"Sei sud sudil sud'ia velikogo kniazia"—"The judge of the grand prince tried this case." This alliterative formula almost always appears as the opening sentence of a Muscovite judgment charter (pravaia gramota). These documents, which are a basic source for the study of Muscovite legal history, were issued by medieval Russian courts from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The judgment charters record the method used in trying cases, the types of evidence presented, the role of litigants, witnesses, and judges, and the decision reached. Where the law codes (Sudebniki) allude to these matters, usually in connection with setting fees or strict procedural requirements, the judgment charters provide illustrations of the court in action. Thus, in many cases, the judgment charters supplement knowledge gained from the law codes, filling gaps or adding detail. Yet, as in the case of the law codes, the documents' laconic nature leaves many questions unanswered. Scribes apparently saw no reason for recording those things which everyone knew. Most extant judgment charters from the fifteenth century, for example, name the disputed land, on which the trial was generally held. While the judge's name is given, there is usually no designation of his rank or indication as to the extent of his jurisdiction. Boiar judges are identified most frequently only by given name and patronymic. Despite such limitations, the judgment charters remain our only source for much basic data concerning the realities of medieval Russian law.

Although Muscovite courts continued to issue judgment charters well into the seventeenth century, approximately one half of the published documents are texts of judgment charters which were issued between ca. 1480 and 1505. A judgment charter (pravaia gramota) was a written trial record and statement of the court's decision which was awarded to the victorious litigant. In form and content it was closely related to two other Muscovite trial documents, the sudnyi spisok (trial record) and dokladnoi spisok (trial record including doklad proceedings, when a case was referred to a court of higher instance). Inclusion of the doklad section is the distinguishing characteristic of the second type of document, while neither the sudnye spiski nor dokladnye spiski, unlike the pravye gramoty, record the decision reached by the court.
Differentiation among the types of documents has not been as clear, however, as the above definitions would indicate. Medieval scribes at times used the terms sudnyi spisok and pravaia gramota interchangeably. Later copyists added to the confusion, which was again compounded by the inconsistency in labels attached by scholars who edited and published the documents. The documents themselves, on the other hand, had become remarkably consistent by the early sixteenth century, and may be classified on the basis of both content and form.

The surviving judgment charters from the fifteenth century are almost all accounts of trials concerning some type of rights to land. The formal nature of these documents is striking—it is reflected both in the language in which they are written and in the judicial procedure which they describe. The two aspects seem to have been closely related and to have reinforced each other.

Muscovite judgment charters record the trial in the form of direct speech. Of course, this is understandable in the light of trial procedure, since all proceedings were conducted orally; yet the judgment charters also contain


Scholars who edited and published these documents were likewise inconsistent in attaching labels to them: see, for example, Meichik's complaint, *Gramoty XIV-XV vv.*, pp. 26, 33-34; the editors of PRP, III, 243, point out that the sudnyi spisok published on pp. 234-237 is a dokladnoi spisok; Shakhmatov calls one judgment charter a sudnaia gramota, although the term pravaia is found in the text itself (A. A. Shakhmatov, “Izlsedovanie o dvinskikh gramotakh XV v.”, *Izlsedovanie po russkomu izaiku*, 4 vols. [St. Petersburg, 1895-1912], II, Pt. III, 34-35, 108-109). This text has been published as a judgment charter in PRP, II, 195. To cite just one more example, the document published as a sudnyi spisok of 1505-1511 in *Akty iuridicheskii, ili sobranie form starinnago deloproizvodstva* [hereafter Af] (St. Petersburg, 1838), No. 12, pp. 24-25, was republished as a pravaia gramota of 1495-1499 in *Akty feodal'nogo zemlevladienia i khoziaistva* [hereafter AFZH], ed. L. V. Cherepnin, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1951-1961), I, No. 129, pp. 118-120.

2. The exception, a case in which a servent is accused of inciting slaves to flee across the border, adds little to our knowledge, since the defendent admits his guilt immediately (ASEL, III. No. 357, pp. 380-381).