

FREEMASONRY AND THE OCCULT AT THE COURT OF PETER THE GREAT

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One of the dominant themes expounded by Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich in his speech at Peter the Great's funeral in February 1725 was of the Tsar as the embodiment of a "Mason King"; a Pygmalion figure, who had hewn a glorious statue from coarse stone. As he stated: 'All of Russia is your statue, from you it is recast . . . and in your emblem it is not falsely portrayed'¹. The theme of the Tsar as a "wise architect" is also expounded by many of the leading propagandists of the Petrine era, such as Feofilakt Lopatinskii and Gavrilla Buzhinskii, who described him as a "wise builder" and a "kind architect" and as the all wise and first architect building the Russian state².

The symbolic representation of Peter hewing, or sculpting, the statue of Russia has obvious strong Masonic resonances. Indeed, Douglas Smith entitled his recent study on Russian Freemasonry, *Working the Rough Stone*, in reference to the general aim of Russian Freemasons, which was to reshape a rough stone so that its original state became unrecognisable³. No longer covered with unhewn and jagged surfaces, it was to be 'scoured, planed . . . and smoothed out'⁴. No mention was made by Smith to Peter the Great in this regard, yet this is one of the most frequent symbolic metaphors used to praise the Tsar during his reign.

Moreover, it is highly likely that Peter the Great himself devised this symbolic metaphor, as he adopted it for use in his personal stamp in 1710 or 1711 (fig. 1)⁵. On the print, the Tsar is portrayed with a hammer and chisel in his hands and a crown on his head. A gown is on the shoulders of the statue of "Russia" with a sceptre and orb in her hands and a crown on her head.

To the right, two classical columns are clearly visible; in the sky is a cloud and portrayed in it is a triangular "all-seeing-eye", containing the Hebrew

¹ Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 298.

² Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 32, 80.

³ Smith, Douglas, *Working the Rough Stone*.

⁴ Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 5.

⁵ See Matveev, V.Iu, 'K Istorii Vozniknoveniia I Razvitiia Siuzheta "Petr I, Visekaiushchii Statuiu Rossii"' in: Sapunov & Ukhanova, *Kultura I Iskusstvo Rossii XVIII Veka*, 26-43.



Fig. 1. Personal stamp of Peter I, F.Kh. Bekker, 1711-1712 (?), The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. Source: Sapunov, B.V. & Ukhanova, I.N (eds.), *Kultura I Iskusstvo Rossii XVIII Veka*, 29.

name of God (Yahweh or Jehovah) and above this is the Latin inscription “Adiuvante”. The two words in combination read as “with God’s help” and signify the divinely sanctioned nature of the Tsar’s mission as a Mason-King sculpting his country into a perfected form.

In addition, the print of Peter the Great as the sculptor of the statue of Russia, judging by its description in literature, was also three-sided⁶. On the second side was portrayed a two-headed eagle (the Imperial emblem of Russia), under three crowns. Furthermore, a breast shield was portrayed with a rider and the sign of the Order of Andrew the First Named was suspended to the shield without chains. On the third side was an “all-seeing-eye” and under it was an arm reaching out of a cloud, holding a crown inscribed with the Latin motto “Dat et Aufert” (Give and Reward). Peter used this personal stamp consistently up until at least 1720 and it also played an important role in the celebrations held in the wake of the Nystad Peace of 1721. Intriguingly here, however, it is Peter himself who is being carved by a worker-mason and at the top the triangle does not contain the name of God, but three “7’s”, a highly symbolic reference to the fact that the Great Northern War spanned twenty-one years and was divided into three significant periods—a fact seen as divinely preordained by Russian officials, such as Prokopovich and Peter himself (fig. 2).

In this regard, one can note the speech delivered by Prokopovich at the Uspenskii Cathedral in Moscow on 30th August 1721 (OS), to mark the conclusion of the peace with Sweden. Explicit reference is made to the prophetic

⁶ See *Devizi Russkikh Gerbov*, 1.



Fig. 2. Circular Relief, B.C. Rastrelli & A.K. Nartov (?), 1723-1729 (?), The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. Source: Sapunov, B.V. & Ukhanova, I.N (eds.), *Kultura I Iskusstvo Rossii XVIII Veka*, 34.

calculations of Ezekiel, Daniel and John, as regards the division of the Great Northern War into three periods of seven years. Prokopovich then elaborates on this theme by stating:

Did we not receive Divine reward in the Trinity in the preceding war, since the Trinity was formed by the rewards of triumph? . . . But since the number of the Trinity—as in Holy Scripture, so also in the actions of people—often tends to use considerable prime numbers (about which there is not space now to converse), and we complete the triple monarchical decree and the rewards of the council of triumph thanks to this . . . we recognise, from this, that daily and incessantly and eternally we are obliged for thanks from up high, . . . the preceding war in question and the peace were established by blessing from the all generous right hand of his adopted children⁷.

Peter the Great also went to great lengths to orchestrate celebrations of the Nystad Peace based on the symbolic length of the war in relation to the Holy Trinity. He ensured that the Peace was announced from the Trinity Cathedral in St. Petersburg on September 4th 1721 (OS) whilst three cannon shots resounded from the nearby St. Peter and Paul Fortress. The Tsar also stated:

⁷ Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 265-66.

‘Since the thrice seven length of the war; it is then necessary to give thanks to the Lord God thrice everywhere as in St. Petersburg’⁸. This required all municipalities to organise three celebrations: (1) as soon as the news reaches them, (2) on October 22nd 1721 (OS) and (3) on January 28th 1722 (OS), which coincided with the religious *Maslenitsa*, or Shrove Tuesday, festival.

The two columns visible in the motif of Peter as a “Mason-King” can be interpreted as the pillars of Jachin and Boaz. Indeed, according to Masonic legend, these pillars can be linked to the rule of the House of David in Jerusalem. ‘He (Yahweh) will establish the throne of David, and his kingdom to his seed for ever’. Legend also has it that the coronations of later kings of the Davidic dynasty took place at these pillars⁹. It is significant, therefore, that panegyric literature, plays and triumphal parades provide plentiful evidence of a concerted effort, from at least as early as 1704, to symbolise the Russian monarch as a new King David building a new House of Israel. This symbolism is entirely resonant of the Davidic-Solomonic myth of Freemasonry, as outlined in the Old Charges, which states that King David began to build the temple in Jerusalem and loved masons, giving them charges according to Euclid¹⁰.

The theme of David defeating Goliath is a popular and consistent theme in panegyrics, acting as a metaphor for Peter’s triumphs over the Swedish monarch, Charles XII in the Great Northern War. Prokopovich, for example, stated in one panegyric that Peter was striking at the head of the new Goliath and was carrying the Russian nation—God’s living regiment—towards a New Israel¹¹. Further popular themes included linking the Tsar’s close friendship with Alexander Menshikov to King David’s bond with Jonathan, as described in the Book of Samuel¹². It seems likely that this biblical comparison was endorsed by the Tsar himself, as the Dutch scholar Jozien Driessen has recently argued that the painting “The Parting of David and Jonathan” (1642) by Rembrandt (fig. 3), which hangs in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, was purchased by the Tsar whilst in Holland in 1716¹³.

⁸ *Zhurnal*, 1770-1772, Vol. I, 175.

⁹ Cf. Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry*, 146.

¹⁰ Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry*, 21.

¹¹ Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 34.

¹² Prokopovich made this link in a panegyric to Menshikov made in 1709. See Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 63.

¹³ Driessen, *Tsar Petr*, 103-04.



Fig. 3. *The Parting of David and Jonathan* (1642), Rembrandt, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

The betrayal by the Cossack Hetman, Ivan Mazepa prior to the Battle of Poltava in 1709 was also directly compared by the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy in 1710 to Absalom's conspiracy against David, his father¹⁴.

Undoubtedly, the most developed use of the symbolic metaphor of Peter as a new King David can be found in two panegyrics by Gavrilla Buzhinskii, the Chaplain of the Fleet and a staunch supporter of the Petrine reforms. In a speech delivered in 1714 to honour a Russian naval victory, Buzhinskii used the occasion to quote extensively from the first book of Chronicles and the first book of Kings. From Chronicles he chose chapter twenty-eight, in which David stands before his people and declares how 'I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building'. Furthermore, in 1719, to mark the seventeenth anniversary of the taking of the Swedish fortress of Schlüsselberg, Buzhinskii gave a speech entitled "Key to the House of David". In this speech, he describes how the Swedish fortress of Schlüsselberg was considered impregnable, but that to the Russian "House of David" was given the key and the sacristan and that 'the pious monarch'

¹⁴ Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 66.

Peter I, had unlocked the castle. He then quotes from Isaiah 22:22: ‘the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open’.

The theme of Peter as a new King David consequently entailed that the new city he built on the River Neva was symbolically seen as a New Jerusalem—and not merely as many have noted as a secular New Amsterdam or an Imperial New Rome. Buzhinskii was most explicit in referring to Petersburg as a New Jerusalem, when he spoke in 1717 in praise of the city and quoted from Isaiah: ‘Shine, shine new Jerusalem! God’s glory illuminating thee’. Other notable ecclesiastic figures referred directly to the city as “newly crowned”, as a “place of particular wonder”, and as a city in which God is well disposed, citing the words of Psalm 147: ‘Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee’¹⁵. Peter the Great also frequently referred to the city as his “Paradise” and “Eden”. Evidence of this can be found in a number of letters he wrote to Alexander Menshikov, such as one dated April 7th 1706 (OS):

I cannot omit to write to you from this Paradise where, with the help of the Almighty, everything is fine . . . We may be living in heaven here; only we must never forget, as you know yourself, to place our hope not in man but in the will and grace of God¹⁶.

Menshikov too, when writing to the Tsar, described the new city as the “promised land”¹⁷.

The clear sense in which key members of the Petrine hierarchy, including the Tsar himself, viewed his mission in biblical terms has never been fully examined. No doubt this has something to do with the continuing assumption that the reforms carried out by Peter the Great were implemented on a Western model characterised by secular and rational thinking. Even in the current post Soviet climate this supposition has not been significantly revised.

Thus, whilst some historians have recently highlighted the fact that Peter the Great held a strong private faith, this has been tempered by stressing the

¹⁵ Stefan Iavorskii, in a speech made on the name day of the Tsar, referred to the city as ‘newly crowned . . . a place of particular wonder’. See *Vedomosti*, Vol. II, 258. Gavrilla Buzhinskii spoke of St. Petersburg as city in which ‘God is clearly disposed’. See Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 80. Feofilakt Lopatinskii cited Psalm 147 when speaking at a ceremony to celebrate the Nystadt Peace in January 1722 (OS). See Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 255.

¹⁶ *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol. IV, 207.

¹⁷ Baehr, *The Paradise Myth*, 69.

fact that religion played no part in determining his approach towards reforming the Russian state. Even more pronounced in existing literature is the sentiment that the Petrine Court was a safe-haven from the occult and esoteric. For example, W.F. Ryan, in his recent historical survey of magic in Russia, entitled *Midnight at the Bathhouse* (the first such work in English) gives short shrift to the issue of the occult during the reign of Peter the Great. He states:

Peter's practicality belonged more to the Enlightenment than to the seventeenth century and there are few traces in him or his court of the occult interests of his father Tsar Aleksei and his sister Sofia . . . There is no evidence that these subjects interested him as anything more than offences against good order and manifestations of discontent¹⁸.

It is widely accepted, therefore, that interest in the occult and mysticism only resurfaced in Russia with the emergence of Rosicrucian Freemasonry, introduced in 1782 by the German J.G. Schwarz and soon embraced by the prominent Muscovite writer and printer, Nikolai Novikov. The birth of Russian Freemasonry, closely affiliated to the Hanoverian system in England, can be officially traced back to 24th January 1731 (OS), when the minutes of the Grand Lodge in London recorded the appointment of John Phillips as Provincial Grand Master of Russia and Germany. Arguably a more significant step occurred in 1740, when James Keith was appointed Grand Master solely of Russia. This accepted chronology of events surrounding the introduction of Freemasonry on Russian soil discounts the legends recited by Russian Freemasons of the latter part of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, which champion Peter the Great as Russia's first Freemason.

There are two principal legends. Firstly, that Peter the Great was initiated into the Masonic Brotherhood by Christopher Wren whilst residing in England in 1698 and secondly, that when Peter departed after his second European tour in 1717, he carried a Masonic statute with the authority to found a lodge¹⁹. The validity of these legends is dismissed by modern commentators, such as the respected British scholar Anthony Cross, who states: 'Peter the Freemason . . . would seem to be essentially the creation of later generations of Russian masons'²⁰.

¹⁸ Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight*, 1999, 23.

¹⁹ A summary of these two legends can be found in Pipin, *Masonstvo v Rossii*, 83.

²⁰ Cross, 'British Freemasons', 43.

Whilst these legends are impossible to prove, I believe it is mistaken to deny the obvious attractions Freemasonry—particularly of a Jacobite hue—would have held to the young Tsar. For example, in addition to portraying himself as a New David and a Mason King, Peter also had a definite liking for secretive Brotherhoods and chivalrous orders. The presence of some form of Brotherhood at the Russian Court seems to be confirmed by Charles Whitworth, the official British Resident in Moscow, who wrote in 1706 of a ‘Brotherhood . . . as true as pleasant’, in which ‘a great glass of wine sanctified the occasion’²¹. As regards chivalrous Orders, one should note that in 1697 the Tsar corresponded with Raymond Perellos, the Grand Master of the Maltese Order of Knights, writing a letter of recommendation for one of his principle military figures, Boris Sheremetev²². When he reached Malta, Sheremetev was initiated into the Order and took part in a ceremonial banquet to honour John the Baptist. Furthermore, on his return to Moscow in February 1699, the Tsar honoured him at a banquet and permitted him to permanently wear his Maltese Cross²³. Peter the Great also founded a Russian Order—the Order of St. Andrew (the First Named)—directly after his return from his first Grand Embassy in 1698. It would seem that his decision was influenced by his observation of a ceremony of the Order of the Garter at Windsor Castle in England.

Peter the Great also displayed a marked religious tolerance and a passion for scientific inquiry wholly in line with the ethos of Freemasonry as it developed during the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. His religious toleration can be clearly seen, for example, on his first Grand Embassy in 1697 and 1698, when he and his retinue visited the Reformed Churches and Synagogues of Amsterdam. In England, the Tsar personally visited and took part in services at Quaker Meeting Houses in Gracechurch Street in London and in Deptford, and he requested plans for educational reform from Francis Lee of the Philadelphian Society. He also met the liberal Bishop of Salisbury, Gilbert Burnet, on a number of occasions and in one of these meetings the pair discoursed for over four hours on scriptural matters²⁴.

The Tsar also exuded a scientific curiosity, deeply imbued with religious meaning and occult tendencies. Even a cursory glance at his attitudes towards

²¹ Letter of 24th January 1706 (OS): The British Library, Stafford Papers, Add. MS 31128, f.34.

²² *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol. I, 154-5.

²³ Ivanov, *Ot Petra Pervago do Nashikh Dnei*, 84.

²⁴ Cross, *Peter the Great*, 34.

the study of such disciplines as astronomy, natural science, mathematics and alchemy reveal a monarch saturated with a scientific worldview still more commonly associated with the supposedly more religiously orientated and credulous minds of the seventeenth century. Peter the Great's stance *vis-à-vis* astronomy is crystallised by remarks he is credited to have made at a Paris Observatory in 1717, where he makes plain his belief in the divine nature of the universe:

Here for the eyes are opened a book of the miracles of God, which clearly shows the great wisdom of Creation! . . . I would advise the Godless and free thinkers to study astronomy and to be a little more often at the observatory, when the earthly sphere is not sufficient to convince them and when they wander through it blindly²⁵.

The Tsar's enthusiastic interest in the macrocosmos was equally matched by his passion for natural curiosities and monstrosities engendered in the earthly microcosmos. He made sure to visit every possible Cabinet of Rarities on his travels and negotiated the purchase of the renowned collections of Albert Seba and Frederick Ruysch, after visiting their Cabinets in Amsterdam. These collections formed a considerable part of the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera, founded by the Tsar in 1714. A revealing insight into the Tsar's views on the human monstrosities on display within Russia's first public museum can be gleaned from a decree he wrote in 1718:

There is only one creator of all creation, and that is God. And the Evil One has no power over any living creatures. For monsters are the result of internal damage, of fear and the thoughts of the mother during her pregnancy²⁶.

The Tsar was also keen to witness chemical experiments on his foreign travels, which included the Paracelsian alchemist Moses Stringer demonstrating the art of separation in London in 1698 and certain 'curious chemical concoctions' formed by Louis Lemery in Paris in 1717. Whilst visiting an experimental scientist in The Hague in the same year, the Tsar is reported to have made the following intriguing statement:

I neither belittle nor revile an alchemist, the search for converting metal into gold, of the mechanic trying to find eternal movement . . . such type of people should be encouraged in every way, and not despised²⁷.

²⁵ Nartov, *Razkazi Nartova o Petr Velikom*, 93.

²⁶ Cf. Anemone, 'The Monsters of Peter the Great', 592.

²⁷ Nartov, *Razkazi Nartova o Petr Velikom*, 96.

As regards eternal movement, Peter the Great was fascinated with Johann Bessler's quest to invent a *Perpetuum Mobile*, embodied in the so-called *Wheel of Offyreus*, and indeed went to great lengths to purchase this contraption²⁸. Considering the Tsar's open-minded scientific curiosity, it is entirely in character that he should have been an enthusiastic patron of esoteric experimental science at the Russian Court and surrounded himself with statesmen fascinated in alchemy, natural magic and even astrology.

Most legends attest that the first Masonic lodge in Russia went by the name of the "Neptune Society" and initially met at the Sukharev Tower on the outskirts of Moscow, home to Russia's first Mathematical and Navigation School and first Observatory. Meetings apparently took place in the fencing hall and involved chemical and other experiments, according to some nineteenth century sources, with Peter the Great as Junior Warden. Two other alleged members of this Society were Jacob Bruce, a Jacobite sympathizer, and Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich, who fulfilled the role of Orator. These two figures were undoubtedly among the Tsar's most intimate and powerful statesmen and provide fine examples of the extent to which interest in the occult actually flourished at the Petrine Court²⁹.

1. *Jacob Bruce (1669-1735)*

With the exception of the Tsar, Jacob Bruce played the most central role in Russian Masonic legends and was ranked as one of the highest dedicated Masons, who was allegedly 'profoundly and fruitfully penetrated into the secrets of the Masonic Order'³⁰. Bruce was the son of a Scottish immigrant, and his talents were utilised by the Tsar in an amazing variety of ways. He was a Field Marshal in the Russian Army, the head of Russia's first

²⁸ See Collis, *Perpetual Motion*, 1997.

²⁹ Although is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that apart from Bruce, there were two other Scottish Jacobites who were allegedly members of the so-called Neptune Society: General Patrick Gordon (1635-1699), who purportedly acted as First Overseer, and Henry Farquharson (c.1675-1739). Both have strong links to Scottish Jacobite Freemasonry. On Gordon, see Collis, 'Patrick Gordon'. Farquharson was enlisted into Russian service in 1698, whilst the Tsar was in England. As head teacher at the Moscow Mathematical & Navigation School he worked extremely closely with Bruce. Farquharson studied under the staunch Jacobite, Professor George Liddel, at Marischal College in Aberdeen. In addition to being a staunch Jacobite, Liddel was a Non-Operative Freemason of the Aberdeen Lodge. On Farquharson's career in Russia see Fedosov, 'A Scottish Mathematician in Russia', 102-115.

³⁰ Ivanov, *Ot Petra Pervago do Nashikh Dnei*, 82.

Mathematical School, the Director of the State Typography, the President of the Mining and Manufacturing Colleges and the Director of the Petersburg Mint. As well as this, he was one of the country's chief diplomats, and was instrumental in brokering the Nystad peace treaty with Sweden in 1721. As already noted, Bruce was the head of the Mathematical and Navigation School, based in the Sukharev Tower. Furthermore, it was Bruce who established Russia's first observatory there on the third floor in 1699, and indeed he resided there for a lengthy period before moving to St. Petersburg.

The Canadian scholar Valentin Boss has referred to Bruce as Russia's 'First Newtonian' and credits him with facilitating the adoption of a "modern" character in scientific inquiry³¹. The popular image of Bruce in Russia, however, has long been associated with sorcery. Pushkin famously wrote that Bruce was the 'Russian Faust' and many colourful oral legends surrounding him survived into the 1920s³². According to these legends, he created a housemaid from flowers, flew over Moscow and resurrected a dead dog—a story reminiscent of Bulgakov's classic tale *The Heart of a Dog*. He was a man who could predict the weather and people's fates by observing the stars and consulted many rare books when concocting powders and remedies³³. Many of these legends relate to Bruce's nocturnal activities at the Sukharev Tower and a nineteenth century author, Ivan Lazhechnikov, even wrote a novella based on them, entitled *The Sorcerer at the Sukharev Tower* (1844).

These oral legends stand in stark contrast to the portrait of the rational scientist painted by Boss, yet their fantastical quality derives from the fact that in reality, Bruce, the experimental scientist, did indeed immerse himself in the esoteric arts. The clearest indication of this are the so-called "Bruce Calendars" supervised by Bruce himself. Six of these calendars were printed between 1709-1715 and they contain a mixture of astronomical expertise with a wealth of astrological predictions and religious symbolism.

The second sheet of the Bruce Calendars, from 1709, contains considerable Masonic character and religious mysticism. At the top it is dominated by an all-seeing-eye in the shape of a triangle, surrounded with the inscription: 'Divine God in his holiness, God of the Israelites'. Below this are quotes from Psalm 20, which begins with the apocalyptic phrase: 'The Lord hear

³¹ Boss, *Newton & Russia*, 33.

³² See Pushkin's unfinished historical tale *The Arab of Peter the Great*, based on his own Grandfather.

³³ See Baranov, *Legendi o Grafe Briuse*.

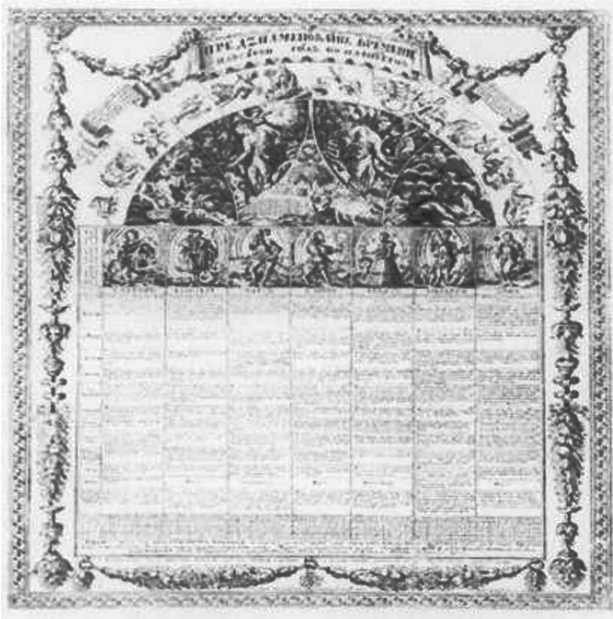


Fig. 4. *Bruce Calendar*, Third sheet (1710), The Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

thee in thy day of trouble’, and Psalm 67, an exhortation to bless God. Most significant of all, however, is that at the bottom two festivals are noted: the birth of Christ and the Day of the Masons³⁴. The importance specifically attached to the Mason’s Day, couched as it is in an astrological sheet replete with religious mysticism and Old Testament citations, is extremely suggestive when one bears in mind Bruce’s alleged links to the Masonic movement. The third sheet, dating from 1710, is entitled *Omens for the Times for every day according to the planets* and gives predictions for events in Russia up until 1821 (fig. 4)³⁵.

The fourth sheet, in a similar vein, provides omens for events based on translating the solar calendar into the lunar calendar. A long list of advantages to be gained by observing these lunar and astrological positions are then stated. These include suitable times to steam in the *Bania*, or Russian sauna without being struck down with sickness, conducive times to let blood

³⁴ Filimon, *Iakov Brius*, 419-21.

³⁵ Filimon, *Iakov Brius*, 421-30.

and the appropriate time to hang minerals in order to emit pleasant effects. It also lists the best times to instigate a battle and the most suitable days to buy wild animals³⁶.

Bruce's private library collection reflects his interest in astrological matters and contains many rare works, including tracts by the two principle authorities cited in the Calendars—Johann Zahn and Wolfgang Hildebrand³⁷. Apart from these two figures, one also finds a number of other works by eminent German astrologers of the seventeenth century, such as Tobias Beutel, Stanislaus Acxtelmeier, Christoph Nottangel and Johann Jakob Zimmermann (2 works)³⁸. Bruce's library collection also holds astrological tomes by a number of prominent English astrologers of the second half of the seventeenth century—William Lilly, Richard Saunders, George Parker and Joseph Moxon³⁹. Lastly, one can find works by esteemed Italian astrological practitioners, such as Girolamo Cardano, Giovanni Antonio Magini and Flaminio Mezzavacca⁴⁰. It seems Bruce also had an interest in the related discipline of geomancy, possessing six works on the subject. This included a collection of tracts on geomancy by Abu Hali ben-Omar and Nicolas Catanus's *Geomantischer Schöpfen-Sul* (1704)⁴¹.

Works on natural magic and the occult are also abundant in Bruce's library collection. An exhaustive survey is not possible here, but even a list of authors provides some insight into the scope of the collection. Thus, in his personal collection, Bruce could consult works by, among others, Ramon Lull, Alessio Piemontese, Giambattista della Porta, Athanasius Kircher, Caspar Schott, Johannes Staricius, Dethlevus Cluverus, the Abbe de Vallemont, Christianius Democritus (alias Johann Conrad Dippel) and Democritus Abderyta⁴².

Bruce also owned a sizeable Cabinet of Rarities and a private chemical laboratory, befitting a man who was undoubtedly the foremost expert on chemical matters in Russia at the time. One can see the clear influence of

³⁶ Filimon, *Iakov Brius*, 430-35.

³⁷ Bruce owned a copy of Zahn's *Oculus Artificialis* (1685). See *Materiali dlia Istorii Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, Tom V, 1742-1743*, St. Petersburg, 1889, No. 176. Bruce owned an original edition of Hildebrand work on natural magic, *Magia Naturalia das ist, kunst und Wunderbuch darinnen begriffen Wunderbare Secreta, Geheimnisse und Kunststuckke* (1610). See *Materiali*, No. 772.

³⁸ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, No. 82; *Materiali*, No. 407, *Materiali*, No. 26 (manuscript section), *Materiali* Nos. 1055 & 1195 respectively.

³⁹ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, Nos. 426, 603, 519 & *Materiali*, No. 1320 respectively.

⁴⁰ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, No. 149 & *Materiali*, Nos. 338 & 334 respectively.

⁴¹ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, Nos. 32 & 154 respectively.

⁴² See both Saveleva, *Biblioteka* & *Materiali* catalogues.



Fig. 5. Illustration to *Uchenie i Praktika Artilerie* (1711).
Source: Petrov, *Sobranie Knig*.

alchemy in the frontispiece to part III of a textbook for artillery, printed in 1711 and edited and translated by Bruce (fig. 5).

Judging by his extraordinary collection of alchemical volumes, many of which were first editions and extremely rare, Bruce must have possessed considerable knowledge of alchemical principles. I have counted at least 143 clear alchemical works by 88 different authors in his collection, including Paracelsus (3 works), Valentin Weigel (1 work), Jacob Böhme (4 works) and the *Waterstone of the Wise* by Johann Siebmacher, attached with letters in defence of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood⁴³. Indeed, Bruce had an alchemical work by Sincerus Renatus—*I.N.J. Göldene Quelle der Natur und Kunst*,

⁴³ See Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 70-72; 21-24 & Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, No. 362 respectively.

(1711)—a man who set out the rules and constitution of an alleged Rosicrucian Order in the 1710s⁴⁴. In its entirety, Bruce's alchemical collection alone is enough to discredit the theory that the occult was of no interest to members of the Petrine court. This, however, is far from the only source indicating such interest among senior statesmen in Peter the Great's Russia.

2. Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736)

Feofan Prokopovich is renowned as being Peter the Great's chief propagandist and principle ecclesiastic ally, referred to by James Cracraft as the 'first authentic voice of the early Enlightenment in Russia' and by Robert Massie as a 'modern eighteenth century man who happened to be a cleric'⁴⁵. For the past century at least, however, scholars have ignored the seemingly less enlightened sides to his worldview, such as the fact that he held to a literal interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Thus, he located the Garden of Eden on the Persian Gulf in Mesopotamia and stated that the Serpent in the Garden of Eden was genuine⁴⁶. He cites his authorities on Creation as St. Basil, Ambrosius, Theodoretus, Augustine, Philo and Josephus Flavius, with the only contemporary figure cited being Johann Zahn (mentioned above), whose work *Specula Physico-Mathematico-Historico* (1696) follows in the Hermetic and occult tradition of Kircher⁴⁷. Furthermore, Prokopovich undertook to demonstrate the mathematical possibility of placing all the animals in Noah's Ark and argued against the existence of the Phoenix on the grounds that God did not create a partner for it⁴⁸. He also remarks that it is absurd to state that there was no rainbow before the deluge and argues that 'by bidding to show' such a phenomenon, God gave 'a sign of his nearness'⁴⁹. What is more, he believes in the existence of the firmament and stated that heavenly bodies have an influence on earthly bodies⁵⁰. Prokopovich's exegesis advocated the study of Hebrew and Greek for the correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and he was fascinated with the question of the Divine Names of God—writing a tract on Pseudo-Dionysius' *Names of God*⁵¹. Prokopovich's

⁴⁴ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka* No. 648.

⁴⁵ Cracraft, *The Church Reform*, 54; Massie, *Peter the Great*, 790.

⁴⁶ Morozov, *Feofan Prokopovich*, 131-44.

⁴⁷ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 299-310.

⁴⁸ Morozov, *Feofan Prokopovich*, 130; Prokopovich, II, p. 307.

⁴⁹ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 455-56.

⁵⁰ Morozov, *Feofan Prokopovich*, 139.

⁵¹ See Tikhomirov, *Traktati*, 16-18.

world was also one in which angels and demons were present. On angels, Prokopovich writes that one should not doubt their existence, although ‘one ought to note that angels do not have the form of God in such a direct sense, in which there is in people’⁵². As regards demons, he again states a belief in their existence and even gives three ways of distinguishing genuine cases: (1) they can explain secrets which a person in a natural condition cannot explain; (2) they can speak languages which they have never learned; (3) supernatural actions⁵³.

In his *Natural Philosophy*, written in 1708 and used as a principal textbook on the subject when he taught at the Kiev Academy, Prokopovich reveals clear beliefs in occult qualities⁵⁴. In the section on stones and gems, for example, he provides a list of their various benefits. Thus, an emerald worn on the finger or hung to its full extent protects against epilepsy, whilst a ruby can oppose poisons and putrefaction, protects from the plague and gladdens the soul⁵⁵. Prokopovich also writes favourably on alchemy, arguing that although alchemists have at present not succeeded in creating artificial gold, it should not be concluded that it is impossible and will not be perfected in the future⁵⁶. He reinforces his argument by even referring to the alchemical expertise of angels:

Angels by nature have the knowledge to foresee which material and which correlations are somehow necessary for the creation of real gold. Consequently, when (alchemists) form everything correctly and mix at the right time, then real gold is created⁵⁷.

Indeed, according to Prokopovich, an alchemist’s search for gold is a productive quest and has led to people mastering the separation of metals and the invention of many useful things⁵⁸. In Prokopovich’s *Natural Philosophy*, the alchemical works of Daniel Sennert are frequently cited as authoritative texts on chemical matters. Thus, Prokopovich draws on Sennert when describing the alchemical process of separating mercury from sulphur and salt:

Daniel Sennert names it a divine liquid or spirit, of which with great effort it is possible to separate from fine sulphur and from simple and very rare salt⁵⁹.

⁵² Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 309.

⁵³ Morozov, *Feofan Prokopovich*, 141-42.

⁵⁴ This constitutes much of the second volume of the *Filosofski Tвори*.

⁵⁵ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 494-501.

⁵⁶ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 154-56.

⁵⁷ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 156.

⁵⁸ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 156.

⁵⁹ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tтвори*, 394.

Interestingly, even at his deathbed in 1736, an alchemist was present—known simply as Jacob the Alchemist—who subsequently became one of the principle beneficiaries in his will⁶⁰.

Prokopovich's library collection reflects his attraction to esotericism. It contains a substantial number of alchemical texts, by at least thirty-four different authors, including original editions of Petrus Severinus' *Idea Medicinae Philosophicae* (1571), Johann Hartmann's *Praxis Chymiatrica* (1683), Johan Finck's *Enchiridion Dogmatico-Hermeticum* (1618) and Otto Tach's *Hippocrates Chymicus*⁶¹. Prokopovich's library is especially rich in occult works. One finds, for example, the collected works of Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, Porta's *Magiae Naturalis*, Cardano's *De Rerum Varietate*, three editions of Lemnius' *Oculta Naturae Miracula* and Marcellus Palingenesis' *Zodiacus Vitae*, as well as a host of works by other Renaissance and early modern writers on natural magic and the occult⁶².

In the past, Prokopovich's passion for learning and scientific experimentation has been viewed solely from a post-Enlightenment perspective, in which his reading of Baconian and Cartesian theories has been stressed⁶³. Whilst it is true that works by both Bacon and Descartes are present in his library, one has to substantially broaden his breadth of learning in order to fully appreciate the intellectual worldview of this fascinating and hugely influential figure. I would argue, therefore, that it would be far more accurate to compare Prokopovich's *Natural Philosophy*—his principle statement of scientific views—to the spirit of scientific inquiry advocated by Athanasius Kircher, a towering late Renaissance figure, which rests on a profoundly religious worldview saturated with occult beliefs.

3. Robert Erskine (1677-1718)

A third figure worthy of mention, in light of links to Freemasonry and the occult, is Robert Erskine FRS, a Scottish physician and Jacobite, who arrived in Russia in 1704⁶⁴. By the time of his death in 1718, he had risen to become

⁶⁰ Chistovich, *Feofan Prokopovich i ego Vremia*, 648.

⁶¹ See Verkhovskoi, *Uchrezhdenie*, Nos. 1570, 1708, 925 & 1814 respectively.

⁶² See Verkhovskoi, *Uchrezhdenie*, Nos. 1659, 1144, 1661, 1723, 1808, 2962, 2678 respectively.

⁶³ See, for example, Cracraft (above).

⁶⁴ Erskine was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society on 30th November 1703, along with his colleague Richard Mead. He was nominated by Sir Hans Sloane.

one of Peter the Great's most trusted and important figures. Erskine fulfilled the role of the Tsar's Chief Physician, was head of the Russian medical establishment and was given the prestigious honour of being the first Director of the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera and its Head Librarian in 1714.

Astonishingly, it seems Erskine amassed one of the largest private alchemical collections in Europe for the age—a secret that has remained deeply buried inside the archives of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences Library up to this day. It is double the size of Bruce's own noteworthy collection, and contains at least 287 separate works by 157 different authors⁶⁵. This quantity well exceeds the noted collection of Isaac Newton and is actually somewhat larger than the renowned collection of Hans Sloane. Two of the most remarkable inclusions in a remarkable collection are an original first edition of *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz* and a rare 1615 Strasbourg edition of both Rosicrucian Manifestos, accompanied with Adam Haselmayer's *Reply* and three others affirming the credibility of the Brotherhood⁶⁶. Erskine's alchemical interests were no doubt cemented by training at the University of Utrecht under the noted alchemist and Chemistry Professor, Johann Conrad Barchusen (1666-1723). In a similar fashion as both Prokopovich and Bruce, Erskine also amassed an extraordinarily rich stock of other volumes on the occult. A small sample being a 1552 edition of Iamblichus's *De Mysteriis Aegyptorum Chaldaeorum*, a work on astral medicine purportedly by Hermes Trismegistus, Caspar Longinus' *Trinum Magicum*, containing a rich collection of ancient sources of magic, Kircher's accounts of Egyptian magic, a work by Johannes Staricius on the magical power of Egyptian shields, Gutsavus Selenus' encyclopaedic work on cryptography, entitled *Cryptomenytices Cryptographia* (1624) and Gabriel Naude's defence of natural magicians⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ The great majority of Erskine's library collection is housed at the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences Library. A catalogue exists listing Erskine's books in this location, entitled *Katalog Knig Biblioteki Areskina R.K. 1719* can be found in Fond 158, Opis 1. d214a. Helsinki University Library also has almost two hundred of Erskine's collection and is listed in the Havu & Lebedeva catalogue (see fn. 41).

⁶⁶ See *Katalog Areskina*, Areskine Libri Medici in Octavo et Duodecimo 27, No. 390 & 389 respectively.

⁶⁷ See *Katalog Areskina*, Areskine Libri Philosophic. Histor. et Philologici in 8vo et 12o, 55., No. 381; Areskine Libri Philosoph. Historici et Philolog in Quarto 39, No. 55; 31ob. Areskine Libri Medici in 8vo et 12o, No. 583; Areskine Libri Philosoph. Historici et Philolog. In Folio 33, No. 12 (*Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, Rome 1652-54), Areskine Libri Philosoph. Historici et Philolog. In Folio 33, No. 13 (*Oedipus Pamphilius*); 57ob. Areskine Libri Philosophici, Histor. et Philologici in 8vo et 12o, No. 478. 36ob; Areskine Philosoph. Historici et Philolog in Folio, No. 162.; Areskine Libri Philosophici, Histor. et Philologici in 8vo et 12o 58, No. 480.

Erskine's links to Jacobite Freemasonry are strong. He was a cousin of the Earl of Mar, who led the Jacobite Rebellion in 1715 and who was also allegedly the Grand Master of the Order of the Temple⁶⁸. Erskine's Grandfather was the 2nd, or 7th Earl of Mar, the favourite childhood companion of King James I and he was also related to Chevalier Andrew Ramsay, the noted champion of mystical Eccossais Freemasonry in the 1730s, whose patron was the Earl of Mar. Robert Erskine maintained contact with the Earl of Mar and his own brother, Sir John Erskine, whilst in Russia and formed part of a Jacobite network that spanned the continent. From a letter addressed to the Earl of Mar and written by George Mackenzie, the official British Resident in St. Petersburg and agent to Mar, it seems clear that some form of Jacobite Masonic network existed in St. Petersburg—with Robert Erskine at its centre—from at least as early as 1714. This letter is worth quoting in full:

St. Petersburg, ye 29th 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 I had the honour to write yor Lordp. The 8th instant, that within a ffortnight thence and less, you were to expect a letter from Dr. Areskine; tho' it may not so soon appear to yor 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 Realition of the Czar, and has 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, Without 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 Joyner'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 apprised of it there, before the whole is come to a walding, to return to the Dr's excuse and my own, that Gentleman having being kept up here till sledge-way, which My Lord in good English is to say, more snow; tho' that's been already our weather above a month⁶⁹.

Mackenzie refers to the "Masson Word" and to a certain Mr. Naroskin, a "Bror Mechanick of his Czarian Maty". From this letter we know that Mr

⁶⁸ *Statutes*, xv-xvi; Baigent, *The Temple & the Lodge*, 228-334, 376-77.

⁶⁹ Cf. Paul, *Miscellany*, 408-10.

Naroskin was a Chamberlain and a relative of the Tsar and it seems he is also acting as some kind of courier or messenger between various royal houses. The indication that a Naryshkin was linked to Freemasonry is highly significant, as Peter the Great held an extremely tight bond with the members of his mother's (Natalia Naryshkina) family. It is my believe that the Naryshkin in question here is Semen Grigorovich Naryshkin (c. 1680-1747), an extremely close aide to the Tsar up until 1718, when he was implicated in the affair surrounding the Tsarevich Alexei and was forced into exile in France.

Semen Grigorovich Naryshkin was indeed a Chamberlain (*Komnatnii Stolnik*) to the Tsar, as well as serving as a General Adjutant. In 1708, he was also awarded the rank of Captain in the Lifeguards of the prestigious Preobrazhenski Regiment⁷⁰. Furthermore, Naryshkin was also frequently utilised as a personal courier and diplomatic messenger by the Tsar, as well as being entrusted with missions to hire craftsmen and purchase artefacts in Italy and Germany⁷¹. No doubt the Tsar drew on the Western European education and widespread connections of his younger kinsman⁷². Naryshkin had, after all, been enlisted as one of only thirty-five so-called "Volunteers" (which included the Tsar himself in its ranks) who accompanied the Russian Grand Embassy to Western Europe in 1697. The young Naryshkin remained in Western Europe for two years, prior to moving on to Berlin in 1699, where he received an education in military engineering and languages.

The intimacy of the relationship between Naryshkin and the Tsar is indicated by their correspondence, in which the former refers to Peter as "Uncle" and signs his letters with the affectionate diminutive "Senka"⁷³. As one of the few young "Volunteers" to receive a Western education, Naryshkin was a shining example of the new breed of boyars, or Russian aristocrats, much vaunted by the Tsar. As a descendant of the Naryshkin clan, Semen would have also encapsulated, in Peter's eyes, the noble and progressive stock of his own bloodline.

⁷⁰ *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol. XI, 366-367. Interestingly, the Tsar also awarded himself the rank of Captain of the Preobrazhenski Regiment.

⁷¹ *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol. XI, 122.

⁷² In 1711, for example, Naryshkin was sent on a lengthy diplomatic mission to Florence and the Court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo de Medici III. Furthermore, in 1712, he was sent on a mission to Denmark and in 1713 he embarked on a mission to Vienna. It should also be mentioned that Naryshkin later became Russian Ambassador to Britain, between the years of 1740-1747.

⁷³ See Gordin, 'Delo Tsarevicha Alekseia', 134; *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol I, 78.

The connection between the Naryshkin clan and Freemasonry in post-Petrine Russia is extremely strong, with eight members of the family documented to have been Freemasons during the eighteenth-century alone⁷⁴. One of these seven, Semen Kirillovich Naryshkin (1710-1775), is officially recorded as Russia's first Freemason, having been initiated into a lodge in Paris in 1737⁷⁵.

In the person of Semen Grigorovich Naryshkin, however, it is hard to think of an individual more suited to the aristocratic and learned ideals of Jacobite Freemasonry and with such ample opportunity to familiarise himself with its milieu in Western Europe. Thus, the tantalising proof that Naryshkin was a "Brother Mechanick" of the Masonic Order as early as at least 1714, with close links to Jacobitism through Robert Erskine and the Earl of Mar, opens up the real need to re-examine the presently accepted view, which marks 1731 as the year in which a Hanoverian form of Freemasonry penetrated into Russia. Furthermore, whilst little is known of the scientific or theological beliefs of Naryshkin, the clear occult interests of Erskine, Bruce and Prokopovich provide a fascinating insight into what still remains something of a hidden and taboo area in the history of Petrine Russia.

Prior to concluding, it is also worthy of note that Bruce, Prokopovich and Erskine all embraced a tolerant form of Christianity, in line with the ethos of Freemasonry, which was imbued with mystical and eschatological elements. Bruce was strongly attracted to German Pietism and his house was a centre for Pietists from Halle who began their activities in Russia from his residence⁷⁶. His Pietist inclinations are clearly revealed in his library collection, which contains many Pietist works, including a significant collection by Phillip Jacob Spener⁷⁷.

Prokopovich was also strongly attracted to Halle Pietism—corresponding with August Francke and sending seminary students to study at Halle. Indeed, Francke sent Prokopovich an edition of Johann Arndt's *True Christianity*, which he subsequently ordered to be translated into Russian⁷⁸. His strong

⁷⁴ See Serkov, *Russkoe Masonstvo*, 2003.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 19. Intriguingly, S.K. Naryshkin also served as a diplomat in London at the same time as S.G. Naryshkin, during the early 1740s.

⁷⁶ Winter, *Halle*, 84.

⁷⁷ Bruce owned four works by Spener, which are stored in Helsinki University Library. See Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 90-93.

⁷⁸ Winter, *Halle*, 1953, 28; Chistovich, *Feofan Prokopovich i ego Vremia*, 589. Arndt's text was subsequently banned in 1742, during the reign of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna.

attraction to reformed Protestant groups can also be seen in his particular attraction to prophetic literature, such as the notorious *Lux e Tenebris*, edited by Comenius, of which he owned two editions, and many prophetic and millenarian works by other authors, such as Johannes Piscator, Johann Alsted, Johannes Coccejus, James Ussher and Campegius Vitringa⁷⁹. Prokopovich's attraction to reformed Protestantism merged with a deep devotion to certain mystical Christian Neoplatonist Church Fathers, such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor, who he frequently cites as authorities on scriptural matters. Erskine too had a sizeable theological collection, which reflects his upbringing as a Scottish Episcopalian. Many Jacobite Episcopalian Physicians from the North East of Scotland, as Erskine was, were renowned for their mystical tendencies at the beginning of the eighteenth century and it is significant that Erskine's religious texts indicate he also shared this outlook. One finds, for example, works by the Scottish mystics George Garden and Henry Scougall, as well as other texts by Thomas a Kempis, Johann Arndt, Gottfried Arnold, William Penn and John Norris⁸⁰. Erskine also owned a whole raft of eschatological texts by such noted figures as John Napier, Alsted, Joseph Mede and a remarkable eleven works by Pierre Jurieu⁸¹.

Conclusion

The triumvirate of Bruce, Prokopovich and Erskine were three of the Tsar's most valued statesmen and helped to enact the Petrine Reforms. They were undoubtedly progressive figures, yet retained religious faith *and* occult inter-

⁷⁹ Verkhovskoi, *Uchrezhdenie*, Nos. 273-4 (*Lux e Tenebris*). Prokopovich also owned ten other works by Comenius: Nos. 1797, 2470, 2471, 2480, 2500, 2654, 2921, 2925, 2927. He owned three works by Piscator: Nos. 746-8; six works by Alsted: Nos. 1088, 1276, 1666, 1741, 1805, 2917; two works by Coccejus: Nos. 425, 2360; Ussher's *Anales Veteris Testamenti*: No. 1043 and three works by Vitringa: Nos. 71, 283, 284.

⁸⁰ Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 104, 198, 132; *Katalog Areskina*, Areskina, 58ob. Areskine Libri Theologici in Octavo et Duodecimo, No. 6; four works by Gottfried Arnold: see Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, No. 14 & *Katalog Areskina*, 45ob. Areskine Libri Theologici in Quarto, No. 323 & *Katalog Areskina*, Areskine Libri Theologici in Octavo et Duodecimo, 59, Nos. 21 & 22; Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 175 & 165.

⁸¹ See Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 161, *Katalog Areskina*, Areskine Libri Philosphi. Historici et Philolog in quarto 38, No. 11 & 47ob. Areskine Libri Philos. Histor. et Philolog in 8vo et 12o, No. 86 (Alsted 2works); Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, No. 155 & eleven works by Jurieu: Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 135-37 & *Katalog Areskina*, 45ob. Areskine Libri Theologici in Quarto, No. 325, 58ob. Areskine Libri Theologici in Octavo et Duodecimo, Nos. 1-5 & Areskine Libri Theologici in Octavo et Duodecimo 59, No. 41.

ests that have been entirely overlooked by historians who have perceived them solely as wholehearted representatives of modern, secular and enlightened thought. There also exists ample evidence that Peter the Great himself shared a very similar outlook to these figures. These revelations do not necessitate a rejection of the long-standing assumption that the Russian Tsar looked to the West for his vision of a modern Russia. It merely requires the realisation that Western Europe itself had not undergone a radical paradigm shift towards the rational and secular, in the Kuhnian sense, at the start of the eighteenth century.

Indeed, I would argue that it is possible (and constructive) to radically re-evaluate the entire Petrine reform project in light of the ideals of Christian reformists of the seventeenth century, such as Francis Bacon, Johann Valentin Andreae and Jan Amos Comenius, in which science and religion fused to create an eschatological, yet progressive vision. Within this strand of Christian-utopian thought, both Masonic style brotherhoods and occult practice were given the freedom and scope to flourish throughout Europe, with Russia being no exception.

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Résumé:

Le règne de Pierre le Grand est considéré comme étant l'une des époques la plus marquante et contestée de l'histoire russe. Les réformes de cette période ont souvent été envisagées en tant que transformation ascendante d'une société désuète ou comme l'abrogation pernicieuse de la culture russe traditionnelle. Cette dichotomie réside dans une idée convenue du rationnel et du séculier de Pierre le Grand et de son règne.

Cette communication tente de réévaluer la dichotomie par l'étude de l'influence occulte et maçonnique qui prévalait à la cour de Pierre le Grand. Ces deux aspects complémentaires de la société et la culture pétrine ont été censurés ou mis à l'écart par des générations successives d'historiens, pourtant ceux-ci ont exercé une influence considérable sur certains des hommes d'état les plus puissants de l'époque, y compris le Tsar lui-même. L'examen de l'influence maçonnique et occulte de la Russie pétrine peut aider à surpasser l'image séculière forte de Pierre le Grand, sans remettre en cause la nature progressiste de ses réformes.

La première partie de l'article envisage les représentations symboliques solides du Tsar en tant que "Roi Maçon" et architecte d'une nouvelle Russie. Celle-ci dévoile une campagne convergente pour décrire Pierre le Grand comme le nouveau Roi David, conduisant son peuple (les nouveaux Israélites) vers les terres promises et la Nouvelle Jérusalem, concrétisée par la fondation de St. Pétersbourg. Nous examinerons ensuite comment la vision du monde de Pierre le grand (sa tolérance religieuse, sa curiosité scientifique tournée vers l'ésotérisme et sa passion pour les sociétés chevaleresques) était entièrement compatible avec les idéaux de la Franc-Maçonnerie, telle qu'elle se développait au XVIII^{ème} siècle.

Dans la deuxième partie de l'article, nous nous concentrerons sur les liens maçonniques et les forts intérêts occultes de Jacob Bruce (1669-1735), Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736) et Robert Erskine (1677-1718)—trois des plus grands hommes d'état de la Russie pétrine. Bruce, issu d'une famille jacobite écossaise, jouait un rôle actif dans presque tous les ressorts de la vie d'état russe, de l'armée à la promotion des sciences et de l'éducation. Prokopovich était la figure ecclésiastique la plus éminente de la Russie pétrine et un fidèle partisan des réformes de l'Etat de Pierre le Grand. Erskine, comme Bruce, descendait d'une famille Jacobite puissante d'Ecosse; il appréciait être proche de Pierre le Grand. Il était son Médecin en Chef, Directeur de la Chancellerie Médicale Russe et Directeur de la Kunstkamera de St. Pétersbourg et de la bibliothèque.

Ce triumvirat a joué un rôle actif dans la transformation de l'état Russe, toutefois, ils ne symbolisent pas des incarnations archétypes des lumières purement rationnelles et séculières. Ils affichaient tous un grand sentiment religieux et un intérêt marqué pour l'ésotérisme. Bruce et Erskine, en particulier, avaient de fortes attaches avec la Franc-Maçonnerie Jacobite. Pierre le Grand exhibait des intérêts similaires et était leur fervent bienfaiteur. Ainsi, nous espérons que notre article mettra en avant la prédominance nette des idéaux Maçonniques et d'une fascination pour l'occulte dans la Cour pétrine et permettra de façonner les transformations édictées durant cette période pivot de l'histoire russe.

Abstract

The reign of Peter the Great is regarded as one of the most significant and contentious epochs in Russian history. It has been customary to view the reforms of the period as either a progressive transformation of an antiquated society or the destructive suppression of traditional Russian culture. This dichotomy rests on an accepted perception of Peter the Great and his reign as rational and secular.

This paper attempts to revise this dichotomy by focussing on the Masonic and occult influence prevalent at the Petrine Court. These two complimentary aspects of Petrine society and culture have been censured or overlooked by successive generations of historians, yet they exerted a considerable hold on some of the most powerful statesmen of the period, including the Tsar himself. The importance of studying Masonic and occult influence in Petrine Russia lies in the fact that it can help to overcome the starkly secular image of Peter the Great, without denying the progressive nature of his reforms.

The first section of the article examines the powerful symbolic representations of the Tsar as a “Mason King” and architect of a new Russia. It reveals a concerted campaign to portray Peter the Great as a new King David, leading his people—new Israelites—to their promised land and a New Jerusalem, crystallised by the foundation of St. Petersburg. This is then followed by examining how Peter the Great’s worldview—encompassing religious tolerance, a scientific curiosity open to esotericism and a passion for chivalrous societies—was wholly compatible with the ideals of Freemasonry as it developed at the beginning of the eighteenth-century.

The second part of the paper focuses on the Masonic links and strong occult interests of Jacob Bruce (1669-1735), Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736) and Robert Erskine (1677-1718)—three of the most prominent statesmen in Petrine Russia. Bruce came from a Scottish Jacobite family and played an active role in practically all fields of Russian state life, ranging from the military to the promotion of science and education. Prokopovich was the most eminent ecclesiastic figure in Petrine Russia and a loyal stalwart of Peter the Great’s state reforms. Erskine, like Bruce, also descended from a powerful Jacobite family in Scotland. He enjoyed a close relationship with Peter the Great and was his Chief Physician and Head of the Russian Medical Chancellery, as well as being Director of the St. Petersburg *Kunstkamera* and Library.

This triumvirate played an active role in transforming the Russian State, but do not represent the archetypal embodiments of purely rational and secular enlighteners. They all displayed a strong religiosity and a marked interest in esoteric matters and Bruce and Erskine, in particular, had strong ties to Jacobite Freemasonry. Peter the Great displayed similar interests and acted as their enthusiastic patron. Thus, it is hoped that this paper will reveal the significant extent to which Masonic ideals and a fascination with the occult were rife at the Petrine Court and helped to shape the transformations enacted during this pivotal period in Russian history.

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