



Politics in the State of Sober Drunkenness: Parody and Piety at the Court of Peter the Great

Author(s): Ernest A. Zitser

Source: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 51, H. 1 (2003), pp. 1-15

Published by: Franz Steiner Verlag

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41050997>

Accessed: 13-05-2020 13:52 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Franz Steiner Verlag is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*

Politics in the State of Sober Drunkenness: Parody and Piety at the Court of Peter the Great

On Sunday, 27 December 1691, General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries (1635–1699), the most senior foreign officer in Muscovite service, recorded in his “Diary” that he was present at a ceremony in the royal palace (literally, “above,” – Gordon’s translation of the traditional Muscovite term for the royal apartments in the Kremlin), where an unnamed number of people, making up the inner circle of tsar Peter Alekseevich, “Choysed [*sic*] a Patr: [...]” Five days later, on New Year’s day, Friday, 1 January 1692, Gordon noted that he was “[i]n Preobrasinsko [*sic*], at the installing of the Patriarch [...]”¹ Judging by these laconic entries, Gordon was as uncomfortable with recording all the details of these extraordinary events, as he was with revealing the identity of the person concealed behind the idiosyncratic abbreviation of “Patr:.” Indeed, to someone who was unaware that the Scottish general was describing the parodic ordination of Matvei Filimonovich Naryshkin – the first mock patriarch of the so-called “Most Comical and All-Drunken Council” (*vseshuteishii i vsepianeishii sobor*) of Peter the Great – it might have seemed that Gordon was talking about the election of the real head of the Russian Orthodox Church.²

In reality, of course, what Gordon witnessed was the promulgation of what could only half-jokingly be called the new “Gospel According to Peter.” For during the course of the

¹ PATRICK GORDON Diary, in: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (RGVIA), f. 846, op. 15, pp. 110, 154 (27 December 1691 and 1 January 1692). The most important source for Gordon’s career in Muscovite service is his unpublished Diary; see also G. HERD General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries – a Scot in Seventeenth-Century Russian Service. Ph.D. thesis, Aberdeen University 1994. On the Kremlin royal quarters (*verkh*), see I. E. ZABELIN Domashnii byt russkikh tsarei v XVI i XVII st. Reprint of 4th ed. Moskva 1990, vol. 1, pp. 59–60.

² In one sense, that is precisely the tactic adopted by REINHARD WITTRAM *Peters des Großen Verhältnis zur Religion und den Kirchen: Glaube, Vernunft, Leidenschaft*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 173 (1952) pp. 261–296, here p. 266; and IDEM *Peter I., Czar und Kaiser: Zur Geschichte Peters des Großen in seiner Zeit*. Göttingen 1964, vol. 1, pp. 106–111. Although fully aware of the difference between the “Prince Pope” and the Russian Orthodox patriarch, Wittram combined Gordon’s vituperative comments about the ecclesiastical politics surrounding the election of patriarch Adrian (1690) with his brief remark about the “installation” of the mock patriarch, and came up with an ingenious explanation for the origins of Peter’s mock ecclesiastical council. Wittram suggested that the defeat of Markell of Pskov, the candidate supposedly favored by the young tsar, embittered Peter against Adrian and formed the immediate background for the parodic ordination of his own, mock patriarch. But as James Cracraft has pointed out, there is no evidence that the tsar and his allies interpreted the rejection of Markell of Pskov as a political defeat. See JAMES CRACRAFT *The Church Reform of Peter the Great*. Stanford 1971, pp. 16–17. Indeed, as V. M. Zhivov has recently argued, immediately after the accession of patriarch Adrian, the tsar and his entourage had even succeeded in scoring a victory against the intolerance and xenophobia expressed in the “Testament” of the late patriarch Joachim by removing the article banning intercourse with heretics and marriages between Orthodox and other believers from the “hierarchical vow” that all the bishops had to swear upon their ordination. See V. M. ZHIVOV *Church Reforms in the Reign of Peter the Great*, in: *Russia in the Reign of Peter the Great: Old and New Perspectives*. Ed. by Anthony Cross. Cambridge 1998, vol. 1, pp. 65–75, here p. 66. Whatever the actual balance of power between the patriarch and the new regime may have been, it is important to point out here that the brevity and ambiguity of Gordon’s diary entries about his participation in the ordination of the first mock patriarch shed less light on the tsar’s motivations than on Gordon’s own fastidious reaction to this monarchical rite of power.

Yuletide celebrations staged in Moscow and on the suburban royal estate of Novo-Preobrazhenskoe, the young tsar and his courtiers elected and installed a mock patriarch to act as the spiritual leader of the tsar's own faction – an unconsecrated “company” (*kompaniia*) based on intimate access to the person of the young Romanov tsar and committed to implementing in real life the religious and chivalric ideals enacted during the court's war-games.³ In direct opposition to the patrimonial politics of the party that had put Peter Alekseevich on the Muscovite throne in 1689, the tsar and his intimates raucously asserted that to be a member of this “royal priesthood” (I Peter 2:9) one did not have to perform the ritual laws of Russian Orthodoxy or to be a royal relative, much less a native Muscovite; one simply had to believe in the divine gift of grace possessed by Russia's anointed one and, like the disciples at the moment of Jesus' transfiguration on Mount Tabor, to bask in the marvelous light of his deified nature. This arguably was the true meaning of the private political sacrament originally enacted during the memorable Yuletide of 1691–1692 – a political sacrament that resulted in the inauguration of one of the least understood and most persistent aspects of the reign of Peter the Great, namely, the annual processions and religious parodies of the “Most Comical and All-Drunken Council.”⁴

The “Company” of Tsar Peter Alekseevich

The mock ecclesiastical council of Peter the Great was an integral part of the counter-cultural play-world created by the tsar and his advisors on the grounds of the royal suburban estate of Novo-Preobrazhenskoe (literally, New Transfiguration). Over the course of Peter's reign, this “Transfigured Kingdom” – with its mock kings, knights, and clerics, its extravagant ceremonies of solidarity, and its imaginary and ever-expanding topography – served as an important reference point for every member of the tsar's inner circle. Simultaneously a geographical, and a rhetorical common place, the “Transfigured Kingdom” delineated the boundaries between those courtiers who belonged to Peter's select “company” and those who did not. Continuously invoked, presented, and re-presented by the organizers of Petrine court spectacles, both in public ceremonies and in private correspondence, this allegorical realm marked off those who had come to believe in Peter's personal gift of grace – that is, in his

³ For a pioneering discussion of the membership and political role of Peter's “company,” see A. I. ZAOZERSKII Fel'dmarshal B. P. Sheremetev. Moskva 1989, pp. 200–206. See also LINDSEY HUGHES *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*. New Haven, London 1998, pp. 416–444; PAUL BUSHKOVITCH *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power*. Cambridge 2001, pp. 178–180.

⁴ For a survey of opinion on the origins and significance of the so-called “Drunken Council” of Peter the Great, see I. I. GOLIKOV *Dopolnenie k Deianiiam Petra Velikogo, mudrogo preobrazovatelia Rossii, sobrannye iz dostovernykh istochnikov i raspolozhennye po godam*. Moskva 1794, vol. 12, p. 325; S. M. SOLOV'EV *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*. Moskva 1962, vol. 8, p. 523; V. O. KLIUCHEVSKII *Sochineniia v deviaty tomakh*. Moskva 1989, vol. 4, pp. 36–39 and vol. 9, pp. 438–439; M. I. SEMEVSKII *Petr I kak iumorist*, in: *Ocherki i razskazy iz russkoi istorii XVIII v.: Slovo i delo! 1700–1725*. S.-Peterburg 1884, pp. 279–317; I. NOSOVICH *Vsepianeishii sobor, uchrezhdennyi Petrom Pervym*, in: *Russkaia Starina* 2 (December 1874) pp.734–739; N. I. PAVLENKO *Petr I (K izucheniiu sotsial'no-politicheskikh vzgliadov)*, in: *Rossia v period reform Petra I*. Moskva 1973, pp. 40–102; RUSSELL ZGUTA *Peter I's “Most Drunken Synod of Fools and Jesters”*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 21 (1973) pp. 18–28; PAUL HOLLINGSWORTH *Carnival and Rulership in the Reign of Peter the Great*. Paper presented at the National Convention of the American Historical Association, December 1985; V. M. ZHIVOV *Kul'turnye reformy v sisteme preobrazovaniia Petra I*, in: *Iz istorii russkoi kul'tury*. Ed. by A. D. Koshelev. Moskva 1996, vol. 3, pp. 528–583; LINDSEY HUGHES *Playing Games: The Alternative History of Peter the Great*. London 2000. = SSEES Occasional Papers No. 41; and the literature cited in footnotes 3 and 4.

charisma, in its original, religious sense – from those who remained unconvinced or hostile to the tsar’s leadership style and his vision of reform.⁵

The original members of the “Most Drunken Council” came from a remarkably cohesive and ideologically committed group of Muscovite courtiers – a cadre group consisting of the young tsar’s kinsmen, friends, and political allies, including some of the very same people who had organized the 1689 court coup, which had put Peter, the young Naryshkin candidate, on the Russian throne. This small “company” was responsible for organizing the spectacles, devising the rituals, and supervising the induction of other courtiers into the mysteries of the “Transfigured Kingdom.” While the actual authors of these “sacred parodies”⁶ assumed minor ranks within the mock ecclesiastical hierarchy (Peter, for example, was only a “Deacon”), the leading actors – the ones who were given the most prominent roles and who were forced to play the most demeaning parts in these spectacles – were usually older men, who were often ambivalent towards the changes introduced by the young tsar and his entourage.⁷

⁵ For a more extensive treatment of this phenomenon, see ERNEST A. ZITSER *The Transfigured Kingdom: Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great*. Ithaca, London, forthcoming.

⁶ Rhetoric manuals of the time defined “parody” (Lat. *parodia*) as a type of “translation” or “imitation,” not as “ridicule” (Lat. *ridiculum*) – which signified simply a generic type of humorous story. See PAULINA LEWIN Jan Kochanowski: *The Model Poet in Eastern Slavic Lectures on Poetics of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, in: *The Polish Renaissance in its European Context*. Ed. by Samuel Fiszman. Bloomington, Indianapolis 1988, pp. 429–443, here p. 442 n. 44; ERNST ROBERT CURTIUS *Jest and Earnest in Medieval Literature*, in: *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Transl. by Willard R. Trask. New York 1953, p. 433 n. 35, 435. Thus, “sacred parody” (Lat. *parodia sacra*) characterized any imitations of sacred texts, whether scriptural, liturgical, or homiletic, no matter the purpose to which it was put. This formal, scholastic definition did not explicitly condemn what we would now call “satire” against ecclesiastics, but that was not its original purpose. Indeed, until well into the eighteenth century, even the most rabidly “antierical” parodies did not signify the conscious rejection of religious tradition altogether. For a discussion of Muscovite *parodia sacra*, see V. P. ADRIANOVA-PERETS *Russkaia demokraticeskaja satira XVII veka*. 2nd ed. Moskva 1977; D. S. LIKHACHEV *Smekh kak mirovozzrenie*, in: *Smekh v drevnei Rusi*. Ed. by D. S. Likhachev [et. al.]. Leningrad 1984, pp. 7–71, esp. pp. 50–57; L. A. CHERNAIA *Parodiia na tserkovnye teksty v russkoi literature XVII veka*, in: *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Seriya 8. Istorii 2* (1980) pp. 53–63; E. B. SMLIANSKAIA *K voprosu o narodnoi smekhovoi kul’ture XVIII v. (Sledstvennoe delo o ‘Sluzhbe kabaku’ v komplekse dokumentov o bogokhul’stve i koschunstve)*, in: *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury XLV* (1992) pp. 435–438; and B. A. USPENSKII *Kratkii ocherk istorii russkogo literaturnogo iazyka (XI–XIX vv.)*. Moskva 1994, pp. 103–105.

⁷ A prime example of this type is I. I. Khovanskii the Elder (d. 1701), who supposedly described his induction into the mock ecclesiastical council as follows: “God had given me a [martyr’s] crown, but I lost it. I was taken to the General’s Yard in [Novo-]Preobrazhenskoe, [where] Mikita Zotov [the second mock pontiff of the “Transfigured Kingdom”] ordained me as a metropolitan. And for the renunciation, they gave me a scroll; and in accordance with that writ I made my renunciation. And during the renunciation they asked me, “Do you drink?” instead of “Do you believe?” [i.e. “Do you believe in the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost,” the standard question of the Orthodox creed]. And with my renunciation I lost more than the beard I disputed. It would have been better for me to receive the crown of martyrdom than to have effected such a renunciation.” This is a powerful, and frequently cited, account of the indignities to which the high-ranking members of Peter’s “Drunken Council” were subjected. Unfortunately, it is an account that is based on the hearsay testimony of a hostile witness (Grigorii Talitskii, Khovanskii’s former cell mate and the author of a heretical treatise equating Peter the Great with the Anti-Christ), who had no direct experience with Peter’s mock ecclesiastical council and who was clearly prepared to depict Khovanskii as a martyr to the cause of Old Belief. But it is not at all clear that Khovanskii really was an Old Believer. Indeed, he could just as easily have been one of a number of old-fashioned courtiers, who objected to Peter’s insistence on the shaving of beards on the grounds that it violated an Orthodox man’s sense of honor and decorum; it is also possible that Khovanskii’s reluctance to play along with the tsar’s “company” stemmed as much from his family’s declining political fortunes, as from his supposedly heterodox religious views. Excerpts from Talitskii’s

Their adherence to what the tsar's "company" defined as outmoded Muscovite values only heightened the polemical charge of the rituals meant to evoke their discomfort and to mark their "conversion" to the new political dispensation.⁸

Over the course of thirty years, the tsar and his advisors continually returned to the quasi-religious, male-bonding rituals of the "Transfigured Kingdom" precisely because these royal spectacles constituted an integral part of the "company's" attempt to articulate and to enact its vision of reform. Indeed, the Petrine "scenario of power" – Peter's inimitable performance of the Russian imperial myth⁹ – could not have been formulated, much less enforced, without the active collaboration of those courtiers, who kept up the illusion (a word, which literally means "in play"¹⁰) of royal "absolutism." The fact that some of the most important political figures of the reign – men such as Fedor (a.k.a. "Generallissimus Friedrich") Iur'evich Romodanovskii ("Prince Caesar" of the "Transfigured Kingdom" and the actual head of Peter's secret police), Gavriilo (a.k.a. "Deacon Gavriil"¹¹) Ivanovich Golovkin (head of the foreign affairs chancellery), Tikhon Nikitich (a.k.a. "Right Reverend Tikhon," "Metropolitan of Novgorod"¹²) Streshnev (head of the war department), Ivan (a.k.a. "Iannikii, Metropolitan of Kiev and Gaditsiia [*sic*]"¹³) Alekseevich Musin-Pushkin (*de facto* administrator of the Russian Orthodox Church), and Nikita (a.k.a. "His Holiness, Ianikit, Archbishop of Pressburg and Patriarch of all Iauza and Kokui"¹⁴) Moiseevich Zotov (Peter's former tutor and long-time head of the tsar's personal chancellery) – also held "ranks" in the mock ecclesiastical council of the "Transfigured Kingdom," from its very inception, only supports the contention that Peter's "company" formed the basis of, and gave an appearance of stability to the fragile construct that was the "well-ordered police state." I say fragile, because despite its nascent bureaucratic pretensions, Peter's government, like those of his early modern contemporaries, was still very much a personal affair. The ability to mobilize a royalist party through familial and clientage ties was still the surest way of guaranteeing that a monarch's

testimony about Khovanskii were first published by G. V. ESIPOV *Raskol' nich'i dela XVIII stoletii, izvlechennye iz del Preobrazhenskogo prikaza i Tainoi Rozysknykh del kantseliarii*. S.-Peterburg 1861, pp. 59–84, here 68–69. This document is currently located in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (RGADA), f. 7, d. 1348, fols. 1–24. For a brief biographical sketch of Prince I. I. Khovanskii the Elder, see the entry by N. CHULKOV, in: *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*. S.-Peterburg 1901, vol. 21, p. 379.

⁸ My interpretation of these deliberately blasphemous "rites of passage" is indebted to the ideas in V. M. Zhivov's seminal article on Petrine cultural reforms; see ZHIVOV *Kul'turnye reformy v sisteme preobrazovaniia Petra I*. See also B. A. USPENSKII *Historia sub specie semioticae*, in: *Soviet Semiotics: An Anthology*. Ed. by Daniel P. Lucid. Baltimore, London 1977, pp. 107–115, here 111.

⁹ For a succinct definition of this term, see RICHARD S. WORTMAN *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*. 2 vols. Princeton 1995, 2000, vol. 1, pp. 6–7.

¹⁰ JOHAN HUIZINGA *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Boston 1970, p. 11.

¹¹ *Pis'ma i Bumagi Imperatora Petra Velikogo*. 14 vols. S.-Peterburg, Moskva, Leningrad 1887–present, vol. 1, pp. 265, 741. In addition to his "sovereign" (Romodanovskii) and "His Holiness" (Zotov), Peter mentions three arch-hierarchs (Tikhon [Streshnev], Misail and Aleksii), as well as "presbyter Alexander the Hairy One" and "deacon Gavriil the Long-Lived One" (Golovkin).

¹² RGADA, f. 156, op. 1, ed. khr. 129, p. 22.

¹³ *Pis'ma i Bumagi* vol. 2, pp. 126–128; ZHIVOV *Kul'turnye reformy v sisteme preobrazovaniia Petra I* p. 555, note 14.

¹⁴ Peter to Prince F. Iu. Romodanovskii (10 June 1695), *Pis'ma i Bumagi* vol. 1, pp. 31–32. New geographical references could be added at will to Zotov's patriarchal title; see, for example, *ibidem* pp. 520–521 ("Archbishop of Paris"); and pp. 532–533 ("Ianikit of Pressburg and Azov and Patriarch of all the Lower Lands from Down There [in the Crimea] [*vsekh tamoshnikh ponizovykh stran patriarkh*]").

will would be done – even if that will was the desire to realize the ideal of the cameralist *Polizeistaat*.¹⁵

The fact that General Patrick Gordon – a career foreign officer and one of the acknowledged leaders of the Catholic community in Moscow – personally took part in the ceremony that sought to transform the court of tsar Peter Alekseevich into the “church” of Peter suggests that what mattered to the tsar and his entourage was not religious convictions or national origin but skill and a commonality of values and goals. This cosmopolitan (if not quite tolerant) attitude was demonstrated very clearly later, in a royal decree of 16 April 1702, which invited foreign specialists to Muscovy by proclaiming that the Russian monarch had no power over people’s consciences and simply sought to enlist knowledgeable people in his service.¹⁶ But already at the end of the seventeenth century, the tsar’s entourage was filled with foreign advisors and confidants. So much so, in fact, that Prince Boris Ivanovich Kurakin (1676–1727), the only other eyewitness and participant to leave a record of these events, accused the tsar of deliberately trying to undermine the power and closeness of the traditional Muscovite elite by favoring foreigners and lowborn Russians.¹⁷ Taken together, then, these two sources reveal the ecumenicism, the openness, and the heterogeneity of the tsar’s entourage, while emphasizing its traditional constituent base in the Muscovite elite. In their silences and emphases, they also shed light on the strange and yet compelling nature of the political sacrament enacted during the winter of 1691–1692.

As if to make up for the reticence of General Gordon’s laconic entries, Prince Kurakin left a very detailed and highly unfavorable description of the election of the first patriarch of the “Transfigured Kingdom.” At the time, the disgruntled Russian diplomat was not only a member of the inner circle of tsar Peter Alekseevich, but also his brother-in-law.¹⁸ Before his honorary exile as an ambassador to the courts of Europe, Kurakin was very well placed within the Naryshkin-Lopukhin clique, which controlled the Muscovite government after the coup of 1689. He was certainly present in the Trinity Monastery during the political standoff

¹⁵ MARC RAEFF *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600–1800*. New Haven, London 1983. For a good introduction to the recent work on the patronage networks and clientage systems which did much to define the limits of Petrine “absolutism,” see ROBERT O. CRUMMEY *Peter and the Boiar Aristocracy, 1689–1700*, in: *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 8 (Summer 1974) 2, pp. 274–287; BRENDA MEEHAN-WATERS *The Russian Aristocracy and the Reforms of Peter the Great*, *ibidem* pp. 288–302; JOHN LEDONNE *Ruling Families in the Russian Political Order, Part I: The Petrine Leadership, 1689–1725*, in: *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 28 (1987) 3–4, pp. 233–322; BUSHKOVITCH *Peter the Great* pp. 1–5. *passim*.

¹⁶ See *Pis'ma i Bumagi* vol. 2, pp. 39 ff., 337 ff. This decree was written by Johann Reinhold von Patkul and translated into Russian by P. P. Shafirov. See WITTRAM *Peters des Großen Verhältnis zur Religion und den Kirchen* pp. 276–277.

¹⁷ However, as recent prosopographical studies attest, and as Prince Kurakin’s own presence in the entourage illustrates, Peter’s court was as filled with nobles as previous ones, and the Muscovite elite continued to play the leading role that it had played in previous reigns. See I. IU. AIRAPETIAN *Federal'naia aristokratia i v period stanovleniia absolutizma v Rossii*. Diss. kand. ist. nauk, M. V. Lomonosov State University 1987; CRUMMEY *Peter and the Boiar Aristocracy* pp. 274–275; MEEHAN-WATERS *The Russian Aristocracy and the Reforms of Peter the Great* pp. 288–302; IDEM *Autocracy and Aristocracy: The Russian Service Elite of 1730*. New Brunswick 1982.

¹⁸ The biography of Prince B. I. Kurakin still remains to be written. For his autobiography, see B. I. KURAKIN *Zhizn' kniazia Borisa Ivanovicha Kurakina, im samim opisannaia*, in: *Arkhiv kn. F. A. Kurakina*. Ed. by M. I. Semevskii. S.-Peterburg 1890, vol. 1, pp. 241–287. Kurakin was married to K. F. Lopukhina, the sister of tsar Peter Alekseevich’s first wife. See A. S. LAVROV *Regenstvo tsarevny Sof'i Alekseevny: Sluzhiloie obshchestvo i bor'ba za vlast' v verkhakh Russkogo gosudarstva v 1682–1689 gg.* Moskva 1999, p. 162.

between the distaff branches of the royal house.¹⁹ And he clearly took part in the war-games staged in the early 1690s by the tsar's personal entourage; the fact that he served as an officer within the regular guards regiments formed during these military maneuvers testifies to his position as a trusted member of the tsar's inner circle. Indeed, in his unfinished exposé of the "court intrigues" during the reign of Peter the Great, written a few years after the death of the first Russian emperor, Kurakin even flaunted his status as a knowledgeable insider, who was "brought up at court alongside [the tsar] and was always with him [...], even until the battle of Poltava [1709]."²⁰

Prince Kurakin devoted an enormous amount of attention to the origins of the tsar's Yuletide amusements, and in particular, to the ordination of the first mock patriarch. Recording his impressions nearly twenty-five years after the event, he consciously conflated several similar ceremonies in order to produce a vivid (and scathing) description of the seemingly frivolous pastimes indulged in by the tsar's entourage in the early 1690s. Despite its late appearance and its polemical intent, his exposé remains the most detailed eyewitness account of this political sacrament, and deserves to be quoted in full:

"Now I must not forget to describe the manner in which the mock patriarch, metropolitans, and other ecclesiastical ranks were established from among the distinguished courtiers who surrounded His Majesty [...]. *Boyar* Matvei Filimonovich Naryshkin, a drunk and foolish old man, was designated [as the] patriarch. A few other *boyars* were given the [titles of] members of the higher orders of clergy [such as bishops, archbishops or metropolitans] from different provinces. The royal chamberlains [served in the capacity of] deacons and various other [clerical] ranks. The garb [of the mock patriarch] was made to be somewhat waggish, and not exactly on the model [of the vestments] of the [real Russian Orthodox] patriarch. He had a tin miter, in the shape of the miters worn by Catholic bishops, which was engraved with the figure of Bacchus [astride] a cask; playing cards [?] were sewed on to his attire; and in place of the pectoral crosses [traditionally worn around the neck by Orthodox bishops], he wore earthenware flasks trimmed with little bells. Finally, a book, which contained several phials of vodka, was constructed in place of the Gospels. And all of this [religious paraphernalia] constituted [the trappings available] there [for the enactment of] the ceremonies [in honor of] the festival of Bacchus."²¹

The spatial designation ("there") in the last sentence of Kurakin's brief sketch referred to the little fortress that served as the royal residence of the mock "tsar and sovereign" of "Pressburg" – Prince F. Iu. Romódanovskii. Over the course of the reign, the mock capital of "Generalissimo Friedrich" served as the site where "the ordination of these mock patriarchs and members of the higher orders of clergy usually took place." Here, the tsar and his advisors composed the entire mock ceremonial. According to Kurakin, it was couched "in such terms, that I dare not repeat them, beyond saying briefly, that it [enjoined the initiates] to drunkenness, to lechery, and to all kinds of debauches."²²

While Gordon found it more prudent to keep his evaluation of the situation to himself, the logic of the political exposé necessitated that Kurakin offered his intended readers an explanation for this strange ceremony. However, beyond noting, almost in passing, that distributing mock clerical ranks among the courtiers was an act that was aimed "more toward the destruction of those ranks" than, presumably, to their maintenance, support, and efflorescence,

¹⁹ LAVROV *Regentstvo tsarevny Sof'i Alekseevny* pp. 162–163. Prince Kurakin and his two brothers all served as privy chamberlains (*komnatnye stol'niki*) at the court of the young tsar Peter Alekseevich. See AIRAPETIAN *Feodal'naia aristokratiia v period stanovleniia absoliutizma v Rossii* pp. 99–100.

²⁰ B. I. KURAKIN *Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche i blizhnikh k nemu liudiakh, 1682–1694*, in: *Arkhiv kn. F. A. Kurakina*, vol. 1, pp. 39–78; reprinted in Petr Velikii. *Vospominaniia. Dnevnikovye zapisi. Anekdoty*. Ed. by L. Nikolaeva [et. al.]. Moskva 1993, pp. 53–84, here p. 56.

²¹ KURAKIN *Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche* pp. 79–80.

²² KURAKIN *Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche* p. 80.

Kurakin never bothered to explain why a “drunk and foolish old man” became the first patriarch of Peter’s play world. His analysis, written several years after the official abolition of the patriarchate and the establishment of the Most Holy Governing Synod (1721), is clearly more of a retrospective judgment than an assessment of the tsar’s actual motives. Furthermore, Kurakin’s use of the passive voice in describing the allocation of roles and the authorship of the mock ceremonial is striking for the heavy-handed way in which it seems to ignore the question of the role played by the tsar himself. This obvious omission was part of Kurakin’s literary strategy, according to which he avoided a direct attack on the person and memory of the recently deceased tsar by choosing to characterize Peter by the supposedly unsavory company that he kept.²³ Indeed, it is precisely by looking at some of the reasons why M. F. Naryshkin became the first patriarch of Peter’s play world that we can get an insight into the true meaning of the political sacrament enacted in the winter of 1691–1692 on the grounds of the royal suburban estate of Novo-Preobrazhenskoe.

The election of M. F. Naryshkin to the position of “Patriarch” during Yuletide of 1691–1692 tapped into the royal entourage’s knowledge of history and genealogy, as well as of traditional Yuletide symbolism, in order to evoke the birth of the new, Petrine “Transfigured Kingdom” from the passing of the old, Alekseevan one. Boyar M. F. Naryshkin (d. 1692) – also known by the coarse, yet affectionate nickname of “Patriarch Dearie” (*Milak*)²⁴ – was Peter Alekseevich’s first cousin twice removed and the oldest living male of the tsar’s maternal relatives.²⁵ According to the Muscovite laws of family precedence, this old courtier represented the generation of the “fathers,” a superior “place” vis-à-vis the one occupied by the young tsar within the Naryshkin clan. In the days before the abolition of precedence ranking (*mestnichestvo*), this position would have given him significant authority over his younger relatives.²⁶ The elevation of this old kinsman to the rank of spiritual “elder” signaled that he still wielded some kind of moral authority at the court of Peter Alekseevich, if only for the duration of the parodic ceremony staged during Yuletide 1691–1692. During this spectacle, the Naryshkin patriarch served in the capacity of “spiritual father” to the young Naryshkin candidate; in turn, such a diarchy between this fictive “father” and “son” recapitulated the original Romanov diarchy – that of Patriarch Filaret and his son, Mikhail Fedorovich, the first Romanov tsar, while poking fun at the current diarchy between tsar Peter and his lame elder half-brother, tsar Ivan Alekseevich (d. 1696).²⁷

²³ For some insightful comments about the literary strategy of Kurakin’s political exposé, see the editor’s introduction to KURAKIN *Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche* p. 55.

²⁴ For the various shades of meaning of the word “dear” (*milyi*) and its derivatives, including the vulgar *milakha*, see V. I. DAL’ *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*. 4 vols. Moskva, S.-Peterburg 1881, vol. 2, pp. 325–326.

²⁵ For a brief biography of M. F. Naryshkin, see *Russkii biograficheskii slovar’*. S.-Peterburg 1914, vol. 11, pp. 94–95.

²⁶ On the “familial” terminology of Muscovite “precedence-ranking,” see E. A. VASILEVSKAIA *Terminologiya mestnichestva i rodstva*, in: *Trudy istoriko-arkhivnogo instituta* 2 (1946) pp. 155–179, here p. 170; and D. [A.] VALUEV *Vvedenie. Razriadnaia kniga ot 7067 [1559] do 7112 [1604]*, in: *Sibirskii sbornik. Istoricheskaia chast’*. Moskva 1845, vol. 1, pp. 36, 72; and NANCY SHIELDS KOLLMANN *By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia*. Ithaca, London 1999.

²⁷ This historical parallel is suggested by the fact that one of the courtiers who participated in the earliest Yuletide amusements adopted the title of “Patriarch of Palestine,” possibly in imitation of the hierarch who had ordained Filaret (Romanov) in 1619. For the ordination of Filaret (Romanov) by Patriarch Feofan III of Jerusalem, see B. A. USPENSKII *Tsar’ i patriarkh: kharizma vlasti v Rossii (Vizantiiskaia model’ i ee russkoe pereosmyslenie)*. Moskva 1998, p. 95. For the undated (ca. 1690s) letters of “Andrei, [the mock Patriarch] of Palestine (*Andrei Palestinskii*),” see RGADA, f. 9, otd. II, op., 4, ch. I, no. 53, pp. 502–504.

However, in pointed contrast to the idealized “symphony” between the first Romanov tsar and patriarch, the unequal relationship between Peter Alekseevich and his older relative(s) embodied a critique of “patriarchal” authority, in both its ecclesiastical and genealogical senses. Seeking to distance themselves from the factions that had organized the coup in favor of the Naryshkin candidate, the tsar and his intimates attacked not only his maternal relatives, but also the court of tsar Ivan Alekseevich and the entourage of the Russian Orthodox patriarch. Indeed, the ordination of “Patriarch Dearie” seems to have been a declaration of independence from the paternalism of the political coalition that had put the young Peter Alekseevich on the throne. As a political commentary on the faction which dominated the formal organs of government since the coup of 1689, the “ordination” of M. F. Naryshkin emphasized the distinction between those men who, bound by familial ties and personal ambitions, had put the young tsar on the throne, and those who came to profess their belief in the tsar’s personal charisma and his vision of a new “Transfigured Kingdom.” The fact that the tsar’s old kinsman could not translate familial into political power, despite his age and genealogical superiority, demonstrated the way the tsar’s entourage felt about the unprecedented “inflation of honors” which accompanied the succession struggle.²⁸ Indeed, M. F. Naryshkin’s relatively recent promotion to the Muscovite royal council only underlined the fact that, like this once-powerful advisory body, he had been reduced to the status of a living link between the past and the future. Increasingly, important political decisions were made in the tsar’s inner council, which gathered at the “Generals’ Yard” in Novo-Preobrazhenskoe, rather than in the royal palace in Moscow.²⁹ Indeed, since the symbolic inauguration of the “Transfigured Kingdom,” participation in the suburban military maneuvers had become at least as important as Muscovite clan politics in determining access to the tsar. While this was still a far cry from the meritocratic thrust of the “Table of Ranks” (1722), the organization of the tsar’s entourage seemed to have shifted the emphasis away from pedigree to professional expertise. In this sense, the parodic ordination “Patriarch Dearie” reflected the existence of a definite, if still fluid, line of demarcation between Peter’s party and the officials of the Naryshkin regime.³⁰

As a critique of the policies of patriarch Joachim (Savelov), the parodic ordination of a mock patriarch and his “Unholy Council” (*neosviashchennyi sobor*) – one of the many joking names by which the mock ecclesiastical council was referred to in the parodic literature produced at Peter’s court – challenged the notion that the Muscovite tsar required the sanction of the church hierarchy in order to carry out his divine calling, the religious position with which the party of Peter Alekseevich came to power in 1689. By arrogating the right to perform the sacrament of Holy Orders, if only in jest and only for the duration of the Yuletide of 1691–1692, the royal entourage asserted that the tsar did not need either the blessings or the approval of the Most Holy Council (*osviashchennyi sobor*) – the official ecclesiastical corporate body consisting of higher clergy and headed by the patriarch, traditionally represented at the “assemblies of the land,” which, for most of the seventeenth-century, were

²⁸ On the “inflation of honors,” see ROBERT O. CRUMMEY *Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia, 1613–1689*. Princeton 1983, pp. 29–31.

²⁹ A. VOSTOKOV O delakh general’nogo dvora, in: *Opisanie dokumentov i bumag, khраниashchiikhsia v Moskovskom arkhive Ministerstva Iustitsii* 5 (1888) 2, pp. 1–11.

³⁰ On the difficulties of distinguishing Peter’s circle of favorites and intimate advisors from “those officials who were associated with the court of Tsar Ivan and with the formal organs of government under the control of the Naryshkin faction,” see CRUMMEY *Peter and the Boiar Aristocracy* p. 279.

theoretically responsible for confirming Romanov royal rule.³¹ This political sacrament even implied that as God's anointed, the tsar was personally responsible for organizing the ceremonies which bestowed grace, a theological position which went one step beyond the arguments voiced by the opponents of patriarch Joachim during the course of the Eucharist debate, which raged at the end of the seventeenth century. In that politically fraught exchange, Silvester (Medvedev) had justified tsarevna Sof'ia Alekseevna's claims to be a receptacle of grace, above and beyond the power of the clergy, by citing the biblical Wisdom literature attributed to King Solomon. And now, despite all appearances to the contrary, so too did the organizers of the Yuletide "ceremonies [in honor] of the festival of Bacchus." Indeed, by transforming the references to wine in Silvester's invocation of Wisdom's feast (Proverbs 9:1–6) – one of the main tropes in pro-Sof'ia propaganda³² – into a bold justification for their seemingly dissolute and sacrilegious behavior, Peter and his intimates offered another, and no less extraordinary assertion of the tsar's unmediated access to the divine.

Substituting the libations of Bacchus for the overflowing of Divine Wisdom, the founding members of Peter's personal "church" initiated select members of the royal entourage into the mystery of the tsar's charismatic authority – the "mystery of state"³³ at the heart of the "Transfigured Kingdom." To the uninitiated, this rite looked like a diabolical inversion of the sacraments, particularly that of Holy Orders, the sacrament that is supposed to bestow grace upon the clerical successors of Peter the Apostle. Indeed, this is precisely how the tsar's "apostasy-like deeds" (*otstupnicheskie dela*) appeared to the outraged author of a late-seventeenth-century denunciation,³⁴ who described how Peter and his companions would "swear with all their faith to call upon and to believe in someone named Bach (*imia nazyvaet nekoego Baga verovat'*)" – an obvious misreading of the Russianized calque of "Bacchus" (*Bag*"), which is pronounced like the word for "God" (*Bog*").³⁵

To those Muscovite courtiers who were familiar with the trope of "sober drunkenness" (*trezvoe p'ianstvo*),³⁶ however, the "Bacchanal" accompanying the revelation of the new

³¹ On the "Most Holy Council," see I. M. LIKHITSKII *Osviashchennyi sobor v Moskve v XVI–XVII vekakh*. S.-Peterburg 1906.

³² On Proverbs 9:1–6 as one of the foundation texts for Wisdom imagery during the regency of tsarevna Sof'ia Alekseevna, see E. K. ZELENSKY 'Sophia the Wisdom of God' as a Rhetorical Device during the Regency of Sof'ia Alekseevna, 1682–1689. Ph.D. thesis, Georgetown University 1992, pp. 106, 122, 279, 309; and A. P. BOGDANOV *Sofiia-Premudrost' Bozhiia i tsarevna Sof'ia Alekseevna: Iz istorii russkoi dukhovnoi literatury i iskusstva XVII veka*, in: *Germenevtika russkoi literatury* 7 (1994) 2, pp. 399–428, here pp. 402–404.

³³ For a discussion of this concept, see ERNST H. KANTOROWICZ *Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and Its Late Mediaeval Origins*, in: *Harvard Theological Review* 48 (January 1955) 1, pp. 65–91.

³⁴ *Otryvok oblicheniia na vseshuteishii sobor. Ok. 1705 g.*, in: *Materialy dlia russkoi istorii*. Ed. by S. A. Belokurov. Moskva 1888, pp. 539–540, here p. 539. Despite Belokurov's tentative date, the internal evidence suggests that this anonymous denunciation must have been written sometime between 1692 and 1700. This suggestion is confirmed by N. B. GOLIKOVA *Politicheskie protsessy pri Petre I: Po materialam Preobrazhenskogo prikaza*. Moskva 1957, p. 132, who has located the original document in RGADA, f. Sekretnykh del, no. 2, pis'mo 12 "ë."

³⁵ For a semiotic discussion of this particular misreading within the broader context of the late Muscovite appropriation of classical culture, see V. M. ZHIVOV, B. A. USPENSKII *Metamorfozy antichnogo iazychestva v istorii russkoi kul'tury XVII–XVIII veka*, in: *Iz istorii russkoi kul'tury*. Ed. by A. D. Koshelev. Moskva 1996, vol. 4, pp. 449–536.

³⁶ For a discussion of the Hellenistic roots of this mystical trope and its use in allegorical exegesis, in both eastern and western Christianity, see HANS LEWY *Sobria ebrietas: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der antiken Mystik*. Gießen 1929; B. KRIVOCHÉINE [VASILII KRIVOSHEIN] *Le thème de l'ivresse spirituelle dans la mystique de Saint Syméon le Nouveau Théologien*, in: *Studia Patristica* 5 (1962) pp.

“Gospel According to Peter” was not blasphemy for its own sake. Rather, this elaborate example of the genre of “sacred parody” re-enacted the apostles’ mystical experience at Pentecost (Acts 2), when Christ’s divinely inspired followers appeared (to the unbelievers gathered around them) as if they were “filled with new wine”, that is, drunk out of their minds. According to this biblical scenario, Peter and the apostles were not drunk in the base, physical sense, but rather in a state of mind akin to the euphoria of intoxication. Illuminated by the Holy Spirit, the apostles “stepped outside” the boundaries of everyday reality (the literal meaning of the Greek *ekstasis*) – an experience that allowed them to catch a glimpse of the world as it really is, or should be organized, in order to conform to divine laws. Therein lay the explanation for their strange, seemingly blasphemous acts, as well as the source of their spiritual authority. Similarly, upon their induction into Peter’s state of sober drunkenness, the participants and eyewitnesses of the Bacchanalian mysteries staged on the royal suburban estate of Novo-Preobrazhenskoe were supposed to be able to glimpse the “Transfigured Kingdom” presided over by the tsar’s chivalrous mock double – the so-called “Prince-Caesar” – and to understand what they must do in order to realize the ideals that inspired it. These political sacraments exposed the rules by which the old world was governed for the conventional, man-made creations that they really are, while making it seem like the new world was just within reach. Like the apostles, the tsar’s new disciples would then feel compelled (sometimes quite literally) to follow through with the trans-valuation of values revealed by their encounter with the divine. In this “ecstatic” state they would venture out into the world, in order to preach about their vision, enjoining other mortals to strive for the deification that was to accompany the imminent transfiguration of the Russian realm.³⁷

Sober Drunkenness at the Court of Peter the Great

Evidence for the fact that the patristic trope of “sober drunkenness” not only entered the homiletic tradition of eastern Orthodoxy but also found its way to the court of Peter the Great exists in the sermons of Stefan (Iavorskii) and Feofan (Prokopovich), the official preachers at the late Muscovite court. Thus, in a sermon delivered during the Feast of Pentecost, sometime after 1700, that is, shortly after the death of the last patriarch of Moscow, metropolitan Stefan offered an allegorical exegesis of the seven signs by which the Holy Spirit appears to the faithful, as well as why each specific symbol of divine grace was particularly “suited” to each “rank” of his listeners.³⁸ The fact that Stefan cribbed this homily from Ioannikii

368–376; and AIMÉ SOLIGNAC *Ivresse spirituelle*, in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique: Doctrine et Histoire*. Paris 1971, vol. 7: 2, pp. 2312–2337. On the importance of this trope in eighteenth-century Russian literary theory, see V. M. ZHIVOV *Iazyk i kul'tura v Rossii XVIII veka*. Moskva 1996, pp. 252–253.

³⁷ According to Prince Kurakin, “the same [mock] patriarch would continue [his] caroling visits [...] to all the distinguished houses in Moscow and in the [Foreigners’] Quarter, as well as to the [houses] of wealthy merchants, [all the while] singing traditional ecclesiastical hymns.” KURAKIN *Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche* p. 80. The author of the anonymous denunciation added that the tsar and his suite would visit not only the houses of “all the royal counselors”, but also the “houses of the [real Russian Orthodox] patriarch and the metropolitans, as well as all kinds of other households; while [the properly ordained ecclesiastical officials not only] do nothing to forbid him [the tsar] [from carrying on in this way, but even] give them [the carol-singers] gifts [for their performances], and drink and act merry along with them.” See BELOKUROV *Otryvok oblicheniia* p. 540.

³⁸ STEFAN (IAVORSKII) *Slovo os'moe [:] v nedeliu Piat'desiatnitsy iz temy: Priimite Dukh Sviat*. Ioan. gl. k. st. z [John 20:22], in: *Propovedi blazhennyya pamiati Stefana Iavorskogo, preosviashchennogo mitropolita Riazanskogo i Muromskogo, byvshago mestobliustitelia prestola patriarshago, vysokim ucheniem znamenitogo, i revnost'iu po blagochestii preslavnogo*. Moskva 1804, vol. 1, pp. 163–179.

(Galiatovskii)'s *Kliuch' razumeniia* – a book of sermons published in L'viv, in 1665 – would lead one to expect a rather abstruse, allegorical reading of the miracle at Pentecost and its significance for the life of the church.³⁹ And Stefan did not disappoint in that respect. However, he also skillfully adapted Ioannikii's Pentecostal sermon to his new surroundings, using the exegetic tradition behind the trope of “sober drunkenness” in order to offer a paean of praise to his Russian patrons.

Contrary to expectations, for example, Stefan reserved the image of “wine” from the Acts of the Apostles for the “princes, boyars, and the entire royal council (*singklit*),” rather than for members of his own “spiritual rank” – that is, for the formally-ordained successors of the apostles. This is doubly surprising, considering the fact that at that very moment, Stefan was serving as the temporary office-holder (*mestobliustitel'*) of the patriarchal see – in essence, the interim patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. So, if anyone had a right to be considered the heir of the apostles, it was he himself. Nevertheless, according to Stefan, the miraculous properties of the “divine wine” (*Bozhestvennoe vino*) that endowed the apostles with the power to preach Christ's message and fortified them to withstand the persecutions of unbelievers, actually applied better to the Russian royal entourage. Addressing Peter's courtiers as “lovers of Christ” (*khristoliubtsy*), Stefan urged them to drink the “divine wine,” which gladdens the heart and strengthens the resolve of loyal servitors to perform heroic feats. In addition to the Pentecostal story, Stefan here referred to the pericope (from Psalm 103: 15) about the “wine, which gladdens the heart of man” – that is, to another one of the most influential biblical proof-texts for the patristic trope of “sober drunkenness.”⁴⁰ During the course of this sermon, therefore, Stefan likened the tsar's court to the table-fellowship of Peter and the apostles – the founding members of the one, true, apostolic Church. According to this analogy, wine serves as a medium for the glorification of a select group of believers in an anointed monarch – *khristos*, in both Greek and Russian – who is chosen by God to perform redemptive acts for those who believe in his mission. This was certainly a very creative reading of Ioannikii's sermon on the part of Stefan (Iavorskii). But, as I will argue, it is an interpretation that fits well with the self-conception of Peter and his chief advisors.

A much more subtle reference to the trope of “sober drunkenness” can also be found in a sermon delivered by Stefan's immediate successor as the chief panegyrist of the Russian tsar. In a sermon given in Kiev, shortly after the battle of Poltava (1709), Feofan (Prokopovich) – the future ideologue of Peter's church reforms – urged the royal entourage to celebrate this great Russian victory in the fashion appropriate to those, who have demonstrated that God is on their side. Addressing the tsar directly – because he was actually sitting in the audience – Feofan counseled: “Drink up, for this wine of gladness was given to you from on high! Delight in the nectar of universal merriment, dry off the sweat shed during the ferment of battle with the victorious palm; display and rejoice in your steadfast and manly army: for in it you see the great fruit of the chivalrous training instituted by you.”⁴¹ Feofan employed a profusion of allegorical motifs in this sermon, among them an explicit call to partake of the “wine of gladness” given to the faithful army of Peter “from on high” – a call that echoed metropolitan Stefan's invocation of Psalm 103 and the “divine wine” of the apostles. Along with “the ferment of battle” (*voennyi var*) – the arresting image invoked by

³⁹ On Stefan's debt to Ioannikii's Pentecostal sermon, see F. A. TERNOVSKII *Russkoe propovednichestvo pri Petre I-m*, in: *Rukovodstvo dlia sel'skikh pastyrei: Zhurnal izdavaemyi pri Kievskoi Duhovnoi Seminarii* 3 (1870) 36, pp. 13–28, here p. 16.

⁴⁰ On Psalm 103:15 as *locus classicus*, see LEWY *Sobria ebrietas* p. 108, fn. 1.

⁴¹ FEOFAN (PROKOPOVICH) *Panegirikos, ili Slovo pokhval'noe o preslavnoi nad voiskami Sveiskimi pobede [...]*, in: Feofan Prokopovich. *Sochineniia*. Ed. by I. P. Eremin. Moskva, Leningrad 1961, p. 36.

Feofan (Prokopovich) to describe the bloody events at Poltava – this reference to “divine wine” hinted at more than the Muscovites’ favorite method of making merry. For, like his predecessor, Feofan urged those who truly believed in the tsar’s enterprise to receive the symbol of the Holy Spirit and of Christ’s sacrifice and, once again, at least for the duration of this sermon, to experience the sense of communion which made this victory possible. Indeed, the fact that both Stefan (Iavorskii) and Feofan (Prokopovich) couched their appeals to the royal entourage in these terms suggests that at least some of the tsar’s advisors were not only aware of this abstruse interpretation, but also found it flattering.

But perhaps the most original reference to the trope of “sober drunkenness” at the court of Peter the Great can be found not in the recondite sermons of academically-trained Ukrainian preachers, but in a congratulatory letter, written in 1715, by general Boris Petrovich Sheremetev (1652–1719) – the first Field-Marshal of the newly-reformed Russian army – on the occasion of the birth of Peter’s son and heir, tsarevich Peter Petrovich.⁴² In this elaborate, if brief example of the genre of “sacred parody,” general Sheremetev compared the party thrown after he and his officers received the news from the capital to the apostles’ celebration of the Pentecost. Like Peter and the apostles, Sheremetev and all his officers just happened to be gathered together in one place, on their Lord’s business (Acts 2:1). According to Sheremetev’s account, as soon they heard the glad tidings about the tsar’s blessed event, there was among them “a noise and a violent wind” (*shum i dykhanie burno*) – an obvious reference to the pericope from Acts 2:2 about the heavenly noise that preceded the descent of the Holy Spirit. “And,” Sheremetev continued, “having rendered praise to God and to his Most Holy Mother [...], we began to enjoy ourselves (*veselit’sia*); and, thanks to God, we were very merry (*vesely*)” – a euphemistic reference to drunkenness, as in the Russian idiomatic expression for tipsiness (*byt’ na vesele*). Unlike the apostles, however, the Holy Spirit does not give the Russian Field-Marshal and his comrades the gift of speaking in tongues. Instead, as is appropriate for men with a military calling, Sheremetev & Co. receive the courage to go into battle. This time, however, their enemy is not king Charles XII, Russia’s enemy during the long Northern War (1700–1721), but rather “Johnny Hops” (*Ivashko Khmel’nitskii*) – the folksy personification of drunkenness. Not surprisingly, despite (or rather, because) of their repeated sorties against the enemy and their frequent calls for more “reliable reinforcements” – that is, for more drinks – the Russian generals are thoroughly thrashed by “Johnny Hops.” However, as the preface to this mock battle makes clear, this so-called “defeat” merely recapitulates – in the terms of a contemporary military report (*reliatsiia*) – the apostles’ descent into a state of “sober drunkenness.”⁴³

⁴² P. B. Sheremetev to Peter I (27 November 1715), in: *Pis'ma k gosudariu imperatoru Petru Velikomu, pisannye ot general-fel'dmarshala, tainogo sovetnika, mal'tiiskogo sv. apostola Andreia, Belogo Orla i Prusskogo Ordena kavhalera grafa Borisa Petrovicha Sheremeteva*. 4 vols. Moskva 1778–1779, vol. 4, p. 120; republished in: *Russkii arkhiv* 1 (1909) 2, pp. 173–174.

⁴³ Sheremetev’s account of his “religious experience” is unique among all of the pieces of correspondence between Peter and his courtiers in the frankness with which it evokes the trope of “sober drunkenness.” The explanation for this frankness can be attributed – at least in part – to the fact that Sheremetev was a courtier who was out of favor with Peter. And as such, the Russian Field-Marshal was perhaps trying a little too hard to appear to be “in on the game.” He thereby made explicit something that is usually only implicit in the language of a court *coterie* – namely, the discourse of the “in-group.” In this light, Sheremetev’s drunken epistle appears as a desperate, and ultimately not very successful attempt to demonstrate his membership in Peter’s inner circle. For a masterful discussion of the complicated relationship between the tsar and his first General Field-Marshal, see A. I. ZAOZERSKII *Fel'dmarshal Sheremetev i pravitel'stvennaia sreda petrovskogo vremeni*, in: *Rossiia v period reform Petra I*. Ed. by N. I. Pavlenko. Moskva 1973, pp. 172–198, esp. pp. 182–183.

The symbolism of the accessories used during the Yuletide caroling processions which accompanied the “Drunken Council’s” periodic “mission” to the unbelievers also tends to support this “mystical” interpretation of the political sacrament enacted by Peter’s “company.” According to several contemporary descriptions and a few scattered archival references, it is known, for example, that Bacchus appeared on the “cover” of the “Gospel” (*Evangelie*) carried by the mock patriarch of the “Most Drunken Council.” This “Good Book,” which was actually a wooden chest (*larets*, of about 30x100x60 cm), served as a portable provisions hamper for the “religious paraphernalia” of the mock patriarch (such as bottles of vodka and smoking pipes).⁴⁴ On the center of the lid, this mock Bible depicted the infant Bacchus, sitting atop a barrel of wine – presumably the “new wine” with which the apostles had been intoxicated during Pentecost. A much larger travel chest, representing the Book of Acts and Epistles (*Apostol*), depicted Bacchus on the top of the lid and the twelve apostles on the back.⁴⁵ The apostles appear seated around a table laden with drinks, an illustration which may represent the Eucharistic meal before Pentecost. If so, then the visual emphasis on the goblets containing the communal wine serves both as a sign of Christ’s absent presence and as a declaration of their readiness to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In typical “Baroque” fashion, this startling juxtaposition between the table fellowship of the apostles and a Bacchanalian feast could also be expressed in the language of classical mythology. So, for example, in the very first book of emblems to be published during the reign of Peter the Great, the image of Ariadne receiving a cup from the hands of Bacchus referred to the previously mentioned Psalm 103 in order to express the notion that “wine banishes sorrow and gladdens the heart.”⁴⁶ The tsar himself frequently expressed similar sentiments in his correspondence with his courtiers. However, nowhere did he make his views more explicit than in a letter addressed to the royal favorite, Aleksander Danilovich Menshikov (1673–1729), in the fall of 1706. Congratulating Menshikov on the occasion of yet another military victory, Peter confessed that this was the third day that he and his companions were “celebrating” (*prazdnuem*) – a euphemism that, like “making merry” (*veselimsia*), usually referred to the drinking bouts which accompanied all courtly festivities. However, in the last part of this sentence, Peter made a veiled allusion to a deeper, almost mystical meaning of these drinking fellowships, in which he would “bring a generous offer of wine to Bacchus, [while simultaneously] singing the praises of God with [my] soul” (*prinostia zhertvu Bakhusu dovol’noiu vinom, a dusheiu Boga slavia*).⁴⁷ Here, in the tradition of the trope of “sober drunkenness,” Peter’s letter acknowledges the divine origins of the wine that “banishes sorrow and gladdens the heart.” Indeed, by juxtaposing *Bog* and *Bag* – the Spirit of God Made Flesh with the spirits of alcohol made divine – this letter serves as a perfect illustration of the way in which the tsar and his inner circle used the idea of “sober

⁴⁴ For a description of this “Gospel,” which is currently housed in the museum of the Moscow Kremlin (inv. No. DK-1806/1–6), see: Petr Velikii i Moskva: Katalog vystavki. Moskva 1998, p. 52 (Nos. 85–86).

⁴⁵ For a description of this “Book of the Apostles,” see I. E. ZABELIN *Istoriia i drevnosti Moskvy*, in: *Opyty izucheniia russkikh drevnostei i istorii*. 2 vols. Moskva 1872, vol. 2, pp. 190–191, footnote 2; and the photograph in GIANCARLO BUZZI *The Life and Times of Peter the Great*. Transl. by Ben Johnson. Feltham 1968, p. 59.

⁴⁶ *Emblemy i simvol’y*. Ed. by A. E. Makhov. Moskva 1995, p. 252 (No. 726: Bacchus and Ariadne).

⁴⁷ Peter to A. D. Menshikov (14–17 November 1706), *Pis’ma i Bumagi* vol. 4 (1), pp. 436–438, here p. 438.

drunkenness” in order to transform everyday festivities into symbols of the coming of a new, “Transfigured Kingdom.”

Conclusion: Bacchic Kingship and Baroque Political Allegory

This essay has argued that the infamous “Most-Drunken Council” of Peter the Great was less a formal institution, than a way of talking about the charismatic authority of Peter the Great. Indeed, despite its abstruse, even mystical connotations, other Christian monarchs would have understood Peter’s resort to the image of Bacchus as a political allegory about royal rule.⁴⁸ This is precisely how, for example, Diego Velázquez, the most famous artist at the court of the Spanish Habsburgs, intended his painting of *Bacchus in Iberia* to be interpreted by his royal patron, king Philip IV. In Velázquez’s painting, executed in the first half of the seventeenth century, the Spanish king appeared in the allegorical guise of Bacchus, offering a glass of wine to his loyal followers. This was not a representation of a dissolute bunch of drunkards, as the popular title of this work (*Los Borrachos*) would indicate, but rather of a virtuous company (or confraternity) that champions the cause of a higher being – a being who, in turn, rewards them for their devotion.⁴⁹ Similarly, we know that during his youth, even the fastidious Louis XIV appeared alongside the Roman god of wine at a court ballet called *The Festivals of Bacchus*.⁵⁰ In this the young “Sun King” was playing out a well-established tradition in French royal propaganda, according to which Bacchus, “the world-conquering God of the East,” embodied the theme of France’s imperial expansion.⁵¹

Nor was the image of Bacchus confined to the courts of these classically minded Christian monarchs. In fact, already in the mid-seventeenth century, Bacchus had made an appearance at the Muscovite court. So, for example, in the winter of 1675, Peter’s father, tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, commissioned a Yuletide theatrical production entitled the *Comedy of Bacchus and Venus*.⁵² Although the text of this “school drama” against the vices of lust and debauchery has not survived, from the description offered in the list of props, Bacchus was depicted in much the same way as the satyr who appeared on the European stage.⁵³ However, his companions were anything but typical. Part of Bacchus’ retinue consisted of the “father of drunks” (*otets p’ianits*) and thirteen “drunkards,” three of whom stuffed their clothes with pillows in order to look like hunchbacks. The appearance of a “father of drunks” and his

⁴⁸ For the notion of “political allegory,” see PAUL KLÉBER MONOD *The Power of Kings: Monarchy and Religion in Europe, 1589–1715*. New Haven, London 1999, pp. 54–57, 340, note 74; for an example of a specifically “Bacchanalian” political allegory, see *ibidem* p. 363, note 192.

⁴⁹ STEVEN N. ORSO Velázquez, “Los Borrachos,” and *Painting at the Court of Philip IV*. Cambridge 1993.

⁵⁰ CHARLES BLITZER *Age of Kings*. New York 1967, p. 129.

⁵¹ FRANCES YATES *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth-Century*. London 1985, pp. 140–146.

⁵² The play was composed by Stepan Chizhinskii, a pupil of the Orthodox Kiev-Mohyla Academy. See S. K. BOGOIAVLENSKII *Moskovskii teatr pri tsariakh Aleksee i Petre*. Moskva 1914, pp. XII, XV–XVI; and V. N. VSEVOLODSKII-GERNGROSS *Russkii teatr: ot istokov do serediny XVIII v*. Moskva 1957, pp. 116–121.

⁵³ On the image of Bacchus in Renaissance art and literature, see the two-volume study by ANDREAS EMMERLING-SKALA *Bacchus in der Renaissance*. Studien zur Kunstgeschichte. Hildesheim, New York 1994. = Band 83. For the Russian appropriation of the Bacchus myth, see ANDREAS EBBINGHAUS *Obraz bakhusa v kontekste russkoi kul’tury XVIII–nachala XIX vekov*, in: *Reflections on Russia in the Eighteenth Century*. = *Bausteine zur slavischen Philologie und Kulturgeschichte*, Neue Folge, Reihe A: Slavistische Forschungen, Band 37. Ed. by Joachim Klein, Simon Dixon, Maarten Fraanje. Köln 2001. pp. 186–199.

thirteen disciples preceded by some two decades the “ordination” of a mock patriarch and his “council” at the court of Aleksei’s son, Peter. Indeed, the similarities between these two productions are quite striking. Both of these theatricalized court spectacles took place during Yuletide, on the grounds of the royal estate named after the Transfiguration. Both included parodies of religious rites: in the case of Aleksei’s *Comedy*, the actors ostensibly enacted a parody of the Last Supper, the historical model for the sacrament of Communion; similarly, during the “ordination” of the “Prince Pope,” the entourage of tsar Peter Alekseevich parodied the sacrament of Holy Orders. Finally, in both cases, these “sacred parodies” served as a dramatic rhetorical device in the pursuit of some higher, didactic or political goal. In sum, while there is little evidence of direct borrowing, the similarities between the Bacchanalian spectacles staged before tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich and his son are a striking illustration of the way in which Peter’s entourage adapted the language and practices of the earlier reign for its own political purposes.

Locating the activities of the tsar’s “company” within the discursive practices of this “Baroque” court culture, I have argued that the religious burlesques associated with the so-called “Drunken Council” served as a type of political sacrament – a monarchical rite of power, which elevated the tsar’s person above normal men, asserted his prerogatives over church affairs, and bound the participants into a community of believers in his God-given authority. Mobilizing the powerful symbolism associated with the trope of “sober drunkenness” – particularly, as it was illustrated in the biblical story of Peter and the apostles at Pentecost – the tsar and his “company” presented themselves as an antinomian elite, empowered by God to go against the previously existing laws in order to perform redemptive “strange acts.” In this view, much of the “company’s” sense of mission and their commitment to imperial expansion, administrative reorganization, and moral renewal, derived from their belief in Peter’s personal “election” for the task of transfiguring the Muscovite realm. Indeed, if the transformation of Muscovy into Imperial Russia was a leap of faith (*preobrazhenie*), as much as a matter of bureaucratic restructuring (*preobrazovanie*), then one is justified in concluding that the path to the rational, bureaucratic, “well-ordered police state” lay directly through the mystical, “state of sober drunkenness.”