

## STUDY GROUP ON EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

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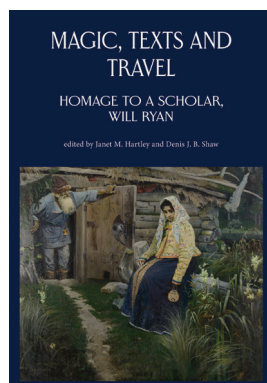
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*Janet M. Hartley and Denis J. B. Shaw*, 'Introduction', pp. i–v.

## Introduction

WILL RYAN learnt his Russian at school (Bromley Grammar School for Boys), then in the joint services programme for linguists during national service in the Royal Navy and finally at Oxford. The greatest intellectual influences on him at Oxford were Boris Unbegaum and John Simmons;<sup>1</sup> they instilled a love of the Russian language and the need for a meticulous approach to sources which has stayed with him throughout his career. He spent one year in Leningrad as a British Council postgraduate student in 1962–63 (during the Cuban missile crisis, at a time when he was still in the naval reserve). While studying manuscripts in the Manuscript Department of what is now the National Library of Russia he made the acquaintance of Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev. Likhachev immediately recognized a true scholar, took a serious interest in his work and they became friends. Will's postgraduate work led to a DPhil in 1970 on 'Astronomical and Astrological Terminology in Old Russian Literature'. By this time he had already been employed by the Clarendon Press and had worked as an assistant curator at the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford. There followed eight years as a lecturer in Russian language and literature at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (University of London, and now part of University College London), where he served as chairman of the staff assembly and editor of the *Slavonic and East European Review*. But the main part of his career was spent at the Warburg Institute where he was the academic librarian for twenty-six years and is now an honorary fellow (and whose contribution, both intellectual and practical, to the Institute is described here by Charles Burnett).

This volume honours and celebrates Will's contribution to scholarship. The range of expertise demonstrated by the contributors reflects the breadth of Will's own scholarship, which encompasses magic, folklore, linguistics, textual analysis, and the history of science and exploration. His postgraduate work evolved into a far wider interest in magical texts and spells which led to the publication of many articles and chapters and culminated in 1999 in his magisterial book, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia*. The book is encyclopaedic in coverage and is divided into the following sections: popular magic; wizards and witches; popular divination; signs, omens, auguries; calendar predictions; predictions

<sup>1</sup> John Simmons, librarian and scholar, loved cats; Will's article 'Russia and the Magic of Cats' was written in his honour in a special edition of the journal *Solanus*.

from dreams and the human body; spells, curses and magic prayers; talismans and amulets; *materia magica*; texts on amulets; magic of letters and number; geomancy; alchemy and the virtues of stones; Byzantine and post-Byzantine astrology; magic, the Church, the law and the State. The book has been described as ‘impressive in its scope, its thoroughness, and its phenomenal basis in knowledge’ [...] ‘a work of incomparable import’<sup>2</sup> and as a ‘fundamental reference work on magic in Russia for generations to come’.<sup>3</sup> Many reviewers commented, almost in awe, that the book was the product of over thirty years of scholarship, all too rare today when so many of us are required to write to meet targets in five-year plans.

The book appeared at a time when the constraints of Soviet scholarship were ending and a new generation of Russian scholars was turning its attention to Russian magic. Will’s book was acknowledged in Russia as of fundamental importance and *The Bathhouse at Midnight* appeared in Russian translation in 2006 as *Bania v polnoch’: istoricheskii obzor magii i gadanii v Rossii* (Aleksei Chernetsov was the main editor and Elena Smilianskaia was one of the translators). A generous tribute to Will’s contribution to Russian cultural history written by Andrei Toporkov and Aleksei Chernetsov was published to celebrate his eightieth birthday.<sup>4</sup>

Magic is well represented in this volume by the chapters on Russian spells by Val Kivelson (on animal magic) and Andrei Toporkov (on love spells) and on Russian amulets by Aleksei Chernetsov. Will’s book demonstrated that the boundaries are porous between magic, science, religion and traditional beliefs (Will was also an active member, and president, of the British Folklore Society). The chapters by Eve Levin on blood-letting, by Gary Marker on the Talitskii case and by Florentina Badalanova Geller on the mythographies of the demonic discuss the complexity of beliefs in the context of medicine, religion and customs in Russia and Bulgaria. As a librarian, Will had few PhD students but Yuri Stoyanov was jointly supervised with Charles Burnett on the topic of ‘Apocryphal Themes and Apocalyptic Elements in Bogomil Dualist Theology and their Implications for the Study of Catharism’; Yuri currently works on Freemasonry and has contributed a chapter here from his latest research on Russian Freemasonry.

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Kivelson, review in *American Historic Review*, 105, 2000, 5, pp. 1834–35.

<sup>3</sup> Eve Levin, review in *Slavic Review*, 59, 2000, 4, p. 931.

<sup>4</sup> A. L. Toporkov, A. V. Chernetsov, ‘Iubilei. Vil’iamu Frensisu Raianu – 80 let’, *Nauchnyi al’manakh traditsionnaia kul’tura*, 2 (66), 2017, pp. 187–91.

Will's first job was to revise and copy edit the *Oxford Russian-English Dictionary*. His interest in linguistics and translations has remained and evolved throughout his career. His first publication, 'Rathbone's Surveyor', in 1964, discovered the first translation of part of an English book into Russian in the early seventeenth century. He jointly wrote the *Penguin Russian Dictionary*, which appeared in 1995, and has translated a number of important articles by Russian scholars into English. His work is founded on a meticulous and erudite analysis of texts, of which particular mention should be made of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secret of Secrets*, alleged to be the advice given by Aristotle to Alexander the Great, which has been described as the most popular non-religious text of the Middle Ages and which could be found in royal libraries all over Europe, including Russia. Will first discovered the Russian version of this document in the Bodleian Library when he was an undergraduate; he wrote many articles on the subject but it would be some sixty years before this important but immensely difficult text with annotated translation was to be published jointly with Moshe Taube as *The Secret of Secrets: The East Slavic Version* (2019). Moshe has added to this work in his analysis of the Slavic translations from Hebrew in this volume. Translations of foreign legal texts were important to the tsars as Bill Butler's paper on Peter I demonstrates. Will's meticulous approach to textual analysis is shared by Ralph Cleminson and Sergei Bogatyrev who both use their expertise in this volume to challenge legends — the former looking at classical writers on the land of Serica and the latter analysing Russian chronicles on the golden belt incident in 1433. Adelina Angusheva-Tihanov thoroughly examines Slavonic renditions of the text of the *Vita* of St Basil. Will has known Boris Uspenskij for many years and the topic of his contribution here on royal titles and forms of address reflects their shared interest in the meaning of words and the possible misinterpretations which can arise from their use.

Will liked to discover things. His own view is that one of his most important publications was a short article on 'John Tradescant's Russian Abacus' published in 1972. Will had discovered when working at the Museum of the History of Science that the abacus in the collection was in fact Russian and wrongly labelled (it was a compulsory part of visits to Oxford that his children had to be taken to the Museum to see the abacus, now of course correctly labelled). His interest in science and naval technology stems not only from his employment at the Museum but also from his national service in the navy. He will be pleased, therefore, to see the inventions of Samuel Bentham described in Roger Bartlett's paper and the account of the exploits of Lord Effingham with

the Russian navy in the joint paper by Elena Smilianskaia and Julia Leikin. The latter stems from a project being prepared for the Hakluyt Society, of which Will had been the series editor for many years and then vice president and president. This volume includes chapters on Russian exploration by Jim Gibson on the river Amur and Alexey Postnikov on the Arctic and North Pacific coasts; Jim published a massive two-volume study of Russian California with the Hakluyt Society, and Alexey is the Russian representative of the Society in Russia. Will devoted much scholarly activity to the Hakluyt Society because of his interest in the history of travel and exploration (and his relationship with the Society is discussed further by Jim Bennett). This volume is rich on travel accounts within the Russian Empire, or at least its extremities — in Siberia (Denis Shaw) and the Crimea (Tony Cross) — and beyond — in Jerusalem (Simon Dixon) and Manchuria (Paul Dukes). It is fitting that so many British members of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia feature in this section of the volume, as Will was one of the earliest members of the Group and has been a regular participant and contributor to the annual meetings in the United Kingdom and to the Group's international conferences. It is perhaps also fitting that the final paper in the collection is on Manchuria — Will's teacher at his grammar school, Freddie May, had learnt his Russian in Harbin under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Will's contribution to scholarship has been given formal recognition: he was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 2000 and was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2007. Will has always been generous in sharing his scholarship, in encouraging younger scholars and in taking an interest in the work of colleagues. His contributions to discussions, whether it has been at seminars at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies and the Warburg Institute or at meetings of the Slavonic and East European Medieval Studies Group and the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia, have been erudite, and often have been witty, but have always been kind and supportive to young scholars. He is a firm believer that the most valuable discussions take place outside the lecture theatre — whether over meals or at the bar in conferences or, best of all, at home with generous supplies of food and drink on the table. Will is a wonderful host and an excellent cook and his *kotlety po-Raianskii* (Ryan meatballs) are legendary.

This volume is a reflection of the deep respect in which Will is held and of his friendship with so many colleagues in so many countries. It was completed under difficult circumstances as COVID-19 closed

archives and libraries and restricted travel. Several contributors had to overcome these unexpected problems and did so with fortitude. We are also grateful to Barbara Wyllie for preparing this difficult and complex text for publication. The publisher is the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia. We have followed the style of the Modern Humanities Research Association and used the Library of Congress transliteration scheme. Above all, we should like to thank all the contributors; they have made this volume not only possible but a pleasure and a privilege to edit.

Janet M. Hartley and Denis J. B. Shaw  
October 2020