

Individual essay contest

**“Unity in Diversity: Russia & The English-Speaking World.  
Time for equal opportunities”**

**«‘The Time of Troubles’ in Russia and imposters through the eyes of  
foreigners»**

**«Смутное время в России и самозванцы глазами иностранцев»**

**SPECIALIZED ACADEMIC AND SCIENCE  
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## **Theses**

1. The historians' views on one event can strongly differ, especially if they originate from different countries.
2. The Time of Troubles in Russia is a period of Russian history which is known for a great political instability, the battle for the throne between various boyar families and several False Dmitrys, and the absence of a tsar.
3. The exact date when the Time of Troubles started significantly varies in different sources.
4. Foreign scientists tend to omit the role of the holy throne and the promise of False Dmitry to turn Russia to Catholicism.
5. In foreign sources this period is called "pretendership", which is quite often compared to similar cases in Medieval Europe.
6. False Dmitry I, also known as Grigoriy (Yury) Otrepiev, was the most successful of three, as he actually made it to Moscow and was officially crowned in 1605.
7. False Dmitry II, the Thief of Tushino, is given a small role, probably, because he never did take Moscow.
8. There is little information about False Dmitry III, a deacon called Sidorka, in the foreign literature.
9. The main driving force for the actions of pretenders were self-benefit, greed, hunger for power and glory, and the most basic need of survival.

*“The transfer of power is always the ultimate test of a regime’s stability”*

Simon Sebag Montefiore, a British historian

History is a science which is focused on researching data about various countries all over the world. It is not a secret that the studies of history of different countries are quite tightly connected at some points. However, the historians’ views on one event can strongly differ, especially if they originate from different countries. One of the events that has long been the apple of discord for numerous researchers is the Time of Troubles in XVII century Russia and numerous impostors trying to seize the throne. I decided to compare the facts presented by Russian scientists and those reviewed by their foreign colleagues. In this essay, I will look at the views on this period of time that exist among Russian, Polish and English-speaking (British and American) scientists.

First and foremost, it is important to understand what the Time of Troubles in Russia is. This is a period of Russian history which is known for a great political instability, the battle for the throne between various boyar families and several False Dmitrys, and the absence of a tsar. Another big problem was the desire of Polish nobility to expand their influence over Russia or, at least, gain wealth. What is more, the ongoing war between Poland and Sweden became yet another challenge since both countries wanted to turn Russia into their battlefield. All the above-mentioned led to cities being unaware who to pay taxes to, bandits roaming the lands, peasants losing their money and lives. It all started because of the death of tsarevich Dmitri, the conspiracy theories which followed it, as well as famine, plague and the rule of Boris Godunov who wasn’t considered to be legit. Encyclopedia Britannica defines this period as “period of political crisis in Russia that followed the demise of the Rurik dynasty (1598) and ended with the establishment of the Romanov dynasty (1613)” [1].

The date when the Time of Troubles started significantly varies. In Russian literature the start of the Time of Troubles is considered to be 1605 after the death



Death of Tsarevich Dmitry  
by P.F. Pleshchikov

of Fyodor II Godunov, while in the foreign sources it happens right after the death of tsarevich Dmitry. Some English historians claim the Time of Troubles started in 1584 with the death of Ivan IV. As well as that, there is an opinion that the Time of Troubles “started with the death of the childless Tsar Feodor Ivanovich, which spurred an ongoing dynastic dispute” [3].

Many foreign historians had different opinions on the reasons of the Time of Troubles. Chester Dunning from Texas A&M University calls this period the “first Russian Civil war” and puts a big emphasis on the political terror during that time [4]. However, it is hard to agree with this opinion for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Time of Troubles’ main difference from all civil wars is that there was no clash of opinions, as, for example, in 1917 Russian Civil war. Secondly, the main reason of the events was the absence of a legitimate ruler who would satisfy everyone in the country. Finally, there were some industrious people who risked (and succeeded to some extent) to take the power which was not taken by anyone at that time. According to Maureen Perrie, a prominent British scholar and expert on Russian history, this period received less attention from foreign researchers than the preceding period of the reign of Ivan IV the Terrible. She claims that Russian historians neglected many facts and gave confusing and sometimes fantastic testimony. In Perrie’s view, Polish scholars, in turn, based their facts mostly on rumors [7]. For example, back in the days, many Polish mercenaries had no idea that tsarevich Dmitri was dead or had ever died. Others believed he was overthrown and was the rightful ruler.

If we continue speaking about the discrepancies in the analysis of the period in question, we will find the following: while Russian historians claim that the Polish king supported False Dmitri, foreign historians insist that Sigismund III,

who is often referred to quite pejoratively in Polish literature, was strongly against the aforementioned person and even sent troops to kill his supporters. Also, foreign scientists tend to omit the role of the holy throne and the promise of False Dmitry to turn Russia to Catholicism. The latter fact might be quite understandable since pope only gave blessings and a little money, so there could be some people who would agree to that. Some Russian historians refer to Polish occupants as “holy knights” for their attempts to change religion in Russia.



Filaret, the father of Mikhail Romanov.

As well that, there is a big difference in the views on situations with Wladyslaw IV, the son of Sigismund III Vasa. He is considered to be the Polish contender on the Russian throne summoned by Filaret Romanov whilst foreign scientist claim that Sigismund III strongly demanded direct control over Russia after Sweden invasion, whilst Russian historians don't usually mention that. Also, Russian historians tend to give a high role to the Romanovs, who even at that time were a really powerful boyar family.

As it has already been mentioned, there were several False Dmitrys during the period in question. In foreign sources this period is called “pretendership”, which is quite often compared to similar cases in Medieval Europe [7], or even the case of Ancient China, such as the period of three kingdoms.

False Dmitry I, also known as Grigoriy (Yury) Otrepiev, was perhaps the most successful of three, as he actually made it to Moscow and was officially crowned in 1605. Martin Bär, a German writer and the author of “Chronicon Muscoviticum”, was the contemporary of False Dmitry I. In his chronicles, he mentions that Otrepiev used to serve to a Lithuanian nobleman Adam Vishnevetsky, who was closely connected with the Polish king. Vishnevetsky was the first to learn about the “royal blood” of his servant [8]. This could be true, as

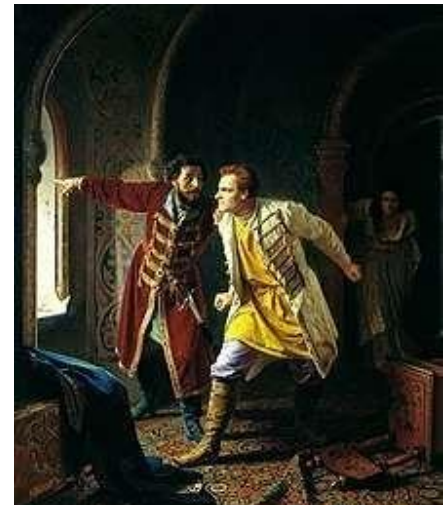
in Russian sources we also find that Vishnevetsky called Sigismund III to help him prove this fact.

Otrepiev, being a skillful actor, managed to trick lots of people. Karamzin in his “History of the Russian State” marks that Otrepiev cried over Ivan IV’s grave and mourned over “his father’s” corpse [9]. The mother of the real Dmitry, Maria Nagaya, recognized her son in the False Dmitry I. Even Vasily Shuyskiy surrendered and let this unfrocked monk get the throne. This caused other boyars to conspire that False Dmitry was, in fact, the real Dmitry. Interestingly enough, Chester Dunning claims that “in spite of centuries of vilification as an odious impostor, recent scholarship has shown that the pretender really did believe that he was Dmitrii Ivanovich; and his campaign for the throne united diverse elements of Russian society” [4].

He planned to live happily in Moscow with his wife Marina Mniszech, a daughter of a Polish aristocrat. Tsarina Marina refused to convert to the Orthodox faith. This was a fatal mistake, which led to the murder of the new tsar 10 days after his marriage.

It should be noted, False Dmitry II is given a small role, probably, because he never did take Moscow. From what we know, he actually married Marina Mniszech, who recognized her late husband in him. They even had a son, Ivan Dmitrievich, who later became a contender to the throne. According to Britannica encyclopedia, having gained control over the South of Russia, False Dmitry II moved to Moscow and placed his headquarters in the village of Tushino (hence, the nickname “The Thief of Tushino). Shuyskiy with the help of Swedish troops managed to make him flee to Kaluga, where he was fatally wounded [2].

There is little information about False Dmitry III, a deacon called Sidorka, in the foreign literature. Judging by the information from scarce foreign sources,



*Last minutes of False Dmitry,*  
by Carl Wenig (1879).

we can make a conclusion that Cossacks (in fact, bandits, criminals or even mercenaries), who supported Polish occupants and False Dmitry III, considered him to be the legitimate ruler and the successor of Rurik. At the same time, Russian sources contradict to that and give the proof to the fact that there were numerous Cossacks who were against him.

All the chaos caused a lot of suffering to the citizens of Russia. Under the threat of becoming Polish vassals Russians rallied and formed a militia. The first militia didn't last for long since there were still many controversies between peasants, boyars and Cossacks. As it is mentioned in Britannica encyclopedia, the reason of their downfall is the failure to make arrangements with Cossacks. The second militia, led by Minin and Pozharskii, was more successful due to the strict separation of functions between leaders and the discipline, and their ability to unite a group of people.

To sum up, I can say that a lot of information from Russian and foreign writers is contradictory: from the start date of the Time of Trouble up to the forces of such as the first militia. All these contradictions are mainly the reason of view on the events from opposing forces (Russians and Polish). The opinion of the latter was generally shared by the English. Many of stories reflected by foreign scholars are dictated by what different sides of the conflict knew and saw. The main reasons for the actions of imposters, as those mentioned above, were neither beliefs nor ideology. The main driving force for the actions of pretenders were self-benefit, greed, hunger for power and glory, and the most basic need of survival. Patriotism won over the sinful feelings only in the end, when militia managed to put the end to the notorious Time of Troubles.

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