

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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(1600-1700)

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Pseudo-epigraphic correspondence with the Ottoman sultan

The Russian versions of the apocryphal correspondence with the Ottoman sultan

DATE 17th and early 18th centuries

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Various, including Polish, German, Dutch, possibly Ukrainian

DESCRIPTION

The several Muscovite Russian texts of an apocryphal correspondence by the Ottoman sultan are a subset – for the most part translations – of a very large European corpus of such anti-Turkish literature. In many cases, the threatening letter purporting to be from the sultan stands alone; in other cases, it is accompanied by a response ostensibly written by the Christian ruler or group he had addressed. Content may vary in details such as addressee, titulature, or specificity of threats, but the substance of the letters' message is generic. After an *intitulatio* that largely parodies his real titles, emphasising the pretensions of the sultan, the sultan demands submission. Those who resist will be destroyed by his armies, their churches desecrated, their women ravished. For Christians to expect that their 'crucified God' can help them is wishful thinking. The responses generally assert just the opposite: faith in the Christian God will result in the defeat of the Turks, the conversion of their places of worship into churches, and so on. Only occasionally do the letters incorporate references derived from any of the widespread polemical literature devoted to exposing what to Christians was the falsehood of Islam or invoking the literature of prophecy about the downfall of the Ottomans. There is little detail in the letters about anything of substance with regard to either faith, its beliefs or practices.

The genealogy of the letters outside Russia can be traced to the late 15th century; over the next two centuries they became possibly the single most widespread polemical work of anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic propaganda in Europe. They generally appeared at moments of impending or actual conflict with the Ottomans, which means that certain details might change with each new edition to fit the particular historical moment. The addressee might at one time be the king of Poland, at

another the Habsburg emperor, at another the Cossacks; the capital city of the particular ruler might be named, or dates of the letters altered. It is clear that the primary purpose of the letters was to rouse Christian sentiment during wars against the Turks and reinforce the message of news reports about the Turkish threat.

Outside Russia, the letters were often printed separately or combined in other imprints (broadside, pamphlets, newspapers). They also circulated as manuscripts. The Russian versions are known only from manuscripts. There is no standard contemporary title for the many variants. In German, a typical title might begin *Absagbrieff*, in Dutch, *Ontsegh-brief*, though often the titles might begin simply 'Copy' (as in Polish *Kopia listu cesarza tureckiego*, 'Copy of the Turkish emperor's letter'). Current Russian reference works and scholarly publications of the texts generally designate them as *Legendarnaia perepiska* ('Legendary correspondence') or (sing.) *Legendarnoe poslanie* ('Legendary missive'), with further specification of the addressee: the king of Poland, the Habsburg emperor, the Cossacks, etc., and a date, where it can be established. The translated Russian texts include the following, none of which is directly dependent on any of the other Russian texts (that is, all represent separate translations of non-Russian sources):

1. The sultan's letter to the king of Poland, translated from a Dutch newspaper published in 1621.
2. A different letter of the sultan to the king of Poland, translated from German, with an internal date of 1637, the translation probably made within a few years of that date. So far the direct source for the Russian translation has not been identified.
3. The sultan's letter addressed to the king of Poland and the Habsburg emperor, probably dating to the mid-17th century, known only from a single late 17th-century manuscript copy.
4. The sultan's letter to German rulers and all Christians, dated 1663, translated from a Dutch broadside in early 1664.
5. A different letter by the sultan addressed to the Habsburg emperor and the emperor's reply, dated 1663. While it is not inconceivable that at least the reply was created in Muscovy (a view still held by some Russian scholars), the evidence points to both letters being a translation whose exact source has not yet been identified. The standard Russian edition of this text erroneously includes a line indicating that it was translated from German in 1669.

6. A letter of the sultan to the king of Poland, dated 1673, known from a single late 17th-century manuscript copy.
7. The sultan's letter to the king of Poland, dated 1678, translated from an as yet unidentified Polish original.
8. A correspondence between the sultan and the Chyhyryn Cosacks, consisting of an elaborate *intitulatio* but then only a single sentence *dispositio*, dated 1678; translated from a presumed Polish original. Some Russian and Ukrainian scholars insist that it is an original composition created either in Ukraine or in Muscovy.
9. A correspondence between the sultan and the Habsburg emperor, dated 1683, translated probably from German and known in only one manuscript copy.
10. Two different translations of the sultan's letter addressed to all Christians, re-dated 1716.

In addition to the translated letters, there are long and short versions of an imagined correspondence between the sultan and Tsar Ivan IV ('the Terrible') composed in Muscovy some time between the late 16th century and the end of the first quarter of the 17th century. There is no direct connection between these texts and those of the translated letters, the sources being other works of Muscovite literature. Apart from a few epithets, the content of the letters has little to do with Christian-Muslim polemic. The sultan demands tribute and reminds Ivan that he, the sultan, is ruler of the Holy Land, among other places. Ivan asserts that he is a divinely appointed defender of Orthodoxy, the sultan is an unbeliever (*nevernyi*) who worships in pagan temples (*molenie tvorish' kapishcham idol'skim*). Proof of how the Deity will support the victory of the true faith over the servant of the Devil can be seen in the tale of how, when the Turks attacked Rhodes in the hope of bringing back to Constantinople the body of St John Chrysostom, the miraculous intervention of the saint sank their fleet. While it is possible that the letters might have been composed as an indirect reminder of the Muscovite conquest of Muslim Kazan in 1552 and reflect something of the ongoing relations of Muscovy with the Crimean Khanate, in which questions about 'tribute' frequently arose, the main message they convey to their Muscovite audience is that Ivan (and by extension, his successors on the throne) is the one true divinely appointed ruler, the defender of the true Orthodox faith. Copies of the sultan-Ivan correspondence are to be found in the company of copies of the translated correspondence of the sultan, knowledge of which may have inspired the creation of the Ivan letters.

Scholarship on the letters has divided over the question of their originality. Kharlampovych and, exhaustively, Waugh have argued for translation; Nud'ha, and especially Kagan-Tarkovskaia for originality of the Russian and Ukrainian texts. The most recent studies (by I. Maier and S. Shamin), by identifying the exact Western sources for two of the Russian translations, have strengthened Waugh's arguments. Kagan-Tarkovskaia's publication of many of the texts (if not all her interpretations) remains fundamental for their study but must be supplemented at every step by the analysis in Waugh, *Great Turkes defiance*.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Russian texts of the apocryphal letters have little broader significance in the history of Christian-Muslim disputation, except for the fact that they have been more closely studied than any of the non-Russian versions of these texts. That study (Waugh, 'On the origins'; *Great Turkes defiance*), for example, has traced the earlier genealogy of the letters and has for the first time addressed seriously the question of what other Slavic versions of these letters exist, the evidence being that in the early modern era they were abundant in Poland but only to a limited degree in Ukraine.

Within the Russian context the letters are of interest for several reasons. Importantly, they demonstrate an active awareness in Muscovy of some of the broader body of European *turcica*, evidence that reinforces historiography emphasizing the substantial increase in Russian contacts with Europe in the 17th century prior to the 'westernizing reforms' of Tsar Peter I ('the Great'). For the most part, the Russian translations seem to have been made soon after the source texts became available elsewhere and in connection with current foreign policy concerns. While Muscovite translation of foreign news and pamphlet literature was in the first instance government-sponsored and intended for a small circle of the elite, the apocryphal letters did circulate outside the chancery milieu, and in a few cases in a good many copies. However, there is no evidence they were deliberately disseminated to influence public opinion about the Turks or Islam, even if the interest in the texts (judging from codicological evidence of the manuscripts) may have in part been stimulated by anti-Muslim sentiment or at least an interest in the exotic 'other' represented by the Ottomans. Muscovite relations with the Ottoman Empire and its Crimean Tatar allies were one of the priorities of Russian foreign policy.

The letters can be connected with developments in Muscovite literary culture which began to use documentary genres as the basis for creating original works for belletrist or propaganda purposes. At the very least, the proof for this is in the fact that copies of the apocryphal letters are often found in the same manuscripts as copies of other such works of 'documentary belles lettres'.

Finally, the Russian letters are of interest for the fact that long after their first appearance, they came to be copied and disseminated as propaganda during wars against the Ottoman Empire, were invoked in connection with the shaping of national identity, or were adapted for specific domestic political purposes. Copies of the letters circulated, for example, during the wars of Catherine the Great against the Ottomans in the last third of the 18th century, and they re-surfaced during the Balkan wars of the 1870s. The best-known versions of the sultan's correspondence with the Cossacks, in which he addresses the Zaporozhians and the *dispositio* of the letters has been expanded and vulgarized, seem not to have emerged before the middle of the 18th century. In their subsequent history they are to be connected with imaginings about Cossack identity, evoked most vividly in Ilya Repin's late 19th-century canvas depicting the Cossacks penning their letter to the sultan. That the correspondence involves the sultan (and thus the Islamic world) is clearly of little consequence. Likewise, when yet further versions of the letters appeared in the Civil War following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, they had become merely popular literary models for political polemic that had nothing to do with the Turks or Islam.

PUBLICATIONS

There is no single bibliography recording all the European versions of the apocryphal correspondence.

For the 16th century see: C. Göllner, *Turcica. Die europäischen Türken-drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, vols 1-3, Bucharest, 1961-78 (where many are listed)

In addition, various national bibliographies need to be consulted, especially for the 17th century in the absence of any comprehensive bibliography for its *turcica*. There is no easy way to locate copies in manuscript collections, many of which await any kind of analytical cataloguing.

The manuscripts of the Russian versions of the letters have been quite thoroughly studied and their texts edited. The standard bibliographical guide to this work (though in need of expansion, updating and correction) is:

M.D. Kagan, arts. 'Legendarnoe perepiska Ivana Groznogo s turetskim sultanom', 'Legendarnaia perepiska turetskogo sultana s tsesrem Leopool'dom', 'Legendarnaia perepiska turetskogo sultana s chigirinskimi kazakami', and 'Legendarnoe poslanie turetskogo sultana nemetskim vladeteliam i vsem khristianam', in D.S. Likhachev (ed.), *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi. Vyp. 3 (XVII v.)*, St Petersburg, 1993, vol. 2, pp. 218-31

The Russian sources (and some of the Polish ones) have been published along with studies on them, notably by Kharlampovych, Kagan (-Tarkovskaia), Eustachiewicz and Ingłot, and Waugh. In addition to these works, which are listed below, some of the letters have been anthologized in:

D.S. Likhachev et al. (eds), *Biblioteka literatury Drevnei Rusi, XVII vek.*, St Petersburg, 2010, vol. 16, pp. 34-43 (annotation on pp. 549-56) (comprising texts that clearly reflect the editors' belief that all are original Muscovite creations)

L.A. Dmitrieva and D.S. Likhachev (eds), *Pamiatniki literatury Drevnei Rusi. XVII vek. Kniga vtoraia*. Moscow, 1989, p. 16-25 (annotation on pp. 587-93) (the correspondence with Ivan the Terrible, one version of that with Emperor Leopold, and the correspondence with the Chyhyryn Cossacks)

STUDIES

I. Maier, "Ontsegh-brief van den Turckschen Keyser..." Ein fiktiver Brief des türkischen Sultans an den König von Polen in russischer Übersetzung (1621)', in P. Ambrosiani, I. Lysén et al. (eds), *Jako blagopesnivaja ptitsa. Hyllningsskrift till Lars Steensland* (Stockholm Slavic Papers 32), Stockholm, 2006, 135-46 (complete textual comparison proving the exact Dutch source for the Russian trans. of 1621, correcting Waugh 1978, which indicated a different original)

I. Maier and S. Shamin, "Legendarnoe poslanie turetskogo sultana nemetskim vladeteliam i vsem khristianam" (1663-1664 g.). K voprosu o rasprostraneniі perevodov evropeiskikh pamfletov iz Posol'skogo prikaza v rukopisnykh sbornikakh', *Drevniaia Rus'. Voprosy medievistiki* 4/30 (2007) 80-9 (publication of the archival original of the 1664 trans. with a facsimile and transcription of its printed Dutch source)

- D.K. Uo (D.C. Waugh), *Istoriia odnoi knigi. Viatka i 'ne-sovremennost' v russkoi kul'ture Petrovskogo vremeni*, St Petersburg, 2003, esp. pp. 100-1, 298-300 (Appendix 5, a previously unpublished letter of the sultan to the king of Poland and a previously unpublished variant of the sultan's correspondence with Emperor Leopold, textually connected with that of 1663)
- D.C. Waugh, *The Great Turkes defiance. On the history of the apocryphal correspondence of the Ottoman sultan in its Muscovite and Russian variants*, Columbus OH, 1978 (the first serious attempt to contextualise the Russian texts with reference to their European sources, this remains the most thorough study of their origins; it includes in appendices a number of previously unpublished versions of the letters)
- V.A. Friedman, 'The Zaporozhian letter to the Turkish sultan. Historical commentary and linguistic analysis', *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 2 (1978) 25-38 (out of touch with the literature, but perhaps useful for its linguistic commentary)
- D.C. Waugh, 'On the origins of the 'Correspondence' between the sultan and the Cossacks', *Recenzija. A Review of Soviet Ukrainian Scholarly Publications* 1/2 (1971) 3-46 (the most thorough study of the origin of the Cossack letters, with textual appendices)
- M. Evstakhevykh (Eustchiewicz) and M. Inhl'ot (Ingłot), 'Pol's'ki versii lystuvannia zaporiz'kykh kozakiv z turets'kym sultanom', *Ukrains'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal* (Kiev) 8 (1966) 116-20; 10, (1966), 132-7 (includes previously unknown Polish versions of the texts published here in Cyrillic transcription)
- M.D. Kagan-Tarkovskaia. 'Perepiska zaporozhskikh i chigirinskikh kazakov s turetskim sultanom (v variantakh XVIII v.)', *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* 31 (1965) 346-54
- H.A. Nud'ha, *Lystuvannia zaporzhtsiv z turets'kym sultanom*, Kiev, 1963 (lacking in serious critical analysis, but discusses the long-term history of the use of the texts)
- M.D. Kagan, 'Legendarnyi tsikl gramot turetskogo sultana k evropeiskim gosudariam. Publitsisticheskoe proizvedenie vtoroi poloviny XVII v.', *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* 15 (1958) 225-50
- M.D. Kagan, 'Russkaia versiia 70-kh godov XVII v. perepiski zaporozhskikh kazakov s turetskim sultanom', *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* 14 (1958) 309-15

- M.D. Kagan, 'Legendarnaia perepiska Ivana IV s turetskim sultanom kak literaturnyi pamiatnik pervoi chetverti XVII v.', *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* 13 (1957) 247-72
- É. Borschak, 'La lettre des zaporogues au sultan', *Revue des Études Slaves* 26 (1950) 99-105 (relies heavily on the interpretations by Kharlampovych but does not cite him)
- K.V. Kharlampovych, 'Lystuvannia zaporoz'kykh kozakiv iz sultanom', *Zapysky Istoychno-filolohichnoho Viddilu* 4 (1923) 200-12 (includes publication of several of the texts from the MS discussed *in extenso* in Waugh *Istoriia*)

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