

“IN FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE”: RUSSIAN TRAVELS TO MUSLIM LANDS IN THE EARLY MODERN ERA

MATTHEW ROMANIELLO

In the city of Delhi or Shahjahanabad there are plenty of cannon, but the people are weak and timid. However they say that the inhabitants of the greater part of India are warlike and courageous; there are two peoples who resemble the nomad Turkmenians – the Sikhs and the Maharratas, who are very warlike. They resemble one another very much, being tall, dark-skinned and strongly built. A considerable part of them are of Mohammedan confession, rougher in their manners than the Indians.

Filip Efremov, c. 1786¹

When Filip Efremov recorded his extensive travel experiences throughout the Muslim world at the end of the eighteenth century, his descriptions of the people he encountered would have been familiar to many Western writers recording their experiences in India or Central Asia. Efremov represented the Enlightened West, observing the customs of Muslims with an “orientalist” eye – noting their “weak and timid” demeanor, not to mention their “rough manners.”² Two notes here might have struck another foreign observer as remarkable. First, the non-Muslim Indians are admirable, at least as a slight improvement in comparison to the Muslims. Second, the Muslims of India resembled the nomadic Turkmen, a group more familiar to the Russians. The implication, of course, was the Russia’s ability to control “its” Muslims could translate into the ability to control India’s Muslims, thus extending Russia’s borders quite far to the south.

Islam had an uneven relationship with Russian authorities throughout the early modern era. Undeniably, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 created a literal crisis of conscience. As a result, following 1453, Russian Orthodox Church rhetoric consistently portrayed Islam as an unquestioned evil and Muslims as moral dangers. This depiction justified the conquest of the Khanate of Kazan in 1552. Under the influence of Metropolitan Makarii of Moscow, Tsar Ivan IV’s war against the Khanate was portrayed as a religious struggle of the Church Militant. Makarii promised Ivan’s army God’s blessing for

¹ *The Travels of Filip Efremov in the Kirghiz Steppes, Bukhara, Khiva, Persia, Tibet, and India and his Return Thence to Russia by Way of England*, in vol. *Russian Travellers to India and Persia (1624-1798)*: Kotov, Yefremov, Danibegov, trans. and ed. by P. M. Kemp, Delhi, 1959, p. 86.

² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, 1979. Said’s work has been challenged as a method of analysis for European views of the outside world and for its shortcomings to consider responses from those being viewed. This literature includes Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, New York, 1992; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York, 1997; Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, London, 2007; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800*, New York, 2007.

their holy work, because the Tatars of Kazan had “shamed the word of God” and “desecrated” the faith. For the Muslims’ impiety, Makarii predicted the “furious wrath of God,” which would bring victory for the army, fulfilling their new role as holy defenders of Orthodoxy.³ After the victory, a new icon, “Blessed is the Host of the Heavenly Tsar,” was painted in commemoration of the victory; it was displayed in Kremlin’s Dormition Cathedral. The image confirmed the earlier rhetoric: Archangel Michael led Ivan IV and the Muscovite army back from Kazan, while numerous angels brought martyrs’ crowns to those fallen in battle.⁴ In Moscow, therefore, the polemical attack on Islam had become a visible reality.

Efremov’s observations seem to fit neatly within this tradition of Muscovite condemnation of Muslims. Indeed, by the nineteenth century, Efremov’s depiction of the Muslim south would be an accepted part of an emergent “Russian orientalism.”⁵ However, opinions that would become dominant narrative tropes in the nineteenth century only reflected short-term gains in Russia’s geopolitical position vis-à-vis Islam in the late eighteenth century, as recent victories against Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Iran led to an expansion into the Caucasus.⁶ Until these recent victories, Russia’s success over its more powerful Muslim neighbors had been largely inconceivable, with the minor victories of Kazan and Astrakhan the only true exceptions. In the early seventeenth century, Moscow dispatched several embassies to Iran to appease Shah Abbas I, and with promises of

³ *Akty istoricheskie, sobrannye i izdannye arkhograficheskoiu kommissieiu*, vol. 1, Sankt Peterburg, 1841, #159, 25 May 1552, pp. 287-290; see also a later epistle, *ibidem*, #160, pp. 290-296, 13 to 20 July 1552.

⁴ For a thorough analysis of this icon and the development of Orthodoxy’s Church Militant, see Daniel Rowland, *Biblical Military Imagery in the Political Culture of Early Modern Russia: The Blessed Host of the Heavenly Tsar*, in vol. *Medieval Russian Culture*, vol. II, ed. by Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland, Berkeley, 1994, pp. 182-217.

⁵ See Elena Andreeva’s recent study of Russian travelers to Iran in the nineteenth century, and her discussion of “Russian Orientalism” in her *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism*, London, 2007. For other analyses, see Eufrosina Dvoichenko-Markov, *A Russian Traveler to Eighteenth-Century America*, in “Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,” 97, 1953, pp. 350-355; Barbara Widenor Maggs, *The Jesuits in China: Views of an Eighteenth-Century Russian Observer*, in “Eighteenth-Century Studies,” 8, 1974-1975, pp. 137-152; Vladimir Bilenkin, *The Sublime Moment: Velichestvennoe in N. M. Karamzin’s Letters of a Russian Traveler*, in “The Slavic and East European Journal,” 42, 1998, pp. 605-620; Lina Bernstein, *Merchant ‘Correspondence’ and Russian Letter-Writing Manuals: Petr Ivanovich Bogdanovich and His Pis’movnik for Merchants*, *ibidem*, 46, 2002, pp. 659-682; Sara Dickinson, *Breaking Ground: Travel and National Culture in Russia from Peter I to the Era of Pushkin*, Amsterdam, 2006; Sergei Kozlov, *Russkie puteshestvenniki novogo vremeni: imperskii vzgliad ili vospriiatie kosmopolita?*, in “Slavic Eurasian Studies,” 17, 2008, pp. 133-147.

⁶ D. M. Lebedev, *Geografiia v Rossii XVII veka (dopetrovskoi epokhi)*, Moskva, 1949, pp. 175-181; N. A. Smirnov, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI-XIX vekakh*, Moskva, 1958; V. L. Tatishvili, *Gruziny v Moskve: Istoricheskii ocherk (1653-1722)*, Tbilisi, 1959; Akhmed Guseinov, *Azerbaidzhan-Russkie otnosheniia: XV-XVII vekov*, Baku, 1963; E. N. Kusheva, *Narody severnogo Kavkaza i ikh sviazei s Rossiei: Vtoraia polovina XVI – 30-e gody XVII veka*, Moskva, 1963; V. G. Gadzhiev, *Rol’ Rossii v istorii Dagestana*, Moskva, 1965; Muriel Atkin, *The Pragmatic Diplomacy of Paul I: Russia’s Relations with Asia, 1796-1801*, in “Slavic Review,” 38, 1979, pp. 60-74; S. A. Ter-Avakimova, *Armiano-Russkie otnosheniia v period podgotovki persidskogo pokhoda*, Yerevan, 1980; A. A. Rakhmani, *Azerbaidzhan v kontse XVI i v XVII veke (1590-1700 gody)*, Baku, 1981; *Istoriia narodov severnogo kavkaza s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XVIII v.*, ed. by B. B. Piotrovskii, Moskva, 1988; Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *Imperial Policies and Perspectives towards Georgia, 1760-1819*, New York, 2000.

improving the treatment of Muslim merchants inside Russia.⁷ Muscovite Russia's attempt to placate its stronger Muslim neighbors remained the tone of diplomatic exchanges for most of the next two centuries. At the same time, the historic opposition between Orthodoxy and Islam limited Russian depictions of the Muslim Empires as inferior cultures. As a result, Russian travelers to the Muslim south were in an uncomfortable position, as the representatives of a weak state incapable of matching the military or economic strength of its more powerful neighbors.

Traveling Russians

Muscovite Russia was far from isolated, having extensive contacts with the outside world. While few of them may have traveled to Western Europe, Russians traveled to the south and east in more significant numbers. For example, between 1590 and 1626, the tsars dispatched at least ten official embassies to Safavid Iran.⁸ Ottoman Turkey was no less ignored, and the entire Caucasus region continued to be traveled to throughout the seventeenth century as both a crossroad and a final destination.⁹ Many of these travelers were official state embassies, but Russian merchants followed these same routes for their own commercial interests.¹⁰ Furthermore, the Caucasian route was both well-established and relatively safe, developing a sufficient reputation that other European travelers ventured into Muscovy to utilize it rather than risking travel through the reputedly dangerous Ottoman territory.¹¹

Despite the frequent interactions, studies of these mobile Russians have been rather scarce. Overwhelming attention has been given to the famous traveler Afanasii Nikitin in the fifteenth century, but Nikitin has been presented as an iconoclastic traveler from an isolated kingdom, positioning his experiences as unique despite the reality of frequent exchanges.¹²

⁷ See, for example, Mikhail Fedorovich's promise to stop forcing Iranian merchants to stay in the Tatar district in Kazan instead of in the merchant quarters. *Pamiatniki diplomaticheskikh i torgovykh snoshenii Moskovskoi Rusi s Persiei*, vol. III *Tsarstvovanie Mikhaila Feodoricha*, ed. by N. I. Veselovskii, Sankt Peterburg, 1898, 29 October 1620, pp. 650-654.

⁸ P. P. Bushev, *Istoriia posol'stv i diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii russkogo i iranskogo gosudarstv v 1586-1612 gg.*, Moskva, 1976; Idem, *Istoriia posol'stv i diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii russkogo i iranskogo gosudarstv v 1613-1621 gg.*, Moskva, 1987.

⁹ Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780-1828*, Minneapolis, 1980; Abolala Soudavar, *The Early Safavids and Their Cultural Interactions with Surrounding States*, in vol. *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, ed. by Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee, Seattle, 2002, pp. 89-120.

¹⁰ M. Polevktov, *The Ways of Communication between Russia and Georgia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, in "The Journal of Modern History," 2, 1930, pp. 367-377; Maxine Siroux, *Les caravanseiras routiers safavids*, in "Iranian Studies," 7, 1974, pp. 348-375; Janet Martin, *Muscovite Travelling Merchants: The Trade with the Muslim Middle East (15th and 16th Centuries)*, in "Central Asian Survey," 4, 1985, pp. 21-38; George Majeska, *Russian Pilgrims in Constantinople*, in "Dumbarton Oaks Papers," 56, 2002, pp. 93-108.

¹¹ This idea was pursued by both the English and Papal authorities. The National Archives (hereafter: NA), Kew, England, PRO 22/60, English Royal Letters in the Soviet Central State Archive of Ancient Records, 1557-1655, No. 35, 2 June 1627, Letter from Charles I to Mikhail Fedorovich; *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries*, vol. I, London, 1939, pp. 104-113.

¹² Walther Kirchner, *The Voyage of Athanasius Nikitin to India, 1466-1472*, in "American Slavic and East European Review," 5, 1946, nos. 3-4, pp. 46-54; Alexander V. Riasanovsky, *A Fifteenth Century Russian Traveller in India: Comments in Connection with a New Edition of Afanasii Nikitin's Journal*, in "Journal of the American Oriental

Of course, his highly sensationalistic narrative lends itself easily to this flawed analysis. Much of Nikitin's concerns in India presaged later Russian assessments of traveling through Muslim countries. The residents had little to no morality, and were marked by striking physical differences. For example: "And that is where the land of India lies, and where everyone goes naked; the women go bareheaded and with breasts uncovered, their hair plaited into one braid. Many women are pregnant; they bear children every year, and have many children. The men and women are all black. Wherever I went I was followed by many people who wondered at me, a white man."¹³

This sexualized depiction of the women in India only confirmed Nikitin's superiority and his assessment of the Indians' lack of morality. This image was only one of several points in which Nikitin disparaged India for both its Muslim culture and its prejudice against Christians. "I was deceived by godless Moslems: they had told me of an abundance of goods but I found that there was nothing for our country. All duty-free goods are for the Moslem country only. ... And the duty is high, and, there are many pirates at sea. And all the pirates are pagans, not Christians or Muslims; they worship stone idols and are ignorant of Christ."¹⁴

As Nikitin, and later Russians, had little to offer to the Indian merchant community, warning later travelers against Indian travels was rather appropriate for Nikitin.¹⁵ However, Nikitin's failure provided little evidence to counter the persistent enticement of the wealth of India. Muscovite economic policy had far more to gain from imported silks and spices than its merchants had to lose by being rebuffed by foreign merchants.¹⁶

Nikitin's description of India was unquestionably the most condemnatory Russian narrative until the end of the eighteenth century, but the fundamental problem he observed for Russians in Muslim spaces remained unresolved. Russian travelers faced a difficult task from the moment they departed Russia's borders traveling in a visibly superior and wealthier society, yet consistently failing to arrange profitable trade. Nikitin's narrative relied on the easiest explanation for failure – Indian inferiority – which fit within the traditional Orthodox depictions of Islam but this hardly explained the Russians' inability to negotiate as equals. It

Society," 81, 1961, pp. 126-130; Lowell R. Tillet, *Afanasy Nikitin as a Cultural Ambassador to India: A Bowdlerized Soviet Translation of His Journal*, in "The Russian Review," 25, 1966, pp. 160-169; A. S. Morris, *The Journey Beyond Three Seas*, in "The Geographical Journal," 133, 1967, pp. 502-508; Mary Jane Maxwell, *Afanasi Nikitin: An Orthodox Russian's Spiritual Voyage in the Dar al-Islam, 1468-1475*, in "Journal of World History," 17, 2006, pp. 243-266.

¹³ *Afanasy Nikitin's Journey across Three Seas*, in vol. *Russia's Medieval Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, ed. and trans. by Serge A. Zenkovsky, New York, 1963, p. 338.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 341.

¹⁵ For an idea of Iranian and Indian assessments of Russia, see Gulifshan Khan, *Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West during the Eighteenth Century*, Karachi, 1998; Rudi Matthee, *Suspicion, Fear, and Admiration: Pre-Nineteenth Century Iranian Views of the English and the Russians*, in vol. *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, ed. by Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee, Seattle, 2002, pp. 121-145; M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*.

¹⁶ For the history of Russia's trade relations with the south, see M. V. Fekhner, *Torgovliia russkogo gosudarstva so stranami vostoka v XVI veke*, Moskva, 1952; N. B. Baikova, *Rol' Srednei Azii v russko-indiiskikh torgovykh svyaziakh (Pervaia polovina XVI – vtoraiia polovina XVIII v.)*, Toshkent, 1964; A. I. Iukht, *Torgovliia s vostochnymi stranami i vnutrennii rynek Rossii (20-60e gody XVIII veka)*, Moskva, 1994; Stephen Frederic Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750*, Cambridge, 1994; Scott C. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550-1900*, Leiden, 2002.

was the Russians who were weak and poor, and the Muslim Empires that were ascendant. Learning to successfully navigate this dichotomy was the work of more than two centuries, and it required a fundamental reassessment of Muslim societies.

By the seventeenth century, the new Romanov dynasty would focus on establishing foreign trade from an economic necessity following the expense of the wars of the sixteenth century and the civil and foreign wars of the seventeenth. Establishing relations with the Muslim states was a high priority, largely from their size, wealth, and desirable commodities.¹⁷ In order to accomplish this goal, information needed to be gathered to support possible exchanges, and, most importantly, a more honest account of the Muslim Empires. This became the official task of the merchant (*gost'*) Fedot Afanasev syn Kotov, dispatched from Moscow in 1623/4 by order of Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich.¹⁸ Kotov traveled on familiar ground in his expedition, traveling down the Moskva River to the Volga all the way to the entrepôt of Astrakhan. From Astrakhan Kotov boarded a barge on the Caspian Sea, landing in the Safavid city of Shirvan, and then traveling overland to the capital, Isfahan. From the international trade center of Isfahan, Kotov gathered information on the Muslim trading world with a particular emphasis on Mughal India. While Muscovite Russians had traded with the Mughals since the sixteenth century, historically all of these exchanges traveled through Iran and then to Astrakhan.

Throughout his travels, Kotov demonstrated extensive knowledge of the region. The route to Iran had been well-trod by Russian envoys in the previous thirty years, including the recent embassies of Fedor Isakovich Leont'ev in 1616 and Mikhail Petrovich Bariatinskii in 1618.¹⁹ He had detailed knowledge of all of the possible routes from Astrakhan to Ottoman Turkey, Safavid Iran, and Mughal India, by land and by sea; he justified his choice of travel by sea to Iran for its safety and speed. Kotov also included several Persian terms in his text (such as *maidan*) without providing a translation for his readers in the Posol'skii Prikaz (Foreign Chancellery), which demonstrated both his and their familiarity with Persian and Muslim trade.

Even with his familiarity with Iran, Kotov's account recorded traditional topics of early-modern travel narratives. It provided an extensive description of time and distance from

¹⁷ Niels Steensgaard, *Carracks, Caravans, and Companies: The Structural Crisis in the European-Asian Trade in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Odense, 1973; K. N. Chaudhuri, *Markets and Traders in India during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, in vol. *Economy and Society: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History*, ed. by K. N. Chaudhuri and Clive J. Dewey, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 143-162; Eric Tagliacozzo, *Trade, Production, and Incorporation: The Indian Ocean in Flux, 1600-1900*, in "Itinerario," 26, 2002, pp. 75-106; Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Western Indian Ocean: The Early Seventeenth Century*, in "Modern Asian Studies," 19, 1985, pp. 481-499; Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, Princeton, 1985; Muzaffar Alam, *Trade, State Policy and Regional Change: Aspects of Mughal-Uzbek Commercial Relations, c. 1550-1750*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient," 37, 1994, pp. 202-227; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Of Imârat and Tijârat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to 1750*, in "Comparative Studies in Society and History," 37, 1995, pp. 750-780; Joginder K. Chawla, *India's Overland Trade with Central Asia and Persia: During the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, New Delhi, 2006.

¹⁸ All translations from Fedot Afanasev syn Kotov, *Of a Journey to the Kingdom of Persia, from Persia to the Land of Turkey and to India and to Hormuz where the Ships Come*, in vol. *Russian Travellers*, ed. by P. M. Kemp, pp. 1-42. Russian original republished in vol. *Khozhenie kuptsa Fedota Kotova v Persiiu*, Moskva, 1958.

¹⁹ *Pamiatniki diplomaticheskikh*, vol. III, ed. by N. I. Veselovskii.

place to place and a physical description of the environment, enumerated potential trade goods, and discussed the customs of Muslims in Iran. All of this information would be necessary for future travelers to successfully navigate the journey and to prepare them for future diplomatic and commercial exchanges with local elites.

Compared with earlier accounts such as Nikitin's or later ones such as Efremov's, Kotov generally admired Safavid Iran. However, he was far more reflective of Muscovite attitudes than either of the others. Kotov was impressed by Iran's wealth, its size, and diversity of its population. For example: "Isfahan stands on a sort of spur between high mountains on a flat place and Isfahan is the capital city of the kingdom of Persia, large and fine, only the citadel is poor, made of clay like the walls thrown up round gardens. The king's palaces stand with gates onto the great *maidan* and the gates are high and over the gates there are pavilions painted in gold and there is pavilion on pavilion three storeys high, and all decorated with gold, and all manner of ambassadors and merchants go into these pavilions ... At the end of the *maidan* there are high gates leading into an enclosure and high up above those gates there stands a clock, and the place where the clock stands is also ornamented with gold and made fine ..." ²⁰

Though his general impressions were overall positive, Kotov did have some concerns about the public presence of Muslim women in the *maidan*. "And the women go wrapped in this cotton cloth so that the face and eyes are not seen, and on their feet they wear the same cloth stockings and slippers, and some have velvet stockings; and those women and girls have trousers, and they wear their long hair in braids to the waist and down to their heels and some of them plait their hair in two or three or four braids, and into their own hair they plait other hair for their adornment; and in their nostrils they have gold rings with jewels and pearls, and the undergarment is a narrow kaftan and their bosoms are bare and on their breasts and round their necks and on their bodies are hung strings of pearls." ²¹

This description, however, is still more positive than Nikitin's outlandish accounts from the fifteenth century, but Muscovite society was far more accustomed with Muslim societies by Kotov's time. Considering Kotov's demonstrated familiarity with Iran and Islam, this description of Iranian mores seems largely presented for his audience back in Moscow. As a traveler familiar with Iran, Kotov could hardly have been surprised by Iranian women, but first-time Muscovite travelers could easily have been shocked at the behavior of these Muslim women. Muscovite elite women of the early seventeenth century still lived in a culture that idealized their total seclusion from public life. Contrasted with that reality at home, Kotov's description was fairly moderate. ²²

In fact, the people of Iran fare better in Kotov's account than Indians or Turks. While Kotov was familiar with India's religious diversity, several features still surprised him: "And as to the Multanis at Isfahan, or in our language 'Indians,' they too have various religions.

²⁰ *Russian Travellers*, ed. by P. M. Kemp, pp. 16-17.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

²² Kotov's reactions tend to be more moderate than those of other Europeans. See the discussion of European travelers and the Iranian coffeehouse in Rudi Matthee, *Coffee in Safavid Iran: Commerce and Consumption*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient," 37, 1994, esp. pp. 17-30.

Some hold to Islam, and others believe in the sun; when the sun begins to rise they pray to it. ... And all the Indians wear clothes of white cotton and white turbans also on their heads, and in stature they are not robust and their faces are bloodless and lean and dark."²³

Either this is reflection of Kotov's greater familiarity and comfort with Iran, or possibly it reflects his concerns of the unlikelihood of successful trade with India. In either case, Kotov's travel was unsuccessful in establishing new trade with the Muslim states, therefore it is not surprising there were some negative features among the Muslims he observed.

Kotov's concern with Mughal India's exoticism was little impediment to later Russian embassies traveling to India. Kotov's description did become the basis for much of their information on the route, its challenges, and local customs, but establishing trade with India independently of Safavid Iran was a driving goal for Muscovite economic policies. Three embassies from Moscow to Mughal India were dispatched over the course of the seventeenth century. Each traveled with the same goal – independent trade connections without Iran's interference. More notable is that each reflected the same perception of these Muslim states as did Kotov's – the Muslim Empires are admirable neighbors who present tremendous opportunities for Muscovy. There was no hint of negative portrayals of Islam or these cultures in the notes of any of the embassies.

This should not imply that the Russians viewed the project of establishing trade with the Muslim world to be an easy one. Russian merchants regularly complained of the dangers of the trade routes, particularly the overland route. Despite the international community of merchants traveling to Persia, no one seemed secure along its trade routes.²⁴ However, the greater problem was the outbreak of war between Mughal India and Safavid Iran in the 1630s.²⁵ With the increased troop deployment in the region, travel had not become safer. The trip to Isfahan had become nearly impassable, making trade with India through Iran nearly unimaginable.

In light of these difficulties, the tsar and the Posol'skii Prikaz dispatched an official embassy to India in 1646.²⁶ It was led by two merchants, Nikita Syroezhin from Kazan and Vasilei Tuskhanov from Astrakhan. The merchants left Moscow with separate introductions for Shah Abbas II and Shah Jahan, reflecting the Posol'skii Prikaz's knowledge of the current political conflict. The primary goal of the embassy was to reach India, in hopes of establishing regular trade independent of the Iranian trade route. The Posol'skii Prikaz instructed the merchants to greet Shah Jahan with an offer of the tsar's "friendship and love and other good things."²⁷ With such fulsome praise for Shah Jahan, the Posol'skii Prikaz

²³ *Russian Travellers*, ed. by P. M. Kemp, pp. 36-37.

²⁴ *Russko-Indiiskie otnosheniia v XVII v.: Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. by K. A. Antonova and N. M. Gol'berg, Moskva, 1958, #15, between 1 March and 12 July 1639, pp. 40-43.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, #11, 24 June 1637, pp. 33-37.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, #s 24-30, 1646-1647, pp. 48-73. This was not the only attempt to influence events in the south. The embassy to India followed one to Georgia, then under Iranian control. See M. Polievktov, *Posol'stvo Kniazia Myshetskogo i d'iaka Kliuchareva v Kakhetiui, 1640-1643*, Tiflis, 1928.

²⁷ "O družbe i o ljubvi i o inykh gosudarskikh dobrykh delakh." *Russko-Indiiskie otnosheniia*, ed. by K. A. Antonova and N. M. Gol'berg, #24, no later than 18 June 1646, p. 48.

seemed to acknowledge the difficulty of Muscovy's position. Muscovy had little to offer of interest to India, and, as a result, had little hopes of enticing Indian trade other than the faint possibility of circumventing the trade through Iran. As a result, the Posol'skii Prikaz did suggest one useful negotiating tool, reminding the merchants to praise Shah Jahan for his country where "Christians and Muslims lived in peace," an intended criticism of the Safavid and Ottoman Empires.²⁸ Despite these kind words, the merchants failed to negotiate new terms for trade.

With little accomplished on the first embassy, the Posol'skii Prikaz tried again with dispatch of Rodion Nikitin syn Pushnikov and Ivan Derevenskii to India in 1651, where they would remain until 1667.²⁹ These merchants were also residents of Kazan and Astrakhan, likely chosen for their familiarity with both the Volga's trade with the Muslim south as well as with the Indian diaspora community that resided in each city. Little in Russia's position had changed by time Pushnikov and Derevenskii departed, other than the renewal of hostilities between Iran and India. The introductory letter from the tsar for the embassy instructed the merchants that "tsar and great prince Aleksei Mikhailovich, autocrat of all Russia, sent you [the merchants] to his own brother, to great sovereign, his majesty Shah Jahan."³⁰ This clearly followed the established precedents for addressing Shah Jahan, which had failed earlier to motivate the Mughal Emperor from signing any binding agreements with the Russians. Pushnikov and Derevenskii, at least, arrived with a concrete plan for trade, as the Posol'skii Prikaz proposed supporting the development of an alternative trade route from India to Bukhara and then into Siberia, completely bypassing Iran.³¹ Clearly, the tsar's hope was the current hostilities would make this Russian alternative more attractive.

At this point, the distinction between Moscow's plans and the travelers' experiences became increasingly sharp. The Posol'skii Prikaz certainly was aware of the complaints of merchants about the lack of safety on the trip, and the continuing violence between Iran and India had only made the situation more precarious for the Russian embassy.³² Complaints constituted the majority of Pushnikov and Derevenskii's correspondence with Moscow over the length of their embassy, reiterating the violence and danger of the trade routes. It seems unlikely the trade plans for Bukhara had a genuine chance of success if the tsar's own representatives were not willing to travel that route.³³ None of the complaints, from official or unofficial representatives of the tsar, altered the Posol'skii Prikaz's position, which continued to write to Shah Jahan with "friendship and love and good deeds."³⁴

At the same time, Muscovy's economic policies were being revised, which ultimately transformed its attitude toward Iran and India. The culmination of these reforms was the

²⁸ *Ibidem*, #24, no later than 18 June 1646, p. 51.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, #s 49-55, 1651-1667, pp. 99-123. As before, this also coincided with the separate embassy to Georgia. See *Posol'stvo stol'nika Tolochanova i d'iaka levleva v Imeretiiu, 1650-1652*, ed. by M. Polevktov, Tiflis, 1926.

³⁰ *Russko-Indiiskie otnosheniia*, ed. by K.A. Antonova and N.M. Gol'berg, #50, 31 May 1651, p. 102.

³¹ *Ibidem*, #50, 31 May 1651, p. 109.

³² For example, *ibidem*, #32, no later than 25 July 1648, pp. 74-82; #54, May 1662, pp. 116-118.

³³ For example, *ibidem*, #55, no later than 15 May 1667, pp. 118-123.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, #64, May 1662, pp. 137-139.

Novotorgovyi ustav (New Commercial Code) of 1667, which regulated all foreign trade.³⁵ The first attempt to provide a comprehensive restructuring of foreign trade arrived in the form of the Commercial Code of 1553, which instituted a higher tax rate on all foreign goods than Russian merchants paid, in a perfect example of mercantilist principles. Foreign merchants protested the new fines, but this only confirmed the state's decision. With the New Commercial Code of 1667, not only foreign merchants received punitive tariffs on all trade goods but also they were physically restricted inside the kingdom. Foreign merchants could conduct business only in Arkhangel'sk, Novgorod, Pskov, Smolensk, Putivl', and Astrakhan, severely curtailing their presence in the Muscovite market.³⁶

For the first time in Russian history, the government placed foreign merchants at a notable disadvantage within the kingdom. As a result, it marked the first instances in which the Muslim merchants became the petitioners rather than the Muscovites. Complaints to the Posol'skii Prikaz became frequent for the remainder of the century. A nephew of the Iranian Shah Mamandu Selbek, Oalarbek, protested the refusal of permission to travel to Kazan from Astrakhan to deliver his goods. In previous years, Oalarbek had traveled to Kazan without hindrance; he protested paying a middleman for that same transportation.³⁷ In that same year, an Indian merchant living in Astrakhan, Banda Mingaev, petitioned the governor of Astrakhan to receive permission to transport his goods to Kazan. The governor of Astrakhan wrote to the current governor of Kazan about Mingaev, arguing that Mingaev had this permission in the past and only wanted his rights restored.³⁸ While even these minor examples were Muscovite successes, there was no guaranteed connection between the experiences of Muslim merchants inside Muscovy and Russia's destiny to the south.

This is not to imply that the New Commercial Code did not transform Muscovy's economic position. In Astrakhan, customs officials suddenly gained responsibility for regulating all trade with Asia. The local governor warned the customs officials to watch all "foreigners and Russian people from across the sea".³⁹ Merchants arriving on Muscovy's shores from East and West protested the newly-invasive inspections, with little result in altering the new policies.⁴⁰ The reason is obvious. While some merchants felt wronged by the new procedures, the state had far more to gain by collecting customs duties than it did in

³⁵ For an introduction to the Muscovite economy, see Joseph T. Fuhrmann, *The Origins of Capitalism in Russia: Industry and Progress in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Chicago, 1972, and J.T. Kotilaine, *Russia's Foreign Trade and Economic Expansion in the Seventeenth Century: Windows on the World*, Leiden, 2005.

³⁶ E. V. Chistiakova, *Novotorgovnyi ustav 1667 goda*, in vol. *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1957 god*, Moskva, 1958, pp. 102-126; and J.T. Kotilaine, *Russia's Foreign Trade*, pp. 220-225.

³⁷ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov – Moskva, f. 159, Prikaznye dela novoi razborki, op. 2, Posol'skii prikaz, d. 328, 29 March 1677.

³⁸ *Russko-Indiiskie otnosheniia*, ed. by K.A. Antonova and N.M. Gol'berg, #172, 29 September 1677 and 8 October 1677, pp. 276-277.

³⁹ "Inozemtsy ili russkie liudi za more," *ibidem*, #98, 28 July 1672, pp. 174-179.

⁴⁰ For example, the English attempted to pressure the tsar both through the Muscovy Company and with direct appeals from the King to the Tsar. NA, SP 91/3, Part 2, ff. 210r-212v, "Instructions from the Right Woell. the Governor and fellowship of English Merchants for Discovery of New Trades, Usually called the Muscovia Company, unto John Hebdon Esq., London," 16 September 1676; and SP 91/3, Part 2, ff. 217r/v, Letter from Charles II to Feodor Aleksevich, 16 September 1676.

accommodating the interest of the merchants. In terms of the long-term attempt to sway the Mughal state into supporting Russian foreign trade interests, this policy could do little but hinder future progress.⁴¹

The next embassy dispatched to India in 1675 turned this impression of Islam into fact, when the Posol'skii Prikaz relied upon a Russian-born Muslim as its emissary for the first time.⁴² Though Muhammed-lusuf Kasimov was also from Astrakhan as most of the earlier choices had been, there were obvious differences in his treatment by the Posol'skii Prikaz. Unlike the earlier embassies that traveled with Russian documents and a translator, Kasimov was dispatched with letters in Latin and Tatar, and no translator, as the expectation was that he would be able to communicate with an audience familiar with Persian in India and along the trade route. The lesson learned from sixty years of failure was to promote the common cultural connection of Russia and the Muslim south. Rather than presenting Muscovy as a foreign state, the appointment of Kasimov suggested that Muscovy was a familiar part of the Muslim trade community.

Despite the intentional choice to reach out to Mughal India with a potentially more familiar intermediary, Kasimov's travels were not a great success. According to Kasimov, poor finances hindered his trade mission. The Posol'skii Prikaz sent Kasimov from Astrakhan to Bukhara with only 711 rubles, more than 1,000 rubles less than any of the Christian embassies had been sent with earlier in the century.⁴³ Kasimov constantly peppered the Posol'skii Prikaz with requests for further funding in order to replace his out of pocket of expenses, which appear to not have been met. Upon his arrival in India, Kasimov was more than 2,000 rubles in debt, which undermined his diplomatic efforts to speak to the Mughal Emperor in "love and friendship," much less persuade the Mughals to support the possibility of the new trade route to Bukhara.

As the new tactics of using a Muslim to succeed where the Russians had failed earlier also ended without a new trade accord, the end of the seventeenth century saw the Posol'skii Prikaz returning to its earliest place – a fact-finding mission. Semen Martinov syn Malen'kii left Astrakhan in 1695 to travel to Khiva, Bukhara, and then to Kabul in northern India.⁴⁴ He also traveled with a translator as well as five *strel'tsy* to provide protection on his journey that suggests the purpose of his mission was different than the earlier trade embassies, which left without any instruction concerning military protection. Malen'kii's narrative recording his journey was modeled on Kotov's journey from the beginning of the century. It included an extensive description of the route and its physical geography, and made pointed comparisons toward the experiences of Syroezhin and Tushkanov who had traveled in 1646 and Kasimov's more recent journey in the 1670s. Malen'kii had clearly read

⁴¹ The new regulations were sufficiently effective to the point that the customs records for merchants leaving from Astrakhan into Russia carried numerous southern trade goods from Armenia, Iran, and India, but in the hands of Russian merchants from major trade centers such as Nizhnii Novgorod, Moscow, Rostov, Kazan, and Murom. See *Knigi Moskovskoi bol'shoi tamozhni: Novgorodskaiia, Astrakhanskaia, Malorossiiskaia, 1693-1694 gg.*, Moskva, 1961, pp. 64-76.

⁴² *Russko-Indiiskie otnosheniia*, ed. by K.A. Antonova and N.M. Gol'berg, #s 107-137, 1675-1716, pp. 189-236.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, #134, no later than 22 February 1678, p. 226.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, #s 251-260, pp. 1695-1716, pp. 356-377.

all of the earlier correspondence as he summarized the travelers' accounts as well as the Posol'skii Prikaz's instructions.⁴⁵ With this journey, Malen'kii effectively summarized the challenges of establishing regular trade with India, in its distance, dangerous routes, and the Russian embassies' failure to attract any support from the Indian government. After a century of exchange, the sum total of Muscovite Russia's success in India and Iran seemed to be little to none.

Conclusion

Despite the Posol'skii Prikaz's continuing failures, the travelers' records of their experiences in the Muslim south provide several insights into Muscovy's relationship with the outside world as well as Russian perceptions of foreigners. First, the Posol'skii Prikaz guided and documented much of the travel between Muscovy and Iran and India. In this sense, travel was not an individual experience for Russians so much as a century-long dialogue among the state and its representatives. It built upon pre-existing knowledge and observations in an attempt to improve Muscovy's relationship with the south. Second, the Muscovite government was effective in controlling their borders with their trade regulations, as seen in the protests and complaints from both Russian and foreign merchants. However, its improving position in controlling trade at home did little to nothing to improve its position with the Muslim states. Safavid Iran and Mughal India remained dominant and powerful trading nations. Much of the Muscovite merchants' failure in those countries arises from the basic fact that Russia had little to offer except words of "friendship and love." The Russian proposal to support a new trade route through Bukhara was not of great interest to India, which had its own overseas trade connections with the West already well-established without any Russian involvement. Third, the geopolitical developments in the region affected Muscovy's interest. The Muscovite embassies were well-informed about the continuing tensions between India and Iran, but failed to use this information in any effective way to improve their own position. There can be no argument to that Muscovite Russia was uninformed about the outside world. While the Russian government might not have been effective in using its information, certainly it possessed the necessary knowledge to make better decisions in the future.

The most important development, however, might also be the most ephemeral. The Muscovite government, and its merchants and embassies, did function in a world of Christian and Muslim space. There are notable glimpses of the governments' vision of a world of Islam that stretched from the Volga River to Mughal India. There was no sense from the Russian travelers in the south of Islam's inferiority, and, in fact, the opposite is generally true. Certain customs and habits might strike the Russian observers as odd, but not from its association with Islam as much as its difference from Russian social mores. Kotov had been a well-versed and knowledgeable traveler who still recorded surprising customs. In order to overcome this disconnect, the Posol'skii Prikaz moved toward relying upon those who would be more familiar with Muslim habits, as well as the Indian and Iranian diaspora communities

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, #252, after 7 May 1695, pp. 357-360.

living inside Muscovy's borders. There was a progression in the seventeenth century as the Prikaz transitioned from Muscovite *gosti*, to Christians from Kazan and Astrakhan, and then finally to its own Muslim populations – steadily moving toward those most familiar with India and Iran and those who would hopefully have greatest success outside of Muscovy's borders.

The Posol'skii Prikaz's attempt to develop a successful strategy of appealing to Mughal India was markedly different than its relationship with the West. For example, while the Mughal Emperor rarely, if ever, corresponded with the tsar despite offers of friendship and love, the kings of England were not as reticent. In a typical exchange from the seventeenth century, King James I, for example, began a letter with the following admiration: "Most excellent Prince, most deare Brother and Frend for as much as nothing doth more nighly combyne and knitt the heart of noble Princes in a mutuall League of Love and Frenship then the entercourse of Trade and Commerce betwene the Subject and People of their Kindomes and Dominions which otherwise by the Contreys are farre remote one from the other."⁴⁶

The praise from England versus the silence from India has a simple explanation. For England, Russia was an essential source of timber, tar, potash, and flax, all necessary commodities for maintaining England's merchant navy. For India, Russia had nothing comparable. While England and Russia exchanged letters in mutual dependency, Russia and India did not. In other words, when Islam was ascendant, Russia was merely a minor market of little importance and less value.

By the eighteenth century, of course, Russia's view of Muslim states of Iran and India would be markedly different, empowered with recent military victories against weaker powers. Finally, the Russian assumptions of Islam's weakness allowed correspondents like Efremov to speak in terms of Western arrogance. While on first glance Efremov's description of Indians in 1786 as "weak and timid" appeared as another example of "orientalist" language, it was more importantly a sign of the dramatic transformation of Russia's geopolitical presence and its aspirations for controlling its southern borders. By the nineteenth century, when Russia's interests along the southern frontier were dictated by its Great Game with Great Britain as much as its own colonial ambitions, the Muslim Empires became small pawns in a global conflict. Scholars who have only examined this last stage of Russian imperialism have neglected the centuries of failures, which have as much to tell us as the very late victories.

⁴⁶ NA, PRO 22/60, no. 31, 30 May 1623, Letter from James I to Mikhail Fedorovich.