

Jos Schaeken, Leiden

On Language Learning and Intercultural Communication in Seventeenth-Century Russia*

1. Introduction

The British Library preserves a remarkable collection of Russian documents from the early age of Tsar Peter the Great. The Cyrillic texts, 114 folios in total, are part of a large and heterogeneous convolute (Harley 6356), including twenty-two other manuscripts written in different languages (English, Latin, French, and Arabic).¹ The texts have recently been published by P.S. Stefanovič and B.N. Morozov under the title “Roman Vilimovič v gostjach u Petra Ignat’eviča: Pskovskij archiv anglijskogo kupca 1680-ch godov.” The title already indicates that we would be dealing with a unique collection: an “archive” of an English merchant with the russified name Roman Vilimovič, who was visiting a certain Petr Ignat’evič in Pskov in the late seventeenth-century.

This paper offers an analysis of the collection and a critical review of the far-reaching conclusions drawn by the editors. I will first discuss the manuscript and its contents (par. 2 and 3) and then focus on the identification of persons, in particular foreigners, mentioned in the collection and the assumed close intercultural relationship between the two main characters, Roman Vilimovič and Petr Ignat’evič (par. 4 and 5). In the remainder of the paper (par. 6 and 7), I will argue that the editors have overlooked a very obvious identification of the person Roman Vilimovič and that the proposed alternative explanation puts the collection in a totally different light.

2. The manuscript and its edition

On codicological grounds, the collection can be divided into three parts, labeled here as A, B, and C. On the basis of their contents, parts A and C can be subdivided into two and four sections, respectively:

- (A1) A memorandum of 27 July 1667 from Tsar Aleksej Michajlovič to the governor of Pskov (fol. 228r–230r) about the New Trade Statute (*Novotorgovij Ustav*), which was introduced by him in the same year.
- (A2) The text of the New Trade Statute (fol. 230r–268r).
- (B) A copy of Luther’s Catechism according to the 1627 edition, which was printed in Stockholm, with some additional excerpts from the Gospel (fol. 269r–299r).
- (C) A miscellaneous set of texts (fol. 300r–341r), consisting of:
 - (C1) a copy of the “Parable on Why it is Inappropriate to Leave Church During Chanting” (fol. 300r–302r), a moralistic-religious story (also known as “The Story of the

* Text last revised on November 2, 2010.

1 For a description of Harley 6356, see Catalogue, pp. 359–360.

- Devout Slave,” *Povest’ o blagočestivom rabe*), which is well-attested from the fifteenth century onwards;
- (C2) twenty-three letters of correspondence between two people who usually identify themselves as Roman Vilimovič or RV and Petr Ignat’evič or PI (fol. 302r–303r and 324r–340r); according to the dates of some of the letters, the correspondence took place in the Summer of 1686 (July, August) and the Spring of 1687 (March, April);
- (C3) twenty formulae for writing business, legal and personal letters, of which a number includes dates between September 1682 and March 1687 (fol. 303v–307r, 314r–324r, and 340r–341r);
- (C4) a copy – in fact, the earliest one known to date – of the “Tale of Erš Eršovič” (fol. 307r–313v), a ‘democratic satire’ which was popular in the late seventeenth century.

It should be noted that there is no strict codicological division between sections C2 and C3 which alternate on fol. 302r–307r and fol. 314r–341r. Section C4 is placed in the middle of C3.

Stefanovič and Morozov have chosen to present the different parts and sections thematically in the following order: C2 (“Correspondence between Roman Vilimovič and Petr Ignat’evič”), C3 (“Letter Book” – Pis’movnik), B, C1, C4, and A1. Section A2, the text of the “New Trade Statute,” is not included because it was published already several times: “In itself, it is not connected at all with the rest of the texts of our manuscript, although, at its time it may have had a practical purpose for the owner of the ‘archive’” (p. 72). Nevertheless, it is a pity for historical linguistic research that the editors have not published the full collection. As they point out themselves (p. 67, cf. also p. 10), the texts reveal a number of linguistic features which are highly relevant for the reconstruction of the northwestern variety of Old Russian and Late Common Slavic in general.

According to the editors (p. 10), the collection is written by a single hand, although in an earlier description several hands (“three as a minimum”) have been discerned.² The sample photographs included in the edition – eight pages taken from sections B, C1, C2, C3, and C4 – provide insufficient data for the reader to investigate the number of hands.

3. The collection and its contents

In their lengthy introduction (pp. 7–74), Stefanovič and Morozov claim that we are dealing with a “Pskovian archive” of an English merchant named Roman Vilimovič (RV). In his native language, this would be Robert, son of William; his surname is nowhere attested in the collection. During the 1680s, RV was learning Russian from a professional tutor called Petr Ignat’evič (PI). This relationship can be established on the basis of their correspondence (C2), which is mainly of an educational nature: PI was instructing RV to write correct Russian and made him familiar with various expressions and different styles of letters and official documents (cf. p. 14). On several occasions, RV addresses PI as his teacher (*učitel’*), whereas PI calls RV his student (*učenik*). In letter no. 2, PI writes: “From now onwards, I will write more often to your Grace. And you, possibly, also might want to write to me. And what you do not know how to say, or if you do not know the words

2 CLEMINSON Union Catalogue, pp. 163–166.

that are written on this card, you might want to ask me, and I am glad to explain everything to your Grace." In letter no. 22, RV thanks PI for all his letters: "... and I am glad to see them for learning (*dlja učeniija*) ..." Letters nos. 14 and 15 give us an insight how PI proceeded in correcting RV's letters: "I did not correct your letter, because there is little room between the lines to add (*pripisat*)" (no. 14); "Please, do not blame me for copying the letter you have sent on this sheet of paper, so that it will be clear and intelligible (*razumno i vnjatno*) to you" (no. 15). Also, PI often provides RV with alternatives for idiomatic expressions and phrases. An illustrative example can be found in letter no. 2: "... and I am a disgrace or a shame (*zazorno ili / stydno*) to all good Russian people and foreigners because I was often drunk and always drank a lot, and that I was lazy, and that I did not write anything to you, and that you have wasted a lot of time without learning because of my laziness. And for this, for everything (*za to za vsě*) I ask you forgiveness, have mercy on me for this, forgive (*prošu u tebjja proščeniija, požalui menja v tom, prosti*)".

From the correspondence we also learn that RV was living at PI's house and that PI was paid for housing and teaching him (cf. letters nos. 7 and 8, and 16 and 17). Judging from the fact that several letters were exchanged on the same day (cf. nos. 7 and 8, 16 and 17,³ 18 and 19, 21 and 22), we may assume that RV was doing his 'homework' at PI's place, both working at the same table, so to speak. PI also must have had other students; in letter no. 9 he mentions that a certain Benderik has not come to his home that day and hopes that he is studying well (*ja čaju ..., čto učitca chorošen'ko*) (cf. also the references to other pupils in nos. 10 and 17).

Two other sections in the collection, C1 and C3, can be directly linked to the correspondence. In letter no. 1, PI tells RV that he has written down a parable (*pričča*) for him, which he had promised him earlier and is now presenting to him (*ja teper' tebě ... ob'javljaju*). Apparently, this must be section C1, which in the collection immediately precedes letter no. 1. From letter no. 17 we learn that RV has asked PI how to write bonds and contracts (*kak kabalu i zapis' pišut*). PI informs him that, together with his letter, he is sending him "how they are written" (*kak ich pišut*). Obviously, PI's samples are incorporated in section C3. However, some of them (nos. 1, 2, 17, and 19) carry dates (February, March 1687) which are posterior to letter no. 17 of 25 August 1686. This gives rise to the assumption that only part of the *Pis'movnik* can be directly connected to the correspondence; apparently only those formulae which are dated in August 1686 and which explicitly begin with the words *kabala* or *zapis'*. These are nos. 11, 12, and 13. The following number, no. 14, of the *Pis'movnik* is a short postscript commenting on the textual structure of these types of documents. The editors rightfully assume (p. 105) that this note, which is also dated August 1686, must be attributed to PI; its contents are closely related to RV's request as mentioned by PI in letter no. 17 of the correspondence.

This last observation already suggests that no rigorous division can be made between sections C2 and C3 in terms of the assumed *factual* character of the correspondence (C2), truthfully rendering RV's and PI's thoughts and the events which they describe, and the

3 Note that letter no. 17 is not dated 25 August 1684, as stated in the edition (p. 87), but 25 August 1686. In letter no. 16, RV erroneously puts the date 27 August 1686 at the end, which is pointed out by PI in his reply on the same day ("you have made a mistake in the dates and days").

fictional character of the contents of the sample letters (C3). There are more clues which support this view. For instance, in the correspondence we find two letters, nos. 10 and 20, which are addressed to a "so-and-so" (*imjarek*); no. 10 is signed by PI, whereas no. 20 does not reveal the name of the sender. Both letters do not deviate very much from those in the *Pis'movnik*, which for the larger part includes formulae from anonymous senders and / or to anonymous addressees. Also, letter no. 6 in the correspondence, which is addressed to RV, is signed by a certain clerk (*ploščadnoj pod"jačij*) Mitka Evščev. However, stylistically and thematically it is fully consistent with the letters which carry PI's signature. The editors speculate (p. 79), whether we are dealing with a letter from a second tutor or with a letter from PI which he dictated to the clerk while he was on the road, not having his writing materials at hand. Be it as it may, no. 6 is another example of the eclectic composition of the correspondence, which to my opinion does not necessarily reflect what was originally exchanged on paper between RV and PI. This *caveat* can be corroborated by letters nos. 13 and 16, which were sent by RV, but signed by PI. Keeping in mind that PI corrected RV's letters by rewriting them (see above), we might be dealing with corrected copies made by PI, who at the end wrote down his own name, something which is an understandable mistake. Note that letter no. 13 from RV also contains alternatives for one and the same expression (e.g., *naprasno / ili / i darom* "idle or in vain"); these may have been added by PI in his copy of RV's original letter.

Thus, we cannot take the correspondence as it was handed down in the collection at face value, neither when it comes to its original wordings nor to the nature of the contents which may or may not represent factual information about the two writers. This by no means makes the correspondence less valuable for our knowledge about Russian language learning by foreigners in the pre-Petrine era. The collection clearly shows that language teaching in the seventeenth-century was a serious business, carried out by professionals like Petr Ignat'evič. The evidence we have for this practice from other testimonies is less explicit and only based on accounts made by foreigners, most notably on Tönnies Fenne's Russian-German phrasebook, which was compiled in Pskov some eighty years – i. e. three generations – earlier than the collection under discussion.⁴ Now, we have unique and detailed first-hand information from a professional tutor himself about the methods and procedures in language learning.

4. Identification of persons

The *caveat* expressed above with regard to factual information which can be gained from the correspondence particularly applies to the identity of RV. We can confidently draw conclusions about PI's professional life, but who was Roman Vilimovič?

First of all, it is important to note that nowhere in the correspondence the place of residence of RV and PI is mentioned. According to Stefanovič and Morozov (pp. 14–15), the collection provides strong evidence that this must have been Pskov: section A1 is connected with Pskov, and in eight formulae in C3 we find the same place name. For instance, the first five samples of business letters are all from a Pskovian townsman (*pskovitin posackoi čelovek*) called Grigorei Lukin, and are addressed to the English merchant (*aglincu trgovomu čeloveku*) "Ivan Ivanovič Peket", who was active in Narva (*Rugodiv*). The lin-

4 See HAMMERICH / JAKOBSON, Manual, pp. VIII–IX.

guistic features of the correspondence (see par. 2 above) corroborate the assumption that Pskov indeed was the place where RV and PI were meeting each other. The editors have not been able to find a Petr Ignat'evič in archives and historical sources related to Pskov, although there are some hints that he might have been a member of the Pskovian family of the Koljagins (cf. pp. 19–22).

But again, who was Roman Vilimovič? We do not know his surname and in the correspondence he does not write anything about his professional activities. The only thing we learn from his own letters is that on 25 August 1686 he informs PI that he is thinking of going to Narva the following week (no. 16). On 17 March 1687 he writes PI that he has been in Narva (no. 19): "... I have not written a single line to you for half a year and this can all be justified by the fact that I was in Rugodiv and neglected my studies". The editors connect this piece of information with the English merchant community in Narva, to which section C3 is strongly related. Here, we not only find the name of "Ivan Ivanovič Peket", but also those of other foreigners (*inozemcy*) who were active in Narva: the Englishman "Erofej Bekin, son of Fomin" (no. 6), a certain "Ivan Drach" from England (no. 7), and "Ivan Tirman", the sender of sample letter no. 18. The editors have been able to identify this last person as John Tyreman, a representative of the Eastland Company between 1685 and 1690 (pp. 19, 109).⁵ In addition to this identification, it should be noted that the names of Richard Bacon, son of Thomas Bacon (cf. "Erofej Bekin, son of Fomin") and John Drake (cf. "Ivan Drach") can be found in the list of apprentices of the Eastland Company York Residence of the second half of the seventeenth century.⁶ Richard Bacon is mentioned under the year 1668 and John Drake under the year 1678. In a second list of the same Eastland Company York Residence ("Eastland Company Members 1646–1689"),⁷ we find the names of John Peckett Jr. (cf. "Ivan Ivanovič Peket"), admitted 7 July 1688, and John Tyreman (cf. "Ivan Tirman"), admitted as early as 19 March 1646/7. This means that all English merchants mentioned in C3 belonged to the York Residence of the Eastland Company.

In sample letter no. 18, "Ivan Tirman" / John Tyreman not only refers to "Ivan Pekat", who is obviously the same person as "Ivan Ivanovič Peket" mentioned earlier, but also to "Roman Darvin": "And I have written about this to Pskov, to Roman Darvin ..." The editors speculate (pp. 18–19, 109) that "Roman Darvin" (Robert Darwin in English) may be identical with Roman Vilimovič. In the sample letters, the first name "Roman" also appears in no. 8. Again, the editors contend that this could be RV (p. 101). They also conjecture that his father might be mentioned in the *Pis'movnik*: in nos. 15 (dated as early as 7 September 1682) and 16, we encounter a person named "Vilim" / "Vilimko" (pp. 106–107). Of course, given the fact that Roman / Robert and Vilim / William are very common

5 See also ERPENBECK *Engländer in Narva*, p. 493.

6 BISSET *Eastland Company York Residence*, pp. 14–26. The list is online available at the address: <http://www.york.ac.uk/media/library/documents/borthwick/3.1.3.3Eastland.pdf> (accessed on: 31 October 2010).

7 BISSET *Eastland Company York Residence*, pp. 1–13. The list is online available at the address: <http://www.york.ac.uk/media/library/documents/borthwick/3.1.3.2Eastland.pdf> (accessed on: 31 October 2010).

names,⁸ it is a mere guess that "Roman Darvin" and "Vilim" / "Vilimko" in the *Pis'movnik* can be linked to Roman Vilimovič in the correspondence.

5. Evidence of intercultural communication

On the basis of all these pieces of indirect evidence, Stefanovič and Morozov come to the following characterization of RV:

"Apparently, RV was an Englishman, who either lived in Narva, or was staying there for longer periods, with relatives or friends. He was somehow settled there, conducting transit trade between Russia and England. For running his trade operations successfully, he needed to have knowledge of the Russian language and to have business contacts in northwestern Russian cities. This explains his long-term stay in Pskov and his lessons with a Russian 'tutor' (*repetitor*)." (p. 17)

After having established this profile, the editors point out (see especially pp. 24–46) that the correspondence contains topics which testify to a unique intercultural type of communication between a foreigner and a Russian in the late seventeenth century. PI writes to RV about religious and spiritual issues, quoting the Gospel on several occasions (cf. letters nos. 4, 14, and 20). In return, RV answers: "As you wrote to me, that God does not love a man who does not love his brother, I hope that this is true, and we Christians are all born into this world from one Father" (no. 5). PI also discusses personal affairs, like the poor health of his wife Pelageja (no. 9; cf. RV's response in no. 13). In letter no. 6, PI (or Mitka Evsčev? – see par. 3 above) asks RV to lend him two books (*tetrati*) – The "Story of the Seven Sages" (*Povest' o semi mudrecach*) and "The Story of Ahikar the Wise" (*Povest' ob Akire Premudrom*) – which according to the editors "clearly shows that everyday reading of diverting literature was just as normal for a 'Muscovite' as for an Englishman" (p. 35). In the English summary of the edition, they come to a far-reaching appraisal of the collection and the correspondence in particular:

"The very possibility of such a dialogue in Muscovite Russia shatters the stereotype of mutual mistrust and dislike between Russians and West-European visitors. It is significant that the two men avoid such issues as icons, saints, ritualistic differences to leave the path of conflict and seek shared values. Examples of such relationship between native Russians and visiting westerners are rare (see, e.g., the dialogue of religion in *Grammatica Russica* by Heinrich Wilhelm Ludolf), but they do exist – which means that the Petrine reforms had their (potential) supporters not only among the boyar elite but also in certain circles of the urban middle class. This dialogue was greatly encouraged by the multicultural, rather open-minded environment of the Russian border market town." (p. 166)

6. Roman Vilimovič's identity questioned

To be sure, Stefanovič and Morozov emphasize on several occasions that their conclusions are mainly based on circumstantial evidence, which for the larger part is drawn from section C3, the *Pis'movnik*, not directly from C2, the correspondence between RV and PI

8 For instance, in the two lists of the Eastland Company York Residence (see the two previous footnotes), we find nine other merchants with the name Robert, and as much as thirty-seven people called William.

itself. The identity of RV is a reconstruction which could not be supported by solid evidence: "Efforts to find any traces of the presence of a foreigner in Russia with the name Roman Vilimovič (i. e. Robert, son of William) in the available sources – both published and archival – have not led to a success" (p. 18).

It is surprising that the editors have not found any historical clue about the identity of Roman Vilimovič because it is not very difficult to find a person with the same name, who lived in Russia in the 1680s and who can be directly connected with the city of Pskov: Roman Vilimovič Brjus, or Robert Bruce, born in 1668 in Pskov, son of William Bruce, who was of noble Scottish descent and immigrated to Russia in 1647, and brother of Jakov Vilimovič Brjus, or James (Daniel) Bruce, who was born in Moscow one year after Robert and later became famous as General Field Marshal ("Generalfeldzeugmeister") – being the most high-ranking foreigner in the Russian Empire of Peter the Great – as well as a naturalist and astronomer.

It is all the more surprising that the editors have not explored the possible identification of Roman Vilimovič with Robert Bruce, because this link was already made as early as 1926 by Vladimir Burtsev in his description of the collection Harley 6356: "Was not this Roman Willimovich the renowned R.V. Bruce, one of the Generals and Statesmen of Peter the Great? Many things in this volume appear to confirm this surmise".⁹

The question is whether the contents of the collection indeed can be brought in line with what we know about Robert Bruce.¹⁰ In the years that RV corresponded with PI (1686–1687), Bruce must have been 18 or 19 years old. Obviously, his permanent residence was no longer Pskov at that moment; his father had already died in 1680 and since 1683 he was, together with his brother, a member of the Mock Troops (*potešnye voiska*) of Peter the Great, which later became known as the Preobrazhensky Regiment (*Preobraženskij polk*).¹¹ The historical sources do not give us much more information about his early years. He and his brother must have had a good home education in Russia. Of James we know that he also studied in England; perhaps Robert was also sent there in his youth for further education. Later, Robert Bruce made an outstanding military career in the Russian army, became the first commander of St Petersburg in 1704, and earned the rank of Lieutenant-General in 1710. In 1704 or 1705 he founded Saint Anna's Church, the first Lutheran church in St Petersburg. He died in 1720, just after his appointment as a member of the College of War, and was buried in Saints Peter and Paul's Cathedral.

Considering the fact that Robert Bruce was born and raised in Russia, we may assume that he must have had a rather good practical knowledge of the language. This is not in conflict with the type of correspondence and with the inclusion of the *Pis'movnik* in the collection. Both sections deal specifically with the correct use of the written language. The correspondence does not reflect first-stage language exercises for a non-native speaker. It is rather an 'advanced course', designed for a specific goal: to write official letters

9 BURTSEV Russian documents, p. 674.

10 See *Ėnciklopedičeskij leksikon*, pp. 213–214; FEDOSOV Russian Bruces, pp. 63–64. Information about Robert Bruce on the Internet is mainly based on the article in the eighth volume of the Brokgauz & Efron Encyclopedia (1891). On Scottish-Russian relationships in the seventeenth century in general, see the collection of articles in ARTEM'EVA / MIKEŠIN Scotland and Russia.

11 See AZANČEVSKIJ Istorija, p. 2.

and use standard phrases. This is a goal that would fit the profile of someone like Robert Bruce – his background and his age at the time of the correspondence.

What about the type of texts which are included in the *Pis'movnik*? These do not reflect Bruce's later career. However, we have to keep in mind that in the 1680s he was still a young man. He may have planned several future activities and the acquisition of a general knowledge of a broad range of text types would always come in handy.

7. Conclusion

What are the odds that Roman Vilimovič is the same person as Robert Bruce, son of William? These odds are so obvious that Stefanovič and Morozov should have taken up the task to thoroughly investigate the contents of the collection in the light of an identification of both persons. To my opinion, the collection does not provide any evidence which can refute such identification. This also implies that the far-reaching statements of the editors about revising our views on intercultural communication between foreigners and Russians in Muscovite Russia are difficult to uphold. Bruce was not a foreign visitor, not a Western merchant in a far and exotic country, trying to communicate with its natives in their own language and to explore intercultural relationships. He was an immigrant, who in his younger years tried to learn the subtleties of the written Russian language and oriented himself on a future career in the land where he was born and raised. If RV is in fact Robert Bruce, the collection now published as a "Pskovian archive of an English merchant" would be more adequately described as a "Pskovian archive of a Scottish immigrant."¹²

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12 I am indebted to A. A. Gippius and S. M. Micheev, Institut slavjanovedenija RAN, for drawing my attention to the collection under discussion. I am grateful to F. J. Thomson, University of Antwerp, for providing me with further information about the Russian Bruce family.

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Summary

On Language Learning and Intercultural Communication in Seventeenth-Century Russia

The article offers a critical analysis of a recently published collection of late seventeenth-century Russian texts. According to the editors, the collection not only enhances our knowledge about Russian language learning by West-European foreigners in the pre-Petrine era, but also testifies to an "intercultural dialogue" in Muscovite Russia, which fundamentally changes the general view of (negative) stereotypes of "mutual mistrust and dislike." I argue that the collection indeed gives us valuable and detailed first-hand information about the methods and procedures in Russian language learning. However, the claim that the collection is a unique example of (positive) "intercultural communication" in the seventeenth-century should be rejected in view of the most obvious identification of the main foreign character which figures in the collection: Roman Vilimovič.