

## STUDY GROUP ON EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

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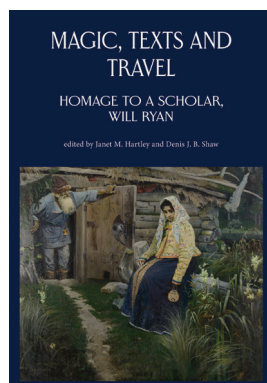
Janet M. Hartley and Denis J. B. Shaw (eds),  
***Magic, Texts and Travel: Homage to a  
Scholar, Will Ryan***, SGECR, London, 2021

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ISBN 978-0-9503314-8-5

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*Boris Uspenskij*, 'Diplomacy and Language (a Russian Embassy to Italy in 1659)', pp. 192–199.

## Diplomacy and Language (a Russian Embassy to Italy in 1659)

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AFTER his accession to the throne in 1645, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich adopted a new title. He started self-styling not in the manner of his immediate predecessors on the throne, but rather in that of Ivan IV, the first crowned Russian tsar. Like Ivan IV, Aleksei Mikhailovich would refer to himself as *otchich* ('paternal heir'), *dedich* ('ancestral heir') and *naslednik* ('successor'), thus putting emphasis on his hereditary right to the throne of the Russian tsars. In his case, unlike that of Ivan, this right looked somewhat dubious: Aleksei Mikhailovich was not related by blood to the dynasty of Rurikids. He began to engage more zealously in international affairs, wanting his new status to be recognized. He sent embassies with friendly letters (*liubitel'nye poslaniia*, literally 'loving epistles') and valuable gifts to various European countries with which Russia had not had earlier diplomatic relations. The main objective of these embassies was not so much establishing friendly relations as receiving any sort of return document where, according to the etiquette of diplomacy, the Tsar's complete title would be reproduced precisely in the way it was written in the letter sent with the embassy. In this way, the new title of Aleksei Mikhailovich that had raised considerable doubt in Western Europe would be confirmed and recognized. The process was not always smooth, however. The very persistence of the Russians in demanding that the title be reproduced accurately would inadvertently raise suspicions that the issue of the title was not merely formal and that political ambitions were involved.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus, in 1667 Aleksei Mikhailovich and Louis XIV of France ('Le Roi Soleil') exchanged messages of friendship. The letter from Aleksei Mikhailovich had his complete title, including the words *samoderzhets*, *otchich*, *i dedich*, *i naslednik*, *i gosudar'*, *i obladatael'* ('autocrat, paternal heir, and ancestral heir, and successor, and Sovereign, and dominator'). According to the diplomatic protocol, the exact title was expected to be fully reproduced in the return letter from the King to the Tsar. However, the King's response omitted the words 'autocrat, paternal heir, and ancestral heir, and successor, and Sovereign, and dominator': or rather, the original Latin letter of the King did not contain them, although they were present in the Russian copy given to the Russian ambassadors. This discrepancy did not go unnoticed, and the ambassadors, the *stol'nik* (an honorary court title) Petr Ivanovich Potemkin and the *d'iak* (a senior official) Semen Rumiantsev, protested to the French authorities by pointing out that the original letter from the King had omitted 'the highest titles':

These suspicions were in fact not totally groundless, since Aleksei Mikhailovich saw himself as an heir or successor of the Byzantine emperors which meant that he, like a Byzantine emperor, would consider the other Christian monarchs to be his potential vassals.<sup>2</sup> At his coronation, Aleksei Mikhailovich received the following words in blessing from the head of Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Iosif: '[...] may you be the Sovereign of the Universe, Tsar and Autocrat of Christians, and may you co-shine like the sun among stars.'<sup>3</sup> It was at the same ceremony that the Patriarch, referring to the wish that the father of the new Tsar (Mikhail Fedorovich) had expressed on his deathbed, stated that henceforth Aleksei Mikhailovich should be styled as 'paternal heir, and ancestral heir, and successor, and dominator'.<sup>4</sup> This wording was perceived as a formula asserting the hierarchical superiority of the Russian tsar over other Christian monarchs.

In 1666–67 Grigorii Kotoshikhin was asked in Sweden why the Russian tsar addressed other Christian monarchs as his vassals, styling himself the 'paternal heir, and ancestral heir, and successor, and Sovereign, and dominator':

Why does the Tsar of Muscovy write to Christian states [styling himself] in the full long titles of an overlord [...] 'paternal heir, and ancestral heir, and successor, and Sovereign, and dominator', and never uses these titles when writing to heathen countries. What is the reason for it?

*Puteshestviia russkikh poslov XVI–XVII vv: Stateinye spiski*, Moscow, 1954, p. 288; see also *Drevniaia rossiiskaia vivliofika ... izdannaia Nikolaem Novikovym* (hereafter DRV), 2nd edition, 20 vols, Moscow, 1788–91, 4, pp. 529–33. A similar episode took place earlier the same year involving the same two ambassadors during their mission in Spain: the royal document in Spanish handed to them had the Tsar's title shortened: DRV, vol. 4, pp. 422–32. When the ambassadors protested, the comment they received was: 'His Royal Majesty had a session with his councillors on this matter, so His Royal Majesty instructed us to tell you that there was no better way of wording in Spanish. And the ambassadors told the officer appointed to look after them: if His Royal Majesty is not going to have this letter of his corrected and re-written, we shall not take such a letter to our Great Sovereign His Majesty the Tsar, — and they returned him the letter. And the officer did not take the letter back but said he would inform His Royal Majesty'. Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>2</sup> See B. Uspenskij, V. Zhivov, 'Tsar and God: Semiotic Aspects of the Sacralization of the Monarch in Russia', in Boris Uspenskij and Victor Zhivov, *'Tsar and God' and Other Essays in Russian Cultural Semiotics*, Boston, MA, 2012, pp. 13–17.

<sup>3</sup> DRV, vol. 7, p. 266.

<sup>4</sup> On the meaning and perception of the word *obladatel'* 'dominator' present in the titles of all Russian tsars from Ivan IV to Peter I, see B. A. Uspenskij, 'Zagadochnaia forma v titule russkikh tsarei', *Slověne: International Journal of Slavic Studies*, 8, 1, 2020, pp. 163–84.

Kotoshikhin's response was that the Tsar did it just for his glory without any reason and that it was the custom in some countries to address the monarch this way for the sake of courtesy, due to the general custom of calling the addressee 'lord' and oneself 'servant', while these countries are not actually his vassal states:

[...] To some states, the Tsar writes [in this manner] for his own glory, not for any reason, and there is a custom in these states to address the Tsar by belittling themselves and praising his person, calling themselves his serfs (*khology*), just as some states have a custom of writing 'your humble servant' by a lord to another lord. And they [the Russians], from these self-belittling letters, assume that they [these states] are actually their vassals, which is not true.<sup>5</sup>

Kotoshikhin's explanation can be illuminated by a case which is the subject of the present contribution.

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In 1658, an embassy of the nobleman Vasilii Bogdanovich Likhachev and the *d'iak* Ivan Fomin was sent to Florence.<sup>6</sup> Shortly before that,

<sup>5</sup> Grigorij Kotošixin. *O Rossii v carstvovanie Alekseja Mixajloviča. Text and Commentary*, ed. A. E. Pennington, Oxford, 1980, p. 53 [fols 56v–57r].

<sup>6</sup> Sources disagree as to when the ambassadors were sent and when they actually arrived in Italy. According to the Russian ambassadorial reports (*stateinie spiski*), the Tsar's order to send the ambassadors was issued on 23 June 7167 (= AD 1659), they were in Arkhangel'sk by 9 September 7168 (= 1659), left Arkhangel'sk on 20 September 7168 (= 1659), arrived in Livorno on 5 January (1660), left Florence on 15 February (1660) and were back in Arkhangel'sk by early June (1660): *DRV*, vol. 4, pp. 339, 340, 342, 355, 359; *Pamiatniki diplomaticheskikh snoshenii Drevnei Rusi s derzhavami inostrannymi* (hereafter *PDS*), 10 vols, St Petersburg, 1851–71, 10, columns 509, 514, 516, 532, 612, 664. However, the contemporary Italian documents on this embassy consistently have the year 1659 rather than 1660: thus, the letters from Livorno reporting the arrival of the embassy date from 19 and 20 January 1659, the letter from the Grand Duke of Tuscany handed to the ambassadors at their departure from Florence was issued on 24 February 1659 etc.: *Documenti che si conservano nel R. Archivio di Stato in Firenze, sezione Medicea, riguardanti l'antica Moscovia (Russia)*, trans. and compiled Michele Boutourlin, 2 vols, Moscow, 1871, 1, pp. 236, 248, 273. (The difference in days is due to the difference between the Gregorian and Julian calendars.) Upon their return to Moscow, the Ambassadorial Chancellery (*Posol'skii prikaz*) provided a translation of the letter from Ferdinand II delivered with the embassy. The translation bears the date presumably referring to when it was undertaken, and it is 2 August 7167 (= 1659): A. [D.] Chertkov, 'Opisanie posol'stva, otpravlennogo v 1659 godu pri tsare Aleksee Mikhailoviche k Ferdinandu II-mu, Velikomu gertsogu Toskanskomu', *Russkii istoricheskii sbornik, izdavaemyi Obshchestvom istorii i drevnostei Rossiiskikh*, vol. 3, book 4, Moscow, 1840, p. 365. Ivan Fomin, the second ambassador, in his letter of application to the Tsar specifies that he was on the mission in 1658–59: *Akty*

Likhachev was granted the title of viceroy of Borovsk. Viceroyalties were in fact defunct by that time,<sup>7</sup> and Likhachev's title was hardly more than nominal, being merely a token intended to impress foreigners (which it did). The embassy was sent to thank the Grand Duke of Tuscany for his earlier (1656) reception of other Russian ambassadors, the *stol'nik* Ivan Ivanovich Chemodanov and the *d'iak* Aleksei Postnikov, who were passing through his domain on their way to Venice.<sup>8</sup> The Likhachev mission is well documented: there are two reports from the ambassador himself and a number of Italian documents related to this event. A juxtaposition of these sources allows us to reconstruct much of the actual course of events.

The mission was remarkably successful: the ambassadors were received with appropriate ceremony and much grandeur,<sup>9</sup> and,

*Moskovskogo gosudarstva, izdannye imp. Akademiei nauk*, 3 vols, St Petersburg, 1890–1901, 3, nos. 167, 150; S. B. Veselovskii, *D'iaki i pod'iachie XV–XVII vv.*, Moscow, 1975, p. 559. One has to assume that it is the ambassadorial reports that have the wrong date: all other data indicate that the Likhachev–Fomin embassy sailed from Arkhangel'sk on 20 September 1658 and had been in the Duchy of Tuscany between 5 January and 15 February 1659 according to the Julian Calendar.

<sup>7</sup> Viceroyalties had been abolished under Ivan IV, but some survived locally until the early seventeenth century: see, for example, R. V. Fomenko, 'Namestnich'e upravlenie i ego al'ternativa: problema effektivnosti mestnogo upravleniia v Russkom gosudarstve v kontse XV–XVI vv.', *Iuridicheskii vestnik Samarskogo universiteta*, 5, 2019, 3, pp. 30–31.

<sup>8</sup> V. Korsakova, 'Likhachev Vasilii Bogdanovich' in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, vol. *Labzina–Liashenko*, St Petersburg, 1914, p. 485; see also PDS, vol. 10, column 558. An Italian agent who met the ambassadors in Livorno (where they had arrived from Arkhangel'sk by sea) reported the rumour that the 'first ambassador' (Likhachev) was 'the governor of some large city unknown to me and that he is generally a more important person than the previous first ambassador [Chemodanov], and that the previous ambassador allegedly never speaks to this first ambassador [of the present mission] with his hat on. Then I asked the interpreter about the purpose of the present embassy, but he told that he heard nothing about it from the ambassadors, save for the fact that they were carrying gifts of much value from the Tsar to His Highness [the Grand Duke of Tuscany], but the interpreter himself believed there was no purpose other than reporting the great respect with which Muscovy received the news of the friendly reception extended by His Highness on their previous mission sent to Venice: Boutourlin, *Documenti che si conservano nel R. Archivio di Stato in Firenze*, vol. 1, pp. 56, 233. Before his departure for Venice, Chemodanov was made viceroy of Pereslavl'–Zalesskii. Again, his appointment must have been purely token: ambassadors seem to have been made viceroys just for the sake of looking important abroad. Chemodanov's position in Russia was actually much higher than Likhachev's, and the rumours of their inequality were apparently spread on purpose, that is, merely for show. The next person after Likhachev who was given the title of viceroy of Borovsk would be P. I. Potemkin, the ambassador to Spain and France in 1667–68; later on (in 1680), Potemkin was made viceroy of Uglich, on the occasion of a new mission to the same countries: N. V-n-v" (N. Voinov?), 'Potemkin Petr Ivanovich', in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, vol. *Plavil'shchikov–Primo*, St Petersburg, 1905, pp. 583–84. After the mid-seventeenth century 'viceroy' seems to have become a token title reserved for ambassadors.

<sup>9</sup> One reads in the correspondence between the hosts of the event: 'We are dealing

moreover, Ferdinand II, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, when receiving the Tsar's letter, declared himself and his family to be *serfs* of the Russian tsar. The ambassadorial report has the following account of the meeting between the Grand Duke and the ambassadors in Pisa:

And the Duke received the Sovereign's letter from the Ambassadors, and kissed it, and started weeping, and spoke in Italian through the interpreter thus: for what [virtue] is it that your Grand Duke Aleksei Mikhailovich, renowned in all States and Hordes, Autocrat of all the Russias, Great and Little and White, sought me, *his serf (kholopa svoego)*, from his faraway great and most glorious city of Moscow, and sent me his letter of love and gifts? And he the Great Sovereign is as high as heaven above earth, so great he is, glorious and most glorious from one end of the universe to the other; and his name is most glorious and awful [that is, awe-inspiring] in all the States, from the old Rome to the new one and to Jerusalem; and how can I, a poor man, pay tribute to the Great Sovereign for his great and abundant favour? And I, and my brothers Mattias, and Leopoldo, and Gian Graziano, and my son Cosimo, are the Great Sovereign's slaves and serfs (*rabi i kholopi*); and the Tsar's heart is in God's hand; that being God's will.<sup>10</sup>

A similar wording was used then by the wife of Ferdinand II, the Great Duchess Victoria della Rovere,<sup>11</sup> who invited the ambassadors to her Florentine palace:

Your Great Sovereign, the most glorious and valiant Tsar, paid us a visit from his faraway great state, sent to my husband, son and brothers

with such a strange and significant mission [...], that His Highness [the Grand Duke of Tuscany] is even deigning to abandon the conventional protocol that is the custom at his court; I consider whether it would be proper, instead of the Lord Senior Majordomo, to have at the city gates Duke [*sic*, actually, Marquis] Salviati himself who at the time of his mission to the German Emperor was granted by His Highness the title of cousin of his Most Illustrious House [...]; see Boutourlin, *Documenti che si conservano nel R. Archivio di Stato in Firenze*, vol. 1, pp. 242–43.

<sup>10</sup> DRV, vol. 4, pp. 345–46; Chertkov, 'Opisanie posol'stva', p. 328. The interpreter in question was Lieutenant Ivan (Giovanni) Sacx in service at the court of the Grand Duke. Initially, the embassy had their own interpreter from Italian, Timofei Toporovskii, who previously had been in Venice with the mission of Chemodanov and Postnikov, but he died suddenly shortly after the departure from Arkhangel'sk, so that 'we were left without any interpreter from the Italian tongue at all', as Likhachev wrote in his report: DRV, vol. 4, pp. 339–41. When the Likhachev–Fomin embassy arrived in Livorno, the Grand Duke sent them an interpreter of his own: see DRV, vol. 4, pp. 339–41, 348; Chertkov, 'Opisanie posol'stva', p. 328; PDS, vol. 10, column 518.

<sup>11</sup> In the embassy's reports she is referred to as *kniaginia Anna* 'Princess Anna': DRV, vol. 4, p. 349; PDS, vol. 10, column 601.

his gifts of love and a letter of his, the Great Sovereign; by which great favour of his he put *us his serfs (nas kholopei svoikh)* into great amazement and delight, since from the beginning of the world such things were unheard of. And we from you, the ambassadors of His Royal Majesty, are pleading for mercy and humbly begging you, may you not blame us in our folly and simplicity if we have not pleased or gratified you, and if anything would have been done not by your custom, because we do not know how to make you pleased; have mercy on us and bestow us with your benevolence and mercy, and tell your Great Sovereign of our diligence, care and love, and ask him the Great Sovereign to have mercy on us, so that he the Great Sovereign will henceforth favour my husband, son and brothers; and my husband, son and brothers are *his slaves and serfs forever (vechnye ego raby i kholopi)*; this is what I beg of you.<sup>12</sup>

There are two surviving recensions of Likhachev's report. The full text recension is a detailed formal account after the standard template, registered in the Chancellery of Secret Affairs (*Prikaz tainykh del*);<sup>13</sup> the second version cited above<sup>14</sup> was written by Likhachev himself.<sup>15</sup> In the full text version, the Grand Duke of Tuscany calls himself also a *rabotnik* ('servant, worker') of the Russian tsar and asks for his patronage, and on one single occasion even refers to himself as the tsar's *rab* ('slave'):

And he, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, with his issue, is pleased to serve the Great Sovereign, His Royal Majesty, and to work for him as his *slave (rab)*.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> DRV, vol. 4, column 354; Chertkov, 'Opisanie posol'stva', pp. 340–41.

<sup>13</sup> See PDS, vol. 10, columns 515–666. The manuscript contains 180 sheets in quarto. Each sheet has a registration signature by *d'iak* Artemii Stepanov: Chertkov, 'Opisanie posol'stva', p. 365. Artemii Stepanov had been a clerk of the Chancellery of Secret Affairs from 1660 and was promoted to the position of *d'iak* in 1674; see Veselovskii, *D'iaki i pod'iachie XV–XVII vv.*, p. 490. The Chancellery of Secret Affairs was abolished in 1676 after the death of Aleksei Mikhailovich. The full-text recension of Likhachev's report must therefore have been registered in 1674–76.

<sup>14</sup> DRV, vol. 4, columns 339–59.

<sup>15</sup> Korsakova, 'Likhachev Vasilii Bogdanovich', pp. 485–86.

<sup>16</sup> PDS, vol. 10, column 571. According to the full text version, when meeting the ambassadors in Pisa, Ferdinand II said: 'Delighted with so much favour from your Great Sovereign, Tsar and Grand Duke Aleksei Mikhailovich, Autocrat of all the Russias, Great and Little and White, His Royal Majesty, that he, your Great Sovereign, His Royal Majesty, from such a [faraway] state of his has honoured me, *his servant (rabotnika svoego)* with his lordly favour, for which lordly favour I do not know what to pay in tribute. But I am pleased to serve the Great Sovereign and work for him forever, as much as he the Great Sovereign pleases and I am able to:' PDS, vol. 10, column 550, see also columns 557, 580, 581, 591, 593. Ferdinand's valedictory speech in the full text



Likhachev apparently prized his report very much. On the way back across the Gotthard Pass 'the state treasury and baggage [...] were carried by oxen, but the letter of the Florentine Duke and the report were carried by the clerks, for horses with packs, if the wind is strong, are thrown into deep abysses [...] And Ambassador Vasilii Likhachev and all the others were walking on foot'.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, the document contained exactly what the Russian Tsar wanted to hear.

One can safely assume that Ferdinand II Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, never saw himself and his family as serfs of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. Does this suggest that the whole episode was invented by the ambassador? Historians have favoured this interpretation: for example, V. D. Korsakova wrote that, in Likhachev's view, 'there was no person more illustrious than Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, so he was just putting into the mouth of the Grand Duke of Tuscany the words [normally] heard in the Kremlin'.<sup>18</sup>

However, this is unlikely to have been the case. More probably the report of the Russian ambassador was based on the actual words pronounced by the Grand Duke but understood by Likhachev in his own way. The whole story seems to have arisen from the phenomenon described by Kotoshikhin, namely, the Duke's declaration that he and his family are the serfs (*kholopi*) of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, derives from a common Western formula of courtesy, misinterpreted by the Russians in a too literal sense, cf.: 'And they [the Russians], from these self-belittling letters, assume that they [these countries] are actually

version closely matches what his wife says in the shorter one (her words have been cited above): 'As you with God's help arrive to the reigning city of Moscow and you see your Great Sovereign, His Royal Majesty, in his most illustrious person, then if I pleased not him the Great Sovereign, His Royal Majesty, in any way or committed any indiscretion against him the Great Sovereign, His Royal Majesty, may you address the Great Sovereign, His Royal Majesty, and intercede for me, and plead his mercy so that your Great Sovereign, His Royal Majesty, spread his lordly mercy over my simplicity and henceforth me, *his eternal servant (vechnago rabotnika svoego)*, and my son, and my brothers be honoured with his great lordly favour; and to him the Great Sovereign, His Royal Majesty, for his great lordly favour and honour, we are to serve forever and to work for him now and henceforth, as well as our successors, for the rest of our lives, and as best we can.' *PDS*, vol. 10, column 611.

<sup>17</sup> *DRV*, vol. 4, p. 356. The Likhachev-Fomin embassy, as mentioned above, arrived in Italy by sea, from Arkhangel'sk to Livorno. They had no ships chartered for their return journey (see Boutourlin, *Documenti che si conservano nel R. Archivio di Stato in Firenze*, vol. 1, p. 244), so that the whole embassy had to cross the Alps in order to get to Amsterdam, from where they would sail to Arkhangel'sk.

<sup>18</sup> Korsakova, 'Likhachev Vasilii Bogdanovich', p. 487. According to Chertkov, 'One does not know who translated the speech of Ferdinand II [...], but it seems to be different in wording from what the Duke presumably must have said': Chertkov, 'Opisanie posol'stva', p. 328.



their vassals, which is not true.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Ferdinand II in his response to the Tsar refers to himself as his 'most humble servant' and uses a number of other formulas of courteous self-deprecation.<sup>20</sup> Likhachev clearly misunderstood the conventions of courtesy and was inclined to interpret the rhetoric quite literally, since it was consistent with his idea of how foreign monarchs should address the Russian tsar.

The Grand Duke of Tuscany's declarations of servant-like devotion and loyalty must have attracted attention in Moscow. It is hardly a coincidence that the fuller version of Likhachev's report was brought not to the Ambassadorial Chancellery (as it should have been) but to the Chancellery of Secret Affairs: there must have been a special request for the manuscript. Ferdinand's words did not only gratify the vanity of Aleksei Mikhailovich, but were in line with his self-perception, reinforcing his notion of the Muscovite tsar as the true successor of the Byzantine emperors. At the same time, for the more experienced clerks at the Ambassadorial Chancellery, such as Kotoshikhin, the mechanisms that created such texts were apparently no secret.

<sup>19</sup> Pennington, *Grigorij Kotošixin*, p. 53 [fol. 56v–57r].

<sup>20</sup> See the letter from Ferdinand II sent with the Russian embassy: Boutourlin, *Documenti che si conservano nel R. Archivio di Stato in Firenze*, vol. 1, pp. 273–74, no. XLVIII (a draft in Italian: *ibid.*, pp. 77–78, no. XLII). The translation of the document from Latin into the Russian officialese (see Chertkov, 'Opisanie posol'stva', pp. 365–67) fails to convey the refined style of the original.