

BOYAR LITERACY AND DIPLOMACY DURING THE REIGN OF IVAN IV

Given a lack of sources there is no way to estimate the extent of literacy among Muscovite classes, including the boyars¹, the apex of the social pyramid, just beneath the dynasty, during the reign of Ivan IV. Nor is there unanimity among historians in deciding upon a methodology to identify literate boyars. Not everyone, it seems, accepts signatures as proof of literacy. This article will broaden the source base for identifying literate boyars. It will argue that several observations in Possevino's *Moscovia* that boyar-diplomats read position papers aloud in negotiations can be corroborated by the ambassadorial books (*posol'skie knigi*). However, it is still impossible to gauge how many of the boyars were literate, because no extant evidence addresses the literacy of the majority of boyars.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Historians have never agreed upon the extent of literacy among boyars. This situation is complicated because some authors treat all noble landowners, boyars and gentry (*deti boiarskie*), together, and others refer only to Muscovite «society» as a whole or lay society, excluding clergy but only implicitly excluding the professionally literate bureaucratic scribes (*d'iaki*). In addition different studies address different chronological periods. For background I will highlight relevant publications in approximately chronological order. A. Sobolevskii, based upon signatures and saints' lives, wrote that more than half of all large and petty landowners, which would certainly include the boyars, were literate in the sixteenth century². A. Iatsimirskii upped that, claiming that signatures showed that fifty to eighty percent of boyars and gentry were literate³. H. Rüß writes that among the high aristocracy (which must be the boyars), the ability to read and write was as much the rule as the exception, which

¹ In this article «boyars» always includes associate boyars (*okol'niche*).

² *Соболевский А. И. Образованность Московской Руси XV–XVII веков.* СПб., 1892. С. 8–9.

³ *Яцимирский А. И. Образованность в Московской Руси // Русская история в очерках и статьях / Под ред. М. В. Довнар-Запольского.* Т. 3. Киев, 1909. С. 487–546.

I interpret as meaning a literacy rate as fifty percent⁴. N. Kollmann referred to the «low rate of lay literacy in the sixteenth century» in Muscovy, its «illiterate society», «literate members of the secular elite (of whom few were literate before the seventeenth century)» and the «dearth of literacy». Boyars constituted the «secular elite»⁵. A. Pavlov and M. Perrie assert that only a low level of literacy pertained to society, which I take to mean Muscovite society as a whole⁶. D. Rowland called attention to the «almost complete absence of literacy among laymen» in Muscovy's «largely illiterate Russian society»⁷. Rowland also declared that the majority, if not most courtiers, which would include boyars and gentry, were illiterate⁸. D. Miller, using signatures as evidence, found the level of literacy among those who wrote or signed donation charters to the Trinity Sergius Monastery rising during Ivan IV's reign from fifty-four percent to as high as eighty-five percent and among witnesses who signed the documents to as high as seventy-one percent. However, he did not differentiate among the social classes to which these men belonged. Undoubtedly they were overwhelmingly gentry⁹.

Kollman referred to a general lack of literacy in Muscovy, in which the vast majority of the population was illiterate. Nevertheless merchants and artisans mastered occupationally necessary literacy skills. The provincial gentry should have needed and acquired functional literacy for estate management and service, which she documents by citing Miller. Kollmann here does not mention boyars¹⁰. Halperin provided documentary justification for concluding that participants in legal transactions who «knew letters» (*gramota umeet*) and «affixed their hands» (*ruki prilozhili*) to documents were literate and did sign those documents. He also surveyed documents written by a major party to a transaction and the use by boyars and upper gentry of one of their servants or slaves to write documents. Because the wealthier elite could support such an «employee,» they did not need to write documents themselves. Thus boyars were barely present as writers generating their own legal paper¹¹.

A. Usachev uncovered how many laymen who were not professional secretaries were literate enough to copy manuscript books¹². Of course none of these lower-class copyists were boyars. Moreover, that a boyar (or anyone) commissioned, purchased, bequeathed or donated a manuscript book does not constitute evidence that he (or she) did or even could

⁴ Rüß H. Herren und Diener. Die soziale und politische Mentalität des Russischen Adels. 9.–17. Jahrhundert. Cologne, 1994. P. 217–218.

⁵ Kollmann N. S. By honor bound: State and society in Early Modern Russia. Ithaca, 1999. P. 21, 68, 174, 252.

⁶ Pavlov A., Perrie M. Ivan the Terrible. London, 2003. P. 7.

⁷ Rowland D. Muscovy // European political thought 1450–1700. Religion, law and philosophy / Ed. by H. Lloyd et al. New Haven, 2007. P. 268, 270.

⁸ Rowland D. Blessed is the host of the heavenly Tsar: An icon from the Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin // Picturing Russia: Explorations in visual culture / Ed. by V. A. Kivelson, J. Neuberger. New Haven, 2008. P. 33.

⁹ Miller D. B. Saint Sergius of Radonezh, his Trinity Monastery, and the formation of the Russian Identity. DeKalb, 2010. P. 239–243.

¹⁰ Kollmann N. S. Crime and punishment in Early Modern Russia. Cambridge, 2012. P. 27, 49.

¹¹ Halperin C. J. Three «Hands» and literacy in Muscovy during the reign of Ivan IV: «I Affix My Hand», «By My Own Hand», and «My Man's Hand» // Canadian-American Slavic Studies, 2017. Vol. 51. No. 1. P. 29–63.

¹² Усачев А. С. Книгописание в России XVI века по материалам датированных выходных записей. Т. 1. М.; СПб., 2018. С. 271–302.

read it. Kollmann specified that «even the elite was generally illiterate», which again meant the boyars¹³. Halperin tracked down at least 361 individuals who signed documents during Ivan IV's reign published in an anthology from the Iosifov Monastery but found only two signatory boyars, Princes Dmitrii and Fedor Ivanovich Telepnev Obolenskii Nemoi. These findings fit Miller's on the provincial gentry, but do not do much to elucidate boyar literacy¹⁴.

This brief survey illustrates several aspects of historiography on boyar literacy. First, most historical literature does not focus exclusively on boyars. Second, signatures as evidence of literacy, the universal criterion¹⁵, are embraced at most very gingerly by historians who minimize literacy among any or all Muscovite social classes even when signatures survive by implicitly distinguishing «functional literacy» from «real» literacy. A Muscovite boyar did not have to possess the linguistic and literary skills of a hagiographer to qualify as literate. Even fully embracing signatures as evidence, however, cannot overcome the paucity of boyar signatories.

There is some additional signatory evidence concerning boyars. Two boyars, Fedor Adashev and Prince Dmitrii Fedorovich Paletskii, signed documents in other documentary anthologies¹⁶. Fifteen of seventeen boyars in attendance at the «Assembly of the Land» (*Zemskii sobor*) of 1566 to consider whether to continue the war against Poland-Lithuania signed the protocols of the meeting. Only two, Ivan Sheremetev Menshoi and Ivan Chebotov, failed to sign the charter because «they were illiterate» (*ruke k sei gramote neprilozhili, chto gramote neumeiut*)¹⁷. To my knowledge these are the only two boyars from Ivan IV's reign who confessed to being illiterate. Even if in this case there is no reason to suspect that literacy figured in the selection of boyars who would attend the assembly, we have no way of judging how «representative» of the boyar class as a whole this «sample» was. On such small numbers computing percentages (if fifteen of seventeen, eighty-eight percent literate, if thirteen of fifteen, eighty-seven percent literate) is not worth the effort. Trying to judge whether a fifty percent literacy rate is high or low (compared to what standard?) is pointless when that percentage is based on intuition, not reliable statistical data. Absence of evidence should not be construed as evidence of absence. Sobolevskii already knew, and Halperin has

¹³ Kollmann N. S. A Muscovite Republic? // *Slavic Review*. 2021. Vol. 80. No. 3. P. 496.

¹⁴ Halperin C. J. Signatures and Signatories: Literacy and documentation in Muscovy during the Reign of Ivan IV // *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. 2022. Vol. 70. No. 1–2. P. 71.

¹⁵ Houston R. A. Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and education 1500–1800. London, 1988.

¹⁶ Акты феодального землевладения и хозяйства. Акты московского Симонова монастыря (1506–1613). Л., 1983. С. 83–86; Акты, относящиеся до гражданской расправы древней России / Сост. А. Федотов-Чеховский. Т. 1. Киев, 1860. № 145. С. 166–195.

¹⁷ Зимин А. А. Опричнина Ивана Грозного. М., 1964. С. 196, footnote № 4 deciphered the identities of boyar signatories as follows: I. D. Bel'skii, I. F. Mstislavskii, I. P. Iakovlev, I. I. Pronskii, I. V. Sheremetov Bol'shoi, I. V. Sheremetev Men'shoi, V. S. Serebriannii, I. R. Iur'ev, M. I. Vorotynskii, I. M. Vorontsov, M. Ia. Morozov, V. M. Iur'ev, I. Ia. Chebotov, V. D. Danilov, V. Iu. Mali Trakhaniot, S. V. Iakovlev and I. P. Fedorov. From the published text: Акты, относящиеся к истории земских соборов / Сост. Ю. Готье. М., 1909. С. 10–12. — I have confirmed fifteen of seventeen names in the Got'e manuscript. I failed to find I. D. Bel'skii and M. I. Vorotynskii. I also failed to correlate «Nikita Romanov» in the manuscript with Zimin's list. In the following book (Черепнин Л. В. Земские соборы русского государства в XVI–XVII вв. М., 1983. P. 109) counts seventeen boyars and three associate boyars in attendance, but does not name them.

documented, that some participants in a transaction who did not sign one document were not illiterate, because they signed other documents.

Given the unhelpful disposition of evidence of signatures, therefore, one would expect historians to eagerly grasp any additional sources that might supplement these data on literate boyars. That has not the case with several passages written by Antonio Possevino about Muscovite diplomacy.

POSSEVINO ON LITERATE DIPLOMATS

The Jesuit Antonio Possevino was named papal legate to Eastern Europe by Pope Gregory XIII to mediate a truce in the Livonian War between Stephen Batory, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, and Tsar Ivan IV. After mediating the Truce of Yam Zapol'skii he wrote his *Moscovia*, which included a narrative of his diplomatic activities. After being greeted by Ivan IV, the tsar retreated to a separate chamber. Possevino then negotiated directly with the senators (boyars). «The Senators would read out his [Ivan's] views, which were written out on long strips of parchment, and these strips were handed over to me after the Senators had taken turns reading from them». When a new issue arose, the Senators would excuse themselves to discuss the matter with Ivan IV. The «Senators take down his [Ivan IV's] statements on pieces of paper, which they then distribute among themselves, and each takes his turn in reading out from them to the messengers and envoys what the Prince has just finished saying». This procedure, in Possevino's opinion, wasted an enormous amount of time¹⁸.

Possevino describes diplomatic activities in which he personally took part. He cannot have borrowed this description from any of the published works about Muscovy he read in preparation for his mission, notably Herberstein, but also Giovio or Guagnini, because they contain nothing of the sort¹⁹. His mockery of the passive senators, who mindlessly regurgitated word-for-word Ivan IV's words, and his extreme irritation at the inefficiency of this procedure seem to reflect quite accurately his emotional response to Muscovite protocol. However, we must add two caveats. First, Possevino could not have observed Russian diplomats writing down Ivan IV's words in a separate room. Rather, he saw them leave the room he was in, enter the room with Ivan IV, and then return to his room and read aloud from written notes which purportedly expressed Ivan IV's views. Possevino only inferred that Ivan IV had dictated those words and that the senators had written them down. Possevino does not mention the social composition of the group of Muscovite diplomats he was engaging in discussion. As we shall see, they included primarily boyars, that is senators, and professional bureaucrats, scribes (*d'iaki*). If Ivan IV had been dictating his views to the group, it would have been the scribes, not the senators, who took the dictation. It is highly unlikely and would have been quite impossible socially for boyars to physically write down Ivan IV's words. Moreover, Ivan IV could have himself been using a previously written statement with potential responses to different questions or arguments, comparable to the instructions given Muscovite envoys and ambassadors sent abroad. Secondly, as proven by

¹⁸ The *Moscovia* of Antonio Possevino / Ed. by S. J. Hugh F. Graham, H. F. tr. Pittsburgh, 1977. Pp. 16, 50, 180. — Russian translation: *Поссевино А. Исторические сочинения о России XVI в.* / Пер. Л. Н. Годовиковой. М., 1983. С. 25, 53. — Godovikova translates «senators» as «*dumnye boiars*» (Royal Council boyars).

¹⁹ See: *Поссевино А. Исторические сочинения...* С. 9.

Possevino's letters written while he was mediating the negotiations in Yam Zapol'skii that led to the 1582 truce bearing the name of that location, in other situations Muscovite diplomats were fully capable of engaging in back-and-forth negotiations on their own, albeit following previously prepared guidelines²⁰. The diplomats were not just Ivan IV's ventriloquist dummies. However, as we shall see, Possevino was absolutely correct that in presenting their initial position in negotiations Muscovite diplomats did take turns reading aloud in turn from a written position paper.

Possevino expresses no surprise that the boyars could read, only exasperation at how long it took them to do so aloud. Describing literate boyars seems not to serve any particular vested interest or bias on his part. He could easily have taken the opportunity to mock the boyars for not knowing Latin or any «civilized» language. After all he fully discloses his reliance on interpreters and translators because of Muscovite ignorance of Latin. Because eyewitnesses get things wrong, his eyewitness account cannot automatically be accepted literally²¹.

Possevino's account of how Muscovites negotiated has mostly been overlooked in studies of both Possevino and of Muscovite diplomacy. Paul Pierling, author of the most comprehensive account of Possevino's mission, an entire volume in his multi-volume study of Russian relations with the Papacy, at least paraphrases the two passages quoted above, but makes no attempt to verify them²². Other studies of Possevino fail even to mention boyars reading Ivan IV's statements aloud²³. This is understandable. Authors writing about Possevino were more interested in the content of his religious and diplomatic negotiations than their form. L. Iuzefovich, a specialist in Muscovite diplomacy, of course discusses the procedure Possevino describes, but, at least in a semi-popular (*nauchno-populiarnaia*) book with limited scholarly apparatus, he does not cite Possevino's description of it²⁴. Writing from the sources themselves he did not need to. I will return to his analysis below. Consequently, to my knowledge no historian has ever connected Possevino to Muscovite diplomatic procedure. Nor has Possevino's description of literate boyars been taken into account in discussions of Muscovite literacy or illiteracy²⁵. Miller observes of the nobility in general that «Those of high rank had to read and write to perform their duties»²⁶. The «duties» of the boyars included conducting diplomacy.

²⁰ Иван Грозный и иезуиты: Миссия Антонио Поссевино в Москве / Сост. И. В. Курукин. М., 2005. С. 153–167.

²¹ We know that not everything he wrote in *Moscovia* was based upon his own eyewitness experience and that some passages are extremely unreliable. See: *Bushkovitch P.* Possevino and the Death of tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich // *Cahiers du monde russe*. 2014. Vol. 55. No. 1–2. P. 119–134.

²² *Pierling P.* La Russie et le Saint-Siège: Études diplomatiques. Vol. II. Paris, 1897. P. 87–88.

²³ *Delius W.* Antonio Possevino und Ivan Groznyj. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Kirchlichen Union und der Gegenreformation des 16. Jahrhunderts. Stuttgart, 1962. — Russian translation: Иван Грозный и иезуиты... С. 13–150; *Santich J. J.* Missio Moscovitica: The Role of the Jesuits in the Westernization of Russia 1582–1689. New York, 1995. Pp. 85–111; *Mund S.* Orbis russiarum: genèse et développement de la représentation du monde «russe» en Occident à la Renaissance. Geneva, 2003. P. 217–220.

²⁴ Юзефович Л. А. Путь посла: Русский посольский обычай. Обиход. Этикет. Церемониал: конец XV – первая половина XVI в. СПб., 2007. С. 236.

²⁵ Neither: *Halperin Ch.* Three «Hands»...

²⁶ *Miller A.* St. Sergius of Radonezh... P. 242.

MUSCOVITE DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE

Although individuals on diplomatic missions might deliver correspondence, negotiations with foreigners, either in Muscovy or abroad, were often conducted by a group or team. The more important the mission, the more likely that one or more boyars would lead it, always accompanied by one or more secretaries. In many cases one or more gentry would also participate²⁷. Therefore, Muscovite embassies and negotiators almost always contained men from different social classes. When sent abroad, this combination of representatives might be called a delegation or embassy. Muscovite sources provide no special term for such groups negotiating in Muscovy, most of the time but not only in Moscow²⁸. We might call it a «team» or a «committee». Because they include a boyar we might apply to them Vasilii Kliuchevskii's terminology, «commission». Perforce my vocabulary will be inconsistent.

I have found fourteen cases of multispeaker diplomatic presentations in five published ambassadorial books, two concerning relations with Poland-Lithuania, and one each with England, the Holy Roman Empire, and the papacy. The ambassadorial book for relations with Sweden does not contain any relevant instances²⁹. Diplomacy with the Crimean and Nogai Tatars worked differently. All negotiations with them seem to have been with individuals. The elaborate procedure of multiple speakers was employed for major negotiations. The procedure itself was hardly an outlier. Rather, it was fully articulated by the beginning of Ivan IV's reign. It was utilized during that reign from start to finish. It appears in relations with four different European polities and in every decade (1530s, 1540, 1550s, 1560s, 1570s, 1580s) of Ivan IV's reign, even the shorter initial (beginning 1533) and final (ending 1584) decades. In short, it represents standard Muscovite operating procedure for committee negotiations.

An ambassadorial book is a redacted combination of direct quotation and paraphrase intended to present a coherent narrative of diplomatic relations and negotiations. It is not a «raw» stenographic account. The secretaries of the Ambassadorial Bureau (*Posol'skii prikaz*) compiled the books after the fact. The standardized presentation of multi-person speakers was not improvised. Rather, it reflected fully developed Muscovite governmental and administrative practices and language.

The most reiterated verb attributed in the diplomatic books to the diplomats is *govoriti*, «to speak», although occasionally *molviti*. This verb is of no utility in deciding if diplomats were literate, because someone reading aloud is «speaking» regardless of whether he is reading something aloud or speaking extemporaneously or from memory. Even when speaking from memory, we have no way of knowing *how* the diplomat memorized his text, either by reading it or by listening to it read aloud by someone else, presumably a literate secretary.

The ambassadorial books explicitly posit a one-to-one relationship between documentation and oration. From 1536: «and this is the first note (*zapis'*) from the treasurer that (secretary)

²⁷ To make a better impression, the diplomatic books systematically use the boyar patronymic form (Ivan Vasil'evich) for gentry who should have used the less prestigious form «son of» (Ivan Vasil'ev syn). Only secretaries appear consistently (well, almost consistently; see below for a scribal error) with «son of» patronymics. For convenience I have retained this improper format for gentry.

²⁸ Possevino first met Ivan IV in Staritsa.

²⁹ Сборник Императорского Русского исторического общества (further — СИРИО). Т. 129. СПб., 1910.

Fedor (Mishurin) said to the envoys». Fedor «spoke (*molvil*) the speech of the treasurer». «This is the note» from the boyars that Fedor spoke (*gorovil*)»³⁰. From 1560: this «memo» (*pamiat'*) contains what the diplomats should say³¹. What was written determined what was said.

However, negotiations were more complicated than that. Negotiations began with formal presentations of a position paper written in advance to be orated verbatim. Possevino wrote that he received the long strips of paper (scrolls, *stolbtsy*) on which Ivan IV's remarks had been written after the boyars had read them aloud to him. The ambassadorial books confirm that these formal presentations were written *before* they were declaimed³² and were, often upon request as in 1536, given to the foreign diplomats who heard them. Presumably copies were transferred, because obviously the Ambassadorial Bureau must have retained the originals in order to produce the ambassadorial books³³. A 1569 text provides an especially good explanation of this practice. After the Muscovite diplomats had spoken their response to his remarks (*i kak spisok otvety izgorovili*), the Lithuanian envoy insisted that he had not understood their presentation. He asked for a written copy of it (*govoril, chto on inykh rechi ne urazumel, i dali b» im na te rechi spisok*), which was provided³⁴. Similarly in 1581 English diplomats asked for a written copy of the Muscovite presentation, which was also supplied³⁵. If Muscovite diplomats were speaking extemporaneously, then a written copy of their remarks could be disseminated only if a Muscovite scribe had been taking dictation. Of course Muscovite scribes could take dictation when foreign diplomats spoke, but initial position statements were written texts prepared in advance and shared after enunciation. This was true of demarches by couriers or envoys as well. One instruction dictates explicitly that in answering questions the courier was to «follow the memo when speaking» (*izgovora rechi po pamiatu*)³⁶. Another declares that diplomats should speak «from a copy», i. e. a written text or texts (*spisok, spiski*)³⁷.

This practice for formal presentations did not apply to the negotiations that followed. Give-and-take preclude the possibility that Muscovite diplomats were reading a prepared text aloud, although on deal-breaker issues the Muscovites could retire to «consult» the ruler when he was at hand, and might actually have returned with a written response to be read aloud. In general Muscovite diplomats could very well rely upon memory. Obviously, since written verbatim or summary texts of their replies to what foreign diplomats said appear in the ambassadorial books, someone was taking notes or shorthand to record what was uttered on both sides. Possevino's description of negotiators reading written texts aloud probably confined itself to formal presentations. I will return to the records of these negotiations below.

Possevino's describes a presentation by all the members of the negotiating team. However, even if the ambassadorial books contain a long list of potential speakers/committee members,

³⁰ СИРИО. Т. 59. СПб., 1887. С. 93–94.

³¹ СИРИО. Т. 71. СПб., 1892. С. 1–10.

³² СИРИО. Том 59. С. 69 (1537 г.): «the grand prince ordered a reply to the envoy to be written» (*i velel kniaz' velikii otvet poslom napisati*).

³³ СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 49–50.

³⁴ СИРИО. Т. 71. С. 647.

³⁵ СИРИО. Т. 38. СПб., 1883. С. 38–39.

³⁶ СИРИО. Т. 71. С. 320 (1563–1564 гг.).

³⁷ ПДС. Т. 1. СПб., 1851. Стб. 533–543 (1576–1578 гг.).

that did not necessarily entail that anyone was recorded actually speaking individually³⁸. In 1561 the ambassadorial book names the diplomats designated to respond to the Lithuanian statement: «servant» (*slug*, a unique distinguished status, held only by a boyar) Prince Mikhail Ivanovich Vorotynskii, boyar Vasilii Mikhailovich Iur'ev, boyar Mikhail Ivanovich Volynskii, boyar Fedor Ivanovich Sukin, keeper-of-the seal (*pechatnik*) secretary Ivan Mikhailov syn Viskovatyi, secretary (*d'iakon* should be *d'iak*) Ivan Vasil'ev syn Bezsonon, and secretary Andrei Vasil'ev, but they only speak collectively, as if in a group recital or a congregational reading of a prayer. It is doubtful that this ever happened. The group-speak concept was a literary facade to finesse the need to attribute different sections of the presentation to different members of the team. Usually, however, the ambassadorial books specify what each member said speaking in turn. The longer the presentation, the more likely that it would take more than one rotation among the negotiators to complete the statement. This procedure permitted considerable flexibility. Rotations could vary in personnel or sequence. Different men could speak a different number of times and certainly at different lengths. Possevino captured the essence of this behavior perfectly. As far as I know, no other account by a European did so.

Iuzefovich's analysis of this diplomatic procedure is convincing as far as it goes. Originally, he writes, diplomats spoke from memory, but by the middle of the sixteenth century the position papers were just too long for anyone to memorize. Instead, the text of a «reply» was preliminarily divided among the Royal Council members according to individual «points» or «articles» (*stat'iam*). Sometimes «the answer was given by heart (*naizust'*) by article», but more often «from writing (*po pis'mu*) by article»³⁹. However, Iuzefovich overlooks that if the presentation was too long for anyone to memorize it, there was no reason that the entire presentation could not have been read aloud by one man, presumably someone who was professionally literate, a scribe. In some of the cases discussed below the Conciliar Scribe (*dumnyi d'iak*), member of the Royal Council, and head of the Ambassadorial Bureau Ivan Viskovatyi belonged to the negotiating team, but read aloud only his «share» of the position paper. The decision that each member of the negotiating team speak, and often speak more than once, was a social, perhaps political decision, but once made, it absolutely and irrevocably made memorization out of the question. Coordinating a multi-speaker presentation — maintaining the flow of the argument, avoiding repetition, guaranteeing coverage, ensuring no confusion as to the sequence of speakers — required relying upon a «master» text. To do so with some literate and some illiterate negotiators, some diplomats speaking from memory and others reading aloud, would have generated innumerable opportunities for disaster, diplomatically speaking, which could dangerously impugn the prestige of the government, let alone the ruler. We may imagine, precisely as Possevino indicates outright, the diplomats handling a manuscript scroll with each speaker's «part» identified, passing it around to the next speaker named in the manuscript in the arranged sequence. This was literally a staged performance (minus a rehearsal!), in which the performers had to be literate. In order to appreciate the sophistication of this diplomatic procedure fully it is necessary to examine each case of multiple speakers separately. Each précis here focuses on personnel and procedure to the exclusion of diplomatic content.

³⁸ СИРИО. Т. 71. С. 33–37.

³⁹ Юзефович Л. А. Путь посла... С. 236–237.

1. 1536. This is an exception — no boyar is involved — to make a necessary point. Two secretaries, Elizar Tyspliatev and Men'shoi Putiatin, make three rotations of each speaking⁴⁰. No one questions that secretaries were literate, yet the same multi-class procedure was followed even when only secretaries made a presentation.

2. 1537. The members of the Muscovite team were boyar Ivan Mikhail Iur'evich Iur'ev Zakhar'in, Tver' major domo (*dvoretskii*) Ivan Iur'evich Podzhigin, and secretaries Elizar Tyspliatev, Menshei Putiatin, and Fedor Mishurin. Speakers rotated twice in different orders. Only three of the five diplomats contributed to the second rotation. Note that at least one secretary appears in each rotation and that the highest ranking member, a boyar, speaks first and last (I will identify this feature in all cases and return to its significance below)⁴¹.

First Rotation: Zakhar'in, Podzhigin, Tyspliatev, Putiatin, Mishurin

Second Rotation: Putiatin, Podzhigin, Zakhar'in

3. 1542. Each member of the team of boyar Vasilii Grigor'evich Morozov, Uglich and Kaluga major domo Fedor Semenovich Vorontsov, and secretaries Elizar Ivanov syn Tyspliatev, Tret'iak Mikhailov syn Rakov, and Grigorii Zakhar'in speaks once in the same order as they were identified narratively⁴². Boyar Morozov leads off but does not make the closing argument.

4. 1542. The committee consisted of boyar Vasilii Grigor'evich Morozov, Uglich and Kaluga major domo Fedor Semenovich Vorontsov, and secretary Fedor Nikitin syn Moklokov (also known as Postnik Nikitin syn Moklokov/Gubin). There is no pattern to the rotation, but boyar Morozov does lead and finish⁴³. He speaks three times, Vorontsov three times, Moklokov twice. The concept of «rotation» here is more than a little arbitrary.

First Rotation: Morozov, Vorontsov

Second Rotation: Morozov, Vorontsov, Moklokov

Third Rotation: Vorontsov, Moklokov

Fourth Rotation: Vorontsov, Morozov

5. 1549. These documents contain three flawless rotations of associate boyar (*okol'nichii*) Mikhail Iakovlevich Morozov (once called «boyar associate boyar», a scribal error), Riazan' major domo Petr Vasil'evich Morozov, and secretary Bakak Mitrofanov syn Karacharov, plus a closing speech by Mikhail Morozov⁴⁴.

6. 1553. There are two anomalies in this presentation. The personnel consist of boyar and Tver' major domo Vasilii Mikhailovich Yur'ev, associate boyar Ivan Mikhailovich Vorontsov, treasurer Fedor Ivanovich Sukin, and secretaries Ivan Mikhailov syn Viskovatyi and Ishiuk (also known as Ivan Ivanov syn) Bukharin. The speakers are Viskovatyi, Sukin, Viskovatyi, Bukharin, and Yur'ev. The first anomaly is that in a single rotation only four of five diplomats speak; Vorontsov does not. The second anomaly is that the initial speaker is not the boyar or associate boyar but a secretary, although a boyar concludes the presentation⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 47–48.

⁴¹ СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 70–72.

⁴² СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 152–154.

⁴³ СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 172–174.

⁴⁴ СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 309–312.

⁴⁵ СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 391–393.

7. 1556. The negotiating team comprises boyar Mikhail Iakovlevich Morozov, boyar Ivan Mikhailovich Vorontsov, treasurer Fedor Ivanovich Sukin, and secretary Ivan Mikhailov syn Viskovatyi. The rotation of speakers is irregular, and includes a secretary not listed as a member of the negotiating committee. The boyar leads and closes⁴⁶.

First Rotation: Morozov, Vorontsov, Sukin, Viskovatyi,* secretary Boris Alekseev syn Shchekin**

*so far so good from the given list

**who is omitted from the list of participants

Second Rotation: Morozov,* Viskovatyi, Sukin,** Viskovatyi, Viskovatyi,***

*who is not followed by his fellow boyar Vorontsov

**above Sukin precedes Viskovatyi

*** two consecutive speeches; it is rare enough for the same speaker to appear twice in one rotation, but unique for a speaker to deliver three speeches in the same rotation. However, this number derives from his speaking twice in a row. This is the only case that caught my eye in which the summary of a negotiation repeats a speaker's name if his speeches are consecutive.

Third Rotation: Morozov

8. 1563. This is the longest presentation with multiple speakers, occupying seventy-two pages. Six different speakers make twenty one presentations. The usual full identification of the participants is missing in the manuscript so I can only propose tentative identifications of the speakers (the short form in the records appears in parentheses after the tentative complete identification): boyar Fedor Ivanovich Umnyi Kolychev (Fedor Ivanovich), secretary Ivan Mikhailov syn Viskovatyi (Ivan), secretary Andrei Iakovlev syn Shchelkalov (Andrei Iakovlevich)⁴⁷, boyar Vasilii Mikhailovich Iur'ev Zakhar'in (Vasilii), boyar Aleksei Danilovich Basmanov Pleshcheev (Aleksei), and secretary Andrei Vasil'ev (Andrei Vasil'ev). No two rotations are identical. Four speakers spoke four times (Umnyi Kolychev, Viskovatyi, Shchelkalov, Iur'ev Zakhar'in), one, three times (Vasil'ev), one twice (Basmanov Pleshcheev)⁴⁸. Note that frequency of speech does not conform to social hierarchy: two secretaries speak more often than one of the boyars. Rotations have six, seven, four and five speakers. Organizing this spectacle of diplomatic overkill must have taken some time. I was afraid to try to estimate how long the actual presentation must have taken. Note that different boyars lead off and close.

First Rotation: Umnyi Kolychev, Viskovatyi, Shchelkalov, Iur'ev Zakhar'in, Basmanov Pleshcheev

Second Rotation: Umnyi Kolychev, Viskovatyi, Vasil'ev, Shchelkalov, Iur'ev Zakhar'in,* Basmanov Pleshcheev, Zakhar'in

*speaks twice in same rotation

Third Rotation: Umnyi Kolychev, Viskovatyi, Vasil'ev, Shchelkalov

Fourth Rotation: Umnyi Kolychev, Viskovatyi, Vasil'ev, Shchelkalov, Iur'ev Zakhar'in

⁴⁶ СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 495–502.

⁴⁷ A scribe should not have been accorded the boyar patronymic form.

⁴⁸ СИРИО. Т. 71. С. 198–269.

9. 1566. The Muscovite negotiating team consisted of boyar and governor (*namestnik*) of Rzhev Vasilii Mikhailovich Iur'ev Zakhar'in⁴⁹, associate boyar, armorer (*oruzhenii*), and governor of Vologda Afansii Vasil'evich Viazemskii; privy gentry-man (*blizhnyi dvorianin*) and governor of Kovel' Petr Vasil'evich Zaitsov⁵⁰; keeper-of-the-seal Ivan Mikhailov syn Viskovatyi; secretary Andrei Vasil'ev; and secretary Druzhina Volodimerov. Counting Viskovatyi as a secretary (which he was, of course), the team consisted of two boyars, a gentry man, and three secretaries. Six speakers make twelve speeches, but not everyone speaks twice. There were two nearly identical rotations. The same boyar opens and closes the presentation.

First rotation: Iur'ev Zakhar'in, Viazemskii, Zaitsov, Viskovatyi, Vasil'ev, Volodimerov

Second rotation: Iur'ev Zakhar'in,* Zaitsev, Viskovatyi, Vasil'ev, Volodimerov**

*not followed by Viazemskii as in the first rotation

**Viazemskii did not speak in the second rotation

Third rotation: Iur'ev Zakhar'in

Iur'ev Zakhar'in spoke three times, Viazemskii once, Zaitsev, Viskovatyi, Vasil'ev and Volodimerov twice⁵¹.

10. 1570. Negotiation with a Lithuanian delegation consisted of one relatively brief rotation of the four speakers: boyar, governor of Livonia Mikhail Iakovlevich Morozov, boyar, major domo, governor of Tver' Nikola Romanovich Iur'ev Zakhar'in, keeper-of-the-seal Ivan Mikhailov syn Viskovatyi, and secretary Andrei Vasil'ev. Each participant speaks once except the lead boyar who opens and closes the presentation. The secretary who compiled the entry on this event for the ambassadorial books conceptualized the multiple-speaker procedure. The four speakers spoke «in segments» (*po stat'iam*), the first of three appearances of a phrase that superbly elucidates the procedure described by Possevino and documented so well by the ambassadorial books⁵².

11. 1576–1578. The five speakers — boyar and Moscow major domo Nikita Romanovich Iur'ev; Privy Gentry-man Royal Councillor (*dumnyi blizhnyi dvorianin*) Afanasii Nagoi; secretaries Andrei and Vasilii Shchelkalov and Ivan Dorofeev — spoke in two identical complete rotations «in segments,» concluding with the boyar's closing remarks⁵³.

12. 1581. The first case from the Possevino mission contains sixty-three columns, five perfect rotations of the five speakers, plus the close by the lead speaker. In this case, however, the lead/close speaker was not a boyar because the team did not include a boyar. A conciliar gentry-man opened and closed the presentation; he outranked by office the other gentry-man fellow-governor who did not belong to the Royal Council and by social status the secretaries. The five speakers were Conciliar gentry man and Suzdal' governor Vasilii Grigori'evich Zuzin;

⁴⁹ In most cases the governorships are probably honorary, to enhance the prestige of the diplomat.

⁵⁰ The relationship of the Privy Council (*Blizhniaia Duma*) to the Royal Council (*Duma*), is contested, but each eventually included men other than boyars, namely gentry, called *dumny dvoriane*, Conciliar Gentry, and secretaries, called *dumnyi d'iaki*. Except where noted, gentry and secretaries in the negotiating teams were not members of the Royal Council.

⁵¹ СИРИО. Т. 71. С. 354–362.

⁵² СИРИО. Т. 71. С. 641–647.

⁵³ ПДС. Т. 1. Стб. 547–567.

Elatmovskii governor Roman Mikhailovich Pivov; secretary Andrei Shchelkalov; secretary Afanasii Dem'ianov; and secretary Ivan Streshnev⁵⁴.

13. 1582. The second multi-speaker session in the Possevino negotiation, which occupies fifteen columns, comprised the same five speakers as the first, plus an additional lead (but not concluding) speaker, boyar and Velikii Novgorod governor Nikita Romanovich Iur'ev Zakhar'in, followed by Ziuzin, Pivov, Shchelkalov, Dem'ianov and Streshnev, who perform two perfect rotations⁵⁵.

14. 1583. This presentation to the ambassador from England by four diplomats (boyar and Novgorod governor Nikita Romanovich Iur'ev Zakhar'in ; boyar, armorer and Rzhev governor Bogdan Iakovlevich Bel'skii; secretary Andrei Shchelkalov; and secretary Sava Frolov) delivered two rotations in perfect order, followed by the closing remarks by the lead speaker. It also contains the third, final iteration of the phrase «in segments»⁵⁶.

Common sense alone dictates that these intricate presentations by multiple boyars, gentrymen and secretaries could hardly have been staged except by having the participants read aloud from a common script, even if such a document does not survive. Such a script must have marked off each change in speaker. I could not find any sixteenth-century chancery Russian equivalent to modern Russian *chitat' vslukh* (to read aloud). However, the edited text in the ambassadorial papers provides additional evidence of the role of reading in the proceedings

As early as 1549 state secretary Viskovatyi «proof-read» (*prochel*) the text of a truce⁵⁷, hardly notable for a professional bureaucrat. However, in 1557 associate boyar Aleksei Adashev, who was not a secretary, and Viskovatyi «read» (*prochli*) a Swedish answer that reproduced what they had «heard» the Swedes declare orally (*otvet esmia vash vyslushali i v vashem otvete pisano*). This passage entails that Adashev could read. A skeptic could argue that «read» meant «heard read aloud» by someone else. In that case only Viskovatyi actually read the document and Adashev's literacy would simply be pro forma. Other usages of «read» in the ambassadorial books argue against that interpretation of this passage.

No ambiguity obtains concerning passages from the ambassadorial books, ironically or appropriately enough, about Possevino's mission to Moscow. The entries begin by noting that the narrative reproduced «the response read in segments,» not, as commonly recorded «spoken,» and then given in writing to envoy Possevino (*takov otvet chten po stati'iam i dan papiny poslu Antoniiu*). After regurgitating those multi-person presentations, the ambassadorial book notes that Ziuzin and Pivov and their associates had «read» their response and that Possevino said that he had heard the sovereign's (Ivan IV's) response and understood it (*kak Vasilei i Roman s tovarishchimi otvet prochli, i papin posol govoril, chto on otvet gosudarev vyslushal i vrazumel*). The text declares after reproducing the second round of presentations that this last response was «read» (*chten*) and then given in writing to Possevino⁵⁸.

Therefore, when Possevino wrote that the boyars (to which we would add negotiators from the gentry and secretaries) read their speeches aloud in rotation to him (except during give-and-take conversations), he was accurately describing Muscovite diplomatic practice, conducted not only by literate secretaries, but also by literate boyars and gentry.

⁵⁴ ПДС. Т. 10. СПб., 1871. Стб. 113–176.

⁵⁵ ПДС. Т. 10. Стб. 282–296.

⁵⁶ СИРИО. Т. 38. С. 86–91.

⁵⁷ СИРИО. Т. 59. С. 302.

⁵⁸ ПДС. Т. 10. Стб. 136, 341.

I do not think that boyars or gentry would have found it demeaning to read a speech out loud, least of all a speech that purported to be the very words of the ruler. Rather, precisely because reading out loud *was* speaking, and everyone, at least at Court, knew that was how it was done, most of the time no one needed to refer to «reading» or to include a description of that procedure in the ambassadorial books. Only one foreigner, Possevino, noted what Muscovites usually found too familiar to point out in native sources.

We should probably not criticize Possevino too severely for characterizing the Muscovite delegations collectively as «Senators» despite their multi-class composition. He could not be expected to acquire sufficient expertise in Muscovite society to appreciate its subtle social mores completely. For example, from his own experience he could easily not have noticed that the senior boyar (when there was one) of the negotiating team usually opened and closed the presentation. Even this social deference to the head-of-mission or chair-of-committee was not absolutely mandatory. The same boyar performed both functions in eight cases (number 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14); different boyars did so in one case (number 8). A boyar opened the presentation but did not close it twice (numbers 3 and 13). Once the boyar who closed did not open the presentation (number 6). Moreover, although Possevino was probably not directly influenced by the literary conventions of the ambassadorial books, he did imitate its habitual collective designation of the team. The texts refer to them as «the boyars» or as the senior boyar, by first name, or name and patronymic, with or without title or office, or two boyars, if present, «and associates» (*tovarishchi*), for example, «Fedor and associates» or «Fedor Mikhailovich and associates.» Everyone seems to have known or be expected to know to whom the short-form name of the lead boyar belonged. Often «the boyars» speak, although only one person can speak at a time and not all members of the delegation/team were boyars. Actions other than speech are also referred to the team by these phrases. Quite commonly a boyar or boyars «and associates» speak or act, or «the boyars» speak⁵⁹. Why the scribes of the Ambassadorial Bureau sometimes «collectivized» the committee's presentation and sometimes «deconstructed» its segments remains unclear, but, regardless, Possevino's collective personification of the negotiating team as «senators» (boyars) unconsciously but accurately imitated Muscovite diplomatic and social protocol.

LITERATE BOYARS

Possevino's description confirms the contents of the ambassadorial books themselves that some boyars and members of the gentry, non-secretaries who constituted the lay (court) elite, were literate. Altogether the thirteen cases of multiple diplomatic speakers including boyars attest that eleven literate boyars made twenty-one appearances in the ambassadorial books.

The literate boyars (in alphabetical order by last name; I have standardized names) and the dates of their appearances are Aleksei Danilovich Basmanov Pleshcheev (1563), Ivan Mikhailovich Iur'ev Zakhar'in (1537), Nikita Romanovich Iur'ev Zakhar'in (1570, 1576–1578, 1582, 1583), Vasilii Mikhailovich Iur'ev Zakhar'in (1553, 1563, 1566); Mikhail Iakovlevich Morozov (1549, 1556, 1570); Petr Vasil'evich Morozov (1549), Vasilii Grigor'evich Morozov (1542 in two separate negotiating sessions), Fedor Ivanovich Umnyi Kolychiev (1563), Afansii Vasil'evich Viazemskii (1566), Fedor Semenovitch Vorontsov (1542), and Ivan Mikhailovich Vorontsov (1553, 1556). Multiple appearances reflect a boyar's

⁵⁹ СИРИО. Т. 38. С. 71–133; Т. 59. С. 41–62, 109–130, 152–154; Т. 71. С. 1–10, 187–302, 356–362.

experience and expertise in foreign relations. Only one of these boyars, M. Ia. Morovzov, appears to have attended the 1566 Assembly of the Land, where he signed its resolutions.

Rationalizing this data by noting that when a literate boyar was needed for a diplomatic mission, a literate boyar was found, misses the point. The point should be that when it was decided that a literate boyar was needed, a literate boyar could be found. We have no reliable way of judging how easy or difficult it was to do so. Knowing how many boyars there were at that time would not tell us how many of them were literate, only how many of them appear in sources which confirm or refute their literacy.

CONCLUSION

Possevino asserts that Muscovite diplomats took turns reading prepared remarks when making presentations. As no one has noticed, diplomatic records confirm that members of a delegation made such presentations by taking turns speaking. We now even know the term Muscovites used for a presentation broken up into segments delivered by rotations of diplomatic term members, *po stat'iam*. However, this procedure was not utilized in the give-and-take of actual negotiating, which Possevino does not discuss, and despite Possevino's account, boyars did not take written notes of Ivan's speeches. Despite these qualifications, the diplomatic records undeniably corroborate the core of Possevino's exposition, diplomats «speaking» segments in rotation, which lends credibility to the other half of the coin, that «speaking» meant *reading* a portion of the presentation aloud. Other passages in the ambassadorial books leave no doubt that diplomatic negotiators read aloud portions of their position papers in rotation. Indeed, the complexity of lengthy multi-speaker presentation, with multiple rotations of personnel as speaker, makes it highly unlikely that any negotiating team member spoke from memory. Moreover, the diplomatic records reference Muscovite diplomatic personnel, not just secretaries, reading documents. In short these boyar (and gentry) diplomats were literate.

What percentage of boyars were literate remains unknown and unknowable. Comprehensive examination of the entire published and unpublished corpus of Muscovite private and public documentation during Ivan IV's reign should disclose more signatures by literate boyars but cannot be expected to encompass the entire boyar corpus. Still, we now know that evidence of boyar literacy can appear where no one expected to find it. Perhaps literate boyars will appear on other already-known source types. In any event, it would not contribute anything to the question of boyar literacy but it would be very interesting to learn when this multi-speaker procedure first appeared and how long it lasted.

Информация о статье

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Заголовок: Boyar literacy and diplomacy during the reign of Ivan IV

Резюме: Историки расходятся во мнениях относительно степени грамотности бояр в царствование Ивана IV. У нас нет боярских автографов, мало эпистолярных памятников. О грамотности свидетельствует относительно небольшое количество боярских подписей, но еще меньше признаний в неграмотности при объяснении того, почему бояре не подписали документ. Замечания Антонио Поссевино о том, что бояре и другие члены московских дипломатических команд зачитывают вслух свои вступительную дипломатическую позицию в начале переговоров, могут быть подтверждены посольскими книгами. В них мы видим дипломатический ритуал, когда бояре один за одним зачитывают свою часть дипломатической декларации, обозначающей позицию Москвы на переговорах. Они ее действительно читали, исходя из важности документа, который должен был звучать очень точно.

Автор в статье показывает, что сложная ротация ораторов могла быть осуществлена только в том случае, если бы все московские дипломаты читали вслух. Более того, в посольских книгах иногда прямо указывается, что делегаты читали документы вслух. Поэтому у нас теперь больше свидетельств боярской грамотности, хотя мы еще не можем оценить процент грамотных бояр. Всестороннее изучение всего опубликованного и неопубликованного массива частной и публичной документации Московского государства времён правления Ивана IV должно выявить больше подписей грамотных бояр, но нельзя ожидать, что это охватит весь боярский корпус. Тем не менее, теперь мы знаем, что свидетельства грамотности бояр могут появиться там, где их никто не ожидал найти. Польские книги дали нам эти новые свидетельства.

Ключевые слова: Иван IV, боярство, дипломатика, образованность, посольские книги

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Title: Boyar literacy and diplomacy during the reign of Ivan IV

Summary: Historians disagree about the degree of literacy of the boyars during the reign of Ivan IV. We have no boyar autographs, few epistolary monuments. Literacy is evidenced by a relatively small number of boyar

signatures, but even fewer admissions of illiteracy when explaining why the boyars did not sign the document. Antonio Possevino's remarks that boyars and other members of Moscow's diplomatic teams read aloud their opening diplomatic positions at the start of negotiations can be confirmed by embassy books. In them, we see a diplomatic ritual, when the boyars, one by one, read out their part of the diplomatic declaration indicating Moscow's position in the negotiations. They actually read it, based on the importance of the document, which had to sound very accurate. The author shows in the article that a complex rotation of speakers could only be carried out if all Moscow diplomats read aloud. Moreover, the embassy books sometimes explicitly state that the delegates read the documents aloud. Therefore, we now have more evidence of boyar literacy, although we still cannot estimate the percentage of literate boyars. A comprehensive study of the entire published and unpublished array of private and public documentation of the Moscow state during the reign of Ivan IV should reveal more signatures of literate boyars, but it cannot be expected that this will cover the entire boyar corps. However, now we know that evidence of Boyar literacy can appear where no one expected to find it. Polish books have given us these new evidences.

Keywords: Ivan IV, boyars, diplomacy, literacy, ambassadorial books

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