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A.K. Salmin

*Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera),
Russian Academy of Sciences,
Universitetskaya nab. 3, St. Petersburg, 199034, Russia
E-mail: antsalmin@mail.ru*

Ivan Lepyokhin's Expedition to the Middle Volga*

This study describes Ivan Lepyokhin's journey to the Middle Volga as part of the 1768–1774 Academic Expedition. All the 18th-century expeditions from the Academy of Sciences were aimed at colonizing new territories, especially the eastern ones, exploring their landscapes, natural resources, and inhabitants. The article focuses on the team working in the Cheremshan basin. The description of findings is arranged in five sections, following Lepyokhin's classification: landscape, population, clothing, occupations, and rituals. For the first time, a complete, updated, and verified list of settlements visited by the expedition members is provided. The role of the Imperial St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences Director, Count Vladimir Orlov, in the organization of the expedition is described. The author disproves the opinion regarding the authorship of the anonymous article "Brief Report about the Simbirsk Governorship" published in the "Mesyatsoslov" journal in 1786. The authors to whom the article was attributed include Lepyokhin, Maslenitsky, and Ozeretskovsky, but the textological analysis of the article and of a manuscript at the Russian State Archives of Military History suggests that this is a collective digest of manuscripts by Milkovich and Maslenitsky.

Keywords: 1768–1774 Academic Expedition, Ivan Lepyokhin, Middle Volga, Cheremshan River basin, ethnography.

Introduction

By and large, the main task of all academic expeditions in the 18th century was appropriating the lands of the state, describing the landscape, flora, and fauna, as well as studying the population patterns of the territories. The state needed to occupy empty lands, extract natural resources from them, and grow crops, which naturally needed a workforce. Settlers sometimes did not limit themselves to the granted lands and whenever they could, seized nearby land plots or lands belonging to the indigenous population. Non-Russians did the same. Thus, the plot

near the village of Shlanga in the Simbirsky Uyezd "was seized without authorization by eighteen fugitive Chuvash peasants from various uyezds of the Kazan Governorate, led by Krymka, the son of Ivash. They have already built their shacks on the captured land, plowed arable areas, and sowed rye" (Gromova, 2010: 47). As a result, the Chuvash village of Krymovo emerged in this place.

This topic has become the subject of several studies. However, none of them were directly related to the analysis of the Middle Volga materials recorded by the unit under the leadership of Ivan Lepyokhin. Thus, the book of N.G. Fradkin provided a general overview of the life and work of this scholar (1953). T.A. Lukina predominantly focused on Ivan Lepyokhin's research on Siberia, giving only a summary of the ethnography of the peoples living in the Volga region (1965), while L.D. Bondar analyzed the Urals stage of the expedition (2018).

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Locations of the survey

We should first indicate the settlements of the Middle Volga region, surveyed by the unit of Ivan Lepyokhin from August 25th, 1768 to May 20th, 1769 (within the present-day administrative and territorial entities; present-day names are given in parenthesis)*:

Orenburg Region

Severny District

Tatarsky Bakai village (Bakaevo settlement)

Sok-Karmala settlement (Severnoye settlement)

Penza Region

Lopatinsky District

Generalshchino village (Generalshchino settlement)

Republic of Tatarstan

Alekseevsky District

Chuvashsky Bilyar settlement (Bilyar fortified settlement)

Tatarsky Bilyar village (Bilyarsk settlement)

Bugulminsky District

Bugulma suburb (Bugulma town)

Karabash (Karabash urban settlement)

Spaskoye settlement (Spasskoye settlement)

Tatar village of Dymkaya (Tatarskaya Dymkaya settlement)

Leninogorsky District

Karatai (Zai-Karatai settlement)

Kuakbash (Kuakbash settlement)

Nurlatsky District

Bekulovo village (Bikulovo village)

Bilyar settlement (Bilyar-Ozero settlement)

Karaulnaya Gora village (Karaulnaya Gora village)

Kikly village (Burmetyevo settlement)

Chuvash village of Yakushkin (Yakushkino settlement)

Spassky District

Bulgar fortified settlement (Bolgar town)

Tetyushsky District

Tetyushi suburb (Tetyushi town)

Cheremshansky District

Cheremshanskaya fortress (Cheremshan settlement)

Samara Region

Bezenchuksky District

Perevolka settlement (Perevoloki settlement)

Kamyshlinsky District

Tatar village of Baitugan (Tatarsky Baitugan settlement)

Tatar village of Kamyshly (Kamyshla settlement)

Klyavliny District

Mordovian village of Sosny (Novye Sosny settlement)

Stary Betermish village (Stary Baitermish settlement)

Koshkinsky District

Mordovskaya Karmala village (Staraya Karmala settlement)

Novaya Maksimkina village (Maloye Maksimkino village)

Krasnoyarsky District

Novyi Buyan (Novyi Buyan settlement)

Rakovka village (Bolshaya Rakovka settlement)

Staryi Buyan village (Staryi Buyan settlement)

Sergievsky District

Orlyany (Verkhnyaya Orlyanka settlement)

Sergievsk suburb (Sergievsk settlement)

Spaskoye settlement (Spasskoye settlement)

Chornovikh village (Chernovka settlement)

Yakushkino village (Staroye Yakushkino settlement)

Stavropolsky District

Rezan settlement (Bolshaya Ryazan settlement)

Stavropol city (Tolyatti city)

Staraya Brusyana settlement (Brusyany settlement)

Chuvashskoye Syurikovo village (Sevryukaevo settlement)

Syzransky District

Sisran city (Syzran city)

Chelno-Vershinsky District

Sedelkino/Sidelkino/Mordovskoye Sedelkino settlement (Sidelkino settlement)

Staraya Tayaba (Staraya Tayaba settlement)

Shigonsky District

Usolye settlement (Usolye settlement)

Chuvashskoye Taidakovo village (Taidakovo Usolye settlement)

Ulyanovsk Region

Sinbirsk city (Ulyanovsk city)

Melekessky District

Nikolskoye settlement (Nikolskoye-na-Cheremshane settlement)

Mordovian village of Birlya (Birlya settlement)

Russky Melekes village (Russky Melekes settlement)

Chuvashsky Melekes village (Dimitrovgrad city)

Chuvash village of Suskan (Chuvashsky Suskan settlement)

Novomalyklinsky District

Tatar village of Abtreikina (Abdrevo settlement)

Besovka settlement (Staraya Besovka settlement)

Malykla Novaya (Novaya Malykla settlement)

Sentemir (Stary Santimir settlement)

Chuvashskaya Malykla village (Staraya Malykla settlement)

*The main sources for compiling this list were diary records and traveling reports (Dnevnik..., 1768–1772; Prikhodoraskhodnaya kniga..., 1768–1772; Lepyokhin, 1771), as well as maps and reference books of administrative and territorial entities.

Chuvashskaya Yakushkina village (Nizhnyaya Yakushka settlement)
 Chuvashsky Salavan (Novocheremshansk urban settlement)
Terengulsky District
 Chuvash village of Baidulina (Baidulino settlement)
 Yasashnaya Tashla (Yasashnaya Tashla settlement)
Ulyanovsky District
 Gorodishchi settlement (Gorodishche village)
 Klyuchishchi settlement (Bolshie Klyuchishchi settlement)
Cherdaklinsky District
 Brendino settlement (Bryandino settlement)
 Matyushkino settlement (Staroye Matyushkino settlement)
 Sukhodol settlement (Sukhodol settlement)
 Cherdaki settlement (Cherdakly urban settlement)
 Krasny Yar village (Krasny Yar settlement)
 Chuvash village of Karmayur (Chuvashsky Kalmayur settlement)

Landscape

Concerning the area under discussion, it should be mentioned that in the 18th century, a part of the Chuvash people from the right bank of the Volga moved to the Cheremshan River basin—virtually to the lands inhabited by their historical ancestors the Suvars in the late 9th to early 10th century (Salmin, 2017: 49–50, 57–58). People were also resettled to free lands from other regions of Russia. Fortresses were built there to protect the southern frontiers.

The diary of Ivan Lepyokhin is noteworthy for the fact that while writing down his traveling route, he immediately included notes about the area, which described the local landscape, for example, “From the Chuvash [village of – *translator’s note*] Melekes, we drove through the aforementioned vast pine forest, where in two versts, the Cheremshan oxbow lake was located, which now constitutes a swamp overgrown with forest. After traveling for about three versts from the oxbow lake, we crossed the Cheremshan River and drove to the Cheremshan meadow side. Vast and rich fields appeared on the meadow sides, and accumulations of groves, all filled with wild roses, were on the right side. The Chuvash village of Yakushkina, located 10 versts away, served as a base for us. A small river called the Avrel [Avral – A.S.] flows through this village out of a spring near the Tatar village of Abtreikina into the Cheremshan River” (Lepyokhin, 1771: 129).

In the area around the Cheremshanka River, travelers often encountered “hilly places rich with black soil”, lakes, rivers, and swamps. Crucian carp of “great size

and taste” lived in the lakes. Travelers went for 10–15 miles across “steppe area”, and “small groves, for the most part”. “One and a half versts from Baidulin, there was a ridge of low mountains, stretching as a band for about ten versts. <...> Lady’s slippers (*Cypripedium calceolus*)... and large lilies of the valley (*Hemerocallis liliastrum*) grew abundantly on the mountain. <...> Urban spurge (*Euphorbia segetalis*) and hairy spurge (*Euphorbia pilosa*) grew in low places” (Ibid: 317–320). Or: “It was a very smooth steppe road, and it was completely plowed” (Dnevnik..., 1768–1772: Fol. 50). On the bank of Cheremshan River, the travelers found a great number of rose bushes and wild hops. And in another area, they “could not find anything except a great number of hops” (Ibid.: Fol. 51v).

Thus, we have the first reliable description of landscapes near the Cheremshan River, as well as the flora and fauna of the present-day Ulyanovsk and Samara Regions, and the Republic of Tatarstan as things stood in the second half of the 18th century. As scholars have rightly pointed out, many species of flora and fauna in these places have now either completely disappeared or are on the verge of extinction. “These representatives of the animal world include the Russian desman” (Gurkin, 2011: 191). According to Ivan Lepyokhin, almost all floodplain lakes near Simbirsk were abundantly inhabited by the Russian desman. Extinct species also include beluga, sturgeon, sterlet, and starred sturgeon.

Population

Simultaneously with the construction of the Simbirsk Great Abatis Line in 1648, the population was resettled to the region. Until that time, there were almost no Russian villages there. Even the villages of the original inhabitants (the Chuvash people, Mordvins, and Tatars) were not continuous. Occasionally, there were “guarding posts”—“posts for observing enemy movements, and ‘wild fields’ and ‘empty lands’ spread over immense spaces inside the region” (Martynov, 1904: 7).

When Ivan Lepyokhin mentioned the location of his stay, he also indicated the ethnicity of the population. Let us cite only some excerpts from his notes describing the ethnic composition of the population living in the Cheremshan River basin: “By the evening, we arrived at the Chuvash village of Melekes”; “it is only 10 versts from the Russian Melekes to the Chuvash Melekes”; “there is a vast and dense pine forest between the Russian and Chuvash Melekes”; “the Chuvash village of Yakushkina”; “the river... flows out of a spring near the Tatar village of Abtreikina”; “we went from the village of Yakushkina to the Chuvash village of Malykla Novaya”.

Clothing

Ivan Lepyokhin mentioned that the Chuvash people, Mordvins, and Tatars wore the same shirts as the Russian peasants, but the shirts of the Chuvash people and the Mordvins were embroidered around the collar and on the shoulders with multicolored wool. The Chuvash people wore only white embroidered shirts, while the Tatars on the holidays wore caftans of woolen cloth and beshmets of various colors (Lepyokhin, 1771: 159, 162). As for shoes, they all wore bast shoes, but had boots for special occasions (Dnevnik..., 1768–1772: Fol. 63v; Lepyokhin, 1771: 226).

One of the most precious adornments of the Chuvash women was the *khushpu* headdress, which was worn over the *surpan* (head cover) and tied with a strap under the chin. The *khÿre* (“tail” of canvas) was sewn to it in the back. This “tail” went down almost to the back of the knees, gradually tapering towards the end. The *khÿre* was passed under the belt and was invisible under the outer garment (Lepyokhin, 1771: 159; Pallas, 1773: 136).

Old silver kopecks and rubles constituted the main value of the *khushpu*. Its entire surface was covered with sewn-on coins resembling fish scales with smaller coins at the top, larger coins below, and large twenty kopeck coins in the bottom row. There are references to seven rows of coins or *nukhrats* (imitations of silver coins). Three silver coins hung on the forehead (a large coin in the middle, two smaller coins on the sides). In addition, the *khushpu* was decorated with a variety of tin sequins and beads in several rows, and was hung around with strings of beads and bead-like oval-shaped plaques. Freely hanging strings with coins were sewn around the entire circumference. At the bottom, the *khÿre* was embroidered with colored wool and finished with colored laces; it was studded with beads and cowry shells. Generally, such a headdress was quite weighty. The festive shaft bow of a horse harness was compared to the *khushpu* of a rich bride because of its rich decoration (Lepyokhin, 1771: 159; Pallas, 1773: 136; Ashmarin, 1941: 277).

The Tatar women of the Cheremshan River basin also wore *kashpau*: “Some have *kashpau* with a pointed tip like a cone, and the top of the cone is covered with a small cast silver cone. Others, on the contrary, have *kashpau* without the headdress crown, in which case the top of the head is covered with a scarf. Near the temples, ties, studded in the same way, are attached to the *kashpau*. They are fastened under the neck with a button and are called the *kashpau sakal*” (Lepyokhin, 1771: 160). Ivan Lepyokhin believed that the *kashpau* was borrowed by the Chuvash women from the Tatars. This point requires clarification: headdresses with a pointed silver cone in the upper part were not worn by all Tatar and Chuvash women, but only by unmarried girls, and this headdress was called not *khushpu/kashpau*, but *tukhya/takya*.

Ivan Lepyokhin also noticed that the headdress of the Vogul women “somewhat resembles the Chuvash headdress, and consists of a thick, white drabbet cloak; the women covered their head with scarves, and in the winter they wore *malakhais*; the girls braided [their hair] and walked around wearing a headdress studded with multicolored beads” (1814: 28–29).

According to the observations of the traveler, the dwellers of the settlements which he studied, did not use soap, but instead used ash. They first soaked their undergarments interlaid with ash for five or six days in a trough. Then they washed them, adding warm water as needed. Every thing was scrubbed with ash. Then they went to the river to rinse it (Lepyokhin, 1771: 151–152).

Occupations

Already the medieval sources mentioned the fertility of lands around the Cheremshan River. Dwellers of the town of Suvar in the Volga Bulgaria had many croplands and an abundance of wheat (Al-Muqaddasi, 1994: 289). In the 11th–12th centuries, the main agricultural crops in the Cheremshan River basin were millet and oats (Gazimzyanov, Nabiullin, 2011: 22).

In the 10th century, the population used advanced agricultural tools. The transition to plowing cultivation of land required a large number of iron tools (coulters, plow blades, axes), which contributed to the further development of metallurgy. The *saban* wooden plow of primitive design with metal cutting parts, which was used by the Chuvash people until the mid 20th century, goes back to the cultivation culture of the 10th century. Its metal parts (ploughshare *tÿren*, cutter *shÿrt*) are exhibited in museums. This type of tool must have developed in the Middle Volga region, because it was suitable for heavy soils. Most likely, the *saban* had been used in the region even before the arrival of the Bulgars and Suvars (Smirnov, 1951: 17, 84–85).

In the 18th century, rye, oats, and farro were the most frequently cultivated crops. Flax and hemp were grown only for people’s own needs. Buckwheat was not a popular crop (Lepyokhin, 1771: 144). Near the village of Yakushkino, entire fields were covered with watermelons and melons, which, according to the dwellers, gave a good harvest. As follows from the report of the expedition, the Chuvash people were engaged in cultivating arable lands, while the Qizilbashes cultivated cucurbits and tobacco (Ibid.: 121, 131). “They all are engaged in arable farming with the only difference that the Mordvins sow more than the others. The Chuvash people come in second; the Tatars come after the Chuvash people, while the Qazylbashes sow almost nothing at all, but live from cattle breeding and are hired as shepherds. The women of both the Mordvins and Chuvash people are very hard

working, and they not only help their husbands, but plow on their own, and do almost every kind of work as their husbands” (Ibid.: 41).

The local population began to hire shepherds starting from when the Kalmyks settled near the Kondurcha River. Prior to that, the cattle grazed in the wild. In the households, people made fences for cattle, called *karta*. In the summer, cattle mostly grazed beyond the outskirts of the village. “In the morning, when they go to milk the cows, they feed their cattle with chopped straw from farro or spring wheat. They cut it finely, mix it with some flour, and add boiling water, especially in the wintertime. After watering the cattle at noon, they give hay to it, and in the evening they give straw again. They feed the sheep with straw in the same way, but this occurs not because of a shortage of hay, but because they think that sheep which are fed only hay often become mangy, give bad wool, and do not grow as fat” (Ibid.: 149). Peasants sheared sheep twice a year—in the spring, when the sheep were drafted into the herd, and in the fall. Then the wool was spun.

Visiting Russians from nearby places worked as blacksmiths there, and the members of the expedition did not see a single blacksmith who was a Chuvash or a Mordvin (Ibid.: 153). This can be explained by the fact that according to the Tsar’s decree, non-Russians were forbidden to engage in blacksmithing since the time of Peter the Great. The authorities were afraid that the Chuvash people, Cheremis people, and Votyaks would manufacture weapons. The villagers even had to buy agricultural tools such as axes, scythes, sickles, and knives at the market in Kazan (Polnoye sobraniye..., 1830: 286–287). Generally, local residents practiced almost no craftsmanship. Many Chuvash people worked at the nearby state-owned distilleries and complained about an exploitative attitude towards them (Dnevnik..., 1768–1772: Fols. 50v, 54).

Describing the colonies of the Germans, Ivan Lepyokhin mentioned their diligence. They grew all kinds of vegetables in their vegetable gardens, and tilled the land with plows (Lepyokhin, 1771: 382).

In the 1760s, *yasak* tribute was collected from the Volga *yasak*-paying people. The local Mordvins, Chuvash people, and Tatars paid numerous types of tax: for harvesting honey, catching fish and hunting beavers, hay mowing, arable lands, hop lands, for cultivated wheat, and a hearth tax (Zertsalov, 1896: 49–90). All these requisitions put the peasants in unbearable conditions of survival.

Rituals

Ivan Lepyokhin recorded especially valuable information about the leaders of religious and ritual activities. According to his records, old men occupied a high

position in family- and clan-oriented rituals. Indeed, for everyone the term *vatŭ* meant primarily the oldest member of a family or clan. This notion corresponded to the idea of the deep and wise old man. Only the oldest would come to clan gatherings. The head of the house would ask the oldest of those present to conduct the ritual on his behalf. The *munkun* spring clan festival was an important gathering of relatives. Already a day before the festival, old men would visit their blood relatives and have feasts. After praying in the space near the door, the oldest person in the family was seated on a bench in the front corner and given a mug of beer. He arranged the main attribute of the table by placing spoons around the bowl of porridge and putting a loaf of bread on top (Lepyokhin, 1771: 167; Ashmarin, 1895–1943: 164).

As we can see, old men led ritual actions and prayers on behalf of the family, clan, and village. Some of them were experts in magic. For example, when the informants told us about ritual actions aimed at extinguishing fires, they emphasized that the old women knew that magic (FMA*, 1989, village of Mikhailovka, Kurmanaevsky District, informants P.I. Stepanova (b. 1918) and E.V. Stepanova (b. 1916)). Gray-bearded old men could practice healing. During child labor, some old women did exactly the same procedures as midwives. A healer and person of senior age sometimes had synonymous meaning among the Chuvash people. Thus, during collective sacrifices, the right to conduct the ritual was granted to a healer or knowledgeable old man (Lepyokhin, 1771: 164).

Assisting women in the process of giving birth was the main occupation of the midwife. In the past, in all Chuvash villages, there used to be midwives, who helped women, especially in complicated cases. The old woman who was invited and the woman in labor were given “a special house, and in the absence of such, a warm bathhouse” (Nikolsky, 1903–1910: 82). Taking the child into her arms, the midwife gnawed through the umbilical cord. She also prepared the sacrificial food immediately after the birth. Among the Mordvins, the old woman did not immediately let the relatives enter the house after washing the child. First, she cooked thick porridge, baked crêpes, and set out the table for a meal (Lepyokhin, 1771: 169).

As is known, the naming of a child was performed either during childbirth or during a special ritual with the invited relatives. In the first case, the old lady gnawed through the umbilical cord and, spitting in the direction of the newborn, uttered: “Let him have such a name” (Ashmarin, 1841–1903: 611). Among the Mordvins, the old woman who was assisting the woman in the process of giving birth, “according to the custom, would begin to

*Field materials of the author from the expeditions to the Buzuluksky, Grachevsky, Derzhavinsky, and Kurmanaevsky Districts of Orenburg Region in 1989.

pray and give the name to the baby which she desired; sometimes the baby received its name from the person whom the old lady met first” (Lepyokhin, 1771: 169). She also was the main person to be asked for advice while naming in the presence of the relatives.

If a father wished to marry his son, he sent someone who was not in his family to the bride’s father to get an answer to the question: “Does he wish to give his daughter to the father’s son?” After receiving a positive answer, the parents met and discussed the bride price. The whole point of the wedding ceremony was that the father of the bride, taking his daughter by the hand, and the mother of the bride, taking bread and salt, handed the bride to the parents of the groom (Ibid.: 171). According to the records of Ivan Lepyokhin, a Chuvash man could have up to three wives if he was able to support them. The Chuvash people also practiced abduction of brides. When the bride was taken out of her parents’ house, she pretended to resist, but was carried out in the abductor’s arms (Ibid.: 174–176).

Apparently, researchers did not obtain information about the local rituals and customs with ease. For instance, on May 17, 1769, Ivan Lepyokhin wrote in his diary: “After leaving the settlement of Klyuchishchi, we continued our way for 15 versts to the Chuvash village of Taidakova, where we stayed for some time asking the Chuvash dwellers about their rituals. However, not finding anything different from the customs discovered in the Cheremshan basin, we hurried to the settlement of Usolye, 10 versts from Taidakova” (Ibid.: 320). The people protected their sacred life from prying eyes.

Role of Vladimir Orlov in organizing the expedition

As the grandson of Count Vladimir Orlov noted, his grandfather, “belonging, by his birth and upbringing, to the highest social and courtly circles...; however, more desired a rural life and rural environment; in him, Western civilization merged with the greatness of national sentiments” (Orlov-Davydov, 1908: 301). During her trip along the Volga River in 1767, a year before Ivan Lepyokhin, Empress Catherine II paid considerable attention to the Orlovs and their estates where she stayed. In the Simbirsk Governorate, she visited the oldest of the Orlov brothers, Ivan. “Since the owner had not yet managed to build a decent house for himself, for receiving the Tsarina, he built two Russian houses connected by a gallery and decorated them with coats of arms and different emblems. The Empress spent two days in this rural shelter... Rewarding the landowner, the Empress did not overlook the peasants belonging to him who constituted the Golovkinskaya Volost, freeing them from paying taxes for three years” (Sbornik..., 1868: 146). In the settlement of Usolye,

Ivan Orlov had a distillery (Kratkoye izvestiye..., 1786: 70). While visiting the estate of Grigory Orlov, the Empress wrote an enthusiastic letter to her Chancellor Nikita Panin, “This is a village three versts from the town of Mainsk... and yesterday we walked around its meadows. Grains of every kind are so good here as we have never seen before; cherries and wild roses are everywhere in the forests, and there are no other trees but oaks and lime trees; the soil is so black that you cannot find such soil in garden beds in vegetable gardens; in short, these people are spoiled by God. I have never eaten such delicious fish as I did here, and everything that you can imagine is in abundance, and I don’t know what they would need; everything is available here, and everything is inexpensive” (Orlov-Davydov, 1908: 328).

The grandson of Vladimir Orlov also wrote about the amazingly beautiful nature of the Middle Volga region and his grandfather’s love for it. According to V.P. Orlov-Davydov, the Count not only cared about the economic structure of his Usolye estate, but also enjoyed it and was proud of it. The population of the area was the subject of constant concern of Vladimir Orlov. Being the Director of the Academy of Sciences, Vladimir Orlov ordered scholars to investigate the Usolye area from a scientific point of view (Ibid.: 349–350).

From their expeditions, Peter Pallas and Ivan Lepyokhin sent their reports to the Academy of Sciences. As is known, their routes often coincided, and they were forced to end up in the same locations. In this respect, sometimes there were misunderstandings concerning the priority of discoveries. In such cases, Vladimir Orlov advised both leaders of units to resolve the conflict peacefully and wished them further success in useful discoveries (Ibid.: 390).

Concerning the authorship of the anonymous article on the Simbirsk Governorship

In 1786, three articles relating to the topic under discussion were published in the annual journal, “Mesyatsoslov Istoricheskiy and Geograficheskiy” (Historical and Geographical Almanac): “Description of the Towns of the Nizhny Novgorod Governorship”, “Brief Report about the Simbirsk Governorship”, and “Distance Between the Towns and Villages where the Most Frequent Change of Horse Wagons Occurs on the Road from Simbirsk to Kizlyar”. In terms of content, we are more interested in the publication about the Simbirsk Governorship which was organized in December, 1780. The article briefly describes its structure and main enterprises which gave economic benefits to the country. The article contains valuable information about the peoples inhabiting the Middle Volga region. “Russians, Tatars, Mordvins, Chuvash

people, Kalmyks, and Persians live in this Governorate, who numbered 304,854 persons in the census records from 1782, including 323 merchants; 5609 common town dwellers and workmen; 3304 Kalmyks; 320 Persians; 3062 settled soldiers, and 136,890 persons from among state peasants, single farmers, plowing soldiers, and servicemen from former services, as well as 155,154 landowners' peasants" (Kratkoye izvestiye..., 1786: 70–71). At the end, the article provided a description of the town coats of arms of the Simbirsk Governorship. For example, the coat of arms of the town of Buinsk had a silver sheep on a green field, which signified the abundance of this type of livestock in the area.

According to T.A. Lukina, the "Brief Report about the Simbirsk Governorship" belonged to Ivan Lepyokhin. She wrote, "Lepyokhin visited these places in 1768, so he very vividly, based on his personal recollections, described the rivers of the new governorship and large black forest on the banks of the Sura River, as well as factories and plants he had seen. Many of these materials were used in his 'Diary Notes'. The detailed description of the coats of arms belonging to Simbirsk, Sengilei, and other towns of the governorship was new, as compared to his 'Notes'" (Lukina, 1965: 111–112). All this is true. However, there are other points of view concerning that article. Thus, in the catalog of books of the 18th century, N.Y. Ozeretskovsky, who was the compiler of the "Mesyatsoslov", was mentioned in square brackets as the author (Svodny katalog..., 1966: 220). The bibliographic editor of the catalog was A.S. Mylnikov, who then worked in the Public Library.

The debate on the authorship of that article was fostered by a number of circumstances. By the time of its publication in the "Mesyatsoslov", there existed some manuscripts with similar contents, including "The Topographical Description of Towns in the Simbirsk Governorate, Composed by the Court Counselor Maslenitsky in 1783" (Russian State Military-Historical Archive. Military and Scholarly Archive. D. 19024); "The Topographical Description of the Simbirsk Governorship as a Whole, Composed from the Information Delivered by the Commandants, Town Governors, and Lower Territorial Courts, with the Addition of Historical Records According to the Inquiries from the Cabinet of Her Imperial Majesty in 1785" (Ibid.: D. 19025); and "The Topographical Description of the Simbirsk Governorate as a Whole, and Individual Towns and Uyezds, and Non-Russian-Speaking Peoples Living in it, According to the Inquiries from the Cabinet of Her Imperial Majesty in 1784, Compiled from the Information About the Towns from Town Magistrates Together with the Commandants and Town Governors, and About Uyezds from the Lower Territorial Courts and Various Offices with the Addition of Pertinent Historical Information on this Land by the Court Counselor Timofei Maslenitsky in 1785" (Ibid.:

D. 19026). All of these manuscripts are solid studies, which have not lost their relevance to this day. They are also large in terms of volume. For example, document No. 19026 covers 450 full-length sheets. The materials were collected on the instructions of Catherine II, who ruled Russia in 1762–1796. The manuscript has a note written in a different hand: "Received on February 12, 1786". This is the date when the manuscript was received by those who ordered it—the Cabinet of the Empress. This means that in February, 1786, the manuscript about the Simbirsk Governorship arrived in St. Petersburg. The basis of the "manuscript of Maslenitsky" for the anonymous article "Brief Report about the Simbirsk Governorship" is indicated by the coincidence of their contents and the order of listing the towns of the Simbirsk Governorate. In turn, T.G. Maslenitsky included the essay by K.S. Milkovich, "About the Chuvash People", which covers the pages from 233 to 308, in the manuscript submitted to the Empress.

As we can see, in 1786, the manuscripts about the Simbirsk Governorship were available to I.I. Lepyokhin, N.Y. Ozeretskovsky, and other St. Petersburg scholars. All basic information provided in the anonymous article "Brief Report about the Simbirsk Governorship" was contained in the works of K.S. Milkovich and T.G. Maslenitsky. It can be argued that this article was compiled on the basis of these works. However, we do not yet have firm grounds for giving preference in the problem of authorship of the article "Brief Report about the Simbirsk Governorship", published anonymously in the "Mesyatsoslov" in 1786, either to K.S. Milkovich, or to T.G. Maslenitsky, I.I. Lepyokhin, or N.Y. Ozeretskovsky. We are dealing here with a collective compilation.

Conclusions

As we see, Ivan Lepyokhin, along with Peter Pallas, was one of the first scholars who gave an academic description of the Middle Volga region as a whole. For example, he recorded the landscape features of the area, including pine woods, forests, swamps, meadows, rich fields, multitude of shrub roses and wild hops, the Bolshoi Cheremshan River, as well as small rivers and lakes. At his times, Russian desman, beluga, sturgeon, starlet, and sturgeon, which now have become extinct, were found in water sources.

In most cases, Ivan Lepyokhin recorded the ethnicity of the settlements. The Chuvash people, Tatars, Qizilbashes, Mordvins, and Russians lived there. Ivan Lepyokhin also paid attention to the clothing of local dwellers. He noted that the Mordvins, Chuvash people, and Tatars wore the same kind of shirts as Russian peasants, and bast shoes. He also described the female headdresses *tukhya/takya*, *khushpa/kashpau*, and *surpan*.

Since ancient times, the Cheremshan River basin was rich in fertile black soils. In the 18th century, mainly rye, oats, and farro were cultivated there, but people also grew watermelons, melons, and tobacco. Women worked equally with men. The government forbade non-Russians to engage in blacksmithing, because it feared that people might make weapons. Therefore, people bought agricultural supplies in Kazan. Many worked in local distilleries. Ivan Lepyokhin noted the diligence of the Germans, who settled in small colonies. Countless taxes put people in enslaving conditions.

The information about the leaders of religious and ritual actions (old men, midwives, and healers) is especially valuable in the records of Ivan Lepyokhin. Descriptions of ritual gatherings among the Chuvash people and Mordvins, for example, at *kiremetishchas* (places for offering public sacrifice), are of no less scholarly importance.

The results of the Middle Volga expedition by the team of Ivan Lepyokhin were presented in his “Diary Notes”, published in 1771. The things that he had brought were put in order, systematized, and supplied with labels in the *Kunstkamera*.

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