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Historico-cultural relations between Tuscany and the Russian Empire

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Abstract

The object of research is the international cultural exchange between the Italian region of Tuscany and the Russian Empire in the period of its formation and prosperity at the turn of 18-19 centuries. The studies on diplomatic relations start from the middle of the 15-th century and serve as a foundation for the knowledge of migration of artists, writers, architects, sculptors, composers and other cultural figures in the historical period of the Russian Empire. During the research there were studied primary sources, archival documents and actual data that helped also to discover new names and biographies of some government officials and architects, who have made their contributions to the economic and cultural development of the two states.

Keywords: ambassador; migration; foreign trade; architecture; art; Maecenas

Introduction

Traveling through Italy, one can understand that each its region has its own cultural peculiarities. Here every city is not only a unique work of art, but in every region there are also its own language dialects, recipes and age-old traditions. Today's united Italy still about 160 years ago was a territory with several independent states. Thus, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was an independent state existed from 1569 to 1859, before under the dynasty of the Medici and under Habsburg-Lorraine after. During that period, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was able to maintain its independence and to grow up until it was one of the most prosperous and modern states in Europe. Florence is the capital of Tuscany; it attracts tourists with its beauty, and especially for its architectural masterpieces and sculptural compositions. Walking along the promenade Lungarno Serristori and admiring the Florentine sceneries, in the 60 meters from the Ponte alle Grazie on the right hand one can see the green rectangular area in the center of which there is situated a large sculpture dedicated to Nikolay Demidov (Nicola Demidoff). From this point we immerse ourselves in the story that tells of the Demidov family, and of the relationships of two peoples - Russian and Tuscan, connected since ancient times. What could there be in common between the colossal brute Russia and a small, flowering and enlightened Duchy of Florence?

Origins and development of the diplomatic relations between the two countries

In X-XIII centuries the Russian cities had closed trade links with Europe, but the Mongol-Tatar invasion interrupted them. They were restored only in the XV century. By this time the Mongol-Tatars were completely defeated, and Eastern Russia fell under the sway of Moscow princes. Muscovy began to actively develop trade and diplomatic ties with the European countries. At the same time the Vatican in order to prevent the threat of invasion of Muslim Turks set out to search for a possible alliance with the Orthodox Church. In 1438 the Council of Florence was assembled, where in addition to Catholics, there were also representatives of the Orthodox Church, headed by Metropolitan Isidor and Bishop Avraamy Suzdalsky. Russian delegation was represented by more than one hundred people. Besides the clergy, it included secular person, such as Foam, the ambassador of the city of Tver. The Churches Union wasn't implemented, but for that moment Russia re-emerged on the diplomatic scene in Europe. Traveling through Italy, one can understand that each its region has its own cultural

Paragraph: use this for the first paragraph in a section, or to continue after an extract. In connection with these events one of the earliest descriptions in Russian literature of the Western European world was spread in Russia. It is "Going to Florence 1437-1440 years". Unknown citizen of Suzdal, a member of the retinue of Avraamy, described the travelling of the Russian delegation. The Embassy had left Moscow on 8 September 1437, and came back in Suzdal on 29 September 1440.

The author of the notes was interested in nature, architecture, landmarks, development of trade and crafts, production of expensive fabrics and felts, olive oil and the breeding of silkworms. Florence is described more detailed: beautiful churches, very high skilled white stone chambers, fast river Arno, the famous Ponte Vecchio, so wide that on its both sides the structures are located, the church of Santa Maria Novella, and under it the hospital for the poor and pilgrims. That glorious city of Florence is very large, and all that there is, we have not seen in the earlier described towns: churches here are very beautiful and great, and the houses are built of white stone, very high and skillfully decorated. And in the middle of the city the large river flowing very fast, it is called Arno; and the wide stone bridge is built on the river; and on both sides of the bridge houses are built. There is a large temple in the city, and it contains more than a thousand beds, and even in the last beds there are good duvets and expensive blankets; all this is done for Christ's sake for the sick strangers and pilgrims from other lands; and there they are fed, and clothed, and put them shoes, and wash them, and well-contained; and who gets well, he thanks the city and goes further, praising God; and in the middle of beds a place for worship allocated and service doing every day.¹

A certain growth of Russian-Italian relations was observed during the reign of Boris Godunov, who in 1587 got the right of self-diplomatic relations, even before he was elected the king. Exactly in those years the Grand Duchy of Tuscany has equipped the embassy in Moscow and sought an agreement of free trade of certain goods in the cities of Novgorod and Pskov.^{2, 3} In 1840 in Moscow there was published a book named "Description of the embassy, sent in 1659 by Tsar Aleksey Mikhaylovich to Ferdinand II Grand Duke of Tuscany".⁴ Its author was Alexander Chertkov (1789 -1858), Russian historian and scientist. 18 November 1822 he resigned and for two years went from St. Petersburg to Europe, where he became interested in history. Staying in Florence Chertkov became friendly with the Italian scientist and priest Sebastiano Ciampi whereby addicted to the study of Italian antiquities. The book describes the location of the painting dedicated to that Embassy:

The Palazzo Pitti is an ordinary residence of the Dukes of Tuscany in Florence, joined by a long pass with another building, which also belongs to the Duke; there is placed a fine art gallery, statues and other valuables. This wide corridor, which goes across the river Arno, over the Ponte Vecchio, serves as an internal road between his ducal palace and the rich storehouse of antiquities collections and works of fine arts. Duke may, at any time, without being subject to court etiquette, visit his museum and art gallery. The walls of this passage, on both sides decorated with images of the most important statesmen of the Tuscany and with the modern pictures of the main Florentine history. Among the paintings there is the image of the reception the Russian embassy sent in 1660 by Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich to Ferdinand. This contemporary picture, which occupies its place in the chronological order of other events of Tuscan history, is remarkable for the costumes of our ambassadors of the XVII century, and reproduces, of course, the portraits of Likhachev and clerk Fomin. Similarly, on other scenes, placed next to them, there are portraits of different persons depicted in the brilliant era when art flourished, and especially famous Florentine school. For this reason, I found the picture worthy of the attention of the Historical Society and ordered to make a copy of it in my recent stay in Florence.⁵

The nation, up to that time unknown in Italy, which manners and customs were so different from the European, aroused curiosity to the full as the Grand Duke, and all the inhabitants of Tuscany. In 1680 in Padua from a manuscript of Jacob Reutenfels a book was published in printing house of Pietro Maria Frambotti. The book is called "De rebus Moschoviticis ad Serenissimum Magnum Hetruriae Ducem Cosmum Tertium". Author manuscript narrated about the events, the behavior and habits of life in Moscow and of the Muscovites, based on authentic Russian and other monuments, on his personal experience and on the observations of eyewitnesses. Since 1676 the manuscript before being published was kept in the Florentine Library, the chief of which was Antonio Magliabechi. Then it was bought by an unknown noble German and brought to Padua. The book, like the manuscript, was in Latin, and wasn't transferred to any European languages. A. I. Stankevich translated the book into Russian and published it in Moscow in 1905. It collected a lot of information about the geography, political system, economy and history of the Russian state. The characteristics are especially valuable of Stepan Razin (Reutenfels witnessed his execution, there is evidence that in 1670-1673 he was in Moscow), Artamon Matveyev, Simeon Polotsky, and other prominent figures of the second half of the XVII century, the architecture and culture of Moscow of that era.⁶

At the end of the XVII - beginning of the XVIII century the policy of Peter the Great revived Russian-Italian relations. In this regard, the Florentine merchants, continued to maintain a definite stand at the Russian market. Russian historian and philologist V.

V. Makushev (1837-1883) during his research in the archives and libraries of Naples, Venice, Milan, Palermo, Ancona and Florence, collected an enormous factual material, mainly on the history of the South Slavs. Several documents of the time he was discovered in the State Archives of Florence:

C. Segreteria Vecchia.

a. Russia. Documenti originali (filza XI, № 8).

“About three Russian embassies” to Florence: the first two (1656 and 1659 - 1660) were sent by Aleksey Mikhaylovich, and the last (1687), by Ivan and Peter Alexeyevich. The reports from Livorno described the standing there for a whole month of I.I. Chemodanov and V.T. Postnikov with a large retinue, in which there was also a priest (1656). These reports describe how Russian Embassy spent its time, there are represented the main characteristic of those states, their clothes, manners and customs, prejudices and superstitions. In one of the reports there is attached the portrait Russian Ambassador. Both the first and the second embassy were sent in business trade (especially the Tuscans were busy on the export of caviar from Russia); the third embassy tried to persuade the Grand Duke of Tuscany to an alliance against the Turks. In these papers there are two authentic letters of Ivan and Peter Alexeyevich and a letter of recommendation given by the Grand Duke of Tuscany to Jesuit Ivan Grimaldi, set from Russia to China (1689).⁷

One document dated from 8 April 1687 also refers to the Florentine ambassador Frants Gvaskoniya (Francesco Guasconi). He lived for several years in Russia in the Principality of Novgorod and communicated various information from the Tuscan Prince Cosmas III to the Novgorod Prince Vasily Golitsyn.⁸ In the late 60-ies of the XVIII century, Russia took the decisive step, after fruitless negotiations with the Italian states lasted almost a century with short intervals. In 1767 Catherine II sent Orlov brothers on a secret mission to Italy. According to the official version, their visit was connected with the necessity of medical treatment. In fact, Alexey Orlov incognito visited Naples, Rome, Pisa, Livorno, Siena, Florence and established contact with the political leaders of the Italian states. Catherine II established a connection with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, almost entirely depended on Austria. For a long time bilateral contacts were limited to brief reports on information about the birth and death of princes, dynastic marriages and other grand events.⁹

In 1780 in Florence, the charge d'affaires was appointed Count Demetrio Mocenigo, State Councilor and the Order of St. Vladimir 4-th degree Cavalier, who served from 1778 as the Marine General Commissioner in Italy and the commander of the Russian squadron in Livorno.¹⁰ Under him assistant was also appointed, Titular Counselor Count Giorgio Mocenigo. The diplomatic relations between Tuscany and Russia were established only in 1785 (already after such relations have been established with the Kingdom of Naples, Piedmont, Genoa and Venice). However, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in St. Petersburg was represented by the Austrian, and not by Tuscan ambassadors. In 1786 the Tuscan Embassy in Russia was represented by Baron Seddeler and Demetrio Mocenigo was already appointed minister in the Russian Embassy in Florence.¹¹

Tuscans in Russia

In connection with the North American War of England and the occupation of the island of Menorca by the Spanish, Catherine II ordered the Count Demetrio Mocenigo to provide support immediately to the Greeks, who were deported and who would be willing to go to Russia. The so-called “Greek project” on settling the Greek Christians of the peninsula of Crimea has been developed. At this point, the Corsicans appeared (Corsica was then the Italian island), lost their jobs from the British and they were scattered in various cities of northern and central Italy - Nice, Genoa, Livorno and others. On May 1782, having learned about the decree, immigrants from the islands presented to Mocenigo the letter, in which they expressed willingness to go to Kherson on the condition that they would be adopted as military settlers, of which a company of rangers would be organized and lands with homes would be given to them in Russia. These were the signs of movement caused by the Russian proposal. Soon it found an echo outside the circle of “the exiles from Menorca”. Among the interested persons, the majority were Italians. In the summer of 1782 to Mocenigo addressed Frediano Quillici originally from Lucca that was without “means to support themselves and live honestly in his own country due to the vicissitudes of life”, offered to carry in Russia for another 5 or 6 of peasant families to acquaint their new homeland with cotton processing.

For this, he asked to allot the land, the houses in ownership to the newcomers Tuscans, to give subsidies to the road and provide them with the necessary tools in the production of cotton. Both requests were granted in July of the same year. These were the first reports of the first settlement of the Novorossiia Territory with the people came from Tuscany.¹² Labor migration of the Tuscans in Russia began even earlier, during the reign of Peter I.

With the start of construction of the new capital of Russia - St. Petersburg, the Italians were in great demand, especially who worked in different areas of the arts: architecture, painting, music and theater. Some of them came for a few years, and earning, came back home, while others remained in the country for a long time, but finally, also returned home. If at the beginning of the XVIII century, foreigners worked mainly in Moscow and St. Petersburg, at the end of XVIII - early XIX centuries the Italians served as the main architects in some Russian provinces.

Carlo Bartolomeo Rastrelli was born on 29 November 1675 in the family of a wealthy nobleman Francesco Rastrelli in Florence. Noting the inclination for art of his son, the father sent him to the art school of the Baroque sculpture master Giovan Battista Foggini, where Carlo got an excellent education. He was good at drawing, able to work in bronze, understood the artistic casting and jewelry, received architectural design skills, met with construction equipment and hydraulics, and mastered the art of theater painting. In the years 1698-1699 he lived and worked in Rome, but the orders weren't, and he returned to Florence. Married a Spanish noblewoman, he went to Paris with her. In 1700 there was born their son Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, the future famous Russian architect. Working at the court of Louis XIV in 1707 on a tomb of the Marquis de Pompon the sculptor received the title of Count.¹³

In 1715, Peter I invited the Italian sculptor and architect to serve in Russia. Carlo took the invitation and signed a contract with I. Lefort, an agent of Peter I that he must serve the Russian Tsar: found guns, create statues, build houses, and invent different machinery for theater. At the end of March 1716 Rastrelli's family came to the banks of the Neva. Peter I gave the commandment that the newcomers "do not lose time in vain and have not lived in vain", and so Carlo Bartolomeo and his son Francesco Bartolomeo started to work almost for the next day.¹⁴

The first sculptural work done by Carlo Rastrelli in Russia became a bust of Alexander Menshikov (1716-1717 years, Bronze, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg). The next sculptural works, executed by Rastrelli in St. Petersburg, became the bronze figures on the motives of different fables of Aesop; they were placed on the left bank of the Neva River and were later donated by Catherine II to the Count Ostermann and Betskoy, who ordered to recast them; thus, they were destroyed. From the sculptures of Rastrelli there is preserved the bronze bust of Peter I, is stored in the State Hermitage; the statue of Peter I on horseback is in the square before the Engineers' Castle; "Anna Ivanovna with a blackamoor boy", the bronze statue of the Empress, accompanied by the page is in the State Russian Museum. The head of Peter I on the equestrian statue of Ferdinand II Medici, performed by the sculptor, is at the Liechtenstein Museum in Vienna.

From the works not remained up today there was a famous bronze bust of S.L. Bukhvostov founded by Rastrelli by order of Peter I, and there were also lead statues adorning the alleys and fountains of Peterhof and the Summer Gardens. Amusement fountain "Dubok" was restored in 1952 by the original metal preserved twig. From 1716 Carlo Rastrelli participated as an architect in the projecting of the Strelna Palace for Peter I., they started digging canals and planting trees in the park under his leadership, but four months later the architect Jean-Baptiste Leblon arrived in Russia, and the subsequent works were carried out without the participation of Rastrelli. With the work of Rastrelli there relate the formation and development of secular sculpture in Russia, the emergence of new types of sculpture in Russian art: the equestrian statue, the sculptural group and the portrait bust. He died on 18 November 1744 in St. Petersburg; he hadn't any direct student-sculptor, however, the Russian apprentices worked with him, immediately adopted technical experiences.

The Rastrelli father's work in the construction of St. Petersburg was continued by his son, Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli. During 48 years of work in Russia Rastrelli-young created the magnificent palaces, mansions, religious buildings, including very affecting, bold architectural solutions, with their amplitudes: The Great Palace in Peterhof (1747 -1752), Convent Smolnij (1748 - 1754), Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo (1752 - 1757) and the grandest creation, the Winter Palace (1754-1762). It is one of the most interesting buildings in the Baroque style in the history of world architecture (the 10441 square meters, there are 1050 rooms, 1,886 doors, 1,945 windows, 117 stairs.

The reforms of Catherine II and its policy on the formation of new cities and the renovation of old also contributed to the arrival in Russia of foreigners of different professions. It is impossible not to note the significance of the architects of Tuscany. By 1792 Russia was divided into 42 Vicariates. On 27 December 1780 there was founded Simbirsk Vicariate with its center in the city of Simbirsk. The structure of the Simbirsk Vicariate consisted of 1529 settlements, including 13 cities, 9 suburbs, 18 settlements (sloboda), 551 villages and 938 hamlets. The total population was 760 773 people.

From 1784 under the Government of Simbirsk Vicariate it was established the position of the architect. Ivan Petrovich Taskany (Giovanni Pietro Toscani) of Italian origins, the lieutenant of the Württemberg service held the post until 1793.¹⁵

If Giovanni Pietro Toscani was a descendant of the Florentine painter of Quattrocento Giovanni Toscani, author of the stigmata of San Francesco e miracle of San Nicola in Bari, it is unknown. It is also unknown if Toscani Pietro Di Mariotto, the Professor of Florentine Academy of Drawing, was ancestor of the chief architect of Simbirsk. It is known that Giovanni Toscani during his service designed residential and public buildings, led the development of urban areas in accordance with the approved plan of 1780. In one of the buildings preserved from the late eighteenth century, situated on the Spasskaya street, 18 in Ulyanovsk (Simbirsk before 1924), in 1786 the first public city school was organized. Some sources say that the building was being structured specifically for the school; other sources say that the building has passed from Tverdyshev landlords. In any case, we can confidently recognize the authorship of Giovanni Toscani, which included in the composition of the main facade decorative elements that were inherent in the Tuscan architecture of that period. Another talented Tuscan architect Alexander Digby was invited to work in the Caucasian Vicariate. He came to Astrakhan in 1786 and served until 1803.¹⁶ He formed the basis of the nature of architecture in Astrakhan - comforting atmosphere with elegance of the late classicism and the southern flavor. In 1804, the architect wrote about himself as follows:

I am Italian by nationality and subject of His Majesty the King of Austria, I am 46 years old, and I am married, and have four children and wife's mother-widow... I had the honor to serve His Majesty the Emperor as an architect of the provincial city of Astrakhan from 1786 to 1803 years and in this period I carried out my duties with success, and with all the zeal...¹⁷ In 1793 the chief architect position of Tobolsk was covered by Barsanti.¹⁸ It also has information that in the years 1786-1788 the Governor of Tambov G. R. Derzhavin built the theater in the city, ordering from St. Petersburg the theatrical master and decorator Barsanti. Perhaps showing himself in the construction of the theater, he was recommended to Tobolsk as chief architect. The surname Barsanti has spread in Tuscany. One of the greatest engineers and inventors, the creator and builder of the first internal combustion engine Nicolò Barsanti (better known as Eugenio) was born in Pietrasanta on 12 October 1821. It would be interesting to know if these two extraordinary personalities were relatives or just homonyms.

In the nineteenth century, the number of Italians slowly but steadily continued to increase. Since 70-ies of the XIX century, the growth of the Italian group stopped, and at the same time, the Italians began to disperse in the Russian environment. There appeared double surnames, often drastically reducing the Italian part and many Italian surnames completely disappeared in mixed marriages.

Russians in Tuscany

The training tradition of Russian artists in Italy was established in the reign of Peter the Great Reformer, when in the year 1716 there were directed the brothers Ivan and Roman Nikitin. For three years they have mastered the language, traveled to Venice and Rome, studied in Florence at the professor of local Academy Tommaso Redi. In the second half of the XVIII century the boarders of the Academy were artists A.P. Losenko and P.I. Sokolov, sculptor F.I. Shubin. The state spent considerable capitals for such trips, called the board, and was interested in the fact that they should be spent for the intended purpose. Therefore, Russian boarders were under the constant supervision of Russian ambassadors and specially selected for this purpose the officials, obliging boarders regularly write detailed reports to their homeland.

After the revolutionary events of the XVIII century during the time of the Napoleonic wars Institute of "boarding-school" at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts has been canceled. However, there are lists of students of different schools and also notes of Russian students in the historical archive of the Academy of Arts in Florence. For example, Nicola Raika 18-year-old arrived from St. Petersburg was under a progressive number 23, he was accepted at the School of Architecture in December 1812. He lived in Florence at the Piazza del Duomo, 83. In the particulars of his father it is written "Defunto".¹⁹ From the above-mentioned data it can be assumed that Nicola was the son of serfs, he had a talent for drawing, and the landlord sent him to study in Florence, paying his tuition and living expenses, in order to have his own professional architect in the estate after his return from Italy. The surname Raika isn't widespread in Russia. Perhaps Nicola was originally from the Raikovo village in the Governorate of Tver, and his surname came from the name of the village. At the present time the surname Raika can be found in the United States and Germany. Much more information is known about the Russian painter, who as an adult became a member of the Florence Academy of Fine Arts.

Orest Kiprensky was born on 13 March 1783 in farmstead Nezhinskaya next to the Kopor'e village in the Governorate of St. Petersburg. His father, Adam Schwalbe, was a serf of Brigadier A. S. Dyakov. He noticed at 5-year-old Orest outstanding artistic ability, gave him a buyout and in 1788 identified him in the Imperial Academy of Arts. Surname Kiprensky is believed to have gone by the nickname Koporsky, given from the place of his birth and baptism. His teachers were famous, illustrious masters of historical and portrait genre: first mentor – K.I. Golovachevsky, following teacher – G.I. Ugryumov, and the French painter G. F. Doyen.

Orest Kiprensky could go to Italy only in 1816, received the board from the Empress Elizabeth Alekseevna. By this time he had already become a venerable painter, fulfilled portraits of many Russian public figures and well-known persons. Among them there were the Countess E.P. Rostopchina, the Earl D.I. Khvostov, the actor A.I. Dmitrievsky and many others. In Florence Kiprensky received public recognition and was awarded the highest honor - the first proposal of the Russian artist to paint a self-portrait for the Uffizi Gallery, which was decorated with the image of Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens and many other luminaries. The Kiprensky portraits are characterized according to his contemporaries, not only of similarities, but also of right and agreeable collaring.²⁰ He died in 1836 due to severe pneumonia and was buried in Rome, in the church of Sant'Andrea delle Frate, there is also a monument “in onore e in memoria di Orest Kiprenskij, tra i più famosi artisti russi...”

The article “Russian necropolis in Florence”, comprised by Michael Talalay, modern St. Petersburg historian and researcher of the Russian presence in Italy, can tell about how many Russians had been living at that time in Tuscany. According to the data collected in the article, it is easy enough to determine that in Tuscany at the time primarily representatives of the Russian nobility and merchant class inhabited, who attempted in the healing climate of Central Italy to recover from pulmonary diseases: in the first half of the XIX century Florence and Pisa were considered a good health resort. At the turn of XIX-XX centuries, many Russian retired officials and the military, settled down in Florence, as it evidenced by the published list.²¹

However, also peasants who remained with the noble families, even after the abolition of the right of serfdom lived in Italy with their masters. Efrosinia Kirillovna Lopatina, born in 1821 in the village of Novaya Batan of Kozelsky Uezd, worked as a nanny at the family of the landowner Rakhmanov arrived from the Governorate of Chernigov. Presumably, Larisa Andreevna Smirnova, the wife of the Decembrist A.V. Poggio, has lived most part of her life in Florence. Alexander Poggio was deported to Siberia in 1839. He married Larisa in 1851, when she made the teacher at the Institute of Irkutsk. In 1856, after the amnesty, the family moved to Moscow together with the daughter Varvara, born in 1854. A little later they departed for Europe. The Alexander origins were from the city of Novara in Piedmont, despite the Poggio family settled down in Florence for climatic reasons. Throughout his life Alexander maintained friendship with the Decembrist Aleksandr Gercen since 1865 lived in Geneva, where he went enough often to visit the friend. However, the closest friend stayed the Decembrist Sergei Volkonsky, next to which on 6 June 1873 in the estate Voronki of the Governorate of Chernigov Alexander was buried. In the same year in Florence his only daughter Varvara married Vladimir Vysotsky who later became a general. Their life together was not long, Vladimir returned to Russia soon, and Varvara remained in Florence with their three daughters and her mother.²² Larisa Poggio outlived her husband by 25 years and died at the age of 65 in 1898.²³

In addition to the resort qualities, Italy has always attracted its artistic beauty, becoming from the last third of the XVIII century must-see destination of the Grand Tour - educational travel of the European gentleman. Many Russian writers, composers, musicians, artists stayed here while travelling through Europe. And charmed the extraordinary beauty of this Italian region, they created their masterpieces. Here Dostoevsky lived and admiring views of the city, wrote the novel “The Idiot”. From the gardens of Boboli one can see a magnificent villa that was rented by a Russian Maecenas N. F. Von Meck especially for the composer P.I. Tchaikovsky.

Today in via di San Leonardo, 64, one of the walls is decorated with a plaque which shows: “In Questa villa nel MDCCCLXXVIII dimorò e operò Pëtr Il'ich Čajkovskij, dall'immensa Pianura Russa alla Dolce Collina Toscana. Aphrodite d'entrambe nutrendo le sue armonie immortali”. The most famous Russian family and not only in Tuscany were the Demidov; they were one of the richest personalities in the Russian Empire. The progenitor of the dynasty was a state peasant Demid Grigoryevich Antufyev. He worked at the Tula arms factory, had three sons - Nikita, Semyon and Grigory. The most energetic and enterprising of them was the eldest son Nikita, who successfully continued the armory craft of his father. Samples guns made by Nikita Antufyev so pleased to Peter I, that he made him the supplier of weapons for the army.

In 1702, Antufiev Nikita became named Demidov at the same time of the transfer of the Nevyansk plant to him. Nikita Demidov and his son Akinfy gradually settled in the Urals, prospecting new ore deposits, accumulating capital and creating new plants. In 1727 there were already six plants in possession of the Demidov. The real dawn of the Demidov plants occurred in the late XVIII early XIX century. At that time already grandchildren and great grandsons of Nikita Demidov managed the factories.²⁴ Nikolay, the only son of Nikita Akinfiyevich Demidov, was a great grandson of the founder of the Ural metallurgical enterprises. He was born 9 November 1773 in the village Chirkovitsy of Yamburgsky Uezd in the Governorate of St. Petersburg, where later a monument was erected in his honor. When he was one year old his parents assigned him as a corporal of the Preobrazhensky Regiment. From his father he inherited the 8 plants, and with them 11 550 serfs. At sixteen, he served as adjutant under Prince G. A. Potemkin, at eighteen he was already a lieutenant-colonel, at court the court of the Empress.

At his own expense he built a frigate for the Black Sea Fleet, and at the same time continued the extractive industry business of his ancestors. There are indications that in 1810 N.N. Demidov held the ambassadorship in Florence. However, the official documents show that in 1810 in the position of consul general in Tuscany served Dmitry Nikolayevich Narantsy (Demetrio Naranci).²⁵ And until 1815, the General Consulate was in Livorno, not in Florence. From 1816, the Minister Plenipotentiary in Florence was Major-General Nikolay Fyodorovich Khitrov, and as his assistant served the Valet de chambre Aleksandr Obrezkov.²⁶ Taking into account all available information about the life of Nikolay Demidov, it becomes clear that he settled in Florence in 1822 to improve his health and not on service. S. Nechayev writes in his book: In those years, some rich Russian family (Khitrovo, Buturlin, and Orlov) lived in Florence, but keep in the house the whole theatre company was possible only to N. N. Demidov. Twice a week, he invited the Russian aristocrats lived in Tuscany to see French shows even when he was seriously ill and paralyzed “transported from room to room on chairs with the wheels”.²⁷ In the nineteenth century Demidov began to deal with the extraction of gold and platinum. Their wealth grew steadily, with an increase of well-being also grew chapter of charitable spending. Nikolay Demidov founded and maintained until the end of his life a pharmacy, shelter for elderly, free primary school for 160 boys from poor families. To don't cease to exist the school even after his death, he gave to the city's authority for rent two adjoining wings to Serristori Palace on condition that the rent would be used for the maintenance of the school. He died in 1828, leaving one of the richest art galleries in the world.

The real patron of the arts became Anatoly Demidov, the son of Nikolay. Arriving with his father in Florence, he was very attached to it. Gradually he developed the marshland that his father acquired from the monks of Holy Cross, outside the city near the Church of San Donato in Polverosa. The construction of the magnificent villa designed by the architect Giovanni Battista Silvestri began in 1822 and was finished in the year 1831, under the guide of Anatoly, which received at that time from the Grand Duke Leopold II the title of Prince of San Donato. Anatoly Demidov was a customer of the famous painting “The Last Days of Pompeii”, created in 1833 by Karl Bryullov and awarded huge success in Italy and later exhibited in the Louvre Museum. In 1836 Anatoly with his brother Paul created the silk factory, which was to provide employment to the poor Florentines. In 1837 he equipped at his own expense the expedition to southern Russia. In that remarkable for its important results expedition 22 persons took part, including some outstanding scientists and artists, headed by Le Play, the famous professor of the Mines Paris Tech. He gave the money to travel to Russia and Tuscany to the French artist M. Durand, and then in 1839 he published in Paris the album of views entitled “Voyage pittoresque et archéologique en Russie”.²⁸ Thanks to Anatoly in Florence there appeared a monument to his father.

The monument, ordered to the Italian sculptor Lorenzo Bartolini soon after the death of Nikolay Nikitich, for a long time was at the Villa San Donato, and in 1871 was installed in the square next to the Palazzo Serristori, which also bears the name of Demidov. Under the glass canopy the majestic marble monument powerfully evident, the central group is raised on a pedestal, portrays Nikolay Demidov in the toga of a Roman senator, embosoming his son. The female figure, symbolizing gratitude of the residents of Florence, offers him a laurel wreath. The four statues in the corners symbolize Nature, Art, Charity, and Siberia - the latter holds a god of wealth Ploutos in her hands, hinting at the origin of the great fortune of the family. About what it is also evidenced by the inscription on the monument: “Perchè il popolo di San Niccolò avesse ognora dinanzi memoria viva del commendatore Niccolò Demidoff indefesso benefattore munifico il figlio principe Anatolio al comune di Firenze questo monumento dono MDCCCLXX”.

Notes

1. Khozhdeniye na Florentysky sobor, pp. 466-487.
2. Zonova, Rossiya i Italiya: istoriya diplomaticheskikh otnosheny.
3. Documents that are preserved in the State Archives in Florence [...] regarding the ancient Muscovy (Russia) [...] With Russian translation by Count Michele Boutourlin, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924028421943;view=1up;seq=1> (accessed October 18, 2016)
4. Chertkov, Opisaniye posolstva, otpravlennoye v 1659 godu ot tsarya Alekseye Mikhaylovicha k Ferdinandu II velikomu Gertsogu Toskanskomu.
5. Ibid., pp. 1-2
6. Reutenfels, Skazaniya svetleyshemu gertsogu Toskanskomu Kozme Tretyemu o Moskovii.
7. Makushev, Monumenta Historica. Slavorum Meridionalium. Vicinorumque Populorum e tabularis et bibliothecis italicis depromta.
8. Di Salvo, Villani, Mazzei and others wrote about Francesco Guasconi.
9. Zonova, Rossiya i Italiya, cit.
10. Villani, Ambasciatori russi a Livorno e rapporti tra Moscovia e Toscana nel XVII secolo.
11. Mesyatseslov s rospisyu chinovnykh osob v gosudarstve, na leto ot Rozhdestva Khristova 1778....1786.
12. Italiyskiye kolonii na Yuge Rossii, <http://www.lavita-odessita.com/italia2.html> (accessed October 10, 2016)
13. Dmitriyenko, Kuznetsova, Petrova, Fedorova, 50 kratkikh biografy masterov russkogo iskusstva.
14. Nechayev, Russkaya Italiya, p. 11.
15. Mesyatseslov s rospisyu chinovnykh osob v gosudarstve, na leto ot Rozhdestva Khristova 1784, p. 381
16. Mesyatseslov s rospisyu chinovnykh osob v gosudarstve, na leto ot Rozhdestva Khristova 1794, p. 377
17. Tarkova, Italiyskiy sled v Astrakhani: vek Prosveshcheniya, <http://radmila-tarkova.livejournal.com/1024.html> (accessed October 10, 2016)
18. Mesyatseslov s rospisyu chinovnykh osob v gosudarstve, na leto ot Rozhdestva Khristova 1793, p. 332
19. Ruolo degli iscritti all'Accademia di Belle Arti, 1812-1940, Historical Archives of the Academy of Arts in Florence.
20. Polovtsov, Russkiy biograficheskiy slovar, T. 8.
21. Talalay, Rossyskiy nekropol vo Florentsii.
22. Rumyantsev, Podzhio (Smirnova) Larisa Andreyevna, http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_p/podzhio_la.html (accessed October 10, 2016)
23. Talalay, Rossyskiy nekropol vo Florentsii, cit.
24. Olegas, Puteshestviya po Uralu, <http://triptotheurals.ru/2014/10/demidovskie-zavodi-na-urale.html> (accessed October 10, 2016)
25. Mesyatseslov s rospisyu chinovnykh osob v gosudarstve, na leto ot Rozhdestva Khristova 1810, p. 149
26. Mesyatseslov s rospisyu chinovnykh osob v gosudarstve, na leto ot Rozhdestva Khristova 1816, p. 253
27. Nechayev, Russkaya Italiya, cit., p. 67.
28. Polovtsov, Russkiy biograficheskiy slovar, T. 6, p. 211-213.

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