

**Freemasonry and Fraternalism in  
Eighteenth-Century Russia**

Andreas Önnerfors  
Robert Collis (eds.)

*Sheffield Lectures on the  
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## List of Contributors

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*Robert Collis* received his doctorate from The University of Turku (Finland) in February 2008. His thesis, entitled *The Petrine Instauration: Religion, Esotericism and Science at the Court of Peter the Great, 1689-1725*, has been published by The University of Turku Press (2007). In July 2009 Dr. Collis's thesis won the inaugural European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism Thesis Prize. Prior to his studies in Finland Robert spent five years at The University of Sussex, where he graduated with an MA (distinction) in Russian Studies (1993-1998). He also spent one year at the Bakhtin Centre at The University of Sheffield (2000-2001), where he began work on his PhD. In 2001 Robert spent much of the year living in St. Petersburg. Dr. Collis is currently undertaking research on the influence of Western physicians in transmitting esotericism to Russia from the early 1500s up until 1917. He is also studying the origins of Freemasonry in Russia in the early eighteenth-century.

*Tatiana Artemyeva* teaches at the A. I Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University. She is also the head of the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences and is the Director of Research Programs at the St. Petersburg Centre for the History of Ideas. Professor Artem'eva was recently a Visiting Fellow at the Aleksanteri Institute (University of Helsinki), where she taught on the traditions of Russian utopianism. Professor Artem'eva has published extensively in Russia. A selection of her main works includes *The History of Metaphysics in Russia in the Eighteenth Century* (1994); *Mikhail Shcherbatov* (1994); *The Idea of History in Russia in the Eighteenth Century* (1996) and *Philosophy in the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences* (1999).

*Anthony Cross* was Professor of Slavonic Studies at the University of Cambridge from 1985 to 2004. Previously, he was Reader in Russian at the University of East Anglia and Roberts Professor of Russian at the University of Leeds. He was elected to the British Academy in 1989 and to the Russian Academy of the Humanities in 1996. He is internationally known for his work on eighteenth-century Russia and Anglo-Russian cultural relations. He founded the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia in 1968 and has edited the Group's annual Newsletter since 1973. Professor Cross has written and edited some twenty books and has published over three hundred articles, notes and reviews. Among his principal publications are: *By the Banks of the Thames: Russians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1980); *Anglo-Russica: Aspects of Anglo-Russian Relations in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (1993); *By the Banks of the Neva: Chapters from the Lives and Careers of the British in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (1996). *By the Banks of the Neva* was awarded the 1998 Antsiferov Prize for the best work on St Petersburg published by a foreign author in 1996-1997.

*Natalie Bayer* took up a post as an Honorary Research Fellow at UCLA in September 2009, where she will work in collaboration with Professor Margaret Jacob. In 2007 and 2008 she was Visiting Assistant Professor in History at Trinity University (San Antonio, Texas). In 2007 she completed her PhD thesis, entitled *Spreading the Light: European Freemasonry and Russia in the Eighteenth Century*, at Rice University (Houston, Texas). Her supervisors were Professor John Zammito (Rice) and Professor Margaret Jacob (UCLA). Dr. Bayer has presented papers at international conferences in the United States and Europe and in November 2008 she was a keynote speaker at “The Expression of Freemasonry” organised by The University of Leiden (The Netherlands). Oxford University Press will soon publish an article by Dr. Bayer, entitled “‘What do you Seek From Us: Wisdom, Virtue, Enlightenment?’ Inventing a Masonic Science of Man in Russia’, in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Daniel Edelstein.



# Introduction

*Andreas Önnarfors*

Russians are a book-loving people. Already when I visited the Soviet Union as a high-school graduate in 1989, I was struck by the amount of literature that was available and that everybody was reading. The subsequent dramatic shifts in political life affected the assortment of titles available in bookshops. On a visit to Georgia in 1991 I witnessed how an opponent of the status quo chipped away at the stone-faces of the unpopular communists that adorned the façade of a public building on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi, whilst across the road I saw an edition of the Bible and a catalogue from a German mail order company displayed next to each other in the showcase of a second hand bookshop.

If one browses the lavkas at any market place in Eastern Europe today it will soon become apparent that there is a strong element of popular esoteric literature on sale in the stalls that reflects a taste for the supernatural, unexplainable and magical. In this category of books can be ranked numerous titles that discuss freemasonry, which is typified, for example, by Oleg Platonov's *Kriminalnaia istoriia masonstva 1731-2004. Zagovor protiv Rossiia* (2005). This work assumes that there is a criminal plot against Russia that is being secretly carried out by freemasons. Such sensational assumptions about freemasonry are not a novelty in the Russian context. In this regard one only has to think of the spurious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" that circulated at the end of the nineteenth century, which had been forged by elements of the Tsarist security service.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As part of our lecture series, Mattias Nowak from Lund University in Sweden gave an excellent paper entitled 'Freemasonry, Catholicism and Polish National Identity – A Historical Overview'. For consistency, we have not included his lecture in this volume but have invited him to submit his forthcoming article in another publication format. The reason why I am mentioning Mattias Nowak's

Serious academic research in the area is still a desideratum and a fascinating volume like *La franc-maçonnerie et la culture russe*, published in Toulouse in 2007, is still a rarity.<sup>2</sup> In this volume no less than twenty authors over nearly six hundred pages explore the relationship between freemasonry and Russian sociability, politics, philosophy and literature. The second volume in the *Sheffield Lectures on the History of Freemasonry and Fraternalism* series is the first ever collection of essays by academics on freemasonry in Russia in the eighteenth century and represents our modest contribution towards breaking new ground in the field. The collection stems from a series of lectures that took place at the University of Sheffield between March-May 2009, which included eminent guest speakers from Russia, Sweden, the United States and Britain. As well as appearing in print each lecture is also available to listen to on-line at: [freemasonry.dept.shef.ac.uk](http://freemasonry.dept.shef.ac.uk).

The history of Russian freemasonry in the eighteenth century is a history of rich cultural transfers crossing religious and linguistic barriers. From the obsession of Peter the Great with various fraternities to the strong utopian potential that developed towards the end of the century, distance and mobility across European space seems to have been a minor obstacle. The leading figures of this active exchange of ideas were linked in a trans-national network of communication, through correspondence, travel or both. The local transformation of new knowledge generated within these networks differs perhaps only in one respect in Russia, as compared to other European states. As the exhibition “500 years of Gnosis in Europe” displayed,

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lecture at this point is that there are striking parallels between conspiracy literature on freemasonry across Central and Eastern Europe; even across cultural borders that are perceived as boundaries between “civilisations”. Estonia and Poland, who in general are not keen to be associated with Russia, share to a large extent a strong anti-masonic discourse. In Estonia, for example, Jüri Lina’s book *Architects of Deception* and his film *The Lightbringers: Emissionaries of Jabulon* have attracted widespread interest.

<sup>2</sup> ‘La franc-maçonnerie et la culture russe’, *Slavica Occitania*, Numéro 24, (Toulouse, 2007).

when held in Amsterdam in 1993, major hermetic texts in the tradition of Western Esotericism, published and printed in Western Europe, were translated into Russian in manuscript form by Russian freemasons for internal circulation and only in rare exceptions were the texts disseminated to a wider readership.<sup>3</sup>

However, studying Russian freemasonry during the eighteenth century contributes to establishing a critical stance towards an emerging Eurasian paradigm in Eastern European studies in general; namely the essentialist assumption that there is a Slavonic *Sonderweg* in the development of culture and ideas. A deeper analysis of freemasonry and other fraternal organisations will show that the Russian case goes against Fyodor Tiutchev's famous assertion that 'One cannot understand Russia by reason...One can only believe in Russia'. In other words, Russia *can* be measured according to European standards, and that this is not so much a "special character" as a character sketch of a cultural phenomenon spread across European space with little local variation. That this is not a matter of belief but of evidence is one of the unifying characteristics of the subsequent papers.

In Lev Tolstoi's *War and Peace* (1865-7) the acclaimed author introduces freemasonry into the life of Count Pierre Bezukhov. At a coach station on his way to St. Petersburg, Pierre meets an old "stranger" and is engaged in a deep conversation about belief and atheism and freemasonry as a way of reconciliation between these positions. Tolstoi reveals that the stranger was Joseph Alekseevich Bazdeev, who had been one of the most well known freemasons and Martinists in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Thus, this meeting acts as a link between the early nineteenth century and previous decades, which results in a fundamental change in Pierre's mind and soul: 'He firmly believed in the possibility of the brotherhood of men united in the aim of supporting one another in the path of virtue, and that is how

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<sup>3</sup> See the impressive exhibition catalogue *500 years of Gnosis in Europe: Exhibition of Printed Books and Manuscripts from the Gnostic Tradition*, (Amsterdam, 1993).

Freemasonry presented itself to him'. Arriving in St. Petersburg, Pierre is filled by 'the joy, hitherto unknown to him, of believing in the possibility of attaining perfection, and in the possibility of active brotherly love among men'. Here he is invited to join a masonic lodge. Unique, both to historical sources and literary fiction, Tolstoi subsequently includes a lengthy description of Pierre's initiation into freemasonry. If one interprets *War and Peace* as a saga of the Decembrist generation, Tolstoi makes a powerful statement about the influence of freemasonry. It stresses its utopian and social potential that went on to form a strong element in the humanitarian ideas of the philosopher from Iasnaia Poliana. Unfortunately we had no paper in our lecture series covering this period of Russian freemasonry, which in a sense resembles the developments of the previous century. Pierre's – and through him Tolstoi's – view of freemasonry is liberated from any sinister connotations and clearly proves its firm integration into genuine Russian thought.

*Ernest Zitser's* paper 'A Mason-Tsar? Freemasonry and Fraternalism at the Court of Peter the Great' opens this volume with a fascinating analysis of esoteric symbolism in use at the Petrine court. Based upon a new reading of A.F. Zubov's famous engraving of Peter the Great's second wedding in 1712, Zitser explores it as a symbol of the Petrine "cultural revolution"; as a complex visual summary of the new dynastic scenario enacted during the royal nuptials of Peter and Catherine. Taking a close look at the imagery of the engraving it emerges that elements of fraternalism and esotericism form an underlying topic of the pictorial message. The tsar as a mediator in the road to perfection made use of both elements in order to consolidate his rule and his ambition to transform Russia.

*Robert Collis* argues in 'Hewing the Rough Stone: Masonic Influence in Peter the Great's Russia, 1689-1725' that freemasonry formed a significant part in the imagination of Peter's reign. Analysing the Emperors personal seal that displays a mason-king hewing a feminine, regal figure, replete with orb and



sceptre, from a rough stone, it emerges that Peter might have seen a similarity in building the Russian empire and perfecting a masonic work. Collis traces this potential masonic influence to Peter's obsession with fraternities and convivial associations, and to the fact that many people in his service belonged to a Jacobite network in which quasi-masonic forms of fraternalism played a significant role from a very early point in his reign.

*Tatiana Artemyeva* explores 'Utopian Spaces of Russian Masons in the Enlightenment' in her paper, focusing on the conceptual dimensions of Russian freemasonry and its implications for a better understanding of the Russian history of ideas. Defining various forms of utopian thought, Artemyeva convincingly argues that freemasonry played a significant role in the formulation of wide-ranging and sometimes overlapping utopias: pedagogical, moral, epistemological, socio-political, legal, theological and technological. These utopias enabled the Russian elite to connect to the intellectual currents of Europe and deeply influenced Russian culture and society of the time.

*Anthony Cross's* paper on 'Anglo-Russian Contacts in the Reign of Catherine the Great' clearly demonstrates that the borders of British freemasonry stretched over the entire continent, and thus it is an impressive example of how counterproductive it would be to delimit the scope of research into the fraternity. To a large extent based upon English sources, Cross is able to reconstruct the complicated power-play between various masonic obediences during the latter half of the eighteenth century and how Russian elites as well as the Empress herself responded to the challenges. The paper offers a fascinating overview of the actions of the main representatives of various lodges and masonic bodies and enhances our comprehension of the complicated situation of the time. His investigation proves that Russian freemasons were fully integrated into European networks and developments of the period.

Unfortunately we did not receive *Robert Cooper's* paper on 'Scottish Freemasons in Petersburg 1784-1794' in time to include

it in the present volume, but hope to be able to publish it in our Working Paper series in due course. His paper would have added to the findings of Anthony Cross in regard to the Scottish freemasons that were active in the construction of Tsarskoe Selo, and who brought their associational culture with them whilst working abroad. This is another proof of the importance of freemasonry for a fuller comprehension of various forms of migration and mobility across European space.

Finally, *Natalie Bayer's* contribution 'The "Société Antiabsurde": Catherine the Great and Freemasonry' sheds light upon the cultural perception of freemasonry during the late eighteenth century. There is no doubt that Russian freemasonry played an important role in the promotion of sciences, culture, education and hence societal reform. These activities were broadly tolerated by Catherine II. However, around 1780 Russian freemasonry became increasingly influenced by esoteric ideas introduced from abroad, such as mysticism, magnetism and Martinism. It was in this environment that the Empress wrote four plays against freemasonry that mocked the rituals, spirit and ideas of freemasonry. On the eve of the French revolution the tensions between the authoritarian agenda of the Empress and the independent culture of freemasonry (that was both enlightened and esoteric) were on the rise and ultimately culminated in the dissolution of the lodges in 1792.

If one takes the five papers as a whole, it becomes evident that research into Russian freemasonry offers fascinating insights into the transfer and exchange of ideas in Europe. It is our sincere hope that this research is strengthened in the future. And to conclude with Tolstoi: "Can he really be going away leaving me alone without having told me all, and without promising to help me"? thought Pierre'. Yes, we believe in our reader.

# A Mason-Tsar?

## Freemasonry and Fraternalism at the Court of Peter the Great

*Ernest Zitser*

I have always been fascinated by the esoteric symbolism in use at the court of Russia's founding father, not least because it complicates the standard view of early eighteenth-century Russian political culture, which is often pictured (anachronistically, I believe) as an epitome of rationalism, secularism, and utilitarianism.<sup>1</sup> Until recently, however, I have shied away from the daunting task of exploring the use of masonic symbolism in Petrine political theology. But as Robert Collis has recently reminded us,<sup>2</sup> Peter not only employed the services of foreign advisors with close ties to Jacobite Scottish freemasonry, but also

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This paper was presented at the Centre for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism, University of Sheffield, UK, 25 March 2009. I would like to thank Drs. Andreas Önnarfors and Robert Collis, of the Centre for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism, not only for their gracious hospitality, but also for providing me with an opportunity to think more seriously about the topic of freemasonry at the court of Russia's first Emperor.

<sup>1</sup> A view shared both by the dean of Soviet *petrovedenie* and his post-Soviet successor. See N. I. Pavlenko, 'Petr I (K izucheniiu sotsial'no-politicheskikh vzgliadov), *Rossia v period reform Petra I* (Moskva, 1973), pp. 40-102; and E. V. Anisimov, 'Petr I: rozhdenie imperii', *Voprosy istorii* 7 (1989): 3-21, translated as 'Peter I: Birth of an Empire', ed. Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Studies in History* 30:2 (Fall 1991), pp. 6-29.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Collis, *The Petrine Instauration: Religion, Esotericism and Science at the Court of Peter the Great, 1689-1725*, (Turku, Finland: Turku University Library Uniprint, 2007). See also 'Patrick Gordon and his links to Jacobite and Stuart Freemasonry', *Faravid* 28 (2004); 'Semen Grigorovich Naryshkin (c.1680-1747): Russia's First Freemason?' *Faravid* 29 (2005); 'Freemasonry and the Occult at the Court of Peter the Great', *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 6:1 (2006); and 'Alchemical Interest at the Petrine Court', *Esoterica* 7 (2005), pp.52-77; available at:

<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVII/Russianalchemy.htm>.

incorporated masonic motifs into his self-presentation as a Russian Orthodox tsar, frequently in surprising and unorthodox ways. One of the earliest examples of this practice can be found in **Figure 1**, which reproduces the wax stamp that Peter used to seal his personal correspondence in 1695, during the siege of the Tatar-held fortress of Azov.



**Fig. 1:** Emblem on Peter’s personal ring-seal from c. 1695 (nineteenth-century reconstruction).

The homemade emblem on Peter’s personal ring-seal depicts the profile of a young apprentice, who is presumably the Russian tsar himself in the guise of “bombardier Peter Mikhailov”.<sup>3</sup> This was the *nom de guerre* that Peter had adopted in his correspondence with the members of his inner circle during the siege of Azov, the very first of the numerous military campaigns that the tsar was to

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<sup>3</sup> During the 1696 triumphal procession following the conclusion of the second Azov campaign, Peter appeared with the rank of “captain” of the Preobrazhensk guards-regiment. However, during the first Azov campaign, the tsar was listed as a “bombardier”, a description of his function during the siege of the fortress, rather than an official military rank. Pavlenko, *op. cit.* p. 42, p. 44; *PiB*, 9(2): pp.1013-4.

lead during his thirty-six-year reign and the one from which Peter dated his life-long career of “service”.<sup>4</sup> This circle of trusted advisors included F. Iu. Romodanovskii, the courtier who was simultaneously the head of the royal chancellery charged with the task of protecting Peter against defaming “words or deeds” during the period of the tsar’s increasingly frequent absences from Moscow, and the mock sovereign to whom the tsar paid obeisance and from whom he received various military and naval commissions.<sup>5</sup> This so-called “Prince Caesar” was the secular counterpart of the “Most Comical and All-Drunken Prince Pope” (N. M. Zotov), who also did double duty, not only as one of the main participants of the sacred parodies that served as an important element of the counter-cultural play-world, which the tsar had first elaborated at the end of the seventeenth century on the royal estate of Novo-Preobrazhenskoe (New Transfiguration),<sup>6</sup> but also as the secretary in charge of Peter’s

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<sup>4</sup> In a handwritten note intended for the official *History of the Swedish War*, Peter wrote: ‘I began my service [career] in the rank of a bombardier during the first Azov campaign [at the moment] when the [enemy] watch-towers were captured’ (*Nachal sluzhit’ s pervogo Azovskogo pokhodu bombardirom, kogda kalanchi vzjaty*), *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Drevnikh Aktov*, razr. IX, otd. 1, op. 6, d. 144, l. 4, cited in Pavlenko, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43, p. 42n2. In the same place, Pavlenko also mentions other examples in which the tsar refers to his “service”, citing *Pis’mo i bumagi imperatora Petra Velikogo* [hereafter *PiB*] (St. Petersburg-Leningrad, 1887-present), p. 8 (1): 110 (August 1708); p.11 (2): p. 12 (1711).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of Peter’s promotions from “captain” to “colonel of the Preobrazhensk guards regiment” (1706), “rear-admiral” (1709), “general” (1713), see Pavlenko, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>6</sup> As I argued elsewhere, participation in the Bacchanalian mysteries of this carnivalesque realm of mock kings, priests, knights, and shipwrights not only delineated the boundaries between those courtiers who belonged to Peter’s select company from those who remained hostile to the tsar’s vision of reform, but also polemically highlighted the fundamental differences between the old Muscovite dispensation and the new Petrine one. Ernest A. Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom: Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 4-5, and *passim*.

own travelling personal chancellery. So when “bombardier Mikhailov” sealed his personal letters to the “Prince Caesar”, it was the “Prince Pope” who copied and mailed his correspondence.

As V. Iu. Matveev has noted,<sup>7</sup> however, the earliest letter that retains an identifiable fragment of the red wax seal used by “Peter Mikhailov” was addressed not to the Prince-Caesar,<sup>8</sup> but to an obscure English translator in Muscovite service who went by the name of Andrei Iur’evich Krevet (“Andrew Crafft” or “Gravat”).<sup>9</sup> The uncertainty about the spelling of his name demonstrates just how little is actually known about this individual.<sup>10</sup> Available evidence suggests that in addition to his duties as an employee of the Foreign Affairs Chancellery, Crafft ordered special tools from Europe whenever and wherever the

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<sup>7</sup> V. Iu. Matveev, ‘Emblematika lichnykh pechatei Petra I’, in *Geral’dika: Materialy i issledovaniia. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, ed. G. V. Vilibakhov (Leningrad, 1987), pp. 70-83, here pp. 71-2.

<sup>8</sup> Although Peter did use this seal in his correspondence with the “Prince Caesar.” See “Piter” to “Min Her Kenich” [F. I. Romodanovskii] (17 August 1697), in ‘Pis'ma Petra Velikogo k kniaziu Fedoru Iur'evichu Romodanovskomu’, ed. P. I. Bartenev, *Russkii arkhiv* 3 (1865), pp. 25-62, here p. 25. This letter, which was written during the “Grand Embassy”, when the tsar was in Amsterdam, learning the art of shipbuilding, has led scholars to misread the image on its seal. According to Bartenev, the red wax seal contained a ‘depiction of a young carpenter, who was surrounded by maritime instruments (*korabel'nyimi instrumentami*) and military arms (*voennymi orudiiami*)’, with the inscription: ‘*Az bo esm' v chinu uchinmykh, i uchiashchikh mia trebuii*’. Bartenev’s description, including the (erroneous) notion that this is an image of a “young carpenter,” is repeated almost verbatim in Matveev, ‘Emblematika lichnykh pechatei Petra I’, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> Peter to A. Iu. Krevet (17 July 1695) in *PiB*, 1: p. 40, p. 522.

<sup>10</sup> Eugene Schuyler, *Peter the Great, Emperor of Russia: A Study of Historical Biography* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1884), I: p. 215, refers to “Andrew Crafft”; Robert Nisbet Bain, *The First Romanovs. (1613-1725): A History of Moscovite Civilisation and the Rise of Modern Russia under Peter the Great and His Forerunners* (London, 1905), p. 220, refers to ‘Krevet, or Gravat’ (the latter name is a variant of the word for what the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as ‘an article of dress worn round the neck, chiefly by men’).

tsar needed them, including vices, compasses, and a tool belt that could hold a case for drawing implements, about which the tsar corresponded during the siege of Azov.<sup>11</sup> After the failure of the first Azov campaign and the tsar's momentous decision to build a war fleet in Russia, this Englishman was given the important task of managing the Preobrazhensk saw mills. In this capacity Crafft supervised the carpenters and soldiers assigned to copy the design of a galley acquired in Holland, and then to cut and assemble the parts of the flotilla of ships that would eventually be used to stage a successful naval blockade of the Tatar fortress.<sup>12</sup> The enterprising Crafft was thus one of a handful of Russian-speaking, foreign advisers ("Russified" foreigners like Andrei Vinius, Franz Lefort, and Jacob Bruce)<sup>13</sup> on whom Peter relied to carry out the first military campaign of his reign; a campaign to which the tsar dated the origins of his self-styled service career, and during which he employed a personal seal that, as we shall see, could be interpreted as a reference to Peter's personal apprenticeship in the guild of non-operative masons.

If we examine the miniature portrait of "bombardier Peter Mikhailov" even more closely, we will notice that the young

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<sup>11</sup> For a summary of Crafft's correspondence with Peter, see Edward J. Phillips, *The Founding of the Russian Navy: Peter the Great and the Azov Fleet, 1688-1714* (Westport, CT, 1995), p. 39, p. 41, p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> In 1696-7, with the encouragement of the tsar himself, Craft also founded the state Weaving Court — a manufactory for the production of sailcloth, the demand for which had become great with the start of fleet construction. He was commissioned to hire weavers from abroad and to build a sawmill in Preobrazhenskoe, on the bank of the river Iauza (which provided the water-power). Also hired were Russian weavers from Moscow's Kadashevskaiia settlement, where the weaving trade had a long tradition. By the start of the eighteenth-century, the Weaving Court was already working at full power supplying the Admiralty with sailcloth. By 1719, this was a huge enterprise with more than 1,200 specialists and workers. E. V. Anisimov, *The Reforms of Peter the Great*, ed. John T. Alexander (Armonk, NY, 1993), p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> S. M. Solov'ev, *Peter the Great: A Reign Begins, 1689-1703*, trans. Lindsey A. J. Hughes (Gulf Breeze, FL, 1994), p. 289.

apprentice is literally surrounded by the tools of his trade: accoutrements that any ruler living after the seventeenth-century “Military Revolution” was expected to learn how to wield on the international stage, namely arms, both cold (swords, pikes, broadaxes) and hot (guns and mortars). These were, in fact, the very weapons that the Muscovite armed forces were actually wielding (with the help of native and foreign military advisors) against the Crimean Tatars in Azov. Consequently, it is not surprising that during the course of his first “apprenticeship” in actual warfare the royal “bombardier” should seal his letters from the front with a wax impression representing the implements of his martial guild. What is more surprising, and what knowledgeable recipients of Peter’s letters would not fail to note, is that among the typical implements of early modern war-making depicted on the wax seal there could also be found mathematical instruments, such as the compasses (one of the most common masonic symbols, representing ‘virtue, the measure of life and conduct, the additional light to instruct in duty and keep passions within bounds’);<sup>14</sup> a gavel (the double-headed wooden hammer that a mason uses to break off corners of rough stone, a tool that non-operative masons associate with “the active will”);<sup>15</sup> and, finally, a large heart, a familiar component of many early modern emblems, which is shown immediately below the portrait of the young tsar and which in this case may represent Peter’s ardour for his military calling.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> James Stevens Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry* (Woodstock and NY, 2002), p. 236.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Beresniak, *Symbols of Freemasonry*, photos by Laziz Hamani (New York, 1997), pp. 52-3; Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry*, p. 238.

<sup>16</sup> On the second version of the seal, the heart is inscribed within the circumference of a circle containing not only the portrait, but also a set of compasses and a flaming bomb (as well as an identified item that looks like a drum or mortar). Early on this flaming bomb (or “shell and flame”) device was variously applied by European military establishments as insignia for infantry grenadiers as well as officers and men of artillery and ordnance branches. As



Although the first two pieces of equipment were part of the standard tool-kit of those trained in the art of *architectura militaris* (the branch of architecture devoted to military fortifications, artillery, and ballistics), the heart and the vaguely masonic-sounding inscription that accompanied this emblematic portrait of “Peter Mikhailov” suggest that there may be more here than meets the eye. This inscription can be roughly translated as: ‘I am in the rank of a student (*v chinu uchimykh*) and seek those who can teach me (*mia uchashchikh*)’. In Muscovite Russia, the word that I have translated as “rank” (*chin*) could also mean “degree” (*stepen*), “rule” (*pravilo, ustav*), or the state of putting oneself under the authority of someone (*podchinenie*).<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the word “student” (*uchenik*) could also mean “a follower of a particular teaching” (*posledovatel’ ucheniia*); a “worshiper or admirer” (*poklonnik, pochitatel’*), as well as an “apprentice” (*uchеничество* is in fact the contemporary Russian word for “apprenticeship”).<sup>18</sup> In other words, any Russian-speaking correspondent who was familiar with contemporary masonic and military emblems could, if he so chose, interpret Peter’s seal as a reference to the Degree of “Entered Apprentice”, the first of the Three Degrees of Ancient Craft (or St. John’s) masonry.<sup>19</sup> Whether anyone actually did so is another question. We simply do not know if Crafft was inclined to read a masonic meaning into Peter’s seal, much less whether he actually lived up to his name as a practitioner of the Craft (that is,

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such, it appears to be a reference to Peter’s service as a “bombardier” during the first Azov campaign.

<sup>17</sup> I. I. Sreznevskii, *Materialy dlia slovaria drevne-russkogo iazyka po pis’mennym pamiatnikam*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1906 [Graz, 1956]), 3: pp. 1519-22, s.v. “chin.”

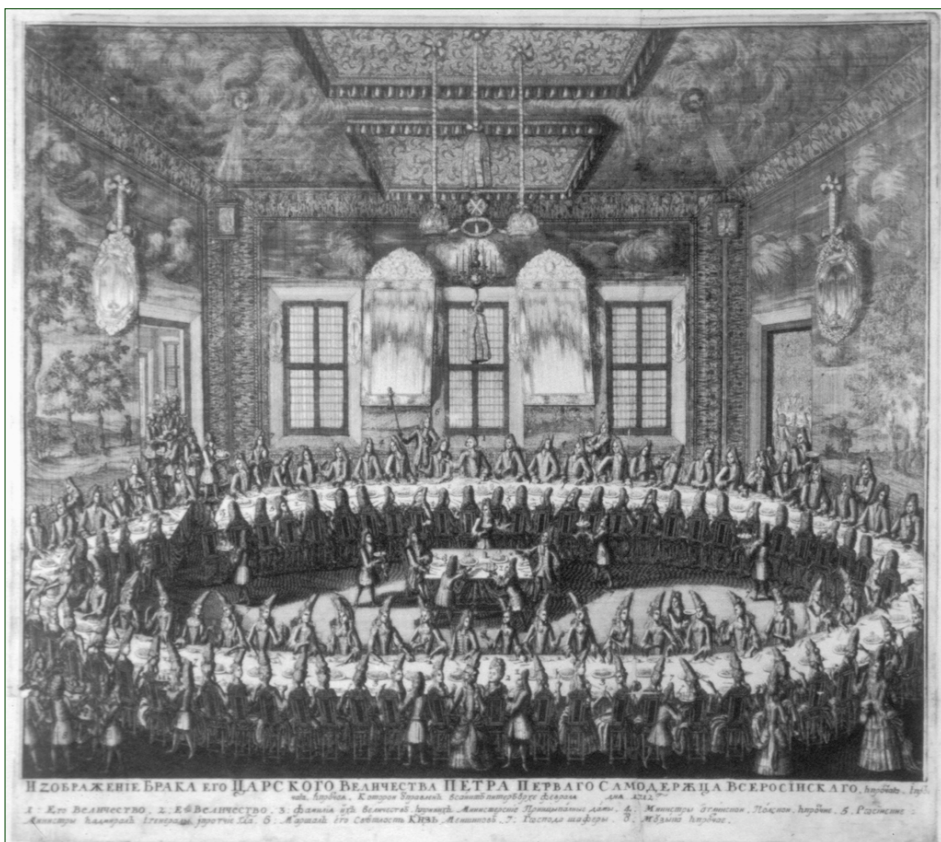
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 3: p. 1336, s.v. “ouchenik,” meaning “one who is being taught (*obuchaemyi*), given over to learning (*otdannyi v nauku*)”; a “student, or follower of a particular teaching, rule, or commandment” (*posledovatel’ ucheniia*); or a “worshiper, admirer” (*poklonnik, pochitatel’*).

<sup>19</sup> James Stevens Curl, “Glossary of Terms”, in *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry: An Introductory Study* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 2002), p. 233, p. 236.

a member of the brotherhood of freemasons). What we do know is that Crafft's boss did in fact employ this highly allusive language on the contemporary equivalent of a business card; and that he did so from very early in his reign, in fact several years before the tsar's "Grand Embassy" to Europe and Peter's apocryphal induction into the masonic order by Christopher Wren.

This fact adds a new wrinkle to Robert Collis's discussion of the masonic imagery on the second (and even better-known) of Peter's personal ring seals. I am referring to the emblematic depiction of Pygmalion and Galatea on one side of the three-sided ring-seal that the Russian tsar commissioned from I. K. Bekkher some time in 1711 or 1712 (which is reproduced elsewhere in this volume). I do not want to repeat Collis' argument (summarized in this volume), especially because I agree with much of his interpretation, particularly its invocation of such symbols as the ashlar (or unhewn rock), the material on which a mason works; the gavel and chisel, the tools that a mason wields; as well as the All-Seeing Eye, that oversees the entire process of working the rough stone. I do, however, want to draw attention to two points that bear further elaboration. Firstly, the fact that in the personal ring-seal commissioned in 1711-2, the tsar no longer appears as an apprentice, as he did in the homemade seal of 1695. Instead, he is now depicted as a master-craftsman, completely in control of the tools of his trade. Furthermore, these tools are no longer just military accoutrements, a change, which suggests that Peter's interests have expanded beyond the art of war. In fact, we can go even further and say that the tools and the general imagery associated with the second ring-seal are much more clearly paramasonic than the first. At the very least, the visual evidence provided by the emblems on Peter's personal seals suggests that even if it did not specifically refer to his progression from the First to the Second Degree of freemasonry, the apparent advancement from "apprentice" to "master" was not pure coincidence.

The second thing that I would like to note is that Peter's personal appropriation of the Pygmalion myth took place in a charged political context that shaped how the tsar's contemporaries would have understood this apparent invocation of masonic imagery. For we must remember that the ring seal bearing the Pygmalion emblem was commissioned around the same time as Peter's controversial decision to stage a public celebration of his marriage to Marta Skavronskaia (aka Catherine Alekseevna), the low-born, foreign mistress, with whom he had already had several illegitimate children; a celebration that, as I will argue, also contains elements that could be interpreted in a Masonic light. It is to the analysis of these masonic overtones that I would like to devote the rest of this article. My point of entry will be the sole contemporary engraving of the event under discussion, Aleksei Fedorovich Zubov's 'Depiction of the Marriage of His Royal Highness Peter the Great, Autocrat of All the Russias'. **[Fig. 2]**.



**Fig. 2:** A. F. Zubov, “Depiction of the Marriage of His Royal Highness, Peter the First, Autocrat of All the Russias”. Engraving, 1712.

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> Zubov’s engraving must be read neither as a snapshot of the wedding festivities nor merely as

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Zitser, “The Russian Round Table: Aleksei Zubov’s *Depiction of the Marriage of His Royal Highness, Peter the First, Autocrat of All the Russias*”, in *Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture* (New Haven, 2008), pp. 57-62,

a symbol of the Petrine “cultural revolution”; but rather as a complex visual summary of the new dynastic scenario enacted during the royal nuptials of Peter and Catherine. Zubov’s engraving is, in fact, more akin to what at the time was called a *conclusio*, a genre that was quite popular in early modern Russia and Ukraine and that was usually used to offer a visual explication of a particular position in a sermon or scholastic theological debate.<sup>21</sup> In this case, the debate in question concerned not so much a matter of Orthodox dogma as the question of royal succession, specifically, Peter’s controversial plan to legitimate the children of the newly-baptised Catherine Alekseevna; and consequently, to by-pass tsarevich Aleksei Petrovich, the issue of Peter’s first marriage to the very-much alive tsaritsa Evdokiia Lopukhina, who in the late 1690s had been exiled to a far-off nunnery in a canonically-questionable and politically-motivated divorce. In other words, what from our point of view appears as an extremely stylised depiction of a rather staid court ceremony, could, from the perspective of Zubov’s court patrons and other knowledgeable insiders, appear as a political allegory of the tsar’s God-given right to flout Muscovite conventions and turn the world upside-down, if necessary, in order to institute a new political order.<sup>22</sup>

In an earlier discussion of Zubov’s engraving, I identified several elements that I believe confirm the court artist’s intention to produce nothing less than a visual apotheosis of the tsar. Chief among these was Zubov’s decision to depict the baroque interior

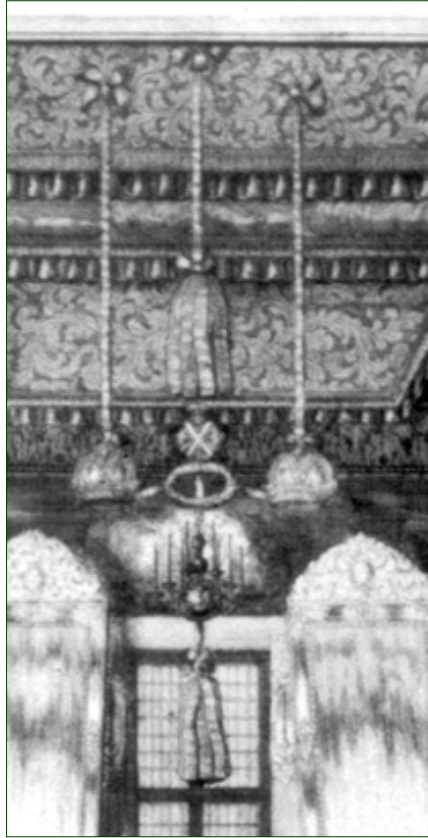
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<sup>21</sup> M. A. Alekseeva ‘Brat’ia Ivan i Aleksei Zubovy i graviura Petrovskogo vremeni’, in *Rossiiia v period reform Petra I* (Moscow, 1973), pp. 337-361, here pp. 342-3; and for the wider literary context, L. I. Sazonova, *Literaturnaia kul’tura Rossii: rannee novoe vremia* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul’tur, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> A prerogative that was to be justified most eloquently by Peter’s court preacher, the newly-installed Archbishop of Novgorod, Feofan (Prokopovich), in his treatise *On The Monarch’s Right to Appoint His Own Heir* (1718). See V. M. Zhivov, ‘Kul’turnye reformy v sisteme obrazovaniia Petra I’, in *Razyskaniia v oblasti istorii i predistorii russkoi kul’tury* (Moscow, 2002), pp. 381-2, n.1.

of the grand hall in which the wedding reception took place as if it were split into two even halves by a horizon line going through the figure of Peter himself, who is also the central vanishing point for the entire engraving. In the resulting *trompe l'oeil*, Peter's body marks the boundary between two planes – the light, airy, window-filled top half representing the heavenly realm of icons and painted cherubim, and the glitzy, crowded, bottom half representing the terrestrial realm of wealth, power, and privilege. Here Zubov, ever the icon-painter's son, employs the device of three-dimensional perspective and the technique of etching – both relatively new developments in Russian visual art – to render the ineffable quality of the tsar's “two bodies” and to reinterpret for his contemporaries a very old trope of Muscovite royal panegyrics, one that depicted Russian tsars as divinely appointed intercessors between heaven and earth.

In this paper, however, I would like to focus on a different element of this engraving, an element that relates most directly to the topic of freemasonry and fraternalism at the court of Peter the Great, namely, Zubov's representation of the large, bone candelabra that dominates the top half of the engraving, and that illuminates the scene below (**Fig. 3**).



**Fig. 3:** Detail of Zubov's 1712 engraving, depicting Peter's bone candelabra.

As we know from contemporary official court records, Peter created this lighting fixture especially for the occasion on a lathe from his own turner's shop.<sup>23</sup> The royal turner then made a

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<sup>23</sup> *Pokhobodnyi zhurnal 1712 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1854), pp. 1-2: 'In the first days of the year [1712], in [the month of] January, His Tsarist Majesty deigned to begin to carve a bone candelabra, which by his own labours He completed in time for His Tsarist Majesty's [own] wedding, that is, by the nineteenth of

special point of hanging up the candelabra in the centre of the room, above the heads of his guests, immediately before the wedding banquet itself was to begin. It is as if Peter was deliberately trying to make sure that his wedding guests – the contemporary viewers of Zubov's engraving – would understand that this lighting fixture served a much more important function than it would seem at first sight. In other words, the product of the tsar's labours on his workbench was meant to be read allegorically, not as an example of Peter's simple tastes, practicality, and utilitarian outlook.

Contemporary viewers would be more likely than we are to interpret Peter's candelabra according to the rhetorical conventions of the language of Renaissance and Baroque emblem books, such as the compendium of symbols and emblems that the tsar had translated and published in 1705. Under entry no. 756, in this, the very first Russian emblem book, there is an engraving of 'a candelabra, or chandelier, with burning candles' (*Panikadilo, ili liustr, s goriashchimi svechami*).<sup>24</sup> This image is accompanied by inscriptions in five languages (Russian, Latin, French, German and English): *Tem zhe ognem zbzhemsia. Edin nas ogon' vosplameniaet. Eodem igne urimur. Nous brulons d'un meme feu. Wir brennen vor gleichem Feuer. We burn by the same fire.* Like other baroque emblems, this one was presumably intended to be

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February... And before dinner, before anyone had a chance to sit at the table, in the middle of the very same room where everyone would be sitting, facing the baldachins, His Tsarist Majesty deigned to hang up the above-mentioned candelabra, which he himself deigned to carve'. On the royal turner's shop, see Vladimir Matveev, "'Tokarnia" Petra', *Petr I i Golandiia: russko-gollandskie khudozhestvennye i nauchnye sviazi. K 300-letiiu Velikogo posol'stva* (St. Petersburg, MCMXCVI), 160-3; and *Teatrum machinarium, ili Tri epokhi iskusstva rez'by po kosti v Sankt-Peterburge: k 300-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia A. K. Nartova*. Katalog, ed. V. Iu. Matveev, et. al. (SPb, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> *Emblemy i Simvoly*, ed. A. E. Makhov (Moskva, 1995), pp. 260-1 (Fig. 756).



interpreted on many levels: moral, religious, and political.<sup>25</sup> However, it is important to emphasize, that all of these readings inevitably referred to the community that was invoked by the use of the first person plural (“We”). This is what makes Peter’s demonstrative act (and its representation in Zubov’s engraving) of such interest to anyone studying fraternalism at the court of Peter the Great.

The available evidence allows us to offer several possible contemporary readings of Peter’s bone candelabra. The first, and most obvious, is suggested by the occasion itself: the candelabra referred to the royal bride and bridegroom, who burned with love for one another and whose union was central to the new dynastic scenario being enacted during the wedding feast. A representation of the fiery union of these soul-mates was in fact a prominent part of the evening fireworks display on the first night of the festivities, which featured (among other illuminations) a pair of intertwined, burning monograms of the newlyweds’ given names.<sup>26</sup> In this interpretation, the bridegroom’s demonstrative gesture of love played off (and thereby magnified) the meaning of the emblem on his newly commissioned personal seal, much like candlelight bouncing off a mirror. This meaning was actually much more in keeping with the original motto accompanying the depiction of ‘Pygmalion and his image’ [*i ego obraz*ŭ]– ‘Love puts all in order’ – (No. 705 in the official emblem book of 1705) – a motto that emphasized the redemptive and organising power not of royal labour, but rather of love (both divine and human). This reading of the emblem on Peter’s personal seal suggested that while Catherine, the Livonian Galatea, may have been Peter’s creation in the political sense, she was not merely a product of his labour of love. Illuminated by the divine spark of love (represented respectively by the All-Seeing Eye in the personal

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<sup>25</sup> L. I. Sazonova, ‘Obshcheevropeiskie cherty vostochnoslavianskogo barokko. Iz nabliudenii nad poetikoi: Acumen, poesia artificiosa, emblema, picta poesis’, *Slavianovedenie* 2 (2002), pp. 98-110

<sup>26</sup> *Pokhodnyi zhurnal 1712 goda*, p. 7.

seal, and the bone candelabra at the wedding feast), Catherine becomes if not an equal partner then one of the chief means by which the tsar can introduce “order” both into his family and his realm – a key help-mate in the tsar’s plan to realise and secure his imperial ambitions and his new dynastic scenario.

Simultaneously, those lucky guests who were invited to sit with the royal bride and groom at the circular table immediately under Peter’s candelabra, could have interpreted the tsar’s demonstrative act as a reference to the chivalrous community represented by the Petrine Round Table itself. This chivalrous reference is underscored by the parallelism between the saltire cross that the tsar proudly displays on his chest, and the one that hangs down from the wedding wreath that connects the two baldachins to the candelabra suspended over the heads of the wedding guests. This cross is the badge of the very first Russian order of knighthood, the Order of St. Andrew the First-Called (Rus. *pervozvannyi*; Gk. *Protoctetos*), which was created in 1698 by Peter himself, possibly as an Eastern Orthodox counterpart to the Catholic Order of the sea-going Knights of Malta.<sup>27</sup> The fact that St. Andrew was Jesus’ first disciple (before even his older brother, St. Peter) hinted at the Russian Orthodox tsar’s imperial pretensions vis-à-vis the Holy See and the Holy Roman Emperor, the official sponsors of the crusading Knights of Malta. Similarly, the fact that St. Andrew’s saltire cross was quickly adopted as the naval jack of Russia’s newly-founded fleet, demonstrated Peter’s desire to invoke the help of Russia’s (and his own) patron saint in his efforts to transform Muscovy into a major maritime power. The deliberate invocation of the fellowship of sea-going Russian knights explains, in part, the tsar’s decision to appear (and to have

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<sup>27</sup> A. L. Khazin, ‘Vysshiaia nagrada Otechestva: k voprosu o sozdanii statute ordena Sviatogo apostola Andreia Pervozvannogo’, *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* 12 (2008), pp. 53-5, here p. 55n2. See also G. V. Vilinbakhov, ‘K istorii uchrezhdeniia ordena Andreia Pervozvannogo i evoliutsiia ego znaka’, in *Kul’tura i iskusstvo petrovskogo vremeni; Publikatsii i issledovaniia* (Leningrad, 1977), pp. 144-58; and Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom*, pp. 89-92.

his grooms appear) in the uniforms of the Imperial Russian navy, rather than in the traditional formal attire previously required at Muscovite royal weddings. This was just one of the features that lent a masquerade-air to the celebration of the tsar's second wedding, which, it must be remembered, took place at Shrovetide, a time of the year when travesty was expected, if not exactly condoned by the Church.

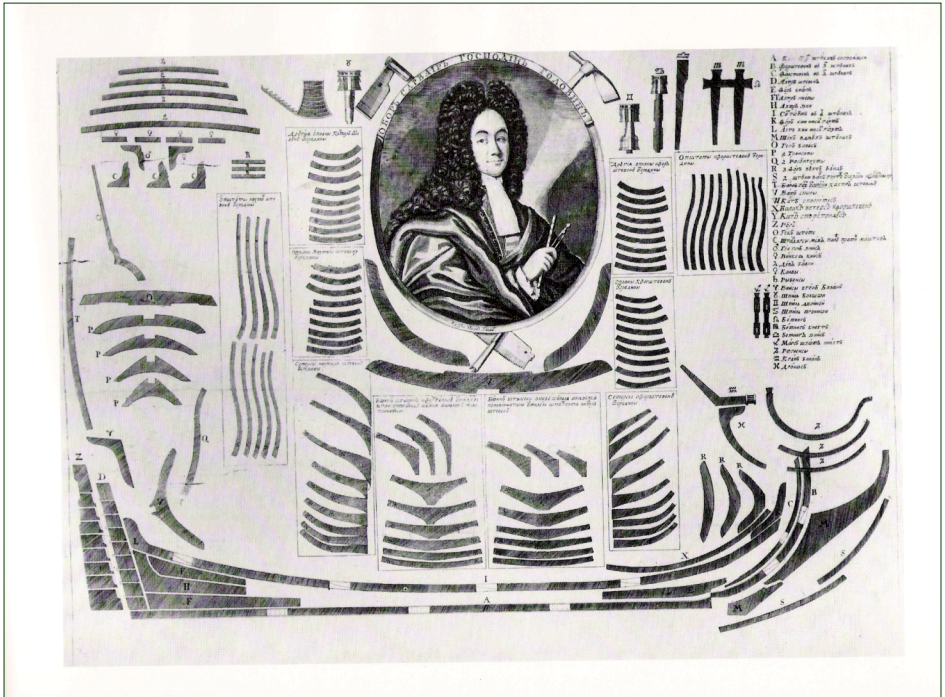
As in the previous parodies of the seventh sacrament staged at his court,<sup>28</sup> Peter underscored his intention to flout everyday conventions by dispensing with all the traditional functionaries, ceremonies, and fertility rituals associated with Muscovite matrimonial celebrations. Instead, the tsar personally composed the list of participants, assigning the most important ceremonial posts, often with new, foreign-sounding titles such as *Marshal*, *Schaffer*, and *Vorschinder*, to his trusted advisers and companions, most of whom served in Peter's cherished navy.<sup>29</sup> As in traditional Muscovite royal weddings, the bride and groom were chaperoned by their proxy mothers and fathers. However, whereas these honorific posts were usually occupied by blood relatives, at Peter's wedding three of the four proxy parents were foreigners: Count de Buss, rear-admiral in command of Peter's galley fleet; Cornelius Cruys, vice-admiral in command of the Baltic fleet; and Cruys' wife; while the fourth, Tsaritsa Praskov'ia Fedorovna (née Saltykova), widow of Peter's half-brother (Tsar Ivan Alekseevich), was a Romanov only by marriage. The proxy brothers were Fedor Skliaev, one of Peter's long-time companions, a low-born but energetic shipbuilder; and Ivan Golovin (aka "The Shipwright-Prince", *keniaz'-bas*), a Russian courtier who reputedly failed to learn the basics of nautical architecture when the tsar sent him abroad for study, but who was nevertheless appointed to serve as the nominal head of

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<sup>28</sup> Zitser, *ibid.*, ch. 3.

<sup>29</sup> For Peter's handwritten list, see *PiB*, 12 (1): p. 83; for the official list of weddings guests, see *Pokhodnyi zhurnal 1712 goda*, pp. 1-7.

Russia's fledgling shipbuilding industry, a position denoted by the gold compasses that he holds in the engraving in **Figure 4**. This Zubov print depicts Golovin surrounded by the implements of “nautical architecture” (*architectura navalis*) and all the parts necessary to build a sailing ship from scratch.



**Fig. 4:** A. F. Zubov, Portrait of “Prince-Shipwright” I. M. Golovin. Engraving, c. 1720.

One would think that the invocation of the compasses to characterise the individual who was the butt of jokes at Peter’s court must surely have been done in jest. But as Lindsey Hughes has noted, the “Shipwright-Prince” (like other jesters at Peter’s court) played a much more serious political role than is generally supposed, in effect, helping the tsar to enact the very things that

he appeared to be mocking.<sup>30</sup> This was certainly the case with the “Cavalier of the Order of Judas”, a jester who wore the badge of the mock chivalrous-religious order that served as the inverse counter-part to the Order of St. Andrew, and who was charged with ferreting out Judases (foreign and domestic) who would betray Russia’s Own Anointed One.<sup>31</sup> And it appears to have been the case with *Ober-sarvaer* Golovin, the Russian naval official who was responsible for supervising foreign shipwrights and craftsmen in Russian service and for ratifying their promotion from one grade to another (much like an officer of a masonic lodge). A masonic connection can even be detected in the collective epistle in which Peter and several British shipwrights address Golovin as the “initiator” of Russian shipbuilding, “or our second Noah”.<sup>32</sup> After all, in some quarters the Ark is a symbol for the masonic lodge, while Noah himself appears as a ‘keeper of a secret, who was “raised” by his sons’ – an interpretation that allows us to see the toast traditionally raised in Golovin’s honour (‘For the Health of the Sons of Ivan Mikhailovich’) in a whole new, masonic light.<sup>33</sup> Regardless of whether or not there really was a masonic subtext to the engraved portrait of Golovin, however, it is clear that (as with the depiction of Peter’s wedding banquet), realism as we understand it today

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<sup>30</sup> For an extended discussion of I. M. Golovin’s place in Peter’s “company,” see Lindsey Hughes, “‘For the Health of the Sons of Ivan Mikhailovich’: I. M. Golovin and Peter the Great’s Mock Court’, in *Reflections on Russia in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Joachim Klein, Simon Dixon, and Maarten Fraanje (Cologne, 2001), pp. 43-51.

<sup>31</sup> The badge of this mock-order depicted the suicide of Judas, after his betrayal of Christ, and was initially intended as a punitive decoration for Hetman Ivan Mazepa, a former ally and cavalier of St. Andrew, who betrayed Peter on the eve of the battle of Poltava. See Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom*, chapter 3. An unattributed and as yet unsubstantiated image of the medal is available on the Russian Wikipedia site:

<[http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:Orden\\_Juda.jpg](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:Orden_Juda.jpg)>.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Hughes, “‘For the Health of the Sons of Ivan Mikhailovich’, p. 51.

<sup>33</sup> Curl, *op. cit.*, p. 241 (Noah), p. 234 (Ark).

was not really the point of Zubov's print. Indeed, this engraving can perhaps most profitably be read as a reference to the analogy between St. Petersburg and Noah's Ark, which was extremely popular in early eighteenth-century written and pictorial panegyrics, particularly those connected with the newly built (and perennially flooded) capital city.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Collis' research, we still do not know if the appearance of Golovin's compasses, or for that matter, St. Andrew's saltire cross, can legitimately be traced back to the influence of the Scottish Jacobites in Peter's entourage. What is clear, however, is that the ties that were supposed to bind the knights and ladies of the Petrine Round Table to the Russian royal couple were neither those of nationality nor religion, but rather of "Faith and Fidelity", the official motto of the Order of St. Andrew. In fact, Peter's well-known (and well-advertised) xenophilia and egalitarianism may even have encouraged some of the guests at the tsar's wedding banquet, particularly those inclined to more esoteric pursuits and practices, to read yet another, alchemical meaning into Peter's candelabra: that is, to see in this emblem a reference to the notion that the obvious social, ethnic, and religious heterogeneity of this assembled group concealed the fact that in reality they were all made of the same noble metal, and, consequently, that they all burned at the same temperature, or, as the motto associated with the candelabra emblem suggested, with the same fire.<sup>35</sup> Needless to say, this fire

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<sup>34</sup> G. Kaganov, "'As in the Ship of Peter'", *Slavic Review* 50(1991): pp. 354-67; *idem*, *Images of Space: St Petersburg in the Visual and Verbal Arts*, trans. Sidney Monas (Stanford, 1997); and especially Robert Collis, 'Peter the Great and the Petersburg Myth: Notions of Babylon and New Jerusalem', *Faravid* 28 (2004).

<sup>35</sup> In a 1719 letter to the German Pietist August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), Archbishop Feofan would compare Peter's efforts to educate Russian men to the skills of a metallurgist: 'Russia, is, believe me, full of excellent men, but as with precious metals, they have laid buried deep under ground until today. A long time there was no one who could dig them up, burn and polish them. This was the first result of our most venerable autocrat Peter's wisdom and indefatigable efforts'. See Eduard Winter, *Halle als Ausgangspunkt der*

was provided by none other than the Russian monarch, who not only founded the princely order that brought them all together at the same round table, but also turned the candelabra that hung over their heads as a reminder of the source of their service opportunities and their badges of honour – both real and parodic (as in the case of Golovin). This courtier, like all the other leading actors in the carnivalesque court ceremony staged to celebrate Peter’s wedding in the winter of 1712, thus complemented Peter’s fictional identity as a Russian knight and a rear admiral and sustained the drama of transformation that was being enacted at his carnivalesque wedding feast.

The case of the mock “Shipwright-Prince” brings us to the final meaning of Peter’s candelabra, which I would suggest could be read not only as a reference to the bonds of holy matrimony or the knighthood of the Petrine Round Table, but also as the mystical table-fellowship of the disciples of Russia’s own Anointed One. As I argued elsewhere,<sup>36</sup> such a table-fellowship was obviously modelled on the Pentecostal moment of divine illumination described in the Acts of the Apostles, when tongues of flame descend upon the heads of Christ’s disciples and they achieve the ecstatic state of “spiritual” or “sober drunkenness” that allows them to see the truth of divine revelation and the ability to speak in tongues (i.e. proselytise in all the languages of the world). At Peter’s wedding banquet (and in the *conclusio* created to celebrate it), the table-fellowship of the apostles was represented by three individuals, who (as we see in **Figure 5**) are sitting at or raising a toast by a small square table located within the circumference of the circle traced by the Petrine Round Table.

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*deutschen Russlandkunde im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953), p. 438, cited in Collis, *The Petrine Instauration*, p. 310.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest A. Zitser, ‘Politics in the State of Sober Drunkenness: Parody and Piety at the Court of Peter the Great’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51: 1 (2003), pp. 1–15; Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom*, ch. 2.



**Fig. 5:** Detail of Zubov’s 1712 engraving depicting the square table with “clerical personages”.

The official court journal refers to these three bewigged courtiers as “clerical personages” (*dukhovnye osoby*),<sup>37</sup> and identifies them as none other than ‘Prince-Pope [Nikita] Zotov, Metropolitan Peter Buturlin, and Archdeacon Prince Iurii Fedorovich Shakhovskoi’, that is, as the high priests of the infamous “Most-Comical and All Drunken Council”, the mock monastic brotherhood of self-described devotees of Bacchus, which regularly gathered in His name (cf. Matthew 18:20), at both public and private court functions, in order to toast Petrine military victories and indications of God’s favour towards Russia’s anointed monarch. Like the Order of St. Andrew, this

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<sup>37</sup> For the reference to, and identification of the individuals sitting at the square table, see *Pokhodnyi zhurnal*, p. 6.



monastic fraternity was founded in the 1690s by none other than Peter himself, who held the rank of Archdeacon, under the speaking name of Pachomius-Crams-With-His-Prick Mikhailov (*Pakhom-pikhai-bekhui-Mikhailov*), an obscene pun on (among other things) the Russian word for groin (*pakh*) and the name of the creator of cenobitic monasticism (St. Pachomius).<sup>38</sup>

Just as the placing of civil servants, foreign naval officers, and décolleté ladies around the main banquet table offered a clear visual demonstration of the knightly code of conduct that bound the guests to the Russian monarch and his bride, so the prominent presence of the “Prince-Pope” and the leading members of his “Unholy Council” – not to mention the conspicuous absence of Peter’s first-born son and presumed heir-apparent<sup>39</sup> – proclaimed the tsar’s intention to celebrate his wedding in the company of his own creation, independent of the traditional demands placed by family or faith. But whereas the first of these meanings was relatively obvious to the knights of the Petrine Round Table, the second meaning – like the second table – remained prominently in sight, but just out of reach of most guests. For of the many who were called to Peter’s royal wedding banquet, only a select few could, without external coaching, identify the three mock clerics seated at the centre of the Round Table or appreciate the seriousness of this inside joke. Consequently, only those individuals who had abetted Peter’s carnivalesque inversion of the old dispensation could understand the full political significance of his decision to place the members of the Drunken Council at the very centre of the Petrine Round Table. It is important to emphasize that these individuals were

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<sup>38</sup> A point made by Claudio-Sergio Ingerflom in conversation with the author of this paper.

<sup>39</sup> As Lindsey Hughes points out, Tsarevich Aleksei ‘apparently stormed off to his estate in Ingermanland on the day of the wedding in protest, perhaps disappointed that there were no special celebrations for his birthday on 18 February’. Lindsey Hughes, *Peter the Great: A Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 103.

not just the tsar's drunken playmates. The fact that (in the words of the motto accompanying the candelabra emblem) they could all be described as "lit together", could, of course, be understood as a weak pun on the term for being drunk ("all lit up"); but it could also be interpreted as a reference to those who had literally attained illumination, that is, the *illuminati* who have eyes to see the deeper mysteries of state revealed by Peter's demonstrative act of royal craftsmanship.

From this "soberly drunk" perspective, the candelabra that Peter turned on his work-bench and hung up during his wedding banquet (and that Zubov faithfully re-produced in his *conclusio*) constituted a crucial prop in a court ceremony that sought to make a bold statement about the new political dispensation heralded by Peter's marriage to Catherine. By drawing an implicit comparison between the royal wedding feast in St. Petersburg and the coming Kingdom of Heaven, this ceremony in effect playfully re-enacted Jesus's parable about the wedding feast to which 'many are called, but few are chosen'. (Matt. 22:2-14; cf. Rev. 19:9) As in the biblical parable, those individuals who were invited to attend Peter's wedding (in the proper attire) would have been made to feel like they were a chosen people, the select few called (in the apocalyptically-tinged words of St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews [Hebrews 10:24-25]) 'to consider one another[,] in order to stir up love and good works, <...> so much the more as you see the Day [of Reckoning] approaching'. For its organisers, on the other hand, this court ceremony would have offered yet another opportunity to depict the Russian tsar, the light-bearing carpenter-king, who literally provided both the occasion and the illumination for this event, as nothing less than a Christ-figure: a New Adam whose labour and sacrifices serve to insure that his realm will regain paradise.

In sum, my analysis of the possible meanings that Peter's bone candelabra may have held for its contemporaries leads me to conclude that the tsar and his chief engraver both invoked para-masonic motifs (alongside other, more traditional elements

of early Imperial Russian political theology) to herald the ongoing transfiguration of the Muscovite realm. Although there may have been individuals at Peter's wedding feast who could have interpreted the tsar's demonstrative act of royal labour, its physical product, and its engraved reproduction in masonic terms, there is no evidence that Peter actually intended this carnivalesque court ceremony to be understood in that way. In fact, those individuals who organised and performed this live political allegory appeared not in the guise of a masonic brotherhood, but rather of a quasi-mystical table-fellowship of sea-going Christian knights, who were, at the same time, soberly drunk apostles of Russia's own Anointed One. Together, these "illuminati" enacted what Stephen Baehr called the "monarchical version" of the Russian "paradise myth"<sup>40</sup> – the perennial quest for an ideal world that saw the restoration of the divine image in man not so much as a moral mission, as primarily a political one.

According to Baehr, the monarchical version of the Russian paradise myth portrayed the tsar as a mediator in the road to perfection, who through his suffering, would remake himself in the image and likeness of God – and then provide the perfect example for remaking his subjects. This politically-motivated, panegyric interpretation of Muscovite political theology was propagated by Peter's panegyrists, like Archbishop Feofan (Prokopovich) of Novgorod, who stressed the redemptive significance of the divinely anointed monarch 'by whose labours we rest, by whose campaigns we stand unshakeable', and even 'by whose many deaths we live'.<sup>41</sup> However, it is important to emphasize, as does Baehr, that this official, monarchical version of the paradise myth had very little in common (at least

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<sup>40</sup> Stephen Lessing Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Russian Culture: Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 97.

<sup>41</sup> *Sochineniia Feofana Prokopovicha*, ed. I. P. Eremin (Moscow and Leningrad, 1961), 67; Nicholas Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought* (New York, 1985), pp. 12-3.

politically) with the masonic one, in which the masons themselves (rather than the tsar) serve in the exemplary role, collectively embodying the small group of the elect, spiritual knights, on a moral mission to restore the Golden Age first within themselves, and only afterwards in the external world. This is a crucial distinction, and, for me, it is one of the main reasons why for all his masonic-sounding rhetoric, Peter could never be a mason-tsar.

## Hewing the Rough Stone: Masonic Influence in Peter the Great's Russia, 1689-1725

Robert Collis

In the 1770s and 1780s freemasonry in Russia flourished in a variety of guises.<sup>1</sup> Despite the significant differences between allegiances they shared a common symbolic language. As Douglas Smith has noted, in his study on freemasonry and society in eighteenth-century Russia, the general metaphorical aim of Russian freemasons was ‘to reshape the rough stone so that its original surfaces became unrecognizable: no longer covered with unhewn and jagged surfaces, it was to be “scoured, planed...and smoothed out”’.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the symbolic language of the masonic craft was adopted to express the goal of transforming the rough and base character of an uninitiated individual into a refined, virtuous and morally upright freemason.

Thus, in light of the emphasis placed on “working the rough stone” among Russian freemasons in the latter half of the

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed studies on the forms of freemasonry that developed in Russia in this period, see In-Ho L. Ryu, ‘Moscow Freemasons and the Rosicrucian Order’, in J. G. Garrard (ed.) *The Eighteenth Century in Russia* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973), pp.198-232; Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999); Raffaella Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N. I. Novikov* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005); Natalie Bayer, *‘Spreading the Light’: European Freemasonry and Russia in the Eighteenth Century* (PhD thesis: Rice University, 2007). In Russian, see M. N. Longinov, *Novikov i moscovskie martinisty* (Moscow, 1867); A. N. Pypin, *Russkoe masonstvo. XVIII i pervaya chetvert XIX v.* (Petrograd: OGNI, 1916); G.V. Vernadskii, *Russkoe masonstvo v tsarstvovanie Ekateriny II* (Petrograd, 1917); S. P. Mel’gunov & N. P. Sidorov (eds.), *Masonstvo v ego proshlom i nastoiashchem*, two volumes (Moscow: IKPA, 1991). These two volumes were originally published in 1914 and 1915 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, p. 41.

eighteenth-century, it is extremely intriguing to study the personal seal adopted by Peter the Great (1672-1725) from at least as early as January 1714.<sup>3</sup>

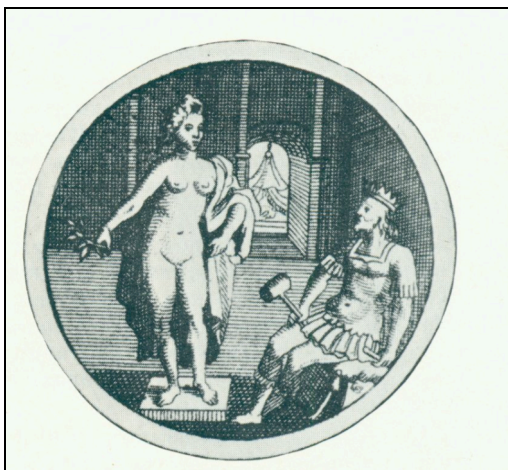


**Fig. 1:** Personal Seal of Peter the Great, dating from 1711-1712. Source: Sapunov & Ukhanova, p.29. An original copy of the seal can be found in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

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<sup>3</sup> The seal is present on a document relating ‘to the matter of Gospodin Kornilus Kreus’, or in other words, Vice-Admiral Cornelis Cruys (1665-1727). See V. Iu. Matveev, ‘K istorii vozniknoveniia i razvitiia siuzheta “Petr I, vysekaiushchii statuiu Rossii”’ in B.V. Sapunov and I. N. Ukhanova (eds.) *Kul'tura i iskusstvo Rossii XVIII veka: novye materialy i issleovaniia*, (Leningrad: “Iskusstvo”, 1981), p. 28. However, Matveev argues that the seal actually dates from 1711-1712, and was designed by F. Kh Bekker. The seal is also present on a letter written by Peter the Great on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1723, from Preobrazhenskoe Palace. It is described in the following manner: ‘The seal upon the Czar’s original letter bears no arms, but a device. Two figures in the foreground, one of whom, wearing an imperial crown, is seated and wields a hammer, driving a chisel into wood or stone, out of which has been hewn the greater part of the second figure, which is erect, and also wears an Imperial crown, with robes and sceptre. In the background is a view of houses and shipping. Overhead is a triangular emblem of the Deity with the motto “Adjuvante”’. See Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Reports on the Manuscripts of the Earl of Eglinton, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, Bart. , C.S.H.Drummond Moray, Esq. C.F. Weston Underwood Esq. & Sir Wingfield Digby Esq.* (London, 1885), p.164.

The central motif of the seal shows a mason-king hewing a feminine, regal figure, replete with orb and sceptre, from a rough stone. This image draws on the Pygmalion myth, as narrated by Ovid in the tenth book of *Metamorphoses*, in which the Cypriot king carves a beautiful ivory statue. Enamoured with his own creation, Pygmalion asks the gods to animate his “ivory maiden”, which they agree to do. Peter the Great was well aware of the Pygmalion story, as recited by Ovid. In *Symbola et Emblemata*, commissioned in 1705 by the Russian monarch, for example, one finds an emblematic depiction of the myth.<sup>4</sup>



**Fig. 2:** An Image of Pygmalion and Galatea from *Symbola et Emblemata* (Amsterdam, 1705), No. 750, p.251.

The masonic symbolism contained in this ancient myth was not lost on the nineteenth-century American masonic scholar J.D. Buck, who in 1869 wrote:

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<sup>4</sup> See *Symbola et emblemata* (Amsterdam, 1705), No. 750, p.251.

These great truths...are like a Divine Image concealed in a block of stone (the rough ashlar), which many artisans assail with mallet and chisel...perchance, to release a distorted idol. Only the Perfect Master can so chip away the stone as to reveal in all its grandeur and beauty the Divine Ideal, and endow it with the breath of life. Such is the building of character. The fable of Pygmalion and Galatea is, after all, more real than history.<sup>5</sup>

I would argue that the so-called “Divine Ideal” being hewn in Peter the Great’s seal is Russia, with the monarch portrayed as a mason-king capable of transforming the country from its previous crude and base condition. Indeed, the sermon delivered by Feofan Prokopovich at Peter the Great’s funeral in 1725 exalted the monarch as a skilled mason-sculptor: ‘All of Russia is your statue, from you it is recast...and in your emblem it is not falsely portrayed’.<sup>6</sup>

Other motifs clearly visible in the seal also add to its masonic character. The two columns standing to the right of the mason-king, for example, strike one as being evocative of the pillars of Jachin and Boaz that stood at the entrance to the Temple of Solomon. According to the Bible (I Kings 7:21), Hiram of Tyre cast these pillars, and it is said that Israelite rulers of the House of David were crowned at their base.<sup>7</sup> These Solomonic pillars play a pivotal role in masonic tradition. Moreover, I would argue that their presence in Peter the Great’s seal suggests that the Russian monarch consciously perceived himself as a worthy heir to the

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<sup>5</sup> J.D. Buck, *Mystic Masonry Or the Symbols of Freemasonry and the Greater Mysteries of Antiquity* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1992) pp. xxx-xxxii.

<sup>6</sup> V.P. Grebeniuk (ed.), *Panegiricheskaiia literature petrovskogo vremeni* (Moscow: “Nauka”, 1979), p. 298.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard E. Jones, *Freemasons’ Guide and Compendium*, (London: Harrap, 1979), p. 358.



House of David in his attempt to establish a New Jerusalem in Russia.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to bear in mind that Peter the Great's embrace of masonic-style symbolism arose at a time when St. Petersburg had become the new Russian capital and was emerging as one of the great European cities. Thus, not only was the city awash with stonemasons applying their craft, but its rise from the boggy landscape on the banks of the River Neva also fuelled Peter's perception of himself as a divinely ordained monarch.

Further masonic-style imagery can be seen in the upper section of the seal, where one can see a radiant all-seeing eye that also contains the Tetragrammaton, or Hebrew name of God. Significantly, it has been noted that this striking combination was first utilised in Russia in the prints for Peter the Great's seal.<sup>9</sup> In other words, Peter the Great was not simply drawing on a pre-existing baroque tradition present in Russia, but was consciously forging a new visual symbolic language. The divinely sanctioned nature of Peter the Great's "masonic" mission is stressed by the Latin word "Adiuvante" that adorns the uppermost section of the seal. In combination with the Tetragrammaton, this word signifies that the task of working the rough stone will be carried out "with God's help".

A somewhat inverted version of the image on Peter the Great's seal was also frequently used after the victorious conclusion of the Great Northern War in 1721, when the monarch assumed the title of Emperor and Father of the Fatherland. In a circular relief produced to commemorate the Russian victory, for example, one can see a mason hewing a male monarch from rough stone. In addition, it is once again possible to note a distinctive arch, a radiant all-seeing eye and the Latin word "adiuvante", as well as a ship. Crucially, one can also view a

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this theme, see Robert Collis, *The Petrine Institution: Religion, Esotericism and Science at the Court of Peter the Great, 1689-1725* (Turku: University of Turku Press, 2007), pp. 321-61.

<sup>9</sup> Matveev in Sapunov and Ukhanova (eds.), p. 30.

depiction of the angel of victory reaching up to crown the monarch as emperor, symbolising that Peter the Great had finally been carved into his perfected form as the ruler of Russia.



**Fig. 3:** A Circular Relief by B.C. Rastrelli and A.K. Nartov (?), dating from between 1723-1729. Source: Sapunov & Ukhanova, p.34.

An original can be found in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

Moreover, it is also extremely significant that the Tetragrammaton has been replaced within the radiant sun by three 7's. In official celebrations held to mark the Nystad peace treaty much was made of the fact that the Great Northern War lasted for twenty-one years and was divided into three significant periods. On New Year's Day 1722, for example, Feofilakt

Lopatinskii stressed in an official speech that God favoured odd numbers when orchestrating earthly affairs.<sup>10</sup> Four weeks later Prokopovich made reference to the prophetic calculations of Ezekiel, Daniel and John in regard to the length and division of the war and contemplated the significance of the number of the trinity.<sup>11</sup>

Given the subject matter of the central motif in the circular relief it is worth noting that the numbers three and seven hold special significance in masonic symbolism. In Albert Mackay's *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, for example, the author describes that 'in freemasonry the tenary is the most sacred of all the mystical numbers', citing the three degrees of the craft, as well as the fact that there are three principal officers in a lodge.<sup>12</sup> Mackay also notes that 'seven is a sacred number in masonic symbolism' and that 'in the earliest instructions of the eighteenth century it was said that a lodge required seven to make it perfect'. In addition, the author refers to the mystical significance of the number seven in relation to the seven liberal arts, the seven steps of the winding stairs, the seven days of the week, the ancient belief in the seven planets and the seven notes of the musical scale.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, I would argue that Peter the Great's personal seal, as well as the various prints, reliefs and busts that subsequently adopted a similar theme, provide visual evidence of an outlook seemingly in accord with masonic symbolism. Indeed, Peter the Great's utilisation of masonic-style symbolism in the 1710s and 1720s occurred precisely at a time when Freemasonry began to flourish in Britain and set down foundations in Continental Europe. Hence, it begs the question of whether Peter the Great

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<sup>10</sup> Grebeniuk, p. 256.

<sup>11</sup> Grebeniuk, pp. 265-66.

<sup>12</sup> Albert G. Mackay, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry: And Its Kindred Sciences Comprising the Whole Range of Arts, Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1999), p. 930

<sup>13</sup> Mackay, pp. 930-2.

was consciously aware of the masonic symbolism inherent in his personal seal?

Since the nineteenth-century a host of Russian and Western scholars have addressed the question of whether Peter the Great himself was actually a freemason, yet have overlooked the powerful visual symbolism present in many prints and designs commissioned by the Russian monarch. What is more, little attention has been paid to the similarities between the common reformatory goals of freemasonry and Peter the Great's efforts to bring about cultural, religious, philosophical, social and political transformation in Russia.

Instead, scholars have been drawn to two particular legends attesting that Peter the Great was initiated into the Craft during his travels to Western Europe. According to one legend, Christopher Wren initiated Peter the Great into freemasonry in 1698, that is, during the Russian monarch's three-month residence in London.<sup>14</sup> The other principal legend recounts how Peter the Great brought back a masonic statute to found a lodge on the island of Kronstadt, in the Gulf of Finland, after his second Grand Embassy in 1717.<sup>15</sup> In support of these legends it is customary to point to the fact that Russian freemasons in the last quarter of the eighteenth-century were known to sing G.R. Derzhavin's 'Song to Peter the Great' and to revere his name in lodges.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst these legends are undoubtedly seductive, I would argue that they have actually deflected attention from more persuasive evidence suggesting masonic influence at the Petrine court. Indeed, in 1998 Lindsey Hughes — the outstanding scholar of Petrine Russia — wrote that the study of freemasonry

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<sup>14</sup> Pypin, p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> M. N. Longinov, *Novikov i moscovskie martinsty* (St. Petersburg: MVD Rossii, 2000), p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> Pypin, pp. 88-9; Longinov, p. 111; A. G. Cross, 'British Freemasons in Russia during the Reign of Catherine the Great', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 4 (1971), p. 43.

and fraternalism in the reign of Peter the Great ‘requires further investigation’ as ‘evidently there existed a number of overlapping groupings and activities’ which she argued may have influenced the Russian monarch.<sup>17</sup>

In support of this sentiment it is worth considering how Peter the Great’s attempts to radically recast his subjects, to borrow Prokopovich’s apt phrase, along Western European lines was in harmony with the broad goals of eighteenth-century freemasonry. In simple terms these goals stressed civic responsibility, politeness, virtue, loyalty to the crown, Christian values and education. Peter the Great’s radical programme of reforms embraced precisely such goals, including the establishment and active promotion of new associative public forms. Douglas Smith has stressed the crucial role played by freemasonry in Russia in the second half of the eighteenth-century, in terms of developing a “public sphere” parallel to the rise of an absolutist state. Drawing on the pioneering work of Jürgen Habermas and on the research of Margaret Jacob, Smith has powerfully demonstrated the role of new associative forms (salons, coffeehouses, learned societies, fraternal clubs etc.), alongside the growth of a print culture, in forging Russia’s public sphere and civil society.<sup>18</sup>

Whilst new associative forms, including freemasonry, did flourish in Russia in the second half of the eighteenth-century, their enthusiastic progenitor was Peter the Great. The absolute monarch was the driving force, for example, behind the creation of Russia’s first newspaper (*Vedomosti*) in December 1702, as well as the dramatic expansion in the output of the country’s printing presses. During his reign he also commissioned the publication of an etiquette manual, *The Honourable Mirror of Youth* (*Iunosti chestnoe*

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<sup>17</sup> Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 251.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, p. 55. Also see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Boston, Massachusetts: MIT, 1989); Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, Second Edition (Morristown, New Jersey: The Temple Publishers, 2003)

*zertsalo*) (1717). This manual prescribed a list of sixty-two rules that young children should follow, including how to behave at weddings and dances.<sup>19</sup> What is more, the tsar sought to actively encourage his servitors to adopt new forms of social interaction. Most noticeably, he issued an Act of Assemblies on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1718, which outlined the establishment of French-style salon-assemblies. The decree stipulated that any decently dressed person was free to attend an assembly at the residence of a private individual, where they were positively encouraged to dance, smoke, play cards and chess and listen to instrumental music; all forms of entertainment previously viewed by conservatives as “devilish”.<sup>20</sup>

Alongside attending these new assemblies, the *public* were also encouraged to visit the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera- Russia’s first museum. Indeed, at the official opening in 1719, visitors in decent attire were permitted to enter without cost *and* were tempted by offers of complimentary coffee, wine and vodka.<sup>21</sup> These *public* initiatives went hand-in-hand with sweeping educational reforms, which included the foundation of various pedagogical institutions and the Academy of Sciences in 1724. Furthermore, Peter the Great promoted the ideal of meritocratic service to the state, when he introduced a Table of Ranks in 1722, which consisted in fourteen hierarchical grades for both military and civil positions. As Marc Raeff has stated, ‘masonry offered a parallel or equivalent to the Table of Ranks in public service’.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, in addition to these general features, which I would argue were in broad harmony with the ideals of

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<sup>19</sup> The original text of *The Honourable Mirror of Youth* is available on-line. See: < [http://historydoc.edu.ru/catalog.asp?cat\\_ob\\_no=13059&ob\\_no=12770](http://historydoc.edu.ru/catalog.asp?cat_ob_no=13059&ob_no=12770) >. Viewed on 24.2.2009.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, pp. 267-8.

<sup>21</sup> Jakob von Storcksburg Staehlin, *Original Anecdotes of Peter the Great* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1970), pp. 95-6.

<sup>22</sup> Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 161.

freemasonry, I will now examine a number of factors that I believe reinforce the case that Peter the Great would have been well aware of the masonic symbolism inherent in his personal seal. Firstly, I will outline Peter the Great's enthusiastic sponsorship of various fraternal societies and assemblies in Russia from the early 1690s until his death in 1725. Crucially, these secretive and/or exclusive bodies were open to — indeed thrived because of — participants from Western Europe, particularly from Britain.

Secondly, I will argue that direct masonic influence was brought to the Petrine court by way of a Jacobite network centred around the pivotal figure of Dr. Robert Erskine (1677-1718), Peter the Great's chief physician, as well as being a privy councillor and the first director of the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera. Evidence suggests that key members of this Jacobite network in Russia were masons, or had been initiated into quasi-masonic fraternities, who were not only able to operate in St. Petersburg but were also able to draw in a senior servitor (and relative of) Peter the Great into their brotherhood.

### *(1) Fraternalism in Petrine Russia*

In the early 1690s Peter the Great instigated the establishment of the so-called All-Mad, All-Jesting, All Drunken Assembly (*sumasbrodneishii, vseshuteishii, vsep'ianeishii sobor*). This notorious institution constituted a mock church hierarchy and a mock-court led by an appointed “prince-pope” (*kniaz-papa*) and “prince-caesar” (*kniaz-tsesar*) respectively. Both bodies functioned according to a strict hierarchical structure, with appointed metropolitans, sacristans, deacons, sub-deacons, a dean, secretaries and lighters. Peter the Great assumed the relatively lowly rank of “Protodeacon” in the assembly. The assembly also enlisted various entertainers, including twelve ‘thundering stammerers’ (*groznyiakh zaike*), bird-like singers, Russian minstrels

(known as *skomorokhi*), jesters and fools (*duraki*).<sup>23</sup> One such *durak* was a mad Frenchman, that Peter the Great had acquired from the king of Poland, who was known as Vymenka, or officially as Cardinal and Prince Vymeni, King of the Samoyeds.<sup>24</sup>

Females were permitted to take part in the mock assembly, the most prominent of whom was Daria Gavrilovna Rzhevskaiia (the wife of Ivan Rzhevskii), who in 1712 was granted the title of ‘princess-abbess’ (*kniaz’-igumen’ia*). In 1717 she was promoted to the rank of ‘arch-abbess’ (*arkhi-igumeniia*), and was lauded by the new prince-pope, Peter Buturlin, for her drinking ‘exploits’ before the assembly.<sup>25</sup> Besides the arch-abbess, the assembly also contained Mother Superiors (*igumen’i*), deaconesses (*diakonisy*), nuns (*monakhini*) and ‘servants of Bacchus’ (*sluzhitelei Bakhusa*).<sup>26</sup>

In addition to a strict mock-hierarchy, the assembly displayed a number of other distinctive features. It embraced crude and blasphemous language, for example, which still retains the power to shock those of a more sensitive disposition. All members of the assembly were given nicknames, which more often than not contained the Russian word “khui”, which translates as penis. Thus, Peter the Great’s nickname was Pakhom-Pikhakhui, whilst Archdeacon Stroev was known as Idinakhui- a phrase still used in Russia today to crudely inform someone to go away.<sup>27</sup>

The assembly was also awash with Bacchanalian symbolism. Drunkenness and dissipation were championed in the guises of Ivashka Khmel’nitskii and Eremka respectively. Moreover, the Roman god Bacchus played a central role in the rituals and

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Shutki i Potekhi Petra Velikago. Petr Velikii- kak iumorist, *Russkaia Starina*, June 1872, pp. 875-7; Oleg Usenko, ‘Strasti u trona’, *Rodina*, No. 8, 2000.

Available online at:

<[http://www.istrodina.com/rodina\\_articul.php3?id=1479&n=26](http://www.istrodina.com/rodina_articul.php3?id=1479&n=26)>. Viewed on 10. 2.09.

<sup>24</sup> N.M Moleva, “‘Persony” vseshuteishego sobora’, *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 10, (1974), p. 210; Hughes, p. 252.

<sup>25</sup> Shutki i Potekhi, pp. 874-5.

<sup>26</sup> Usenko. Online version.

<sup>27</sup> See Ernest Zitser’s discussion of this name in the preceding article, p. 16.



ceremonies of the assembly. For example, at the so-called conclave to elect a new prince-pope on December 28<sup>th</sup> 1717 the assembled members began by striking up a song to Bacchus, before then beseeching the god to help them in the task ahead. Further exclamations pronounced the attendees to be ‘the uttermost devotees and first sons of our father Bacchus’.<sup>28</sup>

In general, despite the abundance of parody and mockery unleashed in the assembly, it was a hierarchical body marked by defined rituals, ceremonies and regulations that sought to direct the behaviour of members.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the assembly also functioned in both the private and public spheres. All meetings of the assembly, for example, were concealed from the gaze of the public. However, on festive occasions, such as weddings, Christmas and Shrovetide, the members of the assembly took to the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg in grand, carnivalesque processions that openly mocked the church and old Muscovite traditions.

What factors contributed to the birth of the All-Mad, All-Jesting, All-Drunken Assembly in the 1690s? It seems probable that Peter the Great’s rise to power in 1689, in place of his half-sister, the regent Sophia, was of critical importance, along with witnessing the election of Patriarch Adrian in 1690. However, it is also likely that the young tsar’s frequent visits to the foreign quarter (*nemetskaia sloboda*), in Moscow — particularly to the residences of Patrick Gordon (1635-1699) and Franz Lefort (1656-1699) — introduced him to new forms of fraternal bonding and drunken revelry. This is easy to imagine if one bears in mind the fact that locals referred to the area in the late seventeenth-century as the “drunken quarter” (*p’ianaia sloboda*).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Shutki i Potekhi, p. 868.

<sup>29</sup> A document of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1723, for example, lists members of the assembly who were being ‘disobedient’ and who were living in ‘unruly fashion’ in Moscow. See Shutki i Potekhi, pp. 875-6; Hughes, p. 257.

<sup>30</sup> A.G. Cross, ‘The Bung College or British Monastery in Petrine Russia’, *Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia Newsletter*, 12 (1984), p. 15.

It is impossible to ascertain the precise degree of foreign influence on the foundation of the mock assembly in the early 1690s. However, it is fascinating to note that a parallel fraternal organisation run by foreign residents in Russia — predominantly from Britain — was in existence from at least as early as the first decade of the eighteenth-century. In January 1706, Charles Whitworth, the British Representative in Moscow, wrote of the activities of a ‘Brotherhood...as true as pleasant’, where ‘a great glass of wine sanctified the occasion’.<sup>31</sup>

In all likelihood this “Brotherhood” referred to the so-called Bung College, or British Monastery. It is not known precisely when the Bung College was established, but the first firm evidence of its existence dates from August 10<sup>th</sup> 1709. It was on this date that a warrant was issued in Kiev, which informed the British Metropolitan in Moscow that a certain William Lloyd had been promoted from the rank of deacon to archdeacon. The warrant was signed by Protodeacon Piter and Archdeacon Gedeon Shakovskii; in other words Lloyd’s promotion had been authorised by Peter the Great himself, along with Prince Iurii Fyedorovich Shakovskoi, a fellow member of the mock assembly.<sup>32</sup> This indicates that the Bung College was subordinate to the All-Mad, All-Jesting, All-Drunken Assembly, but highlights the close links between the two fraternal organisations. These tight bonds are reinforced by the fact that in a letter from 6 March 1708 Peter the Great lists ‘British *arkhierei*’ among the members of the All-Drunken Assembly.<sup>33</sup>

The similarities between the Bung College and the All-Drunken Assembly become apparent if one consults an “Announcement” (*Ob’iavlenie*) and “Register” (*Reestr*) of the

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<sup>31</sup> Letter of 4 February/24 January 1706: British Library, Strafford Papers, Add. MSS. 31128, f.34.

<sup>32</sup> S.F. Platonov, ‘Iz bytvoi istorii Petrovskoi epokhi. i Bengo-Kollegiia ili Veilikobritanskii monastyr v S. Peterburge pri Petre Velikom’, *Izvestiia Akademii nauk SSSR, seriia: istoriia*, Nos. 7-8 (1926), pp. 531-2.

<sup>33</sup> Platonov, p. 533; Cross, 1984, p. 16.

former body, which was written on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1720.<sup>34</sup> In this document it is stated that the All-Mad Brotherhood of the British Monastery meets on Dvorianskaia Street, opposite the home of Peter Buturlin (d. 1724), the ‘prince-pope and prince bacchus’. The announcement proceeds to state that ‘in this monastery...the brotherhood of the all-mad assembly reside in common according to the law of Bacchus’.<sup>35</sup>

In total fifty-five members are listed as belonging to the All-Mad Brotherhood — a figure which includes four female cooks. Fifteen religious positions are given, as well as fifteen other posts (including an orator, a solicitor-general and a keeper of the seraglio). Other specified roles include a bag-piper, and, controversially, a cunt-piper (*kont-piper*). Of the forty-six named brothers of the college, twenty-eight were British, including Sir Henry Stirling (named as the Professor and Doctor of Civil Law) and Henry Farquharson (named as the Professor of Mathematics).<sup>36</sup> Both these men were Scottish Jacobites — a theme I shall return to shortly.

The regulations of the college stipulate that members of the All-Mad Brotherhood are to wear a green leek in their hats. Moreover, in order to honour the prince-pope they made a flag, on which was drawn a green onion and an image of St. David. The regulations also outline a series of four punishments for brothers who violate the ‘law of Bacchus’: (1) the president of the brotherhood is to strike his hand on the bare buttocks of the guilty party; (2) the guilty brother is to be tossed in a blanket; (3) cold water is to be poured down the sleeves of the guilty party so that it emerges from the trousers; (4) two hungry ducks are to be

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<sup>34</sup> See Platonov, pp. 528-32.

<sup>35</sup> Platonov, p. 528.

<sup>36</sup> For the full membership list of the Bung College in 1720, see Platonov, 528-9. For further information on the membership of the college, see Cross, 1984, pp. 17-21. Sir Henry Stirling was admitted to the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh in 1710. See John Chamberlayne, *Magnae Britanniae notitia: or, the present state of Great Britain*, II (London, 1727), p. 48.

set upon an offender, whose penis has been smeared with egg yolk and oats.<sup>37</sup>

The existence of the All-Mad, All-Jesting, All-Drunken Assembly and the Bung College were contemporaneous with similar blasphemous and mock fraternities in Western Europe. In France, for example, the Order of the Grape (*l'Ordre de la Grappe*) was founded in Arles in 1693, and by 1703 had established lodges in Paris, Cologne, Berne, Milan and as far afield as Constantinople. This bacchanalian order had a Grand Master, officers and a Council of Order, along with certificates and seals for its new initiates.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, a select group of young aristocrats formed a secret society called the Regiment of the Calotte in 1702.<sup>39</sup> The calotte was a small, grey cap worn by members, which they adorned with little bells, butterflies, rats and weathervanes. The society chose Momus — the Greek god of ridicule and mockery — as their patron. As with the All-Mad, All-Jesting, All-Drunken Assembly, the French society met in secret in order to carry out their rituals and ceremonies *and* performed acts of ridicule in the public sphere.

Significantly, both the All-Mad, All-Jesting, All-Drunken Assembly and the Bung College also bear many similar features to the Knights of Jubilation, which was active in The Hague from at least as early as 1710. Margaret Jacob has written extensively on this secret society, which she argues had a decidedly masonic character, highlighting the combination of its playful, bawdy exuberance alongside a ritualised and hierarchical brotherhood governed by a series of regulations.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Platonov, p. 531.

<sup>38</sup> Thierry Zarcone, 'French Pre-Masonic Fraternities, Freemasonry and Dervish Orders in the Muslim World', *Freemasonry and Fraternalism in the Middle East*, Sheffield Lectures on the History of Freemasonry, Vol. I (2009), pp.15-52. Provence was also the home of the Order of the Boisson and the Méduse. See Zarcone, pp.18-21.

<sup>39</sup> Dorothy S. Packer, "'La Calotte'" and the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century French Vaudeville', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 23, No.1 (Spring 1970), p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> Jacob, pp. 165-70.

Furthermore, a fascinating insight into the proliferation of secret clubs in England at this time can be gleaned from Ned Ward's *The Secret History of Clubs*, published in London in 1709. This wonderful satirical work mixes documented clubs (The Yorkshire Club of Northern Tykes, the Mollies Club and the Kit Kat Club) with seemingly fictitious societies (the most notable of which include the Farting Club and the No-Nose Club). However, despite this blurring of fact and probable fiction, *The Secret History of Clubs* throws valuable light on the extent to which secret clubs had become designated spaces for the expression of bawdy and blasphemous sentiments. In this regard it is fitting to quote the scathing words of Ward himself, in his opening remarks on clubs in general, which he states had flourished in England since the middle of the seventeenth-century:

For notwithstanding their formal Orders, exemplify'd at large by some Scrivener's Apprentice, and Ostentatiously hung up in Lacquer'd Frames, as the Laws of the Society; the ridiculous Chaplets that Crown the empty Noddles of their officious Stewards, and Adorn their Temples like Fiddlers in a Musick-Booth; their honorary White-Wands, which like a Church-Wardens Pew, they wear as Badges of their fanatical Authority; contemptible Ceremonies, which heretofore have been frequently supported in all such sort of *Bacchanalian* Communities, presuming thereby to Govern one another with such a solemn Decorum, as might preserve Peace, Unity, and Sobriety; and punish all Immorality and Prophaness, by *Pecuniary* Amercements, that they might have the more to be Drunk with at their next Quarterly Festival...the principal Felicities that ever were enjoy'd by the giddy Members and Promoters of such Suck-Bottle Assemblies, have been inebrious Health-Drinking and impertinent Tittle-Tattle.<sup>41</sup>

The first club described by Ward in his history — the Vertuoso's Club — purportedly met to 'propagate New Whims, advance Mechanick Exercises, and to promote Useless, as well as

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<sup>41</sup> Ned Ward, *The Secret History of Clubs* (London, 1709), p. 2.

Useful Experiments'. Moreover, a brother of this 'Teeming Society' was respected according to 'the Searches he had made into the Misteries of Nature' and by their 'vain pursuit of the Philosophers-Stone'.<sup>42</sup>

This withering attack on a club allegedly linked to the Royal Society in London echoes the rumours and suspicion associated with the Neptune Society in Peter the Great's Russia. Little is known about the activities of this society, which initially met in the Sukharev Tower in Moscow — home to Russia's first mathematical and navigation school and the country's first observatory. According to various nineteenth-century accounts, members of the society engaged in experimental science, with Peter the Great acting as overseer, whilst the orator was Feofan Prokopovich. Other members included Henry Farquharson and Jacob Bruce who both shared Jacobite loyalties, as well as various other prominent Russian officials.<sup>43</sup>

Alongside these fraternal societies Peter the Great also established the chivalric Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First Named on his return from his Grand Embassy in the autumn of 1698. Interestingly, knights of this Order, which ranked as the most prestigious honour in Petrine Russia, were also central figures in the All-Mad Assembly. The first knight of the order, Fedor Alekseevich Golovin (1650-1706), for example, was also the "Drunken Protopresbyter" in the Mock Council. Jacob Bruce, of Scottish descent was also a knight of the order, whilst participating in the All-Mad Assembly and allegedly being a member of the Neptune Society.<sup>44</sup> In other words, inclusion in

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<sup>42</sup> Ward, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> See F. F. Veselago, *Ocherk istorii morskago kadetskago korpusa s prilozheniem spiska vosiptannikov za 100 let* (St. Petersburg, 1852) p. 22; Pypin, pp. 88-9; Longinov, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup> Ernest A. Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom: Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 185. Other members of both orders included Peter the Great himself, Gavriil Ivanovich Golovkin, Anikita Ivanovich Repnin, Fyodor Matveevich Apraksin, Pyotr Pavlovich Shafirov, Aleksandr Danilovich Menshikov and Jacob Bruce.

the brotherhood of the All-Mad Assembly and the Neptune Society was a definite sign of the monarch's trust and favour.

Peter the Great's enthusiastic patronage of the All-Mad Assembly, the Bung College and the Neptune Society does not provide direct evidence of masonic influence at the Petrine court. However, they do demonstrate a court culture orchestrated by the monarch that was permeated with a spirit strongly reminiscent of freemasonry in the early eighteenth-century. It is important to remember that the bacchanalian antics of the All-Mad Assembly and the Bung College — even when carried out in the public sphere — were not simply forms of carnivalesque anti-behaviour borrowed from popular culture. True, the inherent possibilities granted by the collapse of conventional boundaries at traditional periods of festive carnival did enable the societies to display their bacchanalian spirit on the streets. However, one should remember that these riotous antics did not cease at the end of the festive period; rather they returned to the private sphere, where initiates continued to act in the same manner among their select peers.

Moreover, the All-Mad Assembly and the Bung College adopted a highly codified and hierarchical form of behaviour among themselves that went against the chaotic spirit of liminality associated with popular carnival periods. The intrinsic importance of order in the brotherhoods of the All-Mad Assembly and the Bung College is demonstrated by the strict regulations set out by the societies reinforced by a series of prescribed punishments and fines for offenders.

Thus, these societies were an entirely innovative phenomenon in Russia, and, I would argue, thrived on the dynamic interaction

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For a membership list of the Unholy Council. see Zitser, pp. 185-90. For a list of the knights of the Order of St. Andrew initiated during the reign of Peter the Great, see N.N. Bantysh-Kamenskii, *Spiski kavaleram rossiiskikh imperatorskikh ordenov Sv. Andreia Pervozvannogo, Sv. Ekateriny, Sv. Aleksandra Nevskogo i Sv. Anny s uchrezhdeniia do ustanovleniia v 1797 godu ordenskogo kapitula* (Moscow: Truten, 2005).

between Russian courtiers and Western — particularly British — residents. The significance of this complex interaction should not be underplayed, as it reveals that Russian court culture was at the forefront of the development of fraternal societies in Europe. In other words, it did not lag behind Western Europe in any sense; a fact highlighted by noting that both the All-Mad Assembly and the Bung College significantly pre-date the infamous Hell-Fire Club in England.<sup>45</sup>

What is more, judging by the description of masonic lodges in Russia in the 1750s given by Ivan Perfil'evich Elagin (1725-1793), who was one of the pre-eminent Russian masons in the second half of the eighteenth-century, it appears that there was little to distinguish them from the earlier fraternal societies of the Petrine era.<sup>46</sup> He wrote, for example, that lodge meetings were simply 'an amusement for people who want to entertain themselves, sometimes inexcusably and indecently' and for brothers who wanted to indulge in shouting 'unintelligible and disharmonious songs at the ceremonial banquet, to become intoxicated on good wine...and to end this dedication to Minerva with a worship to Bacchus'.<sup>47</sup> Such behaviour was entirely in the spirit of the bacchanalian atmosphere of the societies promoted by Peter the Great, and on this count alone it would seem entirely appropriate that some Russian Masons chose to raise a glass to the tsar and to revere his name in song.

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<sup>45</sup> The earliest reference to the existence of the Hell-Fire Club occurs in 1719, when a print appeared entitled *The Diabolical Maskquerade: the Dragon's Feast as acted by the Hell-Fire Club, at Somerset House in the Strand*. For more on the Hell-Fire Club, see Evelyn Lord, *The Hell-Fire Clubs: Sex, Satanism and Secret Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 45-73.

<sup>46</sup> For more on Elagin, see Smith, pp. 24-6.

<sup>47</sup> I.P. Elagin, 'Zapiski o masonstve I.P. Elagina', *Russkii arkhiv*, Book I, (1866), pp. 593-4. Thanks to Dr. Natalie Bayer for this reference.



## *(2) Robert Erskine and the Jacobite Network in Petrine Russia*

The most compelling evidence of direct masonic influence at the Petrine court centres on a Jacobite network based around the influential figure of Dr. Robert Erskine (1677-1718). Erskine arrived in Russia in 1704, having undertaken medical studies in Edinburgh, Paris and Utrecht and after being made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1703. By the time of his death, in 1718, the Scot had arguably become one of the most powerful of Peter the Great's trusted advisors: he was the tsar's chief physician, was head of the entire medical chancellery, had been appointed the first director of the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera and library and in 1716 had been made a privy councillor. In short, he held enormous sway over the Russian monarch; a fact not overlooked by his Jacobite kinsmen.

Erskine emanated from one of the most influential families in Scotland, and was the first cousin of the Jacobite leader John Erskine, the Earl of Mar (1675-1732). From surviving documents it seems that Robert Erskine did not engage in any Jacobite activities in Russia between 1704-1714. However, events conspired in 1714 to bring Erskine into the Jacobite fold. Firstly, in May 1714 George Mackenzie was appointed British Resident in St. Petersburg, having previously been secretary in charge of affairs in Poland between 1710-1714.<sup>48</sup> In all likelihood Mackenzie's new position was dictated by political manoeuvrings by the Earl of Mar, who at the time was British Secretary of State and a member of the Privy Council. From subsequent correspondence it is clear that Mackenzie was a loyal agent acting on behalf of the Earl of Mar.

The death of Queen Anne on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1714 and the subsequent coronation of George I on October 20<sup>th</sup> shattered the

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<sup>48</sup> D.G. Kirby, 'The Balance of the North and Baltic Trade: George Mackenzie's Relation, August 1715, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Jul. 1976), p. 429.

Earl of Mar's powerbase. Not only did he lose his position as Secretary of State, but also Mackenzie's new post was also immediately thrown into question. This helps us to understand the context of a letter sent by Mackenzie to Mar from St. Petersburg on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1714, only nine days after the coronation of George I. Mackenzie emphasizes his precarious position by stating that 'I stand however as yet *unconfirmed* and lean so far on Court stile, as the event may support me'.<sup>49</sup> It is fortunate for historians that in Mackenzie's haste to despatch his letter he forgoes the procedure of encrypting the document: 'I hope [you] will excuse that I don't as I ought put it under a covert'.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, we are able to study an astonishing document that suggests a masonic network of Scottish Jacobites was able to exert influence at the Russian court via the lofty position of Robert Erskine *and*, crucially, by drawing on the diplomatic services of a fellow Russian brother. The implications of this document are considerable, especially if one considers the fact that freemasonry is generally considered to have only entered Russia in 1731, with the first Russian freemason only being initiated in Paris in 1737.<sup>51</sup> Hence, it is worth quoting at length:

St. Petersburg, ye 29<sup>th</sup> of October o.s 1714.

My Lord,- To the very best of Guarantys there is stil allow'd time according to the circumstances, or nature of the principals, for whose sake these are enter'd into; 'tis true that within a ffortnight thence and less, you were to expect a letter from Dr. Areskine; tho' it may not so soon appear to your Lordp. both of us has acted with the utmost good faith, for there's above a week, that he gave Mr. Naroskin a letter of Recommendation to your Lordp. he is chambellan and Relation of the Czar, and has

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Paul, 'Letters and Documents Relating to Robert Erskine, Physician to Peter the Great, 1677-1720', *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, Second Volume (1904), p. 411.

<sup>50</sup> Paul, p. 410.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, p.19.

the advantage to be destin'd the Bearer of an answer to a letter, our Monarch wrote this Prince from Hanover; as he is to have several other matters given him in charge, whereof, wtout breaking throw the Masson Word, I hope, as to a Bror Mechanick of his Czarian Maty, it will as yet be allow'd me to acquaint you so far, that he is to carry, say they, a sea Compass to our King: the value of that present is that 'tis of this Prince's own gradation, and the box of his own turning. what the other things may be? Are also Joyners's work; but not being so compleat a Carpenter as to let out all the cunning, without being seen, your Lordp. having so long ago pass't the Essay Master will enough be apprized of it there, before the whole is come to a walding.<sup>52</sup>

In the seventh line of the above letter Mackenzie clearly explains that Robert Erskine has written a letter of recommendation to his cousin, the Earl of Mar, on behalf of a 'Mr. Naroskin', a 'chambellan and Relation of the Czar'. The individual mentioned by Mackenzie is Semyon Grigor'evich Naryshkin (c. 1680s-1747), whose father, Grigorii Filimonovich (?-1706), was a first-cousin once-removed of Natalia Kirillovna Naryshkina (1651-1694), Peter the Great's mother.

The letter correctly states that Naryshkin was a chamberlain (*komnatnii stol'nik*) of the tsar. Moreover, he was one of the thirty-five so-called "volunteers" who accompanied Peter the Great on his Grand Embassy to Western Europe in 1697 and 1698. Indeed, Naryshkin was a member of a smaller group of the volunteers, whose foreman (*desiatnik*) was Petr Mikhailov, that is, Peter the Great.<sup>53</sup> The Russian monarch left England in April 1698, but Naryshkin stayed on in order to further his education. In 1699 the young student continued his education in Berlin,

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<sup>52</sup> Paul, pp. 408-9.

<sup>53</sup> For a full list of the volunteers on the Grand Embassy, see D. Guzevich & I. Guzevich, *Velikoe Posol'stvo*, (St. Petersburg: Feniks, 2003), pp. 261-6.

from where he wrote to the tsar keeping him updated on his progress.<sup>54</sup>

On completing his studies Naryshkin became a general adjutant to the tsar and in 1708 was awarded the prestigious rank of Captain in the Lifeguards of the Preobrazhenskii Regiment. Significantly, Peter the Great also began entrusting sensitive diplomatic missions to Naryshkin. The tsar's envoy, for example, spent much of 1711 in Italy and Germany, meeting Cosimo de Medici III (1642-1723) in Florence and then being charged with enlisting craftsmen into Russian service. Furthermore, in 1712 Naryshkin travelled to Copenhagen on behalf of the tsar, where he met with King Frederick IV (1671-1730), and the following year he was sent to Vienna in order to conclude a treaty uniting Russia and the Hapsburg Empire against the Ottoman Turks.<sup>55</sup>

On the accession of George I to the British throne, Naryshkin was charged with travelling to England in order to congratulate the Hanoverian monarch on behalf of Peter the Great. Yet, Mackenzie's letter also reveals two additional sub-texts to Naryshkin's official mission. Firstly, he was being employed as a Jacobite courier, who was 'to be destin'd the Bearer of an answer to a letter, Our Monarch'. Secondly, a distinct masonic sub-text is revealed in Mackenzie's letter, which suggests that not only is he a mason, but that both the Earl of Mar and Naryshkin, who is referred to as a 'Bror Mechanick of his Czarian Majesty', are also members of the brotherhood.

The reference to not 'breaking throw the Masson Word' incorporates Mackenzie into a Scottish masonic tradition dating back to at least the first half of the seventeenth-century. As David Stevenson has noted, the mason word lay 'at the centre of the esoteric activities described in the [masonic] catechism'.<sup>56</sup> The

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<sup>54</sup> *Pisma i Bumagi Imperatora Petra Veilikogo*, Vol. I, (St. Petersburg-Moscow, 1887), p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> *Novii Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar*, Vol. XX, (Moscow, 1916).

<sup>56</sup> David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's century 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 125.

first printed reference to the term dates from 1638, when Henry Adamson of Perth wrote a poem, entitled *The Muses Threnodie*, which states:

For we the brethren of the *Rosie Crosse*:  
We have the *Mason word* and the second sight,  
Things for to come we can foretell aright.<sup>57</sup>

The ritualistic importance of the masons' word in Scottish masonry is testified by the so-called *Edinburgh Register House MS.* of 1696. This manuscript explains 'the forme of giving the mason-word', as well as elaborating upon 'the grand secret...of giving the mason-word' and providing 'some questions that masons use to put to these who profess to have the mason word'.<sup>58</sup>

Further evidence linking the Earl of Mar to Scottish masonry relates to Mackenzie describing how his lordship had 'so long ago pass't the Essay Master'. According to David Stevenson an essay consisted in 'an exercise in designing a house to a given basic specification and constructing a scale model of it'. Thus, it effectively connected the mason with architecture and was only something to 'to be undertaken rather later in the mason's career'<sup>59</sup> and was set for a 'a privileged minority' who 'went on to

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<sup>57</sup> Henry Adamson, *The Muses Threnodie, or, the Mirthfull Mournings, on the death of Master Gall.* (Edinburgh, 1638), p. 32.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas Knoop, G.P. Jones & D. Hamer, *The Early Masonic Catechisms* (Manchester: The University of Manchester Press, 1943), pp. 31-4. For more on the masons' word, see Douglas Knoop, 'The Mason Word', *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Volume LI, (1938) pp. 194-211; Matthew D.J. Scanlan, 'The Mystery of the Acception, 1630-1723: A Fatal Flaw', *Heredom*, Volume 11 (2003), pp. 55-112.

<sup>59</sup> Stevenson, p. 41. The Earl of Mar was a talented architect, responsible for a number of building projects and designs. For more on his architectural interests and plans, see T. Friedman, 'A "Palace worthy of the Grandeur of the King": Lord Mar's designs for the Old Pretender, 1718-30', *Architectural*

become mason burgesses and (on approval of an essay) masters of the incorporation'.<sup>60</sup> Hence, it would seem from Mackenzie's letter that the Earl of Mar was a high-ranking mason.<sup>61</sup>

As far as I am aware no documentary evidence exists that directly links Robert Erskine with masonry. However, Mackenzie's letter of October 1714 seems to reveal that Erskine was a pivotal member of a Scottish Jacobite network that included masons *and* that had attracted a Russian courtier into the Craft. What is more, in the aftermath of the unsuccessful Jacobite Rebellion of 1715, led by the Earl of Mar, Robert Erskine facilitated the enlistment into Russian service of a coterie of Jacobite exiles who were, or went on to become, either Freemasons or members of masonic-style fraternities.

In enlisting Jacobite exiles, Erskine took full advantage of being in the Low Countries and France during 1716 and 1717, where he was accompanying the tsar on his second tour of Western Europe. The new Jacobite recruits into Russian service at this time included Sir Henry Stirling, 3<sup>rd</sup> baronet of Ardoch (1688-1753), who was Erskine's nephew. As mentioned earlier, Stirling was a member of the Bung College. Moreover, Stirling went on to become one of the select "Brother Knights" of the The Most Ancient, the Most Illustrious and Most Noble Order del Toboso, after it was founded around 1726.<sup>62</sup> The Order had a

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*History*, 29 (1986), pp. 102–33; T.C. Smout., 'The Erskines of Mar and the development of Alloa, 1689–1825', *Scottish Studies*, 7 (1963), pp. 57–74 .

<sup>60</sup> David Stevenson, 1989, *The First Freemasons: Scotland's Early Lodges and Their Members*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Grand Lodge of Scotland), p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> In 1872 John Yarker, without evidence it must be said, wrote that 'Lord Mar was Grand Master of the Scottish Templars in 1715'. See John Yarker, *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity* (Rochdale: E. Wrigley & Sons), p.124. In turn, Yarker's comments are cited by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh. See, Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh, *The Temple and the Lodge* (London: Arrow Books), pp.229–30.

<sup>62</sup> A letter dated April 22 1734, which was written by Ezekiel Hamilton, the second Grand Master of the Order, refers to the fraternity being 'in the eight year of our great mastership'. See Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Reports*

designated Grand Master and was entirely made up of Jacobites, of whom at least five were also known to have been freemasons.<sup>63</sup> The Order seems to have been geographically spread across Europe, but with distinct centres of activity in Rome (at least 7 members) and Russia (at least 5 members).<sup>64</sup> Significantly, Erskine had enlisted all five of the Russian contingent of the Order into service in the country: Sir Henry Stirling, Captain William Hay, Admiral Thomas Gordon, Rear Admiral Thomas Saunders and Captain Robert Little.<sup>65</sup> In February 1732 Hay sent ‘two rings of the order of Toboso to Stirling and Gordon, from Rome, and informed his friends that ‘after drinking the healths of the Royal Family’, they have ‘a fair meeting on the green fellows’.<sup>66</sup>

### (3) Conclusion

It was through Robert Erskine’s close relationship with Peter the Great that a Jacobite network was able to prosper in Russia after 1714. The esteem in which Erskine was held by the tsar is

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*on the Manuscripts of the Earl of Eglinton, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, Bart., C.S.H. Drummond Moray, Esq. C.F. Weston Underwood Esq. & Sir Wingfield Digby Esq.* (London, 1885), p.185.

<sup>63</sup> John Stuart, George Keith, William Hay, Mark Carse and James Keith were both known members of the Order of Toboso and freemasons. Hay served in the Russian navy between 1718 and February 1724, when he voluntarily retired. Thenceforth he acted as a Jacobite envoy. In 1725 he returned to St. Petersburg, from Rome, as an envoy of the James Francis Stuart. He was once more in St. Petersburg in 1727, where he lodged with Henry Stirling. See Wills, p. 99, p. 103. James Keith entered Russian service in 1728 and was known to have been a Worshipful Master of a lodge in St. Petersburg in 1732. In 1740 he was appointed Provincial Grand Master of Russia by the Grand Lodge of England. See Rebecca Wills, *The Jacobites and Russia 1715-1750* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002), fn. 100, p.220.

<sup>64</sup> Steven Murdoch, *Network North: Scottish Kin, Commercial and Covert Associations in Northern Europe, 1603-1746* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p.348.

<sup>65</sup> See Wills, p. 53.

<sup>66</sup> Murdoch, p.313.

highlighted by the Scot's funeral, held in St. Petersburg on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1719, which was accorded full state honours. According to an eyewitness account of the funeral, 'Peter gave some marks of the esteem he had for the deceased, and at the same time shewed particular favour towards his relation Sir Harry Stirling'. The monarch also 'followed the corpse carrying a burning taper...as far as the [funeral] vault'.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, given Erskine's links with the masonic circle of the Earl of Mar, Mackenzie and Naryshkin, it is entirely plausible that this grouping had some influence in court circles. Indeed, Naryshkin was a prominent courtier up until 1718, when he was implicated in the affair of the Tsarevich Aleksei, who was accused of various charges (including treachery).<sup>68</sup> The journal of Peter the Great's favourite, Aleksandr Menshikov (1673-1729), contains many references, for example, to 'General Adjutant *Gospodin* Naryshkin' dining with him in 1716.<sup>69</sup>

This influence would arguably have not been possible without at least the tacit support of Peter the Great. Indeed, one can ask what would Peter the Great have objected to if he had become aware of a masonic powerbase at court? After all, his personal seal is awash with masonic-style symbolism. Here is a mason-king hewing his country into a perfected form. On hearing of Peter's death, Aaron Hill (1685-1750), the English playwright, theatre manager and freemason, wrote that the monarch 'new-moulded' his countrymen.<sup>70</sup> This is a fitting eulogy for a monarch-craftsman, who in establishing new forms of public association,

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<sup>67</sup> Christian Friedrich Weber, *The Present State of Russia* I, (London, 1722-23), pp. 246-7.

<sup>68</sup> The tsarevich was tortured and died in his prison cell in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1718. For more on the trial of the tsarevich, see Hughes, pp. 402-11.

<sup>69</sup> T.V. Pomeranskaia (ed.), *Trudy i dni kniazia Aleksandra Danilovicha Menshikova* (Moscow: Rossiiskii Arkhiv, 2004), p. 40, p. 50, pp. 52-5.

<sup>70</sup> *Plain Dealer: Being Select Essays on Several Curious Subjects* (London, 1730), p. 410.



behaviour and etiquette, alongside wholesale government reform, sought to embody the masonic ideal of smoothing the rough stone.

Moreover, Peter was a passionate sponsor of fraternal brotherhoods during his reign, which were closely integrated with a foreign (mainly British) society. Masonic notions of chivalry were also completely in keeping with Peter the Great's promotion of the knightly Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew. What is more, the practical foundations of masonry, combined with its mythical and biblical ontology, matched Peter the Great's own worldview. The Russian monarch is rightly famed for his practicality; yet he was also acutely aware of what he perceived as (or certainly wanted others to view as) his divine mission as a king continuing the work of the House of David. This duality bears a striking resemblance to freemasonry as it developed at the start of the eighteenth-century. In concluding, I would argue that further studies on the influence of freemasonry in Petrine Russia, as advocated by Lindsey Hughes, would not only help to broaden our understanding of Russia in this age, but would also help to increase our knowledge of the early pan-European nature of the fraternal brotherhood.



## Utopian Spaces of Russian Masons in the Enlightenment

*Tatiana Artemyeva*

The famous Russian historian of literature Grigorii Gukovskii wrote the following about masons:

They created a mystical utopia about a wonderful country of believers and happy people, ruled by saints according to the laws of Masonic religion, without bureaucracy, clerks, policemen, magnates, despotism and arbitrariness. In their papers they advocated utopia as their programme: in their state there would be no poverty, no slaves, no taxes. All people would be educated and their life would be peaceful and lofty. To realise this everybody should be a mason and purified from the foul. There would be neither Church nor laws in the future Masonic Paradise. It would be a free alliance of good people who believed in God as they wished.<sup>1</sup>

For nobles masonic lodges were sometimes the only places where they could discuss these problems and be united with representatives of other circles, such as academics. The masonic magazines published by Nikolai Novikov — ‘The Morning Light’ (*Utrennii svet*), ‘Dusk’ (*Vecherniaia zaria*), ‘A Hard-Working Man at Rest’ (*Pokoiasbchiisia trudolinbets*) — produced various articles on

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<sup>1</sup> В формах мистики они создали утопию о прекрасной стране верующих и счастливых людей, управляемой только святыми людьми, только по законам масонской религии без бюрократии, подьячих, полицейских, вельмож, произвола, разврата власти. В своих письмах они проповедовали эту утопию как свою программу, в их государстве исчезнет нужда, не будет ни наемников, ни рабов, ни налогов, все будут учиться и жить мирно и возвышенно. Для этого нужно, чтобы все стали масонами и очистились от скверны. В будущем масонском раю не будет ни церкви, ни законов, а будет свободное объединение хороших людей, верующих в бога, кто как хочет’. Cited from G. A. Gukovskii, *Russkaia literatura XVIII veka*. (Moscow, 1939), p.288.

philosophical problems. His activity as a publisher provided a generation of Russian intellectuals with specialist works, including popular masonic authors, and created a special interest in moral and spiritual problems.

There is a story by Aleksandr Labzin about Novikov's dissemination of spiritual books. A customer asked for *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité qui s'est retiré du monde* (it was a translation of the first part of the *Histoire de chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*) by Abbé Prévost. The book was sold out and Novikov consequently presented him with a pile of books on morals.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the Russian intellectual and political elite were more or less active members of masonic lodges. As Nikolai Novikov stated, 'not a small number of the most distinguished persons in the country' were masons,<sup>3</sup> among them members of the Imperial Council, chamberlains at Catherine the Great's court, members of the Senate and governors.<sup>4</sup> The masonic fraternity gave Russian nobles a feeling of what it was like to be a European intellectual and a spiritual identity. Many philosophical, political, cosmological, ethical and aesthetical ideas were transferred to Russian culture via masonry. It was the only way for some complex ideas, such as hermetical philosophy, to penetrate into Russia. The Russian intellectual elite of the Enlightenment, which mainly consisted of nobles, was partly included by freemasonry in the international process of the exchange of ideas.

The orientations of Russian masonry actualised some social and moral problems reflected in utopias of various forms and genres. Thus, when studying Russian masonic utopianism in the Enlightenment we can first of all understand some general

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<sup>2</sup> See G. V. Vernadskii, *Russkoe masonstvo v tsarstvovanie Ekateriny II* (Petrograd, 1917), p.131.

<sup>3</sup> 'Не малое число знатнейших особ в государстве'. Cited from Vernadskii, p.86.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

problems and can provide answers to a number of questions:

1. What is a Utopia?
2. What is the essence of a masonic utopia, or, what makes a masonic utopia so special?

In answer to the first question one must take into account the many existing definitions of utopia and utopianism. Representatives of many currents in the humanities and social sciences consider that the notion of “utopia” belongs to their particular discipline. This explains why the study of utopias can be viewed in terms of a literary genre, a social prognosis, futurology, a way of thinking in politics, a notion of social philosophy and so on.

The content of a “utopia” is much older than the name coined by Thomas More. It appeared in the time of Plato and Euhemerus and has not changed its general nature. I think we can consider the notion of a “utopia” as one of the *unit-ideas*, as articulated by Arthur Lovejoy or a *social archetype* and study it in the context of the history of ideas. The term belongs to both scholarly and everyday spheres. Dictionaries and encyclopedias usually give a general explanation of this phenomenon. In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for example, “Utopia” is defined as ‘an ideal commonwealth whose inhabitants exist under seemingly perfect conditions. Hence “utopian” and “utopianism” are words used to denote visionary reform that tends to be impossibly idealistic’.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, they describe Utopia in ideal (or even idealistic), mythological, paradisiacal and heavenly terms, whilst on the other they are portrayed in a critical, satirical and pessimistic manner. The notion “utopian” is much wider than its narrow use as an adjective and also has both positive and negative connotations.

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<sup>5</sup> Definition of "utopia" cited from Encyclopædia Britannica  
<<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=76516>>. Accessed July 26, 2003].

Different types of utopias and social theories are usually discussed from the point of view of their content: whether the description of possible social institutions is complete and they are just, “really progressive” and even real. From Karl Popper’s works we know that the main difference between social utopianism and possible social prognosis is in their theoretical basis. If a political thinker uses the method of *historism*, s/he may predict some local and definite events more or less reliably. It is necessary to realise the process of piecemeal engineering in the social sphere. More determined politicians appeal for more radical changes up to the total realignment of society. They are sure that there is nothing easier than to presuppose a possible image of society in all its details and then create it like a little child building a toy house using plastic bricks. The methodology of *historicism* they use gives them the opportunity to think that it is possible to create a mental image of society and then embody it in life.

Utopian projects are essential components of social philosophy, being a sphere of hypothetical speculations. The impossibility to realise them is first of all connected with an effort to imagine the complex social mechanism *ideally* as something to be expressed in a single act of thinking or describing. Thus, in answer to the question “What is a Utopia”?, I conclude that it is a way of thinking about social ideals. We can see several ways of thinking about social ideals:

1. Positive (utopia itself)
2. Negative (anti-utopia or cacotopia (Jeremy Bentham), dystopia (John Stuart Mill))
3. Alternative (alternate history or uchronia, *l’uchronie* (Régis Messac))

In respect to masonic discourse, only the first way is possible. The masonic movement in the Enlightenment was principally oriented to the perfection of society and human nature and was sure that it would be realised. This is why masonry created neither

an *anti-utopia* nor an *uchronia*.

Many utopias include detailed descriptions (if not calculations) of how to write laws, ways to educate children, methods to build cities and even how to be moral and happy. In many ways they embody a special type of encyclopedia of life. Naturally, the best ways to reflect it are various types of *narrations*. Of course, we cannot speak about a special utopian genre (in spite of some researchers who use the term), but some genres in Russian literature of that epoch were ideally suited to express utopian ideas. They were:

- **“Sentimental journeys”** (A.N. Radishchev’s *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscon*).
- **“A voyage into an unknown country”** (M.M. Shcherbatov’s *A Journey to the Land of Ophir* and V.A. Levshin’s *The Newest Voyage*).
- **“Political novels”** (P.M. Zakhar'in’s *Arfaksad: a Chaldean Story* and M.M. Kheraskov’s *Cadmus and Harmony*).
- **“Eastern stories”** — mostly anonymous ([M.M. Kheraskov’s] *The Golden Twig*; *Three Aub’s Sons*; *Alibey* and *Sizim, or Sultan the Great*).
- **Dreams** (A.P. Sumarokov’s *The Dream, a Happy Society* and A.D. Ulybyshev’s *A Dream*).
- **Critical allegories** (A.P. Sumarokov’s ‘Chorus’ for Catherine II’s coronation).
- **Historical writings**, which later transformed into historical novels.

The best examples of the last genre were the historical writings of I.P. Elagin (1725-1793), the leader of English masonry in Russia. Elagin recited the following quote from masonic ritual books: ‘Masonry, being ancient, being spread from people to people, being respected by all enlightened human beings should

embrace *something* excellent and useful for mankind', and also that 'this *something* is impossible to understand without the key'.<sup>6</sup> To find "the key", or in other words the clue to the masonic secret, Elagin turned to the doctrines of ancient authors. In his search he followed the admonitions of brother NN (Stanislaw Eli, whose masonic name was Seddag, the author of *Brüderliche Vermahnungen an einige Brüder Freymäurer von dem Bruder Seddag*. Philadelphia, 1781<sup>7</sup>, which was translated into Russian by Elagin himself). Eli revealed to his disciple some secrets, including the idea 'that masonry is the most ancient mysterious science called "the sacred wisdom"; [and] that it embraces all other sciences and arts...'<sup>8</sup>

Under the guidance of his advisor Elagin embarked on studies of the ancient wisdom. The choice of authors chosen by Elagin is distinctive:

For the whole five years, as it is the time prescribed to our fellows for studies, I vigilantly read the Holy Scripture under given instructions. The Old and the New Testaments were and still are my most pleasant tutors, and also the Church Fathers, notably: Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Justin the Philosopher, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory the Theologian or Gregory Nazianzen, Basil of Caesarea or Saint Basil the Great, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint John of Damascus, Venerable Macarius<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Масонство по древности своей, по происхождению его от народа в народ, по почтению его от всех просвещенных языков должно заключать в себе нечто превосходное и полезное для рода человеческого', а также то, что 'сие нечто, то в ней неудобь понятно без ключа'. Cited from *Pis'ma N. I. Novikova* (St. Petersburg, 1994), p.105.

<sup>7</sup> Stanislaw Eli, *Bratskiiia uveshchaniia k nekotorym bratiiam svbdnm. Kmnschikem [svobodnym kamenshchikam]*. *Pisany bratom Seddagom* (Moscow, 1784). In 1786 it was included by archbishop Plato in the list of suspicious masonic editions and was withdrawn from sale.

<sup>8</sup> '...что масонство есть древнейшая таинственная наука, святою премудростию называемая; что она все прочие науки и искусства в себе содержит...' Cited from *Pis'ma N. I. Novikova*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>9</sup> 'Целые пять лет, яко время товарищем нашим на учение предписанное, препроводил под даваемым мне наставлениями в неусыпном чтении Божественного писания. Ветхий и Новый завет



Among the authors named by Elagin who 'became expositors for my incomprehension' are Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Socrates, Epictetus, Plato, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Homer, Zoroaster, Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, Cicero and Pliny the Elder. He adds here the books of Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory Palamas, St. Augustine, and also the works of the British authors John Pordage, Andrew Michael Ramsay, William Hutchinson and William Dergham. Moreover, he pays special attention to Louis Claude de Saint-Martin's famous treatise *Des erreurs et de la verité* and Stanislaw Eli's *Brüderliche Vermahnungen*. All the above-named authors create an image of the world origins of Russian intellectual history, as well as "another History of Russia". The vision embraced by Russian freemasons made Russian history more European and comparable with the histories of other European states.

Elagin's 'A Narrative History of Russia'<sup>10</sup> represented history as a series of moral examples and described Russian history in a utopian way. He tried to discern traces of the epistle of the Supreme Being in history. The most important reason for him to undertake historical research was in order to discover and reveal the concealed Word of God. He envisioned that the result of his endeavours would transform peoples' lives. It is important that he thought the historiosophical component of his "History" was the most essential element. He deliberately began his book with 'A Sacrifice to Sophia-Wisdom', and indeed the working title of his essay was 'An Attempt to Tell Wisely and Politically about the Russian State'. It is curious that this preface had an ambivalent

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были и еще суть приятнейшие мои учителя. Отцы церковные, яко то...' Cited from *Pis'ma N. I. Novikova*, pp.105-7.

<sup>10</sup> I. P. Elagin, *Opyt povesstvovaniia o Rossii*, Otd. Rukopisei RNB OSRK, f. IV. 651. I have published some fragments from the philosophical contents of the manuscript. See I. P. Elagin, 'Opyt povesstvovaniia o Rossii (Podgotovka teksta, prim., posleslov. T. V. Artem'evoi)' in *Literatura i istoriia*, Vypusk 3 (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2001), pp. 446-523.

character and was dedicated to St. Sophia — a popular saint in the Orthodox tradition and a traditional image in mystical movements. Ivan Elagin was under the influence of the German mystic Jakob Böhme and the British mystic John Pordage. The most popular of John Pordage's works among Russian masons were *Divine Metaphysics* and *Sophia*.

The term “masonic literature” as a special genre was introduced by N.K. Piksanov and P.N. Sakulin, and has now been adopted, among others, by A.V. Pozdeev and V.I. Sakharov. But very often such authors refer to “masonic literature” as entailing all written works by masons. I would argue that this is not correct, especially in the eighteenth century when the overwhelming majority of the intellectual elite were masons. Of course, “masonic literature” did exist in the Enlightenment, but nevertheless it was limited by its functions and tasks. I prefer to use a reasonable scheme devised by A.I. Serkov<sup>11</sup>. He includes the following categories in “masonic literature”:

1. Educational literature for future adepts, first of all translations of various works devoted to virtual life.
2. Masonic works written specially for “brothers” and read during masonic meetings, such as verses written by M.M. Kheraskov.
3. Freemasons' works written for the profane, which include verses by N.S. Murav'yov.
4. Pseudo-masonic works that tried to imitate or analyse original masonic texts.
5. Masonic critical papers presented at the lodge meetings;

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<sup>11</sup> A. Serkov, *Masonstvo i literatura*.

See <<http://www.freemasonry.ru/Publications/frmlit.html>>. I prefer the term “masonic texts”.

peculiar to these papers was the fact that for their authors the audience was especially important.

Serkov has noted that masonic literature groups appeared at various lodges. The leader of these groups in St. Petersburg was Alexander Sumarokov, whilst in Moscow in the 1780s there were Rosicrucians, led by Mikhail Kheraskov and Nikolai Novikov.

Literature and even narration is not the only possible way to reflect utopian ideas. Enlightenment utopianism existed in various forms, including scientific-looking treatises (philosophical, political, social, economic, etc.), political or organisational documents (declarations, constitutions, manifestos, programmes, etc.), social experiments or practices of political and social activity, various forms of the arts – painting, architecture, etc. We can find all of them in the activities of Russian masons in the eighteenth century. That activity itself was represented as utopian. Utopian descriptions may be concentrated in various aspects, which give us the possibility to see several types of utopianism:

- Pedagogical
- Moral
- Epistemological
- Socio-political
- Legal
- Theological
- Technological

Of course, these types have never been realised in their explicit and “pure” form. Usually every utopian project represented a mixture of some of them.

*Pedagogical utopianism* proclaimed the possibility to educate “ideal persons” and even the “ideal ruler”. This kind of utopia described special methods and special social institutions to create “a new species of people”. There were some attempts to realise pedagogical ideals in Russia during Catherine the Great’s reign. For example, boarding schools for noble girls and boys were established — the Smolny Institute and the Corps de Pages respectively. For Russian freemasons this type of utopianism was very important. Educational activities were realised by masons and inside masonic organisations and were based on special philosophical principles.

Though pedagogical activity was an important task of all masonic societies, its institutional part was concentrated at Moscow University. The university was founded in 1755 by Empress Elizaveta Petrovna’s favourite Ivan Shuvalov, who was a mason, and the famous Russian scientist and poet Mikhail Lomonosov. Shuvalov became the first curator of the University. Many eminent masons were employed in the various faculties and in administrative roles. Its first director was the eminent mason Ivan Melissino (who later became the Ober-Procurator of the Sacred Synod between 1763 and 1768), who tried to make the University a centre of culture. He founded The Russian Free Assembly (*Vol’noe rossiiskoe sobranie*), which functioned between 177 and 1783. This was the first Russian scholarly society. Among its members were many masons, including N.I. Novikov, A.P. Sumarokov, M.M. Kheraskov, D.I. Fonvisin and M.M. Shcherbatov. The Assembly’s journal was entitled ‘Essays of the Free Russian Assembly’ (*Opyt trudov vol’nogo rossiiskogo sobraniia*).

Moscow masons became especially active in the 1770s, based around the dynamic activities of Nikolai Novikov. He had a special interest in pedagogical problems and was the author of ‘On the education and tuition of children’ (*O vospitanii i nastavlenii detei*), which was influenced by John Locke’s ‘Some Thoughts Concerning Education’, which was also reprinted at Novikov’s

publishing house in 1788.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Nikolai Novikov and Johann-Georg Schwarz established The Friendly Learned Society (*Druzhbeskoe uchenoe obshchestvo*) in order to help fathers educate their children. What is more, in 1779 M. Kheraskov, also a mason, founded the Free Noble Institute at Moscow University (*Vol'nyi blagorodnyi pansion*).

The role of Johann-Georg Schwarz (1751—1784) was very important for educational processes at Moscow University, as well as for the masonic movement. He was a major agent in the intellectual communication of hermetic philosophy that he taught at the university and later during his private lectures at home. Vasilii Kliuchevskii thought that a particularly important deed enacted by Schwarz was the establishment in 1781 of the Conference of University Pupils (*Sobranie universitetskikh pitomtsev*). He wrote 'that the students' society was intended to educate members' minds and taste, to perfect their moral qualities and to exercise them in philanthropic exploits'.<sup>13</sup>

Among the faculty of Moscow University there were many masons, including Matvei Gavrillov, the philologist; the historian Ivan Heim; Friedrich Küster, the professor of German; Christian Friedrich von Matthaei and Roman Timkovskii, the professors of antique studies; Anton Prokopovich-Antonskii, the professor of natural history; Pavel Sokhatskii, the professor of philosophy; Petr Strakhov, the professor of experimental physics; Khariton Chebotarev, the professor of history and rhetoric and Johann Schneider, the professor of civil and Roman law. Of course they did not reveal masonic knowledge in their lectures, or even studied authors important for masons, but their participation in

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<sup>12</sup> See *O vospitanii detei Gospodina Lokka* (Moscow, 1788).

<sup>13</sup> 'Это студенческое общество имело целью образование ума и вкуса своих членов, их нравственное усовершенствование, упражнение в человеколюбивых подвигах'. Cited from V.O. Kliuchevskii, 'Vospominanie o N.I. Novikov i ego vremeni', in V.O. Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia v vos'mi tomakh*, Tom VIII (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959), p. 231.

the masonic network created a special spiritual and ethical atmosphere at the university.<sup>14</sup>

*Moral utopianism* presupposed the possibility of total personal perfection according to the aim formulated above. One can cite many texts about “natural man”, “true man”, or a “new Adam”, and calls to work at perfecting the rough stone in order to take off the Old Adam. Personal perfection was an important part of a mason’s life and work. Thus many were devoted to moral problems. As a principal document for Russian masons one can mention the *Catéchisme moral pour les vrais F.M.*, written in French by Ivan Lopukhin. It was published in St. Petersburg in 1799<sup>15</sup> together with other spiritual works by Lopukhin, such as *A Spiritual Knight* (*Dukhovnyi rytsar’*) and *Some Features of the Inner Church* (*Nekotorye cherty*) and disseminated as written by ‘an unknown foreign author’. Later the work was translated into German by Doctor Ewald<sup>16</sup> and Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling. The book was very popular among German masons, being particularly praised by Karl von Eckartshausen himself.<sup>17</sup>

Lopukhin noted that that “Catechism” was the result of his discussion about freemasonry with Metropolitan Plato. It is instructive to note that Metropolitan Platon of Moscow was the author of the first Russian Orthodox “Catechism”, which was published around 1778.<sup>18</sup> We can find an analogy in utopian writings, such as M.M. Shcherbatov’s *Journey to the Land of Ophir*, where the author describes a special moral “Catechism” used for the education of both the rulers and citizens of Ophir. Personal

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<sup>14</sup> See V. Novikov 'Masonry v Moskovskom universitete', in *Vyshee obrazovanie v Rossii*, No. 5., 2001, pp. 106-15.

<sup>15</sup> Quelques traits de l'église intérieure, de l'unique chemin, qui même à la vérité, et des diverses routes qui conduisent à l'erreur et à la perdition: On y a ajouté un Tableau abrégé du caractère, et des devoirs du vrai chrétien: Traduit du russe. (St. Petersburg: De l'Imprimerie Impériale, 1799).

<sup>16</sup> Possibly Johann Ludwig Ewald (1747—1822).

<sup>17</sup> See *Masonskie trudy I.V. Lopukhina. Materialy po istorii russkogo masonstva XVIII veka*. Vypusk 1 (Moscow, 1913) p. IV.

<sup>18</sup> See Platon, *Sokrashchennyi katikhevizis* (c. 1788).

examples were also important for masons, with some even becoming legendary. An example of this trend is provided by S.I. Gamaleia (1743—1822) who was a Christian ascetic and a disinterested person. His biography may be regarded as the realisation of a personal moral utopia.

Such genres as “masonic songs” also reflect the many utopian images of the perfect person and may be included in this type. Masonic songs described the system of qualities for a real mason, which were: individual perfection, honesty, truthfulness, charity and the protection of the unfortunate, modesty, contempt for vanity, virtue, and the need to honour and remain loyal to the monarch.<sup>19</sup> It is pertinent to recollect Lopukhin’s note about the qualities necessary for a mason. According to him, a “true mason” should esteem his sovereign and obey him or her in any controversy irrespective of whether they are kind or obstinate.<sup>20</sup>

*Epistemological utopianism* can be understood as the search for general “true knowledge” and universal knowledge about everything. This knowledge can be the theoretical basis of a concrete instruction regarding how to refashion society into a sophiocracy or a philo-sophiocracy, which denotes a state ruled by sages or philosophers. M.M. Kheraskov’s ‘Polydoros, a son of Cadmus and Harmony’ and M.M. Shcherbatov’s ‘A Voyage to Countries of True Sciences and Futile Learning’<sup>21</sup> represent this kind of ideal society as an intellectual paradise. In both utopias the Kingdom of Reason and Wisdom is situated in the East (Kheraskov even constructed something like the “Eastern Pole”). Moreover, both works represent the process of knowledge and moral perfection as an ascent up a mountain, where the Temple

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<sup>19</sup> See A. V. Pozdneev 'Rannie masonskie pesni', in *Scando-Slavica*, Vol. 8, 1962, pp. 26-64.

<sup>20</sup> 'Он должен Царя чтить и во всяких спорах повиноваться ему, не токмо доброму и кроткому, но и строптивому'. See *Masonskie trudy I.V. Lopukhina*, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> See M.M. Shcherbatov's 'Puteshestvie v strany istinnykh nauk in tshchetnogo ucheniia', in *Voprosy filosofii*, No. 10, 2000, No. 10, pp. 104-11.

of Wisdom is located and the goddess of Wisdom reigns.

Belief in the power of reason and faith in the possibility of a rational and reasonable solution to all social problems developed precisely at this time. The idea of an enlightened monarchy presupposes that a “wise person”, a “ruler philosopher”, or a “philosopher on the throne” can create an ideal political regime and ensure prosperity for all sections of the population. In political language one can call it an enlightened monarchy, but in a more general way I use the term sophiocracy or philosophiocracy, that is, the power of Wisdom or Philosophy. This kind of ideal society was described as an enlightened society, or a reign of wisdom or reason, where truth was viewed as the highest value of society. During the Enlightenment “real Truth” also included real Virtue. A sage had to be virtuous, because higher knowledge meant understanding the laws of Divine (or Natural) Wisdom.

I refer to these types of utopia as *epistemological* because they usually describe the process of understanding and cognition. We can find this type of utopian thought in the Western tradition. An example is David Fordyce’s *The Temple of Virtue, a Dream* (1757), where a journey fraught with danger to virtue and wisdom was described. Margaret C. Jacob has noted that ‘The Temple of Virtue ‘employed obviously “Scottish” rite language to elucidate its moral message’.<sup>22</sup> I am sure that the closeness of these texts may be explained not by the influence of David Fordyce (in spite of him being an eminent moral philosopher), but because of the general international character of masonic utopianism and its system of ideals.

Masonic documents were often archetypical for many and were sometimes very important. I am convinced that it is methodologically fruitful to reveal these connections. I

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<sup>22</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, ‘Freemasonry and the Utopian Impulse, in Millenarianism and Messianism’, in Richard H. Popkin (ed.) *English Literature and Thought, 1650—1800: Clark Library Lectures, 1981-1982* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 138-9.



presuppose that the closeness between the American Constitution and the principal documents of the Russian Decembrists, which have been interpreted as being greatly influenced by American thought<sup>23</sup>, may be explained by their mutual source being found in masonic documents.

Some mystics, who were crucially important in the creation of utopian images, were popular in Russia. One such mystic was John Pordage (1607-1681). His 'Fifth Tract on Paradise'<sup>24</sup> was translated and disseminated in Russia.<sup>25</sup> In this work we can find all the archetypes of epistemological travel: the "Temple of Higher Wisdom" and ascent up a mountain (Mount Zion). The path from the temple to Mount Zion is very narrow, with an abyss of fire on one side and a watery abyss on the other.<sup>26</sup> As the American scholar Stephen Baehr notes:

In Pordage's version, as later in the higher order masonry, Adam had a twofold paradise before the Fall: an external paradise in nature and an internal paradise within himself. After the fall God took back the external paradise but did not destroy the internal, which remained "separated from the external world and hidden within each person's own self". According to Portage, through Sophia (divine knowledge – *premudrost'*) and through Christ, this internal paradise can be restored again. When this knowledge becomes common to all men, "all the world will be paradise", wrote Pordage, prefiguring a common masonic Ideal.<sup>27</sup>

*Epistemological* utopianism is based upon classical utopian examples accepted in masonic circles. We can find it in Thomas

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, N.M Druzhinin, *Dekabrist Nikita Murav'ev* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politkatorzhan, 1933).

<sup>24</sup> 'Piatyi traktat o rai', RNB, o. III, No. 142, ff. 20-2.

<sup>25</sup> S. L Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia*. Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture (Stanford: The University of Stanford Press, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

More's *Utopia* (1516), where it is stated that high officials – ambassadors, priests and the prince himself – were chosen among the learned. The same situation can be seen in Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627), where Solomon's House is the residence of Wisdom. Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1602) gives another example of a sophiocracy. In his utopia the supreme ruler was styled the Sun or the Metaphysician.

The epoch of the Enlightenment was a specific time to understand the order and nature of society. A naive belief in the abilities of Reason gave birth to the assurance that Absolute Truth might be reached with the help of some additional intellectual effort. Thinkers believed that this "truth" was on the tip of their pens. Moreover, it was a time when many intellectuals believed in the Universal Method. Ideal images of perfect societies were thus created as a result of rational speculations, like mathematical formulas or medical prescriptions. Imaginative facilities for the realisation of such projects and the belief in reason and virtue, which were so characteristic during the Enlightenment, make this period the triumphal epoch of utopianism in social theory.

Along with the promotion of rational knowledge by the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Moscow University, irrational forms of knowledge, including the hermetic tradition, were also popular. This tradition may be described as "philosophy as vision" or "immanent knowledge" and was attained by an immediate understanding of mystical irradiation. Intimate knowledge at its highest level is the result of this way of cognition. The only institution in Russia that developed according to this way of thinking was freemasonry, with its secret studies and its attempt to actualise forms of ancient knowledge.

*Socio-political* utopianism is represented as an ideal political programme that aspires to change a political regime and/or some political institutions. Apt examples of this form of utopianism are Mikhail Shcherbatov's *Journey to the Land of Ophir* and Mikhail Kheraskov's *Cadim and Harmony, an Ancient Story* (*Kadm i*

*Garmoniia, drevnee povestvovanie*), which have been repeatedly described as “masonic utopias”.<sup>28</sup> Both authors used a popular Enlightenment model: the enlightened sovereign on the throne. In these cases the sovereign was also a mason who organised social life along the same lines as a masonic lodge.

This kind of utopianism cannot only be reflected in literary forms, but also in political plans. Catherine the Great actively expressed this in her first decree after coming to power in a coup d'état in 1762, when she expressed her distinct wish to raise her people to the highest degree of prosperity. She once demonstrated her intention in a dramatic spectacle entitled “Minerva Triumphant”, staged during her coronation in Moscow. This pageant represented the victory of the Russian Minerva with virtues over crime, knowledge over ignorance, and the beginning of the “Golden Age” in the new enlightened Russia. Catherine the Great was incarnated in three mythological images in this spectacle: Minerva, Glory and Astraea.

It is remarkable that even whilst ridiculing freemasonry in a series of plays in the 1780s (*Société Antiabsurde*, *The Deceiver*, *The Deceived* and the *Siberian Shaman*) she used the same system of symbols.<sup>29</sup> In her utopian allegory *A Tale about Prince Chlore* she wrote about the protagonist's ascent of a mountain in order to find the Temple of Virtue, where a rose without thorns grew. It demonstrated that masonic systems of symbols and values did not contradict those of the wider Russian society. Masons were distinctive not because of the content of their philosophical or political doctrine, but because of their social communications. Their bonds were deemed to be dangerous because they were beyond the control of the state and sovereign.

*Legal utopianism* is an important variant of socio-political utopianism and presupposes the creation of the perfect legal

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<sup>28</sup> Bachr S.L. The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia. Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture.

<sup>29</sup> The Russian titles of the plays are *Taina protivno-nelepogo obschestva, otkrytaia ne prichastnym onmu*; *Obmanschik*; *Obol'shebennyi* and *Shaman sibirskii* respectively.

regulations, or code of laws, and their enactment in civil society. Catherine the Great's legal "Instruction" (*Nakaz*), written especially for the Legislative Commission in 1767, is nothing but a detailed utopian project that reflects the influence of Montesquieu, Beccaria, Justi, Sonnenfels and Bielfeld. As the author of this "Instruction" she was honoured by Frederick the Great, who made her an Academician of the Berlin Academy of Sciences. However, the work was suppressed in France as it was deemed to be a politically dangerous text. In 1767-68 she instigated a Russian translation of Marmontel's *Bélisaire*, a famous utopian novel that had been banned in France by the Archbishop of Paris. Catherine distributed various chapters of the novel among members of her court, who became her "team" of translators. She herself translated the most "theoretical" ninth chapter, where the ideal ruler and the ideal way of ruling were described.

In the "Instruction" for the Legislative Commission Catherine tries to portray the "natural" political and legislative state of Russia that she stipulated should match the nature of the Russian people. It is interesting to note that Catherine's political programme corresponds in detail to the utopian project by Mikhail Shcherbatov in *Journey to the Land of Ophir*, written by him in a classical form as a voyage into an unknown country.

*Theological utopias*, or *theocratic and masonic utopias*, presuppose that society may be organised as a church or a masonic lodge. An example of a "theological utopia" is *About the Souls of Dead People* (*O dushakh umershikh liudei*), which was written by the Russian thinker A. Bolotov (1738-1833). Bolotov was not a mason, but he was a close friend of Nikolai Novikov. Furthermore, his text was written under the strong influence of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817), who was one of the most popular authors among Russian masons.

Masonic documents also demonstrated utopian images of a possible society based on ritual masonic virtues. Of principal importance in this regard was a document entitled *A New Outline*

of *True Theology* (*Novoe nachertanie istinnyia teologii*), which was accepted by Russian masonry.<sup>30</sup> Herein a new society is described in the following manner: '[It] prepares for the future glorious reign of Jesus Christ on Earth; joining all believers, all churches and all peoples through the union of a universal love for Christ; correcting the teaching, customs, outwards worship and civil government throughout the world'. Hence, a paradisiacal society may be created on Earth and we can even presuppose its main features:

1. It will have no particular confession of faith, nor any particular outward worship, but each of its members will take the scriptures as the truth for himself, as he understands it, and will be completely free to serve God according to his own conscience.
2. It will only consist of believers.
3. In matters of conscience it will have no other leader than Jesus Christ.
4. It will recognise as its brethren all other believers from all other sects and parties.
5. It will be completely devoted to the worship of God and one's own neighbour.
6. It will have a practical religion... the fulfillment of all Christian virtues and duties.
7. It will be disseminated and present throughout the world and in all societies... they will strive for the improvement, on the basis of Christ's teaching, of lay governments, outward worship and the understanding of all people's manners.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The full Russian title is as follows: *Novoe nachertanie istinnyia teologii, v kotoroi uchenie spanseniiia v novom svete predstavleno ko slave Boga i ko vseobshchemu nazhdamiiu, s pismom, pripisannym vsem chelovekam: Teologicheskoe i nraštennoe ispravlenie*, translated from the original French by N. N. Trubetskoi (Moscow, 1784). For an English translation and detailed analysis see: Raffaella Faggionato *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N.I. Novikov*. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), pp. 86-8.

<sup>31</sup> See Faggionato, p. 88.

*Technological utopianism* is a belief in the power of natural sciences or in the possibility to change society through scientific and technological means. This kind of utopianism was very popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the form of science fiction. In freemasonry it was represented in the *Magnum Opus* as a meta-scientific form of alchemical utopianism and realised in the forms of alchemical natural philosophy as a search of the philosophical stone and alchemical anthropology as creation of a homunculus. Russian masons studied *Chrysomander* (1774), which had been translated from the original German in 1783 by A.A. Petrov and A.I. Kutuzov<sup>32</sup> and were inspired by the secrets or creation of opened possibilities. Later Vladimir Odoevskii used the plot developed in *Chrysomander* in his novel *Sylphide*, which was published in 1837.

When studying masonic utopias in the Enlightenment we can see that they had many mutual features with other utopian projects. Even the system of symbols and images that mark the most evident masonic indications were shared with other utopias. I think we must not exaggerate the significance of some symbols that we usually call “masonic”. We should remember that freemasonry adopted the world system of symbols, which may be used not only by freemasonry, but also by other forms of intellectual communication. It is especially evident if we begin to compare some texts, such as Catherine the Great’s non-masonic utopian allegory entitled *A Tale about Prince Chlore* and M. Shcherbatov’s masonic utopia entitled *A Voyage to Countries of True Sciences*. Both utopias incorporate the same system of symbols (the Temple of Virtue, the Kingdom of Truth, a path fraught with danger, etc.) and the same ideas. The main idea that united the Russian empress and her opponent was the creation of a new sort of people through the establishment of a system of education

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<sup>32</sup> The full title of the Russian translation was: *Krisomander: Allegoricheskaiia I satiricheskaiia povest', razlichnago I ves'ma razhnago sodержaniia*, translated into Russian by A.A Petrov and A. I Kutuzov (Moscow, 1783).

and new type of educational institution.

Catherine and Shcherbatov thought that education was the primary means for bringing about the foundation of a perfect society. By establishing educational institutions they both deemed that it was possible to create not only “the ideal human being”, but “the ideal citizen”, or even “the ideal ruler”. Catherine paid special attention to the education of her grandsons Alexander (the future Alexander I), Constantine (a potential ruler of the restored Byzantine as a result of the realisation of her utopian Greek project), Nicholas (the future Nicholas I) and Michael. She worked out the principles of their education in a special “Instruction” given to Prince Nikolai Ivanovich Saltykov, when he was appointed to be the tutor of the Grand Princes.<sup>33</sup> This “Instruction” bore many similarities to the “Instruction” to educate Ophir’s princes in Shcherbatov’s masonic utopia entitled *Journey to the Land of Ophir*. This was not a result of mutual influence, but is evidence that both authors shared the same utopian worldview, thus using the same methodology of historicism.

Nevertheless, we can discern some particularities in masonic utopian visions, which can be summarised as follows:

- A positive dimension of social and moral ideals.
- An international dimension of social ideals.
- A practical dimension of measures aimed at achieving ideals.

Thus, we see that masonic utopias neither opposed nor contradicted utopian and political ideas of the Enlightenment. They used the same ideas and sometimes the same symbols. The

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<sup>33</sup> Catherine the Great, 'Instruktsiia kniazium Nikolaiu Ivanovichu Saltykovu pri naznachenii ego k vospitaniiu velikikh kniazei', in *Skazhki i pedagogicheskie sochineniia imperatritsy Ekateriny II* (St. Petersburg, 1873).

principal factor was the practical realisation of moral ideals by working on self-perfection and social ideals during the rituals played out at the lodges. Masons were sure that this would be possible and believed in people's reason and the natural inclination to aspire towards perfection. Other important features of masonry in Russia centred on its cosmopolitanism and its international character. Russian freemasons were not only going to change their country, but also the whole world. This is typified by a new master at Elagin's lodge, who asked himself 'Why do I identify myself as a citizen of the world and the whole world as a city in which I am living'? In reply, the mason answered that 'people are granted a reason which leads us in our acting, and that is why we have our mutual natural law'.<sup>34</sup>

Nikolai Berdiaev wrote that freemasonry in Russia was 'the first form of social self-organisation'.<sup>35</sup> Possibly it was the first display of civic society in Russia, because the nobility, that formed the majority in masonic lodges, was the only social group capable of developing such a phenomenon in the country. Even Georgii Florovskii, who is known for his criticism of some Western influences in Russia, underlined that freemasonry represented 'the sentimental education of Russian society – an awakening of the heart' that permitted the country to join the Western mystical and utopian tradition.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> 'Новопринимаемый мастер елагинской ложи на вопрос "Почему себя я почитаю гражданином света, а свет весь одним градусом, в котором я живу?" отвечает: "Люди одарены разумом, который изучает, что делать и как поступать нам, а потому и имеем общий естества закон"'. Cited from Vernadskii, p.161.

<sup>35</sup> 'Масонство было первой формой самоорганизации общества. В эту форму выливалась наиболее напряженная духовная жизнь'. Cited from N.A. Berdiaev, *Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma* (Moscow, 1990), p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> 'Сентиментальное воспитание русского общества, — пробуждение сердца'. Cited from Georgii Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1937), p.116.



# Anglo-Russian Masonic Contacts in the Reign of Catherine the Great

*Anthony Cross*

In the summer of 1768 Charles, Lord Cathcart, the British ambassador in St Petersburg, suggested that ‘Russia is now, by the Empress’s firm determined and declared opinions, and will be more so by all her institutions, decidedly English’.<sup>1</sup> He was to be proved wrong about Catherine the Great’s own institutions but he was at least correct in his assessment of her strongly Anglophile proclivities in the first decade of her reign. His secretary, Henry Shirley, who had briefly been chargé d’affaires before Cathcart’s arrival, had already noted a more general transition from Gallomania to a cult of things English;<sup>2</sup> and there is little doubt that St Petersburg’s rapidly growing British community clearly sensed the wind of change.<sup>3</sup> The position of the British merchants had been given a considerable boost with the renewal of the Anglo-Russian Commercial Agreement in July 1766 that continued Britain’s status as “the most favoured nation” (“la nation la plus favorisée”)<sup>4</sup> and prompted the merchants to convey to the then ambassador, George Macartney, their ‘public acknowledgement of the entire and unreserved approbation of every article in this Treaty from us who are so

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<sup>1</sup> *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obschestva*, XII (St Petersburg, 1873), p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> British Library, London, Add. Ms. 37, 054 (letterbook of Henry Shirley, 1767-1768), ff.40-41.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed overview of the British community in St Petersburg in the eighteenth century, see Anthony Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva: Chapters from the Lives and Careers of the British in Eighteenth-Century Russian* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 9-40.

<sup>4</sup> F. Martens (ed.), *Sobranie traktatov i konventsii, zakliuchennykh Rossiei s inostrannymi derzhavami*, IX (X) (St. Petersburg, 1892), p. 89.

immediately and so nearly concerned in its Consequences'.<sup>5</sup> Its economic consequences were enormous but so also were its social and cultural implications.

Already since March 1754 the British community had had its own permanent place of worship, the English Church, converted from the old Sheremetev mansion towards the western end of Galley Embankment. Adjacent houses were increasingly bought or rented by British subjects and the embankment, which soon was known as the English Embankment, became the focus of the community's spiritual and social life.<sup>6</sup> Parallel to the embankment ran Galley or Isaac Street, from which there was access to the courtyards of the houses and where there were to be found an English inn and a coffee house, as well as the workplaces of British craftsmen and traders. During the first decade of Catherine's reign, the British established a subscription library, which was located in one of the church's courtyard buildings and it was in the English inn that there were held winter subscription balls, popular with both the British and the Russian nobility. Even more popular with the Russians, and strictly male in its membership, was the English Club, founded officially on 1/12 March 1770 with 50 founder members and growing to 250 by the end of 1771.<sup>7</sup> At virtually the same time there was founded another characteristically English institution, a masonic lodge.

'Perfect Union' began functioning in the summer of 1770, but it was not until 1 June 1771 that the lodge was granted its constitution from the Grand Lodge of England. The traditions of English freemasonry were to be as influential as those of the English social club at this period in Russia but were to be far more short-lived. 'Perfect Union' was proud to describe itself as

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<sup>5</sup> Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Macartney Papers, D2225/1/2.

<sup>6</sup> See Anthony Cross, 'The English Embankment', in Cross (ed.), *St Petersburg, 1703-1825* (London, 2003), pp. 50-70.

<sup>7</sup> See *Stoletie Sankt-Peterburgskogo Angliiskogo sobraniia* (St Petersburg, 1870) and L.V. Zavialova, *Peterburgskii angliiskii klub 1770-1918* (St Petersburg, 2005).

‘a British Lodge whose foundation & Existence is national’,<sup>8</sup> but its membership was from the very beginning as international as that of the English Club (many of the masons were also members of the latter) and it was soon to lose the special status it claimed. ‘Perfect Union’'s wish to be subject directly and only to the Grand Master of the Order in London was soon to be challenged and the challenge came in the person of Ivan Perfil’evich Elagin (1725-93). It is the conflict between ‘Perfect Union’ and Elagin that forms the core of what follows and is described from unique documents preserved in the archives of the Grand Lodge in Freemasons’ Hall in London, namely the Petersburg lodge’s Journal or Minute Book for the year June 1771 to July 1772 and the correspondence between the Grand Lodge and Elagin, a correspondence that in fact takes us beyond the bounds of the conflict to consider his role in the complex development of Russian freemasonry in the later years of Catherine’s reign.<sup>9</sup>

Russian freemasonry during Catherine’s reign presents a picture of extraordinary confusion and prolonged ferment, when the English and various continental systems and rites vied for supremacy. During much of this period Elagin was a major player. Translator, poet, dramatist, he was also a trusted servant of the Empress, holding a number of responsible positions at Court, including State Secretary for the Receipt of Petitions (1762-8), Director of the Imperial Theatres (from 1766), and Steward and, later (from 1782), Chief Steward (*obergofmeister*) in

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<sup>8</sup> United Grand Lodge of England, Freemasons’ Hall, London, ‘Journal of the Lodge of Perfect Union at St. Petersburg’, f. 44. Further references to the ‘journal’ are in the text by folio number.

<sup>9</sup> It was the discovery of the Journal or Minute Book some forty years ago that inspired my article ‘British Freemasons in Russia during the Reign of Catherine the Great’, *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, NS IV (1971), 43-72. It was, however, only of recent years that I became aware of the collection of letters. All the letters and related documents from the Minute Book are due to appear in English with Russian translations in *XVIII vek*, XXV (St Petersburg, 2009). The ten letters are referred to by date in the text of this article and are not footnoted.

the Imperial Household<sup>10</sup> He had become a mason in the 1750s and in 1770 he was a member of the lodge known as ‘Skromnost’ in Russian and as ‘Discretion’ in English, according to the minutes of ‘Perfect Union’. The emergence of Elagin as the ‘new’ force in Russian freemasonry dates from the years following his appointment as director of the imperial theatres. Certainly, actors, musicians and writers, foreign and Russian, were to become conspicuous members of Elagin Lodges, not least of the aptly named ‘The Muses’. Elagin did in fact pay an early visit to the St Petersburg English lodge, when its first master was Giuseppe Brigonzi (d. 1789), the famous “machinist”, creator of elaborate scenarios and stage machinery first for Locatelli’s company, with which he had come to Russia in 1757, and then, pertinently, for the imperial theatres. It was during this period that England as the repository of masonic lore and wisdom assumed great importance for Elagin and at the same time it was London, which had the authority to affirm his own leading position among Russian freemasons.

As Elagin probably knew, he would not be the first Provincial Grand Master of Russia warranted by London. The London Grand Lodge minutes record the election of a Captain John Philipps as Provincial Grand Master of Germany and Russia on 24 January 1731 and of General James Keith as Provincial Grand Master of Russia in 1740.<sup>11</sup> Of Philipps we know nothing, not even of the existence of lodges over which he had authority. Keith in contrast is a major figure in the eighteenth century for his Jacobite allegiances, his military prowess, but much less for his masonic activities. We know, however, that in 1740, recovering from the operation in Paris that had saved his leg from amputation, Keith visited London. The visit was memorable on

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<sup>10</sup> The best account of Elagin’s very full and varied career is V.P. Stepanov, ‘Elagin, Ivan Perfil’evich’, in A.M. Panchenko et al. (eds.), *Slovar’ russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka*, I (Leningrad, 1988), pp. 304–9.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Freke Gould, *The History of Freemasonry, its Antiquities, Symbols, Constitutions, Customs, etc.*, III (London, no date), p. 214.

several counts, not least because Keith, in his capacity as an official representative of Russia, was received by King George II and declared that he accepted the Hanoverian dynasty and renounced active support for the Stuarts. He also met his cousin John Keith, Earl of Kintore, the masonic Grand Master of England, and was appointed Provincial Grand Master of Russia. Of Keith's subsequent masonic activities in Russia we again know almost nothing, but he came to be regarded as the founding father of Russian freemasonry and his role was celebrated in a masonic hymn sung in Russian lodges during the reign of the Empress Elizabeth:

The holy fire he here ignited,  
The temple of wisdom he erected  
Minds and hearts he corrected  
And us in brotherhood united.<sup>12</sup>

Elagin was thus to become the third Provincial Grand Master, but the first Russian to hold the post. His decision to turn to England was connected with, indeed hastened by, two other factors. He almost certainly knew of 'Perfect Union's wish to seek a constitution from the London Grand Lodge but believed that appointment as Provincial Grand Master which would give him authority over the English lodge. At the same time he was anxious to counteract the threat to his position posed by Baron Georg Reichel (1729-91), formerly Hofmeister to the Duke of Brunswick, who had arrived in St Petersburg in 1770 to occupy a senior position in the Noble Cadet Corps. On 3/14 March 1771 Reichel erected a lodge called 'Apollo', which followed the so-called Zinnendorf system of Lax Observance. Johann Wilhelm Ellenberg (1731-82), better known as von Zinnendorf, had founded a Grand Lodge of Freemasons of Germany in Berlin in 1770 and was anxious to spread his authority into Russia, while

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<sup>12</sup> A.N. Pypin, *Russkoe masonstvo XVIII i pervaiia chetvert' XIXv.* (Petrograd, 1916), p. 90.

careful not to offend Elagin. Thus, on 15 October Zinnendorf himself wrote to Elagin to announce the erection of the new lodge, to recommend to him Reichel and to seek Elagin's 'protection, trust and benevolence'.<sup>13</sup> This might seem to indicate subservience to Elagin's authority but the Russian clearly thought otherwise. At all events by this time he had already taken action to secure his position.

To achieve his appointment as Provincial Grand Master for Russia he decided in the summer of 1771 to dispatch to London his fellow dramatist and fellow mason, Vasilii Ignat'evich Lukin (1737-94), who worked for him in the Office of Her Majesty. Lukin at this time was a member of 'The Muses' lodge (also known subsequently as 'The Three Muses' and 'The Nine Muses'). Although Lukin's journey to Europe was on official business (among commissions he was to carry out for the empress was to deliver to her correspondent Mme de Bielke the medal celebrating Count Aleksei Orlov's naval victory over the Turks at Chesme<sup>14</sup>), the trip to London seems to have been only for Elagin's benefit. On 13/24 August Elagin wrote to the Russian ambassador in London, Count Aleksei Semenovich Musin-Pushkin, also a noted mason and Anglophile, warmly recommending Lukin and asking for every assistance, but adding: 'As to the business which I have entrusted to him he himself will orally inform Your Honour, when the necessity arises'.<sup>15</sup> Lukin probably arrived before the end of the year and was to leave again for Russia at the very beginning of March 1772, taking with him the all-important patent of office for Elagin as Provincial Grand

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Russian from the French original in A. Semeka, 'Russkoe masonstvo v XVIII veke', in S.P. Mel'gunov and N.P. Sidorov (eds.), *Masonstvo v ego proshlom i nastoiashchem*, I (Moscow, 1914), p. 141.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of 29 August /9 September 1771, *Sbornik IRIO*, XIII (1874), p. 149.

<sup>15</sup> Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossii, Moscow, Fond Snosheniia Rossii s Angliei, opis' 36/1, delo 296, l. 1. (Musin-Pushkin was renowned as one of the earliest and most high-ranking adherents of Strict Observance, to which he had been admitted in 1765 in Germany ((Pypin, pp. 108-109).)

Master, which the Duke of Beaufort, the English Grand Master, had signed on 26 February.<sup>16</sup> He also carried with him letters, both prepared and signed by the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge, James Heseltine (1743-1804), for Elagin and for the master of 'Perfect Union', who was by then the prominent merchant William Gomm Jr (1728-92).

The letter to Elagin contains much of interest. In addition to Elagin's patent, Lukin was given a specially bound copy of James Anderson's *Constitutions of the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons* in the new updated edition of 1767. Originally published in 1723, soon after the foundation of the Grand Lodge of England, but many times thereafter re-issued and revised, it was the basic guide to the early history of freemasonry and to the running of a lodge with its concomitant ceremonies and rituals. It was also essentially an eighteenth-century rationalist approach to many of the 'mysteries' of freemasonry and was to all intents and purposes the "bible" of the "Moderns", as adherents of the Grand Lodge came to be known. This is the book referred to by Heseltine in his letter and which 'in order to give it every possible authenticity I have certified the same under my signature as G.S. [Grand Secretary - AC] and the Public Seal of the Society'. This copy, bearing handwritten additions by Heseltine and dated 29 February 1772, is, like Elagin's patent, preserved in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA).<sup>17</sup> Lukin was also given various other printed

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<sup>16</sup> The diploma, which is reproduced in *Masonstvo v ego proshlom i nastoiashchem*, II (1915), p. 65, is held in RGADA, F. 154, op. 3, delo 209, l.1.

<sup>17</sup> James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons Containing Their History, Charges, Regulation, &c. Collected and Digested, By Order of the Grand Lodge, from the Old Records, Faithful Traditions, and Lodge-Books, for the Use of the Lodges*, carefully revised, continued, and enlarged by John Entick. A New Edition, with alterations and additions, by a Committee appointed by the Grand Lodge (London, 1767. In the vulgar year of masonry 5767) (RGADA, F. 8, op. 1, delo 254, ll. 1-36). (Also available on microfiche from IDC Publishers, Amsterdam, R-18877, item 22.) See also P.

materials, such as lists of lodges and their officers. It was, however, to be ‘the inspection of all our Forms and Ceremonies’ during Lukin’s visits to various lodges in the English capital that was to prove equally invaluable to Elagin for the running of his own lodges. Of particular significance both in this context and for its wider relevance to arguments about the degrees bestowed by the Grand Lodge is the further information that Lukin was also ‘received into the sublime degree of the Royal Arch, which is the chief or superior degree known to or at least practised by Us’.

In an autobiographical memoir, written in 1786, Elagin relates how a meeting in St Petersburg with an elderly visiting English mason (whom he does not name and whose identity it is impossible to establish) convinced him that ‘masonry is a science that is rarely revealed to anyone, that England never provides anything in writing about it, that the mystery itself is held in London in a special lodge known as the ancient, that very few brothers know of this lodge, that, finally, it is extremely difficult to locate and enter this lodge, and even more difficult to be initiated into its mystery’.<sup>18</sup> Although Elagin does not give a precise year for this momentous meeting, scholars agree that it was prior to the dispatch of Lukin to London, but there is no such agreement about the identity of the lodge, ‘known as the ancient’ (*drevnei nazvyvaemaia*). Whilst one Russian authority understood this as referring simply to the Grand Lodge of England, another specifies the ‘Lodge of Antiquity’, which was the name given in 1770 to the ‘Lodge of St Paul’, the oldest of the original four lodges uniting in 1717 to form the Grand Lodge of England. In contrast, yet a third scholar saw it as evidence of

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Pekarskii, *Dopolneniia k istorii masonstva v Rossii XVIII stoletia* (St Petersburg, 1869), pp. 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Novye materialy dlia istorii masonstva. Zapiska I.P. Elagina: “Povest’ o sebe samom”’, *Russkii arkhiv* (1864), col. 597.



Elagin's turning away from the Grand Lodge of England, from 'the Moderns', to the 'Antients'.<sup>19</sup>

It is widely assumed that the "Moderns" only worked the first three degrees of freemasonry, the so-called degrees of St John – Apprentice, Fellow Craftsman and Master – as described by Anderson in *Constitutions*. The so-called fourth degree of the Royal Arch was, however, frequently bestowed within the Grand Lodge of England 'according to the Old Institutions', which was formed in 1751 by a number of masons, mainly Irish, who believed the "Moderns" were betraying the beliefs and practices of true or ancient masonry. Their answer to Anderson's work was their Grand Secretary, later Deputy Grand Master, Laurence Dermott's *Ahiman Rezon*, first published in 1756, which gave due prominence to the more mystical aspects of the masonic quest. However, as is clear from Heseltine's statement quoted above, the "Moderns", or at least some of their lodges, worked the fourth degree.

Although the Grand Lodge of England's official attitude towards the Royal Arch was one of disapproval, the Moderns who worked the degree decided in the 1760s to establish a body to encourage, govern and control it. On 22 July 1766 the Grand and Royal Arch Chapter of the Royal Arch of Jerusalem was constituted in London. Among the brothers, or companions, as they were later termed, who were present on that occasion were the then Grand Master of the "Moderns", Cadwallader, Lord Blayney (1720-75) and James Heseltine. Blayney was elected First Grand Principal of the Chapter, a position Heseltine was later to hold during the time he was Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge (1769-84).<sup>20</sup> The formation of the Grand Chapter received a

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<sup>19</sup> Semeka, p. 140; Pypin, pp. 142-3; Vernadskii, pp. 31-2; Raffaella Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N.I. Novikov* (Dordrecht, 2005), pp. 16-19.

<sup>20</sup> See A.R. Hewitt, 'The Supreme Grand Chapter of England: A Brief History from Lord Blayney to the Duke of Sussex', in A.S. Frere (ed.), *Grand Lodge 1717-1967* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 280-5.

mixed reception among the leaders of the Grand Lodge, but the Grand Chapter flourished and many leading masons “passed the arch” at its subsequent meetings, including further Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge. Distinguished foreign masons, such as the Duke of Mecklenburg, were occasionally invited to join the Order and it was an indication of the esteem in which Heseltine held him as a person or as a representative of the new Provincial Grand Master Elagin that Lukin was in their number.<sup>21</sup> And it was through Lukin that Elagin would be initiated into the mysteries of the Royal Arch.<sup>22</sup>

Heseltine’s first letter also reflects Elagin’s concern with the Reichel-Zinnendorf threat to his authority. Lukin had informed Heseltine that Reichel had claimed to be Provincial Grand Master for Russia, appointed by Zinnendorf, whose own authority derived from the Provincial Grand Master for Sweden, Count C.F. Scheffer. Scheffer had received his appointment in 1770 from the Grand Lodge of England, but, as Heseltine emphasized, only within Sweden and ‘consequently he has not the least to interfere in any other Nation’. Lukin was given a letter to pass on to Scheffer to make this clear. Heseltine also suspected that Zinnendorf was responsible for creating the whole business and he had therefore written to the Royal York Lodge ‘acting under Us at Berlin’ to try to rectify the situation.

The events following Lukin’s return to Petersburg are graphically reflected in the Journal of ‘Perfect Union’. The minutes cover the period from St John the Baptist’s Day, 13/24 June 1771 to 23 July/3 August 1772 and thus begin before

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<sup>21</sup> During his service in England as a naval officer in the 1770s Nikolai Mordvinov also “passed the arch”. See his letters of 1778 to the Russian chaplain in London; IRLI, F. 620, arkhiv A.A. Samborskogo, ed. khran. 127, ll. 1ob., 4ob.

<sup>22</sup> There is, incidentally, among manuscripts belonging to Elagin an undated folio notebook, entitled ‘Stepen’ 4, nazyvaemaia Royal Arch., to est’ Tsarskiiia arkhitektury (Priem onogo sleduiushchim obrazom delaetsia: vse k semu nadlezhashchie brat’ia)’ (Pekarskii, p. 58).

Elagin's appointment and end at a time of turmoil and confusion and with as yet no resolution to the dilemma in which 'Perfect Union' found itself. 'Perfect Union' suspended its meetings in the summer months, operating only from the second Thursday in October and continuing until St John's Day and this in fact meant that it was only in October 1771 that the Lodge officially received its Constitution, granted four and a half months earlier in London. Much discussion followed about the extent to which 'Perfect Union' could follow laws and regulations, some of which seemed 'to be calculated only for the Lodges in London' (f.5), and it was only on 17/28 February 1772 that 'Perfect Union' wrote to the Duke of Beaufort, the Grand Master of England, apologising for the delay in acknowledging the safe arrival of its constitution. By a most curious coincidence this was but one day (according to the New Style) before the Duke of Beaufort in London signed Elagin's patent of office. The English lodge's peace was soon shattered by a visit on 3/14 May from the recently returned Lukin, bearing a letter from Heseltine, dated 29 February, which called for 'Perfect Union's' submission to Elagin's authority and described 'the Year 1772 as the Aera of Masonick Splendour and Dignity in Russia' (f. 35). The members of 'Perfect Union' were indignant and, although offering congratulations to Elagin on his appointment, unanimously resolved to have 'no dependance, nor official Correspondence to that Effect with any other than the Grand Lodge in London' (ff. 37-8). The Lodge's Orator, Sebastian de Villiers, a French merchant, was sent to deliver the message to Elagin at his home on Elagin Island. In all, six meetings of the lodge were held during May at the height of the crisis. On 30 May/10 June the lodge took the last-ditch decision to send to London a copy of its current minutes to support its petition to remain a truly British lodge. Soon after that meeting a letter was addressed to the Duke of Beaufort by Gomm and the officers of the lodge. The members of 'Perfect Union', as well as Elagin, Lukin and others,

were as yet unaware that on 4 May Lord Robert Petre, Baron Writtle, had been elected to succeed Beaufort as Grand Master.

'Perfect Union's tactic was to wish Elagin success in the erection of new and prosperous lodges in Russia and to regard him and his followers as true brothers and therefore admissible to its meetings, but not as their master and superior. Elagin was naturally incensed by what he considered was a slight to his new eminence and particularly by the doubts expressed by 'Perfect Union' as to whether a letter signed by the Grand Secretary really conveyed the sentiments of the Grand Master himself (not the most convincing of ploys!). Elagin demanded a firm commitment from 'Perfect Union': 'I tell you frankly and as a father who has grown old in our royal art that a No, which would leave me in no doubt, would have been more agreeable to me than the page of compliments that your Orator has given me' (f. 47). The members of 'Perfect Union' took strong exception to the tone and expression of Elagin's letter and their detailed objections cover several pages of the minute book (ff. 49-59). Elagin meanwhile was anxious to bring further pressure to bear from the Grand Lodge of England. He passed on a letter from London, dated 24 June (NS), the text of which is not, unfortunately, extant. It may be surmised that it was a call for submission from Lord Petre, the newly installed Grand Master in London, but Gomm simply wrote to inform Elagin that it preferred to communicate directly with London. The masons of the British Lodge saw the new Provincial Grand Master as the embodiment of 'arbitrary Controul of such open and avowed Despotism' (f. 71) and they expected their fellow-countrymen to be sympathetic to their request for virtual autonomy within Russia. But they were wrong: on 28 October 1772 the Committee of Charity of the Grand Lodge in London decided that 'Perfect Union' must submit to Elagin's authority.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gould, *History of Freemasonry*, III, 216, n. 1.

For Elagin personally, 1772 indeed inaugurated the ‘Aera of Masonick Splendour and Dignity’ in Russia. He soon appointed members of his own Grand Provincial Lodge and began to issue warrants to his first lodges: ‘The Muses’, known by then as Elagin’s own lodge and meeting in his house on Elagin Island, ‘Urania’, created by members of ‘The Muses’ and electing Lukin as its master, and ‘Bellona’, with its membership dominated by officers from the Imperial Horse Guards, all three lodges in St Petersburg, but also the military lodge ‘Mars’ at Jassy and ‘Clio’ in Moscow with masons from the army, civil service and the university. On 18/29 December 1773 Lukin had replaced the poet Vasilii Maikov as Grand Provincial Secretary and among his first tasks was to resume correspondence with the Grand Lodge of England and inform it of the lodges warranted by Elagin. Thus, almost two years after his own departure from London, Lukin wrote to his friend and opposite number, Grand Secretary Heseltine, to accompany letters addressed by Elagin to the Grand Master in London, Lord Petre. Unfortunately, neither Lukin’s letter nor those from Elagin are extant, although the invaluable list of the memberships of the Grand Provincial Lodge and of the first five Elagin lodges, which is in Lukin’s hand, survives (inserted at the end of ‘Perfect Union’s minute book).<sup>24</sup> These lodges were duly entered in the original Engraved Lists of the Grand Lodge of London as nos. 566-570 and the membership of the Grand Provincial Lodge appeared in the second volume of *Freemasons’ Calendar* in 1777, by which time it was no longer applicable.<sup>25</sup> Heseltine was delighted to receive the registers, which, he wrote, provided clear evidence of ‘the very great and rapid increase of Our Society in Russia, and it affords the most

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<sup>24</sup> These lists were printed as Appendix I in my ‘British Freemasons in Russia during the Reign of Catherine the Great’, pp. 62-8.

<sup>25</sup> John Lane, *Masonic Records, 1717-1894; Being Lists of All the Lodges at Home and Abroad Warranted by the Four Grand Lodges and ‘United Grand Lodge’ of England*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1895), pp. 191-2; *Freemasons’ Calendar for 1777* (London, 1777), pp. 38-9.

promising hopes of establishing the Order upon a firm and lasting basis under your Authority’.

In the same letter Heseltine refers to developments in masonic affairs in Germany, especially to Zinnendorf. As a result of Lukin’s earlier (1771-72) account of the problems with Reichel and Zinnendorf, he had written letters to Berlin and Stockholm that seemed to have had their effect. Thus Reichel’s first Petersburg lodge ‘Apollo’, shortly before it was obliged to close because of financial difficulties, had been told from Germany that only London could grant lodges constitutions. Its replacement, the lodge ‘Harpokrates’, erected on 15/26 May 1773 under the mastership of Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi, was informed at the end of August by the new German Provincial Grand Master, the Prince of Hesse and Darmstadt, that it should seek its constitution either from Elagin or from London.<sup>26</sup> Heseltine further explained that the Prince of Hesse had joined with other masons ‘for a confirmation of their authority as a national Grand Lodge — under such restrictions and conditions as might be agreeable to us’ with the result that an alliance had been formed: Hesse was confirmed as Grand Master and ‘Mr Zinnindorff, who was hitherto looked upon as a very irregular Bror has conformed to all our regulations & is now an Officer under the Prince of Hesse’. Elagin was therefore recommended to instigate ‘a friendly correspondence’ with Berlin.

There is a break in the correspondence until 1776 and when it was resumed there was no direct mention of Reichel and his activities in St Petersburg. It was during these years nevertheless that Reichel, undeterred by his rejection from Germany, erected a number of new lodges, three in the Russian capital and one in Revel and another in Riga, all in 1774, and a further lodge in Moscow in 1776. An attempt to enlist support for his lodges from the Swedish Provincial Grand Lodge, however, also ended in failure and Reichel was obliged to consider a union with

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<sup>26</sup> Semeka, pp. 141-3.

Elagin. Despite the refusal of Elagin's lodges to admit as visitors to their meetings masons from non-constituted lodges (reminiscent of the stance previously taken by 'Perfect Union'), the Provincial Grand Master himself was increasingly thinking the unthinkable. His letters to the Grand Lodge of England reveal his growing discontent at receiving little from London but general civilities and nothing to guide him and his fellow masons along the road to the secrets of true masonry. In his letter of August 1776 he regrets that 'we have nothing in writing of our whole Work, so every point is performed by memory'. Lukin had returned from his visit to England with 'nothing [...] in writing, which was refused him, & he exerts himself to assist us with his Capacity as he can, we still don't find it sufficient enough'. He then underlined the further threat from lodges of Strict Observance, which were proving seductive to 'a good many of our younger Brethren'.

It was not only Strict Observance or the Swedish chivalric rite that was proving popular. Nikolai Novikov, the great publisher and enlightener who was drawn into masonry c.1775, was to recall the attraction of the moral teaching characteristic of lodges following the Zinnendorf rite and the personal appeal of Reichel, by comparison with which Elagin's 'English' system of three degrees seemed inadequate and devoid of real content.<sup>27</sup> Elagin hoped by his union with Reichel to unite what was best in both systems while increasing his own authority. The letters to the Grand Lodge in 1776 give no indication that any such union was imminent, but on 3/14 September 1776 Reichel and Elagin signed an agreement that gave Elagin formal control of some twenty lodges. In August Elagin had expressed to Heseltine the hope that 'Unity & Order will be fully erected among the Northern Brothers'. His hopes seemed to have been realised, for on 2/13 October he wrote to the German Grand Lodge in Berlin

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<sup>27</sup> M.N. Longinov, *Novikov i moskovskie martinisty* (St. Petersburg, 2000), pp. 480-1.

that ‘in the whole Russia there is one shepherd and flock’ (‘odin pastyr’ i odno stado’).<sup>28</sup> The picture he painted was, nonetheless, idyllic rather than faithful.

Even before Elagin penned his letter to Berlin, the union which he headed was proving fragile. Once again, his own ideological searches led him to contemplate the attractions of the higher orders offered by the Swedish system that was proving irresistible to many other Russian masons. Although some years later Elagin was to write that ‘hitherto [c. 1786] no one has yet received even the fourth degree’, he had from the very beginning of his Provincial Grand Mastership authorised the practice of the three degrees of the Scottish rite, known as the St Andrew degrees, in lodges under his control.<sup>29</sup> It is also known that Elagin made an approach to the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1773 for ‘a masonical mark of distinction’ and possibly enlightenment on the working of higher degrees: after consultation with the Grand Lodge of the Antients, the Scots consented, but the Duke of Atholl, who was Grand Master of both Grand Lodges, intervened and forbade any communication, unless Elagin renounced his existing allegiance.<sup>30</sup> It might also be noted that even ‘Perfect Union’, while taking pride in its English constitution, was from its earliest days ‘irregular’ and practised ‘Scotch’ degrees: it laid down fees for admittance to the degrees of Scotch Master, Elu and Philosopher (f. 7) and on St Andrew’s Day, 1/12 December 1771, held a Lodge of Scotch Masters (f. 13).<sup>31</sup> This might suggest

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<sup>28</sup> Semeka, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> A historian of the Grand Lodge of England noted that ‘Perfect Union’ conferred Scotch degrees and added that Elagin’s lodges ‘were not more orthodox, conferring four ‘higher’ degrees, besides introducing innovations in the ritual of the Craft degrees’ (A.J. B. Milbourne, ‘Overseas Development and the Military Lodges’, in *Grand Lodge 1717-1967*, p. 233).

<sup>30</sup> Gould, *History of Freemasonry*, III, 216; J.R. Clarke, ‘The Antient Grand Lodge, 1751-1796’, in *Grand Lodge, 1717-1967*, p. 101.

<sup>31</sup> It is interesting nonetheless that a member of ‘Perfect Union’, John Robison (1739-1805), who had earlier been made a Scotch master in a French lodge in Liège, wrote in his *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of*



that prior to the granting of constitutions from London, 'Perfect Union' and other lodges existing around 1768-72, such as 'Discretion' and 'The Muses', were working the degrees of the Berlin lodge 'Royal York'. Elagin's subsequent turn to Sweden for the written documentation for the working of the higher degrees of the Scotch rite, which both he and his new associate Reichel professed to lack, would, however, most certainly have also been encouraged by the man Elagin called 'one of the most respected of our brothers, my perfect friend, the benefactor of the human race', Count Nikita Panin (1718-83), his deputy as Grand Master in the new Provincial Lodge, but also Catherine's minister for foreign affairs pursuing a pro-Swedish policy.<sup>32</sup>

On 30 September/11 October 1776 Prince Aleksandr Borisovich Kurakin (1752-1818), a relative of Panin, was dispatched to Stockholm to announce to the Swedish court the recent marriage of the tsezarevich Pavel Petrovich to Sophia Dorothea of Württemberg (Mariia Fedorovna). However, like Lukin in 1771-2, Kurakin also travelled on masonic business with an explicit recommendation from Elagin.<sup>33</sup> He and his companion, Prince Gavriil Petrovich Gagarin (1745-1807), were admitted to the higher degrees of Strict Observance, which had re-established its pre-eminence in Sweden under the mastership of Charles, Duke of Sudermania, and on their return to St Petersburg in the spring of 1777, they brought with them documents relating to the constitutions of lodges and the workings of the new degrees. The visit to St Petersburg of King Gustav III, the elder brother of the Duke, during the summer of the same year was not only to cement Russo-Swedish relations but also to further the cause of the Swedish High Chapter of

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*Europe* (1797) that such a degree was 'not given in the English lodge' (*Proofs* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., Dublin, 1798), p. 2).

<sup>32</sup> 'Zapiska I.P. Elagina', *Russkii arkhiv*, col. 588.

<sup>33</sup> See the Russian translation of an unfinished letter in French in Elagin's archive: Pekarskii, p. 60.

Templar Strict Observance.<sup>34</sup> In the event, however, Strict Observance was established in St Petersburg without Elagin and without Reichel. The Swedes had hoped that Elagin and all the lodges of the Elagin-Reichel union would accept the Swedish rite, but in fact once more there were to be at least two systems operating in Russia. It was only at the very end of 1778 that the first Russian lodge following the Swedish system, 'Phoenix' was officially erected. The following spring (7/18 May 1779) Gagarin, who had accepted the Grand Mastership, received his warrant from the Duke of Sudermania and three weeks later the Grand National Lodge under his control was formally instituted.

Nearly three years had elapsed since Kurakin departed for Sweden and much had changed. As Novikov after his arrest subsequently made clear,<sup>35</sup> Reichel was hostile to Swedish masonry and not only Novikov but also Elagin came to distinguish its "deceptions" ("obmany") from the essential truths of freemasonry. Elagin was offered the Grand Mastership of the National Lodge and vacillated for some time before rejecting it, possibly aware of Kurakin's own aspirations and duplicity.<sup>36</sup> He was seriously tempted by the possibilities this new role offered and among his papers there are his own translations from the documents Kurakin had brought, together with a list of the Scottish degrees leading figures in his lodges would receive in the new order.<sup>37</sup> The lure of positions of authority had always been an unhappy bedfellow for his genuine search for masonic enlightenment. His autobiographical essay, 'Tale about Myself' ('Povest' o sebe samom') is to some extent a later rationalisation,

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<sup>34</sup> The king apparently was to bring with him other documents concerning the establishment of the Swedish chapter in Russia, and it would seem to be these documents, which Elagin wished to peruse before he committed himself. See Vernadskii, pp. 40-1; Pekarskii, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> Longinov, p. 482.

<sup>36</sup> See Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb, 1999), pp. 124, 214, note 138.

<sup>37</sup> Pekarskii, pp. 52-3; Vernadskii, pp. 39-40.

as well as a chronologically confusing account, of the momentous decisions in his life as a mason. It seems clear, however, that rejecting Swedish masonry, Elagin sought to revivify his adherence to the English system, whose basic three degrees of St John represented what he called ‘the perfect content of the whole of our teaching’. Nevertheless, emphasizing yet again what he had said in his letter to Heseltine that the London Grand Lodge ‘communicates nothing in writing’ even about the working of these degrees, he believed that ‘at the same time it does not forbid the working of the higher degrees, should any brother be of a mind to take them’. This allowed him to work towards the erection of his own particular ‘Scottish Lodge’ (“lozha Ekoskaia”), to the exclusive members of which, masters of existing lodges and all already admitted to the fourth degree, he would teach the meaning of true masonry.<sup>38</sup> He had decided to frame his teaching in a series of “conversations” (“besedy”), a work he was to leave unfinished, among the reasons for which he points unerringly at the adherents of what he calls the “the Karlsbad system” (“sistema Karlsbadskaia”), whose “sacrileges” (“pustosviatstva”) brought down the wrath of both civil and religious authorities against not only ‘those led astray’ (“obol’shchennye”) but all masons, obliging Elagin himself to cease his activities and close down his lodges.<sup>39</sup>

Elagin was alluding to the political factors that moved Catherine to take action against the masons. For many years the empress had been prepared to indulge the masonic enthusiasms of her trusted Elagin and was obviously little troubled by his approaches to the London Grand Lodge. Apart from the actual working of the degrees, many of the activities of the lodges, particularly of those functioning according to the English system,

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Zapiska I.P. Elagina’, *Russkii arkhiv* (1864), col.590. The work that ‘revealed’ the mysteries of masonry to Elagin was Saint-Martin, *Des erreurs et de la vérité* (1775), the importance of which he tried to impart to Panin (*ibid.*, cols. 587-9).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* col. 591.

were open and well publicised and involved many prominent figures from the aristocracy and government service, such as already frequented the English Club.<sup>40</sup> Convivial ‘Table Lodges’ and musical entertainments were a feature of Elagin’s lodges, particularly of ‘Urania’, whose master, Lukin, had probably taken part in many such events during his sojourn in London.<sup>41</sup> It is also clear from the correspondence with Heseltine that Elagin was planning a special building for meetings of the Grand Provincial Lodge in emulation of the new Freemasons’ Hall in London that was completed in 1776 and was keen to learn of the various ceremonies connected with its dedication and grand opening.<sup>42</sup> When the king of Sweden arrived in the Russian capital in the summer of 1777 he was not only welcomed at court but also openly fêted by the masons of ‘Apollo’, a lodge that had refused to join the Elagin-Reichel union. Two years later, however, the Empress’s attitude to both Sweden and freemasonry was changing. Describing freemasonry in a letter to Grimm in 1779 as an aberration, ‘pursued by the hero of the age’ (“chem zanimaetsia geroi veka”),<sup>43</sup> she published the following year her

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<sup>40</sup> Indeed, ‘Perfect Union’, for instance, rivalled the English Club in its lavish entertainments: to mark the Feast of St John (13/24 June) in 1772 it arranged a ‘Concert Supper and Ball’ for eighty guests in the so-called English Playhouse on Tsaritsyn lug, which Catherine had given two years previously to an itinerant English dramatic troupe.

<sup>41</sup> See, among other evidence, the diary of A. Ia. Il’in: ‘Iz dnevnika masona 1775-1776 gg. (A.Ia. Il’ina), *Chteniia v Imperatorskom obshchestve istorii i drevnostei Rossiiskikh*, IV (1908), pp. 1-15.

<sup>42</sup> Lukin wrote in his letter of 1775 to Heseltine that ‘we are building a hall, and the next year we hope to installate it’. There is the fascinating possibility that at the ceremony in London two Russians were among the members of the Lodge of Alfred in the University of Oxford processing. Vasilii Nikitich Nikitin (1737-1809) and Prokhor Ignat’evich Suvorov (1750-1815) had both been admitted to the Lodge of Alfred earlier in 1775 and raised to Master Masons. Moreover, Suvorov was appointed Junior Warden on 1 June (see A.G. Cross, *By the Banks of the Thames: Russians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Newtonville, Mass., 1980), p. 109).

<sup>43</sup> Pis’ma Ekateriny k baronu Grimmu’, *Russkii arkhiv*, nos. 9-10 (1878), p. 61.

*Taina protivno-nelepagu obsbchestva (Anti-absurd) otkrytaia ne prichastnym onomu* ('The Secret of the Anti-Absurd Society, Revealed to Those outside its Membership'), a little pamphlet ridiculing the Order.<sup>44</sup> Angered by Swedish pretensions to hold ultimate authority over Russian lodges, she was moved to action, twice dispatching her chief of police V.P. Lopukhin to visit Gagarin's lodges 'to find out about correspondnece with the Duke of Sudermania and to report to Her Majesty about it'.<sup>45</sup> She also suspected that the Swedes were intent on wooing Pavel Petrovich into their ranks through the good offices of his close friends Kurakin and Gagarin and his erstwhile tutor Panin. In 1781 Panin was removed from his post as Minister for Foreign Affairs and retired, if briefly, to his estate. In the same year Paul and his wife were sent off, unwillingly, on a European tour and with an entourage that included Kurakin. Gagarin meanwhile had removed to Moscow, where he established his Provincial Grand Lodge, formally independent of Sweden.

It is against this background that the last three letters from Freemasons' Hall may be assessed. They date from 20 December 1777, 29 June 1779 and 28 April 1780 and were all written by Heseltine to Elagin. They nonetheless refer explicitly to letters written by Elagin, dating from 13/24 May and 24 October/ 4 November 1777, 1778 (no date given), and 1/12 January 1780, which, sadly, are not extant. Also two letters written by Heseltine to Elagin in 1777 and another on 25 June 1778 were apparently never delivered in Russia. It is clear that despite his dalliance with the Swedish rite, Elagin at no stage abandoned London. He was still keen to receive all the latest works on masonry: following his request for William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* (1772), he asked for three more (unnamed) works in 1778, very probably

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<sup>44</sup> *Svodnyi katalog russkoi knigi XVIII veka 1725-1800*, I (Moscow, 1963), p. 338, no. 2188. (Versions also in French and German.) Faggionatto suggests that Elagin himself helped the empress in its writing (Faggionatto, p. 24).

<sup>45</sup> G.N. Gennadi (ed.), *Pamiatnye zapiski A.V. Khrapovitskago, stats-sekretaria Imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoroi* (Moscow, 1862), p. 268.

including another classic of English freemasonry, William Hutchinson's *The Spirit of Freemasonry* (1775).<sup>46</sup> Lord Petre and James Heseltine were among the high-placed officers of the Grand Lodge who sanctioned the publication of Hutchinson's work, in which it was said that 'of all the arts which Masons profess, the art of keeping a secret particularly distinguishes them. Secrecy is a proof of wisdom, and is of the utmost importance in the different transactions of life', which Elagin would have understood but which prevented him from receiving 'in writing' the secrets he desired.<sup>47</sup> Heseltine, the recipient in late 1777 of a pair of "elegant pistols" from Elagin via the good offices of the Russian consul in London, the Scottish merchant and mason Alexander Baxter, was for his part intent on maintaining cordial relations with Russia. However, if he could write in buoyant mood in June 1779 that London was 'particularly happy to find that the peace & harmony of the Brotherhood is not interrupted by national disputes and commotions', when he did at last receive a letter from Elagin at the very beginning of 1780, he was obliged to change his tune. It was now an occasion to 'lament the great change that has happened in the state of Masonry in the Russian Empire thro the ambition & invention of individuals pleased with novelty and trifles, yet the Grd Lodge highly applauds your Excellencys perseverance in the pursuit of true Masonry'. The letter ends with the wish for 'the continuance of your Correspondence & friendship', but we have no evidence that letters continued to be exchanged. Heseltine for his part was to relinquish the post of Grand Secretary in 1784 after fourteen years, before becoming Grand Treasurer from 1785 until his death. The Grand Mastership passed in 1782 to the Duke of

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<sup>46</sup> The Russian translation of this work from the German version was one of the first books to be published at the secret masonic press in Moscow and was among the books confiscated in 1793: *Dukh masonstva. Nravouchitelnyia iztolkovatel'nyia rechi Vil'gel'ma Guchinsona* (Moscow, 1783). See *Svodnyi katalog russkoi knigi*, III (1966), pp. 327-8, no. 7944.

<sup>47</sup> William Hutchinson, *The Spirit of Masonry* (new ed., London, 1848), p. 313.

Cumberland, the first of three “princes of the blood” in succession in the post. Perhaps correspondence with Russia was no longer high on the list of priorities. Elagin, heading the Second Elagin Union in 1786 after an interval of some two years’ inactivity, continued to be, in name at least, an “English” mason until his death in 1793, some ten months before the demise of Lukin, the other link in the Anglo-Russian masonic chain. Both thus lived to hear of the moves against Novikov and the Moscow “Martinists” but not to witness the final suppression of the masonic lodges in 1794.

Finally, to close the Anglo-Russian circle, it is pertinent to ask what became of ‘Perfect Union’ during these years of conflict among the “northern brothers”? Although there are no further mentions of ‘Perfect Union’ in the extant correspondence between Elagin and the London Grand Lodge after the summer of 1772, it is clear that it too had joined the “flock”. In May 1774, however, it had not yet given way: an entry in the minutes of Lukin’s lodge ‘Urania’ for 10/21 May refers to the ‘gatherings of some English brothers, of whom it is well known that they no longer have a constitution from our maternal English Grand Lodge’.<sup>48</sup> Its submission probably came with the election of officers on St John’s Day 1774, when Gomm, whose business affairs had gone from bad to worse, was replaced as Master by John Cayley (d. 1795), originally holding the office of Senior Steward.<sup>49</sup> Soon thereafter members of the English lodge, including James Gardner, the founder of the St Petersburg English Club, were frequenting Elagin lodges, particularly ‘Urania’, where English was to be used as a second language to German in the 1780s.<sup>50</sup> The name of Cayley himself as Master of ‘Perfect Union’ was included by Elagin in his list of masons

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<sup>48</sup> Vernadskii, pp. 19-20, n.7.

<sup>49</sup> On the business careers of Gomm and Cayley, see Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva*, pp. 74-9 (Gomm), 63-4, 84-7 (Cayley).

<sup>50</sup> Vernadskii, pp. 21, n. 1, 200, n. 4, 12.

designated for higher “Scotch” degrees in 1776.<sup>51</sup> It was in the summer of 1777 that Prince Kurakin described the lodge as ‘one of the better ordered here [in St Petersburg], one of the wealthiest, and the members of which are all estimable and can bring honour to the order’.<sup>52</sup> He had hoped, misguidedly, through the good offices of the merchant Dietrich Jäger, who had earlier been its Junior Steward, to persuade ‘Perfect Union’ to accept Swedish authority. ‘Perfect Union’, which had only reluctantly submitted to Elagin’s authority, would hardly have tolerated further foreign allegiance. In all probability, the lodge stayed with Elagin and the “English system” at least until he closed his lodges in 1784, although it is known that ‘Urania’, for instance, carried on its work, regardless. It may even have existed until the closure of all the lodges a decade later, but we simply have no evidence.

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<sup>51</sup> Pekarskii, p. 52.

<sup>52</sup> TsKhIDK, f. 1412, op. 1, d. 5300, l. 10, quoted in Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, p. 97. Jäger, incidentally, died soon afterwards and his death was mourned in an oration in the lodge ‘Skromnost’ on 4/15 November 1777 (Pypin, pp. 129-30, n. 1).



# **The *Société Antiabsurde*: Catherine the Great and Freemasonry**

*Natalie Bayer*

In many European countries throughout the eighteenth century freemasons participated in public ceremonies, laying down the foundations of socially significant civic works. Involvement in such events vividly encapsulated the ideological and philosophical character of eighteenth-century European freemasonry.<sup>1</sup> It also reflected the idea that “enlightenment” was considered not only as an ultimate goal and a continuous process, but also as constructive practical work. Thus, members of the brotherhood could serve a patriotic purpose by seeking to bring light and learning to the people. This was enacted by forming a bond with the state, which thereby facilitated the creation of a civil society.<sup>2</sup> Hence, in Russia, as elsewhere, the flourishing of masonic lodges was part and parcel of the development of sociability, civil institutions and public life. However, unlike for instance, their British brothers, freemasons in Russia only gave their triumphant “three huzzahs” in the secrecy of their lodges. The participation of freemasons in public ceremonies in Russia would have been fitting, given their role in the establishment of

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The phrase *Société Antiabsurde* comes from the title of Catherine the Great’s play *Taina protivno-nelepogo obshchestva, otkrytaia ne prichastnym onomu* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Veitbrekhta i Shnora, 1759 [1780]).

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the ceremony of laying down the foundation stone of a new building at the University of Edinburgh on 16 November 1789, as described in *Freemasons’ Magazine* 4 (1795), 162ff.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of the role of eighteenth-century freemasonry in the formation of the European public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1981); Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: The Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

new forms of education and free institutions, and providing access to the secrets of nature and supporting ministry to the sick and injured. Moreover, by the end of the 1780s, the public stance and educational goals of freemasons in Russia coincided with the efforts of the state. In a personal manner, the society of freemasons pursued the objectives that the state, led by the enlightened Empress, sought to attain. It was essentially the aim of both Catherine and Russian freemasons to promote the arts and sciences and the education of the people. However, it was Catherine the Great who was at the head of significant processions and dedications, with participation restricted to the highest state nobility and bureaucrats.<sup>3</sup> The empress had her own consideration when dealing with freemasonry, which was the first public organisation in Russia that was not sponsored by the state.

The first official investigation into the principles of the Craft in Russia took place in 1747, during the reign of Empress Elizabeth. Subsequently, state suspicion of the brotherhood steadily increased, culminating in the so-called “Novikov Affair” of 1792 and the ultimate dissolution of the lodges. The general course of the events leading to the arrest of Nikolai Novikov, a well-known writer, publisher and a Moscow freemason, has been well researched.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, questions remain. Did Novikov’s

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Catherine the Great led the dedication ceremony for the famous equestrian statue of Peter the Great in St. Petersburg in 1782.

<sup>4</sup> For an extensive analysis of the Novikov affair, see Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-century Russia* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), pp. 173-4, and Gareth Jones, *Nikolai Novikov, Enlightener of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 206-15. For a bibliography of Novikov and Catherine’s relations, see, for instance, Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 522-31; Gilbert McArthur, ‘Catherine II and the Masonic circle of N.I. Novikov’, *Canadian Slavonic Studies* IV.3 (Fall, 1970): pp. 529-546; P.N. Berkov, ed. *Satiricheskie zhurnaly N.I. Novikova: Truten’, 1769-1770; Pustomelia, 1770; Zhivopisets, 1772-1773; Koshelek, 1774*, ed. (Moscow-Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1951); John G. Garrard, ed. *The Eighteenth Century in Russia* (New York: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1973); V.P. Semennikov, *Knizoisdatel'skaia deiatel'nost' Novikova* (Petrograd:

arrest represent the climax in the first struggle between the authoritarian state, anxious to maintain its critical function, and an increasingly self-conscious public?<sup>5</sup> Or was it a ‘matter of personal distaste’, in which the empress felt disconcerted at being challenged as to her enlightened credentials as a leading supporter of the French *philosophes*?<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, was this backlash directed specifically at Novikov or at Russian freemasonry as a whole?<sup>7</sup>

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Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo, 1921); M.N. Longinov, *Novikov i moskovskie martinisty* (Moscow: Tipografiia Gracheva, 1867); G. Vernadskii, *Russkoe masonstvo* (Petrograd, 1918). On Catherine’s alliance with the Church against Freemasons, see R. Faggionato, *Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N. I. Novikov* (Dordrecht: International Archives of the History of Ideas, Springer, 2005), pp. 192-201.

<sup>5</sup> According to the famous interpretation advanced by A.N. Pypin, and repeated by others afterwards, the arrest and subsequent incarceration of Novikov in 1792 represented a climax of the first struggle between an increasingly self-conscious public and a state, which was beginning to abrogate its critical function. This position is also prominently reflected in V. Bogolubov, *Novikov i ego vremia*, p. 454, pp. 457-59; Pypin, *Russkoe masonstvo*; G.P. Makogonenko, *Nikolai Novikov i russkoe prosveschenie XVIII veka*. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Russian historians tended to emphasize the political aspect of the Moscow masonic circle, including their involvement with foreign lodges and Grand Duke Paul (for instance, the interpretations by Ia.L. Barskov, A.N. Pypin, and G. Vernadskii). For ideological purposes Soviet-era historians interpreted the events as Catherine’s personal attack on Novikov “the Enlightener” (see, for instance G.P. Makogonenko, *Novikov i russkoe prosveschenie*).

<sup>6</sup> Catherine the Great, letter to Grimm on 11 January 1780 in Catherine II, *Pis'ma Imperatritsy Ekateriny II k Grimmu* (St. Petersburg, 1878), p. 168, mentioned in In-Ho L. Ryu, “Freemasonry under Catherine the Great: A Reinterpretation” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1967), p. 299.

<sup>7</sup> Here I concentrate mainly on the activities of the Moscow masonic circle of Novikov and Schwarz for several reasons. First, they are better documented. Secondly, because of their association with Moscow University, which had a coherent ideological and organizational structure, the undertakings of the Moscow masons are more easily distinguishable from random acts of other masonic organizations in Russia in the eighteenth century. In contrast with their St. Petersburg brothers in the 1780s, Nikolai Novikov and Johann Georg

If we take into consideration Novikov's printing activities, it is clear that there was a connection between the quest for power and influence in Russia on the one hand and the desire — on the part of Catherine and the Church — to control printing on the other.<sup>8</sup> In the order against Novikov it is alleged that initiatives sponsored by freemasons, such as hospitals, pharmacies, seminaries and printing houses were part of a scheme to deceive people and to trick them into parting with their money and to divert their aspirations for power and control.<sup>9</sup> After freemasons secured control over Moscow University Press, the Governor-General of Moscow, A.A. Prozorovskii, reported to Catherine that they were a society endeavouring to attain special privileges. According to Prozorovskii, it was with this goal that they established the Friendly Learned Society and, under the pretense of a science-oriented association, started printing books that did not go through the censoring system. They 'deceived stupid people', and opened 'grand buildings with hospitals, pharmacies, printing houses, and admitted students from seminaries to teach them for free'.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the masonic elite were seeking moral regeneration by influencing society through the support of associations, printing houses, societies for translation and learning, hospitals and pharmacies. In this respect, the

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Schwarz had a pronounced theoretical programme and had the influence to try and put in place its practical implications.

<sup>8</sup> For more on how the pursuit of an effective public voice by political, religious, and literary elites became synonymous with the struggle to create, to control, or to have access to the printed media, see Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of Intellectual Life in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> A letter written on 1 May 1792, signed by Catherine the Great, Division of Written Sources of the State Historical Museum, Moscow (OPI GIM), fond 17, opis' 2, folder 343, pp. 161-162.

<sup>10</sup> P.P. Pekarskii, *Dopolneniia k istorii masonstva v Rossii XVIII stoletii* (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiiia nauk, 1869), pp. 128-9; Longinov, *Novikov i moskovskie martinisty*, p. 272; I.P. Elagin, 'Zapiska o masonstve I.P. Elagina'. *Russkii arkhiv*, book 1 (1864; reprinted, 1866), p. 90; N.M. Karamzin, *Neizdannnye sochineniia i perepiska* (St. Petersburg, 1862), p. 223, p. 224.

government backlash against freemasons can be seen as the response of a high-handed autocracy intent on scything down the first independent civic-minded initiative and implementing greater preventive censorship in the struggle against the nascent public sphere.

While this interpretation of the events still presents a persuasive argument, I believe it plays down important particulars of the conflict, such as accusations of sectarianism and charlatanism, the political ambiguity surrounding the successor to the Russian throne, dependence on the guidance of German and Swedish masons, and the state of European politics at the time. As the official accusations against Novikov testify, in connection to freemasonry the state faced several problems in the period between 1770 and 1792: possible foreign influences and secretive involvement with an anti-Catherine faction; and an ideological component that included potential damage to the morals and opinions of Russian society.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, as Douglas Smith points out, it is necessary to emphasize that Novikov's arrest was not ordered directly by Catherine. It was not a simple act of a high-handed autocrat, but a series of measures initiated and carried out by the Moscow authorities, who were intent on annihilating all aspects of

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<sup>11</sup> The official version of the state's dissatisfaction with Novikov and his activities was expressed in several articles of the verdict (Decree of August 1, 1792, OPI GIM, fond 17, opis' 2, folder 343, 164rev.; reprinted in *N.I. Novikov i ego sovremenniki: Izbrannye sochineniia*, ed. I.V. Malyshev (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1961), pp. 606-62, pp. 671-2.). According to the decree, Novikov and his Moscow masonic friends were dangerous because of their:

- 1) Relations with the Duke of Brunswick.
- 2) Clandestine correspondence with Prince Hessel-Kassel and a Prussian minister.
- 3) Attempts to lure "a known person" into a masonic "sect".
- 4) Secret religious-type assemblies with the use of religious symbols.
- 5) Printing books of inadequate moral content in a secret publishing house.

practical masonic influence on Russian society.<sup>12</sup> We also need to take into account Catherine's own intellectual and philosophical objections to the increasingly mystical turn that Russian freemasons were taking at the time. I believe that the dialectic development of Catherine's attitude to freemasonry through the last thirty years of the eighteenth century illuminates a general European tendency. On the intellectual level, the rationalistically minded monarch, who prided herself in carrying out personal correspondence with the leading figures of the French Enlightenment, considered masonic rituals and ceremonies to be absurd and contrary to reason. In other words, Catherine was an autocrat dealing with intellectual, social and (potentially) political dissent, who perceived all forms of secret societies as a disguised form of social climbing, aristocratic-corporatist politics, foolish hermeticism, and pseudo-religious ritualism that had lost touch with reality.

Several dubious public affairs in Russia, involving foreign freemasons claiming to bring light or searching for secret knowledge in the country, influenced the development of the Craft in the second half of the eighteenth century. These events brought Catherine's attention to the 'mystical and fantastic teaching of Cagliostro, Schrepfer, pater Gassner, Lavater, Swedenborg, and Saint-Martin who were beginning to cloud the thinking of people'.<sup>13</sup>

In particular, Count Giuseppe Balsamo Cagliostro's visit to St. Petersburg and the Baltic provinces in 1779-80 contributed immensely to the growing identification of freemasonry with shady machinations, alchemy, and magic.<sup>14</sup> At the time of this

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Pypin, p. 283.

<sup>14</sup> Masonic lodges were among many eighteenth-century societies interested in mysticism and occultism. But Freemasonry cannot be directly identified with them. As In-Ho L. Ryu points out in "Freemasonry under Catherine the Great," p. 112, many of the most effective proponents of esoteric doctrines, including Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, and Lavater, preferred to operate outside

visit, Elisa von der Recke, a lady-in-waiting to Catherine II, made an attempt to unmask Cagliostro as a charlatan. She considered Cagliostro to be a dangerous swindler, who played on the superstitious and impressionable minds of Russians trusting in the knowledge and masonic expertise of foreigners.<sup>15</sup> As von Recke pointed out, Cagliostro's trip to Russia was well planned and was aimed at involving the Empress in Egyptian masonry.<sup>16</sup> This theory was also supported by Baron von Heyking, a high-degree mason in the Strict Observance system, who in his memoirs reiterated Cagliostro's announcements about his grandiose mission in Russia:

I am delighted to see the Great Catherine, this Semiramis of the North, and to spread the great Light here [in Russia] openly. Educated in the pyramids of Egypt, I have learned there the "occult" sciences and am the Grand Master of the Rosicrucians.<sup>17</sup>

Despite numerous unfavourable characterisations given to Cagliostro, and the suspicion surrounding his ultimate goals in Russia, the adventurer befriended a number of influential

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organised masonic systems and found other vehicles for the transmission of their doctrines. Others, such as Count Zinzendorf and Saint-Martin's mentor Martinez de Pasquales, succeeded in organising their followers into special orders close to masonic circles (H. Schneider, *Quest for Mysteries: The Masonic Background for Literature in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1947), p. 107).

<sup>15</sup> H. Funk, 'Briefwechsel zwischen Lavater und Frau von der Recke' *Euphorion*, 25 (1924): pp. 52-63.

<sup>16</sup> Charlotta Elisabeth Konstantia von der Recke, *Nachricht von der beruechtigten Cagliostro Aufenthalte in Mitau im Jahre 1779 und von dessen dortigen magischen Operationen*, Berlin und Stettin (Berlin: bey Friedrich Nicolai, 1787); an abbreviated edition of this text also appears in *Der Erzzauberer Cagliostro*, herausgegeben von Johannes von Guenther (Munich: Georg Muller Verlag, 1919). The first edition in Russian: Charlotte von der Recke, *Opisanie prebyvaniia v Mitave izvestnago Kaliostro na 1779 god* (St. Petersburg: Schnor, 1787).

<sup>17</sup> Karl-Heinrich Heyking, *Aus Polen und Kurlands, letzten Tagen. Memoren des Baron Karl Heinrich Heyking* (Berlin: n. p., 1897), 223ff.

freemasons in St. Petersburg. Leading masons searching for “higher masonic knowledge”, for example, such as I.P. Elagin,<sup>18</sup> Petr Melissino,<sup>19</sup> and Count Alexander Stroganov,<sup>20</sup> were attracted by Cagliostro’s claims.<sup>21</sup> In his memoirs Baron Schröder<sup>22</sup> reports

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<sup>18</sup> Ivan Perfil’evich Elagin (1725-1794) was a Privy Councilor, Senator, and member of the Imperial Cabinet, writer, translator, author of the *Opyty povestvovaniia o Rossii*, and Catherine’s stats-secretary. In 1766, he was appointed the director of the court theatre and later became the founder of the first public theatre and theatre school in Russia. He was initiated into freemasonry as early as 1750. In 1772 he became the first ethnic Russian to be appointed Provincial Grand Master by the Grand Lodge of England. In 1776 Elagin tried to create a union of English and Zinnendorf lodges in Russia with Baron Reichel that became known as Elagin-Reichel union or system.

<sup>19</sup> Petr Ivanovich Melissino (1726(1724?)-1797) was a Greek expatriate, whose name is associated with the eighteenth-century advances in Russian artillery. In 1783, he was appointed the director of the Artillery and Engineer Corps. Petr Melissino is often confused with his brother, Ivan Melissino (1718-1795), who also was an influential freemason, author, publisher, theatre enthusiast, and Curator of Moscow University. Initiated in the 1750s, Petr Melissino created his own high-degree system which is often referred to as the only “Russian” high-degree system of freemasonry.

<sup>20</sup> Count Alexander Stroganov (1733-1811) was a member of the State Council and a Senator. In 1800 he was appointed the president of the Academy of Arts and the director of the Public library. According to R. William Weisberger, Stroganov participated in the meetings of the Nine Muses Lodge in Paris in 1778. See R. William Weisberger, ‘Parisian Masonry, the Lodge of the Nine Sisters, and the French Enlightenment’, *Heredom*, Vol. 10 (2002), p. 173.

<sup>21</sup> B. Ivanov, ‘Cagliostro in Eastern Europe (Courland, Russia and Poland)’, *AQC* vol. XI (1927), p. 18. A. F. Moshchinskii, *Kalliostr poznannyi v Varshave, ili Dostovernoe opisanie khimicheskikh i magicheskikh ego deistvii proizvodimykh v sem stolichnom gorode v 1780* (Moscow: Senatskaia Tipografiia, 1788); Professor Gilbo *Alkhimist bez maski, ili otkrytoi obman umovoobrazhatel'nago zlatodelaniia* (Moscow: Universitetskaia Tipografiia, 1789); *Karmannaia knizhka, dlia razmysbliaiushechikh iunoshei, sluzhashchaia priiatnomu i poleznomu ikh uprazhneniiu* (Moscow: Gubernskaia Tipografiia, 1800), pp. 339-51; and the Russian comedy by N.F. Emin, *Mnimy mudrets* (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1786). The fashionable curiosity for mysticism and magic that was significant among freemasons was touched upon in A.I. Klushin’s play ‘Alkhimist’, in *Russkaia komediia i komicheskaia opera XVIII veka*, ed. P.N. Berkov (Moscow-Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1950), pp. 465-83. Other critical and



that Elagin enthusiastically supported the adventurer because he ‘wanted to learn how to make gold from Cagliostro. The latter promised to send him all the necessary ingredients from Poland, but never did’.<sup>23</sup> The nature of the relations between Cagliostro and Elagin was also corroborated in a pamphlet published by Andrei Krivtsov, the Russian’s secretary. Krivtsov considered Cagliostro to be ‘a vulgar and ignorant charlatan’ and ended up hitting Cagliostro in the face after learning that he had obtained a considerable sum of money from Elagin.<sup>24</sup>

While Elagin expected to establish an alchemical laboratory or to find a “key” to masonic knowledge with Cagliostro’s help, other Russian aristocrats hoped to receive a cure. A pamphlet published in Frankfurt in 1781 reports that while in St. Petersburg Cagliostro cured assessor Ivan Isleniev when all hope had been abandoned by the doctors, and that this cure was recorded by a special certificate. Chevalier de Corberon, a French *chargé d’affaires* in Russia, made the following entry in his diary on 2 July 1781: ‘At St. Petersburg, Cagliostro cured Baron Stroganov, who had attacks of lunacy, caused by his nerves, Yelaguin [sic], Mme. Boutourlin, etc.’, and sarcastically remarked that ‘Cagliostro did not cure everybody, but many’.<sup>25</sup>

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satirical works include *Mops bez osheinika i bez tsepi ili Svobodnoe i tochnoe otkrytie tainstv obshchestva imenniuschbagosia Mopsami* (St. Petersburg: Christopher Henning, 1784), which was a translation of a part of G.L. Perau’s *L’ordre des francs-maçons trahi, et le secret de Mopses revele*.

<sup>22</sup> Baron Heinrich-Jacob von Schröder (1757-1797), a captain in Prussia in 1778, entered Russian service in 1783. After being dismissed from service in 1784, he lived in Berlin. In 1786 Schröder returned to Russia. In his diary, he indicates that he was initiated into freemasonry in the *Three Stars (Drei Sterne)* lodge in Rostock, receiving a patent of the Master on 8 April 1778.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Pekarskii, p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> A. Veidemeier, *Dvor i zamechatel’nye ludi v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVIII veka* (St. Petersburg, 1846), pp. 196-8.

<sup>25</sup> Marie Daniel Bourrée, Baron de Corberon, *Journal intime*, ed. L. H. Lablande, vol. 1 (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1901), 105ff. Corberon’s diary makes it clear that not only Russians, but also foreign dignitaries visiting or residing in Russia, such as Count Lassy, Count von Bruhl, Prince of Anhalt, and Prince Henry of Prussia,

It is clear that Catherine did not identify Cagliostro and his claims for possessing high masonic knowledge with freemasonry as a whole,<sup>26</sup> but she took the reception he received from the most educated people in Russia as an indicative and worrisome sign of the times.<sup>27</sup> She noted in a letter to her German correspondent Friedrich Grimm in 1781 that ‘Cagliostro arrived at a time most favourable for him ... when several masonic lodges nourished by Swedenborg’s teachings wanted to see ghosts at any price. So they rushed to Cagliostro’.<sup>28</sup> In her private correspondence Catherine also often briskly dismissed Freemasons as ‘harmless’ and ‘weak-minded fanatics’.<sup>29</sup> Making sweeping generalisations about various masonic systems, she simply saw lodge meetings as the occasions for the indolent Russian nobility to engage in

...idle talk and children’s games which are as boring as they are loathsome; masquerades and ridiculous adornments of all sorts, all sorts of absurdity with questions and answers that are just as absurd.<sup>30</sup>

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were all involved in freemasonry and interested in Cagliostro’s affairs and in gold-making. Corberon mentions freemasonry frequently. These allusions to freemasonry were edited out of the two volume published edition. However, the electronic ‘Journal (Paris-St. Pétersbourg-Paris: 1775-1781)’, Édition électronique, texte produit et réalisé par Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire et Dominique Taurisson, édité par Éric-Olivier Lochard selon la méthodologie Arcane, URL: <http://melior.univ-montp3.fr/eol/egoDoc/Corberon/PageAccueil.htm> (last visited on June 10, 2009) has an extended version. This information was kindly relayed to me by Margaret Jacob.

<sup>26</sup> Ivanov, p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> On the success of Catherine’s plays in Russia, see Smith, pp. 149-50.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Bogolubov, p. 355. On Catherine and Grimm’s relationship, see more in Inna Gorbato, *Catherine the Great and the French Philosophers of the Enlightenment* (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2006), pp. 211-30.

<sup>29</sup> H.M. Marcard, *Zimmermann’s Verhältnisse mit der Kaiserin Catharina II. und mit dem Herrn Weikard*. (Bremen: Seyffert, 1803), pp. 365-6.

<sup>30</sup> Catherine II, *Sochineniia Imperatitsy Ekateriny II*, ed. A. N. Pypin, vol. V (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia nauk, 1901-1907), pp. 346-7.

In the beginning of the 1780s Catherine composed her first play against freemasonry, *Société Antiabsurde*,<sup>31</sup> which was then followed by a trilogy of comedies that mocked masonic ritual, spirit and ideas: *Obmanskik* (*The Deceiver*, 1785); *Obol'shchennyi* (*The Deceived*, 1785) and *Shaman sibirskii* (*The Siberian Shaman*, 1786).<sup>32</sup>

Catherine's *Deceiver* revolves around a mysterious foreigner named Kalifalkzherston. He is an alchemist, necromancer, and healer with supernatural powers, who enters the Samblin family household in order to trick them out of money and valuable possessions. As the author herself explained in a letter to Zimmerman, '[t]he first of these comedies [*The Deceiver*] represents Cagliostro as he really is, and the second [*The Deceived*] depicts those deceived by him'.<sup>33</sup> Despite the common theme, these two pieces are somewhat different in tone and emphasis. While the first simply exposes Kalifalkzherston as dishonest, the second play focuses on the harm people like him cause to the naïve. In the *Deceiver*, the charlatan's machinations seem bizarre; in the *Deceived*, they are not only misleading, but also potentially dangerous. As Douglas Smith points out, in general, the *Deceived* marks an important shift in the image of freemasonry in Russia: the leaders of secret "sects" are not simply odd people; they are greedy and smart charlatans.

In all of her anti-masonic plays, despite a lot of talk about establishing schools, hospitals, and other beneficial public works, the deceivers are especially anxious about involving wealthy people in their cause. In reality, Catherine was aware of the financial funds sent by the Swedes to Russia for the propagation

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<sup>31</sup> *Taina protivno-nelepogo obschestva, otkrytaia ne prichastnym onomu* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Veitbrekhta i Shnora], 1759 [1780]). The date of the Russian-language publication is misleading for tactical purposes.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Cross, *Catherine the Great and the British*, pp. 47-8, points out that although these plays were almost immediately translated into German and published in a number of editions by the German publisher C.F. Nicolai, they were not translated into English and therefore went unnoticed in England, except for a short review of the German translations in 1800.

<sup>33</sup> Marcand, pp. 324-5 (letter of 10 January 1786).

of the Swedish masonic system.<sup>34</sup> She obviously suspected that the funds were transferred from Russia abroad. After Novikov was interrogated, Catherine's suspicions were confirmed. She also did not have any illusions about Cagliostro's special interest in wealthy and influential Russians. Mirroring reality, in her *Société Antiabsurde*, the director of the anti-absurd society explains to the novice: 'Our society does not send its own money to foreigners; we dine together in a friendly and gay atmosphere; now it depends on you to increase our number; you will pay your ruble the next time'.<sup>35</sup>

In the *Deceived*, Protolk, a swindler of Cagliostro's rank, enters the wealthy Radotov family. This time the deceiver is not a foreigner. The members of the family desperately strive for higher enlightenment and the ability to communicate with the spirits that Protolk promises to them. For his part, Propolk is tempted by the dowry offered with Radotov's daughter and schemes to obtain the promise of her hand in marriage. The charlatan organises the meetings of a mysterious band of brothers to perform various ceremonies. Radotov is drawn to Protolk by his own curiosity. The desire to be a part of a select group of "enlightened" people comes later, and by portraying this Russian aristocrat's desperation to follow the trend, Catherine lashes out against the need to set themselves apart from their surroundings. As Radotov explains:

At first, I was driven by curiosity; I was convinced by the aspirations of two or three acquaintances of mine; then my pride found satisfaction in distinguishing myself and being able to think differently from my family and friends. I was also taken in by a naïve hope that perhaps I would be able to see and hear what is deemed impossible.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Pekarskii, p. 127. Novikov, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 636.

<sup>35</sup> Catherine II, 'Taina protivonelepogo obschestva', pp. 169-82.

<sup>36</sup> Catherine II, "Obol'schennyi," p. 335. Compare this description of the interest in freemasonry with I.P. Elagin, 'Povest' o samom sebe', *Russkii arkhiv* (1864), nos. 1-12, p. 99.

The head of the family is not the only victim of the deceivers. Although she is not formally initiated into this society, Radotov's daughter is also under the spell of Protolk's ideas and her imagination is captivated by virtually incomprehensible mystical books:

She has completely given herself over to the reading of those books which many people buy only to follow fashion, and for which, frankly, I cannot find precise meaning or sound reasoning. She interprets them in such a way that it is hard to believe.<sup>37</sup>

Led by the false enlightenment, Radotov's daughter hears voices that inhibit matter and believes in seeing human souls in butterflies. This influence on young minds seemed to Catherine to be more dangerous than the greediness of common thieves.

At the end, these 'melancholic-looking monkeys', who 'throw dust into people's eyes', are publicly exposed and the falseness of their claims of spiritual enlightenment is illuminated.<sup>38</sup> Justice is obtained after Protolk is arrested, when the money and jewelry are returned to their lawful owners.

Catherine repeatedly posed a seminal question in her plays: why did freemasons prefer to carry out their activities in secret if their intentions were truly honourable? Through her level headed character, she asked:

Do you mean to say that there are virtues higher and greater in number than those which are already demanded of us by our laws established since time immemorial? Isn't there some kind of depraved meaning hidden behind the "other, better virtues"?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Catherine II, "Obol'schennyi," p. 315.

<sup>38</sup> Act V, scene 13.

<sup>39</sup> Catherine II, "Obol'schennyi." Translated and quoted in In-Ho L. Ryu, 'Freemasonry under Catherine the Great', pp. 309-10.

By implying that there were “better virtues” available only to a limited circle of the initiated, freemasons, according to Catherine, deceived themselves.<sup>40</sup> Even more importantly, they became dangerous to the state by trying to exercise a harmful influence on society.

The *Siberian Shaman* continues the same theme. The members of the Bobin family are fooled by Amban-Lai, a native of Siberia and a self-proclaimed Master of the 140<sup>th</sup> degree. He is a charlatan of the same calibre as Kalifalkzherston and Protolk. As in the previous two plays, the *Siberian Shaman* ends with the state police capturing the deceiver. However, this time the deceiver is accused not only of playing tricks and being a charlatan, but first and foremost of starting a school to propagate his ideas.

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<sup>40</sup> According to the transcripts of the interrogation of Ivan Lopukhin, who was an active member of the Novikov circle, he was amused by the question of why freemasons were hiding from the police. This was a tongue-in-cheek answer, although he did point out that the times and places of masonic meetings were not only well known to the police, but that special enforcements were sent to regulate traffic during special masonic celebrations. S.V. Eshevskii, ‘Neskol’ko dopolnitel’nykh zamechanii k stat’e “Novikov i Schwarz”’, *Russkii vestnik* 19 (1864), p. 175.

For the members, the leaders of freemasonry in Russia commonly justified the need for secrecy by moral considerations emphasizing that charitable actions were morally valuable only when performed without expecting anything in return. See, for instance, ‘Ustav ili pravilo svobodnykh kamen’schikov’ (1783), in the Manuscript Division of the Russian State Library, Moscow (NIOR RGB), fond 14, folder 1 (1-2), 2rev. Often, Russian freemasons described freemasonry not as a secret society, but as a “modest” society, meaning that true freemasons did not boast about their knowledge and good deeds (see, for instance, NIOR RGB, fond 147, folder 54, 150-152 rev.) In this sense, in Margaret Jacob’s words, masonic secrecy can be considered as ‘an extreme form of privacy’ (Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World. The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 101). However, no matter how much Lopukhin tried to present freemasonry as a publicly accepted institution in Russia, it still remained more secretive than many of its European counterparts.

On 21 April 1787, Catherine explained to Zimmerman that her last play was written as an explicit warning to both the deceivers and the deceived:

I am very glad you spoke well of *The Siberian Shaman*, but I am afraid the comedy will not correct anybody. Absurdities are catching, and these particular absurdities have become fashionable...I remember that in 1740 the least philosophical people pretended to be philosophers, and by this means at least reason and commonsense were not lost. But these new erroneous ideas have made fools of many who were not fools before.<sup>41</sup>

On 1 July 1787, writing to Zimmerman about his article in the *Hamburg Gazette*, in which he had denounced the Strasbourg magnetists<sup>42</sup> and compared them to the shaman in Catherine's play, she added, jokingly:

I do hope these magnetists will be asked to come from there to those countries where similar charlatans are so decidedly liked. I can give an assurance beforehand that they will be taken less seriously and will cost less than Cagliostro and his comrades.<sup>43</sup>

Zimmermann replied by stating, '[t]he South no longer enlightens the North, but the North enlightens the South; now enlightenment comes to us from the banks of the Neva',<sup>44</sup> a

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<sup>41</sup> Marcard, p. 352.

<sup>42</sup> Magnetists were the followers of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), who used bar magnets and *magnétisme animal* (animal magnetism or mesmerization) to treat patients. After being introduced in the 1770s, the procedure caused a lot of controversy all over Europe, which in 1784 culminated in France's King Louis the XVI forming a prestigious commission composed of pre-eminent scientists, including Benjamin Franklin, to investigate Mesmer. The commission asserted that Mesmer's claims were fictitious.

<sup>43</sup> Marcard, p. 355.

<sup>44</sup> *Filosoficheskaiia i politicheskaiia perepiska Imperatritsy Ekateriny II s doktorom Tsimmermanom, s 1785 po 1792 god* (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia tipografiia, 1803), pp. 51-2. Quoted and translated in Smith, p. 220.

statement that might help to explain why the discussion of Cagliostro and his pseudo-magical talents opened up six years after his visit to Russia.<sup>45</sup> It is possible that by opening up this public debate in Russia, Catherine wanted to be among the first to participate in the European preoccupation with the Diamond Necklace Affair in Paris.<sup>46</sup> Despite Catherine's intentions, the points that she made in her plays about freemasonry had become relatively commonplace in Europe by that time.<sup>47</sup> None of Catherine's plays specifically targeted Moscow freemasons, and she restrained her mockery to objections that were already well known across Europe.<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is ironic that Catherine herself was readily following an anti-masonic trend when she remarked that 'he who does not always follow prejudice in the latest fashion is the one who possesses reason'.<sup>49</sup>

The intellectual debates across Europe at the time centred on the nature of true and false enlightenments, the distinctions between rational foundations of epistemology and enthusiasm,

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<sup>45</sup> Douglas Smith points out this delay in Catherine's reaction. See Smith, p. 153.

<sup>46</sup> The supporters of Cagliostro tried to defend him by the publication of two separate Russian translations of *A Treatise on Behalf of Count Cagliostro*. One version was entitled *Memorial grafa Kallioistro protiv gospodina general prokurora obrviniatshego ego, pisannoi im samim* (Moscow, 1786) whilst another was called *Opravdanie grafa de Kallioistro po delu kardinala Rogana o pokupke slavnago sklavazha vo Frantsii* (St. Petersburg, 1786). The Diamond Necklace Affair was a scandal involving the disappearance of Marie-Antoinette's necklace in 1785. Cagliostro was arrested, but it was established that he did not take part in the plot.

<sup>47</sup> Compare, for instance, with D. Knoop, G. P. Jones, D. Hamer, eds. *The Early Masonic Pamphlets* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1945).

<sup>48</sup> By 1784, two popular anti-masonic pamphlets were published in Russia: Abott Larudan's *Mops without a Collar and Chain, or the Free Revelation of the Mystery of the Society of the Mopses* (*Mops bez osheinika i bez tsepi, ili svobodnoe otkrytie tainstv obschestva, imenuushegosia mopsami* (St. Petersburg, the Genning Press, 1984)); and *The Freemason Unmasked, or the Authentic Masonic Mysteries Published Precisely and Impartially and in Great Detail* (*Mason bez maski, ili podlinnye tainstva masonskiiia, izdannye s mnogimi podrobnostiami tochno i bespriistrastno* (St. Petersburg: the Genning Press, 1784)), both translated from French.

<sup>49</sup> Catherine the Great, "Obmanschik," in *Sochineniia Ekateriny II*, p. 299.



between *Aufklärung* and *Schwärmerei* and the nature of societies, such as the illuminati, the martinists, and freemasons.<sup>50</sup> In 1784, the Bavarian government banned the illuminati and masonic lodges, which ignited a debate about the possible political goals of various secret societies. In 1787, the Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II closed down all but a few masonic lodges in his territories. In Prussia, numerous controversies around secret societies complicated the work of German freemasons. In France, after 1789, members of masonic lodges were suspected of political plotting by all sides, and the lodges were virtually extinguished by 1794. What is more, the lodges came under intense scrutiny in Britain prior to the Secret Societies Act of 1799.

While Russian educated society only felt ‘the aftershocks’<sup>51</sup> of European events, Catherine was deeply unsettled by the furore surrounding secret societies. But she also used the general anti-masonic trend to promote her own image of an enlightened ruler

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<sup>50</sup> This time period is characterised by the general confusion between many secret societies. Most likely, Catherine, like many European intellectuals, lumped together the clandestine goals of freemasons, Illuminati, and even Jesuits. N. Berdiaev put forward a thesis according to which Catherine confused the terms on purpose (N. Berdiaev, ‘Russkaia ideia’, in *O Rossii i russkoi filosofskoi kul'ture* (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), p. 58). At least by the end of the 1780s the terms “freemason” and “martinist” were often used interchangeably in Russia. Le Mercier de la Rivière popularised the name *martinists* in the *Tableau de Paris* by describing under it the followers of the mystical doctrines of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin. Many people in Russia, however, understood by this name the disciples of the occult teachings of Saint-Martin’s early mentor, Martines de Pasqually, who in the later eighteenth century were led by Jean-Baptist Willermoz (Vuillermoz). Saint-Martin had brought his doctrine close to Catholicism by rejecting the elements of occultism and magic, but Willermoz was the direct heir of Pasqually’s occultist rituals. *L’Ordre martiniste des Elus-Cohen de l’Univers* founded by Don Martinez de Pasqually in 1768 was merged with freemasonry by his successor Jean-Batiste Willermoz. (C. Lenning, *Encyclopaedie der Freimaurer*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1882-1828), 398ff; Schneider, *Quest for Mysteries*, p. 54). Russian eighteenth-century Martinists should be distinguished from the members of *L’Ordre Martiniste* that Papus (Dr. Gérard Encausse) created in 1888.

<sup>51</sup> Faggionato, p. 190.

belonging to the European intellectual elite.<sup>52</sup> Between 1787 and 1790 Catherine commissioned the translation and publication of several texts against Cagliostro, one of which was also published by Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, and against J.A. Starck, another well-known freemason with connections to Russia.<sup>53</sup> In March 1788, *Berlinische Monatsschrift* pointed out the effectiveness of the Empress' struggle against ignorance. To support this impression, Catherine wrote a personal letter to the journal promoting von der Recke, which was enthusiastically published in its August issue. Finally, Catherine's European public relations campaign ended with the German-language publication of her three plays, under Nicolai's editorship, and with a foreword extolling the virtues of the enlightened Empress.

In the light of Catherine's attempts to participate in the European debates, the timing of the Novikov campaign stands out. What happened between the publication of Catherine's plays in 1786 and Novikov's imprisonment in 1792 has been the

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<sup>52</sup> This promotion predominantly took place on the pages of *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (edited by Nicolai) and *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* (edited by F. Gedicke and J. Biester). Nicolai, for instance, is deemed 'justly entitled to the thanks of all those who take a sincere interest in the progress of sound reason and mental illumination' and Catherine is praised for the play's 'highly useful tendency' and 'her skill in the great art of making deep impressions on the human mind'. (*Drey Lustspiele wider Schwärmerey und Aberglauben* (Berlin-Stettin, 1788); *German Museum, or Monthly Repository of the Literature of Germany, the North and the Continent in General* I (1800), pp. 570-1; Semeka, 'Russkie rozenkreitsery i sochineniia imperatitsy Ekateriny II', pp. 343-400.

<sup>53</sup> *Etwas über des Herrn Oberhofpredigers J.A. Starck Vertheidigungsschrift, nebst einigen andern nöthigen Erläuterungen von Charlotte von der Recke* (Berlin, 1788); *A Reply on Behalf of Countess de Valios La Motte to the Treatise of Count Cagliostro* (1786) ([Doillot], *Vozrazhenie so storony grafiny de Valua-la Mott, na opravdanie grafa de Kallioistro* (St. Petersburg, 1786) and *News of Cagliostro's Infamous Stay in Mitau in the Year 1779 and his Magical Experiments by Charlotte von der Recke* (1787) (*Opisanie prebyvaniia v Mitave izvestnago Kaliostra na 1779 god, i proizvedennykh im tamo magicheskikh deistvii* (St. Petersburg, 1787); A. F. Moszynski *Kalliostr poznannyi v Varshave, ili Dostovernoe opisanie khimicheskikh i magicheskikh ego deistvii, proizvodimyykh v sem stolichnom gorode v 1780*. (Moscow, 1788).

subject of much speculation. It is clear, however, that Catherine's suspicions towards the political inclinations of the members of secret societies only strengthened after the beginning of the French Revolution. Until 1786, masonic books and periodicals were openly available in the masonic bookstores in Moscow, St. Petersburg and provincial towns. Equally important, masonry-affiliated learning and translating societies, pharmacies, and hospitals received the approval of authorities (on whatever terms). However, by the early 1790s many internal policies saw a reversal of the direction prevalent in the preceding decade, signifying 'the end of the honeymoon between the state and society'.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the political enthusiasm of educated society that marked Catherine's accession to the throne turned to bitter disillusionment.<sup>55</sup> In this respect it can be argued that the repressions of the Novikov group be considered as part of Catherine's broader campaign against political opposition.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, before the 1780s the alliance of the enlightened monarch and the older gentry was founded on a faith in philosophical rationalism. After, both the alliance on the ideology of the state and the reliance on rationalism seemed insufficient to educated Russians, suggesting that the dissention was not only political; it had a deeper philosophical component.

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<sup>54</sup> In-Ho Ryu, 'Freemasonry under Catherine the Great', p. 71.

<sup>55</sup> Catherine's attempts at establishing a dialogue with society by means of the Legislative Commission failed, this endeavour was ended by the violence of the Pugachev rebellion (1773-1775), the greatest peasant rebellion in eighteenth-century Russia. The leader of the uprising, a Don Cossack Emil'ian Ivanovich Pugachev (c. 1742-1775) assembled a diverse group of Cossacks, peasants, serfs, Ural mine workers, ethnic minorities, and religious dissidents dissatisfied with heavy taxation and military recruitment, disruption of the traditional foundations of society, the tightening of the state regulations, and the curtailment of local autonomy. The spontaneous outbreak of disaffected elements grew into a rebellion aimed at changing the social and political foundations of society.

<sup>56</sup> For the particulars of this shift in Russian politics, see for instance, David L. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherine's Russia: The Panin Party* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

This leads to the conclusion that the tension between the public discourse sought by Catherine the Great and the ideas and practical activities of freemasons was not considered as a serious problem until a combination of other factors came into play. At first, the government was concerned with freemasonry because of the masons' publishing endeavours, their practical activities, the presence of a large number of foreigners in their lodges, and contacts with foreign masonic bodies. However, after the beginning of the French Revolution Catherine saw how ideas could inspire political action. In the wake of the French Revolution and Russia's more pronounced role on the European political stage, freemasonry was increasingly seen as an essentially foreign import sustained by the efforts of foreigners.

The combination of ideas and actions of freemasonry was becoming more and more suspect in the eyes of the Russian authorities. The very existence of independent lodges and the practical activities of the Russian freemasons went counter to the idea that Russia's development should be directed from above. In addition, ironically, the majority of freemasons in Russia set their lodges against the philosophy of the French, which Catherine so admired, as they believed that it preached godlessness and immorality. While Catherine supported the theoretical philosophising of the *philosophes*, the practical activities of mystically inclined freemasons in Russia involved the real needs and aspirations of the educated elite.

It has often been pointed out that the notion of the *Intelligentsia* as a socially active educated elite was added to the Russian lexicon in the lectures of a leader of the Moscow masonic circle and an influential German professor at Moscow University Johann Georg Schwarz.<sup>57</sup> Around the 1780s, the nascent

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<sup>57</sup> V. Tukalevskii, *Iskaniia russkikh masonov* (St. Petersburg, 1911); Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia*. Johann Georg Schwarz (commonly called Ivan Grigorievich or Ivan Egorovich) (1751(?)–1784), was an influential German professor at Moscow University and an associate of Novikov in the Moscow masonic circle. Schwarz's life before coming to Russia is almost a blank slate.

intelligentsia began to express the thoughts and aspirations of the educated elite, and eighteenth-century freemasonry formed a basis for its mythology. As custodians of great “truths”, these intellectuals considered their practical philanthropy in terms of their own self-replication, trying to reform not only willing brothers but also members of the “outside” society. Since there were no ‘public places for the citizens to discuss our fatherland’s wellbeing’ in Russia, lodges became the last ‘refuge, temple[s] devoted to truth and wisdom’ that aimed to ‘fire up the hearts of

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Some report that before coming to Russia, he served as petty officer in the Dutch East Indian Company and visited East India. There are some indications that Schwarz received a law degree from Jena University. In 1776 he moved to Russia to become a tutor in the family of a fellow Mason and chairman of Mogilev’s criminal court A. M. Rakhmanov. As a family teacher to the Rakhmanovs, Schwarz spent several years in provincial town of Mogilev, quickly learned the language, and established a Strict Observance lodge under the name of *Hercules in the Cradle*. In 1779, Schwarz moved to Moscow, and with the help of his masonic patrons at the Moscow University, secured a place of an “extraordinary professor” in philosophy and *belles lettres*. Together, Novikov and Schwarz played defining roles in the foundation of the *Garmonia* (Harmony) lodge. In 1781, the Moscow masonic community entrusted Schwartz with a mission to Prussia. While in Prussia, on 1 October 1781 Schwarz was appointed the Director of the Strict Observance system and the Rosicrucian Order in Russia. (OPI GIM, fond 281, opis’ 1, folder 217; N.S. Tikhonravov, *Biographicheskii slovar’ professorov i prepodavatelei Imperatorskogo Moskovskogo Universiteta*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Universitetskaia Tipografiia, 1855), pp. 574-9; Longinov, *Novikov i moskovskie martinisty*, p. 126; V.N. Tukalevskii, “N.I. Novikov i I.G. Schwarz,” in *Istoriia masonstva*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2002), pp. 254-318; A.A. Kizeveter, “Moskovskie rozenkreitsery XVIII stoletiiia,” *Russkaia mysl’* (October, 1915), 102ff; Longinov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (1850-1859), (Moscow, 1915), p. 209, p. 352, p. 380; Vernadskii, *Russkoe masonstvo*; Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov, pp. 44-56; Pypin, *Russkoe masonstvo*; N.S. Tikhonravov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 3, part 1. *Russkaia literatura XVIII i pervoi chetverti XIX vekov* (Moscow, 1898), pp. 60-81; T. O. Sokolovskaia, *Russkoe masonstvo i ego znachenie v istorii obschestvennogo dvizheniia: XVIII i pervaiia chetvert’ XIX stoletiiia* (St. Petersburg, 1908)).

true masons'.<sup>58</sup> In its masonic publication, the Novikov-Schwarz group, for instance, called on freemasons in Russia not to limit their work to the boundaries of the lodge and the confines of theory. Freemasons, they insisted, should propagate their ideas 'not by words... but by actions, leading by example in every kind deed'.<sup>59</sup> While a sub-group of every lodge provided its members with opportunities to give and receive help from each other, they were often intent on working together beyond the confines of their formal association. In this sense, joining a lodge was in great measure an expression of withdrawal from the old traditional patterns of Russian life; it was also an attempt to establish new patterns of social interaction independent of the state.

Freemasons were anxious to incorporate some of their masonic "truths" and regulations into the framework of the community. In a country where the public sphere was underdeveloped, they emphasized that 'your fatherland has a right to claim your life and your service',<sup>60</sup> and this rhetoric of the obligation to serve the public and one's country corresponded with a sense of practical idealism.<sup>61</sup> Novikov's characterisation of his own destiny could also be applied to many freemasons in Russia: 'I was born and reared in the womb of the fatherland. For this I am obligated to serve it by my labours and to love it'.<sup>62</sup> Freemasonry was supposed to only accentuate this feeling by making its members 'better people useful to themselves and to the state'.<sup>63</sup> Noble deeds were equated with heroic actions. Thus,

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<sup>58</sup> *Magazın Svobodno-kamenshicheskii, soderzhaschii v sebe rechi, govorennie v sobraniakh: pis'ma, razgovory i drugie raznyia kratkie pisaniia, stikhami i prozou*, vol. 1, part 2, p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> *Magazın Svobodno-kamenshicheskii*, vol. 1, part 2, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> *Magazın Svobodno-kamenshicheskii*, vol. 1, part 2, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> V.I. Novikov, *Masonstvo i russkaia kul'tura* (Moscow, 1993), pp. 7-8.

<sup>62</sup> [N. Novikov], "Vmesto predislovia," *Koshelek* (1774), 1, quoted in Walter J. Gleason, *Moral Idealists, Bureaucracy, and Catherine the Great* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1981), p. 56.

<sup>63</sup> *Magazın Svobodno-Kamen'shicheskii* vol 1, part 2, p. 85.

in the words of Marc Raeff, 'Freemasons transferred the notion of service to the state to those in society'.<sup>64</sup>

While freemasons in Russia emphasized that their work was not political in any way,<sup>65</sup> the tension between masonic practical activities, the social and intellectual aspirations of the nascent intelligentsia, and the constraints of the state established a framework for the development of Russian intellectual life at the end of the eighteenth century. This self-conscious group of intellectuals worked tirelessly to make a newly acquired moral vision the guide for the development of Russia and its people.<sup>66</sup> Freemasons considered it vital for the dissemination of their moralising message to create a network of book dealers, to attract foreign professors, to establish educational institutions, learning societies and printing houses free from direct control by the state; thus providing an unheard of degree of independence from the state for the circles of the nascent intelligentsia. It is difficult to determine whether these activities had a significant impact on public morals.<sup>67</sup> But the fact that freemasons in Russia tried to carry out these projects attests to the fact that they saw themselves as responsible instruments of both morality and useful entertainment, who required the medium of print to establish a public voice.<sup>68</sup> The ideas of this selective elite claimed influence over the society's intellectual and moral dispositions,

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<sup>64</sup> Raeff, p. 163.

<sup>65</sup> Longinov, *Novikov i Moskovskie martinisty*, 074-075. Translated and quoted in In-Ho Ruy, 'Freemasonry under Catherine the Great', p. 168.

<sup>66</sup> Raeff, *Origins*, 158ff.

<sup>67</sup> In 1802, N. M. Karamzin, who was educated at a masonic pension to become one of the most prominent Russian historians and writers, pointed out that 'even the poorest people subscribe [for books, magazines, and newspapers] and even the most illiterate want to know the news from the distant lands', and related this achievement to the activities of the Novikov circle. N. M. Karamzin, "Lubov' k chteniu i k knigam," *Vestnik Evropy* 9 (1802), pp. 58-9.

<sup>68</sup> *Poleznoe uveselenie* (*Useful Entertainment*) was a title of a magazine that lasted for more than a year, a rarity for a private magazine in Russia.

infringing upon traditional ideas about society, hierarchy, and power.<sup>69</sup> In other words, freemasonry, with its insistence on the leadership of intellectually gifted, moral and socially active individuals, inadvertently nurtured representatives of the early Russian intelligentsia, and by doing so opposed the power of the absolute monarch, Church officials, and the traditional nobility. This was a growing power that could not be ignored by the authorities and the Empress.

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<sup>69</sup> E.K. Marasinova, 'Russkii dvorianin vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka (sotsiopsikhologičeskii ličnost')', *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta: Istorii* 8 (1991), p. 1; D.D. Lotareva, 'Masonstvo v sisteme russkoi kul'turi vtoroi poloviny XVIII- pervoi četverti XIX veka (Problemy kontekstnogo izučeniia istočnikov)', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta: Istorii* 8 (1995), p. 6; R.M. Baiburova 'Moskovskie masony epokhi prosviescheniia –russkaia intelligentsia XVIII veka', in *Russkaia intelligentsia: istoriia i sud'ba* (Moscow: Nauka, 1999).