

Posted to H-EarlySlavic Mon, 20 Oct 2014 11:41:37 -0400

New Book: Sinelobov on local elected officials in Muscovy

by Daniel Waugh

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A[leksei] P[avlovich] Sinelobov. *Personal'nyi sostav gorodovykh prikazchikov i gubnykh starost Moskovskogo gosudarstva XVI-XVII vv. Monografiia*. Moskva: INFRA-M, 2014. 174 p. ISBN 978-5-16-009673-5 (print); ISBN 978-5-16-100997-0 (online).

Modest in format and number of pages, written by an apparently little known scholar (at least I cannot claim to remember reading him, which may not prove anything), and published by (for most early Slavic specialists) an unknown publishing house, this book merits close attention. As the author reminds us, efforts to date have provided guides to the personnel who manned many of the important positions in Muscovite administration. We have lists of *namestniki*, *volosteli*, *prikaznye sud'i*, *gorodovye vovody*, and *d'iaki*. One of the important groups not yet blessed with comprehensive treatment includes the *gorodovye prikazchiki* and *gubnye starosty*, who were part of the administrative reforms underway with the consolidation of the Muscovite state in the early 16th century, for a time ostensibly fell into eclipse, but then revived to survive down into the time of Peter the Great's first administrative reforms. Assigned policing and judicial functions, these officials may seem to be an anomaly in the growing absolutism of the Muscovite state in that they were selected or elected locally. Of course they have not been invisible in the scholarship on local Muscovite administration, but it seems that before Sinelobov, no one had attempted to trace their history over the approximately two centuries for which they can be documented or explore carefully their position in local society, much less compile, as he has done, a listing of them organized by city and region.

His 35-page introduction here is a model of clarity in presenting their history, with carefully selected examples to illustrate the way that the local networks of lesser nobility tended to dominate the ranks, even if one can also document instances where the central government might void local elections or send someone in from the outside. Members of the same families (either by direct descent or by marriage) keep cropping up in some localities. Many of those involved seem to have engaged in this service because they were no longer able (due to disabilities or other reasons) to fulfill their state service by going out on active military campaigns. There are other examples where this local service seems to have been a stepping stone to career advancement in the center. We learn here about the requirements for office, including literacy, which were not, however, always enforced when the government reviewed the appointments. Local communities might defend their elected officials, but they might also petition for their removal if their "feeding" exceeded the bounds of what custom sanctioned or if they proved to be incompetent. There are interesting issues here of the relationship between officials serving in suburbs and the administrative apparatus based in their adjacent main towns. We even get a glimpse into departmental rivalries, where the *Razriadnyi prikaz* might want to require that one of the local officials give up his post and return to active military duty, but the *Razboinyi prikaz* might insist on keeping its local administrator in place. So there is much here to illuminate the

social and political contexts within which Muscovite local administration was staffed and functioned. However, this is not an attempt to write the actual history of how that administration dealt with its day-to-day tasks, a subject for a very different book (or two or three).

Compiling the lists of the officials, which occupy nearly 100 pages of the book, has required looking at a wide range of published and unpublished documentation. The entries are arranged alphabetically by location, with the *prikazchiki* listed first for each town. The ordering of the officials' names is then chronological, the dates not necessarily reflecting the full length of any individual's term in office but rather the range of what the sources document. Occasionally the entries include additional information on the service of relatives or other positions an individual might have held. The source for each entry is indicated. There is an index of names, referenced by place name in the table (not by page number). By my estimate, that index includes some 1400 names.

How complete are the data? Hard to say, given what I think might be other possible options in the mass of unpublished Muscovite archival files. It is safe to say though that Sinelobov has secured for himself a place alongside such luminaries as Zimin, Bogoiavlenskii, Barsukov, Veselovskii and Demidova, who were responsible for the well-known and much-used earlier guides to other members of Muscovy's officialdom.