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HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Maiia Lavrinovich

**THE CONCEPT OF ‘FRIENDSHIP’
IN LATE 18TH – EARLY 19TH
CENTURY RUSSIA: SOCIAL
COHESION RECONSIDERED**

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IN LATE 18TH – EARLY 19TH CENTURY RUSSIA:
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The paper examines social differences within the concept of ‘friendship’ in late 18th – early 19th century Russia in order to ‘reassemble’ friendship as a social phenomenon in this period. Ubiquitously, the voluminous correspondence of the Russian aristocracy is interpreted as “friendly” disregarding any social dimension and ignoring the social station of the correspondents. The 18th century was a critical period in Russia being an age of radical modernization. New social and cultural models were appropriated and, as a result of westernization, the Latin tradition was assimilated too. In early modern Europe, the concept of ‘friendship’ was applied to *allegedly* equal relationships, as the words *cliens*, *patronus*, *clientela* were not in use any more, but clients were described as *amici*, or friends by their patrons. The paper analyzes the correspondence of several Russian aristocrats with their clients – social inferiors. The grandees refer to these relations as ‘friendly’ and call them *friendship* or *amitié* (*bien sincere* or *parfait*) emphasizing their value for them. From the letters of their correspondents, it comes to light that the social inferiors tended to be wary and not to use these notions assessing their relationships, thus remaining in the conceptual framework of the patron-client relationships. Under the impact of the ‘emotional turn’ of early sentimentalism, the concept of friendship, like that of social cohesion, was used by the grandees as a means to reinterpret the relationships of dominance in the patron-client relations as voluntary and predicated on selfless devotion whereas their clients preferred to avoid sensitivity still resorting to more traditional and apprehensible flattery and obsequiousness.

JEL Classification: Z

Key words: Russia, 18th century, friendship, correspondence, Alexander Vorontsov, Nikolai Sheremetev, Alexei Malinovskii, social hierarchy, emotional community

¹Senior Research Fellow, National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Staraia Basmanaia 21/4, str. 3, 105066, Moscow, Russia. E-mail: mlavrinovich@hse.ru.

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The aim of the present paper is to examine social differences within the concept of ‘friendship’ in late 18th – early 19th century Russia and to ‘reassemble’ friendship as a social phenomenon in this period. I analyze the correspondence of Alexei Malinovskii (1762–1840), an official of the Archive of the College of Foreign Affairs with two Russian aristocrats, his patrons: Count Nikolai Sheremetev (1752–1809) and Princess Ekaterina Dashkova (1744–1810, née Countess Vorontsova). The bulk of the correspondence is formed by the letters of one of the highest Russian officials, senator and future Chancellor of the Empire, Count Alexander Vorontsov (1741–1805) exchanged with his client and ‘friend’ brigadier Alexei Diakonov (1734–1789) which I unearthed recently. The selection of these two sets of correspondence was determined last but not least by the fact of the personal relationships between the grandees, Sheremetev, Dashkova and Vorontsov and hence the proximity of their cultural background and ideological guidelines, especially their ideas concerning social hierarchy and sociability. I also take into account the fact that in the 18th century, letter writing all over the European world blossomed as a new kind of social practice which contributed to sharpening an identity and to staking out a respectable position in society³.

Alexei Malinovskii, having started as a petty official in the Moscow Archive of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, made a unique career as a historian and an official at the same time, eventually becoming the executive director of the Archive (since 1814). He owed his success to the protection and patronage of both aristocratic families, the Sheremetevs and the Vorontsovs: alongside with his official archive career, Malinovskii was hired as the manager of the Moscow household of Sheremetev and as the supervisor of Sheremetev’s private hospital which had been under construction since the early 1800s in Moscow and opened in 1810 as a memorial to Sheremetev’s late spouse. It was aimed to provide the poor with shelter and medical care. As an official of the College’s archive, Malinovskii had been subordinated since 1802 to Alexander Vorontsov – Minister of foreign affairs of the Empire and State Chancellor. Since then Malinovskii’s private correspondence with Princess Dashkova, Vorontsov’s sister, began. Before that, although Dashkova was acquainted with Malinovskii as a translator of French and German plays performed both at the Moscow public theatre and at the private theatre of Alexander Vorontsov, she did not favour him with personal letters.

Both Sheremetev and Dashkova, connected to each other as members of a small imperial elite and through their families’ relations, used the services of Malinovskii to connect them

³ K. Dierks, “The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750–1800,” in *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, ed. D. Barton and N. Hall (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999): 31–41, 31.

indirectly with other grantees when necessary in order to avoid publicity or to pass each other some necessary things etc. Malinovskii, for his part, used Dashkova's well-known habit of demanding gifts from well-to-do aristocrats: he delivered her exotic fruits from Sheremetev's greenhouses or passed her such significant symbolic gifts as Rheinwein, tobacco, and French cheese on behalf of Sheremetev. His own gifts were much more modest, but no less important: usually paper, a means of communication for Dashkova, living mostly outside the city⁴. The level of trust between Sheremetev and Malinovskii was very high: the latter could take what he considered necessary to deliver to Dashkova in the name of Sheremetev, not to mention that he managed the Count's Moscow household and its financial funds.

In each letter to Malinovskii, Dashkova referred to their relations as 'friendly' and called them *amitié* (*bien sincere* or *parfait*). So did Sheremetev: in his letters to Malinovskii, he used the word 'friendship' (*druzhba*) regarding the connection between them and emphasizing how precious it was for him. On the contrary, Malinovskii never labeled his relationships to both patrons as 'friendly' and did not refer to his patrons as 'friends'. For Sheremetev, he used the title 'benefactor' (*blagodetel'*) expressing his gratitude for the protection. The shade of flattery, discursively interconnected with friendship in the early modern world⁵, was obvious at least for Dashkova, and supposedly for Sheremetev too; nevertheless they both called their friendship with Malinovskii true, whereas the latter never interpreted their relationship in this way. My assumption is that, due to his education (gymnasium at the Moscow University), origin (a son of the parish priest), and activities (he used to translate French and German plays in the 1780s and 1790s), Malinovskii could well recognize the Latin context of the phenomenon which connected him to his patrons, but he was not able or could not allow himself to accept the affective side of friendship. Supposedly, he did not take into consideration emotions as embedded in this kind of relationship preferring to adhere to the 'traditional' (i.e. connected with the Latin sources) concept of friendship reserving the emotional side of the phenomenon exclusively for the aristocracy.

The idea of the 'unequal friendship' goes back to Aristotelian ethics: the capacity of individuals in a society, including those unequal in rank or power, to form friendships is an evidence of the health of the political order and the absence of despotism⁶. Practical experience of this concept was manifested in the relationship of patronage praised at that time by the court

⁴ RGADA f. 188, op. 1, d. 363, ll. 19–29.

⁵ L. Golburt, "Vasily Petrov and the Poetics of Patronage," *Вуэниооука: E-Journal of Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies* 3 (2015): 47–69, 61.

⁶ Golburt, "Vasily Petrov," 62.

poet and Catherine II's librarian Vasilii Petovich Petrov in his lyrics addressed to various patrons (1770s–1780s). One should not disregard the fact that Petrov was a schoolmate of both Malinovskii's father – the priest Fedor Malinovskii – and of his supervisors in the Archive Nikolai Bantysh-Kamenskii during their studies at the Slavic, Greek and Latin Academy in the 1750s. This institution determined the prevailing intellectual context where Malinovskii was brought up and educated too.

There is hard evidence that patronage as a type of social relationship existed in early modern Russia side by side with other European states in the 16th and 17th centuries⁷, but in the 18th century, due to the Russian reception of the Greco-Roman tradition⁸, the thinking on 'unequal friendship' was reconsidered in the terms of Horatian poetry, and the rhetoric of his relationship to Maecenas. Pindar and Horace were the central figures of Petrov's articulation of friendship in his verse⁹. The social relevance of this kind of relationship was interpreted recently by K. Ospovat in his seminal paper devoted to the mechanisms of the social success of Mikhail Lomonosov. Lomonosov owed his striking success to the fact that his learned occupations (both poetry and chemistry) won recognition among the courtly and political elite (the Vorontsov and Shuvalov clans)¹⁰. There existed a direct connection, Ospovat argues, between his high status as a client and his poetic production. Recognizing him as a 'friend', the magnates blurred the hierarchical distance between patrons and clients without diminishing the real effects of dependence¹¹. L. Golburt too separates patronage as an institution which rests on a stratified social order, and patronage as a discourse which focuses on the social leveling effected by the bonds of friendship and mutual obligation¹².

The fact that these relationships were regarded according to the Latin model of Horace–Maecenas relationships, not only rhetorically but were used also in the everyday practice of contemporaries, is proved by the correspondence of Alexander Vorontsov and his 'friend', army brigadier Alexei Diakonov (1784–1789). A learned, intellectually refined and witty person, Diakonov was a client of the "Vorontsov party". Besides Vorontsov himself, he calls the high officials of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, Zavadovskii and Bezbododko, his benefactors (*milostivets*). His ultimate purpose was to return to the service, not military but civil, and to get a position in the *Assignatsionnyi* Bank supervised by the other clients of the Vorontsov clan. In his

⁷ M. Krom, "Formen und Patronage in Russland des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts: Perspektiven der vergleichenden Forschung im europäischen Kontext," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, N.F. 57, 3 (2009): 321–45.

⁸ See: D. Ia. Kalugin, "Istoria poniatiia druzhba – ot Drevnei Rusi do XVIII veka," in *Druzhiba. Ocherki po teorii praktik. Sbornik statei*, ed. O. V. Kharkhordin, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo EUSPb, 2009), 193–276.

⁹ Golburt, "Vasily Petrov," 61.

¹⁰ K. Ospovat, "Mikhail Lomonosov Writes to his Patron: Professional Ethos, Literary Rhetoric and Social Ambition," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, N.F. 59, 2 (2011): 240–266, 255.

¹¹ Ospovat, "Mikhail Lomonosov," 261.

¹² Golburt, "Vasily Petrov," 61.

letters to Vorontsov, he complains of his allegedly humble origin, loneliness and difficulty to make his way himself, without enjoying any connection with *patricians*¹³ – all that while having direct access to Vorontsov, one of the most influential persons in the Empire in the 1780s. Though the family origin of Diakonov still remains veiled, I found out that by his death, he owned almost 600 male serfs and a landed estate which brought him about 2,500 rubles of annual income. His status and opportunities were much more solid than those of Alexei Malinovskii, a priest's son, who, being almost 30 years younger, achieved a comparable financial and property situation in the 1820s, by approximately the same age. In fact, on the part of Diakonov it was only a pretence self-humiliation, i.e. a strategy which he selected in his correspondence with Vorontsov, just as Malinovskii was accustomed to resort to obsequiousness.

The very fact that Diakonov wrote to Vorontsov and received informal answers from him, and also met Bezborodko and Zavadovskii, disproved the credibility of his claims. He only used this modus because he believed it was the right way to achieve his goals, but did Vorontsov accept these rules too? In his letters, Diakonov demonstrated his acquaintance with the poetry of the contemporary Russian writers, Alexander Sumarokov and Mikhail Lomonosov (for instance, he quoted Lomonosov's rendering of the 26th Psalm as evidence of his pure thoughts and innocence as opposed to his evil and hypocritical persecutors from the Potemkin party) as well as with the writings of Voltaire and with ancient history. Nevertheless, he never dared to call Count Vorontsov his 'friend' and addressed him with his full title (*svetleishii graf*) whereas Vorontsov in his letters did not use any address at all and called him 'my merciful friend' (*moi milostivyi drug*) without any reaction on the complaints (excepting health) and discontent he expressed. Andrei Zorin observes that Alexander Radischev's address 'friends' was an unusual one: it implied his family members (younger children and sister-in-law).¹⁴ Contemporaries used to call Alexander Vorontsov and the high officials Petr Zavadovskii and Aleksander Bezborodko 'friends' though it was well-known that the two latter persons were his clients and executors of his political will. This is further evidence that the semantics of the words 'friend' and 'friendship' underwent a transformation in 18th century Russia.

Paradoxically, at the very time of these epistolary exchanges, a new sentimental comprehension of friendship had been emerging under the influence of Rousseau who identified friends as the opposite of protégés on the base of their mutual attachment etc.¹⁵ Neither flattery

¹³ RGADA f. 1261, op. 3, d. 541, ll. 1, 3 ob.

¹⁴ A. Zorin, *Poiavlenie geroia. Iz istorii russkoi emotsional'noi kul'tury konca XVIII – nachala XIX veka* (Moscow: NLO, 2016), 127.

¹⁵ V. Frede, "Friends: Gilbert Romme and the Stroganovs," *Βυβλιοθηκα: E-Journal of Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies*. 3 (2015): 70–100, 70.

nor deliberate self-humiliation but the affect accompanied by emotional outpourings was henceforth mostly associated with friendship, bringing it closer to the contemporary understanding of the phenomenon (with its much narrower limits – of interpersonal and intimate, not political, bonds)¹⁶. The influence of the new trend is obvious in the letters written by both Sheremetev and Vorontsov to their clients, less so in Princess Dashkova's correspondence (probably due to her age), i.e. in that of social superiors towards their inferiors, but not vice versa. Vorontsov's letters to Diakonov are emotional and even sensitive: he not only inquires about health of his addressee but lets him know about his inner state and feelings¹⁷. On the contrary, Diakonov informs Vorontsov only about the worsening of his health (he died in 1789), the year's harvest and his service ambitions.

It is worth saying that Malinovskii and Diakonov regarded their connection to the magnates as a very practical one, i.e. as a source of ranks and awards. The order of St. Anna which Malinovskii was awarded in 1803 was a kind of favor made by the minister for internal affairs for his patron Sheremetev, according to the latter¹⁸; in 1805, the year when the chancellor Vorontsov, Malinovskii's supervisor, died, the latter harshly refused to fulfill Princess Dashkova's, Vorontsov's sister, 'commissions'¹⁹. Obviously, Malinovskii and Diakonov were not touched by the new sentimental culture and its emotional models imported to Russia through the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Laurence Sterne.²⁰ The new emotional model rejected courtly vanity and glorified the pure joys of the family hearth. However, the aristocrats engaged in literary writing (e.g., Mikhail Nikitich Murav'ev or Alexander Nikolaevich Radischev) did not hasten to give up their state service and court carriers but disposed of a double emotional identity. They resorted to a suitable emotional matrix depending on a given situation.²¹ This observation made by Andrei Zorin is also valid for both Counts Sheremetev and Vorontsov in the 1780s and 1790s because of some biographical circumstances. What they tried to achieve by their affective correspondence with social inferiors, was 'emotional community' which should surpass social boundaries.

The epistolary connection of Alexander Vorontsov and Alexei Diakonov resembles that of Vorontsov with another of his clients, Alexander Radishchev. According to the recent study by Rodolf Bodin, despite their close relationship, Radishchev never allowed himself familiarity, as he always bore in mind that he was writing to his superior and patron. This peculiar kind of

¹⁶ Golburt, "Vasily Petrov," 61.

¹⁷ On the "emerging" of emotions in that period see the most recent contribution: Zorin, *Poiavlenie geroia*.

¹⁸ RGIA f. 1088, op. 14, d. 21, l. 17 ob.

¹⁹ RGADA f. 1287, op. 1, d.4839, l. 54.

²⁰ See: A. Zorin, "Import chuvstv," in *Poiavlenie geroia: iz istorii russkoi emotsional'noi kul'tury XVIII – nachala XIX veka* (Moscow: NLO, 2016), 99–108.

²¹ See: A. Zorin, "Dva komplekta pisem," in *Poiavlenie geroia: iz istorii russkoi emotsional'noi kul'tury XVIII – nachala XIX veka* (Moscow: NLO, 2016), 116 – 27.

intimate relationship was not nevertheless fake, but selective. Therefore, Bodin concludes, the epistolary connection between the two men was obviously not based on friendship²². Could these relationships be considered unequal ‘friendship’, according to the classical model, when regarded from below, i.e. from the point of view of the client? Only if friendship can be not only unequal but nonreciprocal as well.

The above analysis reveals that the magnates (Vorontsov, Sheremetev, and Dashkova to a lesser extent) were striving to overcome the obstacles of the hierarchy in order to create emotional connections to the social inferiors closest to them. Using the concept recently exploited successfully by Andrei Zorin while analyzing the Russian emotional culture of the late 18th – early 19th century, they were seeking to create an “emotional community” as opposed to a social community and hierarchy. They were using either a special language or a modus of writing which originated from the emerging sentimentalist perception. According to recent studies, though in late 18th century Russia patron-client relations continued to organize political life, certain forms of dependence and servility peculiar to this type of relation came to seem unacceptable during the same period. Hence, there existed a necessity to ‘reinvent’ interpersonal relationships as voluntary and predicated on selfless devotion, not on pure dominance and subordination,²³ which comes to light in the correspondence of Vorontsov and Sheremetev. Under the impact of the ‘emotional turn’ of early sentimentalism, the concept of friendship was used by the magnates as a means to create a new social cohesion based on the idea of a common human nature. The letters of the clients, or social inferiors, especially those of Malinovskii, reveal that they were not ready to accept this type of relation and remained indifferent to this cultural turn. They preferred to remain ‘friends’ in the pre-sentimentalist sense and to use their patrons’ social and symbolic capital for their utilitarian purposes. Thus, this kind of ‘friendship’ lacked not only equality (as classical models of patronage presupposed) but reciprocity. And it can be questioned whether they believed it to be ‘friendship’. For the well-educated correspondents of the Russian magnates of the late 18th – early 19th century, their relationship to their social superiors was a way to keep and support the existing social hierarchy, in order to find a solid place within it, whereas for their high-ranking patrons this sort of relationship was obsolete since it interfered with the establishing of a new kind of emotional order within this hierarchy.

²² R. Bodin, “Russian or French? Bilingualism in Alexander Radishchev’s letters,” in *French and Russian in Imperial Russia*, ed. D. Offord, L. Ryazanova-Clarke, V. Rjéoutski and G. Argent, vol. 1: Language use among the Russian nobility (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 121–30.

²³ Frede, “Friends,” 71.

Maiia Lavrinovich

Senior Research Fellow, National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE),
Staraia Basmannaia 21/4, str. 3, 105066, Moscow, Russia. E-mail: mlavrinovich@hse.ru.

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