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THE EARLIEST ENGLISH STUDENTS OF RUSSIAN

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Several of the Elizabethan and Jacobean travellers in Russia had philological interests: and at the close of the seventeenth century the first Russian grammar was published in England with a dedication to a chief counsellor of Czar Peter I, whose practical interest in English for what we should now term technological reasons marks the climax of the first period of Anglo-Russian linguistic relations. It is to these pioneer English diplomats and merchants that we owe the first attempts at transliterating Russian into English characters intended to indicate the pronunciation implied in the Cyrillic writing as used before the first Petrine reform. These Englishmen often also sought to convey some of the colloquial qualities of the Russian as it sounded to their ears.

The first to produce a work in print on Russia was Giles Fletcher the elder, whose *Of the Rvsse Common Wealth* (London, 1591 and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth)[1] was the first serious work of its kind. This book, with its considerable historical interest, though it frequently gives transliterations of Russian words and phrases, shows little actual knowledge of Russian and only such as could be got by ear without knowledge of grammar, and the transliterations are commonly clumsy and inconsistent. But it was Sir Jerome Horsey, diplomat and trader in the latest years of Elizabeth's reign, who was the first Englishman to show a really first-hand knowledge of Russian, its affinities with Greek and its outstanding copiousness. In the *Relation or Memoriall abstracted out of Sir Jerom Horsey his Travells*, printed in the Hakluyt Society's volume for 1856, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, printed from MS. Harley 1813 in the British Museum, Horsey writes:—

> Though but a plaine gramarian, and hauing som smake in the Greeke, I ateyned by the *Affinitie therof* in short tyme to the readie and familier knowledge of their vulgar speach, the Sclavonian tonge, *the most copious and elegant language in the world*.[2]

It also seems that Horsey's interest in Russian grammar almost prompted him to try his hand at a Russian grammar in Latin for his friend who later became the Moscovite Patriarch Philarete. The young Fëdor, the future Philarete, he writes:—

> Whose pleasure was, owt of his loue, in his yong years, to haue me make in the Sclauonian carrector, in Latten wordes and phrases, a kynde of grammer, wherin he toke great delight.[3]

The first consistent effort, however, to produce a dictionary and some sketch of Russian grammar for English readers was provided by the eminent physician and mathematician Mark Ridley, M. D., who was chief medical expert at the Russian imperial court in the last decade of the sixteenth century. In MS. Bodley Laud Misc. 47a, in Ridley's own hand, we find his *A Dictionarie of the vulgar Russe tongue*. This

was evidently an English-Russian dictionary, but with the Russian in careful Cyrillic characters, containing some 6,000 words with their equivalents, preceded by a little skeleton of grammar and including classified lists of the names of birds, fishes, plants and diseases. Ridley never published, but clearly intended his work to teach Englishmen. The Cyrillic alphabet, with names and English pronunciational equivalents of the letters, are the first attempt of the kind. Ridley's *Dictionarie* is discussed, with some further references, in *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 2 (1951).[4] This is, if we omit Horsey's slight touches on the subject, the first little attempt at a Russian grammar in English or Russian. Neither of these two considerable Russian experts is very exact in phonetic transcription though both knew the Russian orthography tolerably: and Horsey has left some specimens of his Cyrillic hand.[5]

I must now pass to by far the most important and interesting work of this period, the Russian-English vocabulary and diary written in the years 1618–1620 during his travels in Russia by Richard James, better known as the possessor of the earliest copied Russian *Byliny*. In MS. James 43 of the Bodleian James wrote down the interesting collections of Russian words and phrases he heard or thought he heard in actual Russian conversations. He wrote these just as they occurred in his daily life, grouping them naturally but with no suggestion of a dictionary plan, unlike Mark Ridley, whose work was clearly based on already established traditional lines as found in John Rider's *Bibliotheca Scholastica* (London, 1581), an English-Latin dictionary.

The first definite grammar of Russian was not to appear till 1696, a small Latin work published in England and for English students though written in the then expected Latin. This *Grammatica Russica* by a German then resident in England, Wilhelm Ludolf, the earliest printed Russian grammar, issued from the Oxford press with its dedication to a Russian Prince, ante-dated the first grammar written in Russian, that of Lomonosov, by nearly seventy years.[6] Ludolf's scholarly little book like all the English efforts on Russian before it, was based on the spoken language primarily: and it is this direct reproduction from ear which gives such value as they have to the work of the English pioneers in Russian. Especially is this true of Richard James. His spontaneously written vocabulary and day-book is also of value for the light it may throw on the pronunciation and locutions of both English and Russian in the early seventeenth century.

It was not till 1959 that full publication of James's material in MS. Bodley James 43 took place with the late B. A. Larin's full and elaborate study. This *Russko-angliyskiy Slovar'-dnevnik Richarda Dzhemsa (1618—1619 gg.)*[7] includes a photograph of James's text, full glossarial indexes with wide discussion and detailed commentaries. But Larin's work is naturally done from a Russian rather than an English position. It is therefore mainly from the English side that I now offer a few observations on James's vocabulary and diary, and to touch on some problems suggested by his use of an English transliteration for all the Russian words and phrases treated. In his Preface Larin makes a sound and important statement:—

> I am deeply convinced of the great importance of the linguistic material contained in Richard James's writings, both for the history of the Russian language and *for the history of English linguistic science.*[8]

Richard James, born and schooled in Newport Isle-of-Wight, was a Fellow of Corpus Christi College Oxford, a violently Protestant theologian, and especially a far-flung and learned philologue. He was a nephew of Bodley's first librarian, closely connected with Sir Robert Cotton whose librarian he was for a time, and with

a group of Anglo-Saxon scholars. His interest in Old English is attested by Anglo-Saxon and related vocabularies which survive in MSS. Bodley James 41 and 42. Before going to Russia as Chaplain to the English Embassy in 1618, James had clearly been studying Russian with some progress. His fairly frequent use of a Cyrillic character among the English letters of his transliteration, and the apparent consciousness of a distinction between the Russian ять, (ѣ) and *e* which this sometimes reveals, are evidence of previous knowledge of written Russian, though his work otherwise strongly suggests that all his Russian was obtained for his vocabularies from the spoken language only. However an acquaintance with the Slavonic characters is clearly proved by notes of James made in his own hand in a copy of an earliest printed Russian *Azbuka* now in the Bodleian as Bodley Vet. Hi f. I.

James's transliterations (he never writes a Russian complete word in Cyrillic) is rather more consistent (though often very crude) than the rough efforts of Giles Fletcher the elder and Horsey. Like Chaucer's Latin, his Russian seems constantly to miss the exact inflexional terminations, writing an *e* for any sort of case-ending, for instance, or confusing the nominative and genitive terminals. Thus, for example, the devil appears both as *tchort* (a nominative form) and *βrage* (clearly an inflected one).[9] These transliterations stand respectively for Чортѣ and βратѣ. The final *e* of *βrage* is intended for a nominative: and such a terminal vowel cannot be a case of indicating a long root-vowel in this way since this would make it long.

There is one remarkable feature in James's transliteration in which he seems to share the tendency of the other early transcribers. This is the writing of Russian Князь with what looks like an intended front vowel: for he has *knaes* where they seem to prefer *knes* or *knez*. This apparently fronted vowel or diphthong, reminding us of such forms as Czech *kněz* priest and *pět* five which like Russian князь and пять go back to forms with nazalized vowel, may perhaps attest the often noticed dialect forms within Russian imitated by English transliterators. Again, James *pete* for Russian пять may be suggestive here: and one may compare the early Hungarian borrowings from Slovak of words beginning with *pent-* as in *pentnak* Friday (Russian пятница). Or may it be that some slight inheritance of the original nazalized vowel made them sound with some kind of nasal twang to English ears: and hence there was something of the kind in the English slack *e* [ɛ:] which represented by *-ea-* the Russian sound.

But the most interesting and problematic feature in James's transliteration is his fairly frequent representation of the Russian ять *yat'* ѣ by English *-ea-*. He often seems to distinguish between *e* and ѣ of the Russian by using *-ea-* for the second one and *-e-* or *-ee-* for the first, as if the latter were slack and the former tense. Now there seems to be some ground for believing that a distinction between *e* and ѣ existed in pronunciation in the later fifteenth century in the South Moscow region: but in general by the nineteenth century such a distinction was utterly lost: so that the spelling reform of Lunacharsky in 1918 completely abolished the letter ять, which has from then onwards completely disappeared from Russian dictionaries. One must use a prerevolutionary dictionary to check James's implied spelling of his Russian.[10] I remember some 40 years ago a young Russian assuring me that his grandfather claimed most confidently that he could *hear* a difference between *e* and ѣ as pronounced. It is unfortunate that Larin, in recording what he took to be the original Russian transliterated by James, totally ignored *yat'*, consistently employing *e* for both symbols. James writes *leato* for лѣто summer, and бѣлый white as *bealy:*

but he writes бѣлка squirrel both as *bealka* and *belka*. While generally preferring *ea* for Russian ѣ, he does at times employ *ea* in words which not always had ѣ, such as his *βeasno* for весна spring, and *βreavno* for бревно beam.

Now it is certain that a diphthongal element in the pronunciation of ѣ, descended from yod, was consciously felt in early times to have been present. Ludolf's *Grammatica Russica* in the alphabet with names and pronunciations at the close of the seventeenth century in his opening chapter, records this symbol as *Iat diphthongus*. Did James intend to indicate a diphthongal element in his *ea* as distinct from a monophthongal, or at least less diphthongal pronunciation of *e*? It seems that some kind of fossilized consciousness of a very fine distinction between ѣ and *e* is inherent, as it were diachronically, in the still not extinct colloquial expression на ять in such a sentence as Я знаю Ивана на ять which may be rendered in English 'I know John to a T'. I incline to think then that the probable value of James's *ea* when he was careful was some type of slack *e*, and that he may have intended his *e* or *ee* for a tense or close vowel. Further, that James's possibly idiolectic slack *e* [ɛ:] held a slight diphthongal element as well, perhaps with something of a 'twang' when long. Another puzzling thing in James's apparent distinction between ѣ and *e* in his transliteration is that it should certainly imply a reference to the Cyrillic orthography, whereas almost all the evidence otherwise seems to point to dependence on the spoken, not the written Russian. The only other evidence for use of a Cyrillic original is James's fairly frequent employment of isolated Slavonic symbols in words otherwise written in the usual English characters. Such characters are his ꙋ for *u*, × for *kh* or *ch*, ѡ for *o*, ф for *ph* and β for *v*. Here are some specimens of James's transliterations:—*ostrove* островъ island, *gode* годъ year, *yasike* языкъ language, *morose* морозъ frost, *clebe* хлебъ bread, *bábꙋshka* Бабушка grandmother, *charras* вчера yesterday, mꙋgick мужикъ peasant.

Besides glossing his transliterated vocabulary, James also kept a rough irregular series of diary entries which were often in Latin. But there is special interest in some of his glosses which were expanded into little essays which often show acute observation of the language of Russian social life or vivid glances at contemporary Russian history. On p. 41 we read: '*Kinjal*, a persian knife with which the customer of Archangell would boaste that he kild the Emperor Demetrius' (referring to the murder of the 'false Dmitri'.). On p. 62 James writes of *Maimanto*, the earliest recorded form of our *mammoth*:—'as they say, a sea *eleφant*, which is never seene, but accordinge to the *Samꙋites* he workes himself under grownde and so they finde his teeth or hornes or bones in *Pechore* and *Nova Zemla*, of which they make table men in Russia.' It is an attractive characteristic of James that, when there is no clear English rendering, he adds a descriptive essay. This account of the mammoth is probably the earliest reference to this originally Siberian word, Russian мамонт. The word appears again in England in Ludolf's *Grammatica Russica* where the bone of this animal is referred to as *mammotovoi kost*, implying that the name of the creature was *mammot*. The frequent identification of *t* and *th* in earlier spelling probably accounts for our current form *mammoth*.[11]

One difficulty in interpreting James's Russian forms is that he seems to have gathered most of his information from speakers in the areas of Archangel and Kholmogory, in which there was a very mixed mercantile community with many travellers from other parts of Russia: so that various regional or dialect forms must have been heard by him. An example of this is probably James's form *badgko*, used 3 times, which is the Ukrainian батько father, as against the normal Russian word

which occurs only once as *oteatz*. Perhaps the incomplete looking form *mors* for a sea horse on p. 18. 24, is to be related to some dialect form of море like Czech and Polish *moře* and *morze*, and it may stand for an unfinished form of *morskoy slon* sea elephant. On it James quaintly remarks: 'a sea horse of whose teeth Mr John Nash had 4 which weied each 8 *pŭndes* quos estimavit pret(io) 40 librarum'. There is a remarkable form on p. 38. 15 rozorinia (corrected in MS. from rosorenia) which seems clear evidence of having been taken from rapidly uttered speech in which two words were telescoped. James's word is made up of разгромъ destruction, and рѣзня slaughter: and he glosses it: 'a destruction, a massacre, so the russes calle the vastation and burninge and slaughter of Musco by the Poles'. Our censure of James's often careless, haphazard, and at times downright wrong transliteration may be chastened by the reflexion that the problem of transliterating Slavonic writing into English has not even yet been solved. If we cannot distinguish between ѣ and *e*, neither can the Czechs avoid using the symbols *i* and *y* for pairs of homophones in which identical sounds have only their etymology and function distinguished by preserving a historical unphonetic spelling.

James arranges his words and phrases in groups according as they arose through association and the time of his meeting them. But the often discursive essays which he added to illustrate meaning, and his interest in recent history give a liveliness and at times a really personal aspect to his glossings. A special literary interest in an addition to James manuscript is provided by the six Great-Russian *Byliny* which he caused to be carefully copied for him. For these ballad-like poems are in some sense the foundation of Russian folklore studies. That James had these *Velikorusskiya pesni zapisannye v 1619—20 gg. dlya R. James'sa* (the term *Byliny* is a later coinage from a misunderstanding of the opening lines of the *Slovo*) copied is a strong testimony to literary sensitiveness: but these famous poems or 'songs' have been often discussed and well studied, and they fall outside the present theme.

James's little essays and diary entries would repay study by students of botany, ornithology and historical anthropology, and he was keenly interested in all contemporary and recent Russian history with here and there something like first-hand knowledge of obscure events. His work far surpasses, both for its light on the Russia he knew for a time and for vivid echoes of actually spoken Russian what his predecessors had done. In particular his apparent implication of a differentiation between ѣ and *e* is valuable and may suggest that he was not always an insensitive phonetician. One fascinating linguistic problem arises from his use of a form he transliterates as *mori* for some kind of imperative of the verb мочь. On p. 26. 10 he writes: '*ne mori* doe not doe it.' This should be the imperative singular of the verb мочь. This may be taken as a Southern or White-Russian form with the *r* representing the dialectal pronunciation of the *g* of могí as some kind of voiced velar fricative, to give [*moγi*]. Or *mori* may show a local pronunciation in the Kholmogory area with the *g* as *zi*, so as to give something like [*moz''''i*]. Larin inclines to the former view though Kholmogory was the scene of much of James's Russian enquiries.[12] Or one might think of the *r* of James's *mori* as suggested by the *ř* of Czech or the *rz* of Polish: and this could be related to possible Ukrainian influences.

James, the strongly Protestant theologian and patriotic Englishman, often shows violent prejudice in depicting Russian customs, especially those that he regarded as religious superstitions. Sometimes indeed his apparent dislike led him to omit any rendering. For instance the popular expression for the dead as 'a soul in Paradise', Душа *β* раю James treats in this way. On p. 68.22 we read: '*dŭssha βrai*, locutio

Rus. de mortuis'. This entry is immediately followed by a similar expression for St. Peter as the key-bearer of Paradise: '*Cluchnic* ѕ *rau*, Petrum sic app(ellant)'. He is ключник ѕ раю.

Much of James's valuable information concerns really colloquial Russian usages some of them not recorded so early, and there is a convincing naturalness in his Russian phrases despite their often queer transliteration. He was not a serious Slavonic philologist like Ludolf whose work presents a scholarly introduction to the comparative study of the Slavonic languages in their Indo-European background and whose lists of phrases taken from actual conversation with natives are often as useful. On the other hand James, though not a particularly good writer of English, never had to resort to German to clarify his explanations as did Ludolf frequently. James's material, including some 2,500 words, is of course far richer than Ludolf's relatively jejune lists. James's English spelling, apart from the light it may give through his methods of transliteration on contemporary pronunciation, differs little from that of his English contemporaries. Such of his spelling-habits with a slight individual sign of preference, like *gould* for gold and *abought* for about, are parallelled among his contemporaries. Save for some early verses, nearly everything he wrote apart from his manuscript vocabularies was in Latin as befitted a Fellow of Corpus Christi College Oxford. He must have had immense verbal curiosity, but his keen and vividly productive interest in Russian does not seem to have lasted, and we have no evidence that he ever thought of publishing his Anglo-Russian writings or intended them for teaching purposes beyond the satisfaction of his own curiosity. Yet because of his own strongly personal approach to his subjects and his lively and for a time indomitable power of observation, James has left material of still incalculable value. It was the reflexion that it was in the English building at Prague that the seminal Prague Linguistic School of which Josef Vachek has been for so long a special pillar and ornament, began, that induced me to offer these tentative thoughts on Richard James here. It is to that most productive blend of English studies with general linguistics for which one especially remembers Vachek and many who, like him, began their teaching in Brno, that I offer through him my greetings and gratulations to *Brno Studies in English*.

NOTES

[1] There is a good fascimile ed. with variants with an introduction by Richard Pipes and a Glossary-index by John V. A. Fine Jnr (Harvard Univ. Press, 1966). All the Russian words are listed, but they are transliterated from the English only in modern spelling.

[2] 156

[3] 265

[4] J. S. G. Simmons and B. O. Unbegaun, 'Slavonic Manuscript Vocabularies in the Bodleian Library'.

[5] *A Relation* 235 and 257.

[6] There is a facsimile of Ludolf's book ed. B. O. Unbegaun with full apparatus: *Henrici Wilhelmi Ludolfi Grammatica Russica Oxonii MDCXCVI* (Oxford, 1959).

[7] Izdatelstvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1959.

[8] 3: my translation and italics.

[9] In the MS. 6a 9 and 8. *Tchort* looks much more like trzort, and one wonders if James was here influenced by the Czech and Polish sound of *rz*.

[10] For checking James's spelling I have used the prerevolutionary *Polnyi Rusko-angliyskiy Slovar'* of A. Aleksandrov (Petrograd, 1915). There is, however, sometimes a little uncertainty as

between ѣ and *e*. For instance, whereas Aleksandrov gives the word for spring as Весна, Ludolf's *Grammatica Russica* has only Вѣсна.

[11] 92. Here is a rather lengthy account of the mammoth bone treated as a fossil. It begins: 'Magnae vero curiositatis res est *Mammotovoi kost*, quod in Siberia è terra effoditur'.

[12] See Larin's very brief discussion in his *Commentaries* 227.

RESUMÉ

První angličtí rusisté

Někteří z Angličanů, kteří pracovali v Rusku v době alžbětinské a jakobínské, přispěli svým amatérským zájmem o ruštinu k anglo-ruské filologii. Nejzajímavější z nich je oxfordský filolog Richard James. Rukopis jeho slovníku a deníku, nyní uložený v bodlejské knihovně, zachycuje ruštinu, jak ji James slyšel. Ze způsobu transliterace je možno získat cenné informace o tehdejší výslovnosti anglických a ruských hlásek.