The Mediterranean and Russia in the Early Modern Period (1400-1700): An Annotated Bibliography

English language sources:


A classic work of naval history by one of the most important 20th century naval historians Roger Charles Anderson (1883-1976). The book devotes significant sections discussing Russian naval activities in the Mediterranean, both in the pre-Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic periods.


The so-called Eastern Question concerning the fate of the Ottoman Empire was from the mid-18th century until the end of the World War One the main focus of the relations between Russia and other European powers. Michael Smith Anderson (1922-2006), a long-time history professor at the London School of Economic, surveys the main issues of contention based on extensive historical research, including the Russian sources.


According to the legend, when Sophia Paleologue got married to the Russian Grand Duke Ivan III, she brought with her to Moscow hundreds of ancient books from the Byzantine libraries. David Arans examines the claims of the proponents and the opponents of the library's existence and evaluates all available historical evidence. He finds both sides to be ideologically colored and concludes that even if the library had existed, it could have hardly survived all the fires, wars, and revolutions affecting Moscow since the 16th century.


Thomas Freller (b. 1964) is a German-born historian who has written several books on the history of Malta and the Knights of St. John. Based on the primary sources from the Maltese archives, Freller chronicles Russian attempts in the second half of the 18th century to make Malta their base in the Mediterranean. Though these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful, they explain the Knights of St. John's relocation to Russia after Napoleon's conquest of Malta.

Jack V. Haney (1940-2015), a distinguished scholar of Russian history and culture, chronicles the activities of the Italian-educated and humanist-oriented Greek monk and philosopher Maxim the Greek (Michael Trivolis) (1475-1556) who came to Russia at the invitation of the Grand Duke Vasily III in 1518, but soon got entangled in political and religious controversies and ended his days in prison. The only book-length biography of Maxim the Greek available in English.


Julia Leikin masterfully reviews three recent books on Russian maritime history, two published in Russian (Igor Kurukin's *Peter the Great's Persian Campaign: The Nizovoi korpus on the Shores of the Caspian, 1722-1735*, and Irina Smilianskaia, Elena Smilianskaia, and Mikhail Velizhev's *Russia in the Mediterranean Region: The Archipelago Expedition of Catherine the Great*) and one in English (Ryan Tucker Jones' *Empire of Extinction: Russia and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867*). She concludes that the maritime agenda, both in the Mediterranean and beyond, was a crucial part of the Russian imperial policies.


Several 15th century Italian architects, including Aristotele Fioravante, Antonio Gislardi, and Pietro Antonio Solari, were invited to Moscow by the Russian Grand Duke Ivan III (1462-1505) to supervise the construction of Russian Orthodox churches. This non-academic, magazine article tells a part of their story. The article includes contemporary color photographs of the churches built by the Italian masters.


A collection of papers presented at the International Conference of the Study Group on 18th Century Russia, University of East Anglia, Norwich in 1981. Max Okenfuss, a long-time professor of Russian history at Washington University, St. Louis, discusses the impact of the Italian travels on the cultural outlook of Peter Tolstoi and other Russian aristocrats sent to Venice by Peter the Great to acquire theoretical and practical naval education.


Max Okenfuss examines the influence of the Jesuit model of classical education on the educational reforms in Russia implemented by Peter the Great. He also analyzes the resistance to this model.

A thorough and unique study of Russian intellectual culture from the mid-17th until the end of the 18th century. Okenfuss traces the trajectory of European (Latin) humanist ideas in the early modern Russian society and finds that, although these ideas were consistently advocated by the intellectual figures from the Western part of the Empire (Ukraine, Poland), their overall impact on the ruling Russian elites was minimal.


Based on primary sources in the Italian archives, Norman E. Saul (b. 1932), a scholar of Russian diplomatic history, chronicles the Russian involvement in the Mediterranean in the first phase of the Napoleonic wars. The special attention is paid on close relations between the Knights of St. John and the Russian Emperor Paul I. Unfortunately, Saul was denied access to the (then) Soviet archives and so (through no fault of his own) his narrative remains incomplete.


The English translation of the travel diary of Peter Tolstoi (1645-1729), one of the key associates of Peter the Great and the first Russian permanent ambassador to Constantinople (1701-1714) (also, a great-great-grandfather of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy). The diary was written in 1698 and contains the perceptive descriptions of Venice, Rome, and other Italian cities as well as many transit stops from Russia to Italy and back. The translator Max Okenfuss provides an in-depth introduction and extensive notes.

Vella, Andrew P. Malta and the Czars: Diplomatic Relations between the Order of St. John and Russia, 1697-1802. Malta: University of Malta, 1972.

The earliest and most thorough study of the relations between the Knights of St. John and Russia from Peter the Great to Paul I. It highlights the cooperation between Russia and the Maltese contributing to the Russian naval victory over the Ottomans during the battle of Chesma between June 24-26, 1770. This slim volume is primarily based on Maltese archives and cites Latin, Italian, French, and Spanish sources.


David Woodward, a British military expert, chronicles the development and growth of the Russian navy from Peter the Great to the post-WWII Soviet state. He describes major Russian naval battles and commanders. He writes for the general audience with a political message supportive of the Western anti-Soviet unity.
Russian language sources:


Sergei Androsov (b. 1948) is an art historian in charge of the Western European Art Section at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. In this book, he discusses and describes in detail the sculptures and other art objects acquired by Peter the Great in Italy. The book contains references to original archival documents.

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Sergei Androsov describes the famous Farsetti Collection acquired from Venice by the Russian tsar Paul in 1800 and now located in the State Hermitage Museum. The collection includes several dozens of plaster casts of ancient and modern sculptures. It was compiled by the 15th century Venetian aristocrat Filippo Vincenzo Farsetti. The book contains color photographs.

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Sergei Androsov discusses the biographies of the Russian aristocrats and art collectors (including the members of the imperial family) who traveled to Rome in the second half of the 18th century in search of art objects. Their acquisitions, located today in the State Hermitage Museum and other museums in Russia, are described in detail.


Maxim Anisimov (b. 1974) is a senior researcher at the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, specializing in the 18th century Russian international relations. In this chapter, he examines several important episodes in the relations between Russia and the Mediterranean powers, including the Napoleonic wars.


A fundamental, three-volume study by the group of well-known Russian military and naval historians. The first volume examines the period from the establishment of the Russian fleet under Peter the Great until the First World War. The second volume deals with the period from the First World War to the Second World War, including the 1917 February and October
revolutions and the Civil War. The last, third volume covers the Second World War and post war developments until the mid-1990s.


Vitalii Dotsenko (b. 1948) is a Russian military historian and the author of more than a dozen books on Russian naval history and the Russian fleet. This book is a collection of his academic articles on the most important Russian naval battles, starting with the times of Peter the Great and ending with the Second World War.


Igor Dubrovskii is a senior researcher at the Institute of General History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, specializing in the history of the Middle Ages and the relations of Russia and Western Europe in the early modern period. In this article, Dubrovskii presents a thorough overview of the relations between Muscovy and the Italian city-states based on the original documents from several Italian archives, including the archives of the Vatican.

Igor Dubrovskii publishes a list of more than 600 archival documents on the 1580-1582 missions of three Russian diplomats to Germany and Italy. He also includes the documents from the unpublished manuscript on the history of the Russian-Italian relations by the early 20th century Russian historian Evgenii F. Shmurlo (1854-1934), a specialist on the Russian diplomatic history.

Igor Dubrovski examines the relations between Muscovy and the Republic of Venice in the second half of the 16th century and explains why the Venetian plan to establish the anti-Ottoman alliance with the Greeks in 1570 by relying on the mediation of Muscovy did not work out. Dubrovski concludes that the influence of Muscovy on the Greeks, assumed by the Venetians, was not strong enough.

Kazdagli, Nejmeddine. “Rossiisko-Tunisskie otnoshenia na nachal'nom etape: Epoha

Nejmeddine Kazdagli is assistant professor of history at the University of Tunis Carthage, currently based at the African Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Basing his research on the work of Russian, Tunisian, and French historians, Kazdagli describes the initial stage of diplomatic relations between the Regency of Tunis and the Russian Empire in the second half of the 18th century. The article emphasizes the crucial role played by the Dutch consul A. Nyssens and includes the discussion of the activities of the Tunisian and Algerian corsairs.


For decades, the only in-depth study by a Soviet/Russian historian of the relations between the Republic of Venice's Eastern Adriatic province of Dalmatia and Russia. Knyazhetskaya pays particular attention to the schooling of the group of the Russian noblemen at the naval school of the Venetian captain and Dalmatian notable Marko Martinović (1663-1716) in his native Perast in the Bay of Kotor (today's Montenegro) in 1698. The seventeen noblemen sent by Peter the Great and included the brother of Peter's first wife, Avraam Lopukhin.


Boris Kurakin (1676-1727) was one of the closest associates of Peter the Great and one of the first Russian “permanent” ambassadors, including the postings in London, The Hague, and Paris. This memoir covers his career prior to diplomatic service and contains the description of his naval training in Italy and visits to Western Europe. It is much less detailed compared to the travel diary of his compatriot and another Peter the Great associate, Peter Tolstoi.


Elena Maleto is a senior researcher at the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, specializing in medieval and early modern cultural interactions between the East and the West. In this volume, she compiles a collection of thirteen writings of Russian medieval and early modern travelers to Western Europe and Central Asia. The volume provides a detailed
Matasova, Tatyana. Russko-italiyanskie otnosheniya v politike i kulture moskovskoi Rusi serediny XV-pervoi treti XVI v. [Russian-Italian Relations in the Politics and Culture of the Moscow Rus’ from the Middle of the 15th to the First Third of the 16th Centuries]. Doctoral Dissertation. The History Faculty of the Moscow State University. Moscow, 2012.

Tatyana Matasova (b. 1986) teaches history at the Moscow State University, specializing in the medieval and early modern history of the Russian-Italian relations. Her dissertation deals with the earliest contacts between Muscovy and the Italian city-states from 1430s (the period of the Council of Florence) until 1520s when, for religious and geopolitical reasons, direct contacts are discontinued for more than one hundred years. Matasova's research is based on archival materials from both Russian and Italian archives.

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Based on earlier Russian historiography and several archival documents from Russian and Italian archives, Tatyana Matasova describes the first accounts of Italian travelers to the Russian North (the Arkhangelsk region, the Solovetsky Islands, and the White Sea), particularly focusing on a letter that the Italian master Ridolfo ‘Aristotele’ Fioravante, the architect of the Uspensky Cathedral in Moscow, sent to the Duke of Milan Gian Galeazzo Sforza in 1476. Matasova concludes that the main focus of Italian interest in the Russian North were furs and hunting birds (gyrfalcons).

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Beginning with the period prior to the marriage between the Russian Grand Duke Ivan III and the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor Sophia Paleologue, Tatyana Matasova presents an in-depth analysis of the perception of Italy among the 15th century Russian elites. She concludes that this perception evolved over time and turned less negative toward the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries. The article relies on the existing Russian historiography and introduces no previously unpublished archival material.

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This short conference report claims that the contract concluded with the Italian architect
Aristotele Fioravante for the building of the Uspensky Cathedral in Moscow in 1479 mirrored the style of other known Italian Renaissance contracts, thus demonstrating the adoption of the Italian legal frameworks in the 15th century Russia. The claims is based on circumstantial evidence found in the early modern Russian chronicles as the original contract has not been found.

Tatyana Matasova examines the rationale behind the mission of two Russian diplomats to Venice and Rome in the period from 1498 until 1504. She relies both on the early modern Russian chronicles and the diaries of the Venetian Senator Marino Sanuto (1466-1536). She concludes that one of the key aims of the Russian diplomats' mission was the purchase of cloths and jewelry for the wedding of Ivan III and Sophia Paleologue's daughter Theodosia (1485-1503). However, the sources do not indicate whether the acquisitions ever made it to Moscow.

Expanding on her previously published work on the mission of Russian diplomats to Venice and Rome in the period from 1498 until 1504, Tatyana Matasova presents an in-depth analysis of the diaries of the Venetian Senator Marino Sanuto with regards to his and his compatriots perceptions of and interactions with the Russians. She concludes that in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, Russia (Muscovy) was perceived by the Italian elites as a rich and strange country of the Far North.

The most thorough biography of Sophia Paleologue (1455-1503), the second wife of the Muscovy Grand Duke Ivan III and the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI available in Russian language. Tatyana Matasova dispels several myths surrounding Sophia Paleologue present in Russian historiography and offers a critical and realistic portrayal of Sophia's life, influence, and role she played in Russian politics of the times. The book includes references to previously unpublished archival material.

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The only in-depth lecture on the relations between a Mediterranean power (in this case, the Republic of Venice) and Russia in the early modern period accessible in the public domain. Tatyana Matasova covers the period from the rule of Ivan III (1462-1505) to the rule of Peter the Great (1682-1725). She focuses on the main areas of interaction, such as trade, cultural exchange, and the Ottoman question. The lecture is 77 minutes long and includes about a dozen slides.


Nikolay Rogozhin (b. 1947) is one of the best known Soviet/Russian historians, specializing in Russian history from the 15th to 17th centuries. He is the author of several books on the early modern Russian diplomatic history. This edited volume collects the Russian translations of the reports and memoirs of English, Italian, Austrian, Hanseatic, Polish, and Danish diplomats based in Muscovy in the 16th and 17th centuries.


Published in the early 1980s, this was the first study of the relations between Russia and Italian states in the early modern period. It is considered a classic in the field. While the book focuses on trade interactions, especially between Russia and Venice and Russia and Genoa, it also provides the wider political and cultural context of the times.


Alexander Shirokorad (b. 1947) is one of the most prolific Russian writers on historical topics, especially those concerning military history. In this short book, he covers the history of Russian interventions in the Mediterranean from the ancient Rus' to the post-Soviet era. Shirokorad relies on the secondary sources. The book is oriented toward the general reader.


Galina Sibireva (b. 1932) is a retired historian who worked in the Institute of General History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This is her doctoral dissertation. The book analyzes the relations between the Kingdom of Naples and Russia in the period before the French Revolution and gives a vivid, in-depth portrayal of the main issues and personalities of the times.

Nina Sinitsyna (1936-2018) was a Soviet/Russian historian, specializing in the medieval and early modern Russian history. Her main research focus were the activities and writings of Maxim the Greek (1475-1556), a humanist-oriented Greek monk, scholar, and philosopher who spent most of his life in Russia and frequently clashed with the conservative authorities of the Russian Orthodox Church. This is the most thorough scholarly treatment of his biography.


Elena Smilianskaia is a professor of history at the Moscow Higher School of Economics. Basing her research on the unpublished Greek and Russian archives, Smilianskaia describes the political, economic, and social organization of daily life on the Greek islands taken over by the fleet of the Russian Empress Catherine the Great in the 1770s. The book also contains the first Russian translation of the diary of the German officer Karl-Ludwig von Toll who was an eyewitness of the events.


The most extensive study of the involvement of the Russian Empire in the Mediterranean during the rule of Catherine the Great written by three noted Russian historians. The book covers a vast range of sources, including both the Russian and Western European archives, and discusses Russian relations with the Ottoman Empire and various Italian states. The focus is not only on the Russian military strategy, but also on public diplomacy and what today would be called 'soft power.' The book contains newly found archival materials published for the first time.

Tokareva, Evegniya and Mikhail Talalai, eds. *Rossiya i Italiya: Italyantsy v Rosii ot Drevnei Rus` do nashikh dnei [Russia and Italy: Italians in Russia from the Ancient Rus' to Our Time]*. Moscow: Lenand, 2015.

A collection of essays by the researchers of the Institute for General History of the Russian Academy of Sciences devoted to the political, economic, and cultural aspects of the Italian presence in Russia from the late 15th to the 20th centuries. The collection includes the analysis of the writings of the Italian travelers and diplomats as well as the memoirs of Italians living in the Soviet Union published for the first time.

The first complete edition of Peter Tolstoi's travel diary published in Russia with an in-depth discussion and meticulous analysis of his activities and writings by the editors in the afterword. The book also provides the discussion of the manuscript's fate from the time it was written until one of its versions was first published in the late 19th century. A key scholarly resource for understanding the relations between Russia and the Mediterranean powers during the rule of Peter the Great.


Mikhail Talalai (b. 1956) is a Russian historian based in Italy as the representative of the Institute of General History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In this book, he provides the most detailed biographical study of the Russian aristocrats and public figures who died and were buried in Italy. The book is based on the archival material from dozens of Italian cities, including Rome, Venice, Milan, Naples, Genoa, San Remo, etc.


Evgenii Tarle (1874-1955) was a well-known Russian/Soviet historian, specializing in military history. Tarle's best known work is on Napoleon and his invasion of Russia, first translated into English in 1942. This publication collects Tarle's scholarly essays, dealing with the history of the Russian fleet, from its first victories, including the battle of Chesma in 1770, to its defeats and near destruction during the Crimean War (1853-1856).

Serb-Croat-Montenegrin language sources:


Yugoslav historiography paid a particular attention to the naval education of the Russian aristocrat Peter Tolstoi (1645-1729) in Venice and his June 1698 8-day stop in Perast (a small town in the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro) to visit more than a dozen fellow Russian aristocrats who studied there in order to emphasize the political and cultural links between Russia and the Southern Slavs. This short essay presents one of the first in-depth scholarly discussions of this topic.


Don Nikola (Niko) Luković (1887-1970), a Catholic priest, was one of the best-known intellectuals and historical researchers in the Bay of Kotor region (Boka Kotorska). In this
article, based on primary archival materials, Luković presents the biography of Marko Martinović (1663-1716), a native of Perast, a distinguished Venetian sea captain, and the founder of the first nautical school in the Eastern Adriatic.


Jovan J. Martinović is a well-known Montenegrin historical researcher and archeologist. Martinović provides the political context for the decision of Peter the Great to send a group of Russian aristocrats to the Republic of Venice for theoretical and practical naval education. The article is based on primary materials from the Russian archives.


The first complete edition of the lectures of the Venetian sea captain Marko Martinović given to the Russian aristocrats at his naval school “Nautika” in Perast in 1698. Based on the notes taken by an unknown Russian aristocrat who attended the lectures and located today at the Russian National Library, the lectures are published in both Russian and Serb-Croat-Montenegrin. The book contains an in-depth commentary and analysis of all previous scholarly writings on Marko Martinović by a distinguished Montenegrin historian, Radoslav Raspopović.


Marija Mihaliček is an art historian and researcher based in Kotor, Montenegro. In this article, she meticulously analyzes one of the most famous paintings in Montenegro depicting the Venetian sea captain Marko Martinovic and his Russian students. She speculates on the name of the author and the date of the painting, which have remained a mystery to this day. The painting is located in the town museum in Perast and is seen by thousands of tourists every year.

This project was completed with funding from NEH and the sponsorship of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library during the 2018 NEH Summer Institute “Thresholds of Change: Modernity and Transformation in the Mediterranean, 1400-1700,” June 18-July 15 2018, Collegeville, Minnesota.