The Russian Letters

In The

Voynich Papers

Of The Grolier Club of New York¹

(From <u>Voynichiana</u>: documents, images, and research illuminating the lives of Wilfrid and Ethel Voynich and of Anne M. Nill, Wilfrid Voynich's assistant and Ethel's life-long companion after Voynich's death.)

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¹ Scans of the letters courtesy of The Grolier Club of New York.

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In Box Six of The Grolier Club's Voynich Collection, in a folder labeled "Voynich, W. M., Letters ca. 1891," lie three mysterious letters hand-written in Russian. Each is one sheet of paper fully covered with writing on both sides. The letters are reproduced below (pp. 3-8). According to the Italian scholar Dario Besseghini, who has <u>translated</u> Letter One into English, all three are written in the same hand and mention the same persons, but have different signatures.

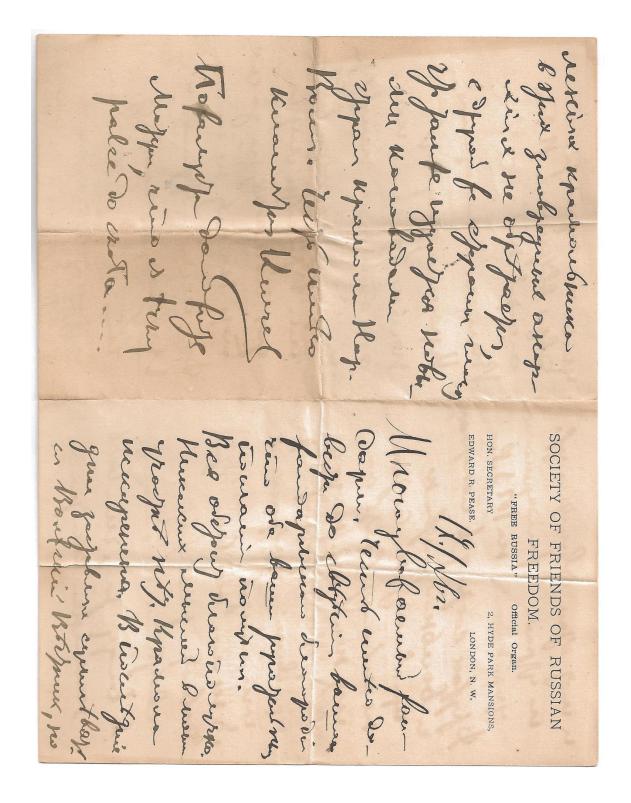
The contents of Letter One, which is written on stationery of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, are bizarre and enigmatic: the letter appears to be a kind of coded message from an informant to a police official. The other letters, one written on plain paper (Letter Two) and one on graph paper (Letter Three), have not been translated from the Russian nor have their contents been studied.

What significance did the letters have for Voynich and why did he keep them to the end of his life? Why did Ethel preserve them after his death?

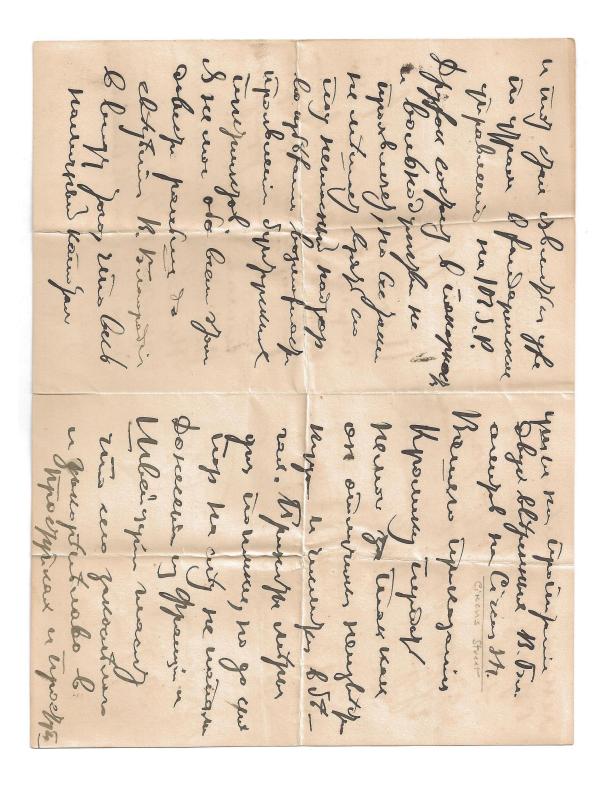
These questions cannot be answered at present. Now that the letters are available on the Web it is to be hoped that scholars will study these strange documents further and produce translations of all three along with explications of their contents. Such translations might shed light on the revolutionary activities of Wilfrid Voynich and the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom and suggest the reasons why Voynich kept the letters.

The letters and the rest of The Grolier Club's Voynich Collection are a donation from the rare bookdealer H.P. Kraus. According to Grolier Club records the Collection was accessioned in 1976. How Kraus acquired the materials in the Collection is not known. They may have accompanied the Voynich Manuscript when he purchased it from Anne M. Nill in the summer of 1961, shortly before she died. It is also conceivable that Emma Seilheimer, Anne's sister and executor of her will, presented them to Kraus when winding up Anne's estate (see Anne M. Nill's Will and her Bequest to the Library of Congress of Ethel Voynich's Unpublished Music).

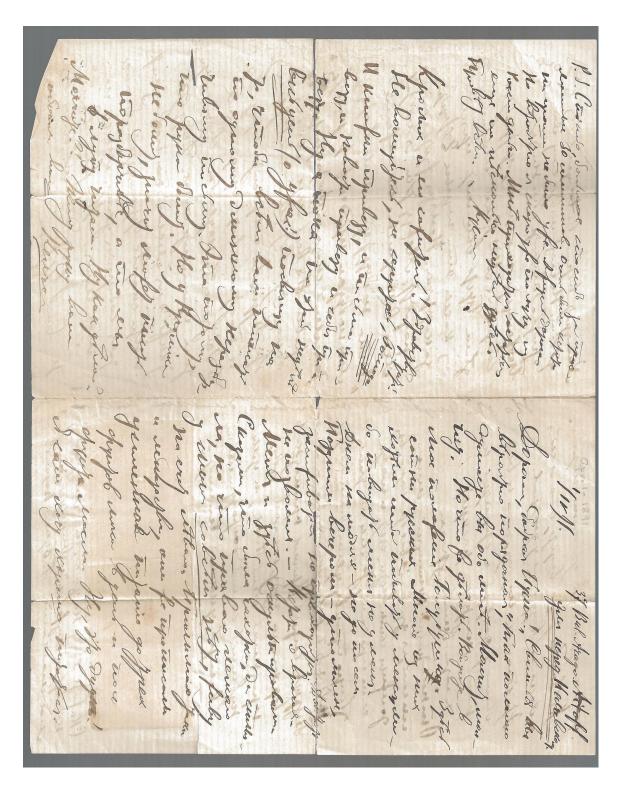
Letter One Outside



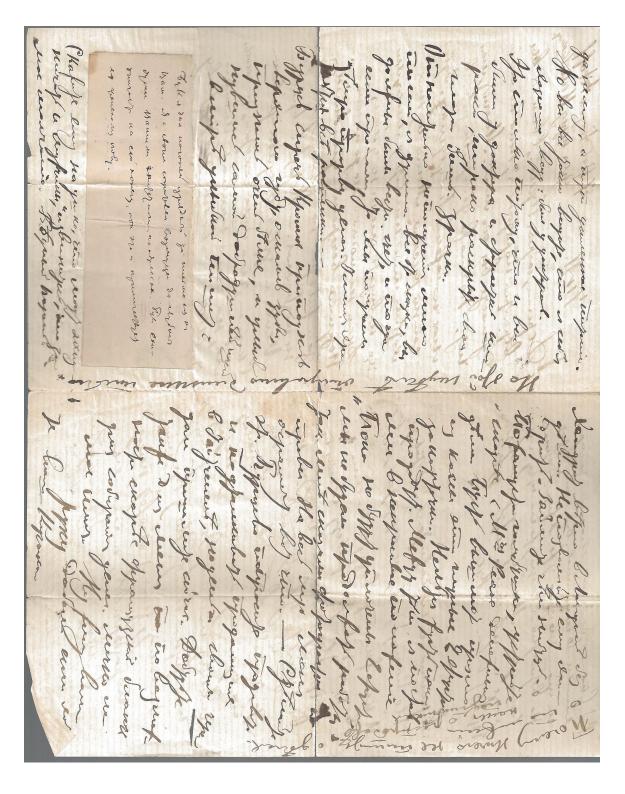
Letter One, Inside



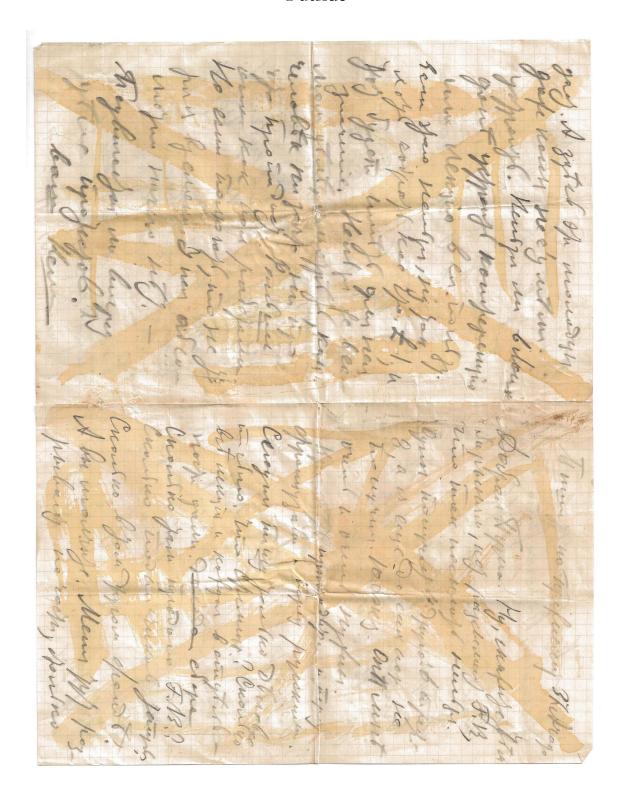
Letter Two, Outside



Letter Two, Inside



Letter Three, Outside



Letter Three, Inside

