The study of Muscovite history in the past decade reflects the proverbial juxtaposition of good news and bad. To judge by the quality of recent publications and the level of discussion at conferences, the field enjoys robust health. Muscovite historians, especially the emerging leaders of the field, have analyzed a wide variety of important issues with rigor and ingenuity, often using methods and insights shared with scholars of other times, climes, and disciplines. On the negative side, the much—and justifiably—lamented decline in “Western” universities’ support for teaching and research on early Rus’/Russia seems trifling compared with the wrenching institutional and economic changes with which our Russian colleagues must cope.

In this essay, I will concentrate on the good news. What follows is a personal reflection on the main trends, prospects, and potential pitfalls of historical writing on Muscovite Russia since the late 1980s. I have chosen to concentrate on four broad themes that particularly interest me: the administrative and social elites of Muscovy with whom its monarchs ruled; the symbolic systems, visual and verbal, that justified the power of the ruler and the sanctity of the realm; the worldview and beliefs of ordinary Muscovites and the attempts of secular and religious elites to shape them; and Muscovy’s relations with non-Russian ethnic communities within its borders and its closest neighbors across its frontiers.

As the perceptive reader has undoubtedly noticed, women’s history as such does not appear on this list. I am not dismissing the substantial achievements of my colleagues in this area. Instead, my goal is to emphasize the extent to which study of women and gender in Muscovy has been integrated into the fabric of social and cultural history.

Choosing these four broad areas means setting aside a number of extremely important recent publications that do not fall within them. This essay has other idiosyncratic features as well. The discussion will concentrate on the Muscovite monarchy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the territories that it encompassed, with only passing reference to

1 Manfred Hildermeier emphasizes women’s history in his review of recent currents in historical writing on Russia, “Russian History at a Turning Point: Notes from a Benevolent Distance,” in Historiography of Imperial Russia: The Profession and Writing of History in a Multinational State, ed. Thomas Sanders (Armonk, NY, 1999), 487–501.

2 The best recent examples include the work of N. L. Pushkareva, Zhenshchiny drevnei Rusi (Moscow, 1989), Zhenshchiny Rossii i Evropy na porogu Novogo vremeni (Moscow, 1996), and Women in Russian history from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century, ed. Eve Levin (Armonk, NY 1997); and Nada Boškovska, Die russische Frau im 17. Jahrhundert (Cologne, 1998), summarized in “Muscovite Women during the Seventeenth Century: At the Peak of the Deprivation of their Rights or on the Road towards New Freedom?” Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte (FzOG) 56 (2000): 47–62.

3 For instance, Richard Hellie, The Economy and Material Culture of Russia, 1600–1725 (Chicago, 1999); Chester S. L. Dunning, Russia’s First Civil War: The Time of Troubles and the Founding of the Romanov Dynasty (University Park, PA, 2001); and Marshall Poe, “A People Born to Slavery”: Russia in Early Modern European Ethnography, 1476–1748 (Ithaca, 2000).
publications on earlier times. The phrase “past decade” will be stretched to include impor-
tant work on the chosen themes that appeared before 1990, but will exclude the work of
scholars whose recent publications, however distinguished, essentially repeat arguments
and conclusions first offered years ago.4

Let us begin by examining recent writing on Muscovite elites. Research in this area has
flourished in Russia and elsewhere since the posthumous publications of S. B. Veselovskii
and the work of A. A. Zimin appeared in the late 1950s and 1960s.5 Following the traditions
of prosopography, scholars strove to identify as precisely as possible who served in the
Boiar Duma and the administrative chanceries or were members of the privileged merchant
corporations. They then proceeded to piece together the individual careers, family and clan
relationships, and economic status of these men. From the apparently arid compilations of
names, lands, and genealogies that resulted, these scholars reconstructed the evolving com-
position of the ruling elite of Muscovy, illuminated the ways in which clans and individuals
gained and exercised power at court, and offered a more subtle understanding of the chang-
ing nature of the autocracy. Many of these authors made clear that, contrary to some earlier
interpretations, the Muscovite monarchs and the aristocratic clans that surrounded their
throne shared a common interest in the effectiveness of the government and the well-being of
the realm. Tsars and boyars were not adversaries, but collaborators as well as, in many
instances, relatives by blood or marriage. By and large, these historians also rejected two
assumptions of much earlier historiography as exemplified, paradoxically, by the works of a
great prerevolutionary historian, S. F. Platonov, and official Soviet textbooks. They did not
see the great princely clans and the nontitled families of royal servitors as consistent adver-
saries in the struggle for power at court, but rather as interwoven strands in the fabric of a
single elite. They also rejected the assumption, based on earlier interpretations of the West
European experience, that Muscovite politics can be understood as the struggle of a declin-
ing court aristocracy to defend its power against the challenge of a rising provincial gentry.6

Even though a great deal of the best prosopographical work appeared in print long
before 1990, this method of studying Muscovite elites is still alive and well. A. P. Pavlov’s
recent book on the structure of Boris Godunov’s court analyzes not only the boyars but also
the members of the lesser court ranks. As the leading figure in Tsar Fedor’s regime, then tsar
in his own right, Godunov had to deal with the chaotic situation created by Ivan IV’s
oprichnina and his subsequent experiments. Under Godunov, after an initial period of flux,
the most distinguished princely and nontitled clans once again dominated the court and
central administration.7 Godunov’s regime, moreover, restructured the lesser servitors of the

4For example, the continuing stream of publications of R. G. Skrynnikov.
5The list of major contributors to this line of inquiry includes Veselovskii, Zimin, S. O. Shmidt, V. B. Kobrin, M.
E. Bychkova, A. L. Stanislavskii, Gustave Alef, Ann Keimola, Samuel H. Baron, Hartmut Rüss, and the present
author.
6The most incisive rebuttal of these two traditional assumptions is V. B. Kobrin, Vlast’ i sobstvennost’ v
srednevekovoi Rossii (XV–XVI vv.) (Moscow, 1985).
7A. P. Pavlov, Gosudarev dvor i politicheskaiia bor’ba pri Borise Godunove (St. Petersburg, 1992). See also his
“Gosudarev dvor v istorii Rossii XVII veka,” FzOG 56 (2000): 227–42. Pavlov’s research also analyzes the
economic and social foundations of these clans’ power: since the policies of Ivan IV had deprived many of them of
their ancestral lands and the patronage networks that went with them, they had to derive most of their income from
estates granted by the crown. Marshall Poe’s quantitative analysis of the court in the seventeenth century also gives
due attention to the servitors in the lower ranks (The Consular and Ceremonial Ranks of the Russian “Sovereign’s
Court” 1613–1713 [forthcoming], and The Russian Elite in the Seventeenth Century: A Quantitative Analysis of the
court, organizing them into a hierarchy of clearly defined ranks and providing as many of them as possible with lands near Moscow. At the bottom of the court hierarchy were the vybornye dvoriane, military servitors from the provinces who were called to service in Moscow from time to time and, in the seventeenth century, became part of the provincial “gentry.”

In Nancy Kollmann’s book, Kinship and Politics, the study of Muscovite elites took a more anthropological turn. To study the structure and politics of the Muscovite court between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries, she chose the noble clan as the fundamental unit of analysis. She argued that the core of the Muscovite system consisted of an interlocking network of aristocratic clans of which the Riurikid dynasty was an integral part. Strictly following genealogical traditions, their members inherited the right to the highest positions at court. The clans sought above all stability and “consensus” within the ruling elite.

Kollmann’s work also brings aristocratic women back onto the historical stage. For, in the complex networks of marriage alliances that held the court together, wives were just as important as husbands. The clans rightly saw their marriageable daughters as an important resource and secluded them from any possible harm to their persons or reputations.

Studies of administrative and social elites have recently moved in a number of interesting new paths, one of which leads from Moscow and the central administration to the provinces and peripheries of Muscovy. To be sure, study of Russia’s regions in early modern times—particularly Novgorod and Pskov, the European North and Siberia—has an honorable history. The most interesting new studies, however, go well beyond kraevedenie (regional studies) as such by examining in comparative perspective the interrelationship between local society and the demands of the royal administration in Moscow.

Valerie A. Kivelson’s Autocracy in the Provinces is an outstanding example of this approach. Using all of the standard tools of prosopography and a thoughtful application of insights from other societies and disciplines, Kivelson argues that, contrary to received wisdom, the “gentry” of the Vladimir-Suzdal’ region in the Muscovite heartland had a strong awareness of their own solidarity and self-interest as a regional elite. She points out, for example, that, particularly in the latter decades of the seventeenth century, many servitors who nominally belonged to the lowest echelons of the royal court actually lived and reported for service in the provinces. Moreover, rather than striving for advancement to Moscow, the gentry of Vladimir-Suzdal’ acted as though they were content to play leading roles in their home territory: the most prominent of them monopolized the “elective” office of local elder and occasionally even served as voevody (governors).

Instead of aspiring to formal corporate rights, Kivelson argues, the gentry pursued their most important objectives in other ways. Their primary preoccupations were protecting the interests of their nuclear families (not clans!) and building viable estates (“nests” if you will) within their home region through royal grants, and purchases and trades on the lively real estate market. Through their dowries and their rights as widows, women contributed very

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significantly to the pursuit of these goals even though their formal legal right to own property declined during the century. The solidity and local power of the Vladimir gentry rested on the fact that the monarchy needed them as a pool of military manpower in spite of the increasing obsolescence of traditional cavalry and as landowners who kept order in rural society. Thus, as elsewhere in Europe, the crown had to reach accommodations with them that met both parties’ basic needs. Kivelson also points out a major change in Muscovite political culture in the middle of the century, from personal relations of ruler and subject based on common Orthodox values to an impersonal bureaucratic regime. The gentry quickly learned to defend its interests under the new rules and “worked out a usable form of autonomy within autocracy.”

As portrayed in the publications of Carol Stevens and Brian Davies, the tsars’ military servitors on the southern frontier bore virtually no resemblance to the courtiers in Moscow or the solid Vladimir gentry. In areas like Belgorod, Sevsk, and Kozlov, the status and way of life of the lesser nobility revolved entirely around military service in regiments, old style or new, in the field or in fortress garrisons. Moreover, the society of the southern frontier was remarkably egalitarian and flexible: almost anybody who could perform a useful military function—even a runaway serf—was welcome. Life on the frontier was hard: whatever their social origin, the “soldiers of the steppe” had to perform their military obligations, feed and equip themselves, and, in addition, contribute to the support of the rest of the army by paying taxes in grain and working on military construction projects. In return, southern servitors received very small allotments of land which they had to farm with little or no labor besides their own, a situation that, over time, forced many of them into the category of odnodvortsy (smallholders), virtually indistinguishable from state peasants.

Thus, the study of Muscovite elites continues to produce valuable new data and insights. Even more important, the prosopographical imperative, if I may call it that, has become second nature in the field. Any historian of Muscovy who discusses social groups must define, as precisely as the sources allow, their personal composition, family and clan

16 B. A. Aleksandrov and N. N. Pokrovskii, *Vlast’ i obschestvo: Sibir’ v XVII v.* (Novosibirsk, 1991), chart a parallel process in which local military servitors—Cossacks in the Siberian case—gradually lost their leading role in local society over the course of the seventeenth century.
ties, and economic condition. In addition to their intrinsic value, the results of such studies are a fundamental precondition of any analysis of elite politics or culture.17

The second area that has flowered in the last decade is the study of the symbolic systems that legitimized the ruler and his realm. Categorizing work on these themes as “new” may seem strange. After all, for generations historians of Russia have studied the canon of Muscovite writings that explain the place of the tsardom in the history of the world and, on that basis, justify the claims and prerogatives of its rulers. Scholars have devoted innumerable publications—some of them exceptionally valuable—to the origin and evolution of the bundle of symbolic statements traditionally known as the “Third Rome” theory. As the most perceptive scholars realized, the implications of these symbolic statements are often extremely ambiguous and subject to interpretation on several levels of meaning. Moreover, they can be understood properly only in the specific historical setting that evoked them. In addition, art historians have published many erudite studies on the architecture and painting of the Muscovite period. All too often, however, the histories of verbal and visual images have remained isolated from one another.

Two scholarly traditions in particular have inspired the most interesting new work—the “Berlin school” of iconography and political theology which entered Muscovite studies in the works of Michael Cherniavsky,18 a student of Ernst Kantorowicz, and the “Moscow-Tartu school” of semiotics, particularly the studies of B. A. Uspenskii and V. M. Zhivov. As Cherniavsky’s publications demonstrate, the “Berlin school” integrated written and visual evidence of political and cultural beliefs into unified schemes of interpretation. By contrast, in its writings on Muscovy, “the Moscow-Tartu school” seeks the structures of culture in written texts alone. In their studies of the evolution of Russian high culture, Uspenskii and Zhivov, individually and together, however, approach their sources in a new way. Linguists as well as cultural historians, they analyze Russian cultural history as an evolving set of semiotic systems that they reconstruct through a meticulous reading of literary and polemical texts.19 They tend to see cultural or religious conflict as the clash of mutually exclusive symbolic systems, each with its own understanding of language.20 Erudite analysis of significant detail is, of course, also characteristic of the “Berlin school” as I have labeled it.

Michael Flier’s and Daniel Rowland’s studies continue these fruitful traditions. Flier, also a linguist by training, has published penetrating and subtle analyses of court ceremonies and works of art, based both on visual representations and written descriptions or

17To mention one promising approach, Paul Bushkovitch’s current work, based primarily on unpublished diplomatic papers, attempts to refine our understanding of the make-up, attitudes, and interplay of factions and “parties” at the Russian court from the mid-seventeenth century through the reign of Peter I. See, for example, his “Aristocratic Faction and the Opposition to Peter the Great: The 1690’s,” FzOG 50 (1995): 80–120, and “Cultural Change among the Russian Boyars, 1650–1680,” FzOG 56 (2000): 91–111. A. S. Lavrov, Regentstvo tsarevny Sof’i Alekseevny (Moscow, 1999), uses a similar approach but concentrates on the institutional implications of the rapid personnel changes in the court and higher administration in the 1680s.


inscriptions. He looks for the ultimate meaning of these symbolic statements in the exact visual details and wordings, seeking their antecedents in earlier Christian iconography and texts and their connection to the liturgical observances of Orthodoxy. His essays refine in important ways our understanding of the self-representation of the Muscovite state and church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Flier’s view, the image of Muscovy presented by the royal court and the ecclesiastical hierarchy on Palm Sunday, for example, was profoundly apocalyptic. More than anything else, Moscow, the capital of the one remaining truly Christian monarchy on earth, was the New Jerusalem. Moreover, contrary to most earlier interpretations, Flier argues that the Palm Sunday ritual served to glorify the tsar’s authority as shepherd of the Christian flock since, when analyzed in detail, the ceremony portrays him as paying homage to Christ, not to the Patriarch who represented Him. In a similar vein, the architecture of the Church of the Intercession (popularly known as St. Basil the Blessed) interprets the military triumphs of the tsar’s armies and the fertility of the ruling house as indications of God’s favor. At the same time, Moscow’s central place in the unfolding of the Apocalypse had highly ambiguous implications, both triumphalist and potentially threatening.

Rowland’s analysis of Muscovite polemical writings and art concentrates more specifically on the theoretical scope and limitations of royal power. Seventeenth-century Russian historical writings about the Time of Troubles, he argues, view political power through conventional images often taken from the Old Testament. In general, Muscovite writers saw political life in moral terms. A good Orthodox tsar should rule justly, in part by heeding the wise advice of virtuous councilors. The rule of an immoral prince, one who listened to evil advisers or, worst of all, a usurper would bring disaster to the realm. From this, Rowland has persuasively argued, it follows that good Christian subjects have the right and duty to resist evil or false rulers whatever the cost. In this sense, prevailing attitudes toward government put moral, if not constitutional, limits on the tsars’ power.

In other respects, Rowland’s studies of Muscovite polemics and visual representations of royal authority dovetail with Flier’s. He too argues that Russia’s rulers and ecclesiastical leaders envisioned Moscow as the New Jerusalem, much more than as the Third Rome. It is this symbol that dominates “The Church Militant,” the well-known icon celebrating Ivan IV’s victory over Kazan’, and recurs repeatedly in written texts justifying the tsar’s authority.


22Uspenskii agrees with this reading (Tsar’ i Patriarkh, 443–46, 457).

As for the future, one can only hope for more interdisciplinary studies of the erudition and subtlety of those we have discussed. New approaches are also welcome. For example, Isolde Thyrét’s ongoing work on the self-image of the tsaritasa as revealed above all in their needlework shows that Muscovite royal women also had their own distinct place in the Orthodox “economy of salvation.”

Recent publications in the third area—the worldview and beliefs of ordinary Muscovites and the attempts of secular and religious elites to shape them—are particularly rich and varied. They analyze such diverse subjects as the theology of the ecclesiastical elite, religious dissent in the seventeenth century, popular devotional practices, and social attitudes shared by all Muscovites.

Beginning with the last of these, Nancy Kollmann’s *By Honor Bound* argues that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Muscovites of all social classes had a strong sense of their honor and personal dignity and did not hesitate to defend it in court. The formal and informal mechanisms to resolve conflicts over honor, she argues, fostered social cohesion and reinforced the moral ideals of a patriarchal, Orthodox society. They also buttressed the autocracy and social order since the ruler stood at the pinnacle of a hierarchy that defended everyone’s honor in proportion to his or her social standing. The code of honor held women in a subservient position, but, at the same time, allowed them and their male kinsmen to defend their reputations zealously. Although Muscovite society was far from tranquil, the recognition of individuals’ honor and the mechanisms to defend it often kept everyday confrontations from escalating into serious social disruption.

Ludwig Steindorff’s meticulous studies of memorial practices in early Muscovy reach some remarkably similar general conclusions. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the practice of endowing memorial prayers for the dead not only linked the monastic communities that performed them with the lay patrons who paid for them but also the latter with one another. Moreover, as the custom spread downward from the highest nobility to less prominent Muscovites, the practice fostered social integration more broadly.

Elite religious culture underwent fundamental change in the second half of the seventeenth century. Paul Bushkovitch’s *Religion and Society in Russia* studies the religious “high culture” of the Muscovite court in the seventeenth century and chronicles the attempts of the government and church hierarchy to channel popular devotion by regulating or suppressing the unauthorized veneration of local saints. The author sees these developments in Muscovy as an Orthodox variant of the European-wide tendency toward greater regulation of popular religious life by state and church acting in concert. He notes, in particular, in the sermons of the Ukrainian-educated hierarchs and court clergy of the middle and late decades of the century, a shift toward a more rational understanding of Christianity centered on moral behavior.

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26 Kollmann sees the much-discussed system of mestnichestvo (precedence) as a small part of the comprehensive code of honor. In contrast, André Berelowitch uses precedence litigation as an important indication that the Muscovite nobility had a strongly developed concept of honor. See his *La hiérarchie des égaux: La noblesse russe d’Ancien Régime XVe–XVIIe siècles* (Paris, 2001).
29 In recent studies of Western and Central Europe these processes are often referred to as “confessionalization.”
Eve Levin approaches Russian popular Christianity in its own terms rather than from above.30 Continuing the ground-breaking work she began in *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs*, a study of both ecclesiastical regulations and actual behavior insofar as it can be reconstructed, she analyzes a wide range of sources to show what ordinary Muscovites believed and how they prayed.31 Central to her approach is her convincing rejection of the time-honored conception of dvoeverie, which assumes that premodern Russian believers lived in two distinct religious spheres—Orthodox Christianity and a pre- or sub-Christian world of spirits and magic. Levin argues instead that popular Christianity in Muscovy was a single complex system of belief and practice whose adherents had no doubt that they were good Christians. Although this seamless web contained both Biblical or patristic and ancient pre-Christian threads, ordinary believers made no such distinction and, beyond a certain point, historians’ attempts to disentangle them are likely to be neither productive nor enlightening.32

Throughout early modern Europe, the lines between popular religion, magic, and witchcraft were extremely indistinct and permeable. As Levin points out, supplicatory prayers are often almost indistinguishable from magical incantations. From now on, any studies of magic in Russia will begin from W. F. Ryan’s encyclopedic survey that covers the entire course of Russian history. Arranged topically, the book assembles all of the available evidence, documentary and literary, of each general type of magical incantation and rite and judiciously distinguishes the specifically Russian, inherited, and common European elements in this vast body of lore.33

Valerie Kivelson’s recent studies of witchcraft in Muscovy concentrate primarily on its social function and meaning and the ways in which the Russian experience differs from that of other European societies.34 Clearly Muscovites of all social classes believed that witchcraft was a fact of life. Indeed, civil and religious authorities had great difficulty distinguishing “white” magic from “black” and both from folk or herbal medicine. At the same time, Muscovite sources reveal no elaborate demonologies or invocations of Satan and his hosts. Muscovy was unusual in another respect as well—the majority of accused practitioners were men. This difference, Kivelson reasonably argues, arose from the tightly organized patriarchal structures of Muscovite society that kept the vast majority of women in their ascribed positions in the family and the community. As in other societies, accused witches were socially marginal figures whom individuals and communities could blame for casting spells that caused medical and social problems ranging from impotence and

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32Going further than Levin, Isolde ThyrŒt has attempted to identify specifically feminine modes of popular piety. See her “Muscovite Miracle Stories as Sources for Gender-Specific Religious Experience,” in *Religion and Culture*, 115–31.


infertility to political and social conflict. And, for its part, the Muscovite government persecuted witchcraft as crime, a threat to social order, rather than as heresy.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the government also had to deal with open religious dissent, much of it centered on the claims and policies of Patriarch Nikon, not least his liturgical reforms. Georg Michels’s *At War with the Church* provocatively reexamines this oft-told story, concentrating on the political, institutional, and social setting and roots of opposition to the official church and the government that sustained it. In telling it, he introduces substantial new archival evidence, particularly the records of governmental investigations, and avoids both classic oversimplifications of older historiography—the populist myth that equates religious dissent with peasant rebellion and the later Old Believers’ conviction that their movement began as a massive spontaneous protest of faithful Orthodox believers against apostasy.

As I understand his work, Michels’s greatest contributions lie in stressing the extent to which the early opposition to Patriarch Nikon and, more generally, the Orthodox hierarchy was fragmented, involved relatively few people, and intersected with a plethora of political, regional, and personal agendas. At first, the *raskol* consisted of two separate elements—a split within the ecclesiastical elite and a series of isolated movements of popular religious revival—often collectively labeled the *Kapitonovshchina*—that opposed the perceived laxity or oppressiveness of the Russian church. In Michels’s understanding, these two disparate streams flowed together only at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—much later than his predecessors believed. In the tumultuous early years of the religious struggles, Michels argues, opposition to Nikon’s liturgical reforms played only a small part in the growing opposition to the official church and the state. Most parishes and monasteries accepted Nikon’s reformed liturgical texts without complaint. Outbreaks of violent resistance to state and church had more mundane causes. In Michels’s reading of the sources, the revolt of the Solovetski Monastery arose from its long-standing conflict with the Archbishop of Novgorod, and the notorious instances of self-immolation in Karelia in the 1680s were ultimately episodes of social banditry. Socially, many of the early dissenters came from marginal groups, often renegade monks and nuns. Energetic women of all social classes played a disproportional role as leaders or supporters of dissent. In short, Michels’s

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35Since the primary evidence consists of confessions made under torture, it is ultimately impossible to determine how often accused witches actually engaged in the practices with which they were charged.

36Georg B. Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford, 1999); and his numerous articles.

37In addition to his own discoveries, Michels relies substantially on the documents published by Vera Rumiantseva, *Narodnoe antitserkovnoe dvizhenie v Rossii XVII veka: Dokumenty Prikaza tainykh del o raskol’nikakh 1665–1667 gg. (Dokumenty)* (Moscow, 1986); and *Dokumenty Razriadnogo, Posol’skogo, Novgorodskogo i Tainogo prikazov o raskol’nikakh v gorodakh Rossii, 1654–1684 gg.* (Moscow, 1991). See also her monograph, *Narodnoe antitserkovnoe dvizhenie v Rossii XVII veka* (Moscow, 1986).


publications have fundamentally recast the debate about the origins and early history of the Old Belief.\footnote{One may question whether Michels appreciates fully the extent to which many dissidents took seriously the liturgical issues and broader implications of the Nikonian reforms and the power of government and ecclesiastical leaders throughout early modern Europe, Muscovy included, to impose their will on potential dissenters through intimidation.}

Michels’s work demonstrates that the Russian archives contain important unpublished materials on dissent in late Muscovy and the early history of the Old Belief.\footnote{In the last decade, there has been a remarkable outpouring of new publications on the later history of the Old Belief, and its ideology and literature. These works, however, lie outside the chronological and thematic limits of this essay.} Moreover, large areas of Muscovite church history need serious exploration. In spite of shelves of books in our libraries, we still need a far better understanding of the content of Nikon’s liturgical reforms,\footnote{Paul Meyendorff, \textit{Russia, Ritual and Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century} (Crestwood, NY, 1991), is a helpful contribution to our understanding of these issues.} his career, goals, and philosophy, and his continually changing position in the political and social life of his time. More broadly, we know remarkably little about the institutional workings of the Orthodox church in the seventeenth century and the hierarchs who led it. There is work to be done.

Our fourth and final focal point, the relations of Rus'/Russia with the ethnic and cultural “other,” also has an honorable history. A veritable genealogy of scholars—George Vernadsky, Edward L. Keenan, and Charles Halperin, to mention only three diverse examples—reexamined the institutional and cultural impact of the Mongol conquest of Rus' and subsequent relations between Moscow and the other successor states of the empire.\footnote{Building on this heritage, Donald Ostrowski has recently argued that, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Rus' adopted most of its fundamental institutions and techniques of governing from the Mongols and their successors. In my view, his strongest arguments are those which most closely follow those of his predecessors. He has not convinced me, however, that the kornienie form of administration and the pomest'e system of conditional landholding were copied from the iqta system found in Muslim societies including the Qipchak Khanate (Donald Ostrowski, \textit{Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304–1589} [Cambridge, MA, 1998], esp. 48–54).} Alexandre Bennigsen and his colleagues maintained the highest scholarly standards in studying Russia’s relations with its Moslem subjects and neighbors at a time when Soviet scholarship foundered in the “eternal friendship of peoples.”

In the last decade, spurred in part by the reassertion of ethnic identity in the USSR and the country’s subsequent collapse, historians of Russian imperial policy have taken several different, fruitful approaches to the subject. Beginning with his pioneering work on the peoples of the Volga valley, Andreas Kappeler has provided a balanced and elegant survey of the Russian government’s policy toward all of the non-Great Russian peoples of the realm. Although sensitive to the distinct histories, traditions, and cultures of these numerous “nationalities,” Kappeler of necessity centers his narrative on official policy and local responses to it. Up to the mid-sixteenth century the Muscovite monarchy dealt pragmatically with its non-Orthodox neighbors. Immediately after the conquest of Kazan’ and Astrakhan’ in the 1550s, its soldiers and officials ruthlessly suppressed local resistance, coopted local elites, ensured Muscovite control over trade networks, and began to convert Moslems and animists to Eastern Orthodoxy. Very soon, however, he argues, the Muscovite government returned to its earlier pragmatism, ending missionary activity and leaving local non-Russian
communities to their own devices as long as they remained quiet and paid their iasak, the form of taxation that Muscovy inherited from the Khanate of Kazan.\footnote{The same general attitude characterized Moscow’s relations with traditionally Christian areas such as left-bank Ukraine.}

Within this broad framework, Kappeler shows admirable sensitivity to ethnic and regional differences within the Volga valley and the Muscovite realm as a whole: local responses to governmental policy varied considerably, as did the interactions between the indigenous population and the increasing number of Russian colonists. Only under Peter I and his successors did the Imperial government strive to subject the diverse regions and peoples of the realm to a uniform system of administration and belief.\footnote{Andreas Kappeler, Russlands erste Nationalitäten: Das Zarenreich und die Völker der Mittleren Wolga vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert (Cologne, 1982); Russland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall (Munich, 1993).}  

Michael Khodarkovsky’s Where Two Worlds Meet is an excellent example of a second approach.\footnote{Michael Khodarkovsky, Where Two Worlds Meet: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600–1771 (Ithaca, 1992); and “Four Degrees of Separation: Constructing Non-Christian Identities in Muscovy,” in Culture and Identity, 248–66. Khodarkovsky’s book on Russians’ relations with the peoples of the steppe, now nearing completion, will be an invaluable addition to the literature.} The book chronicles the interaction of two peoples—Russians and Kalmyks with radically different ways of life, social structures, and religions. When the Kalmyks migrated into the steppes around the lower Volga, this nomadic Mongol-speaking, Buddhist group came into regular contact with the predominantly agrarian, officially Orthodox Christian Russian state. From beginning to end, complete mutual misunderstanding permeated their relationship. As Khodarskovskov notes, the Russian government interpreted any agreement with Kalmyk \textit{taishis} as the latters’ recognition of the tsar’s suzerainty. Any subsequent change in the relationship was understood to be the treason of a subject people. To the Kalmyks, however, the same agreements were alliances of equal partners subject to change as circumstances required. By the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Khodarkovsky argues, the overwhelming military and economic power of Russia had begun to force the Kalmyks into patterns of behavior that more closely fit Russian perceptions and needs. In the long run, these changes led to the catastrophic unraveling of Kalmyk society.

Thus, as Khodarkovsky’s work shows, examining the fault lines along which the Russian government and people encountered radically different neighbors and states opens new perspectives on interethnic relations even when the available sources predominantly reflect Russian opinions and values. After all, mutual misperceptions permeate many relationships between nations and communities.\footnote{The theme runs through much of the recent literature on Ukrainian-Muscovite relations in the seventeenth century and is central to Russia’s dealings with the Moslem peoples of Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia from Mongol times until today. For an excellent study of diplomatic relations rooted in radically different political cultures and mutual misperceptions see Andrzej Sulima Kamiński, Republic vs. Autocracy: Poland-Lithuania and Russia, 1686–1697 (Cambridge, MA, 1993).}

Yuri Slezkine’s tour de force, Arctic Mirrors, takes yet another approach to interethnic relations within the empire.\footnote{Yuri Slezkine, Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North (Ithaca, 1994).} This study of official and unofficial Russian interaction with the “small peoples of the North” surveys Russian governmental policy toward them from their first contacts until the present day and uses ethnographic materials to analyze the dramatic differences in culture and way of life that separated Russians from native peoples and the latter from one another. The book’s title, however, points to its most striking quality:
Slezkine treats relations with the northern peoples as a reflection of the evolving cultural values and agendas of Russia’s administrative and cultural elites.

Slezkine’s chapter on seventeenth-century Muscovy, “The Unbaptised,” stresses the centrality of the “fur rush” that brought Russians to Siberia in the first place. In administering this vast territory, the government in Moscow had one overriding concern, to guarantee the unimpeded collection of iasak (tribute) in furs. As in the Volga valley, it made no attempt to interfere with the traditional way of life of the indigenous peoples nor to convert them to Christianity and, at least in theory, prohibited its local agents from oppressing or demoralizing them, for example, by plying them with alcohol. Indeed, Slezkine argues, unlike European colonial powers elsewhere in the world in the seventeenth century, Russians in Siberia recognized that they were foreigners among peoples whose cultural practices were as legitimate as their own. Only under Peter I did the idea that the indigenous peoples were heathen who needed converting become part of the empire’s civilizing mission.

All three of these approaches, which, as the reader will have noted, complement one another in many important respects, can be the foundation of fruitful new work. At the same time, the nature and accessibility of sources limit their applicability to the Muscovite period. Each of our authors extended his monograph far beyond the end of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, recent studies on other themes suggest that, scattered through the enormous archival holdings from the seventeenth century, enterprising scholars will find many more illuminating instances of interethnic relations within the Muscovite state. Although such materials probably will not support broad works of synthesis, finding and interpreting them will continue to sharpen our understanding of Muscovy’s complex internal cultural dynamics.

To sum up, recent publications on Muscovy have introduced subtle, but important changes in our understanding of politics, administration, society and ways of thinking. To be sure, given the long and honorable tradition of historiography of early modern Russia, no contemporary scholar can reasonably hope to revolutionize our understanding of the fundamental nature of the autocracy or society. Nevertheless, thanks to the scholars whose work we have surveyed—and many others—we are more aware than before of the practical limits of the power of the autocratic government and its need to reach accommodation with its leading servitors in the capital and the provinces, local society on its frontiers, and ethnic and cultural minorities within its borders. New work also emphasizes that Muscovites had a well-developed sense both of the fundamental nature of a Christian polity and society which bound both them and the monarch to a common set of moral assumptions, and of their own individual and collective dignity. In spite of the notorious bloodshed of the buntashnii vek, Muscovites valued social cohesion and, although ready to fight for their rights with fire and sword, preferred to defend themselves and resolve their differences through mechanisms that preserved their families, clans, and communities by peaceful means. Finally, new studies reinforce the perception that, in spite of its apparently overwhelming bureaucratic weight, the central administration in Moscow continuously struggled to rule an enormous territory and an often recalcitrant population and, even in the case of open religious and political

51Future historians can also contribute to our understanding of Muscovy’s international relations: archives in Russia, Turkey, and elsewhere contain extensive files of neglected or underused sources on diplomatic relations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially between Moscow and Muslim states.
dissent, succeeded in exerting its authority only in hit-and-miss fashion. In short, Muscovy appears less and less monolithic to each new generation of scholars.

Thus, looking back after more than forty years in the field, I believe that the study of Muscovite history is in excellent condition—intellectually, if not institutionally and financially. Recent scholarship on Muscovite Russia meets the traditional criteria of good scholarship—command of the published and archival sources, sound reasoning, and good writing. Moreover, Muscovite specialists know the work of historians of other societies and scholars of other disciplines and often participate with them in collaborative projects. In addition to blurring traditional disciplinary lines as most historians now do as a matter of course, Muscovite specialists are breaking more and more with the national paradigm inherited from our distinguished Russian predecessors and giving long overdue attention to regional variations within Russian society, other cultures within the realm, and the relations of Muscovy with the rest of the East Slavic and Orthodox worlds. At the same time, most of my colleagues have resisted the temptation to disappear into a cloud of theory and jargon or to brush aside the special qualities of Rus'/Russia in a burst of comparativist enthusiasm. In short, the best recent work on Muscovite history is excellent in its own right and offers high hope for the future.