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Author's Subject: Shamin on Muscovite kuranty

Date Written: Mon, 30 May 2011 07:58:14 -0700

Date Posted: Tue, 30 May 2011 10:58:14 -0400

<<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-earlyslavic&month=1105&week=e&msg=Z5/D/%2bqcaeZDxVnKa584yQ&user=&pw=>>

S. M. Shamin, *Kuranty XVII stoletia. Evropeiskaia pressa v Rossii i vozniknovenie russkoi periodicheskoi pechati*. Moskva-S.-Peterburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2011.

I should start by indicating the degree of my involvement in Stepan Shamin's topic. His subject is one on which I, and my co-author, Ingrid Maier (Uppsala University), have worked on extensively. We are currently writing a book that encompasses much of what Shamin's does (but, we expect) will complement it by bringing in a good deal of comparative material. He is a co-author with Prof. Maier of several articles; they both now are heavily involved in the ongoing project to edit and publish the Muscovite *kuranty* (the translations/summaries of foreign news accounts). This is an excellent example of the kind of fruitful scholarly collaboration which is now possible but never could have happened back when I began to work on this topic in the Dark Ages (the 1960s). While I am not involved in the *kuranty* publication project, Shamin cites (perhaps over-generously) some of my work. What follows here is not intended to be a full review of his book.

He limits his topic in the first instance by the chronology of when the term "kuranty" first came to be used in Muscovy to identify the foreign news sources and translations (ca. 1650) and when the acquisition of foreign news became regularized through the establishment of the foreign post in the middle of the 1660s. The acquisition of foreign news was a government enterprise which contrasts with important aspects of the development of news communication in most of the rest of Europe, even as it is intimately linked with those developments.

Shamin's most intensive focus is on the relatively short period of Fedor Alekseevich's reign (1676-1682), the subject of his kandidat dissertation on which the current book is based. On the one hand then, many important aspects of the acquisition of foreign news prior to the second half of the 17th century receive little attention. On the other hand though, one of the book's important contributions is to move us ahead into the question of what happens to the by then well-established mechanisms for obtaining foreign news at the time Peter the Great decided to have Russia's first newspaper (*Vedomosti*) published in 1702. Given the fact, as Shamin argues, that the *kuranty* were mainly considered important for their relevance to Muscovite foreign policy, it may seem odd that for much of Peter's reign after 1700, they ceased to be compiled (the *Vedomosti* were primarily intended for domestic propaganda). While the subject is explored only suggestively here, what we might consider operative foreign news now came directly from Russian diplomats abroad in the era when resident embassies were becoming increasingly the norm.

The book contains a good deal of material on the Muscovite post and on the frequency and speed of the acquisition of foreign news, which

fluctuated during the last three decades of the 17th century. Arriving at persuasive statistical evidence on these matters is often hindered by gaps in the documentary record, although there is enough information to provide some reasonable estimates. It should hardly surprise us that the government's interest in foreign news very much seems to have depended on the particular tensions of the moment in Muscovite wars and diplomacy.

The book is a mine of information on a number of interesting topics contained within the foreign news accounts. One of the most substantial chapters deals with the Muscovite government's interest in what was published about Russia and the degree to which it in turn may have influenced such reportage abroad. Shamin's material complements that in Martin Welke's study based on the foreign sources (published years ago in FOG). There are also sections on news about wonders of nature, on what were believed to be miraculous occurrences, on the various religious disputes in Western Europe, on ceremonial at European courts, and much more. Shamin's examples (usually presented as longish quotations from the texts) include a lot that are previously unknown, at the same time that he seems to be consciously avoiding discussing in any detail ones analyzed by others (yours truly included) which would flesh out the material.

Curiously, perhaps, there is very little here on the news that might have had a bearing on foreign policy decisions—that is, news that indeed was being translated on wars, diplomacy, etc. This is a thorny problem for anyone dealing with the *kuranty*, since the only way really to assess such evidence is to place it in the context of a thorough study of all the relevant documentation regarding foreign policy decision-making, a task that goes far beyond what could reasonably be attempted here. What we end up with then is an assertion of the *kuranty*'s importance for the making of foreign policy, but distressingly few concrete examples where that can actually be demonstrated. I am still puzzling over how to tackle this challenge, short of spending the next twenty years on it, a luxury in which I do not intend to indulge. What we have here is a lot on what we can learn from the annotations about the reading of the texts to the tsar and boyars (a more or less regular practice) and on other kinds of annotation that may or may not suggest to what degree locations of European cities or regions were unfamiliar (and therefore needed to be glossed by the translators).

Apart from the possible role of the *kuranty* for government decision making, there is an equally interesting question of the degree to which the foreign news "escaped" the chanceries and made it into wider circulation. Foreign news was considered to be privileged (a state secret, if you wish). Yet occasional translations which constituted part of the *kuranty* are to be found in manuscript contexts outside of the chancery milieu. Shamin brings together here a good many examples. What we are to make of this material is another of the thorny problems to which there is no easy solution, since ownership of a manuscript and the selection of works in it may not tell us much about its owner and what he was thinking or reading. It may be safe to generalize that the knowledge of foreign news contributed to the "Europeanization" of the Russian elite, but to appreciate fully what that may have meant requires a much more thorough look at the elite culture of the late 17th

century than could reasonably be attempted in this book. Even then, much will remain quite speculative.

There is a lot here which will contribute to the ongoing publication of the *kuranty* in the series inaugurated in 1972 and most recently embodied in Vol. 6, which (thanks to Ingrid Maier) is the first to provide an extensive collection of the foreign source texts for the translations. Shamin's work in sorting the archival collections (an appendix here summarizes some of the results) is essential preparation for the successful continuation of this series.

His book also should stimulate additional inquiry into the "transitional" period of the first quarter of the 18th century, concerning which he offers tantalizing ideas, but whose full analysis has to be the subject of another book. We still know all too little about communication, the flow of information, and its influence in "early modern" Russia. We also should want to treat this subject in a comparative European context, concerning which much has been written about the revolution in communication created by the establishment of the press and its ostensible relationship to the emergence of the "modern" world.