A Muscovite in Italy

by

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ITALY has long lured Russians, and Italian connections have played a role in the development of Russian culture, whether in the time of Ivan III in the late 15th century, in the era of Peter I, in the second half of of the 18th century at the court in St. Petersburg, or in the peregrinations of Russian intelligensia and artists in the 19th century. Even as I write, Russia and Italy are in the news (albeit in the context of political machinations), and one who pushes through the crowds of tourists in Florence or Rome can hear Russian being spoken at almost every turn. Insofar as a "Muscovite" is writing here, he is in a sense an adoptive one, whose association with Russia is by profession, not by birth or language.

The primary reason for my traveling to Italy in May 2017 with my wife Charlotte was to attend the workshop on reading in Russia, held in the Palazzo Feltrinelli on Lake Garda, a few hours' drive from Milan (see my posting to H-EarlySlavic). We seized this opportunity to indulge as well in a week in the hill town of Cortona (midway between Florence and Rome), thanks to the good fortune of having won a week's stay there in a fund-raising auction. And, not having been previously in Milan, Florence and Rome, we included them in our itinerary which lasted the better part of a month.

That we learn from travel goes without saying. We bring our own mental baggage to what we see when traveling. In my case, one purpose was to fill in gaps in my first-hand acquaintance with the Roman Empire as a component of the larger world of the "Silk Roads" which I study. Having approached Rome first from some of its provinces (e.g., Syria, Spain), finally we made our way to the capital itself. In these notes though, rather than focus on matters Roman, I have chosen other topics which could be of interest others in the Early Slavic community. In the most general sense, what we saw was a continual reminder of how it may not represent what once was but rather present some kind of modern re-working or re-construction. More specifically for "pre-modern Russia," I was wanting to see first-hand the few examples which might relate to Russia-Italy interactions and to appreciate better the contexts in which those interactions took place. This then raised questions about the value and dangers of trying to do comparative history. Considerable ink has been spilled in trying to fit the Russian experience into a comparative context. Through this traveler's (somewhat superficial) direct acquaintance with a culture deeply invested in its Classical past and at the forefront of the Renaissance, I was brought back to the perhaps tired discussion of whether we can talk of, say, Ivan IV as a "Renaissance prince." Moreover, by being exposed to the scientific and cultural achievements in northern Italy during the Renaissance, I found myself thinking about our endless arguments over Russia's "modernization." Our few days in the "medieval" hill town of Cortona provided perhaps a better comparative model for trying to understand Muscovy than did any amount of exposure to the brilliance of the Medici and Sforza courts

Be warned, these are but meandering impressions, not scholarly analysis. I include a lot of images and links to a couple of videos and will be happy to share higher resolution photos with anyone who asks.

Architecture

I have long been interested in the work of Italian architects in Moscow in the reign of Grand Prince Ivan III (1462-1505). Their work in the Kremlin is well known, responsible for two of the major cathedrals, the lower parts of the great bell tower, the "faceted palace" and the walls themselves. Until a few years ago, I had never seen the Italian buildings that either directly or indirectly served as some of the inspiration for the architects of the Kremlin.

My first opportunity to do so was in Venice in 2010, where I was struck by the beauty of the marble-clad Santa Maria dei Miracoli, built in the 1480s [**Fig. 1,** next page]. It's façade incorporates many decorative features that we find repeated/interpreted in the Kremlin's Cathedral of the Archangel Michael, constructed beginning in 1505 under the supervision of Alevisio "the New." As Faensen and Ivanov have stated (*Early Russian Architecture*, 1975 ed.: 419), "the composition of the facades was entirely in the style of the northern Italian Renaissance."

In Milan one has to be impressed by the Sforza Castle. Although much rebuilt over the centuries, in its present form it preserves important elements of the work commissioned by Francesco Sforza beginning in the 1450s, and restorations have aimed at conveying its 16th-century appearance [**Fig. 2**]. When Sigismund von Herberstein wrote in the 16th century about the

Fig. 1. On left, Church of Sancta Maria dei Miracoli, Venice, On right, Cathedral of the Archangel Michael, Moscow Kremlin.

more italico of the Moscow Kremlin, he was referring in the first instance to the fortifications, the work of the Italian architects hired by Ivan III to rebuild the walls. Their models were something akin to the fortress in Milan (if not directly inspired by it). The Kremlin one sees today, of course, is not the same, the tops of most of the towers having been re-built in the 17th century.

Also in Milan, we walked past the 19th-century Palazzo Turati, whose "rusticated facade [was] inspired by Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara." [**Fig. 3**] Another building which is considered to have been inspired by the Diamantis' residence, although the similarities here are more difficult to perceive, is the Faceted Palace in the Kremlin. It is also the work of Ivan III's Italian architects, even if its appearance today is much changed from when it was first built.

Fig. 2. Above, the Sforza Castle, Milan. Below, the rebuilding of the Moscow Kremlin, engraving by A. Baranskii; the Kremlin at the end of Ivan III's reign in 1505, painting by A.Vasnetsov.

Seeking to visualize through a surviving building in Russia what it might have looked like in earlier times is a challenge. Apart from the Faceted Palace, with a different roofline, window surrounds and other changes, one can find any number of other examples where what we have is modern reconstruction or restoration, often with questionable or mixed results (one of the most striking instances is the Novgorod Church of St. Nicholas, built in 1113, which then lost its original domes and was subjected to later neo-Classical additions, all of which are now visible in the "restored" structure).

The same is true for architectural monuments of Northern Italy. One has to remember that what we see today and may think exemplifies a particular Medieval or Renaissance style may in fact be a mix or a modern evocation or "replica" of the style of centuries earlier. For example, the Gothic excesses of the indeed striking cathedral in Milan **[Fig. 4]**, begun in the early 14th century, are a product not completed until the 20th, as a close examination of some details would

*Fig. 3. (left to right) The Turati Palazzo in Milan, the Palazzo de Diamanti in Ferrara, and the Faceted Palace (*Granovitaia palata*) in the Kremlin.*

Photo courtesy of T. Taranovski

Fig. 4. The west facade of the Milan Duomo.

Fig. 5. The west facade of the Florence Duomo

reveal. In Florence, the addition of dark green and white marble cladding on some of the churches, while largely carefully imitating genuine early examples in the city, was part of a conscious cultural program put in place after Italian unification in the 19th. The main façade of the great Duomo in Florence (whose dome is considered below) [**Fig.**] is an example, since prior to the installation of the marble cladding one now sees, the rougher masonry of the early church had been exposed, and in fact there was a long controversy and more than one effort over the centuries to "complete" the facade. What one sees there now was designed to "complete" the centuries-earlier marble-clad exterior of the main building and harmonize with the accompanying Baptistery and bell tower.

Among the other churches in Florence, Santa Croce now sports a modern marble façade behind which one still sees the unadorned masonry of the parish church of Galileo, Dante, Michelangelo and Machiavelli [**Fig. 6**]. A modern statue of Dante stands to the left of the façade in the piazza; the cenotaph dedicated to him inside the church is but a memorial one [**Fig. 7**]. Unlike Galileo, Michelangelo and Machiavelli, whose tombs in fact are there, he is buried in Ravenna. The church and the adjoining monastic complex of Santa Croce are remarkable for their decoration, including an important series of paintings by Giotto [**Fig. 8**] and for the fact that the library was one of the two largest and most important ones in late medieval and Renaissance Florence. Speaking of Giotto, considered to be a key contributor to the development of early Renais-

Fig. 6. Santa Croce, Florence, from the west and from the south.

Fig. 7. Santa Croce, Florence. Left to right: tombs/cenotaphs of Dante, Michelangelo and Galileo.

Fig. 8. The death of St. Francis, mural by Giotto in the Bardi Chapel of Santa Croce, Florence, 1320-1325.

sance humanism in pain ting, one might ask: how much justification is there for the comparisons that have been made between his work (here from the 1320s) and that of Andrei Rublev at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th centuries?

Cupolas and domes are of some interest to me, given the challenges their construction presents to the architects and the different solutions arrived at, each of which then offers interesting opportunities for decoration of the surfaces. As with any kind of innovation, there may be controversy as to whether or not that which was new was invented de novo or whether it was imported from another source (in which case then, which?).

Students of early church architecture in Rus generally are in agreement about the Byzantine models which were the most important. What was borrowed was not the technically challenging model of the magnificent Hagia Sophia [**Fig.**] built under Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, even if that is the church which, according to the Chronicle, so dazzled the envoys

Fig. 9. Cathedral of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.

Fig. 10. Cathedral of the Dormition, Moscow Kremlin.

from Kiev that they knew not whether they were in Heaven or on earth. When it came to the practical task of important a new architecture of Christianity, the models logically were the contemporary middle Byzantine ones whose domes were smaller and, arguably, easier to construct. It is worth keeping in mind that the original dome of Hagia Sophia collapsed and had to be re-built: apparently the "flatness" of the original dome was structurally unsound, given the size of the area which it was asked to cover. One of the reasons Ivan III ended up hiring an Italian (Aristotle Fiorovanti from Bologna) to re-build the main Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin [**Fig. 10**] was that the church which had been under construction there (designed by Russian architects) had collapsed, apparently before the upper part of the structure could be completed. Fiorovanti's church is distinguished by the sense of spaciousness in the interior and larger drums and domes, since he was able to build with lighter materials and used other innovative engineering that then required less massive columns and other elements of support. However, the talented Italian was constrained by having to adhere to a standard architecture for Orthodox cathedrals (the direct model being the Cathedral of the Dormition in Vladimir).

The result then was a far cry from the imposing architecture of many of the buildings in Fiorovanti's native country which I was able to visit on this recent trip. Arguably what impressed me most were the Pantheon in Rome [**Fig. 11**] (in the words of one guide book, "perhaps the most influential building in art history"), and the Duomo in Florence [**Fig. 12**], whose architect Filippo Brunelleschi

Fig. 11. The Pantheon, Rome.

had studied carefully that 2nd-century Roman example. Even though in theory the builders of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople could have studied the Pantheon first, as far as I know, they did not, which then would help explain the heavy-handed way they went about creating a massive structure to support what turned out to be an untenable dome. In Italy, the Pantheon also was closely studied by Michelangelo for the rebuilding of

Fig. 12. The Duomo, Florence.

Fig. 13. The Vatican, St. Peter's.

St. Peter's **[Fig. 13]**. And the genealogy of the important buildings which can be traced back to the Pantheon leads to Wren's St. Paul's in London, the U.S. Capitol, the Cathedral of St. Isaac of Dalmatia in St. Petersburg, etc.

To build such large domes requires use of light-weight materials. In the case of the Pantheon, the diameter of the dome's base matches the height of the top from the floor. Its dome is relatively "flat" though and was was lightened by the coffering of the ceiling where the borders of the units thus together comprising a strong skeleton to support the whole. The construction material is concrete, with an admixture of pumice in the upper reaches, the volcanic rock contributing to the lightness. If one is going to construct a dome entirely of bricks or stone blocks, that is likely to limit the size.

Brunelleschi's innovations were many, his double dome allowing for the outer dome to rise to a dramatic height, its commanding position over the skyline enhanced by a high drum. He designed a complex array of ribs, hidden support by huge wooden beams and buttresses, and amazed contemporaries by using "floating" scaffolding that did not have to be anchored to the ground. One can walk up through to the top between the inner and outer domes, see some of the equipment and in the Duomo Museum see his wooden models [**Figs. 14, 15**] and some of the architectural designs for completing the decoration of the exterior, which to this day still has incomplete sections. The

Fig. 14, Views from inside the dome in the space between the inner and outer shells.

Fig. 15. Brunelleschi's dome of the Duomo in Florence, seen from the top of the bell tower, and two of his wooden architectural models displayed in the Duomo Museum.

Fig. 16. Brunelleschi's death mask.

Fig. 17. Cosimo Medici the Elder being presented with a model of the Church of San Lorenzo by Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti. Painting by Giorgio Vasari and his atelier in the Apartments of Pope Leo X in the Palazzo Vecchi, Florence, latter 16th century.

technical sophistication of the early 15th-century engineering and design embodied here is breathtaking.

Did I come away from this a Brunelleschi enthusiast? [**Figs. 16**] You bet. One of his other projects which hugely impressed me was his Church of San Lorenzo in Milan, whose classically proportioned Renaissance interior is aesthetically perfect and makes a statement on its own, unencumbered by eye-distracting surface accretions of the later Renaissance and Baroque [**Fig. 18**]. Granted, the great chronicler of Italian Renaissance art, Giorgio Vasari, perhaps as an exercise in one-upmanship, pointed out where Brunelleschi had failed to follow exact Classical proportions, but whatever those problems, they were lost on this viewer. Brunelleschi also designed the building of the Foundling Hospital in the Piazza SS. Annunziata [**Fig. 19**], termed the "first Renaissance building" embodying Classical proportions in its columned loggia that fronts "the most Renaissance square in Florence" (the words of a guide-book, whatever exactly they mean). The use of Classical proportions in architecture is one reason why the façade Fiorovanti's Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin appeals visually and is distinctive among the Russian Orthodox churches.

On the subject of construction techniques, I was surprised to see the way in which large amphorae were

Fig. 18. The nave of San Lorenzo, Florence, lookingtoward the altar.

Fig. 19. The Orphanage designed by Brunelleschi in the Piazza SS. Annunziata, Florence.

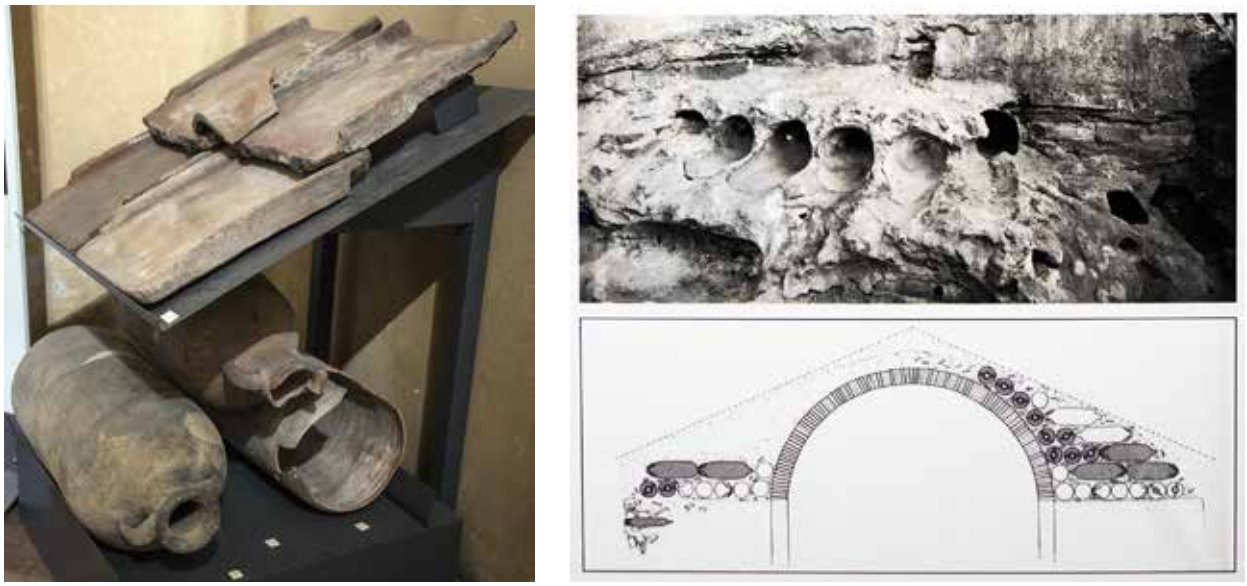


Fig. 20. Amphorae and roof tiles from the original structure of the Chapel of San Aquilino attached to the Church of San Lorenzo, Milan, and, from an analogous example of San Simpliciano, Milan (late 4th-early 5th century) , photograph and drawing of the vault construction of its dome.

used systematically in to create a light vaulting over the dome for the chapel of S. Aquilino, the earliest preserved section of the Cathedral of San Lorenzo in Milan [**Fig. 20**]. The exterior roof is conical, over a domed interior. In the intervening spaces, the architects used both ceramic tubes and large amphorae (of a type common in the 5th and 6th centuries. This is a technique known from earlier Roman times that was then used in a number of important structures in Italy, including ones in Ravenna. On the mosaic decoration of the chapel of S. Aquilino, see below.

I would note that this is not the same thing as the use of ceramic vessels for acoustical purposes (*golosniki*) in Russian Orthodox churches [**Fig. 21**], where they are placed with the mouth open into the interior space of the church, thus enhancing the often wonderful acoustics for a cappella singing by Russian choirs.

Fig. 21. Golosnik *from Church of St. Nicholas (1113), Novgorod, in collection of State Historical Museum, Moscow.*

Mosaics

As has been well documented, the difficult art of creating pictorial mosaics for interior decoration of churches was brought to Kiev with Orthodoxy, but after the beginning of the 12th century, we no longer find mosaics used in Rus for that purpose, the artists and their patrons choosing instead to cover the interior walls with frescoes. That the Byzantine art of mosaic decoration continued nearly to the end of the Empire is well known, one of the most striking examples being the Church of the Savior in Chora (the Kariye Camii), dating from the first half of the 14th century [**Fig. 22**]. Also well known is the fact that some of the most important examples of Christian mosaic art are to be found in Italy (one thinks, for example, of Ravenna). What may be less well appreciated is the fact that the extensive use of mosaic decoration continued there into the period of the Renaissance. While I have only begun to

Fig. 22. Dome mosaic in the Church of the Savior in Chora (Kariye Camii), Istanbul.

Fig. 23. The mosaic dome of the Chapel of San Vittorio, Church of San Ambrosio, Milan, and the "portrait" of San Ambrosio on the left side wall.

view the rich array of mosaics in Italy, where possible, as on this recent trip, I have sought them out. [For the major arrays of mosaics in Italy, see the stunningly illustrated volume by Joachim Poeschke, *I Mosaici in Italia 300-1300* (originally published in German).]

There are some very early examples in Milan [**Fig. 23**], the chapel of S. Vittorio (attached to the Cathedral of S. Ambrosio) containing a noteworthy "portrait" of S. Ambrosio. The conch of the main apse in the cathedral has a striking mosaic composition [**Fig. 24**], though much of what one sees today is the restoration after bomb damage in World War II. The chapel of S. Aquilino, the earliest part of the Cathedral of S. Lorenzo, has but fragments that attest to the richness of what was once there [**Fig. 25**]. The mosaics presumably date from the 5th-6th centuries. Among the most interesting of these compositions is one of the early depictions of Christ as a beardless youth.

Fig. 24. Central portion of the mosaic in the conch of the main apse, Church of San Ambrosi, Milan.

Fig. 25. Mosaics of San Aquilino

Fig. 26. San Miniato, Florence.

Florence is also noteworthy for its mosaics. The 13th-century Church of San Miniato that overlooks the city frames one on its dark green- or black-and-white marble of the façade [**Fig. 26**] and has a well-preserved mosaic composition in the conch of the apse. Aesthetically, this church is one of the loveliest in the city and is among the best preserved.

Most striking of all though is the domed ceiling of the Baptistery Of San Giovanni in Florence [**Fig. 27**], decorated between the early 13th and early-14th centuries. For an appreciation of the beauty of this remarkable building, view the short video I created, which can be accessed in Dropbox.*

Fig. 27. The dome mosaic of the Baptistery, Florence.

* The link provides open access to two videos, one of the Baptistery and one of the pageant at Cortona described below. The files are in .wmv format, for Windows, but I have larger ones in .mp4 which you can request. Click on the image for each to start, and note that the somewhat jittery beginning then evens out. You can enlarge to full screen.

The URL is:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/tqicjblopdzfoqm/AAAEFo5-7kuPENrweujGO2PVa?dl=0

Fig. 28. The Baptistery, Florence: on left, the zodiac floor mosaic; on the right, one panel of Ghiberti's "Gates of Paradise," depicting the divine intervention saving Isaac. Note in the lower left the three angels appearing before Abraham in front of his tent. Think for comparison of Rublev's famous "Old Testament Trinity," painted short decades before Ghiberti created his masterpiece.

Apart from the ceiling mosaics (whose details can be viewed in Timothy Verdon, *The Cathedral, the Baptistery, the Bell Tower* [Firenze: Mandragora, 2016]), the Baptistery is noteworthy for other reasons: the patterned marble floors that include "Islamic" decorative motifs on the zodiac wheel centered on the direct path that leads through the east doors to the Duomo [**Fig. 28**]. The gilded bronze doors made for that most important portal were designed by Lorenzo Ghiberti in the 15th-century; they display reliefs incorporating "pictorial innovations of the period, including perspective and classicizing architecture" (Verdon, p. 56). Both the doors and much of the important early sculpture on the facades of the bell tower and Duomo itself are now replicas, the originals to be seen in the Duomo Museum. Mosaicists from Venice (where Byzantine mosaic art was still very much alive) were hired to do the work in the Baptistery.

The mosaic art is still alive in modern times, witness the cycle of pictures created by the Italian futurist artist Gino Severini for the Stations of the Cross leading up to the hilltop cathedral overlooking the town of Cortona, and the striking image of St. Mark he produced for the church dedicated to the saint in the lower part of the town [**Fig. 29**]. One is reminded here of some of the futurist work by Russian artists of the early 20th century who were responding to the traditions of Russian religious iconography.

Fig. 29. Gino Severini's St. Mark and his "Deposition" for the Stations of the Cross. Note the latter is difficult to photograph properly due to its being protected by plexiglass.

Fig. 29. Chemodanov's portrait (photo from Internet).

Fig. 30. Portraits in the "Giovio series": Scipio Africanus, Attila "the scourge of God," Totila King of the Goths, and Anne Boleyn.

Paintings in the Uffizi Gallery

In visiting the Uffizi, I had hoped to see the portrait done in the 1650s of the Russian envoy who had visited Florence, Ivan Chemodanov [**Fig. 29**]. The picture is attributed to one of the Medici court painters, Justus Sustermans. In the vastness of the Uffizi collections, I did not find it; possibly it is now in storage on account of renovations to some parts of the building.

While most go to the Uffizi for its collection of masterpieces by some of the most famous artists who worked in Italy, I found myself drawn in part to the less noticed portraits that form a frieze along the upper walls of the long corridors [**Fig 30**]. In the early 16th century, Paolo Giovio, the learned physician who was attached to the court of Pope Clement VII in Rome, commissioned a series of portraits of the famous men of his time, which he then hung in a private museum at his Villa on Lake Como. Historians of Muscovy know Giovio for his publication of one of the earliest Western descriptions of Muscovy in 1525, based on what he was told by the Muscovite envoy Dmitrii Gerasimov. Giovio's book went through several Latin, Italian and German editions before the end of the 16th century and even appeared in English translation in 1555.

While Giovio's original portrait collection did not survive, it was copied for the Medici in the late 16th century, and the copies placed in the corridors of the Uffizi. The series then was continued down into the 18th century. What one finds here is notable historical personages (Artaxerxes, Attila, Tamerlane), most of the Ottoman sultans starting in the 15th century, the occasional ruler of Persia, generals (Wallenstein, Tilly), savants (Newton, Leibnitz), Henry VIII and other rulers of England, the unfortunate Anne Boleyn, the Habsburgs, rulers of France….

Notably absent in this so-called "Giovio series" are any portraits of Russian rulers. Were such unobtainable? Possibly, as we have no real portraiture in Muscovy that could have produced them before the 17th century. Or might this indicate that the Medici did not consider Muscovy important enough to include them? The fact that Chemodanov's portrait entered their collection might be evidence to the contrary, at least for the period after its date of ca. 1656.

The long Uffizi corridors display below the Giovio series a somewhat randomly assembled array of larger paintings, and below them examples of classical sculpture. Somewhat to my surprise (even though the paintings do seem to be well known to specialists on

Fig. 31. Nikitin's portraits of Peter and Catherine

Fig. 32. The Nikitin portraits in context.

the Petrine era portraitist Ivan Nikitin), these additional paintings even include two portraits of Russian rulers, Peter I and his wife, the future Catherine I [**Fig. 31**]. Both of them bear the signature of Ivan Nikitin and the date of 23 July 1717, when he apparently was in Florence, having been sent to Italy to study painting. While there he would likely not have had any images from life for his depictions of Peter and Catherine; in both cases the images seem rather stylized idealizations. But there you have it, the only Russian rulers amongst the pleiad of other notables recognized in Florence. Probably there is nothing significant to be concluded by the placement of these two paintings, both below the Giovio series and (as was the practice in the gallery) above examples of Roman sculpture [**Fig. 32**]. Catherine is above a Roman version of an earlier Greek sculpture of Nike (Victory); Peter, somewhat incongruously perhaps, is above a sculpture of the nymph Daphne.

Science, Maps and the Wider World

Much has been written on the ways in which the Muscovite elite gradually began to acquire knowledge of the wider world and tap into the knowledge of the "Scientific Revolution." Western cosmographies and atlases began to be translated possibly as early as the late 16th century, although, judging from surviving manuscripts, their circulation was very limited. The Ambassadorial Office (*Posol'skii prikaz*) accumulated a library of reference works. The foreigners in Muscovite service such as Andrei Vinius and Nikolai Spafarii-Milescu undertook translations. The first knowledge Muscovy had of the Copernican system was in a translation of one of the most famous Western atlases, that of Johannes Blaeu, from a set brought to Moscow as a diplomatic gift. Aleksei Mikhailovich's summer palace at Kolomenskoe outside Moscow had some kind of image of the heavens and the signs of the zodiac painted on one of the ceilings, though whether this in fact portrayed a Copernican model (as the recent reconstruction of the palace has chosen to do) is a good question (see *Dvorets tsaria Alekseia Mikhailovicha XVII veka. Istoriko-khudozhestvennaia rekonstruktsiia* [M., 2013], p. 19). Today in the Moscow Historical Museum, one can see the huge globe made by Johannes Blaeu in the 1690s which Peter I acquired after Charles XII of Sweden refused to pay for it [**Fig. 33**]. And we

Fig. 33. The Blaeu globe in the Moscow Historical Museum.

know that the notable Muscovite cartographer of Siberia, Semen Remizov, was able to consult an extensive collection of Western cartographic originals when he visited Moscow.

All this then peaks one's curiosity to learn more about what was happening at courts elsewhere in Europe. We learn in the Museum of Science in Florence (now named for Galileo), that the Medici in fact created the earliest of the European Royal Science Academies, antedating by some years those in England and France. That museum also boasts important displays of the inventions and experiments by Galileo, even though, as we know, he was persecuted on account of his advocacy of the Copernican system. Among the curiosities are a couple of his finger bones which someone had preserved as "relics" [**Fig. 34**]. While this might make one think of Peter the Great's collection of anatomical specimens in his Kunstkamera, in fact one undoubtedly has to attribute to them a more serious didactic purpose than anything that Galileo's fingers can suggest.

Fig. 34. Galileo's telescopes and finger bones in the Galileo Science Museum, Florence.

And Medici collections, both serious and merely as curiosa in the spirit of inquiry of their time, presumably were originally accessible only to a narrow elite, not the public Peter was trying to acculturate.

That there was an advanced earlier scientific tradition at the Renaissance courts in Italy is attested by a striking (if as yet not fully explained) mural of the

Fig. 35. The sky chart in the Old Sacristy of the Church of San Lorenzo, Florence.

skies covering the domes of two chapels in Florence [**Fig. 35**]. The most complete of these is in the Old Sacristy of the Medici Church of S. Lorenzo in Florence, the sky image with constellations reproducing what would have been seen over Florence in July of 1442. As a website on the church explains, "The scientific importance of the fresco lies in the extreme precision with which the celestial bodies are positioned. The Moon, the Sun, Jupiter, Venus and the principal coordinates of the celestial sphere are evidenced in gold against the blue ground representing the sky, while the personifications of several constellations are outlined in black with white highlighting. The author most likely followed the suggestions of an astronomer who may have been Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, a friend of Filippo Brunelleschi's." But why that particular date, and how one is to interpret the decision to place the image in a religious setting beg for further explanation.

Given my interest in the history of exploration and cartography, I was particularly impressed by the Hall of Geographic Maps in Florence's Palazzo Vecchio, which "contains the Western World's oldest and certainly most important representation of the whole known world in the second half of the sixteenth century" as part of the ducal chambers of Cosimo I de-Medici designed by Giorgio Vasari (Paola Pacetti et al., *The Hall of Geographical Maps in Palazzo Vecchio: caprice and invention of Duke Cosimo* [Florence: Polistampa, 2014], p. 3; for a full publication of the maps, idem, *La Sala della Carte geografiche in Palazzo Vecchio: "capriccio et invenizone nata del Duca Cosimo"* [2008]) [**Fig. 36**]. The original complex cosmographical scheme for the hall was part of a larger project to affirm Cosimo's status in the wider world. Other parts of the palace, following the planning by Vasari and incorporating paintings he and his assistants did, depict the Medicis as patrons of the arts and learning, surrounded by a pleiad of luminaries [**Fig. 37**]. Under Cosimo's son, Fernando, the original project for the hall was downsized and

Fig. 36. The Hall of Maps in the Medici apartments of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence and its maps (clockwise) of Lithuania, Arabia, Armenia (! Westtern Persia) and eastern China.

Fig. 37. Giorgio Vasari's vision of the Medicis as philosophes and patrons of the arts, in the decorations of the apartments of Pope Leo X, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, dating from 1556-58. On the left, Cosimo de Medici the Elder in the company of (left to right) sculptor Luca della Robbia, Ghiberi, Andrea del Castagno, Fra' Giovanni da Fiesole, Pesello, Donatello, Paolo Uccello, Fra Filippo Lippi, Paolo del Pozzo Toscanelli, Brunelleschi, John Arguyropoulos, and Marsilio Ficino. On the right, Lorenzo the Magnificent in the company of Marullo Tracagnotto, Giovanni Lascari, Leonardo Bruni, Leon Battista Alberti, Cristofano Landino, Marsilio Ficino, Gentile de Urbino, Demetrio Calcondila, Francesco Accolti, Pico della Mirandola, Agnolo Poliziano, and Luigi Pulci.

changed, though it still displays the most extensive representations of the known (and sometimes imagined) world of the time. The 53 large maps decorate the cabinet doors of what now primarily served as the duke's wardrobe, and placed in the center was a huge globe created by Friar Egnazio. Descriptive captioning on the maps highlights what was deemed important in each representation and in some instances indicated the sources for the information (e.g., Marco Polo on the Far East, and monuments of Portuguese cartography).

If we ask what the cosmological context was for the visual representations of Muscovite royal power, of course we find nothing that resembles Vasari's apotheosis of the Medici project. The later isolated inclusion of zodiac signs at Kolomenskoe notwithstanding, we need to remember that the Italian-built Faceted Palace in the Kremlin boasted interior decoration derived from Biblical models. Knowledge of the wider world and its geography was not irrelevant for the makers of policy in the Kremlin, but it was not part of a public program of crafting an identity and justification for the ruler. The only genuine Renaissance intellectual in the Muscovy of the 16th century was Maxim the Greek, who, under the likely influence of Savonarola from time spent in Florence, subordinated his classical knowledge to the purpose of lecturing the Muscovites on moral conduct. Whether or not his Renaissance learning had anything to do with it, he fell afoul of the Church authorities and spent most of his last years in monastic incarceration, despite the efforts of hierarchs outside Russia to obtain his release to return home.

So do we arrive at any new answers to the old question about Muscovy's place in the world of the Renaissance? At most, what we observe reinforces some skepticism about efforts to find a Muscovite version of the Renaissance that even remotely resembles what we see in Italy. Borrowing selectively Renaissance expertise for architecture or military purposes was one thing, but much of the substance was passed by. Many still believe that Ivan IV possessed a rich library of Classical authors, but there is not a shred of credible evidence that any part of such a collection has survived, and the sources asserting the existence of such a library are highly problematic.

Fig. 38. In the church and cloisters of San Marco, Florence, clockwise from left: Savonarola's statue on his tomb; the depiction of his execution in front of the Palazzo Vecchio, displayed in his monastic cell; the library; Fra Angelico's painting of The Annunciation.

Contrast the situation in Florence, where a visit to the cloisters and church of San Marco contains a range of material of great interest for any understanding of the cultural and political life of the great Renaissance city. This was the religious home of Savonarola. One can see the stern visage of this critic of contemporary morals whose movement temporarily overthrew the Medici [**Fig. 38**]. On their regaining power with the support of the Pope, Savonarola was burned at the stake in the piazza in front of the Palazzo Vecchio. The cloisters occupied

by him (his cell can be visited) and his followers enclose a lovely Renaissance courtyard and are still decorated with many paintings by Fra Angelico. Not the least of the treasures of San Marco was its library, built with ducal support in the second quarter of the 15th century to house one of the most significant private collections of Greek and Latin manuscripts, that of Niccolo Niccoli, who specified in his will it was to be made available to scholars. We know what it contained from early inventories, and even though the books later were dispersed (the collection continues to hold important liturgical manuscripts), many of them are extant in other major libraries, including the Laurentian in Florence. This is but one of many well documented examples of "Renaissance princes" deserving of that appellation in part because of their book collections and understanding of the importance of an education in the Classics. A far remove from the troubled occupant of the Kremlin in the middle of the 16th century. Bear in mind here the sharp contrast between what Leon Battista Alberti advised parents about the importance of education in the Classics, as opposed to the Muscovite *Domostroi*'s admonitions to beat sons in order that they give parents peace in their old age. Nothing there at all about book learning.

It seems very clear that if one wishes to talk of the "Renaissance" in Muscovy, even if qualifying the discussion by indicating the "northern" Renaissance in Europe lacked some of the richness of the "southern" Reniassance in Italy, a synchronic comparison is likely to leave us disappointed. As Dan Rowland astutely argued, one might instead find better comparisons with the Carolingian "Renaissance" of earlier centuries. To visit Renaissance Florence certainly provides some perspective for assessing the significance what in fact was to be found in Muscovy and also what was *not* there. The point here is not to dismiss or denigrate Muscovite culture or stretch reality to find what we would wish was there. Rather we should appreciate it in its own terms.

We might take to heart advice from a somewhat unexpected place (if we liberally interpret the subject as Muscovy, not the "dames" of the sex-starved American sailors in the South Pacific toward the end of World War II). The song in Rogers and Hammerstein's musical "South Pacific" (an artifact of the late 1940s that in many ways would be deemed politically incorrect today) goes: "…Suppose a dame ain't bright or completely free from flaws,/ as faithful as a bird-dog or as kind as Santa Claus./ It's a waste of time to worry over things that they have not. Be thankful for the things they've got!"

A visit to "medieval" Cortona

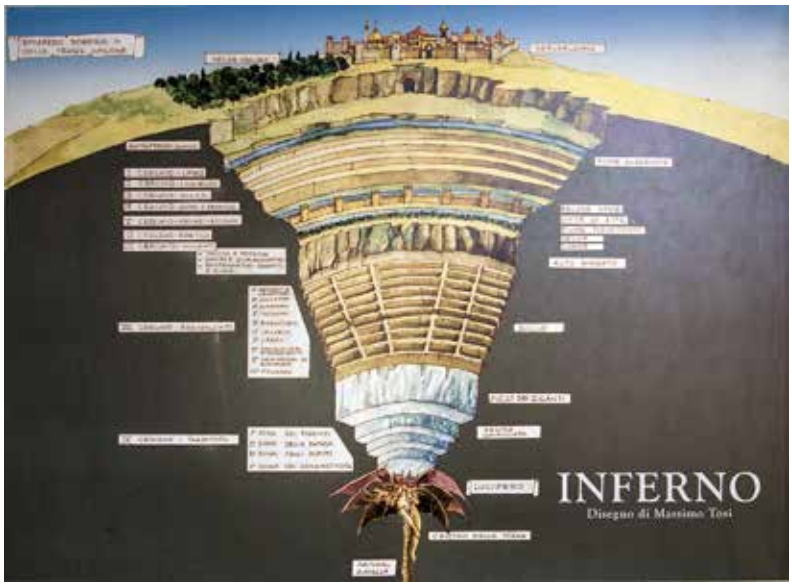
Leaving Florence behind then, we spent a week in the hill town of Cortona in Tuscany [**Fig. 39**]. It is typical of many of these hill towns, preserving parts of the ancient and medieval walls and with narrow, winding streets, clusters of centuries-old buildings, and in this case an excellent local museum highlighting the fact that the region was an important center of the Etruscans prior to their incorporation by the Romans, who paved with basalt the paths one can still walk in the surrounding hills. Like many a medieval town, Cortona's internal administrative organization was defined by the several parishes, and the town venerated more than one patron saint, in this case SS. Mark and Margherita. The latter, born into an elite family and then, after an unfortunate arranged marriage, entered religious orders with the Franciscans, who had a major presence in Cortona. She became known for her work with the poor and for her willingness to confront those in authority for their moral failings. Canonized within decades of her death in 1297, she was interred in the cathedral dedicated to her that overlooks the town. Her mortal remains displayed below altar there are venerated today.

Fig. 39. Cortona: the Porta Santa Maria.

While in Cortona, we were fortunate to witness a pageant performed annually in the days just prior to the feast day of St. Margherita [**Fig. 40**]. The ceremonies incorporate documented medieval tradition into a performance illustrating the requirement that the parishes and guilds annually supply a quantity of wax in

Fig. 40. The pageant on 19 May 2017 in front of the City Hall, Cortona.

Fig. 41. Massimo Tosi's depiction of the levels of Dante's Inferno, displayed in the Casa Dante Museum, Florence.



support of the veneration of Sts. Mark and Margherita. And in a separate "passion play," the performers (most of them residents of the town) re-enact a key moment in the life of Margherits where she risked execution in her advocacy for the poor. The underlying purpose of this annual event undoubtedly is complex, and one has to imagine the authors of the text and stage directions have taken some liberties with history, arguably even "inventing" a usable past. Nonetheless, the pageant reinforces the importance of the local religious heritage as an integral part of Cortona's identity, the event one in which many residents including the younger generation actively participate A video I created of the ceremony can be viewed at (copy and paste into your browser):

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/tqicjblopdzfoqm/AAAEFo5-7kuPENrweujGO2PVa?dl=0

Might not what we have here from Cortona provide a more meaningful comparative example than anything we observe in the elite accomplishments of Renaissance Florence if we would wish to understand what was important in Muscovite culture? It was not the superficial dribs and drabs of Renaissance accomplishments that found their way there which really were of great import, except in the eyes of historical hindsight. Yes, we should still be interested in the accelerating processes of change observable as we move on into the Muscovite 17th century. But what really counted, even for the "westernizing" elites we can begin to identify, was a providential view of the world. Muscovite identity was first and foremost expressed in messianic religious belief; the analogies to Cortona can be seen in such rituals as the Palm Sunday ceremonies performed at the Kremlin or in the processions of the cross carrying the icon of St. Nicholas which was the palladium of provincial Khlynov.

In lieu of a conclusion: the traveler at the theater in the age of the selfie

After having written the above and lovingly pored over the pictures which illustrate it, I come away thinking that in the end it either says far too little or pretends to say too much. I suppose one of the more lasting impressions from the trip was, simply, that we now travel in the age of the selfie. On a sunny day, the hawkers on the streets are peddling selfie sticks (or, sometimes, hats); umbrellas are added to the mix when it rains. At more than one site, I had to wait impatiently for all the takers of selfies to get out of my way so that I could photograph the "whatever" unobstructed. A confession here: I do not carry a mobile phone, and, no, even if my partner for the rest of life does and occasionally insists on photographing one or both of us in front of something, we do not (yet) own a selfie stick. I keep wondering in what circle of hell Dante would have lodged the takers of selfies (at least those who care not a whit about what it is they are standing in front of) were he alive today [**Fig. 41**]. I can easily visualize, in looking at the glorious mosaic of Judgment Day on the ceiling of the Baptistery in Florence that somewhere in the tangle of those down below Christ on his left-hand side, there is tourist with a selfie stick experiencing the agonies of Hell. Oh, I belong there too [**Fig. 42**], for here we are at the Colosseum (the photo, granted, taken with a big Nikon held at arm's length). So yes, we were there at all these places in Italy and brought back the memories of having seen so much of what we had only known from a distance.

Fig. 42. Flirting with eternal damnation: taking a selfie in the Colosseum.

And through a kind of hazy filter even now that we have seen them, not because of incipient cataracts so much as for the fact that in a way, this was like visiting the theater. In the literal sense, we did—the pageant in Cortona was theater *au plein air*. La Scala in Milan was theater in a traditional opera house. One of the most memorable of all our experiences was just to be there, the more so that it was a production of Rossini's rarely performed "La Gazza Ladra" (The Thieving Magpie), mounted to celebrate the 200th anniversary of its premiere. La Scala has a cozy feel one generally does not get in a modern opera house, though it has been modernized to the extent that the patron can choose on the little screen in front of him whether to have the libretto in Italian or in English. I am told by Claudia Jensen, who with Ingrid Maier has been re-writing the history of the earliest theater in Muscovy (see *Scando-Slavica* 59, 61; *Pridvornyi teatr v Rossii XVII veka* [M., 2016]), that the staging we saw, with a professional acrobat as the magpie flying about on a rope, drew in fact on the kind of theatrical tradition the occasional Russian envoy to Italy in the 17th century just might have seen.

Of course what he actually saw and what he may have taken away from the experience is difficult to know, as Claudia is discovering. The source problems here are challenging: Russian ambassadorial reports (*stateinye spiski*) focus on official functions and often are tantalizingly cryptic about sights and other experiences. Even if one can locate material in the Italian archives (and find someone to help read the handwriting….), it may not tell us what was "on" at the time the Russian was there. And more generally, there is the question of how much the visitor would have understood, plunked down in a culture which, arguably, was largely terra icognita, not speaking the local language, and in any event there all too briefly.

So perhaps our several weeks in Italy were akin to a few visits to the theater in a foreign land, where, despite a translated libretto or generally impressively conceived descriptive plaques at the historic sites and in the museums, we came away with but a fleeting sense (obstructed by a forest of selfie sticks) of what we were seeing. Better informed, perhaps, than many an earlier Russian visitor, but still woefully under-educated to see beyond the stage set of Medici or Sforza glitter and the decayed monuments to Roman grandeur which so populate the paintings of the Romantic era. To expect to learn something here that might enhance one's understanding of Muscovy, of course, would be to expect too much. But, hey, I was there, and this verbal selfie which may have taxed the reader's patience proves it.