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an unearthed essay by Yakov Ivanovič Bulgakov
(1743-1809)

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the anonymous article “Reflections on Russia, or Some Remarks on Russians Civil and Moral Status Until Peter I’s Reign” published in 1807 in the Moscow literary magazine “Messenger of Europe”. ‘Reflections’ can provide us with an excellent example of the circulation of ideas between Russia and Western Europe. It elaborated the mythology of Russian history in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries idealizing Russian patriarchal antiquity and strongly criticizing Peter the Great’s reformist activity as an attempt “to transform Russians into foreigners” (as stated previously by J.-J. Rousseau). The anonymous writer argued that to be Russian meant to follow Russian “national” moral rules stamped in history. ‘Reflections on Russia’ are attributed here to the well-known diplomat and man of letters Jakov Ivanovič Bulgakov who might have written the piece in order to convince a part of the European, French-speaking (probably, Polish) aristocracy to change positively its views on Russia and its history in the 1790s. “Reflections” remained a manuscript until the Napoleonic wars when its rhetoric was claimed again as an instrument to win the sympathy of the European public towards Russia. The paper seeks to grasp the moment of the birth of Russian public spaces for debating the problems of Russian history. The publication of the ‘Reflections’ in 1807, through the mechanism of noble patronage, points out the moment of the construction of Russian public space when the common and most famous form of sociability (the salon) starts to be substituted by a new form – by the printed press.

Keywords

History of Russian diplomacy in the eighteenth-century, transnational history, Russian nineteenth-century nationalism, public sphere in Russia, Russo-Polish relations, Russian historiography in the eighteenth-century, history of Russian journalism at the beginning of the nineteenth-century.

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During the course of the reforms conducted by Peter the Great at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Russia began to integrate into the European political and cultural space. Like almost everywhere else in Europe, in the second half of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the forms and historical background of Russian national¹ identity were being discussed and were taking shape. Indeed, the Russian situation was in perfect conformity with three criteria which 'allowed a people to be firmly classed as a nation', according to Eric Hobsbawm². First, 'its historic association with a current state or one with a fairly lengthy and recent past'. Hobsbawm also noticed, 'there was little dispute about the existence of... a (Great) Russian people'. The second criterion concerns 'the existence of a long-established cultural elite, possessing a written national literary and administration vernacular'. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Russian cultural elite was constituted almost entirely by the nobility which in this period was at the core of Russian administrative and cultural activity³. It's worth noting that Russian noblemen spoke the same language

¹ I am using the term 'national(ism)' being aware of the important distinction between 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' in this period. It was drawn by David Bell in his recent monograph 'The cult of the nation in France' (2001). According to Bell's definition, 'patriotism' is 'an emotional attachment to a place thought as a 'home', and more specifically... to that territorial entity whose rulers possess final coercive authority over the persons living within it'. In my view, this emotional attachment could be also reinforced by rational elements, for example by the consciousness of a common past, without having any political dimension. Instead, nationalism is 'a program to build a sovereign political community grouping together people who have enough in common – whether language, customs, beliefs, traditions, or some combination of these – to allow them to act as a homogeneous, collective person' (D. Bell, *The cult of the nation in France. Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, Cambridge, London, 2001, p. 20). I will refer to the 'patriotism' in Bell's terminology considering that the line of demarcation between the two phenomena is quite thin.

² E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780. Program, myth, reality*, Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney, 1990, p. 37.

³ See, for example, J.P. LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class. The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700-1825*, New York, Oxford, 1991, pp. 4-9, 22-28.

(French) as enlightened Europe, went on the same journeys, read the same books and, lastly, adopted the patterns of behavior approved in Europe, being in permanent and intensive dialogue with European (French, English, German...) culture. Finally the third criterion proposed by Hobsbawm, 'a proven capacity for conquest'⁴, or, as I would suggest, military mobilization, which should also be considered valid in the case of Russia in that period: during the eighteenth century, Russia was actively involved in European conflicts and in the early nineteenth century became a battlefield itself. War became one of the forms of intercourse among the Russian elite, which constituted the Russian Corps of Officers, and was the European reality of the time.

All these factors contributed to the formation and construction of a Russian identity, a process strongly connected to the contemporary creation of a national historical mythology, a reinterpretation of the national past and of the actual political situation. The text on Russian history I will analyze here is interesting as a manifestation of this process. Written by a Russian nobleman, and probably distributed among a part of the European nobility, the text was later published in Russia when it was in the full swing of the Napoleonic wars, in the period when the Russian government was forced to oppose the intense Napoleonic propaganda and propose its own historical explanation of European politics and European history as a whole (and consequently, the history of Russia as a part of Europe). Here our research will be focused on the complex process of acculturation of European ideas in Russia, trying to define their 'fonction précise à l'intérieur du système de réception', using the words of Michel Espagne and Michel Werner⁵.

For this analysis I have chosen a document which belonged to that group of texts in eighteenth and nineteenth century Russian culture which seems to be perfectly appropriate to the historical analysis of the circulation of ideas, history of international relationships and interactions inspired by literary and cultural studies, by the history of education, language, and cultural practices. I refer to French language political treatises, verses or memories written by Russian authors, and among them those that have not only been created but also distributed in two different cultural areas. A text could often assume different meanings depending on the cultural context in which this text emerged. At the same time these meanings are not parallel, they supplement each other, a change in point of view helps to reveal new meanings in the allegedly well-known material. For the history of Russian political and philosophical thought articles of this kind are crucial, suffice to remember P.Ja. Chaadaev's first 'Lettre philosophique' (1836) or A.I. Herzen's 'Sur le développement des idées révolutionnaires en Russie' (1869). The comparison of the different cultural and political contexts in which the text was written and published, according to the logic of a comparative approach, will help us to better understand the Russian political phenomenon.

To illustrate this, let me take the ideas of the article, little known⁶ but important for the development of nineteenth century Russian national mythology, entitled 'Reflections on Russia, or some remarks on Russians' civil and moral status until Peter I's reign' ('Мысли о России, или некоторые замечания о гражданском и нравственном состоянии Русских до царствования Петра Великого'). It's well known that European nationalism is an invention of recent times – the eighteenth and

⁴ E.J. Hobsbawm, Nations and nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality, pp. 37-38.

⁵ M. Espagne, M. Werner, La construction d'une référence culturelle allemande en France: genèse et histoire, in *Annales ESC*, 42-4, 1987, p. 970.

⁶ As far as I know, this article has never been studied before.

early nineteenth centuries – and was developed specifically to further nationalist, political aims⁷. The text I am analyzing provides the best sample of “imagined” Russian history designed to convince Europeans to respect Russia as a self-contained national community. It’s particularly important then that “Reflections” has had a long international history: as I have already mentioned, written by a Russian in French during his stay in one of the European countries at the beginning of the 1790s, the text was intended to remain a manuscript. It was partly published in Russia in 1807 and became a model for subsequent nationalistic Russian writings, and probably had to be republished in the German-language press. I will analyze the main ideas of ‘Reflections on Russia’ in the first half of the paper, and in the second half I will concentrate on the problem of its authorship and the historical context of the writing and publication which should shed light upon some basic points of the article.

The anonymous ‘Reflections on Russia’ translated from the French⁸ was published in two issues of the Moscow review ‘Messenger of Europe’ (‘Вестник Европы’) in January 1807 (NN 1-2, pp. 3-29, 107-120) and was annotated by the editor’s comments, by the remarks of an unknown translator and by the author himself. The editor, Mikhail Kacenovskij, specified that the essay constituted only part of the whole text selected by him in order to make it more appropriate to publication in a Russian review⁹. The title – ‘Reflections on Russia...’ – was undoubtedly invented by the editor or someone else but not by the author himself, as we learn from the author’s comments¹⁰; the published version of the ‘Reflections...’ contained not only the description of the Muscovite period of Russian history but that of the eighteenth century as well. Furthermore, some repetitions and even contradictions presented in “Reflections” allow us to conclude that we are probably dealing with a compilation of two or more separate works, the chronological limits of which are very difficult to fix.

The article contains a brief survey of Russian history in the seventeenth century and, in particular, of the reigns of Aleksej Mikhajlovič (1645-1676), Fedor Alekseevič (1676-1682), Princess Sofia (1682-1689), Ivan V (1682-1696) and Peter the Great (1682-1725) with digressions from the main topic to eighteenth century Russian history. The author expounded his ideas without chronological order and in most cases transformed historical material into an illustration of selected political and moral principles which seemed to him to be important. ‘Reflections on Russia’ could be divided into two conceptual parts. In the first part the French authors who studied Russia were strongly criticized, and in the second an alternative Russian history was presented.

First I’d like to dwell on the second part. The author tended to idealize Russian patriarchal antiquity (the old days, ‘starina’). The problem is that he did not provide any, even chronological, definition of ‘antiquity’ (we can only suppose that it lasted

⁷ See: B. Anderson, *Imagined communities*, London, 1983; E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, 1983; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Introduction: Inventing Traditions*, in E.J. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (eds.), *Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 1-15; D. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France*, op. cit.; P.F. Sugar, *The Rise of Nationalism in the Habsburg Empire*, in P.F. Sugar, *Nationality and Society in Habsburg and Ottoman Empire*, Aldershot, 1997, pp. 91-120, and many others.

⁸ It is important immediately to state that unfortunately my research through the Russian archives hasn’t produced any result thus far in unearthing the French original of ‘Reflections on Russia’.

⁹ *Reflections...*, p. 119.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 9.

until the reign of the reformist tsar Peter the Great). This makes his work more ideological or mythological and less historical than was declared on the first pages of 'Reflections'¹¹. In particular, the author wrote: 'Until Peter's reign... the Russian people was uniform in its customs, firm in its rules, wise, perspicacious and prudent in its actions; Russians' sweets consisted in the simple products of common sense'¹². Russian antiquity was characterized by several features always in contrast to contemporary European life. So, Russians had their own, rather 'harsh', but 'straight and fair' character made up of purity of morals and manners, disengagement from the actions of everyday life, without the need to travel abroad in order to 'look at the artificial entertainments', a profound respect of the younger generation towards the older, a kind of 'family' law based on patriarchal morals, on honor and not on 'self-interest' ('корыстолюбие'). All these features formed the 'foundation of public order' ('основа общественного устройства') where every family was similar to a 'small republic'. Tsar Fedor Alekseevič, according to the author, willingly used to resort to 'family' justice instead of the official state punishment. Even Catherine the Great in her 'Instruction', he insisted, showed her preference for the old Muscovite moral institutions¹³.

The economic and cultural activity of the 'old' Russian people was limited by the borders of Russian state, an undoubted advantage from the author's point of view. Of course, the concept of the 'Russian border' was an invented one and did not correspond with any reality but served here first of all as a cultural marker: economic insularity was interpreted as a common good because every contact with Western Europe could be destructive for Russian culture. As a result, 'true' national education should be compulsorily familial: the father's example was esteemed far more than any book knowledge or, even worse, a journey abroad¹⁴.

Another important point explained in 'Reflections' concerned the ideal political structure embodied in the 'wise' and 'meek' administration of Aleksej Mikhajlovič. This ideal consisted in political equality of the estates, of a system which allowed every estate (in this case nobility, clergy and 'free citizens') to take part in the management of the state. For the first time in Russian history Aleksej Mikhajlovič convoked state officials and created a code of laws which expressed 'the good quality of all public institutions' ('доброта всего общественного состава'). The author must have had in mind the so called 'Council Code' ('Земский собор'). He specified that Aleksej Mikhajlovič had introduced a political system in which the tsar came to a determination by taking council with his boyars and the latter then explained his will to the rest of the people. In this way the tsar was closely related to the people and the boyars served as a key force in the communication process¹⁵.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 3-4. It's clear that for the author of 'Reflections' 'history' means first of all the manifestations of Russianess in the past as he interpreted it and not 'history' as a science. On the scientific conception of Aleksej Mikhajlovič's reign far from the descriptions of 'Reflections' see two recently published works: П.В. Седов, Закат Московского царства. Спб., 2008 (P.V. Sedov, The Sunset of the Muscovite Kingdom, Saint Petersburg, 2008); М.Т. Пое, The Russian elite in the seventeenth century, Vammala, 2004, vol. 1.

¹² 'До Петра I... Российский народ был единообразен в своих обычаях, тверд в правилах, благоразумен, прозорлив, и осмотрителен в своих действиях; наслаждения Русских состояли в простых произведениях здравого смысла' (Reflections..., p. 6).

¹³ Ibid, pp. 6-8, 12-14, 19-20, 110.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 6, 28-29.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 10, 12-15.

Implicit obedience to legal procedures, respect for religion and uniformity of political actions were the main features of the 'ideal' model of government allegedly appropriated by Aleksej Mikhajlovič. According to the author's logic, Aleksej Mikhajlovič represented a sort of 'anti-Peter' political figure because father the possessed the major part of the son's goodness but, unlike Peter, was trying to conform in his actions to natural Russian rules. In other words, Aleksej Mikhajlovič knew what the 'people's spirit' ('дух народа') was¹⁶. And this 'people's spirit' was identical with the notion of the political equality of all the estates based on 'family' moral law. The author analyzed Russian history from this standpoint and arrived at the conclusion that both Aleksej Mikhajlovič and his son Fedor Alekseevič represented the Golden Age of Russian policy. Natalija Kirillovna Naryshkina, Peter I's mother, gave an example of moral purity which in the end preserved the throne for Peter¹⁷.

Returning to the author's idea of seventeenth century Russia, the enormous political and cultural role of Moscow needs to be stressed. He argued that in the past Russia meant first of all Moscow, all the positive features mentioned above belonged to Muscovite society. So, Moscow was 'the centre/core of the country' ('средоточие царства'), where all the eminent Russian noblemen were living. Moscow was also famous for her hospitality and moral integrity¹⁸.

The text contains an eloquent 'geographical' example of these Moscow phenomena. The author dedicated a number of pages to the description of Red Square and its symbolism. This was the square of Russian universal unity where the heads of Moscow noble families, 'free citizens', boyars and the tsar himself gathered. Many people used to come to Red Square where people of different ages and social status could discuss their problems. Here one was taught true virtue indeed: the older taught the younger how to be honest in service and to respect their leaders. The author pointed out that all the estates (this obviously excluded peasants) could take part in discussion on equal terms, for example the oldest bourgeois often reproved the younger sons of a boyar, and the latter were forced to accept this as their due. Lying was considered one of the main vices, especially in the symbolic space of Red Square, in front of 'all people's justice' ('суд всего народа')¹⁹.

The author argued that if Aleksej Mikhajlovič always respected the opinions expressed on Red Square, which served him as a mechanism for maintaining close contact with his subjects, Peter I destroyed this political harmony²⁰. The image of Peter in 'Reflections' is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, it was fairly difficult to criticize Peter's reign, even though we are dealing with a text that was initially written for only a few people and remained in manuscript form for a long time. The author seemed to be an ardent adherent of Catherine's politics and undoubtedly felt their symbolic connection with Peter's reign²¹. On the other hand, he wanted to stress the differences between these two autocrats: from his point of view, Catherine was much closer to the old ideals traced in 'Reflections'. The descriptions of Peter and his actions were introduced throughout by permanent references to French historical works on Russia. Indeed, the author strongly criticized not Peter himself but the French conception of his

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 15.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 26-27.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 13-19.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 7, 21.

²¹ R.S. Wortman, *Scenarios of power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1, Princeton, 1994.

substantial role in Russian history²². At the same time he skillfully used this anti-French propaganda and often criticized Peter under the cover of his Western biographers.

The author stated that Peter's reforms were harmful to Russia because he tried to transform Russians into foreigners²³. The single justification for Peter consisted in the 'creative' character of imitation, this was the main answer to J.-J. Rousseau's accusations against Peter²⁴. It's also interesting that the fundamental point of Peter's reforms was neither imitation of all things foreign nor the shaving of boyars' beards, but, according to the author's social program, the cardinal change of the old political system. By abolishing the patriarchate and boyars' council Peter disrupted the old administrative balance constituted by the alleged unity and equality of all the estates in the process of decision making. On the other hand, in spite of his mistaken political actions, Peter had a moral, pious soul and military valor, a product of his Russian home old style education carried out by his mother Natalja, his elder brother Fedor and his mentor, the nobleman Zotov. It's fundamental that Peter developed his best capacities before his journey abroad or his studies with his French mentor Lefort²⁵. Paradoxically Peter's desire to change the Russian political system was nourished on the ideas assimilated in his youth, before his European experience. Here we deal with another consequence of the author's initially ambiguous approach to Peter and his reign.

If the Petrine epoch was a period of considerable deviation from the ideal patriarchic values of the previous era, Catherine II brought Russia back to its cradle. Surprisingly the author here was quite far from giving his attention to political, social or economic development in Russia, but instead was trying again to bring his complex argument to the simple ascertaining of moral progress. It was clear that Catherine's real politic was far from Aleksej Mikhajlovič's model: the Empress, rather, followed Peter's political path. The author interpreted her 'Instruction' not from the political but from the moral point of view. The main principle presented in 'Instruction', according to him, concerned Catherine's references to old Russian moralistic truths, such as 'If someone won't keep his word he should be ashamed'²⁶. By means of these references Catherine allegedly managed to make the Russian reality closer to its initial patriarchal ideal. Why was this so important? The author, following Ch.L. de S. Montesquieu's 'De l'esprit des lois' (1748), introduced the notion of 'natural people qualities' ('природные силы народа'), and argued that a people could develop only if political changes were in accordance with its innate features, that every deviation from this scheme of development, even though good from the rational point of view, would be pernicious for the national character²⁷. Catherine the Great assigned primary importance to this principle, which is why her reign is considered by the author to be a moral 'salvation' for Russia, without any reference to her economic or social reforms.

It is evident then that the author of 'Reflections' had been strongly influenced by the political thought of Montesquieu and in particular by his 'De l'esprit des lois'. The main source of the basic idea of 'Reflections', the concept of the natural qualities of

²² Reflections..., pp. 22-24.

²³ 'Петр I... породил в Русских желание нужд искусственных, и дал им вид подражателей' (Ibid, p. 7).

²⁴ Ibid. 'Pierre avoit le génie imitatif; il n'avoit pas le vrai génie, celui qui crée et fait tout de rien' (J.-J. Rousseau, Du contrat social, in J.-J. Rousseau, Œuvres complètes, t. III, Paris, 1964, p. 386).

²⁵ Reflections..., pp. 7-8, 26-29.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 110-111. I haven't been able to find these exact words in the text of Catherine II's 'Instruction' (1767).

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 8-9.

people, undoubtedly goes back to the characteristics of laws given by Montesquieu in the first book of his treatise (chapters 1 and 3): ‘Les lois, dans la signification la plus étendue, sont les rapports nécessaires qui dérivent de la nature des choses: et dans ce sens tous les êtres ont leurs lois... Elles doivent être tellement propres au peuple pour lequel elles sont faites, que c’est un grand hasard si celle d’une nation peuvent convenir à une autre. Il faut qu’elles se rapportent à la nature et au principe du gouvernement qui est établi... Elles doivent être relatives au physique du pays... elles doivent se rapporter au degré de liberté que la constitution peut souffrir, à la religion des habitants, à leurs inclinations, à leurs richesses, à leurs mœurs, à leurs manieres. Enfin elles ont des rapports entre elles; elles en ont avec leur origine, avec l’objet du législateur, avec l’ordre des choses sur lesquelles elles sont établies’²⁸. Following Montesquieu (Book 2, Chapter 4), the author asserts that under the monarchy the effective role in the administration processes belongs to the nobility and clergy as ‘le pouvoir intermédiaire’ between the monarch and his subjects²⁹. It is noteworthy then that the author of ‘Reflections’ makes an attempt to represent old Russian Muscovite society, where tsarist power was allegedly in perfect harmony with society’s interests and opinions, as a sort of mixed form of government. He ascribed to the monarchy the qualities which, according to Montesquieu, belonged to democracy: for example, moral purity (‘la vertu’) was embodied first of all in a father’s actions. Montesquieu wrote concerning education in the republics: ‘c’est à l’inspirer que l’éducation doit être attentive. Mais, pour que les enfants puissent l’avoir, il y a un moyen sûr, c’est que les peres l’aient eux-mêmes. ... Si cela n’arrive pas, c’est que ce qui a été fait dans la maison paternelle est détruit par les impressions du dehors’³⁰ (Book 4, Chapter 5), and further: ‘L’autorité paternelle est encore très utile pour maintenir les mœurs’ (Book 5 Chapter 7)³¹. It is clear that the author of ‘Reflections’ tried to portray pre-Petrine and Catherine’s Russia as a kind of ‘multifunctional’ state system which, while a monarchy, included many positive features of the republican mode of governing³².

So, Russia had already found its ideal in Aleksej Mikhajlovič’s mode of governing: unity between the tsar, noblemen and ‘free citizens’ could be constructed only on the basis of moral purity which constituted the main inborn feature of the Russian people. At the end of the eighteenth century Catherine’s power represented one possible way of return to the paradise lost after Peter’s reforms. French writers did not

²⁸ Oeuvres complètes de Montesquieu, t. 1, Paris, 1950, pp. 1, 8-9. See also book 19, chapters 21-26 (Ibid, pp. 428-432).

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 20-22.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 46.

³¹ Ibid, p. 66. However, ‘l’honneur’, the main quality of monarchical society’s values, was not so positive and monosemantic in Montesquieu’s interpretation as republican ‘la vertu’: ‘A l’égard des mœurs, j’ai dit que l’éducation des monarchies doit y mettre une certaine franchise. On y veut donc de la vérité dans les discours. Mais est-ce par amour pour elle? Point du tout. On la veut, parcequ’un homme qui est accoutumé à la dire paroît être hardi et libre. ... Enfin l’éducation, dans les monarchies, exige dans les manieres une certaine politesse. ... Elle naît de l’envie de se distinguer. C’est par orgueil que nous sommes polis...’ (Book 4, Chapter 2 ; Ibid, pp. 40-41).

³² In general, the author of ‘Reflections’ would agree with Montesquieu concerning the old history of Russian moral qualities, ‘Les Moscovites ne peuvent point sortir de l’empire, fût-ce pour voyager. Ainsi, séparés des autres nations par les loix du pays, ils ont conservé leurs anciennes coutumes avec d’autant plus d’attachement, qu’ils ne croyoient pas qu’il fût possible d’en avoir d’autres’ (Lettres persanes, lettre 51, Montesquieu, op. cit., t. 3., p. 103) and disagree with his positive evaluation of Peter I’s reforms (Ibid, p. 104) See also in ‘De l’esprits des lois’, book 19, chapter 14. See: R. Minuti, L’image de la Russie dans l’œuvre de Montesquieu, in Cromohs, 10 (2005).

understand this and were wrong in portraying Peter I as the ‘creator’ of the Russian nation.

Who were the French authors provoking the author’s discontent? Here we are dealing with a fairly general French tradition in its portrayal of Russian history, rather than with a response to some specific anti-Russian pamphlet. In the article two writers representing two different traditions in the analysis of eighteenth century Russian reality were mentioned, these are Voltaire and J.-J. Rousseau. The author criticized Voltaire’s conception which emphasized his journeys to Europe as the main source of Peter’s education³³. As a consequence, Peter tried to contest the idea of ‘divine’ and the unexpected conversion of ‘barbarian’ Russia into a ‘civilized’ country was thanks to the practices adopted by Peter during his stay in Western Europe. It was wrong then to interpret the reign of Peter I as the moment of the Russian nation’s ‘creation’, further, the author asserted, alluding to Voltaire, that French historians were more poets than scholars and the Russia created by Peter was nothing but the fruit of a poetic imagination. From his point of view, the very beginning of Russian contemporary history was the resistance to the Swedes and Poles during the Time of Troubles when the Russian national character came into being. Aleksej Mikhajlovič strengthened Russian law and his wise government paved the way for Peter’s victories³⁴.

The author showed that political and economic transformations took place in Russia as far back as the seventeenth century during the reign of Aleksej Mikhajlovič who, in contrast to Peter, aspired to make the reforms more gradual and appropriate to Russian ways of living. ‘Reflections on Russia’ is full of different invectives and accusations towards not only French historians but also French culture, the French education system, French political institutions and ‘civilized’ France which in reality was nothing but ‘barbarian’³⁵.

The author’s point of view is much closer to that of Rousseau – not only because of his critique of Peter I, but also thanks to his concept of ‘national education’ and his respect for the national past³⁶. Furthermore he made reference to Rousseau’s famous reasoning on Russia – ‘Les Russes ne seront jamais rien, puisque Pierre I, au lieu d’un faire des Russes, a commencé à les former d’après les Hollandois, les Allemands etc.’³⁷. Catherine II returned to true Russian policy, thus contradicting Rousseau. Here was the crucial point of the author’s concept of nation: he asserted that Catherine, a German princess, was convinced she was Russian and embodied in her political actions all the Russian ideals – first of all the moral one, by writing in her ‘Instruction’ that it was necessary to be honest in service. So, to be Russian did not mean to speak Russian or to belong to a Russian family but it did mean knowing national history well and being able to draw a moral from it. To be Russian meant to follow Russian national moral rules stamped in history, and to follow the Russian nature.

³³ See, for example, ‘Histoire de l’empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand’, part 1, chapter 2 (even if here Voltaire tried to defend Russia from the accusation of being entirely barbarian), part 2, chapter 9.

³⁴ Reflections..., pp. 7-8, 22-23, 111.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 23.

³⁶ J.-J. Rousseau, *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne et sur la réformation projetée*, in J.-J. Rousseau, *Op. cit.*, pp. 953-1041.

³⁷ Rousseau wrote in his ‘Du contrat social’ (1762): ‘Les Russes ne seront jamais vraiment policés, parce qu’ils l’ont été trop tôt. ... Il (Peter I – M.V.) a vu que son peuple étoit barbare, il n’a point vu qu’il n’étoit pas mûr pour la police; il l’a voulu civiliser quand il ne falloit que l’agguerrir. Il a d’abord voulu faire des Allemands, des Anglois, quand il falloit par faire des Russes’ (Book 1, chapter 8, Ibid, p. 386). Reflections..., p. 7.

‘Reflections on Russia’ was written at the beginning of the 1790s, at the end of Catherine II’s reign and, remaining manuscript form, was probably distributed among the members of some European noble salons. The article’s late publication (1807) needs to be explained. This is connected to another problem: did the text conform to Catherine’s political and cultural aims in this period? Trying to suggest a possible solution to this problem we have to dwell on the question of the authorship of ‘Reflections on Russia’s.

As I have already mentioned, the article was not attributed and its original version was not found until recently. We only have the translation of ‘Reflections’, and as a consequence we cannot evaluate its accuracy. Nevertheless, the information contained in comments in diverse publications is sufficient to set up a certain hypothesis about its author.

First, ‘Reflections’ was created in a European country (not in Russia), written in French and had to satisfy some foreign ‘nobles’ curiosity’ about Russian history and Russian culture³⁸.

Second, the article came to light during the French Revolution, fifteen years before its publication, that is in about 1791-1792, and initially the author did not intend to publish it³⁹.

Third, some remarks (for example about years he had left behind) give us the idea that by 1792 he was quite a good age and was probably born during the reign of Elizabeth (1741-1761)⁴⁰.

Fourth, he was a Moscow nobleman and grew up and studied in Moscow. In his youth he learnt Latin and his mentor was the Archbishop of Riga and Novgorod, Innokentij Nečaev. As a result, the author had always been inclined to write and was particularly interested in Russian history⁴¹.

Fifth, he suffered some misfortunes, ‘not common but which could happen to anyone’. As a consequence suffered an illness which didn’t allow him to frequent society. For this reason he also had hours of leisure to dedicate himself to his studies⁴².

Sixth, during the creation of ‘Reflections on Russia’ its author didn’t use any books as reference and was forced to rely only on his memory for information

³⁸ ‘Господин Автор писал оное в чужих краях, и писал на Французском языке, желая удовлетворить некоторых знатных особ, которые часто спрашивали его о нашем Отечестве...’ (Editor’s note, Reflections..., p. 3).

³⁹ ‘В предисловии сказано, что Г. Автор хотел или совсем не издавать в свет *Мыслей о России*, или издать их не скоро...’ (Editor’s note, Ibid, p. 3); ‘Это писано перед сим лет за пятнадцать’ (Editor’s note, Ibid, p. 4); ‘Это было писано во время Французской революции’ (Translator’s note, Ibid, p. 111).

⁴⁰ ‘Прожитые лета, перенесенные труды, горести... Теперь я стал дряхл...’ (Ibid, pp. 4, 5).

⁴¹ ‘Мы многом учимся в молодости; но от разных обязанностей и забот в жизни иногда забываем выученное: так и я забыл язык Латинской...’ (Ibid, pp. 3-4); ‘Наставник мой, нынешний (1792 – M.V.) Архиепископ Рижский и Псковский... *Инноцентий*...’ (Ibid, p. 4); on author’s Moscow origins see author’s note, Ibid, p. 20 – ‘Я сам помню, что был зван на десять балов в один день...’ etc. On reading and writing: ‘Что делал я тогда (in author’s young years – M.V.) по склонности, то стало теперь для меня необходимостью’ (Ibid, p. 4).

⁴² ‘...горести, не такие какие обыкновенно люди почитают несчастьем, случающиеся не со всяким, но к которым всякой должен себя приготовить – все сие крайне расстроило мое здоровье. Теперь я стал дряхл, и принужден сидеть в своей комнате’ (Ibid, pp. 4-5).

concerning Catherine's epoch. It seems logical to suppose that he was in the service of the state (also at the time of creating the text, in 1792) under the reign of Catherine⁴³.

Seventh, in the conclusions to the publication by the 'Messenger of Europe' the final fragment of the whole memoir was quoted. We learn that in 1792 the author took up a certain post in the Russian service, was going to leave it, wanted to ask Catherine to give him a kind of absence because of his weak health and intended to come back to Russia or to go to Vienna. Most probably the author was a part of the Russian diplomatic corps⁴⁴.

A Moscow past, noble status and the literary interests of the creator of the 'Reflections' suggest that we should look for him among the students of Moscow gymnasia and the University. During the reign of Elizabeth the future Archbishop Innokentij Nečaev, at that a period student and then preacher and prefect of the Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy, taught only until 1761 when he became a governor of Troize-Sergieva Lavra. Probably Innokentij was involved as a home teacher in the family of the author of 'Reflections'.

An analysis of the lists of the Moscow gymnasia and University students of the period leads me to come to a hypothesis that a possible author of 'Reflections on Russia' could be the famous Russian diplomat and Man of Letters Jakov Ivanovič Bulgakov, born in Moscow in 1743 and who died in 1809. The son of a secretary of Preobrazhenskij prikaz, Ivan Mikhajlovič Bulgakov Jakov Ivanovič was provided with a home education, in 1756 he was already studying at the University gymnasia with Potemkin and Fonvizin, and from 1759 to 1761 he was a student at Moscow University. His literary career began early: as a translator Bulgakov took part in M.M. Kheraskov's review 'Poleznoe uveselenie'. In 1762 he began his diplomatic service in Warsaw under the supervision of count Repnin, participated in the peace negotiations with the Ottoman Empire in 1775, in the Teshin congress in 1778-1779 and finally became the Russian ambassador to Constantinople in 1781. His arrest and incarceration in 1787 signified the beginning of the next Russo-Turkish war. While incarcerated in the Yedikule Castle of Seven Towers Bulgakov continued to correspond with Catherine and Potemkin and at the same time was working on the translation of De La Porte's 'Voyageur françois'. He was released in 1789 and in March of 1791 he was nominated the Russian ambassador to Poland. Removed from office by the end of 1792 because of the hostility of Catherine's favorite Platon Zubov, Bulgakov returned to the service only in 1797 when Paul I nominated him the governor of Vilno and Kovno. In 1799 Bulgakov retired and until his death in 1809 lived in Moscow being the best example of a non-serving Russian grandee of Catherine's epoch.

There are many biographical parallels between the lives and ideas of Bulgakov and the author of 'Reflections on Russia'. Noteworthy is the strong similarity of the anti-French spirit of 'Reflections' with Bulgakov's well-known text of 1792 'Memories on the present revolt in Poland' ('Записки о нынешнем возмущении Польши'). The

⁴³ 'Не имея ни одной книги, ни одной бумаги, относящейся к Истории моего Отечества, как могу от одной памяти ожидать чего-нибудь важного?' (Ibid, p. 5); 'Из ее-то (Catherine II – M.V.) славного и спасительного для России царствования память моя может почерпнуть более подробностей...' (Author's note, Ibid, p. 9).

⁴⁴ 'Г. Автор заключает свое сочинение следующими словами: 'Пора собираться в дорогу. Если нынешнею зимою не возвращусь в Отечество, где мои должности не позволят иметь много свободного времени, и если останусь вне России; то воспользуюсь досугом, которой нужен для моего здоровья. Надеюсь получить отсрочку от милосердой моей Государыни. В Вене опять займусь воспоминаниями об отечестве...' (Editor's note, Ibid, pp. 119-120).

text was written at the time Bulgakov was the Russian ambassador in Poland and presumably had been creating 'Reflections'. The 'Memoirs' on Poland were originally written in French, immediately translated into Russian and published in 1792. In his book, Bulgakov analyzed the historical background and course of the contemporary Polish rebellion arguing that the revolt was provoked by the cultural and political influence of revolutionary 'Jacobin' France. The substance of "Reflections on Russia" was quite different to 'Memories' but the motive to write it seems to have been the same, that is to make the Polish elite more distant from France. This aim was in perfect harmony with the main principle of Catherine's foreign policy of this period which aimed to fight the influence of the French revolution wherever it might be.

The inclination towards literature and history common to both Bulgakov and the author of 'Reflections' is to be emphasized. As I have already said, Bulgakov started to practice literary writing and translating when he was a student at Moscow University collaborating with Kheraskov, Bogdanovich, Morkov and others. At the time Bulgakov translated and edited Boiardo's 'Roland L'Amoureux' and De La Porte's 'Voyageur', and had been working on Barthélemy's 'Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce'. Bulgakov was also an honorary member of the Petersburg Academy of Sciences and of Moscow University, gave a hand to N.M. Karamzin in his work on 'History of the Russian State', and was close to D.I. Fonvizin, G.R. Derzhavin, N.A. L'vov, V.A. Zhukovskij, P.A. Vjazemskij, A.I. Turgenev. His passion for literature was well known. The author of 'Reflections' mentioned that reading and writing were for him a kind of necessity. Bulgakov, in turn, was often portrayed by many memorialists in this manner, and he himself remarked in 1787 'I should confess, to write and to read is my single pleasure'.

The author's illness, solitude and his desire to leave correspond with a particular period of Bulgakov's life – just at the beginning of the 1790s (when 'Reflections' was created) Bulgakov, then the Russian ambassador in Poland, suffered from gout (see for example his letters to A.A. Bezborodko of 1790). In Poland Bulgakov was forced to carry out important orders for Catherine during the political crisis of the spring and summer of 1792. This fact is corroborated by the personal correspondence of Bulgakov, surviving in his personal archive at the Russian State Library. For example, Bulgakov wrote to countess de Saint-Prie on June 5 1792: 'M. de Stackelberg voudra vous rendre madame, le compte de ma situation... Je suis aussi mal, comme je l'ai été aux sept tours'⁴⁵. The descriptions of Bulgakov's illness in his letters were often accompanied by references to his imprisonment in the Castle of Seven Towers (for instance in his letters to Bezborodko and Osterman of January and May 1792). I would like to suggest that the words about 'misfortunes... happen not to everyone but everybody but everyone should be ready for them' in 'Reflections' could be concerned with Bulgakov's two year detention in the Castle of the Seven Towers, meaning 'the suffering of guiltless man because of a chapter of accidents'. In June and July 1792 Bulgakov was forced to stay at home in Warsaw and, as a result, was unable to frequent high society. If my assumption is correct, the nobles, the audience of 'Reflections', were certain members of the Polish nobility. According to studies on Polish internal life of this period, Bulgakov, a connoisseur of French high society decencies, always tried to win Polish noblemen over to the Russian side by organizing sumptuous soirees. Bulgakov was also a member of

⁴⁵ Archive of the Russian State Library. F. 41. M. 34. N. 19. F. 1. See also: '...j'ai été extrêmement occupé, fracassé et par dessus tout cela malade' (rough copy of the Bulgakov's letter to Prince Hessen-Filoppstal of June 5th, 1792 (Archive of the Russian State Library. F. 41. M. 32. N. 20. F. 1).

Warsaw noble salons like that of Carl Radzivil, Malakhovsky, Sapega, Potozki, Cartoryjski, Oginski and others. Probably it was this audience that asked Bulgakov to explain Russian history to them.

It was in 1792 when Bulgakov emphatically asked Catherine and Bezborodko to discharge him because of his weak health. In the summer of 1792 Bulgakov hoped to be replaced quickly and leave Warsaw. His wishes were satisfied only in November, and, until then, he stayed in his Warsaw house and, we assume, was occupied by writing his historical articles.

The second question concerning 'Reflections on Russia' is how this text came to be published in the 'Messenger of Europe'. In 1806 and 1807 Jakov Bulgakov, like the review's editor Kacenovskij, was living in Moscow but no contact between them has ever been found. And this is quite logical considering the wide social distance which divided a famous Russian retired diplomat from a young and ordinary review editor and university teacher Kacenovskij. In his introductory note to 'Reflections on Russia' the editor affirmed that its author did not want to publish his work but 'the concatenation of circumstances and the mediation of friendship ended those intentions'⁴⁶. I will dwell in detail on this 'concatenation of circumstances' below, first allow me to comment on the second editor's indication – on the 'mediation of friendship'.

It seems to be clear that this could not refer to a friendship between Bulgakov and Kacenovskij. It is more logical to suggest that here we are dealing with some 'mediator' who was at the same time a 'friend' of both the author and the editor. If we look at the biography of Bulgakov and Kacenovskij we can easily work out who this person was. The only man of aristocratic society strongly connected to Kacenovskij was the university curator Count Aleksej Razumovskij (at the beginning of his career Kacenovskij was the librarian and then the personal secretary of Razumovskij). Aleksej Razumovskij was a brother of Andrej Razumovskij, a famous Russian diplomat who, since 1792, was the Russian ambassador in Vienna, one of the most influential opponent of Russia's rapprochement to France.

The friendship between Aleksej Razumovskij and Bulgakov was well-known. Notwithstanding it is unlikely that Bulgakov would give the 'Messenger of Europe' a text he hadn't wanted to publish earlier unless there was a particular reason. The situation becomes clearer if we take into account that Konstantin Bulgakov, a young Russian diplomat and the second son of Jakov Bulgakov, was serving in Vienna in this period and was a collaborator of Andrej Razumovskij. During the Russian-French war of 1806-1807 Andrej Razumovskij had been fulfilling the task of drawing Austria into the anti-Napoleonic side in the war by influencing Austrian public opinion. Razumovskij was to clarify to the Vienna reading public the matter of the current war starting with its motives and finishing with accounts of its military operations. Razumovskij was to prevent the pro-Napoleonic press from dominating in Austria by publishing pro-Russian articles. In the winter of 1806-1807 an edict was issued in Austria giving permission to publish in the local press only those foreign articles which had previously appeared in foreign reviews. The main source of articles of this kind would logically be supplied by 'Messenger of Europe', the most influential Russian

⁴⁶ 'Стечение обстоятельств и посредничество дружбы уничтожили его намерение' (Reflections..., p. 3).

review participating in Russian state anti-Napoleonic propaganda at that time⁴⁷. In addition its editor owed his success to Andrej Razumovskij's brother. Andrej Razumovskij also knew Jakov Bulgakov, since 1792 when Razumovskij had become the Russian ambassador to Austria and Bulgakov had offered him his services. We also have the confirmation of Razumovskij's particular interest in the Russian and European press and the practice of ordering political articles from German writers. According to this, I would like to suggest that the idea of publishing Jakov Bulgakov's anti-French 'Reflections on Russia' in Russia might have been that of Andrej Razumovskij and his young collaborator Konstantin Bulgakov. The 'mediation of friendship', mentioned in the editor's note means the friendship between two Russian noble families – the Bulgakovs and the Razumovskys.

And what of the second reason leading to the publication of "Reflections on Russia" – the 'concatenation of circumstances'? It's difficult to say to what extent 'Reflections on Russia' convinced the Polish aristocracy but it's absolutely clear that the article strongly influenced Russian anti-French thought after its publication in Russia. After its publication in the 'Messenger of Europe' in 1807 many Russian writers, such as Sergej Glinka, often literally repeated Bulgakov's appraisals of the old Russian social system, 'patriotic' Russian education, Peter the Great's reign, and French culture and its influence upon Russian nobility. Before Karamzin's 'History of the Russian State' was published, 'Reflections on Russia' constituted one of the main, but until now poorly studied, sources for 'mythological' Russian history. So, what historical circumstances made its publication possible? According to my reasoning the editor of the 'Messenger of Europe' received the text thanks to the mediation of the Razumovski family which took advantage of the relationship between Kacenovskij and Aleksej Razumovskij. It should be stressed that perhaps the single moment when a text with so critical approach to the Russian 'official' myth could be published was precisely the period of the Napoleonic wars.

After the five year long reign of Paul I political changes and attempts at economic reforms took place during the first years of Alexander I's reign. In 1804 the most liberal censorial statute in the history of Russia was passed. This meant a weakening in control over printed matter. Unlike his predecessors, Alexander I had less interest in Russian books and periodicals, preferring theatre as a form of sociability. The public political activity of the Russian nobility intensified, beginning with the critique of the government by Nikolaj Karamzin published in the 'Messenger of Europe' in 1802-1803.

Russia's entanglement in the conflict with France during the Napoleonic Wars had an important impact on Russia's interior life. Facing the threat of an invasion and trying to oppose Napoleon's propaganda⁴⁸ with its own ideological policy, the government of Alexander I focused its attention on the state of the public space, trying to manipulate all sections of the public in order to achieve unity. During the Napoleonic wars (up to

⁴⁷ On the similarities between 'Reflections on Russia' and German early nineteenth century national theories see: O.W. Johnston, *The Myth of a Nation – Literature and Politics in Prussia under Napoleon*, Drawer, 1989, pp. 1-103.

⁴⁸ Stuart Woolf remarked on the diplomatic activity of Napoleon's government in Europe: 'The diplomats served the customary two functions of their trade – as sources of information and as agents of their country's policies... The most continuous function of the diplomats, besides reporting information, was to act as instruments of propaganda' (S. Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, London, New York, 1991, pp. 67-68). See also: R.E. Jones, *The nobility and Russian foreign policy*, in *Noblesse, état et société en Russie. XVI-debut du XIX siècle*, Paris, 1993, pp. 159-169.

the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 and especially in 1812-1815) according to the anti-French ideology of the Russian government, an enormous number of articles against French cultural influence in Russia were published. The paradox was, that not only French culture on Russian territory and foreign borrowings as they were, but also the epoch of Peter I was reconsidered. In the official discourse of the eighteenth century, Peter, the first Russian Emperor, was the founder of the modern Russian state. The criticism directed towards the official historical background of the Russian monarchy was one of the features of the early Russian public space.

‘Reflections on Russia’ with its anti-French character, its idea of social unity under the ‘wise’ reign of Aleksej Mikhajlovich, its reconsideration of Peter I’s reforms, its concept of national education and Russian moral exceptionalism were relevant for the new nineteenth century debate which nourished anti-French propaganda in Russia. Bulgakov’s point of view was extremely close to that of the Russian conservator A.S. Shishkov, both were inspired by Rousseau’s theory of national character and differed only in the matter of language, the result, as I have tried to demonstrate, of Bulgakov’s orientation towards the Polish internal cultural situation. It is also obvious why the editor of the 1807 text eliminated even allusions to Polish-oriented logic in Bulgakov’s *Reflections*: in this period the Poles were absolutely identical with the French in the Russian consciousness, and this would have discredited the ‘*Reflections*’. Considering all this, we can interpret a phrase of the editor’s introduction to ‘*Reflections on Russia*’ that the review had been published due to a ‘concatenation of circumstances’. The two historical moments – that of writing and that of publishing – were quiet similar because Russia, both in 1792 and 1807, was forced to carry out anti-French propaganda. There was also an important difference between the two epochs, in 1807 the censorial statute and the relative apathy of the tsar towards the Russian press allowed for the publication of a Russian version of Bulgakov’s text initially designed to remain in manuscript form.

I realize that in the absence of the original of the text as well as of direct evidence of authorship exposes this attribution criticism. Nevertheless, I will try to follow the text’s interpretation based on the proposal of Bulgakov’s as author. Thus we can consider whether the text’s logic corresponds to the historical context. Besides, I suggest to analyzing ‘*Reflections*’ as a text written by an educated Russian nobleman, a manifestation of Moscow noble society. The notion of a ‘Moscow opposition’ took shape in the course of the first half of the nineteenth century but its origins go back to Catherine II’s reign and conflicts between the Empress and Moscow freemasonry at the beginning of the 1790s⁴⁹. From this standpoint, it’s important to consider ‘*Reflections*’ as an expression of the political views of a certain social group, that is of the Moscow nobility. In the period of the publication of Bulgakov’s article, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, this movement (A.S. Shishkov’s circle and Karamzin in his late years) became more tangible first of all thanks to the relative ‘liberty’ of public discussions.

It is also necessary to be clear that the ideas expressed in ‘*Reflections*’, from our point of view, could only with difficulty be addressed, for example, to the French aristocracy: at the beginning of the 1790s the general level of French discussion on Russia and its modern and ancient history was completely different, decisively more

⁴⁹ See: Е. Погосян, От старой Ладogi до Екатеринослава (место Москвы в представлениях Екатерины II о столице империи, in *sLotmanovskij bornik*, 2, Moscow, 1997, pp. 511-522 (Y. Pogosyan, From the old Ladoga to Yekaterinoslav: the way Moscow fitted in Catherine the Great’s perception of her empire’s capital).

detailed than the quite generalized context of Voltaire's and Rousseau's thought, and was focused on the recently published 'Voyage' by J. Chappe d'Auteroche or on different works by Ch.C. Rulhière and others. My hypothesis is also based on the presupposition that the audience of 'Reflections' belonged to a peripheral European society, as I suppose, the Polish one. It seems logical, however, that in explaining Russian history to members of the aristocratic circles the Russian grandee used the universal language of European culture dominated by the French literary and political tradition.

The problem I will consider now is why Bulgakov's text which, as I suggest, had to maintain Russian policy in Poland, couldn't be published in Russia. The aims of the author of 'Reflections', without any doubt, agreed with those of the Russian Empress: in this period she was very preoccupied with the danger of further French revolutionary expansion in Europe and especially in Poland⁵⁰. Bulgakov, as Russian ambassador, was to counteract French propaganda in Poland. I have already mentioned that he wrote a pamphlet in French about the French origins of the Polish rebellion and with 'Reflections' he tried to convince a part of the local aristocracy of the illusiveness of the Russian image created in France in the eighteenth century. It's always important to take into account that 'Reflections on Russia' was written after the beginning of the French revolution and, as a consequence, against its influence.

Bulgakov often stressed the differences between the Russian national political tradition, considered 'barbarian' by French authors, and French political reality which was much less civilized than the Russian under the administration of Catherine. For example, Bulgakov proposed to his readers the comparison of the so-called old 'Moscow Red Square moral school' with the modern Paris clubs, the cult of vanity etc. and asked his readers to say which was the more barbarian between them. The evident allusion to the Jacobin clubs had to prove the obvious advantage of the Russian political system which, thanks to Catherine, was allegedly capable of maintaining an old national moral tradition. Another attack concerned French teachers and Russian noblemen dazzled by French tinsel, a traditional point of Russian anti-French criticism since the middle of the eighteenth century. Moreover, Bulgakov criticized even the modern French education of the nobility, the part of the scapegrace Crispine, the noble fool or the prodigal son in order to study the norms of aristocratic society, while Peter I preferred to establish two personal guard regiments to experiment with drills and to develop war games, and to learn to fulfill orders. Or when imaginary 'civilized' nobles abandoned their children in the countryside, a possible allusion to the famous Rousseau case.

If the general point of Bulgakov's 'Reflections' was fairly close to Catherine's opinion on the French revolution, on French education and contemporary French culture as a whole, his portrayal of an ideal Russian society was extremely far from the theoretical background and real methods of Catherine's government. The eighteenth century Russian reality, with its social structures based on the Table of Ranks, was notably and clearly different from the relatively equal old Muscovite society portrayed by Bulgakov (if not in the sense of the nobility's high moral qualities). Furthermore, the

⁵⁰ See, for example: Katharina II., *Russland und Europa. Beiträge zur internationalen Forschung*, Mainz, 2001, pp. 75-121.

sixth article of ‘Instruction’ contains an unequivocal assertion – ‘Russia is a European power’. Catherine proved that the reforms of Peter the Great were providential for Russia because Peter managed to reveal the real nature of Russia, that is the European one. Bulgakov’s criticism addressed to Peter was quiet contrary to Catherine’s scenario of power based on her continuity with Peter’s attempts at reform. After all, the idea of Russia’s symbolic ‘birth’ under the reign of Russian first Emperor was included in the official Russian monarchical myth belonging at the same time to the basic thought of Voltaire’s concept of Russia. Then, even if we can agree with Bulgakov that the idea of ‘Instruction’ was to make all the estates equal before the law, or that the political mechanism of the Legislative Commission implied direct contact between the Empress and her subjects, notwithstanding the social ideal of Muscovite society described by Bulgakov could have provoked disagreement from Catherine or even incur her anger. In the light of Catherine’s attack on Moscow freemasonry in 1792, the description of Muscovite society which put the moral ideal of making all the free estates equal in their social function in the forefront and contained strong criticism of Peter I particularly because he destroyed the old balance of power and established autocracy, could be conceived by the Empress as ‘seditious’. If we take into consideration that Bulgakov was a close friend of Novikov we can understand why he did not want to publish “Reflections” until the death of Catherine II.

Here another problem is raised – why did Bulgakov, as we know a zealous supporter of Catherine, write a text which was so far from the Russian Empress’s political convictions that it could seem to be ‘seditious’ (in other words “pro-revolutionary”) in Russia being anti-French in Poland? The explanation of this paradox is found in the pragmatics of ‘Reflections on Russia’. According to my hypothesis, in 1792 Bulgakov wrote and probably distributed his text among the Polish aristocracy in order to convince them not to support French propaganda. Probably written immediately after the Russian incursion into Poland in May 1792⁵¹, the text was to prove to other Polish aristocrats the necessity of joining the Targowica Confederation and of taking a pro-Russian stand. This aim required some conformity with the local Polish context and its political features. In few words, what Bulgakov could offer the enlightened Polish aristocracy was a political and cultural framework which should include the possibility of becoming integrated into the Russian empire while preserving a relative “republican” autonomy. In the second half of the eighteenth century Polish political thought was strongly influenced by Rousseau’s treatise and others on Poland. One of the most famous ideological papers of the time, Michal Wielhorski’s ‘On the restoration of the former government according to the original statutes of the Republic’ (1775) began with the words: ‘Every state has a fundamental statute of government, which if it is grounded on the law of nature will lead to certain fortune. Our forebears were once authors of such a government in Poland’. The basis of this political system, inspired by Rousseau’s ‘*Considérations sur le gouvernement de la Pologne*’, was the principle of sovereignty of the nation which included the duty to follow political and cultural republican patterns historically appropriate to Poles⁵².

⁵¹ About the general context of Russo-Polish relationships of that epoch see: N. Davis, *God’s playground. A history of Poland*, vol. 1, Oxford, 1981, pp. 511-547; R.H.. Lord, *The Second Partition of Poland: A Study in Diplomatic History*, Cambridge, London, 1915.

⁵² A. Walicki, *The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood. Polish Political Thought from Noble Republicanism to Tadeusz Kościuszko*, Notre Dame, 1989, pp. 11-16.

At the same time another representative of the Polish republican side, Adam Rzewuski, in his 'Reflections on the forms of republican government' (1790) explained the advantages of national education. Young people, he asserted, should be brought up for public and national life, for without education of this kind, a nation could not exist. Polish thought of this period was guided by the conviction that every nation had an inalienable right to independence. For this reason Rzewuski formulated three main principles of national education: 'to attach a man to the country and to liberty, to endow him with love for custom, and to fill his heart with hatred for slavery and tyrants'⁵³.

The principal of national education which should be taken from the historically given national models of behavior supported by political autonomy was amazingly close to Bulgakov's description of old Muscovite traditions. The crucial point of Bulgakov's 'Reflections' concerns the Russian mode of government. If Catherine, after Peter's reforms, was able to follow the old Muscovite patterns, it meant that she was able to proceed in this way in Poland as well. The single way to preserve Polish national character was to pass on Russian jurisdiction. Bulgakov also argued that the French path was not appropriate to Poles, because Jacobin freedom was completely imagined and in reality transformed into pure immorality. Describing the ideal moral society where all the estates could take part in government and a monarch always respected 'public' opinion Bulgakov wanted to resolve many problematic points in Polish discussions, for example on the hereditary or electoral character of Polish monarchy or on the role of the nobility in the state administration. It's also interesting that Bulgakov did not indicate (perhaps because of its proximity to French Jacobin thought and its relative insignificance in the Polish context⁵⁴) linguistic unification as a fundamental feature of national administrative policy but stated that only moral perfection was able to save a country from tyranny. Moral perfection is treated by Bulgakov not as a universal principle but as an innate Russian feature. Catherine, in her 'Instruction', resorted to innate Russian rules, and so she would also respect Polish innate rules (for example linguistic autonomy). The most interesting point here is, in my opinion, the implicit parallel between Poland and Moscow. In Bulgakov's writing Moscow appeared as a kind of 'Russian' counterpart to the future Poland, as a place where national features and a certain political autonomy were built up, in contrast with the negative image of the present and future Polish 'Jacobin' rebellion. Undoubtedly 'Reflections on Russia' provides one of the first examples of the 'Moscow opposition' so hated by Catherine in the last period of her reign. Paradoxically in order to convince the Polish aristocracy to accept Catherine's power Bulgakov was forced to resort to the purely 'oppositional' argument. The idea of Moscow's political and cultural exceptionalism gained recognition during the anti-Napoleonic wars and became crucial for Nicolas I's national ideology.

I have attributed 'Reflections on Russia' to a famous diplomat and man of letters Jakov Ivanovič Bulgakov. My analysis seeks to grasp the moment of the birth of Russian public spaces for debating the problems of Russian history. The article 'Reflections on Russia' traversed a long path within the framework of Russian noble society. The text was created for the use of a foreign, French language salon and, probably, represented a

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 17-18.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

written form of an initially oral discourse used to convince a part of the European (Polish, as I have suggested) aristocracy to change their views on Russia and its history. After being written and promulgated the text remained as a manuscript until the Napoleonic wars when its rhetoric served again as an instrument to convince a Russian and European public. But in this case the article, thanks to the widespread mechanism of noble patronage, was published in the most popular Russian review of its time. This route points out, first of all, the moment of the construction of Russian public space when the common and most famous form of sociability (the salon) starts to be substituted by a new form such as the printed press. It's interesting that it was the Russian noble elite (and not the third stratum, constituted in Russia by the provincial nobility or the nobility of the provincial towns⁵⁵) who contributed more to the construction of new forms of sociability using its historically approved mechanisms as the patronage to create a more open cultural framework.

Having analyzed the text, I have arrived at the conclusion that its main ideas can be interpreted in diametrically opposite ways depending on the circumstances of its circulation. In this sense 'Reflections' could provide us with an excellent example of the circulation of ideas between Russia and Western Europe. I have also defined more precisely that the apology of the Moscow political system which took place during the first decade of the nineteenth century and proclaimed autonomy towards official Petersburg and which had noticeable ideological consequences later, has to be traced back to the early 1790s. It turns out to be impossible to analyze the text as giving proof to the contradiction between the Moscow and Petersburg political systems, out of the Polish and, more general, European (first of all, French) context. As a consequence, being consistently anti-French Russian nationalism was growing up as a response and elaboration of ideas previously formulated in France whose culture dominated in Europe. I can say that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the French Enlightenment was strongly involved in the process of the construction of Russian national identity, functioning as the main source of ideas and as a sort of 'negative' standpoint to be rejected at the same time⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ J.P. LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class*, op. cit., p. 23.

⁵⁶ On the similar processes in Europe see, for example: R. Eagles, *Francophilia in English Society, 1748-1815*, London, New York, 2000.