



---

## Intercultural Dialogue and Exchange Relations between Scholars at the Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and Scholars in Russia during the long Eighteenth Century

**This synopsis introduces a new research project in the field of European and international scientific and cultural relations. The aim of the project is to describe and analyse exchange relations and intercultural dialogue between scholars attached to the German Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and their colleagues in Russia.**

Until now the history of the Leopoldina is well known but its contacts with scholars in Russia have been studied only partly. In 1652, four German physicians established the “Academia Naturae Curiosorum” as a private learned society. In 1687, the Emperor Leopold I awarded this Academy special privileges, including freedom from censorship for all its publications. Since then the Academy was called “Sacri Romani Imperii Academia Caesareo – Leopoldina Naturae Curiosorum,” in short, Leopoldina. Today, the Leopoldina is the oldest continuously existing academy of medical and natural sciences in the world. From 1878 on, the Leopoldina with its archive and library has been permanently located in the university town of Halle (Saale), Germany. In 2008 the Leopoldina was officially named the German National Academy of Sciences.

Soon after its founding the publication of an academic journal was found essential for scholarly exchange in Europe. In 1670 Sachs von Lewenhaimb, a physician from Breslau (now Wrocław), initiated the world’s first journal for medicine and the natural sciences, *Miscellanea Curiosa Medico-Physica Academiae Naturae Curiosorum*, since continued as *Nova Acta Leopoldina*. Sachs von Lewenhaimb was interested in a wider European reception of the journal and sent copies to Paris, London and Rome. How did the relations with scholars in Russia and “Eastern Europe” develop? In the early years of the academy Breslau was an important centre of the activities of the Leopoldina. It is remarkable that one of the academic “hotspots” in its first decades was located in the east of the Holy Roman Empire. It can be shown that the members of the young academy developed an interest in Poland, Courland and other “Eastern European” countries. During the first two decades of the journal a number of articles came from learned men who worked in Poland. Despite the arising interest in “Eastern Europe”, not a single article appears to have come from Russia during this period.

Hungarian naturalists tried to compensate the absence of an academy in Hungary by subscribing to the journal of the Leopoldina. From the 1670s on several members of the academy showed an interest in Russia and other regions of Eastern Europe. Thus, in 1677, the physician and chemist Johann Sigismund Elsholz, personal physician of Frederick William, the Elector of Brandenburg, published botanical and pharmaceutical observations titled “De Badiani Moscovitico” in which he stated that he was a legation from Frederick William’s court to that of the Tsar in Moscow from 1674 on. Another example is from the beginning of Tsar Peter the Great’s rule: In 1690 Laurentius Blumentrost Sr. published an article in the *Miscellanea Curiosa*. At that time Blumentrost had lived for more than 20 years in Moscow, where he first served as personal physician to Tsar Aleksei Michailovich and later also to Tsar Peter. Blumentrost’s article was probably the first scientific contact between a German doctor working in Russia and the Leopoldina. His short text, titled “De Radicis Chin-Sen,” was a botanical description of ginseng. The editor, Christian Mentzel, published the article Blumentrost sent from Moscow on 21 March 1689. The note attached to the article shows that the physician and botanist Mentzel had previously asked Blumentrost for information about ginseng. Mentzel motivated his request with the shorter distance from Moscow as a

starting point for expeditions to China. He argued that there was probably more information about ginseng in Russia because of previous expeditions from Russia to China.

In this case, the German scholar Mentzel regarded Moscow as a place from which he could obtain useful knowledge. Blumentrost's text must be studied in the context of other works in the journal. Mentzel also published letters from the East Indies in the journal, including botanical observations from Andreas Cleyer. Together with the German botanist Georg Eberhard Rumpf (Rumphius), the pharmacist, botanist, physician, trader and Japanologist Cleyer was working for the United Dutch East Indies Company (VOC). Cleyer and Rumpf worked for several years in Batavia (now Jakarta), the capital of the Dutch East Indies.

Traditionally, scientists present the history of medicine, chemistry, mathematics and other disciplines as if science is universal, the same everywhere in the world. This research project challenges this view and focuses on cultural factors in the transfer and reception of scientific knowledge. Today, historians of science are interested in the global development of knowledge and scientific institutions. In this context, it is necessary to analyse the connections between regional cultural factors and global mechanisms. Since the nineteenth century the introduction of science in eighteenth-century Russia has been a subject of interest. Scholars have studied the founding of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg (1725), the University of Moscow (1755) and other institutions of higher learning. Since the 1950s many essays about the relations between foreign and Russian scholars during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have appeared, looking for the German, French or British "influence" on science in Russia. In recent science studies we find a change in focus about the development of global history and cultural processes. In his work on the history of science in Russia, Andreas Renner pointed to the missing perspective of a "trans-national history of the Scientific Revolution." In this context, he stated that the research has to examine the aspects of filters, traditions of properly constituted knowledge (nauka), and transformations (The Concept of the Scientific Revolution and the History of Sciences in Russia, 2007: 363).

Accordingly, the present research project orientates itself on leading questions from the programme of the 2016 Leopoldina Annual Assembly, discussing "Sciences in Intercultural Dialogue." It is time to "take a critical look at the global know-ledge culture and discuss the accusation of cultural imperialism levelled at Western science" (Leopoldina News 4/2016: 03). The history of science should not be discussed as a one-way-street transfer of knowledge from the "West" to the "East" but as a process of cultural dialogue.

The main sources for my transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary study are the journal *Miscellanea Curiosa*, the correspondence and manuscripts held in the Leopoldina's archive at Halle, the Leopoldina's minute book or "Protocollum," begun in 1694, as well as documents held in several archives in Russia.

The early history of the cultural and scholarly relations between Russian scholars and scholars related to the *Academia Naturae Curiosorum Leopoldina* can be divided in three stages:

- (1) During the seventeenth century several academy members showed an interest in Russia and other regions of "Eastern Europe",
- (2) During the eighteenth century various academy members worked temporarily in Russia, as a physician or a scientist, at the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg or at Moscow University (now Lomonosov University),
- (3) From the end of the eighteenth century on, the Leopoldina accepted Russian scholars as academy members.

Acting factors of Russian cultural policy, for example the support of certain concepts by Peter I, Elisabeth, Catherine II and Alexander I, were influenced by debates on official and constantly changing alternative educational concepts. Furthermore, the activities and the impact of mediators of the scientific and cultural exchange relations have to be analysed. Important questions in the study will be: How did Western scholars try to translate their ideas of science into the reality of Russia? How were these ideas perceived and adapted by their Russian colleagues? In 1999 the historian Martin Dinges demonstrated the importance of cultural factors in the process of the transfer of medical knowledge and anti-plague policies during the 1770-71 epidemic in Moscow. Regarding the question to what extent German physicians during the second half of the eighteenth

century “imported” medical education to Russia, Dinges stated that thus far an adequate assessment had been prevented because the historiography was overshadowed by nationalist paradigms.

During the eighteenth century a few dozen members of the Leopoldina (temporarily) worked in Russia or corresponded with acquaintances or colleagues in Russia. Only three Russians – Kheraskov, Dashkova and Gallitzin – were elected to the Academia Naturae Curiosorum Leopoldina. All of them belonged to the Russian nobility. Although none of them was a doctor or professor, they had close links to scientific research. Dashkova and Kheraskov directed scientific institutions, Gallitzin pursued private studies. All of them can be seen as representatives of the nascent group of scholarly mediators, who actively supported the development of scientific and cultural exchange relations across Europe.

**Contact:**

**Hilmar Preuss, research associate at the Centre for Science Studies, German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, in Halle (Saale), Germany**

**E-mail: [hpreuss.projekt-russland-leopoldina@email.de](mailto:hpreuss.projekt-russland-leopoldina@email.de)**