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Inherited or Witnessed? The Construction of “Otherness” in the Correspondence and Memoirs of Pavel Levashov (c. 1719 – 1820)

When Pavel Levashov showed up in Constantinople acting as an attorney assigned to the Russian embassy, Russian-Ottoman relations were tense and Russian diplomats found themselves in a rather precarious situation. When the Russo-Turkish war of 1768 – 1774 broke up Levashov and his colleagues were imprisoned in Yedikule – the seven-tower castle. He managed to survive and published his diaries under the eloquent title *Plen i stradanie rossiian u turkov* (The Russians’ captivity and sufferings among the Turks, 1790) upon his almost triumphal return to Russia. In addition, he is considered to be the author of *Tsaregradskie pisma o drevnikh i nyneshnikh turkakh* (Letters from Tsargrad [Constantinople] about ancient and contemporary Turks, 1789), a work that is full of insights about Turkish everyday life and traditions and gained comparable popularity, although the attribution to Levashov was established years later. These travel writings amassed remarkable popularity in Russia due to the interest in the Ottoman “other” sparked by a series of Russo-Turkish wars. However, Levashov’s travelogues equally address Russian identity and international aspirations alongside the “customs and manners” practiced by the then Turks.

1 Historiography

The Russian Oriental travelogue has been attracting particular interest from researchers for the last thirty years with numerous colonial and postcolonial studies being the key contributors to this popularity. Such studies present travelogues not as a reliable source of information and knowledge about the “inner” and “outer” East adopted by Russians but rather as a tangle of political,

Note: The author would like to express her profound and sincere gratitude to the Austrian Academy of Sciences for the generous support of this research through the JESH scholarship that made possible the author’s participation in the project “Travelogues: Perceptions of the Other 1500 – 1876 – A Computerized Analysis” in July–August of 2019.

gender, and religious discourses.¹ Moreover, they expose the role of travelogues itself as a combination of several genres.²

The monograph *Authenticity and Fiction in the Russian Literary Journey, 1790–1840*³ by Andreas Schönle is considered a milestone in studies on the Russian travelogue. Although he focused only on travels undertaken by writers (starting from the first author of a travelogue, Nikolay Mikhailovich Karamzin, up to Alexandr Pushkin), nonetheless, Schönle was able to reach a crucial conclusion that is rarely found even in more fact-based travelogues: a Russian traveler is different from Western explorers since Russians do not strive to explore their inner self through traveling but rather to reform themselves “by integrating it [the self] into the public body.”⁴ This idea is also present in the travelogues by Pavel Levashov who was not only striving to explore his inner personality but also was trying to adapt himself to the reality he found himself in.

Oriental travelogues re-emerged in Russian historiography in 1995 when *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II* (Traveling across the east in the Age of Catherine II) by Vigasin and Karpyuk was published.⁵ Not only did they facilitate access to the disparate travelogues published more than fifty years previously,

1 Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (London 2007); Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, IN 1997); Steven H. Clark (ed.), *Travel Writing and Empire: Post-colonial Theory in Transit* (London, New York 1999); Sara Dickinson, *Breaking Ground: Travel and National Culture in Russia from Peter I to the Era of Pushkin* (Amsterdam 2006); Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky, *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered* (Madison 2014); Gerald MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580–1720* (New York 2004); Reuel K. Wilson, *The Literary Travelogue: A Comparative Study with Special Relevance to Russian Literature from Fonvizin to Pushkin* (The Hague 1973); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford 1994).

2 Yuriy Lotman, *O ponyatii geograficheskogo prostranstva v russkikh srednevekovykh tekstakh* (On the Notion of Geographical Space in the Russian Medieval Texts), in Yuriy Lotman, *Semiosfera* (SPb 2000), pp. 297–303; Olga Lvova, *Rasskaz o puteshestvii: formy literaturnoj recepcii traveloga* (Story about Travel: Forms of the Literary Reception of the Travelogue) in *Filologicheskoe nauki. Voprosy teorii i praktiki* (2016), pp. 38–40; Galina Rokina, *Travelog kak istoricheskij istochnik* (Travelogue as a Historical Source), in *Zapad-Vostok, Nauchno-prakticheskij ezhegodnik* 9 (2016), pp. 5–8; Vasilij Rusakov and Olga Rusakova, *Metodologiya diskurs-issledovaniya traveloga* (The Methodology of Research on the Discourse of Travelogues), in *Diskurs-Pi* (2014), pp. 14–20.

3 Andreas Schönle, *Authenticity and Fiction in the Russian Literary Journey, 1790–1840* (Cambridge, Mass., London 2000).

4 Schönle, *Authenticity*, p. 210.

5 Aleksej Vigasin and Sergej Karpyuk (eds.), *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II* (Traveling Across the East in the Age of Catherine II) (Moscow 1995).

they also provided a thorough and critical introduction to each of them, exposing their social and scientific value.

Victor Taki⁶ is considered the most prominent contributor to research on Russian accounts of journeys to the Ottoman Empire. He is known to be the first to put Russo-Ottoman relations into their cultural and historic context in a series of monographs and articles, engaging with perceptions that had been overlooked in classic studies of political history. He discovered several key metaphors and images that are frequently embedded in narratives by Russian travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first such trope was the image of the “ailing man” (“*bolnoi chelovek*”) that Russians associated with the Ottoman Empire. Taki emphasized that this image was based on the contrast between the grandeur that the empire had witnessed in the sixteenth century and its current decline.⁷

In addition, while scrutinizing the captivity narratives left by noblemen – the principal format of Russian travelogues of that time – he pinpointed similar themes addressed by the authors: the loss of faith during captivity, clashes between the protagonists and the Muslim population, accounts of the terrible fate of others in opposition to the magic luck that saved the authors, the presence of “a noble Turk” among their captors in contrast to the “barbarian” habits of his compatriots. Taki went on to argue that the latter image derived from the earlier and widespread image of the “noble savage.”⁸ And finally, in an article published in 2011, Taki employed the notion of “Orientalization” to describe Russian mental constructs of the Ottoman Empire.⁹ An apt quote from this study is worth mentioning here: “Orientalising the Ottoman Empire undoubtedly allowed Russian writers to assert their European identity in the face of the references to Russia’s own semi-barbarous character that one found at times in the Western literature.”¹⁰ The ambivalent nature of the Russian presence in the cross-European discourse is clearly visible here: aware of the rather derogatory reviews they received from European travelers, Russians strived to distance themselves from the other “East,” arguing that to a large extent the reforms introduced by

6 Victor Taki, *Tsar and Sultan: Russian Encounters with the Ottoman Empire* (London, New York 2016) and in Russian: *Viktor Taki, Tsar i sultan. Osmanskaya imperiya glazami rossiiyan* (Moscow 2017).

7 Taki, *Tsar i sultan*, p. 253.

8 Taki, *Tsar i sultan*, p. 167.

9 Viktor Taki, *Orientalism on the Margins: The Ottoman Empire under Russian Eyes*, in *Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12 (2011), pp. 321–351.

10 Taki, *Orientalism*, p. 350.

Peter the Great (1672–1725) made them an integral part of the European civilization.

The image of the Ottoman Turk and Turkish rule cultivated in travelogues and other narratives starting in the nineteenth century is addressed in an article by Elena Linkova and Anastasia Aksenova.¹¹ The authors look at a curious case wherein the image of the “other” had been formed on foreign territory, away from both adversaries, namely during the hostilities between French and Russian troops clashing with Turks in Egypt. The authors conclude that derogatory images of Turks championed in French narratives were designed to justify the French military intervention, whereas Russian narratives argued: “Permanent confrontation with the Ottoman Empire created a need for Russians to mold an image of an evil enemy. Such an image allowed Russia to take on a role as a defender from the ‘evil Turk oppressor’.”¹²

A research paper with a strong theoretical background on Russian travelogues of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is also worth mentioning here: Peter Alekseev’s article *Russkii orientalniy travelog kak zhanr putevoi prozy kontsa XVIII – pervoi treti XIX veka* (The Russian Orientalist travelogue as a genre of travel writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries).¹³ He furnished a list of key flaws of the travelogue genre in general and of Russian travelogues in particular: “An apparent lack of plot, deliberate literary crudeness, an abundance of ‘excessive’ everyday details that transform the narrative into a travel guide, and finally a conspicuously event-influenced structure of presentation can be found in the majority of Oriental travel accounts.”¹⁴ As he looked at travel accounts of actual and imagined journeys, the author exposed the artistic and ideological homogeneity of the Russian Oriental travelogue dwelling upon the fundamental concept of “a Russian man in the East”¹⁵. “A Russian man” is a private traveler and propagator of the idea of Russian Orientalism designed to counter the European perception of Russia as a barbarian country.

11 Elena Linkova and Anastasiya Aksenova, *Obraz turka-osmana i ottomanskogo gospodstva v proizvedeniyah russkikh i francuzskikh puteshestvennikov XIX veka* (The Image of the Ottoman Turk and Ottoman Rule in the Narratives of Russian and French Travelers) in *Vestnik Rossijskogo universiteta družby narodov. Seriya: Vseobshchaya istoriya* (2018), pp. 33–41.

12 Linkova and Aksenova, *Obraz turka-osmana i ottomanskogo gospodstva*, p. 40.

13 Pavel Alekseev, *Russkij orientalniy travelog kak zhanr putevoj prozy konca XVIII – pervoi treti XIX veka* (The Russian Orientalist Travelogue as a Genre of Travel Writing in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries), in *Filologiya I chelovek* 2 (2014), pp. 34–46.

14 Alekseev, *Russkij orientalniy travelog*, p. 35.

15 Alekseev, *Russkij orientalniy travelog*, p. 46.

Summing up the aforesaid, different researchers and compilers of collections of captivity accounts have been pursuing the same goal, i.e., the quest for common notions designed to expose widespread popular perceptions about the Ottoman Empire and other Eastern countries at the end of the eighteenth century. The present chapter is pursuing a slightly different goal: rather than blending together several more or less synchronous texts, the aim here is to detect the internal textual structures employed by a single author. More specifically, the goal of this study is to explore constructions of “otherness” in Pavel Levashov’s works. I proceed with examining the most important *topoi*, their gender, ethnic, and social bias. Then I juxtapose them with earlier travel accounts then available in Russia to identify beliefs, notions, and opinions that Levashov could have borrowed. Such an approach will facilitate detecting patterns in his expectations and real-life experiences endured during his tough times in the Ottoman Empire.

2 Who was Pavel Levashov and why do we question his statements?

We know surprisingly little about Pavel Levashov. The information on his diplomatic and official duties accompanied by accounts of his life at the court form the biggest part of all available data. His date of birth cannot be verified; it is assumed to be around 1719, meaning that he lived for more than a hundred years. He entered military service on 6 January 1737 and took part in the Russo-Turkish war of 1735–1739. In the following years, from 1741 to 1743, he acted as military officer in the hostilities in Finland. In 1752, he started his diplomatic service as a member of the Russian mission to Vienna presided by ambassador Hermann Keyserling (1697–1765).¹⁶ Within five years, he was promoted to embassy’s counsellor. From April 1761 to May 1762, Levashov had other diplomatic roles in Regensburg.

His Constantinople adventure started on 19 August 1763 with his appointment as *chargé d'affaires*, presumably succeeding Aleksey Obreskov (1718–1787), who had fallen ill. However, the start of his mission to the Ottoman Empire was not smooth. The Ottoman authorities refused to accept Levashov’s credentials as new *chargé d'affaires* as result of the intrigues of the French ambassador Vergin. Obreskov complained that “our ill-wishers found a way to present Leva-

¹⁶ Gavriil Kesselbrenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii: Ot Posolskoj izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del* (The Famous Russian Diplomats: from Posolskaya Izba to the Collegium of Foreign Affairs) (Moscow 1999), p. 398.

shov's personality in the worst possible manner to the sultan."¹⁷ Soon afterwards the relations between Obreskov and Levashov deteriorated. However, the worst was yet to come: at the beginning of the Russo-Turkish war of 1768–1774 the unfortunate *chargé d'affaires* was arrested along with his Russian colleagues. He managed to return to Russia in 1771, where he received a warm welcome: the records in the “*Kammerfurier* journals” of 1772–1773 attest that Levashov was a regular guest at official receptions at the palace.¹⁸

When the new war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire broke out in 1787, Levashov had a series of meetings with Grigorii Potemkin (1739–1791) and the Head of the Field Marshal's Office Vasilii Popov (1745–1822). They discussed the founding of the Black Sea Trading Company and the construction of a new port to replace the Khadjibey wharf. Indeed, the wharf was rebuilt and became the present-day city of Odessa (1795).¹⁹ Levashov, Potemkin, and Popov drew up plans of a large-scale colonization of the Black Sea region and planned an expansion of Russian commercial activities in the area of the “three seas” to create opportunities for the “Russian commercial fleet to operate in the four corners of the world” and help “Russia become a mediator between countries of the East and West, drawing riches from all countries”²⁰. Levashov aspired to become a director of the commercial department in the Odessa city administration one day. He accompanied Grand Princes Alexander (1777–1825) and Konstantin Pavlovich (1779–1831) on their journey to London in 1787. Following retirement, Levashov lived on an estate in Belarus granted by Catherine II (1729–1796).²¹ He left the estate from time to time to pay brief visits to Mogilev (Belarus) and Moscow.

Levashov started his writing endeavors upon his release from the Turkish captivity in 1771. His first essay on Ottoman Turkey, *Tsaregradskie pisma* [...] (Letters from Tsargrad [...]) saw two editions at the Bogdanovich publishing house, which was to become his long-term editorial partner. The first edition was pub-

17 Vigin and Karpyuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, p. 9.

18 The *Kammerfurier* was a sixth-grade rank in The Table of Ranks of 1742 and a position at court. He was the head of the court servants and kept the so-called “*Kammerfurier* journals,” where all that happened at court was scrupulously noted. Cited from: Pavel Artemievich Levashov, accessed 4 April 2022, <<http://www.rusdiplomats.narod.ru/levashov-pa.html>>.

19 Vasilij Nadler, *Odessa v pervye epokhi ee sushestvovaniya* (Odessa during the first Centuries of its Existence), (Odessa 2007) p. 30.

20 “Rossijskie kupecheskie floty vo vsekh chetyrekh chastyah sveta plavanie svoe rasprostranili”; “Rossiya sdelalas by sredotochiem mezhdru vostochnymi stranami i vseyu Evropoyu i privilekha by k sebe ot vsekh stran velikie sokrovishcha” as cited in Vigin and Karpyuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, p. 10.

21 Vigin and Karpyuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, p. 11.

lished in 1789. The letters had been written anonymously; Levashov's authorship was confirmed years later. Boris Danzig was the first to attribute them to Levashov in his monograph *Russkie puteshestvenniki na Blizhnem Vostoke* (Russian travelers in the Middle East) (1965).²² Vigin, however, was able to find irrefutable proof: Levashov himself included the *Letters* in a list of his works.²³ The letters were partially based on Levashov's personal experiences, but also included his interpretations of earlier works when he referred to changes that had taken place by the time the letters were written.²⁴

He had completed the manuscript of his captivity diaries long before the end of the war in 1774 and it was published in 1790. It shares the same structure with other similar works in this genre. It begins with the introduction, written, as mentioned above, after the core chapters, and a perfect example of blatant ideological propaganda. The introduction is followed by the detailed account of events: Russia's unexpected declaration of war, the start of Levashov's prosecution, and his voluntary decision to surrender to the Ottoman authorities despite the threat of imminent reprisal for his covert dispatch of two envoys with intelligence to Russia. So Levashov dared to pay a visit to the superintendent of the Yedikule fortress-prison and was allowed to see Obreskov, who had already been jailed. The following night, Levashov, with the help of the court interpreter, drew up a message to the Grand Vizier offering "to put his own life under the custody of the Sublime Porte"²⁵. The Vizier decreed to allow Levashov to join the other Russians imprisoned at Yedikule. Levashov was relieved on hearing this ruling since death penalty could also have been a likely outcome. The diary continues with his descriptions of the daily war news and living conditions of prisoners up to the day of their release.

The captivity diaries were soon followed by an anticipated sequel entitled *Kartina ili opisanie vseh nashestvij na Rossiju Tatar i Turkov, i ih tut branej, grabitelstv i opustoshenij, nachavshihsia v polovine desyatogo veka i pochti bespreryvno cherez vosemsot let prodolzhavshihsia* (Portrayal or report on all invasions

22 Boris DanTsig, *Russkie puteshestvenniki na Blizhnem Vostoke* (Russian Travelers in the Middle East) (Moscow 1965), p. 91.

23 Vigin and Karpuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, p. 36.

24 Pavel Levashov, *Tsaregradskie pisma o drevnih i nyneshnih turkah i o sostoyanii ih vojsk, o Tsaregrade i vseh okrestnostyah onogo [...]* (Letters from Tsargrad about the Ancient and Contemporary Turks and about their Military Forces, about Tsargrad and its Environs), in Vigin and Karpuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, p. 52.

25 Pavel Levashov, *Plen i stradanie rossiyan u turkov [...]* (The Russians' Captivity and Sufferings among the Turks) in Vigin and Karpuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, p. 18.

of Russia by Tatars and Turks and their abuses, looting and devastations that began in the middle of the tenth c. and have been continuing almost ceaselessly for 800 years) that is considered to have been written in 1774 and published in 1791/1792. This treatise is not a travelogue but rather a compilation of evidence the author was able to collect while studying chronicles and records on Cuman, Tatar, and Turk invasions of Russia. In addition to finding an additional “justification” of Russia’s war with Turkey, Levashov aimed with this treatise to substantiate Russia’s inherent rights to own the Crimean Peninsula.

But how trustworthy are his travel narratives, taking into account his biography? First, his Western experience and proficiency in foreign languages hint at his knowledge of European travel narratives. Moreover, we do know that in 1750 he translated François Callières’s (1645–1717) *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains* (1716). Thus, it comes as no surprise to find traces of earlier European travel writings in his own accounts. Second, another challenge in decoding Levashov’s writing deserves particular consideration: almost two decades separated his Ottoman experience from the publication of the travelogue and he managed to edit his first draft and inject all the features that he deemed necessary to boost his career. In fact, he took an active part in Catherine’s “Greek project” that inspired him to adopt and propagate the image of a prosperous and booming Russia facing the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Undoubtedly, acting as a representative of the court whose career depended on royal patronage, his views were biased. Third, a pro smothered in “cons” consists of the fact that he had been living in Constantinople for years and he knew his subject matter well. Last but not least, one should also take into account the causes that propelled this publication – the growing demand for “exotic” literature and, at the same time, the rise of propaganda for the Russian military campaigns in Europe and the East. Therefore, in what follows I shall review the travel accounts of Pavel Levashov in full awareness that they were biased and fairly derivative travelogues, although seasoned with his personal touch.

3 *The Russians’ Captivity and Sufferings among the Turks and the Letters from Tsargrad (Constantinople): main topoi, old and new ideas*

I proceed with Levashov’s most original travelogue describing his experience as a prisoner at the Porte and entitled *Plen i stradanie rossiiian u turkov* (The Rus-

sians' captivity and sufferings among the Turks). The foreword to the travelogue was written by Levashov many years after completion of the manuscript and took into account Russia's recent military and diplomatic victories. The purpose of the foreword is to make the reader interpret the text that follows in a particular light: unlike the travelogue itself, it is filled with stereotypes and topoi. Levashov tried to convey a specific message to an audience he knew well, one that, he argued, was composed of those who had only "vague knowledge" (*"mechtatelnoe poniatie"*) about the Ottoman Empire.²⁶

Which topoi did Levashov focus on? The first can be found in the second paragraph of the foreword. As I shall substantiate in further paragraphs it was not a novelty, but a revision of earlier travelogues. This topos was meant to showcase Russia's progressive image: Russia and the Ottoman Empire were represented as two persons meeting each other on the stairs as one goes up and the other descends. Passing over the imperfect descriptions of the Turkish state by previous authors, we will notice that each region is subject to different changes, i.e., some are booming while others are slumping. For example, if one reads a description of Russia from the previous century and concludes that he has a profound knowledge about its current state he will be driven into a wrong belief that Russia had been constantly growing in contrast with the ailing Ottoman Empire. "Therefore, its [the Ottoman Empire's] present state is a bleak shadow of a mammoth once ruled by the glorious sultans Suleiman, Bayezid, Amurat and Mahomet the Second (sic!), who put an end to the Eastern Greek (sic!) empire and snatched its charming capital – Constantinople."²⁷ Therefore, looking at these metaphorical stairs one could see the Ottoman Empire going down, while Russia was on the rise.

Here Levashov flattered Catherine the Great whose aggressive actions in Poland and "Greek project" were aimed at transforming Russia into an empire that neither Europeans nor Ottomans could ever dare to neglect on the international scene. Elsewhere he rewrote the topos of the Ottoman Empire's decline employing the metaphor of "a building in ruins." He put it as follows: "To get an impression of the present Turkish state one should envisage this Empire as a vast crumbling edifice that once surprised and terrified viewers only by its appearance, but that was shattered by the Russian Boreas so violently that it was almost totally ruined." After such an introduction, he goes on with a praise of Russian arms that "delivered miracles on land and sea."²⁸

²⁶ Levashov, *Plen i stradanie rossiyan u turkov*, p. 31.

²⁷ Levashov, *Plen i stradanie rossiyan u turkov*, p. 31.

²⁸ "[...] tvorimye rossijskim oruzhiem chudesa kak na zemle, tak i na more." Levashov, *Plen i stradanie rossiyan u turkov*, p. 32.

I decided to skip the very well-known topos of the “barbaric Turks” due to its straightforward nature – Levashov mentioned it, but rather seldom. It is curious that he was more concerned not with the ethnic “other” but with a social “other” rather than with an ethnic one. And this “other” will be the second item discussed here. This “other” stood for a rabble or a mob of common people. Levashov refers to it several times in his travelogue. When he recounted the exultation among Turks at the beginning of the war with Russia he said: “In Tsargrad (Constantinople) and its suburbs a violent, ecstatic rabble robbed and abused not only Christians, but also many Muslims, making almost all foreign ministers to abandon the rustic air and flee to Pera.”²⁹

While relating the story of his imprisonment he described his justified concern about his future, fearing most not the “Turkish” cruelty but the atrocities committed by the rabble: “In fear of falling into the hands of the frenzied mob of these guardsmen and the cruel rabble, I have decided to surrender myself to the Porte, ignoring the objections raised by my friends and their advice to flee Constantinople clandestinely on a European ship”.³⁰ He explained his reasons to the dragoman using similar words so that he could pass them over to the Vizier and the divan: “When I saw him I explained to him the aim of my visit and that being in such circumstances when common rights were unable to protect me from the different abuses committed by the rabble I felt necessary to seek shelter in the shadow of the Sublime Porte.”³¹ And the authorities, he remarked with a tinge of admiration in his words, did find a way to herd people “together in trembling and delight” (*“kupno i v trepete i udovolstvii”*),³² unleashing executions and punitive actions. Therefore, the second topos in Levashov’s travel writings is a pejorative representation of commoners. Thus, social status had more importance to him than ethnicity as shown in his decision to surrender to the more “civilized” Turks.

The third topos that formed an integral part of most early modern travelogues was, of course, that of harems, Turkish women, and Turks in love. Leva-

29 “V Tsar-grade i vo vsekhn onogo okrestnostyakh buinaya chern, byv v isstuplenii ot bezmernoi o tom radosti, proizvodila grabezhi i nasiliya ne tokmo protivu khristian, no i vesma mnogikh magometan, chto prinudilo vsekhn pochti chuzhestrannykh ministrov rasstatsya s selskim vozduhom i pereekhat v Peru.” Levashov, *Plen i stradanie rossiiyan u turkov*, pp. 13–14.

30 “Opasayas vpast v ruki neobuzdannoi tolpy sikh strazhej i zhestokoi cherni, reshilsya yavit-sya sam k Porte, nesmotrya na raznye protiv sego ot priyatelei moikh vozrazheniya i sovet, chtob uekhat iz Tsar-grada taino na kakom-nibud evropeiskom sudne.” Levashov, *Plen i stradanie rossiiyan u turkov*, p. 14.

31 Levashov, *Plen i stradanie rossiiyan u turkov*, p. 18.

32 Levashov, *Tsaregradskie pisma*, p. 75.

shov explores the topic at length in his *Tsaregradskie pisma* (Letters from Tsar-grad) (in the second, third, and ninth letters). Following the example of European travel writings Levashov used this topic to spice up his narrative with a pinch of “Oriental exoticism” because he was well aware of market demand, i.e., using modern language, he knew that “sex sells.” The authors of travelogues described the private life of Turks with an eroticism and sensuality that were forbidden fruit in “civilized” Europe. This theme was exempt from censorship and Levashov took advantage of it to promote sales.

His first accounts were quite typical – he started with explaining the notion of “harem,” its place within the structure of the palace, and the isolation of the women who lived there. In the title of the letter, he deliberately used the humiliating notion of “women’s depository” as he tried to convey perceptions of women as inanimate objects. He described the harem hierarchy, i.e., how a woman could become the sultan’s wife and, inevitably, what awaited them when the sultan eventually died. He narrated that that “after the sultan’s death his wives and concubines alike, as well as the old women, are all, apart from the young and beautiful, transferred to an old seraglio, where they get locked together with their children and often a new sultan has them murdered.”³³ Remarkably, the letter on the harem is quite generic, deprived of any personal touch, and does not go beyond stereotypes.

After depicting life in the harem, Levashov gives colorful descriptions of Turkish baths, spicing up his account with descriptions of naked women having a few moments to themselves, finally free from male guardianship. He also dares to address the issue of same-sex love thriving during the women’s visits to baths:

Among Turkish women there are lots of tribades who fall in love desperately with other women and are fond of spending time with their lovers in baths and enjoy greatly seeing them naked; the growth of this unnatural passion among Turkish women is the result of keeping them in severity and isolation. In other words, baths are a kind of earthly paradise for Turkish women, and you would not find baths better than these anywhere in the world.³⁴

33 “Po smerti sultana kak ego zheny, tak i nalozhnicy, prestarelye devicy, krome molodykh i pri-gozhikh, perevodyatsya v staryi seral, gde onykh zapirayut vechno oplakivat smert sultana, so-derzhavshego ikh vzaperti, i svoih detei, koikh novyi sultan chasto davit povelevaet.” Levashov, *Tsaregradskie pisma*, p. 47.

34 “No kak mezhdru tureckimi krasavicami nakhoditsya mnogo tribad, kotorye sami v drugikh zhenshchin do bezumiya vlyublivayutsya, to takovye za naibolshee uveselenie pochitayut, chtob s svoimi lyubovnicami vmeste paritsya i naslazhdatsya zreniem ikh nagoty: sei mezhdru tureck-ikh zhenshchin protivooestvennoi strasti prichinoyu strogoe i nevolnoe ikh sodержanie: odnim slovom, bani dlya tureckikh zhenshchin sut zemnoi rai, i dlya togo nigde ne vidno takogo velikolepnogo ustroeniya onykh, kak v Turcii.” Levashov, *Tsaregradskie pisma*, p. 43.

This remark is at the same time an “Orientalizing” one for women had been living in Turkey imprisoned and separated from men, so to say, quite differently from their Russian counterparts. However, he went beyond simply commenting on their “otherness” and also sympathized with them, refraining from criticism of same-sex intercourse.

His account of relationships among Turks is full of ambiguities. First, he describes the behavior of a Turk in love, circling his sweetheart’s house and demonstrating his passionate feelings through desperate actions such as self-maiming. His love is described as jealous, fearless, and stronger than blood ties. Here Levashov inserts the narration of an event that he claimed to have witnessed: it is a story of a young woman locked in the harem by her uncle and liberated by a young Turk she fell in love with. Subsequently, the brother of this Turk falls in love with her as well and they fight to death over her.³⁵ Levashov and his companions meet the young woman and take care of her by providing two guardians to accompany her on her way back to the uncle’s house. This motive of romantic love contrasts with previous accounts about Turkish men treating their women badly, but it nevertheless fits within the topos of uncivilized relationships between Turkish men and women.

4 Inherited or witnessed? Looking for possible sources in Russian and European (travel) writing

By the time Levashov had started working on his travelogue, the tradition of travel writing in Russia spanned at least one hundred years. Moreover, we do know for sure that Levashov knew every text that addressed Russia’s relations with Turks and Tatars (Russians made no distinction between the two, considering them a single sovereign power). Since he had used these sources in his aforementioned treatise *Kartina ili opisanie vseh nashestvij na Rossiyu Tatar i Turkov* (Portrayal or report on all invasions of Russia by Tatars and Turks), he made his contribution to forming an image of the Turks as a hostile enemy, who invaded the Russian motherland without any legitimate reason.

However, medieval and early modern chronicles were not the only sources that influenced his texts. The first topos under scrutiny here, “the Ottoman Empire in decay,” emerged in travel accounts only after the Russia’s overwhelming

³⁵ Levashov, *Tsaregradskie pisma*, pp. 68–69.

victory in the war of 1768–1774, although the prerequisites for its arrival had been set forth earlier. Two European texts translated and published in Russia in the 1740s and 1750s made a critical contribution. The first, by Luigi Marsigli (1658–1730) had a revealing title in Russian: *Voennoe sostoianie Ottomanskiia imperii s eia prirashcheniem i upadkom* (The military condition of the Ottoman Empire from its growth to its decay, 1737).

The second, *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1665), authored by the British diplomat and historian Paul Rycaut (1629–1700), was translated from Polish (Slutsk 1678) and published in Russia in 1742. Rycaut writes as follows:

And in the times of the best emperours, when vertue and deserts were considered, and the Empire flourished and encreased, Men had Offices conferred for their Merits, and good Services were rewarded freely and with bounty, without Sums of Money and Payments to be a foil to the lustre of their better parts: But now it is quite contrary, and all matters run out of course, a manifest token in my opinion of the declension and decay of the Ottoman Empire.³⁶

It is worth remembering that Levashov's foreword to "Sufferings" included a similar depiction: "[The Ottoman Empire] keeps crumbling. Therefore, its present state is a bleak shadow of a mammoth once ruled by the glorious sultans Suleiman, Bajazet, Amurat and Mahomet the Second."³⁷ The only, yet substantial, difference was the selection of the cause of the decay: whereas Levashov was speaking in evolutionary terms, seeing the state as a living entity, Rycaut was adamant in blaming the corrupt authorities for causing this decline.

The Russian tradition of travel writing, especially that by former prisoners, also had an impact on Levashov's narrative. Formulas employed by Levashov in his narrative can be found in an earlier anonymous travelogue *Opisanie Tureckoj imperii, sostavlennoe russkim, byvshim v plenu u turok vo vtoroi polovine XVII veka* (The description of the Turkish Empire written by a Russian who was imprisoned by Turks in the second half of the seventeenth century). The author starts his account with the following words: "This book was written secretly and meticulously hidden by me, a prisoner, in my captivity, where I suffered."³⁸

³⁶ Paul Rycaut, *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire: Containing The Maxims of the Turkish Polity, the Most Material Points of the Mahometan Religion, Their Sects and Heresies, Their Convents and Religious Votaries. Their Military Discipline, with an Exact Computation of Their Forces both by Sea and Land [...]* In Three Books (London 1686), p. 142.

³⁷ Vigasin and Karpyuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, p. 31.

³⁸ "Napisasia zhe siia kniga vie tainemie, vie sokravennemie vie sokryte mnoiu plennikomie vie plennoi svoei nevoli terpeniia stradaniiia svoego [...]" *Opisanie Tureckoi imperii, sostavlennoe*

Levashov followed this example and set off with a description of how he had to encrypt his log so that if it fell in the hands of an enemy they would not be able to read anything: “When I returned to Russia some of my benefactors were curious to see this log written in brief sentences to make one wonder about its actual meaning since I wrote it in a way that no one could make anything of it, especially the Turks, even if they ever happened to procure it and tried to read.”³⁹

His account of the seraglio and baths must have been inspired by the comprehensive description from the *Nouvelle relation de l'intérieur du serrail du Grand Seigneur* (1675) authored by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), a famous merchant-traveler, who died in Moscow and was well-known among Russian fans of reading. Although in one of the scenes he presented in his *Letters* Levashov described a European “Peeping Tom” in the house of a Turkish woman, according to Vigasin it is highly probable that it could have happened to Levashov himself. Unlike this anecdotal episode, his description of a harem is a lot duller and generic – he could not have missed it since the harem was an unavoidable topos despite the fact that few writers had ever had a chance to visit a real harem. It had not taken much effort to procure descriptions of baths and the private life of Turks since those had been easily accessible to him during his five years in Constantinople. Thus, there had been no need for him to copy abstracts from other travelogues.

And what about Russian themes? In his research on travelogues, Victor Taki was able to identify five captivity narratives by nobles. However, they have little value for our research since Levashov proved to be the earliest Russian high-ranking prisoner. Nikolay Klement (early nineteenth century), Vladimir Safonov (early nineteenth century), Alexandre Duhamel (1801–1880), and Alexandr Grigor’evich Rozalion-Soshal’skiĭ (1797–1873) took part in later Russo-Turkish wars, i.e., 1806–1812 (Klement and Safonov) and 1828–1829.⁴⁰

Therefore, Levashov had at his disposal a very limited selection of travel diaries written by Russians. The only Russian sources he could have used were much earlier travel notes or the travelogues left by his contemporary Baranshchikov (1756–early nineteenth century), *Neshchastnyia priklyucheniia Vasilya Baranshchikova, meshchanina Nizhnego Novgoroda, v trekh chastyakh sveta: v Amerike, Azii i Evrope s 1780 po 1787 god* (The unfortunate adventures of Vasily Baranshchikov, a burgess from Nizhny Novgorod, in three parts of the world:

russkim, byvshim v plenu u turok vo vtoroj polovine XVII veka (The Description of the Turkish Empire Written by a Russian who was Imprisoned by the Turks in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century) (Moscow, 1890), p. 1.

³⁹ Vigasin and Karpyuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Taki, *Tsar i Sultan*, p. 150.

America, Asia, and Europe, from 1780 to 1787).⁴¹ However, those could have hardly inspired a Russian diplomat. Baranshchikov was fleeing from his lenders, converted to Islam, was said to have taken Turkish wives, and had deliberately fabricated his adventures. Therefore, Levashov's narrative made a trade-off between earlier travel notes emphasizing the religious confrontation between Islam and Orthodox Christianity and more secular, entertaining travel fiction. Vigasin suggested the only genuine purpose that these adventures had been designed to serve, i.e., to strike gold, due to the desperate need for money the author was experiencing upon his return to Russia.⁴² Moreover, Vigasin suspected that a later sequel to Baranshchikov's travelogue, written by an unknown author, in fact plagiarized *Tsaregradskie pisma* (Letters from Tsargrad) by Levashov. Thus, even if that is the case, it gives an idea of the impact Levashov made on the Russian tradition of Oriental travelogues than the other way round. In conclusion, it is safe to conclude that Pavel Levashov's borrowings from earlier foreign travelogues were limited to only a few features that he found more appropriate to his social status and that were propagating other goals, in contrast with the earlier Russian tradition.

Conclusions

Generally speaking, despite the presence of certain similarities with earlier travelogues, Levashov's writing stands out in several ways. First, he rarely refers to Turks as a monolithically barbaric nation, except in the foreword, which is full of bias and was written for a specific purpose. Most references mention a social "other", a term that earlier authors, especially Russian ones, had avoided. And there was no coincidence that, for him, the "Westernizing" reforms of Peter the Great had triggered the start of the so-called Europeanizing and "civilizing" process in Russia. Thus, Levashov looked at Turks through the prism of the criteria of "civilization." The image of the "rabble" constructed with very specific adjectives such as "fierce," "violent," and "bloodthirsty" had very little to do with Levashov's beliefs and those of his patrons. It is evident that, being Rus-

41 Vasilii Baranshchikov, *Neshastnyya priklyucheniya Vasilya Baranshikova, meshanina Nizhnego Novgoroda, v treh chastyah sveta: v Amerike, Azii i Evrope s 1780 po 1787 god* (The Unfortunate Adventures of Vasily Baranshchikov, a Burgess from Nizhny Novgorod, in Three Parts of the World: America, Asia, and Europe, from 1780 to 1787), in Vigasin and Karpyuk, *Puteshestvie po Vostoku v epokhu Ekateriny II*, pp. 101–133.

42 Baranshchikov, *Neshastnyya priklyucheniya*, p. 106.

sian, Levashov tried to distance himself from the “otherness” constructed by Europeans in their own travelogues by Orientalizing the Turks.

The same mechanism of constructing “otherness” worked in another sphere that seemed at first unrelated to more general social issues, namely in the description of the private life of the Turks. Levashov highlights their passionate nature, manifested in self-maiming and even homicide; he also emphasizes women’s sexual appetites, earning him a status of a refined “European”. Here we see the same “violent” and “uncivilized” other for the author once more emphasized the exoticism in the behavior of the Turks.

Were his accounts inherited or witnessed? There is no doubt that Levashov knew what he was looking for in the Ottoman everyday life as well as how he should structure his own experience as a prisoner by selecting a few themes: the Empire in decay, barbaric Turks, harems and baths, exotic food and table manners, secret writing and life-threatening situations with violent guardians. All these topoi shaped the narrative of *The Russians’ Captivity and Sufferings among the Turks* and *Letters from Tsargrad* but also left some room for improvising. One’s patterns of expectation do play a great role during travels abroad, but they do not guarantee that one will limit oneself to a mere repetition of well-known stereotypes. Levashov was a good observer and he did his best to become an engaging narrator that enriches his text with colorful details and his personal experience. Another element that influenced his writing was his status at Catherine’s court – Levashov evaded criticism of the sultan’s absolute power, exposed the military weakness of the Ottoman Empire, extolling Russia’s growing might, and elaborated on his awareness of the responsibility he carried as *chargé d’affaires*. It is impossible to draw a distinction between collective representations and individual experience, but it is possible to appreciate the personal touch in Levashov’s travel writing.

One might also wonder about any visual sources that might have been available to him, since diplomatic missions often had painters among their staff. Or, if this was not the case, painters or engravers were involved at the stage of production of travelogues. Unfortunately, a researcher who works with Russian travelogues is deprived of the luxury of analyzing correlations between texts and images. Unlike their Western counterparts, these travelogues were deprived of images. At the same time, we do know that in the late 1790s painters accompanied diplomats during their missions to the “Orient”. One of them was Gavril Sergeev (1765–1816), whose watercolors were put on display during a thematic exposition at the Rybinsk State History, Architecture and Art Museum (8 July–

10 September 2009, Russian Federation).⁴³ However, as Olga Kaparulina recently proved,⁴⁴ his works were mainly copies of an English painter's engravings.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, other paintings, watercolors, and engravings date from the nineteenth century. Therefore, researchers must restrict themselves to verbal pictures only.

⁴³ Accessed 19 May 2022, <<http://www.museum.ru/N37263>>.

⁴⁴ Olga Kaparulina, *Original ili kopiya? k voprosu ob atribucii akvarelej i risunkov G. S. Sergeeva* (Original or Copy? On the Question of Attribution of G. S. Sergeev's Watercolours and Drawings), in *Trudy Istoricheskogo fakulteta Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta* (2014), pp. 300–309.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Luigi Mayer, *Views in Egypt, from the Original Drawings, in the Possession of Sir Robert Ainslie, Taken During his Embassy to Constantinople: Engraved by and under the Direction of Thomas Milton with Historical Observations, and Incidental Illustrations of the Manners and Customs of the Natives of that Country* (London 1805), p. 60.

