

## LOMONOSOV AND THE CAPTURE OF THE FORTRESS OF KHOTIN IN 1739

In 1965 the scholars of Russian literature and history all over the world were celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of the death of the gifted Russian scholar and poet M. V. Lomonosov (1711-1765). It has been well known that Lomonosov occupies an important place in the history of Russian language and culture. In fact he is considered "the real founder of modern Russian literature and of modern Russian culture."<sup>1</sup> A. S. Pushkin (1799-1837) Russia's greatest poet wrote about him:

Lomonosov was a great man. He founded our first university. To be more exact, he himself was our first university . . . combining extraordinary strength of will with extraordinary strength of mind, Lomonosov embraced all the branches of education. A thirst for knowledge was the overpowering passion of this passion-filled soul. Historian, rhetorician, mechanic, chemist, mineralogist, artist, and poet, he experienced everything and fathomed all.<sup>2</sup>

S. I. Vavilov (1891-1951) a Russian physicist and the late president of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences wrote that:

The history of Russian science shows that the characteristic feature of its men of genius has always been the extraordinary scope of the problems they undertook and of the results they achieved, which were always based on amazingly firm grounds and reality and, at the same time, on simplicity in approaching solutions. These features and this style of work, which we meet in Mendeleyev and Pavlov, received extraordinary expression in Lomonosov.<sup>3</sup>

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1. D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature from its Beginnings to 1900* (New York, 1958), p. 43.

2. B. B. Kudryavtsev, *The Life and Work of Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov* (Moscow, 1954), p. 5 and p. 114.

3. *Ibid.* p. 6.

Recently it has been discovered and proven beyond any doubt that a contact between Lomonosov and Benjamin Franklin did exist and as a result of this fact the Americans became aware of Russia's cultural power and the work of Lomonosov quite early while Lomonosov was alive.<sup>4</sup>

Lomonosov played a great role as an outstanding poet and reformer of the literary Russian language and as the Soviet Academician P. Lebedev-Polyansky a specialist in literature, so ably puts it, Lomonosov

remade the Russian language and Russian verse by imparting to them the form and trend of development best suited to express fully the spirit and character of the Russian people, the magnificence, richness, brilliancy, originality, and the inexhaustible strength of Russian creative genius.<sup>5</sup>

Lomonosov was a typical versatile scholar of the eighteenth century and besides being a chemist and a philologist he was also a remarkable poet. He approached poetry as a patriot of his country, a thinker, and a scientist. In the eighteenth century the ode was regarded as a beautiful and refined genre of poetry, which, dedicated to special subjects, was usually written with great inspiration and feeling. Lomonosov wrote odes throughout his literary activity and seventeen of these odes were dedicated to the five rulers who reigned in the Russian Empire between 1739 and 1765. According to Lomonosov:

A perfect poet must be sufficiently versed in all sciences and thoroughly know and be skilled in many of them. It is not enough for a poet to wish to delight people when he cannot teach them anything.<sup>7</sup>

As a poet Lomonosov was influenced by the German baroque poet J. Ch. Günther (1695-1723) and by the German classicist Johann Gottsched (1700-1766); together with V. K. Trediakovsky (1703-1769) and A. P. Sumarokov (1718-1777) Lomonosov is considered the major fountainhead of Russian Classicism.<sup>8</sup> His odes, sacred and panegyrical are expressing the

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4. E. Dvoichenko-Markoff, "The American Philosophical Society and the Russian Academy of Science" *Proceedings of the American Society* (Philadelphia, 1947), pp. 250-251. See also A. Tarsaidze, *Czars and Presidents* (New York, 1958), p. 12.

5. Kudryavtsev, *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

6. Dmitrij Čiževskij, *History of Russian Literature* (The Hague, 1962), p. 421.

7. Kudryavtsev, *Op. cit.*, p. 88.

8. W. E. Harkins, *Dictionary of Russian Literature* (Patterson, N. J., 1959), p. 57. See also Čiževskij, *Op. cit.*, p. 415.

sentiments and aspirations of a nation or at least of its intellectual elite. One of Lomonosov's odes idealizes Emperor Peter the Great and his reforms for the benefit of Russia:

In trials he never bowed his head;  
Forever shine his well-earned fame!  
And Russian rudeness overcame,  
Arose, and followed where he led.<sup>9</sup>

Other odes point out the glory of Russian armies and the greatness of the Empire, but above all, the praise of science, learning, and industry. It was from Germany, where he was sent to complete his education that he sent to the Academy of St. Petersburg his first ode written in iambs on the capture of the Turkish fortress of Khotin in 1739. This ode entitled "Ode to the Sovereign Empress Anna Iannovna on the Victory over the Turks and Tatars, and the Capture of Khotin, in the Year 1739" marked the beginning of the new Russian poetry and of Lomonosov's fame as a poet.<sup>10</sup> With this ode was enclosed a "Letter on the Rules of Russian Poetry" where Lomonosov gives new rules of writing verse which actually in part came to be basic for Russian versification up to the twentieth century. His syllabo-tonic versification, which is based on a regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables is still in use. Lomonosov's metrical reform consisted in the introduction of equisyllabic and accentual feet instead of the old syllabic prosody supported by Trediakovsky in his booklet of 1735 "Method of Composing Russian Verses" and in his "Ode About the Surrender of Danzig" written four years before the ode of Lomonosov. As a result of this dispute Trediakovsky criticized Lomonosov and became his enemy at the Academy.<sup>11</sup>

Lomonosov's ode on the taking of Khotin may be considered the first production in a pure Russian language replacing the heavy and incomprehensible language of Trediakovsky and introducing a musical nature to its verses. Those few who read this ode before its publication considered it absolute perfection. V. E. Adadurov, an Adjunct of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, and Academician Y. Y. Stählin examined the ode. Stählin stated: "We were very much surprised at this meter of verse, which had never before exist-

9. Kudryavtsev, *Op. cit.*, p. 91.

10. B. N. Menshutkin, *Russia's Lomonosov* (Princeton, N. J., 1952), p. 34. See also A. Zapadov, *Otiets Russkoi Poezii. O Tvorchestve Lomonosova* (Moscow, 1961), p. 19.

11. Čiževskij, *Op. cit.*, p. 406 and p. 416. See also D. D. Blagoi, *Istoria Russkoi Literaturi XVIII Veka* (Moscow, 1945), p. 121.

ed in the Russian language . . . all read it, and were amazed at this new meter . . .".<sup>12</sup> Both the ode and the "Letter on the Rules of Russian Poetry," however, appeared in print later in 1751 after twelve years due mostly to the indifference of the Academicians I. D. Schumacher and I. I. Tabert to the dispute between Lomonosov and Trediakovsky. To this one may add the fact that Lomonosov did not get along too well with other members of the Academy, almost all of whom were German.<sup>13</sup>

The ode on the taking of Khotin is based on newspaper reports about a decisive Russian victory in the Russo-Turkish war 1735-1739. Lomonosov was in Germany when he wrote his ode, but the description of the events is quite accurate. In July 1739, Field Marshal Burkhard Christoph Münich, commander of the Russian armies advanced towards the Principality of Moldavia which at that time was under Turkish suzerainty. Upon crossing into Moldavia the Russian army which consisted of 40,000 regular troops and 8,000 irregular troops was joined by a Moldavian detachment under the command of Captain Vasile Curt. In spite of the numerical superiority of the Turks who had about 70,000 men (according to S. M. Solov'ev, however, 90,000 men) under the Seraskier (military commander) Veli-Pasha, the Russian army attacked on August 17, 1739, the heights held by the Turks at Stavuchany (Stauceni) and scored a brilliant victory opening thus the way to the fortress of Khotin.<sup>14</sup> A contemporary Moldavian chronicler Ion Neculce (1672-1745) describes the Russian victory in the following way:

And the Turks ran whichever way they could, Veli-Pasha the Seraskier and with some Turks with the sultan and the Tatars down towards the Pruth, but Kolchiag-Pasha entered the fortress with some Turks. However the Field Marshal did not want to let the Moscovites to pursue the Turks fearing some ambushade and remained for the whole day in that spot at . . . where he defeated the Turks.<sup>15</sup>

The Russian losses at Stavuchany were light with only one hundred casu-

12. Menshutkin, *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

13. Zapadov, *Op. cit.*, pp. 29-30. See also Čiževskij, *Op. cit.*, p. 405.

14. G. Vernadsky, *A History of Russia* (New Haven, 1961), p. 166. See also S. M. Solov'ev, *Istoria Rossii s Drevneishih Vremyon* (Moscow, 1963), Book X, Vol. 20, p. 454 and G. Bezviconi, *Contribuții la Istoria Relațiilor Romîno-Ruse* (Bucharest, 1962), pp. 143-144.

15. Ion Neculce, *Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei și O Samă de Cuvinte* (Bucharest, 1959), p. 368.

alties. The remarkable performance of the Russian artillery, the bravery of the soldiers, and the experienced leadership provided by Russian military commanders such as General A. I. Rumiantsev made this victory possible in spite of the incompetence of Field Marshal Münnich. The insignificant losses of the Russian army gain in significance here since most of the historians writing about this war emphasize the heavy casualties suffered by the Russians due to famine, disease, and constant combat with the Turks and the Tatars.<sup>16</sup> The Russian army moved along with their services of transport and supply and this was the main reason why Field Marshal Münnich delayed for one day the pursuit of the defeated Turks. Three days after the victory at Savuchany, Kolchiag-Pasha (Koltshak-Pasha) surrendered the fortress of Khotin to the victor. Among the Moldavians who have entered the service of the Russian Empire was General Prince Constantine A. Kantemir, the nephew of the former Moldavian hospodar Demetrius Kantemir (1673-1723), the first to enter the Moldavian capital Jassy (Iasi) at the head of 3,000 so-called Moldavian Hussars on September 2, 1739. It was assumed according to previous so-called Diploma of April 13, 1711, by the authority of which a hereditary absolute monarchy under the suzerainty of Russia was established for the Kantemir family in Moldavia that Constantine Kantemir would become the new hospodar of Moldavia. Next day Field Marshal Münnich arrived in Jassy, and on his own, without any official authority from St. Petersburg, initiated negotiations for the incorporation of Moldavia into the Russian Empire. When some Moldavians objected to some points in the partial preliminary agreement Münnich used force in order to obtain all the signatures. In general this German in the service of the Russian Empire with his "arrogance soon alienated laity and clergy alike" and "his brief sway in Jassy . . . effected a noticeable cooling in the Russophil temper of Moldavia."<sup>17</sup> He started to fortify Jassy and was making preparations to spend the winter in Moldavia when news reached him that the Russian ally Austria experiencing military reverses concluded a separate peace with Turkey. With the help of the

16. N. M. Druzhinin et al. ed., *Ocherki Istorii S. S. S. R. Period Feodolizma. Rossiya vo Vtoroi Chetverti XVIII v.* (Moscow, 1957), p. 390. See also L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453* (New York, 1958), p. 184 and W. H. McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier 1500-1800* (Chicago, 1964), p. 172.

17. R. W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians* (Cambridge, England, 1934), p. 13. See also Neculce, *Op. cit.*, p. 372; and N. Iorga, *Histoire des Relations Russo-Roumaines* (Jassy, 1917), pp. 139-142; and N. Iorga, *Histoire des États Balkaniques jusqu'à 1924* (Paris, 1925), pp. 79-81; the text of the Diploma see in Akademia Nauk SSSR, Institut Istorii, *Pis'ma i Bumagi Petra Velikogo* (Moscow, 1962), Vol. XI, pp. 173-177.

French ambassador in Constantinople M. de Villeneuve, who played an important role in promoting Austro-Russian dissensions, the Ottoman Empire was able to impose the humiliating Peace of Belgrade on Austria on September 18, 1739. Due to a threat of war with Sweden and French pressure Russia followed the example of Austria. By the Convention of Nissa of October 3, 1739, Russia surrendered its gains in Moldavia and in the Crimea, regained the fortress of Azov with the condition that it will destroy its fortifications, was allowed to build a fortress on the island of Cherkassy on the Don river, and the Greater and Minor Kabarda Tatar areas were recognized as a neutral barrier between the two empires. A patch of territory in the steppes of the Ukraine brought Russia closer to the Bug river and the Black Sea. The Russians failed to win the right to trade on the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea and in general a peace treaty of this kind after military victories over the enemy caused a great disappointment among the Russians.<sup>18</sup>

After the humiliating and largely unnecessary defeat of Peter the Great on the Pruth in 1711, the victory of Russian arms at Stavuchany and the capture of the mighty Turkish fortress of Khotin in 1739 was quite a remarkable achievement. The Ottoman Turks were still considered to be a major power in Europe at that time and in comparison to the defeats suffered by the ally of Russia, Austria, the Russian victory created a considerable admiration everywhere. Some people in Russia felt that this victory was a fitting retribution for the defeat of Peter the Great at Stănilești on the Pruth in 1711. They considered that the Russian military prestige in Eastern Europe was thus reestablished.<sup>19</sup> It is not surprising therefore that Lomonosov expressed his feelings over the capture of the fortress of Khotin in the following way: "The sudden ecstasy took my reason captive."<sup>20</sup> Nature was silent awaiting the horrors of war. This feeling was described by Lomonosov in the beginning of his ode:

it transports me to the summit of a lofty mountain, where the wind  
has ceased to howl, and all is hushed in the deep valleys below. Silent  
are the listening streams, to which it is natural to murmur, or with  
loud rush to roll down the mountains; crowns of laurel are weaving;

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 140. See also Stavrianos, *Op. cit.*, p. 185; Druzhinin, *Op. cit.*, p. 392; and Francis Ley, *Le Maréchal de Münnich et la Russie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1959), pp. 120-122.

19. A. Oțetea et al. ed. *Istoria României* (Bucharest, 1964), Vol. III, p. 218. See also Vernadsky, *Op. cit.*, p. 155.

20. Čiževskij, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

thither rumour is seen to hasten; afar off the blue smoke rises in the fields.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to this Lomonosov showed a realistic appreciation of the battle and the efforts of the Turks to stop the Russian advance in the following lines:

As a ship, amidst the angry waves seek to overwhelm her, sails on triumphantly, and appears to threaten should they dare to impede her course; grey froth foams around her, her track is imprinted in the deep; thus crowds of Tartars rush towards and surround the Russian forces, but in vain; powerless and breathless they fall.

Since both the Turks and the Tatars are of the same Muslim faith Lomonosov did not bother to separate them in his ode very often. He continued to show the driving force of the Russian advance in the following way:

The love of their country nerves the souls and arms of Russia's sons; eager are all to shed their blood; the raging tumult but inspires them with fresh courage;<sup>22</sup>

The Russian assault uphill towards the fortifications of the Turks was illustrated with powerful comparisons:

Hear I not the deafening din of Aetna forges? Roars not the brass within, bubbling with boiling sulphur? Is not Hell striving to burst its chains, and open its jaws? The posterity of the rejected deity have filled the mountain track with fire, and hurl down flame and liquid metal; but neither foe nor nature can withstand the burning ardour of our people.<sup>23</sup>

The line "hurl down flame and liquid metal" is considered to be one of the best in this ode according to Professor D. D. Blagoi who has stated that any Russian poet would not mind signing his name to this excerpt.<sup>24</sup> Great dangers were faced by the Russian soldiers during the assault

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21. Leo Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature* (New York and London, 1902), Vol. I, p. 246.

22. *Ibid.* p. 247.,

23. *Ibid.*

24. D. D. Blagoi, *Istoria Russkoi Literaturi XVIII Veka* (Moscow, 1955), p. 143.

but the world holds no impediment to arrest the eagle in his flight. To him the waters, the woods, the mountains, the precipices and the silent deserts are but level paths; wherever the wind can blow, thither he can wing his way.<sup>25</sup>

The Russian army broke through the fortifications of the Turks and Lomonosov pointed out in his verses: "and wide is the prospect before you." Further he pointed out: "the parting ray of daylight falls gently into the waters, and leaves the fight to the night fires."<sup>26</sup> After the capture of the Turkish camp preparations were under way for the move towards the fortress of Khotin. During this interlude the poet dreams about a fantastic meeting between two Russian czars from the past i. e. Ivan IV, the Terrible (1533-1584) and Peter I, the Great (1682-1725) who express their approval at the action and the bravery of the Russian army. This original device was presented in the following manner by the poet:

Thus the heroes addressed each other: "Not in vain we toiled; not fruitless our united efforts, that the whole world should stand in awe of Russia. By the aid of our arms, our boundaries have been widened on the north, on the west, and on the east. Anna now triumphs in the south; she has crowned her troops with victory." The cloud has passed and the heroes within it; the eye no longer sees, the ear no longer hears them.<sup>27</sup>

Empress Anne (1730-1740) is presented here by Lomonosov as a successful follower of her famous predecessors and the victory near Khotin gained thus in additional importance. One of the favorite heroes appearing in several odes of Lomonosov is Peter the Great whom he often presents as an extraordinary and almost supernatural hero:

suddenly a countenance of fire shines forth; a hero appears chasing his enemies before him, his sword all red with blood. . . . thus swiftly his proud horse galloped over those fields where we see the morning star arise.

And particularly in the following lines of the present ode it is obvious

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25. Wiener, *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 248-249.



that the way has been opened to the famous A. S. Pushkin's "Poltava":

Loud thunder rattles around him; the plains and the forests tremble at the approach of Peter, who by his side so sternly looks towards the south, girt round with dreadful thunder.<sup>28</sup>

After the appearance of Peter I and Ivan IV the fighting went on and the enemy retreated towards Bender (Tighina):

The blood of the Tartar has purpled the river; he dares not again venture to the fight; he seeks refuge in the desert; and, forgetful alike of the sword, the camp, his own shame, he pictures to himself his friends weltering in their blood; the wavering of the light leaf startles him like whizzing balls as they fly through the air.

The shouts of the victors echo through the woods and valleys; but the wretch who abandons the fight dreads his own shadow.<sup>29</sup>

After the surrender of the fortress of Khotin, Lomonosov addressed his ode to the peaceful native population of Moldavia now freed from the oppression of the Turks:

Joyful are the lands which have thrown off the cruel yoke; the burden the Turks had laid on them is thrown back upon themselves!<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion the poet is admiring the idyllic picture of peace in contrast to the horrors of war. It is a favorite subject which Lomonosov has repeated several times in his poetry:

The robbers who, from beyond the Dniester, came to plunder the fields of the Cossacks, are driven back, scattered like dust; no longer dare they venture on that soil where the fruits of the earth and the blessing of peace together flourish. In safety the merchant pursues his traffic, and the mariner sees a boundary to the waves; no obstacles impede his course. The old and the young are happy; he who wished for the hour of death now prays for lengthened life; his heart is glad-

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28. *Ibid.*, See also Zapadov, *Op. cit.*, pp. 25-28.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

dened by his country's triumphs. The shepherd drives his flocks into the meadow, and enters the forest without fear; there, with his friend who tends his sheep, he sings the song of joy, his theme the bravery of the soldier; he blesses the passing moments of his life, and implores endless peace on the spot where he sleeps in quiet.<sup>31</sup>

A so-called "lyrical disorder" prevails in the greater part of this ode. The poet seems to convey through seemingly disconnected images and thoughts his enthusiasm and his ecstasy. A. N. Radishchev (1749-1802) who criticized Lomonosov severely, admired this ode and said: "The unusual syllables, the strength of expression, the hardly breathing descriptions amazes those reading this new creation."<sup>32</sup>

Monmouth College  
West Long Branch, New Jersey

DEMETRIOS DVOICHENKO-MARKOV

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31. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

32. A. Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu* (Leningrad, 1938), p. 327. See also Čiževskij, *Op. cit.*, p. 424.