

A Seventeenth-Century Russian
Murder Trial

Hoover Institution Archives
Frank Golder Collection box 38

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This is a transcript, a uniformly transcribed copy of a case, that is, it has one copyist's hand on paper of the same type and size, all bound together. It repeats a number of documents that comprised an investigation into a murder in 1683. The murder occurred among enserfed peasants in a village to the east of Moscow in the center of Russia.

Brief glossary and notes:

stol'nik: a high ranking military and administrative rank
state secretary: highest of the bureaucratic ranks
"your slave": formulaic phrase used in petitions by members of the privileged military elite
"Ivashka," "Aleksha," "humble village elder": original Russian is a diminutive form of name or status, indicating personal subservience to tsars, to whom petition is addressed
"favor me": traditional conclusion to petitions, couched in language of personal subservience to tsar
putnoi kliuchnik: local tax collector, fiscal officer

I. COMPLAINT (IN TWO PETITIONS) THAT INITIATED THE CASE

"A copy from the case. In 7192/1683 on Sept. 15 Stol'nik Ivan Ivanov syn Boborykin presented a petition to the grand sovereigns and tsars and grand princes Ioann Alekseevich and Petr Alekseevich of All Great and Small and White Russia Autocrats, and his man Mitka Filipov brought Aleksei Luzhin's men, two men, to Kostroma to the governor's office; and he also brought to the governor's office a dead body. And Boborykin gave two petitions to Stol'nik and governor Boris Markovich Chirikov and to State Secretary Grigorii Protopopov. And in the petitions it says:

To tsars and sovereigns and grand princes Ioann Alekseevich and Petr Alekseevich of all Great and Small and White Russia Autocrats your slave Ivashka Ivanov syn Boborykin petitions. In this year, 7192/1683 Sept. 12 I your slave sent from my Kostroma hamlet my humble village elder Kupriashka Kuzmin to Torzhek, to the market at Sereda Upina. And with him I sent 30 rubles for horses and for various household purchases. And my village elder did not make the purchases at the market but lost the money to the two men of Aleksei Matveev syn Luzhin, Ostashka Vasil'ev and Kupriashka Andreev. They had awaited him, outside the market at the village of Sereda, planning a criminal act, and having awaited him behind the houses in the shadows, they began on the road to beat my village elder with deathly blows and assault him and, having knifed him to death, they took those my monies from him. And now, sovereigns, those criminals and murderers have been brought to Kostroma. Merciful Sovereigns Tsars and Grand Princes Ioann Alekseevich and Petr Alekseevich of all Great and Small and Shite Russia Autocrats, favor me your slave, order, o sovereigns, those criminals and murderers be questioned in the murder of my village elder Kupriashka Kuzmin and in his robbery. And questioning them, torture them. Tsar, sovereigns, have mercy on me, favor me."

On the reverse of the original petition is the note of State Secretary

Grigorii Protopopov "7192/1683 Sept 15 take the murderers and question them according to this petition."

"To tsars the sovereigns and grand princes Ioann Alekseevich and Petr Alekseevich: You slave Ivashko Ivanov syn Boborykin petitions. In this year, o sovereigns, 7192/1683 Sept. 12 I your slave sent my humble village elder Kupriashka Kuzmin to the village of Sereda Upina to purchase horses and household goods and ambushing him on the road criminals knifed him to death and took from him 30 rubles. And now this dead body has been brought to Kostroma for examination. Merciful sovereigns, tsars and grand princes Ioann Alekseevich and Petr Alekseevich, favor me your slave, order, o sovereigns, this dead body of my village elder be examined and recorded. Tsars, sovereigns, have mercy on me!"

On the back of the original petiton is note of state secretary Girgorii Protopopov "7192/1683 sept 15 examine the dead body and record the findings."

II. COURT PROCEDURE: INVESTIGATION AND TESTIMONY

"And stol'nik and vovoda Boris Barkovich Chirikov and diak Grigorii Protopopov ordered Aleksei Luzhin's men taken and questioned and the dead body examined and recorded.

And the dead body of Stol'nik Ivan Boborykin's peasant, Kupriashka Kuzmin, was examined in the governor's office.

And by the examination of the dead body of Kupriashka [it was seen that] below the belly button on the abdomen there was a cut with a knife and the intestines were spilling out.

And Aleksei Luzhin's men, having been brought in, were questioned in turn about this murder.

And in questioning one said that he was called Kupriashka Andreev, household servant of Aleksei Matveev syn Luzhin, of Kostroma district, hamlet Lopatino. In this year 7192/1683 Sept. 12 the village elder of stol'nik Ivan Ivanov syn Boborykin Kupriashka Kuzmin and he Kupriashka Andreev were at the market in Sereda Upina and, having awaited him, Kupriashka Kuzmin, on the road in that village of Sereda Upina on the street in the shadows he cut him with a knife to death but he did not take 30 rubles from him.

The second man brought forward in questioning said he was Ostashka Vasil'ev syn Kormanov, a man of Aleksei Luzhin from the hamlet of Loptina. In this year 7192/ 1683 Sept 12 in Sereda Upina at the market the peasant of stol'nik Ivan Boborykin Kupriashka Kuzmin and he Ostashka were there and also their man Kupriashka Andreev was there. And it is known to him, Ostashka, that their man Kupriashka Andreev in that village Sereda Upina, awaiting in the shadows knifed to death Stol'nik Ivan Boborykin's peasant Kupriashka Kuzmin. But he Ostashka did not join with Kupriashka [Andreev] in planning this murder; but whether he took money from him, he said he knows nothing about it.

Sept 14 or 15 (illegible) in the governor's office before Stol'nik and Governor B M Chirikov and State Secretary Grigorii Protopopov Aleksei Luzin'a man Kupriashka Andreev was questioned again more intensely [s pristrastiem] about the murder of Stol'nik Ivan Boborykin's village elder Kupriashka Kuzmin.

And Kupriashka in questioning said the same as he had said in the earlier interrogation and he also said that he knifed Kupriashka Kuzmin defending himself because Kupriashka Kuzmin had begun to hit him. And he had no intent to kill him with a knife. And there were no other men with him when he knifed him.

And on the back of the original copy is written "State Secretary Grigorii Protopopov" and "Undersecretary Alekshka Korzakov is to look at this."

III. ORDERS FROM CENTRAL MINISTRY TO KOSTROMA GOVERNOR, AND DMITROV GOVERNOR, REGARDING TRANSFER OF CASE

"Copy: From the tsars and grand princes .. [title as above] ... to Kostroma to Stol'nik and Governor B M Chirikov and State Secretary Grigorii Protopopov: according to our order you were ordered, and according to the petition of Aleksei Matveev syn Luzhina you were ordered, to send his Aleksei's man Ostanka and the peasant Kupriashka to Dmitrov to Aleksei Pekin. And when our order comes to you and you are to send to us this original case signed by yourselves to Moscow right away. But a copy of this case also signed by yourselves and the convicts, escorted, should also be sent to Dmitrov to Aleksei Pekin and you are to write to us about having done that. And you are ordered to send that letter and the transcript to the Brigandage Chancery addressed to "boyar Aleksei Petrovich Saltykov with colleagues." And about the reception of the convicts and the copy of the case our order has gone out to Aleksei Pekin in Dmitrov. Written in Moscow 7192/1683 sept 24."

a copy [addressed from the two tsars to the city of Dmitrov to "putnoi kliushnik" Aleksei Pekin]: "we received a petition from Aleksei Matveev syn Luzhin that in this year 7192/1683 Sept. 12 [Luzhin's] peasant Kupriashka Andreev from his Kostroma estate hamlet Lapatino was at the market in that same Kostroma district in the village of Sereda Upina, and he drank at the tavern with servants and peasants of Stol'nik Ivan Ivanov syn Boborykin, that is, with Mitka Filipov and with Iakushka and with the peasant Kupreianko Kuzmin. And, having drunk, in the tavern they began to fight and that peasant of his, Kupriashka Andreev, left them and headed home to the hamlet Lopatino. And as he was leaving the village of Sereda Upina [kak budet sela Seredy Upiny zaovinami] on that day those men of Ivan [Boborykin's] and the peasant of Ivan [Boborykin's] Mikitka Filipov and Iakushka Kuzmin with friends, and they all began to beat [Luzhin's] peasant and tear his upper garment [kaftan] off. And [Luzhin's] peasant, defending himself, knifed to death [pokolol] Ivan [Boborykin's] peasant Kupriashka Kuzmin. And those, Ivan [Boborykin's], men and peasant, having beat [Luzhin's] peasants, also tied up his bailiff Ostanko in that village of Sereda Upina in the market: they seized him and, having tied him up, brought them all there and then took them away to their own place, to Ivan [Boborykin's] hamlet Lgovo. And he Ivan sent off to Kostroma Luzhin's peasant and bailiff Ostanka with the murdered peasant.

But he Aleksei [Luzhin] has an old enmity and many quarrels with the Kostroma Governor Boris Chirikov and he [Luzhin thus] asked us, the sovereigns, to rule on this case. So we ordered the case sent from Kostroma to Moscow to the Brigandage Chancery. And we ordered Luzhin's two men, Ostanka and Kurpriashka Andreev, sent to Dmitrov, to you [addressee of this order]. And when you get this order, you are to send someone to escort Aleksei Luzhin's men, Ostanka and Kupriashka, to Kostroma to Stol'nik Boris Chirikov and State Secretary Grigorii Protopopov. And you are to make a copy of the interrogation and of the original case signed by you. And write to us about all this, addressed to the Militar Service Chancery to Boyar Aleksei Petrovich Saltykov and his colleagues. Written in Moscow 7192/1683 Sept 24."

IV. PETITION FROM THE LORD OF THE ACCUSED MEN

On the reverse: "7192/1683 November 1 such a petition was submitted in Dmitrov."

A petition from "your slave Aleshka Matveev syn Luzhin. This year on Sept. 12 my peasant Kupriashka Andreev and my man Ostanka Vasil'ev syn Karmanov of

Kostroma district were in the village of Sereda Upina in the marketplace and they were drinking at the tavern with men and peasants of stol'nik Ivan Ivanov syn Boborykin, all together. And Ivan's people and peasants started to beat my peasant Kupriashka and so he left the tavern and went home. And they caught up with him on the road and began to beat him and he, defending himself, killed with a knife Ivan's peasant. And now my peasant and my man have been sent to Dmitrov but have not been questioned. Order that my peasant Kupriashka and my man Ostanka be questioned and by your order and by the 1649 Conciliar Lawcode and by the civil codes and the New Criminal Charter, rule on this case!"

V. COURT REVIEWS CASE, PROCEEDS WITH INTERROGATION

Copies of several of the above documents are included here again. A copy of Sept. 15 petition from Boborykin given above [which says that the two men had been brought to Kostroma and also the dead body]. Then the two more petitions (given above) are attached, also from him, which request that the accused men be questioned and tortured and that the body be inspected. Same notations that they should be questioned and the body examined. Same description of dead body. Same two testimonies. Then second questioning in which he says same. And then copy of Luzhin's petition seeking ruling (as above).

[Notation on the back of the the latter one]: "On the original petition the notation of putnoi kliuchnik Aleksei Pekin reads as follows: "7192/1683 November 3 according to this petition, interrogate [them] again, checking against the earlier testimonies"."

"7192/1683 November 3 in Dmitrov in the Governor's office before Putnoi Kliuchnik Aleksei Pekin, according to this petition Aleksii Luzhin's peasant Kurpriashka Andreev, of Luzhin's Kostroma district estate from the hamlet of Lopatino, was questioned about the murder. And in his testimony he said that in this year 1683 (7192) on September 12 he Kupriashka was in the village of Sereda Upina in Kostroma province at the market and he Kupriashka went to the tavern to drink wine with people of stol'nik Ivan Ivanov syn Boborykin, with Iakushko Ustinov, Mikitka Filipov and with the peasant of the hamlet Maslov, Kupriashka Kuzmin. And after he had drunk wine with them, they all left the tavern and they met up with him Kupriashka a second time by the tavern and the men of stol'nik Ivan Ivanov syn Boborykin, Iakushko Ustinov, Mikitka Filipov and the peasant Kupriashka Kuzmin, began to beat him Kupriashka because he, Kupriashka, having bought some wine, did not give them any. And at that time he Kupriashka walked away from them and the tavern and they began to insult him. And he Kupriashka headed home and stol'nik Ivan Ivanov syn Boborykin's men Iakushko and Mitka and Vedenka Mikitin and the peasant Kupriashka, four men, chased him in the village of Sereda Upina in the alley and they began to hit him with whips and trample him. And having beat him they took his fur coat and he, Kupriashka, unable to withstand their beating, stabbed the peasant Kupriashka Kuzmin with a knife in self-defense. And when they were beating him, neither Ostashka Vasil'ev syn Karmanov nor any others were there. Only he Kupriashka was with them alone. And they were four men. And no one, Ostashka or any other, conspired with him Kupriashka; he Kupriashka stabbed the peasant Kupriashka Kuzmin without prior intent, in self-defense, seeing that he was being beaten to death.

That same day Aleksei Luzhin's man Ostashka Vasil'ev syn Karmanov was also questioned about the knifing and he said that Kupriashka Andeev knifed Kupriashka Kuzmin, whether intentionally or defending himself, Ostashka doesn't know, and how he knifed him he didn't see and was not with him then but had ridden off to the marketplace for purchases, and they seized him Ostashka from the marketplace and took him to the Governor's office. And on the original case and testimony it was signed by putnoi kliuchnik Aleksei Pekin with his own hand.

VI. SECOND PETITION FROM LORD OF ACCUSED MEN; REPORT OF FURTHER INTERROGATION

Another petition from Luzin, same as before describing his men drinking with others, alleging that his peasant knifed Kupriashka Kuzmin in self defense. "And instead of him they took my other man Ostashka Karmanov for no good reason, and now Kupriashka and Ostanka have been taken for no good reason and sent to Dmitrov, and yet my man [Ostanka] has had no involvement in any criminal affairs. Tsars, give Ostanka over to me on bail and for Kupriashka, make a ruling according to the civil codes!"

Pettion from Alekshka Pekin to tsars. "This year 7192/1684 January 16 [15? illegible] your order was sent to me at Dmitrov from the Chancery of Criminal Investigations with the signature of State Secretary Vasiliiii Kiprianov. And I was ordered to torture Aleksei Luzhin's man Kupriashka Andreev in the affair of the murder of Boborykin's man Kupriashka Kuzmin, and I was ordered to release on bail Ostanka to him [Luzhin] or to the man he sent for him. And on January 22 I tortured him and what he said under torture I wrote up and am sending to you to the Chancery of Criminal Investigations to Boyar Petr Vasil'evich Sheremetev with colleagues.

7192/1684 January 22 he said under torture that he knifed Kupriashka Kuzmin, defending himself, unable to withstand Kupriashka's assault on him; and he had no prior intent against Kuzmin in this knifing or against his comrades. And he received 25 blows [of torture]."

VII. RESOLUTION OF THE CASE

"Copy of document word for word": [From tsars to Dmitrov to Pekin] "This year February 26? you wrote to us that you had tortured Kupriashka Andreev in the murder of Kupriashka Kuzmin, and under torture he said he killed him [Kuzmin] without intent, defending himself against Kuzmin's assault. And by our order Kupriashka Andreev is ordered released without punishment because that murder of Kupriashka Kuzmin happened out of the blue, and when you get this document you are to release him to Luzhin with bail. Written in Moscow 7192/1684 March 10."

On the original document the signature of State Secretary Larion Pashin and Klim Nifanov and notation: "Send to Dmitrov to Putnoi Kliuchnik Aleksei Pekin."