects of sixteenth-century Muscovite culture. First, we should demand more positive evidence than has heretofore been presented before we conclude that the chronicles—especially those that dealt with the early period of Kievan hegemony—were widely read outside the circles of the monastic clergy who were their copyists and authors. I personally find it quite helpful to think of the Muscovite secular court and the ecclesiastical establishment as distinct cultural spheres, each with its own literary language, social structures and cultural traditions.⁶ Even if such a sharp division is not to be accepted, it must be said that the Muscovite secular elite was not distinguished by literacy, especially in the literary Slavonic in which many (and especially the older) portions of the chronicle texts were written. It

is also true that the manuscript tradition does not support the view that any significant number of Muscovite cavalymen owned or read such texts until the middle of the seventeenth century, when all secular elites began avidly to read native and foreign histories.

Second, as one considers the Muscovite historiography of the later sixteenth century—the great Nikon Chronicle and subsequent original texts—it is difficult not to be struck by what we could call their Moscow-centrism; it is the events that are specifically important to the Muscovite princes and to the emergence of Muscovy that are elaborated upon in literary tales like the *Zadonshchina*; the fate of Kiev itself and the history of the more westerly East Slavic lands, while mentioned in entries borrowed from earlier sources, do not often attract the attention of Muscovite elaborators. The Mongol destruction of Kiev, or raids on Kiev by Mengli-Girei and other Tatar khans, are treated most matter-of-factly, without the kind of literary excursions that accompany, for example, the entries about attacks on Moscow or Riazan. And in general, this later, original, Muscovite historiography for a time—until well into the seventeenth century—develops as a new national historiography, or historiography of the Muscovite dynasty, revealing little concern for the Kievan heritage and even less for the later fate of other East Slavs.⁷ Later, of course—a convenient landmark is the *Synopsis*—Ukrainians themselves begin to re-introduce the sense of a unitary Rus' historical experience, but this is a matter for later discussion. As to the beginning of the period we are considering, it should be said that, in the area of historiography, it is one of *divergence* in the tradition—one finds, e.g., the emergence not only of specifically Muscovite chronicles and chronographs with the point of view I have described, but also distinctively non-Muscovite compilations, the so called “West-Russian” chronicles.

Another important source that has exercised considerable influence upon the traditional interpretation is, of course, the diplomatic correspondence of the period, especially the various exchanges between Moscow and Vilnius concerning disputed lands and towns in Belorussia and Ukraine. The critical phrase, often repeated in such documents from the times of Ivan III if not earlier, is “such-and-such a town (say, Smolensk) is our patrimony (*otchina*).” Now the modern interpretational predispositions of statist and national historiography have led scholars to make much of this diplomatic cliché: to some it has been taken as evidence that the boundaries of a Muscovite nation-state were “legally” construed as extending as far as the given town or territory; others have seen it as evidence that the Muscovite Grand Princes saw themselves as custodians of a national territory so defined.

I would question whether the proponderance of the evidence permits such interpretations. First, let us remember that the Grand Princes were the kingpins of an oligarchic political system based in significant part upon genealogical relationships; no one knew better than the very *diaki* who wrote these

diplomatic texts that scores of Riurikids had some reason to consider Smolensk their *otchina*, and that the claim of the Daniilovichi (the princes of the Moscow house) was not necessarily the strongest. Second, as I mentioned, the notion of the Grand Prince as custodian of some national destiny in anything like our modern sense is quite alien to this period. Of course, in the diplomatic phases of the struggle for control of these contested territories, Muscovites attempted to justify their political objectives with the aid of whatever historical claims came to hand. (One could hardly, after all, begin negotiations by declaring that one coveted Smolensk for its good fortifications and strategic location). And since Muscovites apparently knew that their state—or, rather, their ruling dynasty—a historical entity that they *did* construe as meaningful, had no recent historical claim, those who were at pains to justify Muscovite policy were constrained to broaden the context of discussion until it embraced some category that included both Muscovy and these clearly non-Muscovite lands. The general (and, *nota bene*, not necessarily juridical) notion of “patrimony,” then, served this purpose. I suggest that the formula be read, in modern parlance, “we have certain historical interests in this region.”

Another point upon which the modern interpretative stance has misled us in reading documentary sources, in my view, is the matter of religion—or, more specifically, what we might call confessional politics. Much has been made, since the very beginnings of historiography on these matters, of the mentions of religion that are found in diplomatic and other sources. But there is, I would argue, something slightly paradoxical about any discussion of religion in sixteenth-century Muscovite diplomatic sources, since, in that period, the court itself (by contrast, e.g., with the chronicle-writers) seems to have been rather secular-minded and tolerant about confessional matters (as, for example, in its attitude toward Muslims). Such a statement, while unorthodox, should not be surprising, in view of the fact that Muscovy was still distant from the great confessional struggles of the age in more western lands.

Indeed, what is surprising is the fact that religious matters do indeed find their way into the diplomatic sources, whence, as I have said, I think scholars have drawn the wrong conclusions. Wrong, because, if we look at the sources in the light of what we know about Muscovite court culture of the time, and not from the point of view of what came much later in Moscow’s cultural development, we can interpret these discussions of confessional matters quite differently. What we must keep in mind is the fact that, from the discussion of Ivan III’s marriage to Zoe/Sofia to the great arguments about the betrothal of Peter the Great’s Aunt Irene to Valdemar of Denmark in the 1640s, the great majority of such discussions of religious matters is elicited by questions of marriage, an institution that was by its nature specifically religious—confirmed by a sacrament—whatever other considerations may have determined the choice of partners. At the same time, marriage was, for Muscovite courtiers, the link that held the clan-based patronage organizations of the oligarchy together

and bound them to the Great-Princely family.

Betrothals, in and around the royal family, were the crucial events of domestic politics in the Kremlin. The marriages of the heirs to the throne, and the associated lesser pairings that usually followed closely upon these, established, reinforced and symbolized the political arrangements of a whole generation. Muscovite politicians realized that if the Great-Princely family were to spring itself loose from that affinal web that made the leading clan elders the brothers-in-law and uncles of the Great Prince, the base of their power would be diminished, and a configuration like those of other states would arise, in which the royal establishment, with its non-noble and dependent bureaucracy and clients, would stand apart from and opposed to the hereditary nobility. The potential consequence of such a development for boyar families was clear: they would be deprived, in a system based upon clan seniority and formulated in the system of *mestnichestvo*, of both their only mechanism for orderly change in their own relationships and of their best guarantee against political chaos. Any betrothal, in Kremlin circles, pitted those who stood to benefit from the prospective marriage against those whom it would place at a greater distance from the throne. When faced with the dangers of such a potential match within their own group, the opposition resorted, as the record amply demonstrates, to backstairs intrigue, poison, and black magic. In dealing with the greater, external, threat to the whole political system, they employed the additional weapon of religious arguments. That they did so, however, cannot be taken as proof of their religiosity or—in the present context—of their participation in or understanding of the confessional politics of the Orthodox lands of the Commonwealth. About such matters, I submit, in this early period they were surprisingly indifferent and ignorant.

Let me detain you with a single well-known and historiographically very influential example. The famous “disputation” between Ivan the Terrible and Antonio Possevino has often been cited as an example both of Ivan’s theological erudition and sensitivity and of the anti-Catholicism and Orthodox militancy of the Muscovite court. Indeed, Possevino’s own report of that encounter leaves the strong impression that, although the Italian Jesuit was particularly eloquent in his exposition of the contemporary position of the Vatican in matters of faith and ecumenicity, the Muscovites were obdurate in the defence of their heretical ways. If, however, one compares Possevino’s *ex post facto* report to his superiors in the Vatican with the far more prosaic and detailed contemporary records of the Muscovite *Posolskii prikaz*, there emerges a rather different impression of that encounter. For the Muscovite record, with the dogged meticulousness, love of the letter, and fond embrace of verbatim repetition that characterizes *prikaz* documents, reveals not only that many of the complex religious questions dealt with in Possevino’s account were not even recorded—and probably not discussed—but that Ivan IV demonstrated a decided lack of interest in matters of religion. Ivan did, it is true, have some

curiosity about such unnatural Roman practices as the shaving of beards, but he quite explicitly and repeatedly told the Italian Jesuit that he had no wish to discuss what he called “major matters of religion” with him. There does, of course, arise a question here of the reliability of the two accounts; but I think it quite clear, on the basis of what we know both about the conventions of the *Posolskii prikaz* and about Possevino’s literary activity, that the *diaki* left us a trustworthy account, while Possevino embroidered his narrative with texts prepared in advance for the occasion and perhaps even read aloud, but which, however, had little effect. During this period, I would argue, even in the context of important peace negotiations with Stefan Batory concerning the fate of Orthodox Belorussian and Ukrainian populations, Muscovite politicians, and in particular Ivan, were simply not interested in theological jousting. Little more than a generation later things would be quite different—but that is another matter.

The Possevino materials in the Muscovite records reveal something else that is of interest to us today: the texts of the *posolskie knigi* are here, as in many other cases that have to do with relations with Moscow’s western neighbours, linguistically quite heterogeneous. That is, although much of the description and formal matter is presented in what was by the 1580s the highly standardized and purely Muscovite *prikaz* language, the passages that represent translations of what Possevino said or presented in written form are full of what we might call “Lithuanianisms,” that is, the lexical and grammatical features that distinguish the chancery language of Vilnius and the Orthodox lands of the Commonwealth. It is not difficult to conclude, upon close reading, that, to the extent that Ivan and Possevino spoke to one another at all, they were speaking through one and one-half interpreters, that is, Possevino was speaking some kind of Latin to a Belorussian or Ukrainian (whom he calls his “young interpreter”), who rendered his speeches in a mixed East Slavic not unlike what one hears even today when uneducated Ukrainians and Russians converse. What is quite clear, whatever the actual process of translation might have been, is that mutual comprehension was far from perfect: the portions of Possevino’s account that corresponded almost verbatim with the Muscovite record provide some rather humorous examples, including the discussion of beards, from which it is clear that Possevino remained under the impression that Ivan was talking about the Pope’s beard, while the Muscovites record that Possevino claimed that he—Possevino—did not shave his *own* beard!

This linguistic detail is no isolated curiosity. It draws attention to an important fact that the linguistic process of intervening centuries tends to obscure from us: Muscovites had significant linguistic difficulties with both vernacular and literary Belorussian and Ukrainian in this early period; they misunderstood; they had few experienced interpreters; they could not even “clean up” a macaronic text when it was recopied for inclusion in important official records. This difficulty was alleviated during the following period, but

the process was slow and not necessarily “natural.”

Other examples might be adduced; the point I should like to make is that the record does not, in my view, support the conclusions that the ruling elite in Moscow was well-informed about events in non-Muscovite East Slavic territory, that some sense of historical unity moved Muscovites to become involved in those events, or that they were inclined to be responsive to the religious-cultural struggles that were taking place to the west.

There were, however, those in Muscovy who were much more aware of what was happening in non-Muscovite Orthodox communities, more aware of the chronicle traditions, and more concerned about matters of confessional politics. These were the clergy, and in particular, in the earliest period, the clergy of Novgorodian and Pskovian monasteries and centres in the vast northern Novgorodian hinterland, the *Pomorie*. By proximity and historical experience, these centres were at first more closely associated with Belorussian and Ukrainian lands than was Moscow itself, and they seem to have been differentially receptive to the literature, both manuscript and printed, that began to emerge from the west in the last decades of the sixteenth century. It was in these areas, apparently, that many of the first translations of Ukrainian and Belorussian works were made, and it was through these networks—later, it appears, to become Old Believer networks—that they were spread in Muscovy itself.

Mention of the Old Belief brings me to one of the most complex and perplexing aspects of our subject. The unfortunate neglect of the Old Believer tradition in Russian scholarship, on the one hand, and the indiscriminate inclusion of Old-Believer works in the mainstream of Muscovite texts, on the other, have created a great deal of confusion in the study of the cultural relations between Muscovy and other East Slavic centres. The problem is caused, in part, by the fact that as they became increasingly alienated from the established church, Old Believers became increasingly dependent upon translations from pre-Nikonian printed books published on Belorussian and Ukrainian territory, whose provenance they disguised by omitting title-page information, and spread in numerous copies through rural Muscovy. These were, of course, texts in which the anti-Catholic and, to a lesser extent, anti-Protestant arguments (Muscovites confused the two on occasion) that were generated in the cultural struggles in the western lands were eloquently set forth; as a rule, they reflected an earlier “Vilnius” (pre-Brest) stage of that struggle. The Old Believers used them against the official Orthodoxy of the Nikonians, itself heavily influenced by the post-Mohyla Kievan theology, which Old Believers saw with some justification as dangerously tainted by Catholicism. Scholars have relied on these Old Believer texts as evidence that Muscovites in general were keenly involved in the confessional disputes of their East Slavic cousins in the earlier period; the matter is more complex than has been realized, and still awaits discriminating study.

I should mention here a paradox, or rather a neat symmetry: after roughly the middle of the seventeenth century, older texts from the East Slavic areas of the Commonwealth, the so-called *knigi litovskoi pechati*, were for the Old Believers the repository of the “Old True Faith,” much as Muscovy had been, for Ukrainians and Belorussians a century earlier, the source of “old and authentic” manuscripts—such as that used for the Ostrih Bible—and of “unspoiled” icons.

Let me conclude our discussion of the problems of the names of Muscovite understandings of the other East Slavs with some remarks on the Moscow expedition of one such antique hunter, a monk from Kamianets by name Isaiah. Born in Ukraine, educated in Moldavia, Isaiah seems to have been one of the bright young men of his time and place. In 1560 he was chosen to make an expedition to Muscovy, in order to obtain there some hagiographic literature and icons that were not available in Ukraine. (He may have had some other assignment, but the evidence is ambiguous on that count.) In Moscow he fell into deep trouble for reasons unknown, and apparently he never returned home. Isaiah is interesting in many respects, but those that concern us particularly today are two: first, it appears from his petitions for release that some part in his incarceration was played by confessional differences—he says at one point that “I did not come to raise questions about belief.” One must assume from this that at least some Muscovites, long before the Union and the unleashing of the Jesuit-led Counter-Reformation, felt that Ukrainians were somehow heretical, or at least dangerously different. The second reason that Isaiah is interesting is that it was probably he who, in a sense, re-imported Maksim Grek into Muscovy. It seems that it was in part thanks to his efforts that interest in Maksim, which was surprisingly insignificant at mid-century, began to grow, and it seems quite logical that it would be such a person, educated in the monasteries of Moldavia, where the new Greek humanism that would soon sweep into Ukraine was already establishing itself, would hold Maksim in higher esteem than the Muscovites had originally done. Isaiah, about whom we should be able to learn a great deal more than we now know, is a fine example of how paradoxical, at times, the cultural history of these two East Slavic centres becomes upon close examination.

But I must move on. To summarize these brief remarks on the state of Muscovy’s perception of the other East Slavic lands in the latter part of the sixteenth century, then, I would say that, for the most part, the political elites had surprisingly little information about, interest in, or concern for what we would today consider the most important aspects of cultural-political life in the main centers of Ukrainian and Belorussian culture. Of course, the situation was changing as the century came to an end, and these relationships were transformed particularly by the events of the turbulent decade we call the *Smuta*.

When I say “transformed,” I have in mind for the most part the longer-range effects of the *Smuta*; in the context we are examining here one of the most

remarkable aspects of this period is what *did not* happen between and among East Slavic elites. The events of the period provided numerous occasions for intimate and long-term contacts between Muscovite noble cavalymen and their East Slavic counterparts within the Commonwealth; *Litva*, both Catholic and Orthodox, came to Moscow in force for the first time. This period was, moreover, one in which the first stirrings of what might properly be called a Russian national sentiment, transcending class and traditional regional boundaries, made themselves felt. Finally, at least some writers, in some contexts, construed the battles of the period as battles between Orthodoxy and its enemies. What better context for the awakening of the interest of Muscovites in the cultural life of their East Slavic coreligionists?

And yet here, too, the record disappoints those who would look for such interest among Muscovite politicians, or even for an awareness of the complexity of life in the Commonwealth. It appears, for example, that contemporary Muscovite writers frequently made no distinction between Ukrainians and Poles in the Commonwealth forces, or between Catholics and Orthodox. They are *Litva*; of the Polish occupation of the Kremlin one chronicle says simply, “*A byla Moskva za Litvoiu tri gody.*” In general, the Time of Troubles provides another example of how our Muscovite sources can lead us astray if we are not careful: the most influential narrative accounts, the so-called *Povesti o smutnom vremeni*, so ably studied by Platonov and others, would lead one to believe that there was more national and religious sentiment involved in the motivations of the main actors than there probably actually was. But these were written well after the event, and by churchmen—or churchly men—they are quite at variance with the documentary record and the memoirs of participants such as Żółkiewski. Certainly the various coalitions of boyars who treated with, and even supported, the First False Dimitrii, Władysław and Zygmunt, and even the Swedes, were not what we would call “up tight” about religion or East Slavic unity. The conversations between Żółkiewski and Prince Mstislavsky are particularly interesting in this regard. Here we have a Polish Catholic nobleman, owner of vast estates in Ukraine, dealing with a Muscovite boyar who is the son of a Ukrainian prince, and they seem to discuss only the most pragmatic political affairs, concluding a deal that is eminently practical, but owes little to the national or religious sentiments that the authors of the *Povesti* would have us believe were turning Muscovite hearts to ashes.

Żółkiewski, of course, had a model in mind—that of an expanded multi-ethnic noble republic—in which such sentiments, while certainly important, might find a *modus vivendi* similar to that then operating in the Commonwealth. Mstislavsky and his boyar colleagues, for their part, were willing to have Władysław as tsar—as they had been willing to have the False Dimitrii—because their primary objective was the restoration of the political stability of a system in which they could retain their oligarchic position under a nominal king. In the end, of course, the deal fell through—but *not* because of

religious or national sentiments. (It should be remembered that, after Zygmunt failed them, the boyars made very serious overtures to the Swedes, and would have been satisfied, like the Poles earlier, with a tsar from the house of Vasa.) Of course, the Russians insisted that whoever became tsar convert to Orthodoxy—but this stipulation, as I see it, had to do with the marriage politics of the court; the example of the False Dimitrii had reinforced their insistence upon that linchpin of their political system.

But even if the immediate results of the *Smuta* experience had not fundamentally changed Muscovite attitudes about the supranational significance of Orthodoxy or about their historical relationship to other East Slavs, it did, as I have indicated, mark the beginning of a number of long-range processes that ultimately—rather late in the century—gave rise to the attitudes that are often thought of as typical for the earlier period. This change, I think, was brought about by several new factors, internal and external.

First, the experience of the Time of Troubles seems to have created, within the Muscovite court, a significant group of individuals who, for the first time since the influx of “Lithuanian” nobles in the early sixteenth century—i.e., before the major cultural developments in Ukraine and Belorussia—had some first-hand knowledge of the life and culture of their non-Muscovite East Slavic counterparts. The vicissitudes of the turbulent decade had, in addition, provided some Muscovites with the linguistic and literary experiences and skills needed to broaden that new knowledge.

Second, the Polish defeat, and successive evidences of the political might of Muscovy, turned the minds of Ukrainians and Belorussians, in a period of increasingly aggressive repression of their national and religious life in the Commonwealth, to Moscow as a potential ally and refuge.

Third, a broad array of social and cultural processes, stimulated in significant measure by the successful restoration of the Muscovite political system and the subsequent very impressive economic growth, made Muscovites of various social groups increasingly receptive to new external influences, including in the first instance those that emanated from the adjacent East Slavic lands.

Most of these processes reached their culmination only after the middle of the century, but it is nonetheless possible to trace their early stages as a means of understanding how Muscovite attitudes toward other East Slavs changed from the apparent relative indifference I have posited to the much keener interest of the time of Aleksei Mikhailovich.

It is not yet possible confidently to trace the evolution of that small group within the Muscovite nobility who, contrary to the long-standing boyar tradition, were actively literate in Slavonic and other literary languages, involved in religious and cultural disputes, and relatively *au courant* as concerns the cultural life of Orthodox centres in the Commonwealth. But that such a group emerged shortly after the *Smuta* there is no doubt. The names of Ivan Khvorostinin, Semen Shakhovskoi and Ivan Katyrev-Rostovsky come

immediately to mind, and it appears that their experiences at the court of the False Dimitrii and in subsequent years had much to do with their formation. The return of Filaret and his colleagues from a long exile clearly also played a role, one that has still not been fully explored.

But while these individuals certainly were much more aware of cultural currents beyond Muscovite borders, and able to handle Polish and Slavonic texts from the Commonwealth, there are some caveats and paradoxical features to be noted in their reception of this new influence. First, we should note that, in this generation, Muscovite authors, even when translating from, let us say, texts produced in Ukraine, produced relatively pure Muscovite Slavonic, that is, they cleansed their translations of almost all evidences of their origin. One is stuck by this relative “purity” when comparing their work with texts from the latter half of the century, when, under the apparent influence of the massive emigration of Ukrainians and Belorussians, a kind of “Ukrainophilia” became almost a vogue. In this later period many texts, such as, for example, the later versions of works attributed to Andrei Kurbsky, became increasingly Ukrainized and Polonized with each editorial revision. One need not accept my hypothesis concerning the genesis and growth of the Ivan-Kurbsky “Correspondence” and related materials to acknowledge that the later texts of that corpus, which begins with Kurbsky’s First Letter and Ivan’s great First Letter, written in a Russian Slavonic almost free of Ukrainianisms, becomes increasingly “westernized,” to the point that one can hardly read Kurbskii’s “History” without some knowledge of literary Ukrainian of the period.

Second, we should note the striking fact that Muscovite authors of the *early* seventeenth century, in cleansing their models and originals of Ukrainianisms, also seem quite systematically to have suppressed specific references to Ukrainian *realia*. The study of such matters is just beginning, but it seems clear, for example, from comparison of the thousands of lines that Khvorostinin, apparently, translated line-for-line from Ukrainian poetical collections (and for which he has been acclaimed as the “originator of Russian verse”) that, in addition to very careful deletion of lexical Ukrainianisms, he omits or changes numerous references to “Rus’,” to Ukrainian magnates—and even to St. Volodymyr of Kiev!⁸

Third, in this first generation of educated Muscovite noblemen one notes a very mixed attitude toward the new learning that was emanating in increasingly potent waves—borne primarily by the printed book—from Kiev. Filaret, here, is our exemplar, and it must be said that we still cannot—or at least I cannot—fully understand his attitudes in these matters. On the one hand, he seems to have been staunchly anti-Catholic and suspicious of these “Kievan” books; on the other, he manifestly allowed—and even sponsored—the emigration of a large number of Ukrainian churchmen, beginning a trend that, under Nikon, was to exert a massive influence in Russian cultural life.

This emigration, as I have noted, was one of the aspects of the second long-range trend that so changed Russian attitudes and awareness of other East Slavs in the seventeenth century. Scholars have been aware since Kharlampovich's great works of the massive influence of non-Muscovite East Slavs in Russian church life, and of the books that they brought with them, but I think that there are two aspects of this profoundly important process that, in the present context, call for comment.

First is the fact that it was these immigrants, apparently, who taught Russians to think in new terms not only about Orthodoxy and cultural authenticity, but also about East Slavic unity; it was they who brought to Russia the irredentist and national-historical modes of thought that in later times became so "typically" Russian. I would go so far as to say that it was they, directly and indirectly, who revived the notion of the "Third Rome" and other sadly remembered myths. They were joined in this by another group, about which we need to learn a great deal more—the itinerant and expatriate Greeks, who had, of course, their own reasons for fostering the ambitions of a great Orthodox military and political power, and had themselves, in all probability, acquired their notions of East Slavic history and cultural identity during sojourns of greater or lesser duration in Ukraine, on their way to Moscow.

The second component of this general wave of influence is, of course, the influx of printed texts from the Ukrainian and Belorussian presses that were so active in this period. This subject is by no means new or neglected, but it still requires a great deal of study. We know, of course, that these books were everywhere, in Solovki, in Tobolsk, in monastic and private libraries—but what is, I think, still insufficiently appreciated is the massive influence of these texts, in variously disguised Russian Slavonic translations, throughout the manuscript tradition. These translations were disguised, of course, because of the ambiguous official and unofficial attitude toward "Lithuanian" books, but they were avidly read and copied in very large numbers, both by those who recognized their origin and by those who did not. There are thousands of such copies that have not yet been properly identified and compared with their originals, and until that work is well begun we cannot assess the impact of this powerful new technology of cultural diffusion and the way in which Russian attitudes were gradually changed.⁹

Let me mention a single, rather pertinent example. The "History of the Eighth Council," attributed to the "Klirik Ostrozsky" and printed in Ostrih in 1598, obviously had a wide circulation in Muscovy in subsequent decades, although mostly considerably later than one might expect. Indeed, it is another of the paradoxes of our subject that Muscovites seem not to have been particularly deeply affected, at first, by the church union of 1596. Be that as it may, at some time, perhaps in the middle of the century, the "History" was translated in a version that has been attributed to Ivan Khvorostinin, and it was independently retranslated a number of times throughout the century. At some fairly late date,

a kind of Russian paraphrase was done, probably from the original, and attributed to Kurbsky (the earliest copy is ca. 1675). Now until we gather all of these variant translations, determine what they owe to the original and what to each other, establish the original Russian interpolations and glosses, and study their circulation and readership, we shall not really be able to speak of the evolution of Russian attitudes toward this critical matter of church union and the world-historical role of Russian and East Slavic Orthodoxy.

I mentioned a third set of long-range processes, the general trends of social and cultural development of Muscovy, as a final factor in the evolution of ideas about other East Slavs. I have in mind particularly the role of non-Slavic foreigners, Catholics and Protestants, Danes, and Dutchmen and Scots, in Muscovite court and military circles in the second half of the century. It was these communities, together with the Bohemian and other Jesuits studied by Antonii Florovsky, who, together with the Ukrainian and Belorussian immigrants, finally sensitized Russians to the cultural and confessional issues in the fast-changing and critical cultural turmoil of the 1670s and 1680s, issues that had so long dominated the lives of other East Slavs. Even then, however, I would point out that Muscovites were not so fully committed to the notion of East Slavic unity and historical identity as we might expect them to have been. I am struck, for example, that the capture of Polatsk, Vilnius and even ultimately Kiev did not seem to elicit an outpouring of national rejoicing and expressions of long-sought historical triumph among Muscovites. We should remember, for example, that it was not Muscovites, but the likes of Semen Polotsky who wrote the odes for such occasions, and that the “hero” of the ill-fated campaigns of the 1670s in Ukraine was Vasiliï Golitsyn, a great friend and protector of Moscow Jesuits, and a noted lover of things Western. Whether he was motivated to any significant degree by historical notions of East Slavic common destiny and Orthodox unity remains, in my mind, an open question.

I propose, then, an unorthodox and fundamentally exploratory hypothesis, as follows: in the century before—to take the date for convenience only—1654, leading figures in the Muscovite political establishment, and to a different degree in the ecclesiastical establishment, were passing through a period of learning and development of the notions about East Slavic cultural history and relationships whose results, apparent only later, we wrongly attribute to them over the whole period. At the beginnings of the period, in the middle of the sixteenth century, only a precious few Muscovites had much of an inkling either about what was taking place in Ukraine or about any notion of shared historical experience. Around the time of the *Smuta*, when the cultural turmoil in Ukraine was at its height, Muscovite politicians came into meaningful contact for the first time—largely through chance encounters—with representatives of the most important and dynamic Ukrainian elites that were influenced by the cultural revival. Even then, however, most Muscovites remained at first surprisingly ignorant and indifferent about the nature of the cultural and

national-historical struggle that was taking place. Even after the mid-century wars that ultimately led to the inclusion of vast amounts of Ukrainian and Belorussian territory into the Russian state, one looks in vain for substantial evidence that influential Muscovites were guided, in personal or official acts, by notions of East Slavic unity or common heritage. Moreover, until after the *Smuta* the most significant influence in Muscovy of the Ukrainian and Belorussian cultural-religious experience was felt in peripheral and non-elite areas, such as the terrain that eventually gave rise to the “Old Belief,” and in the “white” clergy generally, while the established church, on the one hand, and the political elite, on the other, were more influenced by a later wave of the most profoundly Catholicized and Polonized representatives of western East Slavic culture.

I am not so mad as to fail to realize that these are somewhat questionable propositions; I shall not cling tightly to them. But I do think that they are well worth considering, and that in any case, even if eventually we must re-embrace the former mistress of our minds, the historiographic tradition, we must first test these or similar hypotheses. In order to dismiss them, reaffirm the tradition, and set our minds at ease, we must reconsider the base upon which that tradition rests in the light of what we know about Muscovite society. We must, in the first instance, restudy the abundant texts, identify their origins and evolution, and assess their influence. We must devote renewed attention to the old agenda of the philologists in order to be able to identify and analyze a great variety of translations, imitations and registers on the basis of their language. We must separate, analyze and ultimately re-integrate the vast and mysterious Old Believer tradition. We must once again reconsider the role of Ukrainian and Belorussian immigrants as cultural intermediaries and as bearers of new ideas about Slavic unity.

We must, finally, consider Muscovite society not as a homogeneous and integrated “national” entity, but as a pre-modern society whose still distinct elites responded differentially to the cultural stimuli of the time, and in particular to a new conception of the historical role and destiny of Muscovy as an East Slavic Orthodox society. In sum, we must set aside modern notions of nation, ideology and society, but apply modern social-science and humanistic techniques, in order better to understand, on its own terms, a complex and still obscure past reality.

Notes

1. Here and below, by politics I mean the process of assigning and maintaining power, property, and status at court, and the associated foreign- and domestic-policy decision-making. I shall often use the term “politicians” to designate

members of the small coterie of clans of cavalrymen—often called “the boyars”—who participated in that activity.

2. For an interesting discussion of this aspect of the matter, see Omeljan Pritsak, “Kievan Rus’ and Sixteenth-Seventeenth-Century Ukraine,” in Ivan L. Rudnytsky, ed., *Rethinking Ukrainian History* (Edmonton, 1981), 1–28.
3. I discuss this problem, from a slightly different point of view, in “Royal Russian Behavior, Style and Self-Image,” Edward Allworth, ed., *Ethnic Russia in the USSR. The Dilemma of Dominance* (New York, 1980), 3–16.
4. One should mention here the traditional notion of the unifying role of Slavonic; in my view Slavonic played almost no role in the lives of the secular elite I am calling “Muscovite politicians.” Very few of them knew Slavonic at all, and almost none could write it; until the seventeenth century and the advent of the printed book there was for practical purposes no communication in any form of Slavonic between Muscovite and other East Slavic *secular* elites. The failure of Church Slavonic as a general cultural “lingua franca” is easy to document, and has to do with the highly unstable relations among vernaculars and languages of literary use in the various territories involved. The period with which we are dealing saw the emergence, in non-Muscovite East Slavic territory, of several literary languages based on Slavonic; texts in these languages, typically, became popular in Muscovy only after they had been translated into either Muscovite “plain style” or Muscovite Slavonic.
5. It has long been the practice, of course, to impute to the demotic majority “patriotic” views on the basis of modern interpretations of the *povesti i skazaniia* (to use Platonov’s term) about the Time of Troubles. Such a practice, however, seems to me to lack sufficient justification, if only because the texts in question, still for the greater part of undetermined origin, remain ambiguous as concerns their original purpose and significance. Furthermore, such evidence as we do possess about such matters does not permit the conclusion that they expressed, or influenced, the thinking of the great illiterate mass of Muscovites.
6. This dichotomy is not, of course, absolute, but it is significant in comparisons of the Muscovite elites with their contemporaries in the rest of Europe; the boundaries are limned by the contrasts between Slavonic and *prikaz* language, between the stress on kinship in the secular elite and its rejection by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and between the military and monastic traditions.
7. I have tried to open the discussion of this matter in “The Trouble of Muscovy: Some Observations upon Problems of the Comparative Study of Form and Genre in Historical Writing,” *Medievalia et Humanistica. Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*, New Series, No. 5 (1974): 103–26.
8. Compare, for example, Khvorostinin’s texts as published in *Letopis zaniatii Arkheograficheskoi kommissii*, with the apparent originals, published in V. P. Kolosova and V. I. Krekoten, comp., *Ukrainska poeziia. Kinets XVI pochatok XVII st.* (Kiev, 1978), 115–36.
9. One must regret that the great work of Vladimir Peretts, *Istoriko-literaturnye issledovaniia i materialy* (St. Petersburg, 1900), has not found imitators in recent times. Peretts sketched convincingly the paths of development of certain forms of

poetry from their Western origins through Ukraine to the “folkloric” imitations collected by nineteenth-century Russian philologists; similar work would, doubtless, elucidate parallel developments in other forms as well.