

Posted to H-EarlySlavic Thu, 29 May 2014 02:30:07 -0400

Kashtanov's new study of princely proto-chanceries

by Daniel Waugh

Posted by Daniel C. Waugh <dwaugh@u.washington.edu>

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S[ergei] M[ikhailovich] Kashtanov. *Issledovaniia po istorii kniazheskikh kantseliarii srednevekovoi Rusi*. Moskva: Nauka, 2014. 674 pp. ISBN 978-5-02-035519-4.

It has been more than four decades since Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Zimin introduced me (a non-entity graduate student) to Sergei Mikhailovich, his most accomplished student and already then one of the leading Russian medievalists. Little did I know then that Zimin had been fighting bitter battles to keep the subject of diplomatics in the curriculum at the Moscow Historical-Archival Institute. Those battles presumably were reflected in some of what Sergei Mikhailovich wrote in the 1960s that suggested there was something like “Marxist diplomatics.” I subsequently was so bold as to write a review of SM’s important *Ocherki russkoi diplomatiki* (*Slavic Review* 32/1 (1973): 158-60). Much later, Sergei Mikhailovich generously took time out from his busy schedule to produce a formal *otzyv* at my department’s request when I was being considered for promotion on the eve of my retirement and then published a version of it as an extended review of my 2003 monograph on Viatka.

I wish I could reciprocate here with an equally penetrating review of his new book, which in important ways might be considered the capstone of his career. Arguably though, for such a review we would need to identify a reincarnation of, say, A. S. Lappo-Danilevskii (1863-1919) and give him several decades to review everything Sergei Mikhailovich has written pertaining to the subject at hand (not to mention a vast corpus of work by Western medievalists). It might take that long, since a decade ago when a Festschrift was published in SM’s honor, his bibliography of scholarly publications already exceeded 600 items. (See the excellent, detailed review of Kashtanov’s career and publications by L. V. Stoliarova in *Ad Fontem / U istochnika: Sbornik statei v chest’ Sergeia Mikhailovicha Kashtanova* [M.: Nauka, 2005]: 7-77.)

The title of this volume is a bit misleading, as the author himself makes clear at the outset when he boldly states that there was nothing in medieval Rus resembling a princely chancery akin to that which can be documented in the medieval West. What one has is at best “proto-chanceries.” By his definition, the Muscovite prikazy do not constitute a “princely chancery”; so he is not concerned here with studying their histories. Indeed, the approach here in the first instance is not to attempt to study institutions that did not exist, but rather to study the form and procedures of the production of documents—that is, engage in diplomatic analysis. An appropriate sub-title to the book might have been *Ocherki russkoi diplomatiki, T. 2*, in that, as the author states, he cannot pretend to have covered all aspects of the subject but rather is offering a series of essays on particular problems. That form is bound to challenge many readers, in part because so much of the analysis is technical in its detail, and in part because there is often little

in the way of summary and generalization. For a coherent exposition of the subject of diplomacy, the history of its scholarship, and methodologies of its application to Russian material, one should consult Sergei Mikhailovich's textbook, *Russkaia diplomatika* (M.: "Vysshiaia shkola," 1988).

A further challenge here for some readers will be to figure out how much of the material is really "new" and how much largely a reprint of Sergei Mikhailovich's earlier publications. I have only begun to check against some of them, and find that long sections are verbatim reprints. Some of the material—for example in his chapter on the treaties with Byzantium that were copied into the Primary Chronicle—is pre-figured in his *Iz istorii russkogo srednevekovogo istochnika. Akty X-XVI vv.* (M.: Nauka, 1996). His treatment of the 16th-century documents of Muscovite communication with the monasteries on Mt. Athos reproduces his contributions to the important volume *Rossia i grecheskii mir v XVI veke*, T. 1 [M.: Nauka, 2004], for which, inter alia, he went to Mt. Athos to examine the manuscripts still preserved there. Of course there is nothing wrong with this, since having so many important studies by SM in one place is a boon, especially where there has been some updating, some expansion of ones only partially published previously, and, the inclusion of some apparently previously unpublished chapters. It would have been nice though had there been a more explicit indication of the relationship between the current essays and the earlier publications. Something like a retrospective self-analysis of the development of his ideas on this material would have been most welcome.

Typically these essays contain an overview of scholarship on a particular set of documents or particular problem in the analysis of their contents, an examination of what we know about the dating, provenance and preservation, and then formal diplomatic analysis of some part of the documents (e.g., the form of certification, the preambles to wills, the intitulation or invocation, etc.). One of my personal favorites here is the chapter reviewing all the evidence for the earliest use of paper in Russian document production, analysis which falls outside any narrow definition of diplomacy as the study of form, but is of interest for any overview of the evolution of chancery practice. Sergei Mikhailovich has long been a notable practitioner of the careful study of paper evidence. I also found of great interest the chapter on the Siberian component of the titulature of the Muscovite rulers in the 16th and 17th centuries, in which he clarifies the chronology of the evolution of Muscovite claims. We find in other chapters insights into the role of the Metropolitanate in documentary production and how that changed with increasing princely control over the church. There is material on the way falsification of documents became an important concern in the Muscovite period and much more.

An important feature of Sergei Mikhailovich's work is his deep acquaintance with Western medieval scholarship. Over the years he was able to attend major congresses of medievalists, and he then would publish often very detailed accounts of their proceedings, something which has to have been a great boon to those who were not so privileged to travel and which surely had a significant impact on the methodologies used by Russian scholars. Many of the essays in this volume are heavy with comparative material from the medieval West, since an important aspect of diplomatic analysis may be to explore whether documentary forms adhered to general norms or how they differed (and why). In the first long appendix to the book are several of Sergei Mikhailovich's reviews of the western congresses' proceedings, with the inclusion of, if not the

full text, then at least an extended summary of the paper he gave which may have appeared in print only in French or German.

The third appendix is a monograph in itself, the publication of the previously unpublished but important treaty of 1535 between Muscovy and the Livonian Order. Prefacing the critical Russian and German texts is a lengthy introduction setting the historical context and describing in fine detail the manuscripts (even to the inclusion of drawings of the way the pendant seals were affixed). There are word indexes for both the Russian and German and a terminological glossary that lists the equivalents in the two languages.

At the end of the book is an index of personal names.

I can only begin to suggest the richness of what this volume contains. I would stress that it is not aimed at a “general reader”: Sergei Mikhailovich takes no prisoners. While in Russian scholarship there are many other examples of diplomatic analysis, no one I can think of has applied it as precisely as has Sergei Mikhailovich and with such a deep knowledge of the whole shape of the field, East and West. Of course this is not the last word on Russian chancery practice, as he has clearly indicated. What we have here are solid foundations and much of the structure above the ground, a structure that, unlike the Cathedral of the Dormition in the Moscow Kremlin when the first effort to rebuild it under Ivan III occurred, is not going to collapse.