

A Foreign Servant of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich: Personal Experience and Collected Knowledge of an Interpreter

Ludwig Steindorff

Christian-Albrechts-Universität at Kiel, Germany

steindorff@oeg.uni-kiel.de

Review of: *Oleg Rusakovskiy*, ed. *Dnevnik perevodchika Posol'skogo prikaza Kristofa Bousha (1654-1664)*. Perevod, kommentarii, nemetskii original. Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Vysshei shkoly ekonomiki, 2024, 424 p. ISBN: 978-5-7598-4018-3 (e-book).

During my student years, I read an introduction to the working techniques of a historian. According to the author, historians sometimes feel like detectives who solve a complicated case thanks to their special skills. Oleg Rusakovskiy's work on the book under review is a perfect example of this experience. Who was the author of the manuscript discovered a few years ago in the Library of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg? The manuscript, consisting of 189 sheets written in German, contains a diary that covers the period from August 4, 1654 until December 18, 1664. The number and length of entries per year vary, with each year followed by a "supplement" (*supplementum*) offering further information about important events during the year. The main topics of the diary are warfare and diplomatic activities surrounding the Russian-Polish conflict from 1654 onwards, but the diary also touches on scandals within the Orthodox Church, the copper coin crisis in Muscovy, plagues, etc. The writer is interested more in the actions of people than in general reflections about their intentions and the structural preconditions. He highlights moments of cruelty in Muscovite warfare, including the practice of abducting women and children, but he frequently shows compassion for the Polish king and those who are loyal to him. Nevertheless, the author's personal loyalty to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich is beyond any doubt. As for historical geography, the term "Ukraine" appears more than thirty times in the diary. Considering the diary as a whole, the author was certainly employed in the "Ambassadorial office" (*Posol'skii prikaz*).

Handwriting and watermarks prove that the manuscript is not contemporary to its content, but from the early eighteenth century. It was evidently used by the historians Johann Georg Lotter and Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer, both members of the young Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, when they worked in 1736-1737 on an "Attempt of a Description of Life and Deeds of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich" (*Opyt opisaniia zhizni i deiatel'nosti tsaria Alekseia Mikhailovicha*). Although this work was never published, a draft of it was preserved. In their work, they identified the author of the diary as a captured Pole in Russian service. Another hand added the name of "Gregori Kolerckzy," which appears once in the diary (18). The surviving copy of the diary was evidently made for Lotter and Bayer, while the original was returned to the unknown owner, never to be seen again. In 1870, following up on a suggestion by Gerhard Müller, P. P. Pekarskii identified "Kolerckzy" as the well-known interpreter Grigorii Kolchitskii (23).

While analyzing the content of the rediscovered manuscript of the diary, Rusakovskiy quickly realized that Grigorii Koltchitskii's known itinerary does not align with the diary or its clear sympathies for Poland and Lithuania. Instead Rusakovskiy then proposed that the interpreter mentioned alongside "Gregori Kolerckzy" in the same section of the diary could be the author of the diary: *Christoph Bousch*, whose itinerary, as described in the diary, aligns perfectly with other historical sources.

Bousch does not mention any personal matters in his diary, which nonetheless allows us to correct and enrich the biography of the author. According to conflicting sources, his origins are linked to Livonia, Courland, or Poland. Based on his use of the Julian calendar in his diary (29), Rusakovskiy suggests that Bousch may have been a Lutheran from Courland. However, this is not a strong argument, because the Julian calendar was commonly used in the context Bousch was writing. Ultimately, Bousch's obvious sympathy for the Polish Commonwealth and his knowledge of German, Polish, and Latin point to an origin from a city in Courland or Polish Livonia.

As we can conclude from the diary (29), Bousch was captured at the end of July 1654 near Orsha. By autumn 1655, he began serving as a *translator*, as he refers to himself in the diary, at the *Posol'skii prikaz*, after spending a certain time in a "prison" (*tiurma*), which was probably a monastery (30) as part of his conversion to Orthodoxy, after which he appears in Russian documents under his new baptismal name, Vasili. The conversion was certainly motivated by pragmatic interests, as Bousch does not show any sympathy for Orthodoxy in his diary. Soon after his conversion, he married a widow named Ul'iana Fedorovna Obraztsova, with whom he had at least three children. He received a house in Moscow's Kitaigorod neighborhood, close to the Kremlin walls. In the Meyerberg album, there is a drawing depicting the reception of the Austrian envoys by Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich on May 18, 1661. The person identified as "*der moßcowitische translator*" is most likely Christoph Bousch (12). Bousch died at the end of 1667 in Mitau (Mitava/Jelgava) on his way home to Moscow from an embassy to the Prince Elector of Brandenburg, who had to be informed about the armistice of Andrusovo. According to various documents, Bousch's wife outlived her husband by twenty years and later moved to a house near Tverskaia Street.

The diary is partly based on events that Bousch either witnessed firsthand or was at least close to, and partly on information from other sources (47), including written materials he had access to through his work at the *Posol'skii prikaz*. He consistently writes from the perspective of an observer, never as an active participant. We can only guess why Bousch did not continue his diary after the end of 1664 – a question that Rusakovskiy does not address. It is as if the existing diary is a second version based on earlier notes by Bousch. This might explain why entries for certain dates sometimes anticipate future events, and why, in addition to revising his notes for one year, Bousch added the *Supplementa*. Perhaps Bousch did continue to make notes after 1664, but he failed to revise them, and they were subsequently lost.

As Rusakovskiy points out, the attitude and style of the diary generally remain stable, but he identifies two tendencies: in the early years, Bousch usually speaks about Muscovites, while later he designates them as "Russians," indicating that he no longer viewed them from an outsider's perspective. And while in the first reports about diplomatic encounters he is most of all interested in formalities and symbolic communication, later he turns his interest to the ways of arguing by both sides. In the text, two perspectives are intertwined: loyalty to the Tsar, but sympathy for Poland.

Rusakovskiy has clearly identified the writer of the diary, but he can only speculate about the implicit audience that Christoph Bousch may have had in mind. Given the many negative comments on Russian actions, it is unlikely that Bousch envisioned a readership in Moscow. Sending the diary to the "West" would have put him and his family at risk. Was he preparing for an escape from Muscovy? Or did Bousch write and revise his diary simply for himself? This reminds me of the memoirs of L. V. Cherepnin, which were published posthumously by V. D. Nazarov and begin: "I had long intended to write about my life. Why? I do not know. Probably to live a second time what I had experienced" (*Я давно уже собирался написать записки о своей жизни. Зачем? Я не знаю. Вероятно, для того, чтобы еще раз пережить все*

прожитое).¹ At the end of the introduction Rusakovskiy expresses his hope that the diary will finally find its readers (51). May the reviewer add a further suggestion: Could the combination of notes and supplements have been intended as the basis for a future book?

Before writing the introduction on which this review mainly relies,² Rusakovskiy had to complete the primary task of transcribing the German manuscript and translating the German text into modern Russian. I did not systematically compare the German and the Russian texts, but I can confirm that I found no instances where I disagreed with the translation or would suggest an alternative. Reading this fascinating diary is a pleasure in both languages.

Besides a detailed introduction, the book includes a Russian translation with commentaries in footnotes, indexes of personal and place names, and a transcription of the German manuscript. However, the hard copy version of Rusakovskii's book does not include the German text. To be frank, it is not convenient switching between the Russian and German texts. In the event of a revision, at least of the e-book, it would be helpful if the original pagination of the manuscript appeared not only in the German transcription but also in the Russian translation.

Just as a suggestion: Before starting a systematic analysis of a diary, any researcher (including Rusakovskiy himself) should prepare a table with six columns:

- Date in the diary
- Page in the manuscript
- Page in the German transcription
- Page in the Russian translation
- Brief notes about the content of each entry
- If necessary, correction or additions to the dating of specific events

Additionally, it should be noted whether Bousch is writing in a particular place primarily as an eyewitness or as a participant in the event, or if he is relying exclusively on other sources of information (if the source is identifiable, it could be indicated).

While preparing this review, I had a look at the Russian translation of the travelogue by Frano Gundulić (Francesco Gondola), a patrician from Dubrovnik (Ragusa) in Austrian service, who participated in the 1655-1656 Imperial Embassy to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich under Allegretto de Allegretti and Johann Dietrich von Lorbach. As cited by Rusakovskiy (25), Gundulić wrote about the meeting between the Tsar and the envoys on July 20, 1656 (July 10, Julian style). The entire relevant passage from which Rusakovskiy quotes reads as follows:

Мне же царь приказал перевести в точности этот разговор Леопаху, который не понимал по-славянски, а переводчик, какой-то новокрещеный Курляндец, был небольшой знаток нашего языка.³

¹ Lev Vladimirovich Cherepnin, *Moia zhizn'. Vospominaniia. Kommentarii. Prilozheniia*, red. Vladislav Dmitrievich Nazarov (Moscow: Iazyki slav'ianskoi kul'tury, 2015), 11. See also Ludwig Steindorff, review of *Moia zhizn'. Vospominaniia. Kommentarii. Prilozheniia* by Lev Vladimirovich Cherepnin, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 66 (2018): 697-700.

² Oleg Rusakovskiy, "Dnevnik perevodchika Posol'skogo prikaza: avtor, kontekst, zhanr," in *Dnevnik perevodchika Posol'skogo prikaza Kristofa Bousha (1654-1664)* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Vysshei shkoly ekonomiki, 2024), 11-51.

³ K. Petkovich, "Puteshestvie iz Veny v Moskvu v 1655. g.," *Russkii vestnik* 9 (1869), 150.

[The tsar gave me the order to translate this conversation exactly to Leopakh, who did not understand Slavonic, and the interpreter, some newly-baptized Courlander, had no great knowledge of our language].

When I compared the Russian and original texts, I was quite surprised by the differences. Gundulić had written:

Et à me il Gran Duca espressamente commando, che io spiegassi tutto cio al Sig.^r Lerperg, doue faceuo mezzo d' interprete, perche il uero interprete non intendeua tanto bene (perche era un Curlando poco prima ribattezato, e capitato in man de Moscouiti).⁴

[And the Grand Prince explicitly ordered me that I should explain everything to Signore Lerperg. So, I was half an interpreter, since the real interpreter did not understand so well (for he was a Courlander, shortly rebaptized, and fallen into the hands of Muscovites)].

How could such a distortion occur? Petkovich, the author of the Russian translation, notes in the introduction to his publication, that his text does not follow the original Italian manuscript in the Dubrovnik archive, but rather the printed Serbian translation in the journal *Dubrovnik*. As I have verified, the translator, P. Franasović, was a Catholic priest, and the language of the translation does not follow the Serbian, but the Croatian standard. The corresponding passage reads:

A meni car u osobito preporuči da sve ove stvari točno istumačim Leopabu, koji nije razumio naški, a tumač, nekakav novo-kršteni Kurlandez, nije bio vele vješt našem jeziku.⁵

[The tsar gave me personally the order to explain these matters exactly to Leopab who did not understand our [language], and the interpreter, a newly baptized Courlander, did not know our language very well].

This translation by Franasović was rather free and partly abridged, and Petković reproduced these inaccuracies, adding the wrong translation of the verb *istumačiti* as "translate" instead of "explain." Furthermore, he altered the reference to the language of the conversation by changing "our language" to "Slavic language." Perhaps, it would be worth revising the entire Russian translation, starting from the original text of Gundulić, which is mainly in Italian, but also includes numerous passages in the Dubrovnik South Slavic language?

Thanks to the marvelous work of Oleg Rusakovskiy – including the transcription, translation, and introduction – we now have an additional source that sheds light not only on military and diplomatic activities, but also other events mostly in Muscovy, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Ukraine during the years 1654–1664. Despite the rich commentary provided by Rusakovskiy in the footnotes, further research is needed to assess even more systematically where the diary offers new insights and how it aligns or contrasts with other sources. Although the world presented in the diary is well-known to us from many other

⁴ Mirko Deanović, "Frano Dživa Gundulić i njegov put u Moskvu 1655. godine," *Starine* 41 (1948), 52.

⁵ "Putovanje G. Alegretića, Gundulića etc. kao česarskijeh punomoćnika iz Beča u Moskov g. 1655," trans. P. Franasović, *Dubrovnik. Zabavnik Dubrovačke Narodne Štioniće za godinu 1868* (Split: Brzotiskom Antuna Zannoni, 1868), 80.

perspectives and has been reconstructed in detail by historiography, Christoph Bousch's work, with its specific viewpoint, is a welcome addition to the available sources on this crucial period in European history.