

RUSSIA OBSERVED

Collected
Essays
on Russian
and Soviet
History

Richard Pipes

Westview

RUSSIA OBSERVED

Collected Essays on
Russian and Soviet History

Richard Pipes

Westview Press
BOULDER, SAN FRANCISCO, & LONDON

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Copyright © 1989 by Westview Press, Inc.

Published in 1989 in the United States of America by Westview Press, Inc., 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, Colorado 80301, and in the United Kingdom by Westview Press, Inc., 13 Brunswick Centre, London WC1N 1AF, England

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Pipes, Richard.

Russia observed : collected essays on Russian and Soviet history /
Richard Pipes.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-8133-0788-0

1. Soviet Union—Politics and government. 2. Minorities—Soviet
Union—History. I. Title.

DK61.P57 1989

947—dc19

88-29026

CIP

Printed and bound in the United States of America



The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National
Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

RUSSIA OBSERVED

Contents

Introduction	1
1 Introduction to Giles Fletcher's <i>Of the Russe Commonwealth</i> (1591)	7
2 Karamzin's Conception of the Monarchy	37
3 Catherine II and the Jews: The Origins of the Pale of Settlement	59
4 The Russian Military Colonies, 1810–1831	83
5 <i>Narodnichestvo</i> : A Semantic Inquiry	103
6 The Origins of Bolshevism: The Intellectual Evolution of Young Lenin	123
7 Max Weber and Russia	151
8 The First Experiment in Soviet National Policy: The Bashkir Republic, 1917–1920	177
9 Muslims of Soviet Central Asia: Trends and Prospects	193
10 “Solving” the Nationality Problem	223
<i>Index</i>	235

Introduction

The essays in this book span nearly four centuries of Russian history. Their topics differ, but they are linked by a common theme, which is Russian political thought and practice.

I was born in Polish Silesia, in the shadow of World War I. Although Warsaw, the city in which I was raised, had been part of the Russian Empire for a century—from the Congress of Vienna until the German occupation of 1915—in my personal life Russia played hardly any part. My father was a native of Austro-Hungarian Galicia and spent his youth in Vienna. During the war, he fought in the ranks of Pilsudski's Legions on the Austrian side. My first language was German: It was only at six, when I was enrolled in school, that I learned Polish. The main source of my cultural influence until the age of seventeen was Germany: as an adolescent I read Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Rilke; I pored over Meyer's *Konversationslexikon*; and I preferred German music to any other. Soviet Russia in the 1930s was hermetically sealed. Although geographically next door, it could as well have been on another planet: all that reached us from there were muted echoes of some terrible and incomprehensible tragedy. Apart from reading some Russian short stories and listening to Russian music, I do not recall having had any contact with the culture or politics of Russia up to the time when World War II broke out and I had to flee Poland with my parents, first to Italy and then the United States.

My interest in Russia was awakened by the Nazi-Soviet war—a war in which the fate of civilization was at stake and, one felt instinctively, even our very lives. I followed the progress of the campaigns and traced on maps the shifting lines of the Eastern front. In 1942, while a college junior, I realized with great excitement that with my knowledge of Polish I could easily acquire Russian. I bought a Russian grammar and dictionary, and began to teach myself. In 1943 I entered the army, which sent me to Cornell for a nine-month course of Russian. The faculty were no ordinary language teachers but émigré intellectuals, several of them Mensheviks and Socialists-Revolutionaries. The students, like myself in uniform, were mostly New York liberals with pro-Soviet sympathies

which I did not share: for although I ardently desired Soviet victory, I found their illusions about Stalinist Russia childish.

The war over, I enrolled at Harvard for a degree in history. My main interests were European cultural history, philosophy of history, and the history of Western art. I intended Russia to be only one of four fields required for the Ph.D. General Examination. Accordingly, the department initially assigned to me as faculty advisor Crane Brinton, a distinguished specialist in the history of European thought. It transpired, however, that the departmental requirements for a doctorate were more rigid than I had realized and that my broad program of studies in European *Geistesgeschichte* was not feasible. On Brinton's advice to settle on a national field, I chose Russia, and was reassigned to Michael Karpovich. While I did take courses in the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history, my graduate work became increasingly focused on Russia. The establishment in 1948 of the Russian Research Center had the further effect of committing me to that field: I became a Fellow of the Center a year later and found myself totally immersed in Russian and Soviet affairs.

When I think back and try to reconstruct the mental processes that led me to devote myself professionally to the study of Russia, I have to conclude that, initially at any rate, it was the overpowering presence and threat of Stalinist Russia which loomed as ominously over our lives after the war as Hitler's had done in the 1930s. For those who did not live through the immediate postwar period and have not experienced these sensations, they are probably difficult to understand. The weakness of "revisionist" histories of U.S.-Soviet relations during this period derives mainly from a failure of the imagination, which results in the "Cold War" being reduced to a conventional great power contest and "values" to mere propaganda tools. They were nothing of the kind to contemporaries to whom the Nazi-Soviet alliance of 1939 and cooperation against the Western democracies were fresh in memory and the postwar Stalinist terror a continuation of defunct Nazism. The Cold War appeared at the time as a test of wills whose outcome would determine whether the rest of the world would have to share the fate of the peoples of Russia under Lenin and Stalin. It was no mean issue.

Those of us who felt this way, naturally were deeply interested in understanding what made Soviet Russia behave as it did. This question could be answered in two ways: sociologically and historically. One could treat the Soviet Union without reference to its historical experience or political culture, as just another society at a certain stage of socio-economic development ("modernization" was then the fashionable word), best analyzed by comparison with other societies at a similar stage. This approach dominated thinking at the Russian Research Center, which

had been founded for the specific purpose of approaching Soviet Russia in an anthropological and sociological (i.e., ahistorical and apolitical) manner. I belonged to a small minority which held that a nation's behavior is shaped mainly by its historical experience and the unique culture that results from it, and that one can no more deduce this behavior from sociological models than understand an individual's behavior from generalizations about "human nature."

My earliest publication dealt with the Russian Military Colonies under Alexander I: it was adapted from a paper I had written in the spring of 1947 for Crane Brinton's seminar. The essay suffers from the faults of youth (I was only twenty-four at the time): it strains the argument and is written in a stiff, academic prose style that I then thought becoming a scholar. In writing it, I was vaguely conscious of an analogy between the colonies of Alexander I and Soviet collective farms, and although the argument is not really worked out, it still seems to me to have merit.

I began work on my doctoral thesis in the summer of 1948. It was the heyday of Stalinist nationalism and it interested me to find out why and when a regime espousing an internationalist ideology had adopted an extreme form of Great Russian chauvinism. My dissertation, completed in 1950, dealt with the evolution of socialist and Communist thought on the subject of nationality and nationalism and concentrated on Lenin's tactical use of minority nationalism in his quest for power.

In the course of working on the dissertation, I discovered the "nationality question." Incredible as it may seem today, in the 1940s and 1950s it was widely believed that the Soviet government had succeeded in eliminating national frictions and even differences among its ethnic groups, assimilating them to the point where all that remained were colorful costumes and harmless folklore. I recall reading a statement of George Kennan's in *Foreign Affairs* to the effect that the Ukraine was as much part of Russia as Pennsylvania was of the United States. Alexander Bennigsen, the French Orientalist who later became a leading student of Soviet Muslims, maintained at that time that these peoples had lost their ethnic identity. Concrete evidence was hard to come by because the Soviet Union was more than ever insulated from the outside world. However, the reading of pre-Stalinist sources convinced me that this could not be the case—that minority nationalism, even though stifled, as everything else in the Soviet Union, remained very much alive. I decided to supplement my investigation of Soviet theory of nationalism with an inquiry into Soviet nationality policies during the Revolution and Civil War for which period sources were abundant. The result was my first book, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, published in 1954.

One of the earliest fruits of this study was an account of Bashkiria during the Revolution and Civil War. It exemplified the fusion of Communism and Russian nationalism which flourished under Stalin, but whose outlines, I now realized, had appeared already in Lenin's day. Robert Wolff referred to this essay in his review of Volume One of E. H. Carr's *The Bolshevik Revolution* in the *Times Literary Supplement* to argue that the English historian, in dealing with Bashkiria, had ignored evidence that did not support his rather favorable view of early Bolshevik nationality policies. Carr defended himself with a lengthy response in *Soviet Studies*. Not long after I was surprised to learn that the protagonist of my article, Zeki Validov, whom I presumed dead, was on the faculty of the University of Istanbul. When we met, I had the unusual experience of testing my historical account against the living memory of a key participant.

In 1953, with assistance from the Institute of Intercultural Studies and the Ford Foundation, I spent the summer in Munich interviewing Muslim refugees (most of them ex-German prisoners of war) about Islam in Central Asia. The information which I systematically collected indicated strongly that ethnic differences and minority nationalism were very much alive in that area, at least until the outbreak of World War II. My findings, summarized in the *Journal of Middle Eastern History* in 1955, persuaded me conclusively that conventional wisdom was wrong, that non-Russian nationalism in the Soviet Union was a force to be reckoned with, and that in the years to come it would make itself increasingly felt. I wrote many articles on the subject, a sample of which I include in this collection ("Solving' the Nationality Question"). But by then I abandoned researches in the nationality question, in part because I concluded that to proceed further I would have to learn the languages of the Soviet minorities and in part because my attention turned to Russian conservatism.

At the Russian Research Center, the debates between the sociologists and historians went on. In 1954 I decided to find out what the sociological method had been able to accomplish in analyzing and forecasting events the outcome of which was known. As the test case I took Max Weber, generally (and rightly) regarded as the greatest sociologist, who also happened to have devoted much attention to Russia. I wished to determine whether Weber had correctly predicted the course of events in contemporary Russia without much reference to its past, relying mainly on comparative sociology. (Weber's knowledge of Russian history was thin, being derived mainly from one source, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu's *L'Empire des Tsars et les Russes*.)

The results of my inquiry appeared in *World Politics* in 1955 under the title "Max Weber and Russia." As I reread this essay I find that I

may have been too critical of Weber. I feel now that he was more correct in stressing bureaucratic continuity in the Russia of 1900 to 1920 than I had allowed. Even so, I believe today as I did then that he was misled by his sociological approach, which convinced him that under modern conditions, with the bureaucracy allegedly complete master, a revolution had become impossible. His view of the 1905 Revolution as serving only to ensconce the Imperial bureaucracy more solidly in power was wide off the mark. Even more wrongheaded was his dismissal of both the March and November Revolutions of 1917 as "swindles." Talcott Parsons, the leading Weber scholar in the United States, told me several years after my article had appeared that it had made him angry and that he had intended to write a rebuttal, but he never wrote it and failed to tell me what had aroused his anger. I suspect it was my *l'èse-majesté*.

The introduction to Fletcher's *Of the Russe Commonwealth* is the only essay in this collection devoted to medieval Russia. It resulted from a suggestion by John Fine, then a graduate student at Harvard and now professor at the University of Michigan, that I urge the Harvard University Press to reprint this scarce and important work. The Press agreed to do so on condition that I write an Introduction. Immersion in Fletcher's account of his travels to Muscovy proved a fascinating experience, for it revealed the antecedents in the late sixteenth century of many institutions and practices which I have identified in Imperial and Soviet Russia. It demonstrated the continuities in Russian political history and confirmed to me, once again, the validity of the historical approach.

"Karamzin's Conception of the Monarchy," written in 1956 for a Festschrift in honor of Michael Karpovich, was the byproduct of a book on which I was working at the time. In it I sought to throw light on Russian liberal conservatism, an ideology which I find particularly congenial but which is largely ignored by historians. The findings were incorporated in *Karamzin's Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, published in 1959.

I do not recall what made me turn to the Jewish policies of Catherine II. It probably was dissatisfaction with the dominant trend in Jewish historiography which depicts the treatment of Jews by Gentiles primarily in terms of pro-Semitic and anti-Semitic attitudes. The status of Jews in Imperial Russia, at any rate until the late nineteenth century, was, in fact, imbedded in the practices of an autocratic and caste-conscious regime. To illustrate this point, I studied the Jewish policies of Catherine, arguably the most liberal of Russian rulers. I was surprised to learn that in some respects her Jewish legislation was the most enlightened in contemporary Europe. The failure of her attempts to integrate Jews into Russian society as equals showed (as she herself realized) that

personal feelings were not the only or even the main consideration in Russian policies toward the Jews.

"*Narodnichestvo*: A Semantic Inquiry" resulted from the study of the life and thought of Peter Struve, which occupied me for the better part of twenty years. Working with late nineteenth century sources I became aware that *narodnichestvo* (Populism), which like other historians of Russia I had been using to describe an allegedly anti-Marxist, agrarian, "utopian" socialism, was a polemical term coined in the 1890s for their rivals by those Russian radicals who viewed themselves as Marx's only true disciples. I concluded that the phenomenon it purported to define did not actually exist. I am convinced that my interpretation was and remains correct; but linguistic habits die hard and I cannot claim to have persuaded the profession.

In the course of my work on Struve's biography, I had to deal with the young Lenin with whom Struve had had close relations. Researches into this subject revealed that Lenin's Bolshevism was rooted in part in his early connections with the Peoples' Will, which were much closer than usually allowed, and in part in the intellectual crisis which he had experienced in 1899-1900 when he lost faith in the basic principles of Social Democracy: reliance on the working class as the motor force of the Revolution, and cooperation with the liberal "bourgeoisie."

My general interpretation of the Russian political tradition is to be found in my books, notably *Russia Under the Old Regime*, the biography of Peter Struve, and the forthcoming *History of the Russian Revolution*. The essays included in this book deal in depth with related subjects for which there was not enough space in the books. They elaborate my views on Russia's political tradition, a subject which I continue to believe holds the key to the understanding of the present and future of a country which plays so large a role in the destiny of the modern world.

Introduction to Giles Fletcher's *Of the Russe Commonwealth* (1591)

In the first edition of that encyclopedia of early English travels, Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589), among descriptions of distant lands in America and Asia, one may find a document dated 1555 which bears the curious title, "Charter of the Merchants of Russia, granted upon the discovery of the said country by King Philip and Queen Mary." That the English of the mid-sixteenth century should have regarded themselves as the discoverers of Russia tells us not only of their provincialism but also of their commercial cunning. Actually, Russia had been "discovered" a good century earlier by continental Europeans, and the English were not entirely unaware of that fact. Their insistence on priority represented, as we shall see, an attempt to buttress an insecure claim to a monopoly on the trade with Russia through the northern route. Nevertheless, the concept of a "discovery" of Russia is not entirely to be dismissed, for it reflects both English and continental feeling of that time. Until the fifteenth century, Russia had indeed been a *terra incognita*, a part of legendary Tartary, the home of Scythians and Sarmatians, about whom Europeans knew no more than about the inhabitants of the continents in fact newly discovered by the great maritime explorers of that age.

There was a time when the principalities of Russia had maintained close commercial and dynastic links with the rest of Christendom. In the eleventh century, Kiev's ruling family married into the royal houses of France, England, and Norway. But a succession of disasters resulting principally from recurrent invasions of Turkic and Mongolian nomads from inner Asia snapped one by one the links connecting Russians with the Catholic world. The final disaster was the great Mongolian invasion of 1236–1241 which ravaged most of Russia and placed it under the

Originally appeared as the introduction to Giles Fletcher's *Of the Russe Commonwealth* (1591), Harvard University Press, 1966. Copyright © 1966 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press.

sovereignty of the Khan. The Russians were henceforth compelled to turn eastward. It was to the east that their princes had to travel to make their humiliating homage and pay their tribute, and it was there that they learned new means of government and warfare. Between the middle of the thirteenth and the middle of the fifteenth century, Russia was effectively separated from Europe and integrated into the oriental world. Infrequent travelers to Mongolia or China crossed lands once inhabited by Russians in the south and west, but they stayed away from the forests of the upper Volga and Oka, to which regions the center of Russian population and statehood had shifted. Plano Carpini, who journeyed to Mongolia in 1246, left in his account only passing references to the Russians, where he depicts them as abused vassals of the Tatars: any Tatar, he says, no matter how lowly, treats the best born Russian with utter disdain. Willem van Ruysbroek, who repeated Carpini's trip seven years later, speaks of Russia as a province "full of woods in all places . . . [which] has been wasted all over by the Tatars and as yet is daily wasted by them."¹ Given the hazards of medieval travel, there was nothing in these casual references to encourage European interest in Russia.

If Russia lost contact with Europe as a result of Mongol-Turkic conquests, she re-established this contact as soon as she had emancipated herself from the invaders and organized a sovereign state. This event occurred in the second half of the fifteenth century. With startling rapidity what had been an impoverished and maltreated frontier area of the Mongol Empire transformed itself into the most powerful eastern Christian kingdom. Some Russian theoreticians even began to claim for the Grand Dukes of Moscow—descendants of princelings who so recently had been humiliated by the Khans—the imperial title which had lapsed with the death of the last Byzantine emperor during the Turkish seizure of Constantinople in 1453. This claim was not very seriously taken by westerners when they first learned of it. But the existence of a large Christian kingdom in the east could not well be ignored by a continent threatened with Ottoman invasion. From the middle of the fifteenth century, Papal and Imperial legates found their way to Moscow in search of diplomatic or military alliances. At the same time, the first Russian missions appeared in western Europe: they arranged for the marriage of Ivan III to the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, then a refugee in Rome (1472), brought to Moscow architects and decorators to construct the new Kremlin, and engaged in a variety of negotiations. In this manner the old links between Russia and the other states of the Western world were gradually reforged.

On the European mind these first contacts produced quite an exotic impression. Owing to long commercial and military dealings with the

Tatars, Turks, and Persians, the Russians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries presented a completely oriental appearance. Their nobles wore clothes imported from Persia, and their soldiers carried weapons copied from the Tatars. Russian women painted their faces with garish colors quite unlike anything seen in Europe. The visual impression of strangeness, recorded by virtually every early visitor to Russia, was reinforced by curious customs. The practice of kowtowing before superiors, imposed on the Russians by the Tatars and retained after independence, astounded visitors as much as it repelled them. The absolute power of the ruler, the habit of even the highest nobles of referring to themselves as the monarch's "slaves" (*khology*), the prevalence of sexual promiscuity—these and many other features of Muscovite Russia amazed all visitors, regardless of background. Russia appeared to them not as a European country, but as what one historian calls "a Christian-exotic country of the New World."² This initial impression never quite lost its hold on the European imagination. It continued to influence attitudes many years later, after Russia had become an integral member of the European cultural and political community. When an angry Castlereagh, in 1815, called the thoroughly Frenchified Alexander I a "Calmuck prince," he was unconsciously reverting to this tradition.

The rediscovery of Russia produced a sizeable body of literature which in Russian historiography is known as *skazaniia inostrantsev* (accounts of foreigners). This literature, like the whole body of travel accounts of the age of discovery, has both specific strengths and weaknesses as a historical source. The early explorers were subjective, intolerant, and often uncritical, but they also approached foreign lands with a freshness of vision that comes only once to individual cultures as to individual persons. They saw more sharply and with less preconditioning than did their successors. The picture of Russia which emerges from these accounts is strikingly consistent—so much so that the historian Kliuchevskii felt justified in preparing on their basis a composite description of Muscovy.³

The most important of these early accounts was written by the Imperial ambassador, Sigismund von Herberstein, who traveled to Russia twice in the reign of Vassilii III (1517 and 1526). His book, *Commentarii rerum Moscoviticarum*, appeared in Vienna in 1549 and ran through several editions. It was based on good knowledge of the written sources as well as intelligent personal observations, and it provided westerners with the first serious description of Russian history, geography, government, and customs.⁴ Herberstein's book was the main source of continental knowledge of Russia in the sixteenth century, but by no means the only one.⁵

The English were at first not greatly interested in this body of information. They did not even bother to translate Herberstein's book, which within a few years of publication in Latin had come out in Italian, German, and Czech editions: for in the middle of the sixteenth century they had neither religious, nor diplomatic, nor commercial relations with Russia. England's first encounter with that country was an accidental byproduct of a search for a route to China, and for that reason bore the earmarks of a genuine maritime discovery.

In the 1550's England experienced an economic depression caused by a sudden drop in the export of textiles. The merchants, who had come to depend on foreign markets, were now compelled to undertake in earnest maritime explorations in which England so far had lagged behind both Spain and Portugal. Since the Spanish and Portuguese had prior claim to the best southern routes, the English had to seek other, more risky ones. One of them was a northeast passage to China. Some of the outstanding geographers of the time, such as the cartographer Mercator, the explorer Sebastian Cabot, and the mathematician and astrologer John Dee, believed that such a passage was feasible. Basing their reasoning on the best available evidence, they concluded that the Asian continent terminated in the vicinity of the river Ob, where the coastline turned sharply south toward China. If that was indeed the case, then by sailing northeast, past the tip of Scandinavia, it would be possible to reach the great Chinese markets in a relatively short time. Encouraged by this prospect, a group of entrepreneurs equipped three vessels and in the summer of 1553 sent them in search of the passage to China by way of the North Sea. The expedition was under the joint command of Sir Hugh Willoughby and Richard Chancellor.

The vessels of this expedition, having rounded the tip of Norway, sailed into waters previously unexplored by westerners. There they soon became separated. Two ships, including the one with Willoughby aboard, encountered adverse winds and decided to drop anchor off the Kola Peninsula. Unprepared for the severity of the northern winter and unable to establish contact with natives, Willoughby and all his companions later froze to death. Their ships, intact but without a sign of life aboard, were discovered the next spring by Laplanders and eventually returned to England. Chancellor, in the meantime, having waited in vain for his companions in the third ship, sailed on into the White Sea, and on August 24, 1553, sighted the Russian monastery of St. Nicholas at the mouth of the Dvina River, where he landed.

The English travelers touched Russian soil at a propitious moment. The country, led by the ambitious and belligerent Ivan IV, was in great need of military supplies and specialists with which to pursue war against the Tatars. Russia's western neighbors had for some time previous

imposed an effective embargo on the shipment of European craftsmen and weapons, for they feared that Moscow, having defeated the Tatars, would once more begin to expand in their direction. By opening the northern route, the English had made it possible to break this embargo, and to establish a new and dependable route connecting Russia with the outside world.⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that they were warmly welcomed. As soon as news of Chancellor's landing had reached Ivan, he ordered the visitors brought to him. In Moscow, where he was received with much display of friendliness, Chancellor learned that the Russian government was prepared to open negotiations for the purpose of granting the English merchants commercial privileges. With this assurance, the sponsors of Chancellor's expedition founded, on his return, a regular company, popularly known as the Muscovy Company, which received a royal charter and became the prototype of the great English joint-stock companies for overseas trade. In the same year (1555) the company received liberal privileges from Ivan IV which exempted it from the payment of customs and other dues, and in effect confirmed the monopoly on all English trade with Russia granted it by the English charter. Subsequent grants extended the company's rights to trade with Persia and with the Baltic port of Narva, held by the Russians between 1566 and 1581. The port of St. Nicholas was reserved for the company's exclusive use.⁷ Under the auspices of the Company, Russia and England developed a lively maritime trade which greatly contributed to the economic development of the entire Russian north.⁸

The English soon discovered that there was in fact no northeast passage to China: the Asian continent stretched far beyond the river Ob, and in any event the northern waters at a certain degree of longitude (not far east of St. Nicholas) were impassable because of ice. But through Russia English traders unexpectedly found a land route to the commercial centers of the Middle East. The establishment of the Muscovy Company coincided with the conquest by the Russians of the entire length of the Volga River. By capturing Astrakhan, in 1556, the Russians planted themselves on the Caspian Sea, through which there was easy access to Persia and Central Asia. One year after the fall of Astrakhan, Anthony Jenkinson carried out a journey through Moscow to Turkestan and a few years later to Persia. Before long, amazed Englishmen began to receive oriental goods by way of the Northern Sea: "The silks of the Medes to come by Muscovia into England is a strange hearing," Sir Thomas Smith wrote to Sir William Cecil in 1564.⁹

The oriental trade through Russia came to an end in 1580. The route had proved too hazardous, and in that year another group of merchants formed the Turkey (or Levant) Company, which undertook trade with the Middle East through the Mediterranean. The Muscovy Company

gave up this part of its business and came to concentrate entirely on an import and export trade with Russia, from which it derived no mean profit. The English brought into Russia manufactured goods (mostly textiles), metals and other mineral products useful for war (tin, lead, saltpeter, sulphur, and gunpowder), and colonial products (sugar, fruits, etc.). They purchased Russian furs, seal oil, tallow, wax, cordage, and even caviar. The Russian monarchy was in general well disposed toward the English merchants, causing by its patronage the displeasure of some high Russian officials. When Ivan died, the head of the foreign office, Andrei Shchelkalov, mocked a member of the Muscovy Company: "And now your English tsar is gone."¹⁰

Under the protection of the Russian monarchy, the company was allowed to establish in Moscow and several provincial towns permanent agencies staffed by its merchants and clerks. In some instances, agents of the company stayed in Russia for many years, learned fluent Russian, and became first-rate Russian experts. In this manner, within thirty years after Chancellor had stepped ashore at St. Nicholas, England knew more about Russia than did any other country in Europe. This expertise lends British accounts particular value. In general, they are both more factual and less partisan than the accounts of Germans, Poles, or Italians. Some of them are indeed nothing more than intelligence reports prepared by and for merchants who cared only for information helpful in business. They reported distances between towns, measures and weights, coinage, available commodities, the customs and practices of their Russian counterparts, and the institutions of local and central government with which they had to deal.

This fact must be kept in mind in evaluating English accounts, lest they be charged with gross prejudice, for they are virtually unanimous in their condemnation of Russia. Although a number of English residents became thoroughly assimilated, only one of them is known to have chosen to remain—and he was a man who faced prosecution for financial misdeeds. To the English of the time, Russia was a barbarous country, much more so than the other countries of the Orient with which they then entered into relations.¹¹ Their impressions are well summed up in three rhymed letters which the poet George Turberville sent to his London friends from Moscow, where he was serving in 1568 as Thomas Randolph's secretary:

Their manners are so Turkie-like, the men so full of guile,
The women wanton, temples stuffed with idols that defile
The seats that sacred ought to be, the customs are so quaint
As if I would describe the whole, I fear my pen would faint.
In sum, I say, I never saw a prince that so did reign