

## Chapter 8

### THE MUSCOVITE LAND

DANIIL AL'SHITS EXPRESSED a total lack of surprise that in the *Zadonshchina* the Russians fought for the Rus' Land. After all, Sofonii "could have said 'for the Muscovite Land' (*moskovskaia zemlia*), but, evidently, that was not suitable."<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding Al'shits's lack of appreciation of the development of the myth of the Rus' Land, he was undeniably correct that the Muscovite elite of the period would not have been satisfied for Dmitrii Donskoi to have fought for the Muscovite Land. In no source did Muscovites ever fight for the Muscovite Land, which would be counter-intuitive save for the obvious superiority of the myth of the Rus' Land to any other "Land" in medieval and early modern Rus'. Nevertheless, the phrase, neither a concept nor a myth, can be found in a variety of sources, not all of Muscovite provenance, some of which have been mentioned above. In this chapter I will recapitulate those allusions and supplement them with others in a preliminary exposition of the history of Muscovite Land.

In the Basic Redaction of the *Narration of the Battle with Mamai* Grand Prince Oleg of Riazan' wrote a letter to the Tatar emir Mamai, de facto ruler of the Juchid ulus (Golden Horde). In that (fictitious) letter Oleg sought to arouse Mamai's greed to motivate him to invade Muscovy. Oleg informed his hoped-for ally that the Muscovite Land was full of gold and silver, an equally false assertion because through the seventeenth century Muscovy lacked gold or silver mines. This was the sole appearance of the phrase in that redaction. The same passage also appears in the Chronicle Redaction of the *Narration*. A few manuscripts of the *Narration* alter a reference to the Muscovite principality (*moskovskoe kniazhenie*) that Grand Duke Algirdas of Lithuania hopes to divide with Oleg to read the Muscovite Land. Algirdas elsewhere promises to give his nobles estates in the Muscovite Land and to divide the Muscovite Land with Oleg. References to the Muscovite Land increase significantly in different passages in different manuscripts of the Expanded Redaction. One such segment, a fictional account of Novgorodian participation in the battle on Donskoi's side, noted that Mamai had invaded the Muscovite Land, and that the personified Muscovite Land was in great confusion as a result. Other manuscripts contain Algirdas's lament upon hearing of Donskoi's victory that he had hoped to rule the Muscovite Land or a paean of praise to the Muscovite Land. The so-called Kiprian Redaction of the *Narration*, found in the *Nikon Chronicle*, constitutes a combination of the Basic Redaction and the *Chronicle Tale* (*letopisnaia povest'*) of the battle of Kulikovo Field. The Kiprian Redaction never refers to the Muscovite Land. This strongly suggests that the sole reference to the Muscovite Land in the Basic Redaction is an inter-

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<sup>1</sup> D. N. Al'shits, "Rol' Kulikovskoi bitvy v opredelenii natsional'nogo soznaniia russkogo naroda," *Uchenye zapiski Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 36, Seriya istoricheskikh nauk 3 (1939): 110–23 at 120.

polation and therefore that the Basic Redaction did not mention the Muscovite Land.<sup>2</sup> We would not have expected it to do so. The *Narration* strongly identifies Donskoi with the Rus' Land. The dating of the redactions of the *Narration* is contested, but the Basic Redaction must predate the Kiprian Redaction, and the latter is reliably dated to the compilation of the core *Nikon Chronicle* in the 1530s. I infer that the sole reference to the Muscovite Land in the Basic Redactions was an interpolation, as was replacing the "Muscovite principality" with the Muscovite Land. The real curiosity is that references to the Muscovite Land, albeit overwhelmingly in neutral, descriptive territorial contexts, proliferated in the Expanded Redaction, by consensus dated to the seventeenth century.

By then the myth of the Rus' Land had been superseded in Muscovy by the concept of the "Muscovite state." It would have been blatantly anachronistic to project the "Muscovite state" onto the battle of Kulikovo, but there was no need to displace the Rus' Land in historical references to late fourteenth-century history. Moreover, some of the passages that adduce the Muscovite Land do carry political dimensions, notably the laud of the Muscovite Land. Further research in seventeenth-century sources should provide more context for interpreting the usage of the Muscovite Land in late manuscripts of late redactions of the *Narration*, but for the present we can draw two conclusions: First, Muscovite authors through the sixteenth century did not pay much attention to the Muscovite Land, and second, they must have been familiar with the phrase if it not only survived into the seventeenth century but to a certain degree flourished then.

Metropolitan Ilarion's famous comparison of rulers and saints praised by various lands, in which the Rus' Land praised Grand Prince St. Vladimir, inspired and was plagiarized by the authors of three texts, each of whom adapted that paragraph to suit his own point of view. The *vita* of Dmitrii Donskoi claimed the Rus' Land's affection for Donskoi, and let the city of Kiev and environs praise St. Vladimir. The Tverian monk Foma retained Kiev's praise for St. Vladimir, omitted Dmitrii Donskoi, and let the Tverian Land praise Grand Prince Boris Aleksandrovich of Tver'. Neither mentioned Moscow or the "Muscovite Land." In his *vita* of St. Stefan of Perm', Epifanii Premudryi restored Ilarion's text that the Rus' Land praised St. Vladimir, like Foma omitted Donskoi, but added that Moscow praised St. Metropolitan Petr, and the Permian Land praised its baptizer, Stefan.<sup>3</sup> Not only did Epifanii not write that the Rus' Land praised the very Muscovite saint Petr, but he did not follow grammatical form and write that the Muscovite Land praised Petr, just the city of Moscow, even as he promulgated yet another "Land"-political or at least territorial concept, the Permian Land. The substitution of a city name, Kiev, for the Rus' Land in the *vita* of Donskoi must have been conscious and politically motivated (to claim the Rus' Land for Donskoi), so it is distinctly possible that Epifanii's use of a city name, Moscow, not a "Land" name, the Muscovite Land, must have been deliberate. I do not think it at all likely that Epifanii was unfamiliar with the phrase the Muscovite Land.

2 Charles J. Halperin, "Some Observations on Interpolations in the *Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche*," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* 23 (1981) [1982]: 97–100.

3 Epifanii, *Zhitie Sviatogo Stefana*, ed. V. G. Druzhinin (St. Petersburg: Arkheograficheskaiia kommissiia, 1907), 89–90. Cf. Plokhly, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 73.

His allusion to the Permian Land strongly testifies that he could create “Land” terminology when needed.

As already mentioned, according to the *Pskov II Chronicle*, in 6930 (1422) “In the entire Rus’ Land there was a great famine for three years, previously in Novgorod and all its districts and in Moscow and in the entire (*vsei*) Muscovite and the entire (*vsei*) Tverian [Lands?].”<sup>4</sup> This curious phrasing grammatically indirectly, almost accidentally, implied invocations of the Muscovite and Tverian Lands, in this case in a territorial meaning.

In the laud of Grand Prince Boris Aleksandrovich of Tver’ by the monk Foma, that prince sends word of his support to the blinded and imprisoned Vasilii II. This information reaches the Muscovite Land.<sup>5</sup> Foma was unlikely to go out of his way to associate Vasilii II with the Rus’ Land, so the neutral substitution makes sense. Rather, it is surprising that this is the only instance in which the phrase occurs in the text.

The Muscovite version of the 1456 Novgorod treaty with Vasilii II equated the Muscovite Land, the Rus’ Land, and the Grand Principality.<sup>6</sup> As discussed above, the Novgorodians preferred to call the Grand Principality of Vladimir, in fact Muscovy, the Suzdalian Land rather than the Rus’ Land. This text reflects Muscovite aspirations, not Novgorod recalcitrance, and it is the only occasion on which the Muscovite Land, by association, carried some ideological weight. (The seventeenth century references, even lauds to the Muscovite Land, were politically innocuous.) If the Muscovite Land equals the Rus’ Land, especially in an official document of indisputable Muscovite provenance, then it had acquired some of the aureole of the myth of the Rus’ Land. Two problems remain: first, the extreme rarity of such usage of the Muscovite Land, and second, its utter superfluity. If Muscovy is *the* Grand Principality, namely, of Vladimir and all Rus’, and the Rus’ Land, then there was no need to generate an additional myth of the Muscovite Land.

A late fifteenth-century Muscovite chronicle s.a. 1461 noted that Rostov Archbishop Feodosii was installed as metropolitan “by the Rus’ bishops of our Muscovite Land” (*vla-dykami russkimi nashea zemlia Moskovskaia*).<sup>7</sup> It is puzzling that the chronicler did not say “our Rus’ Land.”<sup>8</sup> In this case the chronicler cannot have been distinguishing “our” Muscovite Land from somebody else’s Muscovite Land, because there was no other Muscovite Land.

Ukrainians’ sense of themselves as Rus’ induced them to avoid describing Muscovy as the Rus’ Land by referring to it as the Muscovite Land. The concept of the Rus’

<sup>4</sup> *PL*, 2:38.

<sup>5</sup> *Inoka Fomy Slovo pokhval’noe o blagovernom velikom kniaze Borise Aleksandroviche*, ed. N. P. Likhachev (St. Petersburg: Aleksandrov, 1908), 42.

<sup>6</sup> *GVNP*, no. 23: 41–43.

<sup>7</sup> *PSRL*, 25:277. Also found in *PSRL*, 18:214, *Simeonov Chronicle*. The only other reference in that chronicle is a cinnabar marginalia s.a. 1408 that Edigei made war on the Muscovite Land (*PSRL*, 18:155, footnote “a”), a geographic reference.

<sup>8</sup> My previous reference to this passage misread it: Charles J. Halperin, “The Concept of the *ruskaia zemlia* and Medieval National Consciousness,” 79, endnote 37.

Land was not unknown to fourteenth- to seventeenth-century Ruthenians (see below). I found the term the Muscovite Land only once in the Belarusian–Lithuanian Chronicles: in 1444 Casimir, King of Poland, fought the Muscovite Land,<sup>9</sup> but it appears in seventeenth-century sources of Ukrainian derivation. In 1626 the Kyivan Orthodox Brotherhood ascribed to Tsar Mikhail Romanov rule over “the entire Muscovite Land” (*vsia moskovskaia zemlia*), which grossly underestimated the territorial boundaries of Mikhail’s realm or grossly exaggerated the extent of the Muscovite Land. Mikhail was also qualified, more to Muscovite taste, as ruling “Great *Rossia*.”<sup>10</sup> A 1636 thank-you note from Cossacks to the Muscovite governor of the border city of Vol’noe, V. Novosiltsev, for permitting free trade across the border lauded him for carrying out his instructions “to organize and defend the Muscovite Land” (*natsavlennomu stroiti i khraniti zemliu Moskovskuiu*).<sup>11</sup> In 1646 King Wladyslaw IV, in congratulating the leading Ukrainian political leader Adam Kysil for his service to the Commonwealth at home and abroad, alluded in Polish to the Muscovite Land (*ziemie Moskiewska*).<sup>12</sup> In 1648 Bohdan Khmelnytsky called Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich of Moscow the “ruler of the Muscovite Land,” the sovereign, Orthodox Christian Muscovite tsar, which made the Muscovite Land a political concept.<sup>13</sup> In 1654 Khmelnytsky alluded to a Ukrainian envoy en route to Sweden who was crossing the Muscovite Land, here no more than a geographic term.<sup>14</sup>

It is difficult to draw conclusions from this scattered and unsystematic evidence. Locating all references to the Muscovite Land in all sources might not solve that problem. Certainly, the phrase existed, but given the ubiquity of the “Land” nomenclature system that is hardly newsworthy. The almost accidental nature of some references attests to the fact that such a term was no more than par for the course, a neutral territorial phrase. In some ways the “Land”-name system outlived its most famous product, the myth of the Rus’ Land. However, non-Muscovite authors, such as Ukrainians, sometimes used the phrase the Muscovite Land deliberately, as an alternative, one might say counter-myth, to Muscovy’s self-identity as the Rus’ Land. Most infrequently, Muscovite book-men could attribute some significance to the concept of the Muscovite Land. All in all, the Muscovite Land could hardly compete with the Rus’ Land for pride of place in depicting the grand principality and later tsardom of Muscovy.

**9** *Letopisi Belorussko-litovskie* in *PSRL*, 35 (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 60.

**10** *Vossoedinenie Ukrainy s Rossiei. Dokumenty i materialy v trekh tomakh*, ed. P. P. Gudzenko, 3 vols, vol. 1: *Ukraina nakanune osvoboditel'noi voiny, 1620-1647 gody* (Moscow: Nauka, 1954), 66–67.

**11** *Vossoedinenie Ukrainy s Rossiei*, 1:254.

**12** *Vossoedinenie Ukrainy s Rossiei*, 1:415–19.

**13** *Dokumenty Bohdana Khmelnyts'kogo 1648–1657*, ed. L. Krip'iakevich and I. Butich (Kiev: Akademii Nauk USSR, 1961), 47–58 at 49.

**14** *Dokumenty Bohdana Khmelnyts'kogo 1648–1657*, 364–65.