Vladimir Spiridonov, who works as a psychological consultant to universities, banks, and commercial businesses, conducted an experiment to measure people’s attitudes to bribery and blat in contemporary Moscow. He asked forty-eight subjects (sixteen university students, twenty-one bank clerks, and eleven public officials) to evaluate the words and phrases “blat,” “bribe,” “bribe taker,” “myself,” “bureaucrat,” and “person who knows how to live,” using sixteen bi-polar word pairs (such as good-evil, clean-dirty, stupid-clever) on a seven-point scale. He found that most subjects responded neutrally to “bribe” and “blat.” Responses to “bribe taker” were slightly negative on the whole, most negative among the students while barely negative among the officials. Responses to “bureaucrat” were more negative for the students and clerks, almost the opposite of their responses to “myself,” while for the officials it was not a negative word and stood close to “myself”. All three groups responded positively to “person who knows how to live.” Spiridonov concludes that the media’s universally condemnatory treatment of bribery does not match the public’s attitudes.

William Miller, Tatyana Koshechkina and Åse Grodeland report on twenty-six focus groups they convened in the capital cities, towns and villages of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Ukraine to discuss citizens’ encounters with officials. Their questions sought to evaluate citizens’ expectation of fair treatment and their knowledge of the use of bribery. The diversity of measures and countries makes too complex a picture to summarize here. All things considered, I’d rather be in Prague.

The last essay in the book belongs to Mark Galeotti who evaluates “The Corrupt Art of Governing Russia.” Galeotti accepts the mass media’s evaluation of the prevalence and ubiquity of corruption in contemporary Russia but holds out the hope that organized crime and endemic corruption can be tamed, “as in the United States in the nineteenth century.” Eliot Ness and Bobby Kennedy R.I.P. All that is needed, Galeotti concludes, is “an élite willing to outgrow its anarchic roots, a public prepared to fight for change and the legal and political structures and institutions necessary to mobilize and respond to these demands, from the press to the judiciary” (pp. 284-85). I’m not holding my breath.

Bruce F. Adams  
University of Louisville


To introduce students to Muscovite history without travel literature is inconceivable. All the students’ course-readers for two generations – Harcave, Riha, Dmytryshyn, Kaiser and Marker – provided generous selections from Herberstein, von Staden, Fletcher, Olearius, and Korb, among many others. Even the stately three-volume Source Book for Russian History, edited by George Vernadsky, et al., and compiled by Sergei Pushkarev (1972), famous for its selections from a variety of chronicles and other seldom translated sources, although not really designed as classroom friendly, included Von Staden, Herberstein, Jenkinson, and Fletcher on the sixteenth century,
and Kotoshikhin, Collins, Strays, Križanić from the seventeenth. While most histori-
ans would acknowledge that later visitors cited, paraphrased or distorted their prede-
cessors; would give lip-service to travel literature as the mirror of two cultures; would
warn students of the dangers inherent in using carefully edited snippets, teachers eve-
rywhere have taught Muscovy through these sources, the most colorful, most descrip-
tive, and most perceptive available. Kliuchevskii wrote his candidate thesis on the
Skazaniia inostrantsev o Moskovskom gosudarstve, and in recent decades, a couple of
visitors, Herberstein and Possivino, have practically become cottage industries, while
others are virtually unstudied in a systematic way. In 1993 Marshall Poe catalogued
over 600 pieces of European Moscovica in his Foreign Descriptions of Moscow, rele-
gating older lists like Nerhood’s To Russia and Return to the dustbin.

About ninety authors are discussed here. Poe’s new book is simultaneously a clas-
sification of the genre, an imaginative monograph on one important political theme,
and an invitational guidebook for future scholars who may use these sources to pursue
topics untouched here. Under the first heading, the first three chapters survey the bi-
gographies, texts, and the influence of the earliest Europeans to visit or describe Mus-
covy, those relatively unknown pioneers prior to Herberstein; the second examines
accounts left by diplomats, who remained typically in Muscovy from a few weeks to a
few years; the third treats “residents,” most of whom lived in Moscow for more than
five years, from the age of Ivan the Terrible to that of Peter. The earliest “ethno-
graphic” reports which first brought Muscovy to Europe’s attention were contradic-
tory, some written by authors who had not been there. Short-term envoys, in contrast,
often kept isolated from real Russia by Muscovite diplomatic rituals, tended to project
their homelands into a we-they opposition to Moscow, in which a portrait of Russian
tyranny emerged clearly. “Perhaps surprising,” the third group, long-term residents
who knew the language and often lived among the population, also contributed to the
lore of Russian tyranny, as they tended to share the views of the ambassadors.

The latter half of the book, the monograph, also consists of three chapters: one on
Herberstein, and on his enormous influence on subsequent authors; one on the observ-
ations of “Renaissance gentlemen” and humanists who knew their Aristotle, and at-
temted to situate inherited ethnographic lore and actual observations into his political
categories of good and corrupt governments; and one on European “political scien-
tists” – Jean Bodin, Sir Walter Raleigh, Herman Comming, Križanić, and finally Mon-
tesquieu – each of whom took the pages of a particular visitor (Herberstein, Fletcher,
Olearius, Petreius, and Perry, respectively), searched for tyranny, and not surprisingly,
found it. A final chapter asks, “Was Muscovy a despotism?,” Poe’s own attempt to
summarize recent research.

Throughout Poe focuses on the central question, was the tsar a tyrant who ruled
over slave-subjects? He concludes that in fact, the tsar’s authority was “far more ex-
tensive than that of any European monarch.” It might justifiably described as a despot-
ism, or more “neutrally,” as “a patrimonial state.” The most common European expla-
nation for that authority, natural slavery, Poe rejects: “Foreigners interpreted the Mus-
covite discourse of deference literally, when it seems more appropriate to view it
metaphorically.” Essentially he argues that four trends: 1) a political “discourse,”
great lords constantly referring to themselves as slaves, acknowledging uniformly that