

"SHAKESPEARE - ALEXANDER SUMAROKOV.

Gamlet [Hamlet]. Tragediya [Russian]. - [THE FIRST ""HAMLET"" IN RUSSIAN]

Reference: 58458

(Sankt Petersburg, 1748). 8vo. Bound with five other tragedies/dramas in a slightly later (late 18th century) full calf binding with gilt line-borders to boards and richly gilt spine with red and blue title- and tome-labels. Spine with some wear and corners bumped. Upper capital worn. Internally generally nice and clean and on good paper, but ""Hamlet"" - which has clearly been well red and presumably used for a stage set-up - has some light pencil-annotations and pencil-crossovers, occasional brownspotting, a few paper restorations - no loss of text, a tear to one leaf - no loss, and one leaf slightly loosening at the bottom. Hamlet: 68, (2) pp. - separately paginated. 26pp. + 79, (1) pp. + 62 pp. + 68, (2) pp. + 78 pp. + 1 f. blank + 29 pp.

Comment: Extremely rare first edition of the first Russian translation/adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet. The first edition is incredibly scarce and deemed virtually unobtainable. A second appearance, which is also of the utmost scarcity, came out in 1786, in a collection of plays in Russian. The seminal first rendering of ""Hamlet"" in Russian constitutes a milestone in Russian literature and cultural history. It deeply penetrated Russian culture, and in many ways Sumarokov's ""Hamlet"" came to epitomize the Russian spirit. ""The first Russian adaptation of Shakespeare's ""Hamlet"" was made by the founder of the Russian classical theatre Alexander Petrovich Sumarokov (1717-1777). The play was written in 1748 by the 31-year old ambitious statesman and poet. Some researchers suggest that this work was commissioned to legitimise the power of Peter the Great's daughter Elizabeth through cultural discourse. Elizabeth took the Russian throne as a result of a court coup against an infant great grandson of Peter's elder brother. Ivan VI was barely two months old when he became Russian Emperor and ""reigned"" for eleven months. For the rest of his short life he lived in exile and, from the age of 16, in solitary confinement. Elizabeth's actions might be seen as avenging her father by returning power to his successors. Translated from French, Shakespeare in Sumarokov's version was also turned into a classist play, where people represented functions, such as order and chaos, good and evil, wisdom and stupidity. According to this pattern, the state could not be left without a legitimate ruler. Therefore, Sumarokov wrote a happy end with Claudius and Polonius punished by death and Hamlet, Ophelia and Gertrude victorious and content. Although this version was rarely staged, the image of an outcast prince was often referred to. For example, Catherine the Great's son and heir Paul tried on this role - his father was assassinated and overthrown by his mother's lover to get her the throne.... In the 20th century the story of Russian Hamlet continued. As the Russian poet of the Silver Age Maksimilian Voloshin put it, ""Hamlet - is a tragedy of conscience, and in this sense it is a prototype of those tragedies that are experienced by the ""Slavonic soul"" when it lives through disintegration of will, senses and consciousness"" (Katya Rogatchevskaia, for the British Library exhibition ""Shakespeare in Ten Acts""). Sumarokov created the Russian ""Hamlet"" in 1748 and might have acquainted himself with the character of Hamlet through French sources"" However, it is quite probable that his translation was actually done from English, as it is registered that he borrowed a copy of it from the Academic library in the period from 1746 to 1748. It came to play a seminal role in both Russian literature, culture, and politics in the centuries to come. ""Soon after its arrival in a Russia in 1748, ""Hamlet"" and its chief protagonist became inseparable parts of Russian national identity, prompting such remarks as William Morris's: ""Hamlet should have been a Russian, not a Dane"". However, at the outbreak of the Second World War, the play seems to have disappeared for more than a decade from the major stages of Moscow and Leningrad. Thus was born the 'myth' of Stalin and Hamlet. Today virtually every mention of Hamlet in the Stalin era refers to the dictator's hatred for this tragedy and his supposed banning of it from all Soviet stages. Notwithstanding the efforts of theatre directors such as Sergei Radlov with his heroic production of Hamlet in 1938, there is no doubt that Hamlet was problematic in the context of the paradigm of Socialist Realism. And it was

certainly not the most suitable play for a war-stricken country. Moreover, from Stalin's own pejorative reference to 'an indecisive Hamlet' in connection with Eisenstein's ill-fated depiction of Ivan the Terrible (Part II), it is evident that for the dictator the character of Hamlet had negative connotations. The chequered history of Hamlet in the Soviet Union from the outbreak of the War to the death of Stalin in 1953 and the flood of new productions almost immediately after this date, together with the myth of Stalin's 'ban', deserve more nuanced and broadly contextualised study than they have received to date, based on concrete historical facts, memoirs and official documents. (Michelle Assay :What Did Hamlet (Not) Do to Offend Stalin?).""Reforms initiated by Tsar Peter the Great (1672-1725) had far reaching effects on all spheres of life in eighteenth-century Russia, including the cultural sphere. Profound changes also occurred in Russian literature. As Russian literature was becoming increasingly secular and new literary genres evolved there began an intensive search for aesthetic principles and an ideological platform that would be suitable for the demands of the post-Peter the Great epoch. Alexander Sumarokov (1717-1777) was among those Russian writers who considered adopting ethical principles and aesthetic norms of French classicism the most appropriate path for the development of an emergent secular Russian literature. In his rendering of Shakespeare's Hamlet into the Russian language, Sumarokov subscribed to the rules and traditions of French classicist dramaturgy. He adopted the modus operandi and approaches to translation prevalent during the period of classicism in French literature. By doing so, Sumarokov followed a very clear objective. Tailoring his Hamlet according to the patterns of French classicism and bringing in a strong didactic element into his version of Shakespeare's masterpiece, Sumarokov was able to re-evaluate the original material and focus on the issues that he considered most important for his contemporaries in eighteenth-century Russia... Church authority that had dominated public life for centuries was greatly diminished and undermined in both political and cultural spheres. In the 18th century, Russia was a rapidly changing country. A long period of self isolation ended as Russia was opening up and turning its face towards Europe. Profound changes within society also affected the development of 18th-century Russian literature."" (Nikitina, Larisa. (2008). The First Translation of Shakespeare into Russian: A Metamorphosis of Hamlet on Russian Soil. Philologie im Netz. 43. 17-27).""Alexander Sumarokov was the first Russian professional author who chose national subjects for his plays. He introduced Shakespeare to the Russian people with his adaptation of Hamlet, and it was as a spectator at his play Khorev that Elizabeth fell in love with Nikita Beketov who played the leading role."" (Encycl. B.).Apart from Sumarokov's seminal version of ""Hamlet"", the present volume contains the following five works, all by Sumarokov, and all in first editions:Pustynnik [The Hermit]. Drama. 1769Yaropolk i Dimizia. Tragediya, 1768Vysheislav. Tragediya. (1768)Artistona. Tragediya. (1751) Dve Epistoly [Two Letters]Like Hamlet, Sumarokov's other works are very rare in all early printings, especially the first.OCLC lists two copies of this first printing of ""Hamlet"" in Russian in libraries worldwide: One in Germany, one in the UK.

Year

1748

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