Christoff Koch (1637–1711): Sweden's Man in Moscow

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During the seventeenth century, diplomatic relations constituted for the most part elaborated news services, run by news experts. These news experts relied both on their international networks as well as their local expertise in collecting and distributing news. In the case of Sweden, about half of these experts had their backgrounds in wealthy merchant families.¹ These news services were complemented, when necessary, by official embassies, carried out by members of the higher nobility. A great deal of our knowledge about seventeenth-century politics and culture is owed to their reports, which have only begun to be investigated with the rigour they deserve. Contrary to the common perception of diplomatic news as a self-contained system of information, compiled for the good of international negotiations and internal governmental debates, the very same news formed an integral part of the public news flow, which accelerated quickly in the seventeenth century. Printed and manuscript newspapers, more exclusive newsletters, and similar genres shaped contemporaneity, a kind of hitherto impossible, simultaneous participation of social elites in a news flow that stretched over all of Europe.²

Although this news culture was partially available to the general public, its rhetorical style and high cost created a kind of exclusivity, which meant that

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- 1 Heiko Droste, *Im Dienst der Krone: Schwedische Diplomaten im 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), pp. 85–97. The research for this article was enabled through a grant by The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (Riksbankens jubileumsfond, project number RFP12-0055;1) and The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies. We are very grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities (project number RZ-51635-13) for research trips to Amsterdam, Bremen, Copenhagen, London, Tartu, Berlin and Tallinn in order to work in the archives. Any views, findings, or conclusions expressed in this article do not necessarily represent those of the funding organisations. We would also like to thank Dan Waugh and Claudia Jensen (both from Seattle), who have read a previous version of this article and made many valuable suggestions.
 - 2 Brendan Dooley (ed.), *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

only a small elite of news consumers had full access.³ Still, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, news was turned into a commodity, which was traded by a growing number of news experts.

We find their reports in many archives and libraries. The problem is that the identity of the news experts and their reasons for indulging in the market are quite often unclear. We simply do not know, for instance, who posted news in Riga, reporting about events in Moscow, news which eventually turned up in European newspapers.

In order to explore this news flow and the elite of news experts, we not only need to know what kinds of networks these news experts maintained; equally important is the search for the resources involved in this news business. Substantial costs were involved: for occasional bribes in exchange for important news, for the scribe who copied the newsletters, and for the postal fees. Who would reimburse a news expert for his service, and in what ways?

The German press historian Martin Welke proved that some portions of the newsletters from Moscow sent to Queen Christina of Sweden by Johan de Rodes during the first half of the 1650s could also be traced in printed newspapers of the time, sometimes verbatim.⁴ Karl-Heinz Kranhold described the news correspondence in Danzig (Gdansk) in the middle of the seventeenth century and showed which handwritten and printed news was distributed from Danzig to Sweden and other places.⁵ However, Welke cannot prove that de Rodes was *directly* involved in the dissemination of his newsletters; Kranhold struggles to pinpoint the news experts and their methods of gathering news.

Previous studies of the international news flow in the seventeenth century have not been able to answer these questions, not least due to a strong, albeit unconvincing, focus on printed newspapers, in spite of the fact that the majority of news was delivered in manuscript up to the eighteenth century.⁶ Another problem is that many scholars follow (today's) national boundaries, while ignoring the international connections that were necessary in order to organise a news trade, which, as we know, came into existence during the sixteenth century, if not earlier.⁷

3 Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

4 Martin Welke, 'Rußland in der deutschen Publizistik des 17. Jahrhunderts (1613–1689)', *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 23 (1976), pp. 105–276 (here pp. 151–153, 255–264).

5 Karl-Heinz Kranhold, *Frühgeschichte der Danziger Presse* (Münster: C.J. Fahle, 1967).

6 This is strongly emphasised by Andrew Pettegree in *The Invention of News* and by other scholars. See also the forthcoming study by Heiko Droste, *Commercium litterarium: The News Market in the Baltic Sea Region in the Seventeenth Century*.

7 Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali: alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII)* (Rome: Laterza, 2002).

The following example of Christoff Koch, son of a Reval (Tallinn) merchant, who indulged in the news trade from Moscow for decades, demonstrates all these aspects. He is a major source for our knowledge of Russian politics from the 1660s up to the 1680s.⁸ Koch's career is rather typical, although he was exceptional in his ability to penetrate the inner workings of the Kremlin, which were generally marked by suspicion against foreigners and a strong focus on secrecy. At the same time, Koch and other correspondents were obviously used by the Muscovite authorities in order to spread news in their own interest.⁹

Koch's life and correspondence will be discussed in detail, focusing on core aspects of his work as news expert. Why did Koch take the pains and risks of being a Swedish correspondent in Moscow? Who were the recipients of his news? Which subjects did he write about, and which sources for his correspondence can we detect?

The International News Trade in the Seventeenth Century

When dealing with early modern diplomacy and news transfer, several notions of intelligence services and spies come to mind. For the most part these notions are not helpful for our understanding. Sending news about a changing world was the duty of all crown servants stationed abroad. It was also considered as a social norm among relatives, friends, scholars, and business partners. News was mostly exchanged mutually. This news service was called 'correspondence'; one individual piece of this correspondence will be called a 'newsletter', or simply 'report'.¹⁰

This news could be adapted to different purposes and recipients. The crown officials' newsletters were, thus, not only sent to the king or certain institutions, but they also worked as a kind of gift that shaped social relations between crown servants. In fact, the very same news could be used in order to inform a growing number of news experts, who were involved in a partially

8 Heinz Ellersieck, *Russia under Aleksei Mikhailovich and Feodor Alekseevich, 1645–1682: The Scandinavian Sources* (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1955), p. 19: "There is no doubt that Koch ... through his connections with Eberschildt and as a merchant travelling in Russia and residing in Moscow, was one of the best informed foreigners in the tsar's empire".

9 See, for instance, Ingrid Maier, 'How was Western Europe informed about Muscovy? The Razin Rebellion in Focus', in Simon Franklin and Katherine Bowers (eds.), *Information and Empire: Mechanisms of Communication in Russia, 1600–1850* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), pp. 113–151.

10 Unfortunately, there are no common terms for the different kinds of news media, in either seventeenth-century or modern languages.

public news business. The number of newsletters disseminated by one expert could be substantial; moreover, there was a dramatic increase in the seventeenth century, in particular when postal services had been introduced in all parts of Europe. In the case of Russia, this happened in the 1660s, when the international postal traffic reached Moscow.

A major part of this correspondence was sent anonymously, for several reasons. One reason was certainly that a correspondent wanted to protect himself, that is, not reveal his identity. However, it was at least equally common that the *receiver* of a certain correspondence wanted to protect his sources. Since newsletters were a gift within social relations as well as a commodity on the news market, their exclusivity was an important asset. As a result, most newsletters preserved in the archives are anonymous.

Regarding the content of these newsletters, we find more or less informed reports about events taking place first and foremost in the city where the news expert is living, but also in places from which he could obtain news at his location. In the seventeenth century there were several news hubs, usually big merchant cities, where news could be obtained easily. These cities were important for ambassadors, residents, news experts, and newspaper publishers. For the Baltic Sea region the most important news hubs were Riga, Danzig and Hamburg.¹¹

In these nodes, but also at Europe's more important courts, news experts were gathering news by contacting people who had access to them. Some of these people readily shared this news, whereas others had to be paid. It is important to have in mind that this way of obtaining news was expected, albeit not tolerated in every single case and at all times. A necessary background to this news exchange within and outside crown services was that crown servants, news agents, and in particular crown secretaries were almost always poorly paid. To trade in news was a common way to improve one's income or to build a career. As a consequence, the Russian authorities knew that some of the foreign residents (for instance, merchants and news agents) were reporting about the changes they perceived in Moscow as well as interesting events that took place in the environs of the capital.

Efforts to hinder their correspondence mostly relied on rules that ordered secluded areas of living for foreigners, restrictions in their freedom to travel, and control over the interpreters necessary for almost every kind of transaction. In order to trade news in Moscow it was therefore a great advantage if the news expert knew Russian. Sometimes younger students were sent to Moscow

11 See the forthcoming book by Heiko Droste, *Commercium litterarium*.

for a longer period in order to learn Russian.¹² Koch might have been such a student.

From 1665 there was a government-controlled international postal system that offered better opportunities to correspond with Russia; at the same time it also became easier to control the correspondence that flowed through this system. Still, despite efforts of control, Koch's reports show that he was able to report on Russian matters regularly. And although the European newspapers did not contain detailed information on all aspects of Russian politics, not least due to Russia's position as a minor power in the periphery of Christian Europe, West-European newspapers nevertheless contained thousands of news items from Moscow.¹³ The Swedish crown had even more exclusive intelligence, for example an important book about Muscovy, written by Grigorii Kotoshikhin, a former clerk at the Muscovite Ambassadorial Chancery (*Posol'skii prikaz*) who had come to Sweden as a fugitive in February 1666.¹⁴

Christoff Koch's Life and Career

Christoff Koch was born in 1637 into a wealthy merchant family living in Reval (Tallinn).¹⁵ His father, Christoff Koch senior, was the town's mayor.¹⁶ At a young age, Koch started to travel abroad, which was the common way of educating future merchants. In 1655 he came to Moscow, and stayed until 1690,

- 12 The Brandenburgian scholar Hermann Dietrich Hesse went to Moscow in 1673 in order to learn Russian. See Ferdinand Hirsch (ed.), *Urkunden und Actenstücke zur Geschichte des Kurfürsten Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg*, Vol. 19: *Politische Verhandlungen* (Berlin: Reimer, 1906), pp. 291–292. In the 1680s the Swedish scholar Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld went to Moscow for the same reason; see Ulla Birgegård, *Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld and the Lexicon Slavonicum* (Uppsala: Acta Bibliothecae R. Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1985), p. 3.
- 13 For printed newspapers from Hamburg see Welke, 'Rußland in der deutschen Publizistik'.
- 14 The Russian manuscript (which is now at Uppsala University Library) was finished in 1667 and in 1669 the first Swedish translation was produced; see Anne Pennington, *Grigorij Kotošixin. O Rossii v carstvovanie Alekseja Mixajloviča. Text and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 9.
- 15 In the Swedish literature his name is often spelled 'Christopher Kock' or 'Kocken'. ('Kock' is Swedish for 'cook', 'Koch' is German.) Koch himself always wrote 'Christoff Koch'; from 1683 he used his noble title 'von Kochen'. Cf. *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, vol. 21 (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1975–1977), pp. 439–445 (439), where Koch is mentioned in Sven Grauer's entry on his son, Johan Henrik von Kochen.
- 16 Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor: Med tillägg och rättelser* (9 vols., Stockholm: Norstedt, 1925–1936), vol. 4, p. 229.

with the exception of a few shorter periods. For reasons discussed below, he started sending newsletters to the Swedish governor-general in Narva, Simon Grundel-Helmfelt. This service apparently started in 1666, when Koch was still in his twenties.¹⁷ Koch wrote newsletters for about 25 years.

Koch's correspondence was particularly valuable due to his good connections within the foreign merchants' community, but also – at least during certain periods – with the Muscovite administration. His correspondence shows him to be a literate person, who knew how to express himself in writing. The following short extract from one of his reports (datelined Moscow, 14 March 1671) shows his detailed knowledge about Muscovite politics as well as his access to a variety of sources:

Concerning the rebel Razin [Raisin] it is quite silent now. According to a friend, who arrived two days ago from Romodanovskii's army, from Circassia, via Kursk, they have trustworthy news that Razin has gone to see the Tartar Chan with 5000 men. It is said that he is seeking the chan's help against the tsar. He is afraid that they [i.e., Razin and his men] will start some new actions, as soon as the fresh grass in spring will appear.¹⁸

Koch is an important and trustworthy source on many aspects of Muscovite life. In the example quoted above, he mentions his own source, something he often does in order to ascertain the trustworthiness of his news. He was living, working and networking in Moscow, eventually as an officially accredited Swedish commissar. In 1690, after many years of service for the crown and an ennoblement in 1683, he became burgrave (German *Burggraf*, Swedish *borggreve*) in Narva – in other words, an important figure in the administration of the Swedish Baltic provinces. The Great Northern War (1700–1721) forced him into exile in Sweden proper. He died in 1711 in Stockholm.

In order to understand Koch's work in Moscow, it is important to look more deeply into his kinship relations, which were useful in many respects. Koch had an older sister, Medea, born in 1632. In 1653, she married Johan de Rodes,¹⁹

17 Koch tried for decades to make the Swedish crown repay him for his work. These efforts started in 1678, when Koch was in Stockholm for a shorter period. At that point the crown acknowledged his work for Grundel-Helmfelt since 1666. See Swedish National Archives, Stockholm (RA), Kammararkivet (KA, Chamber), Likvidationer, series 24, vol. 17; series 94, vol. 143; series 95–96, vol. 26.

18 Koch in a report sent to Simon Grundel-Helmfelt. RA, Livonica II, vol. 180. All translations are our own.

19 B. Kurts, 'Doneseniia Rodesa i arkhangel'sko-baltiiskii vopros v polovine XVII veka', *Zhur-nal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia*, n.s. 38 (1912), pp. 72–105 (77). Kurts' article contains the most detailed description of de Rodes' life known to us.

who at that time was the Swedish commissioner in Moscow.²⁰ De Rodes' family originated from the Spanish Netherlands, but he moved to Reval, before he was appointed as commercial representative in Moscow.²¹ When de Rodes once again went back to Moscow, in 1655, he took Christoff Koch, his new brother-in-law, with him. De Rodes died on 31 December that same year in Moscow,²² where his widow Medea in February 1656 gave birth to his posthumous son, Johan Gustaf de Rodes.

After de Rodes' death, Christoff Koch – only 18 years of age – stayed in Moscow. When a large Swedish embassy (altogether around 140 persons) was retained in Moscow from May 1656 to April 1658, in a kind of 'house arrest',²³ Christoff Koch's sister – and probably Koch himself, too – were also kept under house arrest, but not together with the embassy. Medea stayed in Moscow for a few more years, but seems to have left Russia in the early 1660s.²⁴ She remarried in 1687, this time the burgrave in Narva, Johan von Tunder, in 1678 ennobled as Tunderfelt.²⁵ Tunder was also born into a merchant family in Reval.²⁶ Another sister of Christoff Koch, Bela, married Eberhart von Straelborn, born in 1625 into yet another Reval merchant family.²⁷ Straelborn worked as a customs officer in Reval (1670) and went to Moscow at least once.

Christoff Koch, in his turn, was married to Anna Hassenia, born in 1661 – incidentally, also into a merchant family from Reval. In 1690, von Kochen took over the position as burgrave in Narva (although he had been appointed already on 16 October 1686), as Johan von Tunderfelt's successor.²⁸ This means,

20 The function of 'kommissar' was most often restricted to missions of a more commercial kind. During the eighteenth century this work was executed by consuls. Cf. Leos Müller, *Consuls, Corsairs, and Commerce. The Swedish Consular Service and Long-distance Shipping, 1720–1815* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004).

21 B. Kurts, 'Doneseniia Rodesa', p. 77.

22 Ibid.

23 Stefan Troebst, *Handelskontrolle, 'Derivation', Eindämmung. Schwedische Moskaupolitik 1617–1661* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), pp. 433–435.

24 Letters by Christoff Koch senior and his daughter Medea Koch to Bengt Horn, governor-general of Estonia in Reval, from 1659 and 1661 are in RA, Bengt Horn's collection, E 4310.

25 Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, vol. 8, p. 387. Koch was promoted to Sweden's commissioner in Moscow on the very day of Tunder's ennoblement (RA, Riksregistraturet (RR), 24 June 1678).

26 Already in 1671, Johan Tunder acted as an intermediary for Christoff Koch in Moscow, transferring money for him (RA, KA, Likvidationer, series 94, vol. 143).

27 Bernhard Schlegel and Carl-Arvid Klingspor, *Den med sköldebref förlänade men ej å Riddarhuset introducerade svenska adelns ättar-taflor* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1875), pp. 285–286.

28 Von Tunderfelt died in 1688; RA, RR; cf. also Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, vol. 4, p. 229.

in a way, that Koch took over the job as a Moscow correspondent from his first brother-in-law, Johan de Rodes, while he later 'inherited' the office in Narva from his second brother-in-law, Johan von Tunderfelt.

All in all, Christoff Koch's family situation shows a strong relationship between several Reval-based merchant families, which ruled for decades over parts of the Swedish foreign relations with Russia. His own son Johan Henrik von Kochen completed the family's social climb, starting his career at the Stockholm court and marrying into another family of crown servants.²⁹

Christoff Koch's Time in Moscow

We know very little about Christoff Koch's activities between de Rodes' death in December 1655 and 1666, when Koch – still living in Moscow – offered his services to the governor-general in Swedish Ingria, Simon Grundel-Helmfelt.³⁰ In 1663 Adolf Ebers, at that time Swedish resident in Moscow, mentions Koch as a merchant, who on at least one occasion delivered Ebers' letters to Grundel-Helmfelt.³¹ In 1664 Koch seems to have worked as some kind of clerk for Ebers.³² At that time Koch was almost 30 years old, still unmarried, and probably fluent in Russian. Unfortunately, we have not found any more detailed information about Koch's activities as a merchant; we do not even know what kinds of merchandise he traded in, or whether he had a merchant company of his own. He eventually took over the administration of the Swedish merchants' court in Moscow, probably after Ebers had left the city.³³ At this point he must have been a wealthy, respected and independent merchant.

In 1666, the governor-general Grundel-Helmfelt in Narva probably wanted to have a personal correspondent among the permanent residents of Moscow, one who knew Russian. He was not satisfied with the correspondence he had been receiving from Moscow during the previous year. According to a 'relation'

29 See the entry on Johan Henrik von Kochen in *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, vol. 21, pp. 439–445.

30 *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, vol. 21, p. 439.

31 Ebers to Grundel-Helmfelt, Moscow, 26 April 1663 (Tartu, National Archives of Estonia, 278.1. XIX, vol. 64a).

32 *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, vol. 4, p. 229.

33 It is not quite clear when Koch officially took over the merchants' court, but both in 1670 and in 1685 he organised and financed the re-building of this court, which had been destroyed by fire twice (RA, KA, Likvidationer, series 95–96, vol. 26, and also Likvidationer, series 24, vol. 17).

Koch sent to the Swedish king in 1683, he was contacted by Johan Tunder in 1666; Tunder asked him, on behalf of Grundel-Helmfelt, to send news to the latter regularly.³⁴ When Koch started sending newsletters to Grundel-Helmfelt he took some risks with respect to his safety and to his finances. His correspondence depended on his merchant business, both financially and because it provided some kind of cover for his work as a correspondent.

But why did Koch start writing about Russian politics, well aware that the authorities disapproved of these activities, and that the postal fees would soon grow to substantial amounts? Although Koch in 1683 claimed that he was contacted by Grundel-Helmfelt, it is likely that Koch himself had contacted Tunder and/or Grundel-Helmfelt prior to the 'request' by the latter. Most Swedish correspondents in diplomatic services contacted the crown in Stockholm, or certain crown representatives at their own location, in order to offer their services. Grundel-Helmfelt offered money in exchange for Koch's correspondence. During the following years he called Koch regularly 'my correspondent', or 'the usual correspondent'.³⁵ Also the next governor-general in Narva, Johan Jacob Taube, referred to Koch as 'my correspondent in Moscow'.³⁶

In 1671, the crown recalled Adolf Ebersköld,³⁷ who had been Swedish resident in Moscow for some time, and asked Grundel-Helmfelt if he could recommend someone who could report secretly about events in Russia. Grundel-Helmfelt suggested that 'his correspondent' in Moscow, Christoff Koch, should be commissioned to write newsletters, if possible every week. This correspondence, he wrote, should be kept as secret as possible. The crown accepted Koch as a correspondent and granted Grundel-Helmfelt 1000 thaler (silver mint) per year for this correspondence, plus extra money for postal expenses. Moreover, Grundel-Helmfelt suggested that Koch should receive a proper crown assignment; however, this was not granted by the crown.³⁸ Koch thus remained in Grundel-Helmfelt's private services. According to a later settlement of Koch's claims from this employment as Grundel-Helmfelt's correspondent, Koch had received hardly any money from the governor-general in Narva up to 1671, and not much more during the following years.³⁹

34 RA, Biographica K 12. Koch wrote to Charles XI from Novgorod on 26 February 1683.

35 For instance, in a letter to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, Narva, 17 August 1666; to Otto Stenbock, Narva, 20 November 1668. Both letters in RA, Ericssbergsarkivet, Autografsamlingen, vol. 84.

36 Taube to the king, Narva, 17 January 1677 (RA, Livonica II, vol. 182).

37 Adolf Ebers had been ennobled in 1666 as Ebersköld.

38 Grundel-Helmfelt to the king, Narva, 16 January 1671 (RA, Biographica, K 12).

39 RA, KA, Likvidationer, series 94, vol. 143.

If we consider the final result (the ennoblement and a career as burgrave in Narva), Koch's reasons for taking on the job seem obvious. However, this goal took more than two decades to achieve, without much of a salary during the first decade. Consequently, the payment is not the most important factor, not least since the crown had the well-earned reputation of paying poorly. Koch might also have hoped to strengthen his position within the Swedish merchant community in Moscow. The merchants received Swedish protection, since the Russian trade was of great interest for the crown. In this matter we find striking similarities between Koch and similar news experts in Swedish services, such as his first brother-in-law Johan de Rodes in Moscow, Simon Dörffler in Poland, and Vincent Möller in Hamburg. All these men were working in merchant cities, and they all belonged to merchant families. Some of them had a formal university education, although this was not a precondition – Koch, for example, did not have any university education. These news experts had economic interests, but they are hard to define, since neither the correspondent nor the crown would often discuss them. Simon Dörffler worked as the crown's correspondent for decades, apparently without ever receiving all of his appointed payment for this service. He was born into a merchant family in Breslau (Wrocław).⁴⁰ Only a short notice in a letter about the impoverished Dörffler, written by another Swedish resident, Anders Lilliehöök, reveals that the basis of Dörffler's economy was the privilege to trade in Silesian linen with the Swedish crown, without being obliged to pay any customs.⁴¹ The trade route for linen probably explains both Dörffler's places of residence and his interest in working as a Swedish correspondent, eventually as a resident in Warsaw. Adolf Ebers also worked first and foremost as a merchant; in January 1667 he suggested in a letter to the king that the money he requested from the crown as a salary could be remunerated in the form of a custom exemption for all trade ships that reached Stockholm under his name.⁴²

Most of these Swedish news agents and residents with a merchant background remained at their place of residence throughout their lives, even if they had a Swedish noble title, other social advancements, estates, and kinship relations to Swedish elites. This unwillingness to move is probably related to their economic interests at their place of residence. Koch left Moscow after about

40 Droste, *Im Dienst der Krone*, pp. 387–388.

41 Anders Lilliehöök to Charles XI, dated Cracow, 1 May 1676 (RA, Polonica, vol. 70).

42 Adolf Ebers to the king, dated Narva, 21 January 1667 (RA, Diplomata Muscovitica, vol. 83). Hans Deijne, Swedish commercial factor in Novgorod, asked Lars Fleming to use him as a messenger, "as I have still some debts in Moscow, which I would like to collect"; see Deijne's letter to Fleming from Novgorod, 10 April 1672 (RA, Livonica II, vol. 626).

thirty years, moving to Narva, an important town in the context of Swedish-Russian commercial relations. Koch's reasons for staying in Moscow for such a long time, indulging in a news business for which he for the most part was not properly paid, are therefore most likely connected to his business activities. However, we have no information about possible economic interests between Koch and the Swedish crown.

The Recipients of Koch's Reports

In the beginning Koch was sending all his newsletters to the governor-general in Narva, Simon Grundel-Helmfelt. We assume that the governor had his secretary make copies of these reports; they were then distributed to his own correspondence partners, among them representatives of the ruling high nobility in crown services. Today we have access to Grundel-Helmfelt's letters in several collections at the Estonian and Swedish National Archives in Tartu and Stockholm. They often contain copies of Koch's letters, or at least mention them.⁴³

Grundel-Helmfelt had good reasons to send Koch's reports to his colleagues. News was hard currency in a political system that longed for ever more news. Grundel-Helmfelt could expect that his correspondence partners would reimburse his correspondence with other news. Without this exchange of news from Moscow on the one hand, and from other Swedish provinces on the other hand, Grundel-Helmfelt would hardly have been able to learn about the world outside his province, since the Swedish crown did not regularly send news to their ministers working abroad. On the contrary, complaints from officials posted abroad about not receiving news are common.⁴⁴

Things changed in 1678, when Koch was promoted to an official position in the Swedish foreign administration. Then, finally, he received official recognition as a commercial representative, or commissioner (Swedish *kommersiefaktor*) in Moscow. The protection that a Swedish office could provide improved his possibilities. Koch continued writing to Narva, or, more correctly, *via* Narva

43 We have letters by Grundel-Helmfelt to Carl Gustaf Wrangel, governor-general in Pomerania (RA, Skoklostersamlingen, II, E 8189); to Per Brahe (*ibid.*, E 8167); to Bengt Horn, governor-general in Livonia (Tartu, National Archives of Estonia, 278. 1. XIX, vol. 64a/b), to Bengt Oxenstierna, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, Gustaf Otto Stenbock (in RA, Ericssbergsarkivet, Autografsamlingen, vol. 84), to the king (Livonica II, vol. 175ff.). In several volumes – e.g., in the letters in Ericssbergsarkivet – Grundel-Helmfelt explicitly mentions attachments from Moscow, which, however, are not present in the volume. We also find newsletters by Koch in RA, Diplomata Muscovitica, vols. 114–115.

44 Droste, *Im Dienst der Krone*, pp. 175–178.

(the main postal route between Moscow and Stockholm went via Narva), because now his correspondence was addressed directly to the court in Stockholm, that is, either to the king or to members of the court elite. As an official crown representative he no longer had any reason to write anonymously, and all his letters to the king and the king's secretary Bergenhielm are signed with his full name. He rarely used ciphers, as the use of ciphers was not very common among Swedish correspondents; obviously he was not really worried about the safety of his reports.

We can only assume that his correspondence also reached recipients beyond the crown, for instance, other news agents. Unfortunately, we know nothing about this for sure, since Koch, like almost all other news experts, did not leave a personal archive behind. All in all, Koch engaged in a news correspondence with members of the Swedish high nobility, who used his letters in order to trade news with their peers in crown offices.

The Topics of Koch's Correspondence

After having studied far more than a hundred newsletters written by Koch from different periods, it becomes clear that he wrote about anything and everything that happened at the Russian court (much of which he could report since he had actually seen it as an eyewitness) – ambassadors who were coming or leaving, the tsar's family going on a trip to Kolomenskoe, feasts, 'ballets', and traditional Russian celebrations (for instance, Epiphany). He also wrote about factions at the Muscovite court (especially during the time of Sofia's reign, when the official tsars, Ivan and Peter, were still children), prices of certain merchandise, etc. Moreover, he described events that he had *not* seen, but about which he could get information via his good connections. From his correspondence we learn about Russian troops heading for a certain destination, the names of the military commanders for a specific operation, the content of diplomatic negotiations not only between Muscovy and Sweden, but also between the tsar and, for instance, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the Polish or the Danish king. Many of Koch's reports would have been interesting enough to be disseminated in any of the German-language newspapers; unfortunately, we have not yet found any newspaper articles that contain exactly the same wordings as Koch's newsletters.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the style of his

45 We have also studied Dutch newspapers (both in Dutch and in French). News about Muscovy is generally much shorter than in the German papers and may have been taken from the latter.

news is very similar to the style of seventeenth-century newspapers, and the *content* is often the same.

A very likely example of a Koch report that turned public is about a vaudeville-like performance, given in the Kremlin for the tsar, his family and two or three court officials in February 1672 – an important event, since this was the very first Western-style performance that had ever taken place in Moscow.⁴⁶ The Hamburg newspaper *Nordischer Mercurius* printed a detailed review: the major part of the news item 'Moscow, 23 February', which covered almost two octavo pages, was dedicated to the 'ballet':

12 Germans presented a ballet for His Tsarish Majesty ... It consisted of 4 Romans, 4 wild men, 2 drunk peasants, and 2 cutpurses, to whom was added an amusing Pickleherring ... The tsaritsa or empress was sitting with her state ladies behind a scarlet curtain, which afforded a glimpse of their beauty and allowed them to see the ballet clearly. They were shining like brilliant stars through small clouds, and since this ballet was the first that has ever been seen in Moscow, it provoked a great deal of interest. The tsar together with his 4 princes and most important ministers as well as the tsaritsa with her ladies were so pleased with it that they often almost shook with laughter This is being written to show that something that is very common for our German people is seen as something new in these parts.⁴⁷

Shorter articles about this 'ballet' were printed in *Oprechte Haerlemse Saterdagse Courant* (No. 15, 1672) and in *La Gazette d'Amsterdam Du Mardi 12 Avril* (No. 15, 1672), so altogether a few thousand newspaper readers in several countries and in three different languages were informed about this cultural event in far-away Moscow.⁴⁸ According to a newsletter from Moscow, an enclosure

46 For more details about this performance, and a similar one from May 1672, see Claudia Jensen and Ingrid Maier, 'Orpheus and Pickleherring in the Kremlin: The "Ballet" for the Tsar of February 1672', *Scando-Slavica*, 59:2 (2013), pp. 145–184; and 'Pickleherring Returns to the Kremlin: More New Sources on the Pre-History of the Russian Court Theatre', *Scando-Slavica*, 61:1 (2015), pp. 7–56. Both articles are available via <http://uu.diva-portal.org/> (open-access).

47 *Nordischer Mercurius*, Martius 1672, p. 197f. Quoted from Jensen and Maier, 'Orpheus and Pickleherring', p. 158.

48 According to Welke, 'Rußland in der deutschen Publizistik', pp. 156–160, the average print runs of German seventeenth-century newspapers were around 350–400, whereas the 'strongest' newspapers reached up to 1000–1500 copies. The Haarlem newspaper (near Amsterdam) was typeset twice and printed on two presses, at least from 1660; the

to a letter from Narva signed by governor-general Grundel-Helmfelt, the ‘ballet’ was “arranged by 12 persons, mostly foreign merchants”. It is thus very likely that the merchant Koch was among the performers; this was more or less the only way to get access to this presentation in the Kremlin. And although we cannot prove that one (or both) of the very detailed reports, which today are kept in Stockholm,⁴⁹ were written by Koch, we assume this to be very likely, all the more since these reports also contain other news, such as the death of the Patriarch – exactly the kind of news we always find in Koch’s correspondence.

The major topic during the previous two years, 1670–1671, was the Cossack uprising under Stepan Razin, which was eventually dissolved with Razin’s public execution in Moscow. Together with many other foreigners, Koch witnessed the execution. He also sent a lengthy description to Narva, together with a colour drawing that shows two separate scenes (from different days):⁵⁰ to the right the entry into Moscow of the main rebel and his brother (2 June), and to the left the scene shows six body parts set up on poles, after the execution (which took place on 6 June; see Fig. 5.1). In this specific case the Muscovite court was more than pleased with all reports the foreigners sent to their home countries, and it is very likely that the Ambassadorial Chancery produced *several* copies of the ‘execution drawing’, although only one copy – the one in Stockholm – seems to have survived. There is, however, indirect evidence that one copy ended up in London,⁵¹ and one in Hamburg.⁵²

The most likely route from Moscow to Sweden is through the hands of Christoff Koch, who obviously in this case was used as a tool to spread the latest news about the rebellion, viz. the gruesome end of its leader. The head

print runs were probably about 800–1000. (Our thanks to Arthur der Weduwen for his estimate.)

49 RA, Bengt Horn collection, E 4304; RA, Livonica II, vol. 180.

50 We suppose that the drawing was produced before the execution took place; see Maier, ‘How was Western Europe informed about Muscovy?’

51 The similarity between the colour drawing preserved in Stockholm and an imprint from London about Razin’s execution is so striking that we are sure that the imprint was made on the basis of another copy of the drawing. See the Moscow drawing and the illustration in the imprint next to each other in Maier, ‘How was Western Europe informed about Muscovy?’

52 Cf. this article in the Hamburg-based newspaper *Nordischer Mercurius*, August 1671, p. 474 (Royal Library Copenhagen): “Lower Elbe, 1 August. How the rebel Razin was executed, this has been drawn in Moscow by hand, and the description is in Greek letters. Arms and legs, as well as the head and the trunk, are on poles, whereas the intestines have been thrown to the dogs”. Apparently, this journalist has seen a copy of the Moscow drawing. He talks about *Greek* letters (instead of Cyrillic), and he mentions that the trunk was also set up on a pole, although all eyewitnesses report that the trunk was left on the ground.

FIGURE 5.1 *The execution of Stepan Razin.*

of the Ambassadorial Chancery, Artamon Sergeevich Matveev, was, of course, well aware that Koch was a worthy ‘multiplier’, somebody who had the necessary connections to spread news far and wide. The drawing must have been handed over to Koch (and to a number of other foreigners) by Matveev, as a kind of hard-currency proof that the rebellion was now indeed over, that all foreign merchants could come to Russia again with their merchandise – the rebellion had previously caused severe problems for the Russian trade. In any event, it was sent to Stockholm by S. Grundel-Helmfelt from Nyen on 30 June 1671, together with two of Koch’s ‘relations’ about Razin.⁵³ (The two reports and the drawing are sewn together.)

The Sources of Koch’s Correspondence

Several reports by Koch can only be explained through his good contacts in the Kremlin, in particular with the head of the Ambassadorial Chancery, Matveev, with whom Koch had a close relationship, at least in the early 1670s. Some of

53 RA, Livonica II, vol. 180.

their meetings took place at the chancery, but it seems that Koch was also invited to Matveev's home. He describes this and other visits in detail, in order to demonstrate his access to and appreciation by Matveev:

Last Friday, in the afternoon, I was at Ertemon Sergiewitz' [i.e., Matveev's] place, and I gave him my best wishes on the occasion of their New Year.⁵⁴ He asked me, among other things, whether I did not have any news from our people [i.e., from Sweden] or any message from Colonel Von Staden. I answered that I had not received any letters from Riga; however, a German in Novgorod had written to me that it had already been communicated across the border that Herr Eberskiöldt is coming as an envoy. He [Matveev] answered: "I am glad that he is coming, especially because I have met him before". I do not doubt that if somebody comes from Sweden right now, he will be successful in his tasks.⁵⁵

During his time in office, Matveev opened the Muscovite court to European influences. One method was to engage in private relations with foreigners and to exchange news with them. Koch reports several times that he – without having any official position – was invited to the chancery and to Matveev's home. Later on, when the relationship between Muscovy and Sweden deteriorated due to the Swedish war with Brandenburg, the same courtesy was given to a student, Hermann Dietrich Hesse, from Brandenburg, who also lacked an official mission.⁵⁶ It seems that Matveev used this kind of contact in order to spread news on Muscovite politics according to *his* interests – a rather typical form of information politics during that time. Since even the Muscovite government could not control the news flow from Moscow, despite its efforts, Matveev engaged in disseminating his version through those he knew, or suspected, were in correspondence with contacts in other countries.

At other times, the Kremlin complained about how Russia was described abroad. One example is the harsh critique addressed to Sweden during the time of Stepan Razin's insurrection in the years 1670–1671. The tsar complained about Sweden's 'anti-Muscovite reports' that were spread in printed newspapers all over Europe, since they usually exaggerated Razin's military successes

54 In Russia the year started 1 September until the reign of Peter I.

55 Moscow, 5 September 1671 (RA, Livonica II, vol. 180); see also the report from Moscow, 23 April 1672 (ibid.).

56 Moscow, 15/25 December 1675; Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (GStA PK, Berlin-Dahlem, I HA, Rep. II, Nr. 6572).

against the tsar's troops.⁵⁷ The Muscovite government clearly understood that the Swedish agents and their correspondence were very important for the image of Russian politics in other parts of Europe. The anti-Muscovite news items (especially during the Razin uprising) were often published under the headline Riga, and Riga was a 'Swedish' city at the time. However, we cannot be sure that the 'Riga reports' always (or even often) were based on the Swedish news agents' reports. Beyond that, there was no periodically printed German newspaper in the Swedish Baltic provinces at that time.

If certain news seemed too sensitive for the postal system or if haste was needed, Koch might send his reports with a special messenger, although this was expensive, and the messenger still had to cross the border, where he could be searched. In any event, the vast majority of his letters were sent via the official Muscovite post. On several occasions, Koch applied other measures of secrecy; for instance, he addressed his letters to trusted private addressees.⁵⁸ An example is his letter of 23 September 1687 to Jacob Johan Hastfer, governor-general of Swedish Livonia in Riga, in which he wrote, among other things, that he will send his letters to the governor via a private person in Riga; this person will then deliver them to Hastfer.⁵⁹ He explains that the reason for this procedure is due to the fact that "the Russians control the correspondence and letters, and a Russian citizen has been ordered to take over the administration of the post".⁶⁰

In 1676, when Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich suddenly died, life as a correspondent and merchant in Moscow became increasingly dangerous. Koch wrote a desperate letter to governor-general Taube, claiming that he was in danger, due to rumours that he was spying for Sweden.⁶¹ Taube tried to calm him down, telling him that he already enjoyed Swedish protection in Moscow, due to his position in the merchant community as head of the merchants' court. Still, Taube also wrote to the king, asking if it would be possible to get more protection for

57 Nicolaus von Staden to Adolf Eberskiöld, Novgorod, 24 September [1672] (RA, *Diplomatica Muscovitica*, vol. 83).

58 In a newsletter written by Koch in Moscow on 16 December, 1676 and sent as an attachment by governor-general Taube from Narva to King Charles XI on 17 January 1677, Koch explains that he is sending his letters to a Friese in order to protect the real recipient, Taube (RA, *Livonica II*, vol. 182).

59 This letter was published in Russian translation; see K.A. Viskovatov, 'Moskva v 1687–1688 gg.', *Russkaia starina. Ezhemesiachnoe istoricheskoe izdanie*, 23 (1878), pp. 121–129 (here p. 122). Most of Koch's letters to Hastfer are kept in Riga, National Archives of Latvia, fond 7349, 2, 88 and 91.

60 Viskovatov, 'Moskva', p. 122.

61 Koch in a letter to Taube, dated Moscow, 16 December 1676 (RA, *Livonica II*, vol. 182).

Koch.⁶² It is not quite clear whether this was a consequence of Taube's letter, but Koch was eventually turned into an official Swedish commissioner in June 1678. A commissioner always had the official duty to write newsletters to his king. In addition to the appointment, King Charles XI wrote to the tsar on behalf of Koch's financial claims in and outside of Moscow, asking the tsar to allow Koch to travel in person in order to collect these debts.⁶³ In another letter from the same day, however, Charles XI wrote to Koch that the letter to the tsar was just meant as an excuse so that he could become more mobile in Moscow and in the capital's surroundings, in order to improve his correspondence.⁶⁴

At one point, as early as 1666, Koch was able to produce a copy of the Russian delegation's instructions for their negotiations about commercial matters with the Swedish envoys. Nils Eosander, at that point secretary and member of the Swedish delegation, later confirmed that Koch had produced this copy.⁶⁵ The instructions were most likely obtained by bribing a secretary – a method employed by many news agents at many courts in contemporary Europe. In his 'relation' about his work in 1683, Koch explicitly recommends bribing the tsar's secretaries and ministers, in order to retain their goodwill regarding Sweden: it would be helpful "to give to the voivodes and the clerks in the chancery a veneration now and then, to maintain their minds in a useful affection towards our nation". In the same 'relation' Koch states that "money can help with those at the tsar's court, who are at the fore and hold the pen".⁶⁶

The tsar's translators formed another important source. Koch probably did not need any personal translator for his everyday life, but from a letter (dated 29 November 1676) by the Danish resident Mogens Gjõe to his king we know that in this case the translator – who was none other than Nikolai Gavrilovich Spafarii-Milescu (1636–1708), one of the tsar's best and most senior translators – was an important source of information, and Gjõe complained bitterly when Spafarii was sent to China.⁶⁷

62 Taube to the king from Narva, 17 January 1677 (RA, Livonica II, vol. 182), and once again in a letter from Narva, March 30, 1678 (RA, Livonica II, vol. 183).

63 The king's letter to Koch from Ljungeby (RA, RR, 24 June 1678).

64 RA, RR, 24 June 1678.

65 Letter by Nils Eosander, Stockholm, 3 August 1678 (RA, Biographica K 12).

66 Relation by Christoff Koch, 26 February 1683 (ibid.).

67 Cf. Gjõe's letter of 16 March 1675: "Mon Interpret Moldavien ira à Chine en qualité d'Envoyé Ext[raordinaire] ce que vient fort mal à propos pour muy, d'autant que Je ne trouveray pas un hom[m]e à qui fier mes affaires, ny quil aura l'industrie et l'add[resse] pareille à la sienne, car le reste de ces gens là icy ne vaut guere, et les scaura on corrompre

Gjøe's successor as a resident in Moscow during the years 1676–1678, Frederik von Gabel, complained that the Swedes, before he had arrived, had been walking in and out of the chancery as if they were natives, whereas now they were no longer welcome.⁶⁸ As first stated by Heinz Ellersieck, the Dane Gabel was certainly complaining about Koch⁶⁹ – who had the same assignments as Gabel and would, without any doubt, use just the same sorts of methods as the Danish resident; of course, it was also in Gabel's interest to damage his Swedish counterpart.

Despite the many different methods to engage in news gathering, we do not think that Koch should be considered as a spy, at least not in the modern understanding of this word. Whereas the term 'spy' is old, today's understanding was shaped in modern times. Koch did only what the Muscovite government expected him to do, considering his Swedish assignments. Matveev knew also how to take advantage of Koch's role as a correspondent. Koch himself seems to have had no problems gathering news, without the need to rummage through 'secret letter boxes'. However, he did engage in diplomatic conflicts that involved illegal measures, such as falsifying news and letters. In 1678, many foreign envoys left Moscow.⁷⁰ The official reason in Koch's case was that he had been writing newsletters to Sweden, and that he had been forging news in cooperation with the English resident John Hebdon.⁷¹ Koch himself wrote about this event: "This letter was fabricated explicitly by us so that the Danish resident might be expelled from Pskov".⁷² We do not know why Koch took part in that conflict. There is no evidence that he acted in the interest of the crown, or on his own account. The Danish resident fought back, which led to Koch's expulsion. He was, however, back in Moscow quite soon.

avec dix Escus" (Danish National Archives, Tyske Kancellis Udenrigske Afdeling, Rusland, Mogens Gjøes gesandtskabsarkiv, fond 73, no. 93).

68 Draft of this letter in Gjøe's draft book (*ibid.*, Rusland, fond 73, no. 39).

69 Ellersieck, *Russia under Aleksei Mikhailovich and Feodor Alekseevich*, p. 52, note 40.

70 Letter by governor-general Taube to the king, Narva, 18 February 1678, containing a letter by Koch, Moscow, 8 January 1678, stating that he was expelled, but that other envoys were also about to leave Moscow (RA, Livonica II, vol. 183).

71 Governor-general Taube reported to the king from Narva on 22 March 1678 that Koch had arrived to Narva, expelled from Moscow, for trying to hinder the Danish resident in his work by forging news (RA, Livonica II, vol. 183). John Hebdon wrote to Koch about a meeting between the two men the day before (Moscow, 18 September 1677); at that occasion, they had discussed Hebdon's negotiations (which also concerned Sweden) – they obviously worked together (RA, Extranea, vol. 156:2).

72 Koch to Taube from Moscow, 24 December 1677 (RA, Livonica II, vol. 183).

Conclusion

Koch's sources and his ability to learn about the Muscovite government depended heavily on his social relations in Moscow, within the merchant community and with other foreigners. At the same time, he had to consider sudden changes in Russian politics. It was certainly a difficult task, and he had to engage in different modes of news gathering, which he did successfully.

Koch was exceptionally well suited for his task. His reports gave detailed information about Russian politics from the 1660s to the 1680s, a time when Moscow became more open to Western influences, in particular during the reign of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. Two years after the tsar's death, in 1678, Koch was finally recognised as a Swedish commissioner (*kommersiefaktor*), which made his work as a correspondent open and widely acknowledged for everybody. However, the Russian authorities – above all Artamon Matveev – were apparently aware of his work as a news expert even earlier, and also the student Hesse from Brandenburg recommended in a letter (1676) that Koch's letters should be intercepted in order to prove that he was working as a correspondent.⁷³ As we have seen, Matveev obviously used Koch as a channel to inform the Swedish crown as early as 1671, in connection with Razin's execution. Regarding another execution (in September 1674), the tsar gave an explicit order to Matveev and another state official to inform the foreigners, so that they would write to their respective countries about the 'traitor' Ivashka Vorob'ev, who pretended to be the tsar's son.⁷⁴

Koch's work as a news expert depended greatly on actual changes in Russian politics and interests. His proximity to the Kremlin in 1671–1672 was simply impossible a few years later, when Russian-Swedish relations had turned sour due to Sweden's war with Brandenburg. To accuse Koch of being a spy must be understood as an effort to hurt him at a particular time, for a particular reason. It was a strategic argument, created for a specific series of events. Despite Koch's and other correspondents' worries, we are not aware of any examples where foreign correspondents were severely punished for their reports or for being a spy.

This leaves us with one important question: Why did Koch do it in the first place? In his work for the crown, Koch was poorly paid, like many other

73 Governor-general Taube to the king, Narva, May 16, 1679, about Koch's return to Moscow (RA, Livonica II, vol. 183).

74 *Dvortsovye razriady: tom tretii. S 1645 po 1676 g.* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo II Otdeleniia Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva Kantseliarii, 1852), col. 1021–1023. On that occasion, the foreigners were also invited explicitly to attend the execution (col. 1022).

Swedish correspondents. As a backdrop for these activities, we might assume a strong interest in the commerce between Sweden and Moscow, although this is only speculation. We have no information about Koch's business relations apart from the evidence of his reports. It is only in his career as a whole that we can find a specific argument for his activities, although it took about two decades of service before he achieved his ennoblement. This is, however, not an unusual time frame. An eventual success could be expected, since almost all Swedish correspondents of his kind were ennobled and promoted, in that way opening prospects also for their families in Swedish services. When it comes to Koch's personal interests, the crown could offer protection, but this happened only in 1678, when Koch already was a middle-aged man who had been living in Moscow for more than 20 years.

Still, some open questions remain, in particular concerning the economic basis of Koch's news services. It is unlikely that the correspondence in itself might have produced a substantial income. The seventeenth-century news market was not so much about financial gains; rather, it was about investing time and resources in order to create a network that represented an amalgamation of kinship with friendship, offering other assets like privileges, monopolies, ennoblements, and such.⁷⁵ In that way, news experts indulged in the news business not primarily as a means in itself, but as part of a career. This is true for most news experts in crown services, which has consequences for our understanding of early modern 'diplomats'. They entered crown services as news agents (residents, agents, correspondents) in exchange for privileges, trade monopolies etc. In that respect, news was a resource, which could be traded in crown services. Despite their crown services, however, they continued to work as merchants.

Therefore, financial gains can hardly explain Koch's or other news experts' work as a correspondent and he probably did not expect that either. He reported to Grundel-Helmfelt and others for years, without getting paid. His work was part of a long-term engagement in networks and services that eventually offered crown services, ennoblement and a social ascent for all of the family. Probably financial gains were also a part of Koch's business in Moscow, although we did not find any proof of this in the historical documents.

75 Droste, *Commercium litterarium*, will deal with these aspects intensively.