

Sergey Karp

**TRAVELS OF COUNTS NIKOLAI PETROVICH
AND SERGEI PETROVICH RUMYANTSEV AND FRIEDRICH
MELCHIOR GRIMM IN ITALY IN 1775–1776: FROM ROME,
THE SYMBOL OF DECLINE, TO ROME, THE CENTRE
OF THE NEW WORLD**

BACKGROUND

In the fall of 1773, Friedrich Melchior Grimm, the editor of the renowned *Correspondance littéraire*, arrived in St Petersburg in the retinue of Ludwig, Crown Prince of Hessen-Darmstadt, hurrying to the wedding of his sister Wilhelmine (Natalia Alekseevna) with the Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich. Grimm accompanied him as a mentor, and in the eyes of the Prince's mother, Landgravine Karoline, and Catherine the Great herself had the reputation of not only a talented journalist and critic, an interesting and witty companion, and a man of the world who could be very useful, but also of a recognised expert in all questions related to the education and upbringing of young men from noble families. It was then that Grimm was presented to Countess Yekaterina Mikhailovna Rumyantsev, wife of Field Marshal Pyotr Alexandrovich Rumyantsev and one of the first ladies of the court, and met two of her sons – the middle son Nikolai, 19, and the youngest Sergei, 18; their elder brother Mikhail was at that time in the army fighting against the Turks (in July 1774 he would be promoted to major-general).

The young Counts Rumyantsev had a brilliant career ahead of them. Nikolai (1754–1826) would become Chancellor of the Empire, Chairman of the State Council, philanthropist, art collector, and founder of the Rumyantsev Museum in St Petersburg; Sergei (1755–1838) would become a diplomat, minister of apanages, senator, member of the State Council,

and the initiator of the decree on “free ploughmen” (1803). But at the time described they were still young men, and before they made their first steps up the career ladder, they had to complete their education abroad: their mother asked Grimm to accompany them to Leiden on his way back from Russia, where they were to take a one-year university course, and then go to Italy with them. Their journey has so far remained outside the field of scholarly study, and I will try to fill this gap at least to some degree.

ITINERARY

On 27 September 1775, the Rumyantsev brothers left Leiden and went to Paris to meet with Grimm, who was there already as a Minister Plenipotentiary of the Duke of Saxe-Gotha. In September 1775 Grimm writes to Sergei Rumyantsev:

Quant à notre route, vous pourriez dire que nous entrons dans l’Italie par Genève, Chambéry et le Mont Cenis, que nous irons à Turin, de là à Gênes, puis par Parme Boulogne à Florence[,] de là par Livourne Pise Luques à Rome. De là à Naples, puis revenir à Rome et par Loretto &c à Venise. Nous placeros Milan où nous pourrons de la manière la plus avantageuse.

Letters of the Rumyantsev brothers to Princess Amalia Golitsyn (wife of Prince Dmitry Alexeevich Golitsyn, Russian envoy in The Hague and a friend of Diderot), to Grimm, the correspondence of Grimm himself, including that with Catherine the Great, reports of Russian diplomats, as well as periodicals allow us to re-trace the actual travel itinerary, which was close enough to that originally scheduled: Geneva (2 November), Turin (17 November), Milan (12–13 December), Florence, Livorno, Rome (January), Naples (30 January, 10 February), Rome (21 February, 24 March, 11, 18, 19 and 23 April), Bologna (2, 5 and 6 May), Venice (15–22 May), and Milan (10 June).

ROME: RELIGION AND ART

We don’t know very much about the impression the Italian cities made on the Rumyantsev brothers. At first glance the surviving evidence seems surprisingly laconic and skeptical. Thus, on 17 November 1775 Sergei Rumyantsev writes to Amalia Golitsyn, “Very soon we will leave Turin and I think we will do so without the slightest regret.” Nikolai Rumyantsev, in a letter to Golitsyn of 12 December 1775 confirms that Milan enjoys the well-deserved reputation of a city with a good society, which is able to provide a decent reception to foreign travellers, but then says that their stay in the city was during a fast, as a result of which a large part of entertainments was not available to them and they had to settle for visits to assemblies, which were too numerous and therefore tedious. We find an explanation for this reticence in his letter to Princess Golitsyn, written in Rome on 24 March 1776:

Je vous avoue Madame que le voyage d'Italie si fameux par ses agacements, m'est à moi une peine et un travail aussi difficile que le serait la manœuvre la plus fatigante; je dis plus: la curiosité folle de tout voir, et l'impossibilité d'y donner le tems nécessaire rendent absolument imbecile, et font que les objets se placent dans l'entendement, comme les figures du Perugin le sont dans ses tableaux, l'une à coté de l'autre; sans ordre, sans liaison, sans rapport. Ici de toutes les facultés[,] la reflexion seule est inactive, c'est à dire précisément celle par laquelle toutes les autres valent quelque chose.

Rome was the only exception to this rule. Our travellers spent more than two months there. Over that period they had time to ponder on what they had seen, and their letters to Amalia Golitsyn conveyed these reflections. Thus, in a letter from Rome on 24 March 1776, Sergei Rumyantsev exclaims: "What can I tell you, madam, about the Capital of the World, home of Catoes and Aemilii!" In response to this rhetorical question, he prefers not to express the widespread opinion about the decline of Rome. On the contrary, in his view,

Rome moderne mérite <...> un meilleur traitement, et l'Eglise de Saint-Pierre, seule me ferait oublier les torts des Papes et de leur doctrine comme l'établissement auguste des Invalides me faisait oublier à Paris toutes les fautes de Louis quatorze. <...> On n'imaginera sans doute rien de plus élevé dans ce genre parce que le génie le plus hardi découragé par la vuë de cet édifice y verra s'aneantir toute la grandeur de ses idées.

Nikolai Rumyantsev shares his brother's opinion in the letter written already in Bologna on 6 May 1776:

Je vous dirai Madame, qu'il m'en a beaucoup coûté de quitter Rome, et que j'eus préférer d'y rester au lieu de nous hater d'être à Venise à l'assension. Un spectacle quelque beau qu'il soit peut-il dédommager de la perte qu'on fait en quittant une ville où tout vous rappelle des événements et des hommes célèbres, et où vous êtes continuellement dans l'adoration de quelque chef d'œuvre? On se croit être d'une meilleure espèce quand on est à Rome, parce que l'on y voit des ouvrages sublimes créés par la main des hommes, et quand on considère l'Eglise de St Pierre on se dit avec satisfaction que tout n'est pas perdu et que les modernes valent quelque chose aussi <...>

Rumyantsev's reflections on Rome have allusions to the famous Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns that flared up in the French Academy at the end of the 17th century around the relative merits of literature and art of antiquity versus modernity, and arose in Europe anew in the second half of the 18th century under the influence of Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Nikolai Rumyantsev continues:

<...> malgré la réputation de la noce aldobrandine et les tableaux de l'Herculanum je ne crois pas que les peintres anciens aient valu Raphael, le

Carache ou le Dominiquain, mais en revanche nos sculpteurs sont font inférieurs aux leurs. Cette preeminence des uns dans la Peinture et des autres dans la sculpture ne vient-elle-pas de la difference du Culte Religieux? Les anciens representoient leurs Divinités par des statues[,] les modernes ont coutume de representer les leur[s] dans des tableaux. Ce sont les Preters qui ont occupés Raphael, le Guide, le Dominiquain, C'est la nessessité d'avoir des images qui a fait fleurir leur art, C'est la nessessité d'avoir les statues des Dieux qu'ils adoroint qui apparament a fait fleurir la sculpture chez les anciens; Ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que leur religion pretoit au statuaire des sujets plus favorables que la nôtre, quand il etoit question de representer Mars, Apollon, ou Meleagre, c'étoit des êtres d'une Nature belle[,] robuste et noble qu'il falloit imiter, au lieu qu'aujourd'hui le sculpteur chargé de faire en marbre un St Bruno, un St Philipe de Neri, ou quelqu'autre fondateur d'un ordre religieux est obligé de prendre pour modele un être decharné, humble, et qui aye quelque chose d'un malade dans la phisionomie[.] De tels sujets sont peu faits pour la sculpture et s'ils occupent quelque fois de jeunes artistes[,] ils s'opposent certainement à la perfection de leur art.

So, in this text, religion is seen as the main reason for the rise and fall of the arts of the Ancients and the Moderns; on the other hand, paganism and Christianity are compared to each other within certain limits and considered only in terms of their impact on art. The original idea of the decline of Rome is enriched by reflections on the role of religion in the development of art, leading to the image of Rome as the centre of the world, united by neo-classicist culture. We can attribute the development of such ideas to the Rumyantsev brothers' reading experience, the education they received in Russia, their training at Leiden University, the impressions of the trip, their conversations with Grimm; Grimm, in any case, was not their only interlocutor who could have influenced the formation of their world outlook and artistic taste. Let us try to reconstruct the network of relationships and contacts they established while travelling in Italy.

SOCIABILITÉ

In Italy of 1775–6 the Rumyantsev brothers followed roughly the same logic of social contacts as most of the enlightened travellers of the time. The name of their father – the winner of the Turks – and Grimm's company ensured them excellent reception everywhere. Their stay in Naples was organised by Abbot Ferdinando Galiani, Grimm's friend; in Bologna they met Count Girolamo Ranuzzi and saw his palace (which housed a collection of Anna Morandi Manzolini's anatomical models); in Venice they met patrician Quirino Angelo, the author of a constitutional reform project (1761), mason, scholar, patron and collector. But it was in Rome that the texture of their relationships became really dense and the cultural milieu very rich. We can distinguish in it several interacting centres of gravity:

- The Roman Academy of Arcadia
- Court of Cardinal de Bernis, the French ambassador to the Holy See
- Salon of Bailli de Breteuil, Ambassador of the Order of Malta to the Holy See
- Community of Trinita dei Monti (circle of Father Jacquier)
- Circle of the antiquary Reiffenstein

Let's start with Arcadia, a cosmopolitan society of poets and art lovers, founded in Rome in 1690 to counter "spoiled" literary tastes. For a long time it was thought that by the second half of the 18th century the academy had lost its importance and was in decline. This approach is consistent with the popular notion of Rome of that time as the periphery of the "literary republic" of the Enlightenment. However, Gilles Montegre recently showed that Arcadia played a primary role in the socialisation of travellers coming to Rome and their admission to the cultural life of the Eternal City. In many cases, the travellers themselves asked for permission to join this community. The Academy only accepted poets, both men and women, and poetry lovers. All members had pastoral names (of Greek shepherds) and met outdoors in masks and the costumes of Arcadian shepherds. So, *Diario ordinario* No. 136 of 20 April 1776 reported on the meeting of the Academy on 11 April. There Caroline Louise, ruling Margravine of Baden-Durlach, became a member of Arcadia under the name of Cleonice Delia; then Corilla Olympica (Maria Maddalena Morelli), famous for her poetic improvisations, asked for a theme for improvisation and "eruditissimo Monsieur Grimm Ministro Plenipotenziario del Principe di Saxe-Gotha in Parigi", proposed the following question: "Se il secolo, in cui le Donne sono più virtuose e più onorate, sia anche il Secolo più felice, e più onorevole per gli uomini"?¹ Corilla gave a brilliant improvisation. *Diario ordinario* No. 138 of 27 April 1776 announces the Arcadia meeting held on 18 April when new members were admitted—"i due conti Sergio e Niccolò Romanzoff, Monsieur Grimm Ministro plenipotenziario del Duca di Saxe-Gotha alla corte di Francia, soggetto ben noto per le sue eccelenti opere alla Repubblica letteraria". The Rumyantsevs received the names Leandro Ellespontiaco and Armindo Acerisiaco respectively, and Grimm became Focèo Epirotide.

The court of French Ambassador to the Holy See (from 1774) Cardinal François Joachim de Bernis, a friend and correspondent of Voltaire, also attracted a lot of people who found themselves in Rome at that time. The Embassy, located in the Palazzo de Carolis on via del Corso, functioned not only as a political institution, but also as an instrument of representation and cultural patronage. Virginie Larre and Gilles Montegre have shown that unlike his predecessors, de Bernis was able to make his residence a centre of long-term cultural influence, and he did it at the time when Rome as a high point of the Grand Tour began to attract a lot of foreign travellers.

¹ "Is the century, in which women are most virtuous and respected, the time when men are most happy and respected?"

The main channel of this influence was the protection that the Cardinal gave to academies and other scientific and literary communities, scientists, artists, writers, both French and foreign. The Rumyantsev brothers and Grimm were presented to de Bernis by Ivan Ivanovich Shuvalov, who provided them with a letter of recommendation back in Paris. In his reply to Shuvalov on 17 January 1776 de Bernis calls them both “well-mannered people”, and Grimm “a well-educated and nice person”. Perhaps precisely because of these qualities, our travellers also got access to Bernis’ intimate circle: in his correspondence Grimm repeatedly mentioned Abbot Des Haises (Deshaises), the cardinal’s “right hand” and private secretary (also a member of the Arcadia); Nikolai Rumyantsev in his letter to Amalia Golitsyn of 24 March 1776 mentions Giuliana Giacometti, Princess Santa Croce, the Cardinal’s mistress; Bernis in a letter to Grimm on 1 November 1778 gives him greetings from his niece, the Marquise de Puy-Montbrun and her little daughter, who also lived in Palazzo de Carolis.

The salon of Jacques Laure Le Tonnelier de Breteuil (le Bailly de Breteuil), Ambassador of the Order of Malta to the Holy See (1758–77), functioned in much the same way as the court of Cardinal de Bernis, differing from it only in a more modest scale of activity and a narrower specialisation—art. De Breteuil received his guests in the Palazzo della Religione di Malta in via dei Condotti, or in the villa Malta on the Pincian Hill, behind Trinità-dei-Monti Church. During his embassy he established his reputation as a passionate collector, philanthropist and a man willing to place large orders for the manufacture of objects of decorative and applied arts. Winckelmann himself mentioned him in his *History of Ancient Art*, Hubert Robert painted his Roman Salon, and the Paris Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture elected him honoraire-associé libre (1780). Charlotte Guichard in her recent work highlighted his role in the structuring of the artistic environment of Rome. The Archive of Ancient Acts in Moscow has fragments of the correspondence between de Breteuil and Grimm, which began when the latter left Rome in the company of the Rumyantsev brothers. Grimm’s correspondence with Catherine the Great contains some more information about his relationship with de Breteuil: it was always built around works of art (richest table decorations, collections of carved stones), which he was selling or going to sell to the Empress.

Another focus of erudition and an intellectual centre open to modern forms of communication was at that time the Trinità dei Monti monastery. In the 1770s the majority of educated Romans and visitors were familiar with the name of the most famous minim of the monastery – father François Jacquier (1711–88), an outstanding mathematician and expert in ancient languages. He taught the Scriptures at the Propaganda Fide Collegium, mathematics and physics at La Sapienza, was a friend of Cardinal de Bernis, Abbot Des Haises and Clérisseau, corresponded with d’Alembert, Condorcet, Maupertuis, Voltaire and Ivan Shuvalov. He became famous thanks to his commentaries on Newton’s *Mathematical Principles*

of Natural Philosophy (3 vol in-4°, Geneva, 1739–42), on which he worked together with father Thomas Le Seur; in 1744 Jacquier stayed at Cirey, helping the Marquise du Châtelet translate *Principles* into French. Jacquier was a member of the Royal Society of London (1741), corresponding member of the Paris Academy of Sciences (1743), a foreign member of the Berlin Academy (1749), who maintained relations with many scientific and literary societies of Europe, and courts of France, Parma and Piedmont. He led an active life, was not averse to secular society, was always courteous and gallant and gave ladies lessons in physics and mathematics. Jacquier willingly participated in Arcadia's activities, his name there being Diofante Amicleo (according to other sources, Diofante Ecateo). Visiting fathers Jacquier and Le Seur (d. 1770) was an obligatory stage of exploring Rome for many French and not only French travellers. The preparation of a critical edition of the correspondence between Catherine the Great and Grimm made it possible to discover the existence of correspondence between Jacquier and Grimm, who apparently became acquainted with him in January 1776, on his arrival in Rome with the Rumyantsevs, and then told the Empress about him.

Finally, the Rumyantsevs' and Grimm's stay in Rome was marked by their acquaintance with Johann Friedrich Reiffenstein, a renowned Roman antiquary, a person close to Winckelmann and Mengs, and later to Goethe and Herder. It is through him, beginning from the 1770s, that Catherine the Great placed most of her commissions in Italy. In his youth Reiffenstein and Grimm were connected with Gottsched: Grimm studied under Gottsched at Leipzig University in 1742–5 and corresponded with him from 1741; Reiffenstein also corresponded with Gottsched from 1743 as a secretary of the Deutsche Gesellschaft in Königsberg. Both Grimm and Reiffenstein were connected with the Saxe-Gotha court. During the young Prince August's trip to Italy (1771–2) Reiffenstein introduced him to the sights of Rome. August's elder brother Duke Ernest II rewarded Reiffenstein, appointing him a court advisor (Hofrat) on arts on 16 December 1772. This appointment brought many benefits to the ducal collections in Gotha: from 1772 to 1786, thanks to Reiffenstein's efforts, they received numerous works of art, books and manuscripts.

Reiffenstein's relations with Russia began in the 1760s. One of his first theoretical texts was *Gedanken zur Aufnahme der Zeichenkunst, nebst einer Vorübung in den ersten Gründen derselben, für gelehrte Liebhaber*, published in 1755 in the *Sammlung einiger ausgesuchten Stücke der Gesellschaft der Freyen Künste zu Leipzig*, a magazine edited by Gottsched. In 1762 it was translated by the young Denis Fonvizin into Russian and entitled *Discourse on Increments of the Art of Drawing, with Instruction in Primary Stages Thereof*; it was published in the magazine *Collection of the Best Works to Spread Knowledge and Bring Pleasure*. The magazine was founded by Johann Gottfried Reichel, professor of Moscow University (from 1757), where he had been invited thanks to Gerhard Friedrich Müller (Miller in Russia) and on Gottsched's recommendation. In the 1760s, Reiffenstein took under his wing

pensioners of the Imperial Academy of Arts who found themselves in Italy. He became acquainted with Ivan Shuvalov, founder and first director of the Academy. Shortly after Catherine the Great came to power Shuvalov left Russia, found himself in Rome and from the late 1760s actively bought statues and casts of ancient and modern masters, as well as architectural models for the Academy, the Empress and her court's nobles. On Shuvalov's recommendation in January 1771 Reiffenstein was made an honorary foreign member of the Academy of Fine Arts with an annual allowance of 200 crowns. This appointment underlined Reiffenstein's role in the establishment and development of contacts between Russia and the cosmopolitan environment of Rome and Italy. Reiffenstein's letters to Grimm give us an idea about the true scope of this activity. The earliest of these letters, where only one passage is extant, informs us about close contacts between Reiffenstein and the Rumyantsevs and Grimm during their stay in Rome in January 1776. I would like to end my speech with a quotation from this letter:

Je vous prie de présenter mes très humbles obéissances à Messieurs les Comtes de Romanzof en les remerciant du souvenir dont ils continuent de m'honorer. Les belles qualités de leur ame et de leur esprit, leur politesse, l'estime et l'amitié qui regnaient entre vous et ces aimables seigneurs ont donné un des plus beaux et des plus rares spectacles à tous ceux qui ont eu l'honneur d'être admis dans votre société et ont laissé bien des regrets après votre départ surtout à ceux qui comme moi ont été pendant bien du temps les convives journaliers à une si belle fête dont la commémoration est devenue un de nos objets favoris dans nos promenades solitaires d'Albano où tant de sujets nous rappellent le plaisir et satisfaction que nous y avons goutés dans votre aimable compagnie.