

New Europe College Yearbook
Ștefan Odobleja Program
2021-2022



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This volume was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for the Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS/CCCDI – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-BSO-2016-0003, within PNCD III

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ISSN 1584-0298

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IDENTITY, SECRECY, AND WAR: THE LETTERS OF IVAN III OF MOSCOW TO HIS DAUGHTER, ELENA OF LITHUANIA

Abstract

This paper addresses the public Orthodox identity of the Muscovite ruling family during the late 15th century, by focusing on the case of Elena Ivanovna (1474/6–1513), daughter of Ivan III of Moscow and wife of Alexander Jagiellon of Lithuania. Through an analysis of the diplomatic correspondence between the grand prince of Moscow and his daughter, it discusses the implications Elena's religious identity had both on an individual level and for the image of the Muscovite dynastic identity.

Keywords: Ivan III of Moscow, Elena of Lithuania, Muscovite–Lithuanian Wars, religious identity.

The late 15th century emergent definitions of Muscovite dynastic identity incorporated this idea of the embodiment of the true Orthodox tradition. When describing events concerning the reign of Ivan III of Moscow (1462–1505), the chroniclers developed extensive arguments of political succession or justifications of military actions entrenched in the grand prince's role as defender of the faith. Such definitions are visible in discussions concerning dynastic marriages, in this particular case the marriage of Elena Ivanovna (1474/6–1513), Ivan's eldest daughter from Sof'ia Paleolog, to Alexander Jagiellon, grand prince of Lithuania. From a diplomatic perspective, this event was meant to complement a peace treaty. However, due to Ivan's requests regarding his daughter's Orthodox identity at the Latin Lithuanian court, turned into a permanent source of tension between the two neighboring polities. When negotiations started, in 1494, Ivan's main request from Alexander was to not pressure Elena to convert to the Roman faith.¹ She was supposed to remain Orthodox and

profess her faith publicly. Since the marriage, in 1495, until his death (in 1505), Ivan kept sending her instructions through letters, envoys, and gifts, with the explicit intention of consolidating her position as an Orthodox patron. The main purpose is considered to have been political. Elena was supposed to gather around her possible supporters of Ivan's policies and act as her father's agent, by providing him with valuable information from the Lithuanian court. Ivan envisioned Elena's public identity as the rallying point for the Orthodox nobility of Western Rus', who had previously been under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Moscow-based metropolitan.

Elena's case offers a unique perspective into the Orthodox self-identification of the Muscovite ruling family. It is one of the rare instances when this identity goes beyond the formulaic explanations offered by chronicle writing, where usually the good Orthodox Muscovites fight the bad Pagan Mongols. This was an identity that was supposed to be actively asserted outside an Orthodox community. It was meant to transform Elena into a patron of Orthodox believers in Lithuania and a symbol of Ivan's legitimate rulership over all the Rus' lands. Thus, the scope of this article is twofold, addressing Elena's individual religious identity and the contribution this identity was supposed to have to the definitions of Muscovite dynastic power. The analysis will focus on the diplomatic correspondence between Muscovy and Lithuania, as kept in the Russian archives and published in collections of documents beginning in the 19th century.² Elena's identity was discussed in letters Ivan sent directly to her, in separate letters to Alexander reminding him of the terms of the marriage, and in peace negotiations with Lithuania and European political figures aiming to mediate peace between the two polities. Two separate stages can be identified. After the marriage until 1500 most of Ivan's instructions were directly for Elena and usually comprised performative advice, on how to act, what to say, on what topics to intervene. After 1500, when Ivan started a new war, the instructions regarding Elena's identity were more often used as political arguments in negotiations and better reflected the Muscovite dynastic image.

Although the article promises to discuss the identity of an elite Muscovite woman, what it archives is an analysis of her father's expectations. This approach reflects the information available in the sources. The diplomatic correspondence carefully records Ivan's side of the conversation, while Elena's rare answers show much less agency. I aim to follow the development of Elena's personal religious identity, according to Ivan's instructions, in three stages, by identifying: (1) the elements which

were assumed to contribute to fashioning her Orthodox identity, (2) how was this identity supposed to be asserted and acknowledged publicly and (3) how was she supposed to navigate opposition. The instructions she received were not limited to the question of religious identity. They also offer glimpses of the political role she was expected to play and of the Muscovite diplomatic practices. Ivan asked for information on the activities of the Lithuanian Court, kept Elena informed of his negotiations with Alexander, and urged her to intervene on his behalf. She was told how to approach the discussions with her husband, which part of her father's messages to disclose, and even how to send secret letters back to Moscow.

From a dynastic perspective, this identity was closely related to Ivan's claims, namely defender of the Orthodox faith and "grand prince of all Rus'". These titles referred not only to Muscovy but to all the former territories of Kyivan Rus' under Lithuanian rule. It meant that Ivan could assert an active political role in relation to the Orthodox community living under Lithuanian suzerainty. Thus, Elena's faith was reflecting her father's patrimonial claims. At the same time, the instructions were just not passive explanations in support of a dynastic ideology but were meant to have an active use, balancing the religious identity with the realities of everyday life at a Latin court. The letters from Ivan focused more on performative aspects of Elena's identity, intended to be seen and acknowledged, rather than on theological justifications. As a result, her identity was represented only in relation to her Muscovite family, and no efforts were directed towards a genuine integration at the Lithuanian court.

Background

We know little about Elena prior to the marriage negotiations.³ The late 15th-century Muscovite chronicles recorded the birth of two daughters of Ivan III named Elena, the first one on 18 April 1474, and the second on 19 May 1476.⁴ Although there have been debates on which of them is the one who reached adulthood, usually the second one is considered to have become the grand princess of Lithuania.⁵ No direct information regarding her upbringing or education has reached us. Based on the scarce information we have regarding the lives of elite Muscovite women, one might speculate that she was raised together with her sisters and brothers in the separate living quarters for women, later known as the *terem*, and received an education focused on religion and household management.⁶

She might have witnessed the public activities of her mother, the Byzantine prince Sof'ia Paleolog, who was receiving foreign envoys, such as the Venetian Ambrogio Contarini, or ambassadors discussing marriage plans.⁷

When negotiating the 1494 peace treaty with Lithuania, the question of a dynastic marriage arose. During the initial visit of the Lithuanian embassy, between 17 January and 12 February 1494, the largest part of the negotiations revolved around Ivan's territorial claims. When the issue was settled, a dynastic union was proposed. The only request the documents mention on Ivan's part was for Elena to keep her Orthodox faith and he asked for a letter signed by Alexander, promising not to force Elena to convert to the Latin faith. The envoys agreed and an engagement by proxy took place in Moscow, with one of the envoys replacing Alexander. In October the final marriage treaty was concluded.⁸ In January 1495 Alexander's emissaries arrived to take the bride to Vilnius. Elena left her home accompanied by a large retinue of Muscovite noblemen and their wives, a considerable dowry, and a detailed plan on how the ceremonies should take place. Ivan wanted this wedding to be a completely Orthodox one, to take place in an Orthodox cathedral, and to be performed by Orthodox clergy. Elena was expected to dress like and follow all the customs of a Muscovite bride, and even the necessary garments for Alexander were provided. In Vilnius, however, Ivan's plans were not followed. This led to a mixed ceremony performed by both a Latin bishop, for Alexander, and an Orthodox priest, for Elena. After the ceremonies, most of the Muscovites were sent back to Ivan.⁹

The mixed ceremony was just the first sign that Alexander would not agree to Ivan's interference in the Lithuanian court's life. This prompted a series of letters from Ivan to both his daughter and his son-in-law restraining his requests. Their content with regard to Elena remained rather similar for the first four years. The situation changed in 1499 when Ivan was informed that both Elena and the Orthodox population from Lithuania were being pressured to convert. Arguing that it was his duty to defend the faith, Ivan attacked Lithuania in 1500.¹⁰ Elena found herself in a difficult situation, having to navigate her duties as Alexander's wife and her father's expectations.¹¹

Ivan's accusations turned into a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy in 1501. In an attempt to find allies against Muscovite aggression, Alexander sent an embassy to Pope Alexander IV. The pope asked for Elena's conversion, but the sources do not indicate whether Alexander acted on this request. In the same year, however, he was also elected king of Poland, after the

death of his brother, John I Albert. The crowning ceremony took place on 12 December 1501 and the Orthodox Elena could not be crowned together with her husband. In 1505 Ivan died but his son and successor, Vasiliï III, continued his father's policy towards Lithuania and Elena. Shortly after, in 1506, Alexander also died and the sources do not mention Elena as present at the funeral. The couple had no children. She was never permitted to return to Moscow and died in 1513. She was buried in the Orthodox Church of the Most Pure Mother of God in Vilnius, the same church where she was prepared alone to become the wife of the grand prince of Lithuania upon her arrival.¹²

The Muscovite- Lithuanian Diplomatic Correspondence

The letters between Ivan and Elena can be described as both diplomatic and personal correspondence. They were kept as part of the diplomatic records, together with all other discussions with the Lithuanian political power. The envoys carrying letters for Elena would, most often, have separate messages for Alexander or were in charge of conducting negotiations on Ivan's behalf. There were some instances when the envoys reached Vilnius expressly for Elena, but most often such a journey would be made only if there was a strong motivation behind it.¹³ But, at the same time, these were the only opportunities to talk (even with the help of mediators) to a daughter living in another kingdom. Some traces of parental care, such as questions about her health, everyday life, or gifts, offer some glimpses of family life. In this sense, the letters to Elena could be read together with the letters of Vasiliï III to his wife, Elena Glinskaia, as personal correspondence of the Muscovite grand princes.¹⁴

The perception of diplomatic encounters most likely changed during Ivan's reign, as a comprehensive Muscovite archive of diplomatic contacts with Lithuania beginning in 1487 (only 8 years before Elena's marriage) has survived to these days.¹⁵ Previously, most of the information regarding embassies, political or military activity, and negotiations would be recorded in chronicles. The structure of the entries a far more comprehensive than simply the letters exchanged. Under the date of a letter, one finds information on which envoys left and when, the text of the letters, how the letters or message were delivered, possible discussions between the envoys and the recipient, and even the answer received. At some points, the exchange of messages can have narrative interpolations, detailing events

connected to the debated topics. For example, the marriage negotiations contain separate entries for discussions taking place on separate days and a description of how Elena left Moscow. The exchange of letters was put into a context and, in the case of negotiations extended over a longer period of time, it recorded several meetings and events.

The messages were mediated through the envoys. Ivan's instructions were sent either as letters or as messages delivered orally by the emissaries when discussing with Elena, Alexander, or Alexander's own envoys. The texts largely document the means by which the message was transmitted, either in direct speech or by introducing the content of the letter. Some of Elena's answers were also delivered by the Muscovite envoys, but the degree to which the records of discussions documented her exact words can be debated.¹⁶ The audience of these letters does not seem to exceed the court of the grand prince. As Lur'e pointed out, not even the extensive letters Elena sent in 1503 seem to have been available outside the family circle.¹⁷ Language did not seem to be a hindrance in this exchange of letters. Just as Orthodoxy was widespread within Lithuania, so was the Ruthenian language at the court. Although at the turn of the 16th century several languages were in use in Lithuanian diplomatic practice, Ruthenian remained dominant.¹⁸ The diplomatic exchanges did not need the mediation of translators.

Within the 10 years between the marriage and his death, Ivan strived to have his requests regarding Elena carried out. Despite the extensive extant correspondence (43 entries varying in length from one page to over 20 pages, included in the *SIRIO* alone for the period January 1495 to April 1505), Ivan's requests sometimes strike as repetitive. The moment which offers a change in his discourse was the 1500-1503 war. Before 1500, his requests and instructions were mostly directed towards Elena herself and addressed religious issues and the way in which she was expected to act. After 1500, Elena and her identity became a much better-defined argument exploited in political negotiations, by transforming her into the representative of the entire Orthodox community in Lithuania.

Elements of a Personal Orthodox Identity

Ivan set up his expectations regarding Elena's identity beginning with the marriage negotiations. His requests remained largely the same afterward and were energetically reinforced through letters, mostly during the first

years after the marriage. These requests can largely be subsumed to three main issues: Elena should keep her Greek faith, an Orthodox church should be built for her at the court, and she should be given a retinue comprising of local Orthodox nobility. Sometimes the letters were accompanied by gifts, such as books, adding up to the considerable amount of objects Elena brought with her as part of her dowry. When connected to Ivan's instructions and expectations, these objects can be interpreted as a means of reinforcing a Muscovite cultural identity, as part of her religious heritage.

Elena's religious identity was negotiated for almost one year. The main guarantee for the enforcement of Ivan's terms was a letter with Alexander's seal. The Lithuanian attempt to specify that Elena could convert of her own free will was promptly rejected.¹⁹ Reminders regarding the issue left Moscow even while the bride was still on her way to Vilnius. In February 1495, Ivan sent Vasilii Romodanovskii and his wife to serve Elena, together with a letter restating his requests concerning the marriage, in a shorter form. Elena was told to remember her father's instructions regarding the Greek faith and the "other issues" without further details.²⁰

These instructions did not receive many explanations even though they were a constant element of diplomatic correspondence. When addressed to Alexander, the letters reminded him of his promises, when addressed to Elena, her duties as a daughter of the grand prince of Moscow were emphasized. The religious issue was raised by Ivan while discussing with Alexander's envoys two months after the events, in May 1495. Ivan pointed out that none of his requests were met. The wedding ceremony was not performed by the metropolitan Makarii, no church was built at the court, and his boyars were sent back, while Elena was surrounded by Alexander's people, all following the Roman faith.²¹ In a similar letter dated August 1495 Ivan complained that the ceremony was not performed in an Orthodox fashion, that Alexander sent back to Moscow a large part of Elena's retinue, and delayed the building of an Orthodox chapel at the court. At the same time, Elena was once more advised to keep her faith.²²

Faith alone, however, was not enough. According to Ivan's instructions, Elena was supposed to present herself as a Muscovite princess, as her considerable dowry suggested. The dowry contained a complete set of objects necessary for a Muscovite-style wedding, such as garments for both bride and groom, jewelry, furs, objects used for the wedding bed and the following ritual baths, and a significant number of religious objects, crosses, and icons.²³ Afterward, the gifts sent to Vilnius decreased considerably. A letter from March 1495 mentioned a sable fur sent by

Sof'ia, and gold coins known as *korabelnik*, sent by her father.²⁴ Envoys reaching Vilnius in November 1497 brought her thirteen books from Ivan. Unfortunately, the letters did not discuss the books in detail, but it could be assumed that they probably had religious content.²⁵ In May 1503 Ivan wrote to her about Sof'ia's death and sent her a golden cross with wood from the Holy Cross and relics, from her mother, and three black sable furs as a gift from him.²⁶

All the objects Elena received and was expected to use became a mark of her cultural identity. While Ivan was actively portraying himself as a defender of the Orthodox faith, his instructions to Elena reveal his understanding of her identity as primarily connected to her Muscovite ancestry, rather than to her new role as the grand princess of Lithuania. The Orthodox faith and the Muscovite cultural identity go together in forming Elena's relational identity not as a wife, but rather as a daughter. The gifts she received became an act meant to reinforce this identity and advance Ivan's political interests.

Already since leaving Moscow, Elena was forbidden by her father to enter Latin churches.²⁷ She was expected to pray in the already existing Orthodox church in Vilnius until Alexander kept his part of the bargain and built her a chapel at the court. However, the church issue became a constant debate in the correspondence, as a more and more impatient Ivan kept asking for his demands to be met. In a letter from March 1496, Alexander argued that a new church was not necessary, as there were Orthodox churches all over his kingdom, in all the towns Elena would visit, and she was free to pray in any of them.²⁸ Over time, this issue was connected to the importance of having Orthodox priests in Elena's retinue. Even previous disputes regarding ecclesiastical jurisdiction between the Moscow-based metropolitan of all Rus' and the Lithuanian-based metropolitan of Kyiv were forgotten in favor of asserting a public religious identity. Ivan had insisted that the metropolitan Makarii of Kyiv should perform the marriage ceremony. Since this proposal was rejected, the priest Foma, who had come with the princess from Moscow, became the center of Ivan's requests. Several letters addressed to members of Elena's retinue mention him and the need of having an Orthodox priest with the princess.²⁹

The political goals of this marriage could be reached only if Elena was to become a patron of Orthodoxy and an active link between her father and the Lithuanian nobility. The issue of Elena's retinue, which Ivan envisioned as comprising both Muscovite and Orthodox Lithuanian

nobility, would bridge the political and religious aims. In the instructions for the envoys sent to Vilnius in August 1495 Ivan argued that when it would be time to attend church service, the Latin members of the retinue would go to their own Latin churches while Elena would be left to travel alone, to a church far away from the court.³⁰ These unfulfilled promises soon became a source of tension between father and daughter. In a letter from November 1497, he expressed his discontent regarding Elena's lack of interest in his instructions. Since she had failed to keep him informed and had not described the situation properly, he had to conclude that Alexander did not keep his word and no local Orthodox nobility was assigned to her service. A short answer was also recorded, where Elena tried to defend herself by saying she discuss the issue with her husband. The same entry contained a letter from Sofi'a Paleolog, who was asking for news about her health and inquired about a possible pregnancy.³¹

Considering the importance Elena's faith had in the negotiations and the subsequent correspondence, the lack of theological arguments becomes surprising. There are no discussions regarding why the confessions professed by the Muscovites and the Lithuanians were different, no theological justifications for Ivan's instructions, or debates on what exactly was "wrong" with the Roman faith. The end of the 15th century was marked by the heresy of the "Judaizers", considered to have appeared in Novgorod and later spread to Moscow. According to their accusers, Orthodox priests had been converted to Judaism by a certain Jew from Kyiv arriving in Novgorod in 1470 with the prince Mikhail Olel'kovich.³² The movement prompted several local church councils and led to severe punishment for those considered heretics, and even to the first complete translation of the Bible into Slavonic.³³ Although considered to have originated in the Lithuanian-ruled Kyiv, the letters exchanged between Moscow and Vilnius do not indicate that the concerns regarding Elena's faith were connected to any contemporary theological debates, neither anti-heretic nor anti-Latin. In Lithuania, late 15th century discussions regarding the religious differences between the Latin and Greek rites revolved around papal primacy, the doctrine of the *filioque* (addition to the Creed, stating that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son), or the practice of baptism through immersion.³⁴ None of these topics were present in Ivan's letters. At the same time, there is no evidence that any Muscovite prominent religious figure (such as the metropolitan or a monk or priest) was involved in writing these instructions. Certainly, the possibility should still be considered, but any such discussions were not

disclosed in Ivan's letters. Given the political implications this marriage had, it is safe to assume this is the closest we can get to how a grand prince of Moscow actually envisioned a public Orthodox identity.

Only on one occasion, the instructions Ivan sent were clearly connected to possible dangers to Elena's immortal soul, rather than to elements meant to construct a publicly asserted identity. This happened when conversion actually seemed possible. In May 1499, Ivan received a letter from Boris Mikhailovich, prince of Viazma, stating that Alexander was pressuring Elena to convert to the "cursed Latin faith" (*v" latynskuiu prokliatuiu věry*) and she refuses out of loyalty to her father.³⁵ Ivan immediately sent an envoy to Elena, to find out whether these accusations were true. The letter explained the danger she faced and what was expected of her, as she herself should remember how she was advised by her father. She should resist any conversion attempt and if necessary, suffer for her faith with blood and even until death, as the soul was from God and this kind of disgrace had never been their way and it would never be. Finally, he asked whether all these accusations concerning her husband were true. A letter from Sof'ia was also sent, following closely the structure and the requests already included in Ivan's letter.³⁶ In return, an answer from Alexander arrived, claiming Elena was unwell and thus unable to receive the envoy.³⁷ Later, in another letter from December 1499, Ivan complained she did not answer. He restated the danger to her soul conversion would pose, together with her duty to obey the parental command.³⁸ The possible pressure to convert Elena to the Latin faith became one of the main grounds for the 1500 military campaign launched by Ivan.

How to Assert a Religious Identity Publicly

The public assertion of Elena's religious identity was mostly supposed to be ceremonial and performative. She was expected to be seen in public as a patron of Orthodoxy, to attend religious services and surround herself with Muscovite and Orthodox Lithuanian nobility, and avoid any association with the Latin faith. Later, her identity became intertwined with the one of the Orthodox community, as Ivan developed accusations of religious persecution as the reason for war.

When Elena left Moscow, in January 1495, she received her first direct instructions from Ivan. The text recorded only the ban on visiting Latin churches (using the word *bozhnitsy*, as opposed to *tserkvi*, used

for Orthodox churches). She could, however, enter Latin churches or monasteries once or twice, if she were curious, but no more. The instructions also took into consideration practical aspects of Elena's future life at a Latin court. If her mother-in-law was to ask Elena to accompany her to church, she was not supposed to refuse; instead, she could go as far as the church's entrance. The text continued by adding that many other instructions were offered by Ivan, on how to maintain her faith. Unfortunately, these were not recorded.³⁹

Considerable attention was paid to the manner in which the bride was to present herself on her way to Vilnius. Before meeting Alexander, the Orthodox residents of the disputed border territories were to see a large retinue of Muscovites, accompanying their future grand princess, who was to stop in the most important towns, to visit and pray at the Orthodox churches and monasteries there. The list of these places of worship had been provided by Ivan.⁴⁰ In Zvenigorod, they were to stop at the church of the Virgin Mary, in Mozhaisk at the church of Saint Nicholas, in Smolensk at the church of the Virgin Mary, in cathedral church of Vitebsk, and in Polotsk at the Saint Sophia Cathedral.⁴¹ After the wedding, the boyars had to send back to Moscow a detailed report of the events. The description started from Viazma, where they were greeted by the local prince. The report carefully recorded the places visited, how they were received, by whom, and any gifts offered or celebrations. The report contained elaborate descriptions of how the local clergy received her, especially on Lithuanian territory, and of the religious ceremonies she attended.⁴²

New arguments concerning Elena's identity were developed beginning with the 1499 letter from Boris Mikhailovich of Viazma. At this point, all direct instructions on how to behave or how to assert her individual identity were no longer of interest to Ivan. The previous unfulfilled requests and an assumed attempt to convert Elena served as a justification for war.⁴³ In a sense, this was the moment when she embodied the role of leader of the Orthodox community living in Lithuania. According to Ivan's claims, a certain priest from Smolensk (together with the bishop of Vilnius, in later letters) who had renounced the Orthodox faith was sent to Elena, to persuade her to do the same. In a similar fashion, the same message reached the Orthodox political elite of Lithuania, despite Alexander's promises.⁴⁴ Another element of change was the context of these arguments. Apart from some initial letters sent to Elena, asking for her confirmation of the events, and a letter after the 1503 peace negotiations, Elena's religious identity, and alleged persecution turned into an almost

exclusive political argument. It was employed mostly in negotiations with Alexander or in answers to the pleas for peace and unity coming from other European rulers.⁴⁵ As the military conflict progressed, vivid images of religious persecution were invoked: Latin churches were being built in Rus' towns, wives were separated from their husbands, children from their parents and people were forcibly converted.⁴⁶ The gradual transformation of this argument over time can actually be traced, from an interest in Elena's individual situation, in 1499, to the general religious persecutions, forcing Ivan to intervene in his capacity as a defender of the Orthodox faith, after 1500.

Despite the lack of any evidence such persecution actually took place, Ivan turned the argument into his justification for breaching the 1494 peace treaty and accepting the allegiance of local princes under Alexander's rule.⁴⁷ Several events, such as the papal letters asking for Elena's conversion, might have been the basis of these accusations. However, no indications have been found that actual persecution took place. In 1498, the bishop of Smolensk sent a letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople asking for an opinion on the Union of Florence. In the same year he became metropolitan of Kyiv, but not even the confirmation from the Patriarch, in 1500, could convince the Muscovites of his Orthodox credentials and to stop the war.⁴⁸ Another famous letter was allegedly sent by the metropolitan Iosif of Kyiv to Pope Alexander VI in 1500, asking for the union of the Churches. The actual letter was lost and its content is known only from the Pope's interpretation of it. As Senyk pointed out, a careful analysis of the answer and of the political context indicates that the metropolitan was actually trying to obtain permission to build Orthodox churches in masonry (forbidden at that time in Lithuania), rather than a union.⁴⁹

During the negotiations from March-April 1503, Elena's situation, linked to the similar persecution of all Rus', remained central to the talks. At the request of her brother-in-law, the cardinal Fryderyk, Elena sent separate letters to her parents and brothers, urging them to conclude peace with Lithuania.⁵⁰ These letters received more scholarly attention for their extensive literary qualities, as they differ in content and length from other messages.⁵¹ She tried to convince her family that Ivan's claims were not based on facts and she extensively described how the situation affected her and her position. Elena wrote about the sadness the war caused her, of her husband's love and care for her, despite Ivan's constant demands, and explained how Alexander's family hoped that this marriage would secure peace, but it became a new reason for war.⁵² Elena's letters and

tears seemed to have little impact. Ivan showed a detailed knowledge of the letters Pope Alexander VI sent, concerning Elena's conversion, and could be convinced neither by his daughter's letter nor by Alexander's envoy addressing the issue directly, that no action was taken.⁵³ As part of the peace agreement, he wanted a new confirmation letter from Alexander, claiming he will not pressure Elena to convert. But this time, the letter was expected to have the seals of the archbishop of Krakow and of the bishop of Vilnius. Moreover, as Elena's mother-in-law was old, Ivan wanted Alexander to allocate his mother's possessions to his wife. Separately, he answered his daughter's pleas insisting on the reality of the persecution and accusing her of hiding the truth.⁵⁴ No answer from her brothers or mother was recorded.

How to Navigate Opposition and Diplomatic Secrecy

Elena's faith would concern not just Alexander, but his entire family. As the Jagellonians were one of the most powerful families of Central Europe, Ivan wanted to make sure they would attend the Orthodox wedding of his daughter. Elena was given information on how to behave around her mother-in-law, while the Muscovite boyars had to give details in their reports about the entire family. Elisabeth of Austria, Alexander's mother, and his brothers, the bishop (Frederick Jagiellon), the king of Hungary (Vladislaus Jagiellon), and Sigismund (the king of Poland) were expected to go to Vilnius for the wedding. But Ivan's fears turned out to be correct, as Alexander's mother arrived only after the ceremony.⁵⁵

During the first years after the marriage, Ivan seemed to hope his daughter would have a direct influence over Alexander's decisions. The correspondence with his daughter provides valuable insights into the manner in which Ivan actually envisioned this influence and his expectations. What is most striking about these letters is the extent of micromanagement (to put it in modern terms) and secrecy employed. He kept pointing out the issues Elena should bring up to her husband, from those concerning her faith to political decisions, and sometimes even offered the exact words she should say. Displeased with Alexander's decision to send back the Muscovite boyars after the wedding, in May 1495 Ivan wrote to Elena. The envoy used the pretext that word had reached Moscow that the grand princess was unwell. The letter, however, did not relate to that but rather dealt with the issue of her retinue. Firstly, Elena

was advised to speak to the envoys alone and to make sure no one read her messages to her father. Then, Ivan described the discussion he had with Alexander's envoy regarding her retinue and asked her to bring the matter up and outline all the promises made to Ivan. In case Alexander would not agree, Ivan's message should be delivered, namely that "(...) you did not marry a Latin, nor did he give his daughter to be converted to Latinism."⁵⁶ Even if Elena would not deliver the message herself, one might assume Alexander could read the letter and see his father-in-law's words. In May 1496, Ivan urged Elena to discuss with Alexander the question of authority over Kyiv, but as if it was her idea, not as coming from Ivan.⁵⁷

The letter from May 1495 opens up the question of the political expectations Ivan had from his daughter living at the Lithuanian court. In various letters, the separate instructions for the boyars delved into the manner in which communication should be ensured and who could be trusted. The grand princess was expected to wish to write „secret letters” (*gramota kakova tainaia*) to her father, and when that happened, the scribe Ivan Kotov was to be in charge of drafting the messages. Afterward, a list of four boyars was provided, to be presented to Elena as trustworthy. These four “trustworthy” boyars were to ensure the connection between Elena and Ivan after Vasilii Romodanvskii and Prokofii Skurat were to leave Lithuania.⁵⁸ Precautions were also taken when the envoys delivered messages aimed only at Elena's ears. They were instructed to speak to her alone, or with just one boyar in attendance. One might assume the boyar had to be from the “trustworthy” list.⁵⁹ Elena's presence at the Lithuanian court was perceived by Ivan as a diplomatic asset. At a time when diplomatic practice throughout Europe was starting to become institutionalized, Elena was expected to act almost as a permanent ambassador, providing valuable information that temporary envoys could not access.⁶⁰ As the one requesting the information was her father, she was also expected to act out of devotion to her family, a tie much more difficult to overcome than the changing loyalty of a subject. As Ivan put it in a letter from March 1497, he had sent her to Alexander in order to keep peace and good understanding between Muscovy and Lithuania.⁶¹

Elena seemed to be of the best politically informed Muscovite women of her time, at least from what the sources indicate. If she was to play an active role in her father's actions, she had to know what was going on. When Ivan's envoys reach Vilnius, in most cases separate letters were sent to her, detailing the negotiations with Alexander and Ivan's diplomatic intentions. Some instances of attempted mediation on her part were

recorded. A Lithuanian envoy reaching Moscow in July 1495 brought two letters from Elena, one for Ivan and one for Sofi'a, similar in content. She was asking about the health of her family and urged them to consider the issue the envoy would put before them, namely Alexander's request for help in a possible conflict with the Crimean Khan.⁶² Ivan answered, informing Elena that he had discussed with the Crimean envoys and told them of the treaty and friendship between Muscovy and Lithuania.⁶³

Before 1499, the messages for Elena regularly contained information on issues of interest to Ivan. He would detail his discussions with Alexander's envoys regarding her faith, the permissions for Muscovite envoys to pass through Lithuanian territory on their way to other polities, or the political alliances he was planning. For example, in a letter from May 1496, Ivan described to Elena his attempt to mediate a treaty between Alexander, the Crimean Khan, and Stephen of Moldavia. He continued by asking her about some rumors he was informed of, that Sigismund of Poland, Alexander's brother, would like to take Kyiv and some other towns from Lithuania under his authority. By pointing out the struggles with family members he himself faced, which Elena must have heard of or even remember, Ivan was asking whether the rumors were true. Separately, the boyars are instructed to find out from Elena which other foreign envoys reached the court of Vilnius.⁶⁴ Not even questions of internal administration were left out. In a letter from March 1498, Ivan informed Elena that he wrote to Alexander, asking him to grant his wife the lands traditionally held by the grand princesses of Lithuania, an issue he would bring up again in the 1503 negotiations.⁶⁵

Elena's position proved to be of value to Ivan on a matter where women's opinions seemed to be of interest. In May 1503, after Sofi'a Paleolog died, Ivan wrote to his daughter about a family issue. His sons and her brothers had reached the age of marriage and he would like to find a bride for Vasili, the eldest. Elena was asked to make inquiries regarding the daughters of Greek and Latin monarchs, their ages, and their mothers. The request was restated in a letter from November 1503.⁶⁶ Elena's findings were recorded on February 1504. A list of monarchs and their daughters was provided, including their ages, and information on whether the mothers are still alive. She had very little luck in finding an Orthodox princess and pointed out the difficulties in finding a Latin bride. Their Latin faith is so strong that they would not convert without a papal dispensation, a difficult task as they call them (those of Greek faith) non-Christians (*nekrestmi*).⁶⁷

Conclusions

The image of 15th and 16th century Muscovite grand princesses reaching us today is one highly idealized. They were mostly defined in religious terms, in their capacities as mothers and vessels of the future of the dynasty, or through their piety and saintly image.⁶⁸ This is due to the nature of the surviving sources, such as chronicles and religious writings. Thus, we know little of their public role, limited mostly to religious veneration. Elena, however, was different. Her portrait comes to us through the exchange of letters with her father, and later with her brother, the grand prince Vasilii III. The letters were not concerned with her gendered and ideal role as grand princess of Lithuania, but with very practical current political affairs. Although the letters contained some formulaic expressions (mostly connected to the obedience she owed her father, health and greetings), Ivan employed them as a means to his political ends. During the first five years after the marriage, Ivan constantly strived to influence her public image in Lithuania, sending instructions to Elena and to Alexander on practical and performative aspects of a public Orthodox identity. A possible answer to the repetitive nature of Ivan's requests regarding faith, the existence of a church at the court, and the retinue of local Orthodox nobility might have been Elena's refusal to comply with her father's demands.

Ivan's instructions also reveal a different side of the roles elite women were expected to play in diplomatic exchanges and political life. Although Elena appears to be regarded as a pawn in complicated political and military strategies, at the same time, she seems to be one of the best politically informed Riurikid women. One might assume that Ivan discussed political issues with his wife, Sofi'a Paleolog, but no surviving sources can prove such speculations. Elena, on the other hand, received information through letters and envoys on how the negotiations between the two sovereigns were going, what Ivan's intentions were, and what kind of news she was expected to send to Moscow. This information was offered to her not from a sort of respect for her position, opinion or agency, but because it was deemed necessary for her to play the role Ivan envisioned. The closest analogy with other Riurikid women would be the position of the mothers of incumbent princes, like Mariia Iaroslavna, Ivan's mother and Elena's grandmother. She has constantly mentioned in the chronicle formulations of the council the grand prince sought on various matters, together with his brothers, the metropolitan, the boyars, and the

court. Another example of a powerful woman in her own right was Anna Vasilievna, Ivan's sister and regent of Riazan for her underage son.⁶⁹ It should be pointed out that such authority does not seem to appear in the sources connected to Ivan's wives, either Maria of Tver or Sof'ia Paleolog. Thus, a woman's political power within the ruling family was connected with either seniority or regency.

Ivan's instructions do not go beyond his own interests. The religious issue was never placed on theological grounds but rather focused on performative aspects, such as visiting churches. The aspects of domestic life revolve around formulaic greeting messages, sometimes including Elena's brothers and sisters, and questions about health. The gifts sent to her, such as books, furs, or coins, were connected to her cultural Muscovite identity and diplomatic practices. Only one such gift seems to have had an impact beyond Elena's life. One of the icons brought as part of her dowry seems to have been venerated as miracle-working in the Orthodox cathedral of Vilnius until the 17th century.⁷⁰ There is also little evidence of any interest in her life and integration at the Lithuanian court, beyond some of Sof'ia's questions regarding possible pregnancies. Even the letters exchanged by mother and daughter were rather similar in content to those sent by Ivan and reflect very little on family relations, focusing more on diplomatic expectations. One explanation might be that Elena's religious identity was first and foremost a tool for fashioning a dynastic identity.

As the daughter of one ruler and the wife of another, Elena was more than a simple member of the Orthodox community. Her identity was directly related to Ivan's patrimonial claims and reflected the emergent dynastic conceptualization of princely power. The best evidence in this respect was Ivan's insistence on being referred to as "sovereign and grand prince of all Rus'".⁷¹ From the beginning of the marriage negotiations, in 1494, Ivan's goal was to convince the Lithuanians to use this title when addressing him. As it referred to all the former territories of Kyivan Rus', under Muscovite and Lithuanian authority at that time, it was significantly based on previous Muscovite ideological developments, claiming to embody the true Orthodox tradition inherited from Vladimir the Great, the baptizer of Kyivan Rus'.⁷² The political circumstances forced the Lithuanians to accept it in 1494, but it was eliminated from official correspondence, as soon as the circumstances changed. The title would become a recurrent topic in future letters. Already after the marriage was concluded in Vilnius, the Muscovite envoys wrote to Ivan complaining Alexander refused to use "of all Rus'" when asked to write

to his father-in-law.⁷³ The issue would be discussed again in March 1498, and after the new Muscovite-Lithuanian war began, it became a constant argument for Ivan to breach the 1494 peace treaty.⁷⁴ Apart from the religious persecution, Ivan claimed Alexander was the one who did not comply with the terms, as he refused to use the title “sovereign and grand prince of all Rus’”, as convened in the treaty, did not allow free passage for Muscovite envoys going to other polities and maintained friendly relations with Ivan’s enemies.⁷⁵

An Orthodox dynastic identity, in this case, was at the same time a political one, and differentiating between the two might be misleading. During Ivan’s reign, we cannot discuss a coherent ideology of power actively enforced by Moscow, but rather an emerging image actively shaped by current events. Even if his requests regarding Elena’s faith might have been motivated by a real concern for her immortal soul, Ivan was aware of the political advantages the situation might bring. As the title “of all Rus’” indicates, the main goal of this identity-building process was claiming pre-eminence among the other Rus’ polities and appropriating the succession of Kyivan Rus’, including the territories of Western Rus’. As such a debate would not be defined in ethnic terms at that time, the Orthodox identity of the Muscovites as proof of their right became the main argument. Thus, Elena’s personal identity implied, most of all, a dynastic identity. She would represent Muscovy in Lithuania, thus she had to act and dress like a Muscovite princess, and surround herself with nobility loyal to Ivan.

The active interest in shaping a dynastic identity around Elena became more obvious in the letters and negotiations taking place after 1500. As she was portrayed as a representative of the Orthodox community, Ivan actively assumed the role of defender of the faith against the supposed Lithuanian Latin persecution. From this point on, Elena’s identity was not dealt with as personal, it became completely an element for political negotiations and a representation of her father’s claims. There were no instructions on how to act or what to say, and her pleas for the end of the war were ignored. Moreover, the letters display a gradual emergence of Ivan’s patrimonial claims. He was not just fighting for religious freedom, he was defending his *otchina*, the lands inherited from his ancestors, as the only legitimate Riurikid successor.⁷⁶

All of these discussions regarding dynastic identity were reflecting a change in the conception of Muscovite princely power during the reign of Ivan III. Roughly 80 years before Elena’s marriage to Alexander, another

dynastic union between the two polities took place. In 1390, Sof'ia Vitotovna, daughter of Vitautaus of Lithuania, married Ivan I of Moscow. Vitotovna was born in 1371, before her father renounced paganism and converted to Roman Catholicism, and probably had to convert to Orthodoxy to become the grand princess of Moscow. Although her religious identity could have attracted at least a mention in Muscovite chronicles, this was not the case. What was mentioned, however, was the close connection Sof'ia kept with her Lithuanian family, by describing her visits to Vitautaus' court in Smolensk, sometimes together with her son, the future Vasilii II, father of Ivan III.⁷⁷ The different approaches to religious identities during the reign of Ivan and the case of his Lithuanian grandmother show how much the dynastic conception changed. At the beginning of the 15th century, religious identities could be more fluid and less important than the political advantages such an alliance would bring. At the end of the 15th century, however, the Orthodox identity became a symbol of Muscovite political power.

NOTES

- ¹ Throughout this article I use the terms Orthodox / Greek faith for Eastern Christianity and Latin / Roman faith for Western Christianity, as these are the terms used in the sources.
- ² *Sbornik Imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* (hereafter *SIRIO*), Vol. 35 *Pamiatniki diplomaticeskikh snoshenii Moskovskogo gosudarstva s Pol'sko-Litovskim" (1487- 1533)*, Tipografiia F. Eleonskogo i K., Sankt Petersburg, 1882.
- ³ Elena's life attracted scholarly attention already from the end of the 19th century when her biography was published. Elena Tsereteli, *Elena Ioannovna, velikaia kniaginia Litovskaia, Russkaia, koroleva Pol'skaia*. Tipografiia I.N. Skorokhodova, St. Petersburg, 1898.
- ⁴ *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* [hereafter *PSRL*], 43 vols. to date, various publishers, St. Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad-Moscow, 1841–2004, vol. 25, 301, 308.
- ⁵ Giedrė Mickūnaitė, "United in blood, divided by faith: Elena Ivanovna and Aleksander Jagiellończyk", in *Frictions and Failures. Cultural Encounters in Crisis*, Almut Bues (ed.), Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2017, 181.
- ⁶ Although the sources detailing the seclusion of elite women in the 16th century, when presenting the meetings Alexander's envoys had with Sof'ia, Elena's mother, the records mentioned they went to see the tsaritsa separately. *SIRIO*, no. 24, 124. See also Nancy Shields Kollmann, "The Seclusion of Elite Muscovite Women", *Russian History*, 10 (2), 1983, 170-187, Natalia L. Pushkareva, *Women in Russian history from the tenth to the twentieth century*, Trans. Eve Levin, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, N.Y., 1997, 62-64.
- ⁷ On Sof'ia's public engagements, Paul Bushkovitch, "Sofia Palaiologina in Life and Legend," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 52 (2-3), 2018, 158–180.
- ⁸ For an extensive description of the military events and the subsequent peace and marriage negotiations, see John L. I. Fennell, *Ivan the Great of Moscow*, Macmillan, London, 1961, 132-163.
- ⁹ Russell E. Martin, "Ritual and Religion in the Foreign Marriages of Three Muscovite Princesses", *Russian History*, 35 (3-4), 2008, 362–381.
- ¹⁰ For the context of the 1500 war declaration and its religious justifications see S.V.Polekhov, C. Squires "Casus belli. Gramota Ivana III ob ob"iavlenii voiny Aleksandru Iagellonu ot 24 iyunia 1500 g.", *Slověne*, 10 (1), 2021, 262–295.
- ¹¹ For a detailed analysis of the Muscovite-Lithuanian wars and the local border situation, see M.M. Krom, *Mezh Rus'iu i Litvoi. Pogranichnye zemli v sisteme rusko-litovskikh otnoshenii kontsa XV - pervoi treti XVI v*, Kvadriga, Moscow, 2010.

- ¹² On Elena's life in Lithuania, see Mickūnaitė, "United in blood, divided by faith", 181-200.
- ¹³ For example, in May 1499, when Ivan wished to find out from his daughter whether the rumors regarding pressures to convert her were true, *SIRIO*, no. 58, 275-276.
- ¹⁴ Vasilii's letters to his wife, sent between 1526 and 1533, revolved around health issues and they are the main sources of the future tsar Ivan IV's childhood illness. Glinskaia's answers were not recorded. These are considered to be the oldest extant private letters of a Muscovite ruler. Cornelia Soldat, "An Early Childhood Illness of Ivan the Terrible Scrofula or Tuberculosis? Chronic or Healed?", *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 52 (2-3), 2018, 312-326, Cornelia Soldat, "Chastnye pis'ma Vasiliia Ivanovicha I Eleny Glinskoi. Issledovanie privatnoi sfery moskovskikh velikikh kniazei", in *Srednevekovia pis'mennoct' i knizhnost' XVI-XVII vv. Istochnikovedenie*, Tranzit-IKS, Vladimir, 2016, 147-164.
- ¹⁵ The "ambassadorial book" (*posol'skie knigi*), a collection of diplomatic records containing these letters is estimated to have been compiled during the reign of Vasilii III, Ivan's successor. However, this was possibly connected to the systematization of the princely archives, without influencing the documents contained. L.V. Moshkova, "Russkii posol'skii knigi: nachalo formirovaniia", in *Velikoie stoyaniie na reke Ugre i formirovaniie Rossiiskogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva: lokal'nyie i global'nyie konteksty*, Kaluga, 2017, 238.
- ¹⁶ As this article focuses exclusively on Muscovite records, the possibility that the envoys would offer a version of the discussions expected to please the grand prince should be taken into consideration, although the practice is largely documented for the 16th and the 17th centuries, in the context of the Siberian expansion. Michael Khodarkovsky, "Four Degrees of Separation: Constructing Non-Christian. Identities in Muscovy", in *Culture and Identity in Muscovy, 1359-1584*, A.M. Kleimola and G.D. Lenhoff (eds.), ITZ-Garant, Moscow, 1997, 250-253.
- ¹⁷ Ia.S. Lur'e, "Elena Ivanovna, koroleva Pol'skaia i velikaia kniagina Litovskaia kak pisatel'-publitsist" *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 13 (1-2), 1979, 111-120.
- ¹⁸ Jakub Niedźwiedz, "Cyrillic and Latin Script in Late Medieval Vilnius", in *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy II*, Marco Mostert, Anna Adamska (eds.), Brepols, Turnhout, 2014, 104. 116. For a more in-depth analysis of Lithuanian diplomatic practice, see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th-18th Century)*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2011.

- 19 Ivan's demands regarding Elena's religious identity and the letter of confirmation from Alexander were already discussed when the peace treaty was concluded, in January – February 1494. *SIRIO*, no. 24, 123-133.
- 20 *SIRIO*, no. 32, 173.
- 21 *SIRIO*, no. 36, 191.
- 22 *SIRIO*, no. 40, 205-6.
- 23 A detailed analysis of Elena's dowry was done by Russell E. Martin, "Dowries, Diplomacy, and Marriage Politics in Muscovy", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38 (1), 2008, 119–145. As he pointed out, the political expectations Ivan had from this marriage were also visible through the value of the dowry, the inventory evaluated the complete value as 61,898 rubles. In comparison, the dowry received by Evdokiia, Elena's sister, when marrying the tsarevich Peter in Moscow was estimated at 2,580 rubles. Martin, "Dowries", 127.
- 24 The *korabelnik* was a gold coin issued during the reign of Ivan III. It was imitating the English noble and it had an image of the prince on a ship on one side (hence the name, from *korabl'*, ship). These coins are considered to have been minted for official ceremonies or for diplomatic purposes. Ivar Leimus, "Additional data about the period of and reasons for minting the 'Russian nobles' (korabelniks) of Ivan III", in *Pieniądz - symbol - władza - wojna - wspólne dziedzictwo Europy*. Polskie Towarzystwo Numizmatyczne, Warsaw, 2011, 92-97.
- 25 *SIRIO*, no. 34, 181, no. 49, 239.
- 26 *SIRIO*, no. 76, 415.
- 27 *SIRIO*, no. 31, 163.
- 28 *SIRIO*, no. 42, 216.
- 29 *SIRIO*, no. 40, 210, no. 49, 241.
- 30 *SIRIO*, no. 40, 211.
- 31 *SIRIO*, no. 49, 239-242.
- 32 Moshe Taube, "The Fifteenth Century Ruthenian Translations from Hebrew and the Heresy of the Judaizers: Is There a Connection?" in *Speculum Slaviae Orientalis Muscovy, Ruthenia and Lithuania in the Late Middle Ages*, Ivanov, V.V., Verkhohantsev, J. (eds.), Novoe izdatel'stvo, Moscow, 2005, 185-208. Taube discussed extensively the texts of Jewish origin translated into Ruthenian beginning with the 15th century and associated with the movement of the "Judaizers".
- 33 The complete Bible translation was finished in 1499, under the supervision of the archbishop Gennadii of Novgorod, one of the main accusers of the "Judaizers".
- 34 Stephen C. Rowell, "Whatever Kind of Pagan the Bearer Might be, The Letter is Valid. A Sketch of Catholic-Orthodox Relations in the Late-Mediaeval Grand Duchy of Lithuania", *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 18, 2013, 50.

- 35 *SIRIO*, no. 57, 273.
- 36 *SIRIO*, no. 58, 275-276.
- 37 *SIRIO*, no. 59, 277.
- 38 *SIRIO*, no. 62, 292-293.
- 39 *SIRIO*, no. 31, 163.
- 40 *SIRIO*, no. 31, 167.
- 41 Ivan's list references some of the oldest Rus' churches and monasteries, still in use today. The Savvino-Storozhevsky Monastery dedicated to the Nativity of the Theotokos, in Zvenigorod was traditionally built at the end of the 14th century by a disciple of Sergius of Radonezh. The church of Saint Nicholas in the Mozhaisk Kremlin (approx. 14th century) is famous for the depiction of Saint Nicholas as the protector of the town during the Mongol invasion. The 12th-century Assumption Cathedral of Smolensk was completely rebuilt in the 17th century. The 12th-century Church of the Annunciation of Vitebsk was destroyed in 1961 and rebuilt in 1996. The oldest of them, the 11th-century Saint Sophia Cathedral in Polotsk was one of the three cathedrals dedicated to the Divine Wisdom, together with the cathedrals from Kyiv and Novgorod.
- 42 *SIRIO*, no. 35, 182-184.
- 43 Fennell explained the alleged religious persecution towards Elena and the community as a *casus belli* Ivan was looking for already after all the preparation for an invasion were made, with territorial expansion as the real motivation. Fennell, *Ivan the Great of Moscow*, 215-216.
- 44 *SIRIO*, no. 57, 273-274.
- 45 February 1501, answer to the envoy of the Polish King, no. 67, 315, January 1503, answer to the envoys of the Hungarian king and the papal letters, no 73, 351-352.
- 46 *SIRIO*, no. 63, 294-295.
- 47 *SIRIO*, no. 63, 299.
- 48 Borys Gudziak, *Crisis and Reform. The Kyivan Metropolitanate, the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Genesis of the Union of Brest*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998, 52-53.
- 49 Sophia Senyk, *A History of the Church in Ukraine, Volume II 1300 to the Union of Brest*, Pontificio istituto orientale, Rome, 2011, 135 - 139.
- 50 Mickūnaitė, "United in blood, divided by faith", 194.
- 51 The literary qualities of these letters have been discussed in comparison with folkloric elements by Ia.S. Lur'e, "Elena Ivanovna, koroleva Pol'skaia", 111-120.
- 52 *SIRIO*, no. 75, 367-376.
- 53 *SIRIO*, no. 75, 407-409.
- 54 *SIRIO*, no. 76, 416-417, 422.
- 55 *SIRIO*, no. 33, 176.
- 56 *SIRIO*, no. 37, 198-199.

- 57 *SIRIO*, no. 43, 224-225.
- 58 *SIRIO*, no. 32, 173.
- 59 *SIRIO*, no. 37, 197.
- 60 For the connection between diplomatic practice and secrecy in medieval and early modern Europe, see Jean-Baptiste Santamaria, "Secrets, Diplomats, and Spies in Late Medieval France and in the Burgundian State: Parallel Practices and Undercover Operations", in *Beyond Ambassadors Consuls, Missionaries, and Spies in Premodern Diplomacy*, Maurits A. Ebben, Louis Sicking (eds.), Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2021, 159-184, Jonathan M. Elukin, "Keeping Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern English Government," in *Geheimnis am Beginn der europäischen Moderne*, J.M. Elukin, G. Engel, B. Rang, K. Reichert, and H. Wunder (eds.), Klostermann, Frankfurt, 2002, 111–129.
- 61 *SIRIO*, no. 53, 255-256.
- 62 *SIRIO*, no. 38, 200.
- 63 *SIRIO*, no. 39, 203.
- 64 *SIRIO*, no. 43, 233-235.
- 65 *SIRIO*, no. 53, 250-256.
- 66 *SIRIO*, no. 76, 426-427, no. 77. 442-443.
- 67 *SIRIO*, no. 77, 452-453.
- 68 Isolde Thyrêt, *Between God and tsar. Religious symbolism and the royal women of Muscovite Russia*. Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb, 2001.
- 69 Pushkareva, *Women in Russian history*, 24.
- 70 Mickūnaitė, "United in blood, divided by faith", 199.
- 71 For the usage of this title by the Muscovite rulers, see A.I. Filiushkin, *Tituly Russkikh gosudarei*, Al'ians Arkheo, Moscow, St. Petersburg, 2006, 152-192.
- 72 Previously, such arguments were extensively used to justify military actions against other Rus' polities, for example, the account of the 1471 campaign against Novgorod, *PSRL*, 25, 285-293. The Muscovite claims to the Kyivan inheritance developed in the second half of the 15th century and the 1490s negotiations with Lithuania are some of the oldest instances of a Muscovite grand prince claiming the title "of all Rus'" in diplomatic practice. Serhii Plokhyy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations. Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, 136-142.
- 73 *SIRIO*, no. 31, 170.
- 74 *SIRIO*, no. 53, 252-256.
- 75 *SIRIO*, no. 65, 304-305, no. 67, 318.
- 76 *SIRIO*, no. 75, 380.
- 77 *PSRL*, 25, 219 for the marriage account, 228, 245-246 for visits to her father, in Smolensk.

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