

A Century Mad and Wise

Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment

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Representing Imperial Power in Eighteenth-Century Russian Art: The Portrait Gallery of the Chesme Palace

EKATERINA SKVORTSOVA

Abstract

The problem of representing the monarch's power was of considerable importance for Russian art of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, Russia was proclaimed an empire, and the fine arts helped define the role of a Russian monarch in European context. On the other hand, it was a century of coup d'états and rulers also made use of the fine arts to validate their right to the throne. This paper examines these two aspects of the depiction of power based on a study of the Chesme Palace. It analyzes its portrait gallery of European monarchs, including: the reasons for the portraits' placement; the relationship between the painted portraits and the bas-relief portraits of Russian rulers; and Catherine II's consideration of the gallery in an unusual literary work. Finally, it offers a comparison of the image of power represented by the Chesme Palace portrait gallery with that of the *Tituliarnik* (1672), a diplomatic reference book containing a list of titles of Russian and foreign political leaders and their portraits that reflected similar ideas. If the tradition of the *Tituliarnik* served as a source for Russian ideas about the representation of monarchical power in the European context, the Chesme Palace marks the climax of their evolution.



Representing the monarch's power in Russian art of the eighteenth century involves two major issues – first, the validation of the ruling monarch's right to the throne, which was an urgent issue in an era of coups d'état; and second, defining monarchical power within the European context, which became especially important in light of the fact that from 1721 Russia proclaimed itself an empire and its rulers emperors. In the Chesme Palace gallery the validation of the ruling monarch's right to rule may be seen in the portraits of Russian rulers that inscribe the present-day Emperor into the line of legitimate Russian monarchs. Such series of portraits were immensely popular and existed in different forms of fine art – engraving, painting (both as series of portraits and a family tree), sculpture applied arts. The second aspect – depicting Russian monarchical power within the European context – was also expressed in the fine arts by a variety of representational means. Among them was presenting a Russian monarch together with one or many of his contemporary European counterparts or partnered with great world rulers of the past. However, in the fine arts such a serial form of manifesting monarchical power was relatively rare and has so far been mostly ignored in art historical scholarship.



Shubin F. A portrait of Grand Duke Sviatoslav Igorevich. Bas-relief medallion from the series of portraits of Russian Princes, Tsars and Emperors for the Chesme palace. 1774-1775. 112X91 cm. Marble. © The Museums of Moscow Kremlin, Moscow.

Notably, these two issues are interrelated. The idea of a pedigree supported by genealogical research gained special importance in Russia for the first time during the reign of Ivan IV, who was crowned as the first Russian tsar in 1547. In order to obtain confirmation of the title from the council of Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs the "Stepennaia kniga" (Royal Book of Degrees) was created. It proved Ivan IV's ancient lineage and demonstrated the Russian monarch's ties with other countries, particularly with Byzantium. Thus, the contemporary aspect – a venerable pedigree – implied family-ties with European ruling families of the past. The same idea was underpinned by legends, for example, that Riurik's power derived from Prus who was allegedly brother of the Roman Emperor Augustus, and another one about the royal regalia that was said to be handed down by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos to his grandson, Grand Prince Vladimir Monomakh. Fine arts also contributed to these ideas, for example, in the form of the portraits of Russian princes in the Archangel Cathedral and the Golden Chamber of the Moscow Kremlin.

In this article I will examine both of these aspects of monarchial power in the eighteenth century by looking at the Chesme Palace portrait gallery in which the idea of the emperor's succession and the monarch's place within the European community of rulers became the basis of the ensemble. The Chesme Palace was conceived as a stopping-off point on the road from St. Petersburg to the imperial summer residence of Tsarskoe Selo. Originally it was a swampy place "covered with wild forest and shrubs"¹ and known as "Kikerekeksinen" which means "frog marsh" in Finnish. Construction of the palace was entrusted to Iurii Veldten who created it in the Gothic taste in the years 1774-1780. In plan the palace is an equilateral triangle with round towers at the corners and a vast circular hall in the center. Later, between 1777-1780, a church dedicated to the birth of St. John the Baptist was built next to the palace (also by Veldten) to commemorate Russia's brilliant naval victory over Turkey in Chesme Bay (on June 24, 1770), during the first Russian-Turkish war. After consecration of the church the palace became known as the Chesme Palace.

Catherine II did not live in the Chesme Palace but often visited it. It was conceived not as a dwelling but as a kind of conceptual ensemble. The walls of the rooms were hung with portraits of European monarchs who ruled at the same time as Catherine II as well as members of their families, a total of fifty-nine portraits. These were all ceremonial, full-length, life-size portraits.² Above them were marble medallions with bas-relief portraits of Russian grand princes, tsars and emperors sculpted by F. Shubin. Foreign-born Catherine II was preoccupied with the idea of establishing herself as a genuinely-Russian empress and the Chesme Palace which looked like an ancestral castle containing portraits of preceding rulers of Russia was ideally suited for this purpose.³ Whereas bas-relief portraits of the Rurikids and the Romanovs were

1 I. G. Georgi, *Opisanie Rossiisko-imperatorskogo stolichnogo goroda Sankt-Peterburga i dostopamiatnostei v okrestnostiakh onogo* (St. Petersburg, 1794), 682.

2 J. G. Georgi, *Versuch einer Beschreibung der russisch Kaiserlichen Residenzstadt St. Petersburg und der Merkwürdigkeiten der Gegend*. 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1790), 2: 418-419.

3 E. A. Tartakovskaia, "Chesmenskii dvorets," *Vremennik otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv Gosudarstvennogo instituta*

to help Catherine II “fit” herself into a genealogy of Russian monarchs, the collection of portraits of European sovereigns was designed to represent her as a member of the community of world rulers, which could also be called “family,” insofar as most European ruling dynasties were closely linked by ties of kinship.

In the 1830s the abandoned palace became an alms-house for disabled war veterans. The medallions were moved to the Armory of the Kremlin in Moscow and the portraits of European monarchs to the English Palace in Peterhof and to the Gatchina Palace. In the 1920s, the portraits were transferred to the State Hermitage Museum. Some of them were later sold abroad. Thus, an integral ensemble was dispersed.

The Chesme Palace has attracted the attention of many researchers over the years. However the portrait gallery, one of its main glories, has remained in the shadows for a long time. It is mentioned without special analysis in the works of the early twentieth-century art historians A. Uspenskii, S. Troinitskii, A. Trubnikov, S. Goriainov, M. Izmailov, and V. Miller.⁴ In the Soviet period the portrait gallery was ignored, mostly for ideological reasons, except for an article by E. Tartakovskaia (1927) that is still one of the most thorough works on the gallery as a whole.⁵ In recent decades, interest in the portrait gallery of the Chesme Palace has increased considerably and information about individual pieces and the artists who created them has been collected. Substantial work has been undertaken in the Hermitage Museum by L. Dukel'skaia, L. Kagané, I. Nemilova, and N. Nikulin.⁶ Of special notice is the outstanding research of Elizaveta Renne who has identified all of the portraits from the gallery that are extant in various museum collections.⁷

istorii iskusstv. 1 (Leningrad, 1927), 172-193.

- 4 A. I. Uspenskii, “Novye dokumenty k istorii Petergofskikh dvortsov i fontanov v XVIII veke,” *Khudozhestvennye sokrovishcha Rossii* 2 (1902), 159-202; S. Troinitskii, “Chesmenskii dvorets,” *Starye gody* (iiul'-sentiabr' 1907), 471-475; A. Trubnikov, “Starye portrety starogo zamka,” *Starye gody* (iiul'-sentiabr' 1916), 86-99; S. Goriainov, “Khudozhestvennye vpechatleniia korolia Stanislava-Avgusta o svoem prebyvanii v Sankt-Peterburge v 1797 godu,” *Starye gody* (oktiabr' 1908), 587-613; M. Izmailov, *Putevoditel' po Petergofu (k 200-letiiu Petergofa)* (St. Petersburg: R. Golike i A. Vil'borg, 1909); M. F. Miller, “Frantsuzskaia zhivopis' XVII-XVIII vekov v novykh zalakh Ermitazha,” *Gorod* 1 (1923), 52-79.
- 5 Tartakovskaia, “Chesmenskii dvorets.”
- 6 L. A. Dukel'skaia, “Zametki k istorii kollektcionirovaniia angliiskoi zhivopisi v Ermitazhe v ekaterininskoe vremia,” in *S beregov Temzy na berega Nevy: Shedevry iz sobraniia britanskogo iskusstva v Ermitazhe*, ed. Brian Allen and L. A. Dukel'skaia (St. Petersburg: Gos. Ermitazh, 1997), 36-46; L. L. Kagané, “Portrety korolevskoi sem'i Portugalii kisti Migela Antoniu du Amaralaiz Chesmenskogo dvortsa,” *Ermitazhnye chteniia pamiati V. F. Levinsona-Lesinga* (2. III. 1893 – 27. VI. 1972): *Kratkoe sodержanie dokladov* (St. Petersburg, 1998), 12-15; L. L. Kagané, “Portrety korolevskoi sem'i Portugalii kisti Migela Antoniu du Amarala,” *Soobshcheniia Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha* 60 (St. Petersburg, 2003), 13-22; L. L. Kagané, “Portrety Karlosa III i printsev Asturiiskikh kisti Mariano Sal'vadora Maiel'i iz Chesmenskogo dvortsa,” *Soobshcheniia Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha* 67 (St. Petersburg, 2009), 128-136, also as: L. Kagané, “Portraits of Charles III and the Prince and Princess of Asturias from the Chesma Palace by Mariano Salvador Maella,” *Reports of the State Hermitage Museum* 67 (St. Petersburg, 2010), 128-136; *Frantsuzskaia zhivopis': XVIII vek. Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh. Sobraniezapadno-evropeiskoi zhivopisi: Katalog*, vol 10, comp. I. Nemilova (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1985); I. Nemilova, “Contemporary French Art in Eighteenth-Century Russia,” *Apollo* (June 1975), 428-442; *Nemetskaia i avstriiskaia zhivopis' XV-XVIII vekov. Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh. Sobranie zapadno-evropeiskoi zhivopisi: Nauchnyi katalog*, vol. 14, comp. N. N. Nikulin (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1988).
- 7 *Angliiskaia zhivopis' XVI-XIX vekov. Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh. Sobranie zapadno-evropeiskoi zhivopisi: Katalog*, vol. 13, comp. L. A. Dukel'skaia and E. P. Renne (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990); E. P. Renne, paper at the

In a recent publication the contemporary Russian art historian Andrey Karev acknowledges that “One of the important factors in the formation of portrait galleries in Russia was the search for new forms of representation of power, and at the same time justification of succession in the form of ‘Genealogy of the Russian state’.”⁸ How does the portrait gallery as part of the Chesme Palace negotiate this problem? My analysis will consider the following points: features of the gallery noted by contemporaries; the location of portraits in the rooms and the ideas behind their placement; the relationship between the painted and bas-relief portraits; and, lastly, the relationship of these portraits to a literary piece by Catherine II entitled “The Chesme Palace: A Conversation between Portraits and Medallions.”

A primary source on the gallery is the description compiled by a deacon of the Chesme church, Matvei Svetlov, in 1782, on the orders of General Engineer Mikhail Mordvinov, who was responsible for overseeing the construction of the Chesme Palace.⁹ It lists all of the painted portraits and bas-reliefs and mentions in which room they are displayed. Another important source is the *Description of the Topographic Attractions of Petersburg Province* (1797), composed by Balthazar Freiherr von Campenhausen, which also provides a list of portraits, but only the painted ones.¹⁰ Other descriptions of the Chesme ensemble exist, but do not contain specific lists of portraits.

All of the portraits in the Chesme Palace represented members of royal families who were alive when it was created, a fact noted by many contemporaries, including Polish King Stanislaus Augustus who visited the Palace in 1797.¹¹ Although Svetlov’s list labels some persons as “deceased” this should not mislead us.¹² The portrait of Louis XV is listed as of being of “the late French King”; Svetlov made his list in 1782 when Louis XV was already dead (he had died in 1774), but the portraits for the gallery had begun to be commissioned in the early 1770s, when the king was still alive. Similarly, portraits of the Portuguese King Joseph I (d. 1777), the Sardinian King, Emmanuel III (d. 1773), Maria Theresa of Austria (d. 1780) and Pope Clement XIV (d. 1774) were all commissioned during their lifetimes. There were also portraits of both spouses of the heir to the Russian throne Pavel Petrovich: the late Grand Duch-

symposium “The Enlightened Gaze: Gender, Power and Visual Culture in 18th-Century Russia,” Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, Georgia, the University of Georgia. November, 1-2, 2013, forthcoming in *The Enlightened Gaze: Gender, Power, and Visual Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, ed. Asen Kirin (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art).

- 8 Andrey A. Karev, “The Portrait Gallery in Eighteenth-Century Russia as an Ensemble: a Typological Aspect,” Abstracts, Research Forum “EXHIBIT ‘A’. Russian Art: Collections, Exhibitions and Archives,” The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, March 21-22, 2014; <http://ccrac.hoart.cam.ac.uk/exhibit-a-russian-art-collections-exhibitions-and-archives/>
- 9 M. Svetlov, *Dostopamiatnosti Chesmenskogo dvortsa, sostoiashhego po Moskovskoi doroge na 7-i verste ot Sankt-Peterburga, opisannye po prikazaniiu general-inzhenera i kavaleria Mordvinova nakhodiashhimsia pri tserkvi onogo dvortsa d’iakonom Matveem Svetlovym* (St. Petersburg, 1782).
- 10 B. F. von Campenhausen, *Auswahl topographischer Merkwürdigkeiten des St. Peterburgischen Gouvernements* (Riga, 1797). Campenhausen lists the same portraits as Svetlov, although in a different order which does not correspond to the rooms. We should not be confused by the fact that the last portrait bears number 58; in fact, there are 59 portraits on the list (as on Svetlov’s) but number 17 is repeated by mistake.
- 11 Goriainov, “Khudozhestvennye vpechatleniia,” 602.
- 12 Svetlov, *Dostopamiatnosti*, 10.



Dance N. Portrait of the Queen Sophie Charlotte. 1773. Oil, canvas. 240x147 cm. © The State Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg, 2015.

ess Natalia Alekseevna (née Princess Wilhelmina of Hessen-Darmstadt), who died in 1776 – but who was alive when the portraits for the gallery were commissioned – and Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna (née Princess Sophia Dorothea of Württemberg) who became Paul's wife in 1776. The inclusion of both of these portraits reflects how the portrait gallery was updated with the changing membership of the Russian royal family.

In retrospect, these portraits were appreciated primarily for their historical value. Thus, Uspenskii emphasizes that “many of them are remarkable art works (by Alizard, Thomire, Ericksen, West) and all [are remarkable] as historical documents. In particular, these sumptuous formal portraits are valuable for the history of costume in the eighteenth century.”¹³ As far as costume is concerned one should not overlook Campenhausen's remark that some clothing is borrowed from an earlier period.¹⁴ Many eighteenth-century authors who visited Chesme remarked upon the artistic quality of the portraits and speak of them as of “somewhat exemplary works” (Johann Gottlieb Georgi)¹⁵ and assert that the “paintings are for the most part painted in a masterly fashion” (Johann Bellermann).¹⁶ Heinrich Storch writes that “there are first-class masterpieces among them,”¹⁷ while Campenhausen also notes that some of these works were notable “for their artistic value.”¹⁸ A more sober evaluation was voiced by the English ambassador, James Harris, who wrote: “There is no portrait which stands out for drawing, colouring or composition in the whole collection except the one depicting two senior princes, painted by West.”¹⁹ Certainly, Catherine II wanted high-quality portraits, and the commissions for these works were in every case entrusted to a renowned artist who worked for the court of the ruler represented (Benjamin West and Nathaniel Dance in Britain, Laurent Pécheux in Parma, Lorens Pasch the Younger in Sweden, Anna Dorothea Therbusch-Lisiewska in Prussia, Jean-Baptiste Alizard in France, Migel Antoniu du Amaral in Portugal, Mariano Salvador Maella in Spain, among others). However, the portraits, though competently executed, are far from superior works of art. The reasons for this seem to be different in each case.

Some new information concerning the gallery's portraits can be found in documents from the Russian State Historical Archive, many of which were discovered by E. A. Tartakovskaia. However, neither she nor other researchers have made full use of this information. The documents reveal how Catherine allocated financial resources for artistic commissions, revealing not only the cost of the portraits but also the names of the artists, ambassadors, and merchants who were involved in the transactions. Here are some examples. In May 1773 a merchant named Veldten received 770 rubles

13 Uspenskii, “Novye dokumenty,” 196.

14 Campenhausen, *Auswahl topographischer*, 163-164.

15 Georgi, *Versuch einer Beschreibung*, 2: 418.

16 Johann Joachim Bellermann, *Bemerkungen über Russland: in Rücksicht auf Wissenschaft, Kunst, Religion und andere merkwürdige Verhältnisse*...., 2 vols. (Erfurt: Georg Adam Keyser, 1788), 1: 269.

17 Heinrich von Storch, *Gemälde von St. Petersburg*, 2 vols. (Riga: Hartknoch, 1793), 1: 93.

18 Campenhausen, *Auswahl topographischer*, 163.

19 Dukel'skaia, *Zametki k istorii kollektionirovaniia*, 39.

for portraits of the Neapolitan royal family and of the Pope.²⁰ On September 3, 1773, Vice-Chancellor Golitsyn was given 2,323 rubles 50 kopeks to pay for bills sent from Madrid for portraits of the Spanish royal family.²¹ 1,317 rubles 25 kopeks were paid to the merchant Bahman on September 10, 1773, after a bill was sent to Prince Golitsyn from Prince Dolgorukii in Berlin for portraits of the Prussian Royal family.²² On August 4, 1775, a banknote from Prince Golitsyn for 535 rubles 96 kopeks (862 guilders and 32 coins) paid for seven portraits of the Roman royal family that had been received in 1774, in addition to 2901 rubles, 98 kopeks that had already been paid in 1773.²³ In December, 1777, 1,461 rubles were paid for two bills sent from Madrid and Vienna “from the local ministers Zinoviev and Prince Golitsyn” for portraits of the king and queen of Naples, according to a letter from Vice-Chancellor Count Osterman.²⁴ On June 16, 1778, the merchants Vogenvol and Severin were paid 327 rubles 91 kopek for delivery from Vienna of these portraits according to another letter of Count Osterman.²⁵ It is interesting to note that in 1778 800 rubles were paid to the artist Dmitrii Levitskii “for the portrait of the Prussian king,”²⁶ although such a picture by Levitskii is not mentioned in any sources or the historiography. It is possible that the portrait might have been connected with the Chesme Palace as the gallery was being formed at that very time and as of now the portrait of Frederick II has not been found in any museum collections. Moreover, the sum of money paid is comparable to those paid for other portraits intended for the gallery; Levitskii’s portrait might not have been necessarily painted for the gallery, but could have been a copy of the Chesme one, for instance.

The portrait gallery of the Chesme Palace was unusual for Russia. First, the collection was conceived as an integral whole. All of the portraits are of approximately the same size, full-length life-size depictions. Second, the portraits were all of contemporaries of Catherine II, and what is more, only those who were alive at the time the gallery was created. Further, the gallery attempted to be fully representative: there were portraits of almost all of the royal families of that time (from fourteen states). Moreover, there were portraits not only of ruling couples, but also of their children and step-children (up to nine of them). In Europe galleries of royal portraits had been created since the sixteenth century, although Campenhausen suggested that such a full collection of ruler portraits as found in the Chesme Palace could not have been found elsewhere. A competitive collecting policy was typical for Catherine II who wanted to catch up with and outmatch Europe as quickly as possible; it was for this reason that she purchased entire European art collections for the Hermitage gallery. Such an ambitious type of collecting appeared strange to some European visitors. For instance,

20 Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), f. 468, op. 1, ch. 2, 1773, d. 3888 (Imennye i vysochaishie ukazy), l. 93.

21 Ibid., l. 161.

22 Ibid, l. 177.

23 RGIA, f. 468, op. 1, ch. 2, 1773, d. 3890 (Imennye i vysochaishie ukazy), l.15 verso – 16, l. 141 verso.

24 RGIA, f. 468, op. 1, ch. 2, 1777, d. 3892 (Imennye i vysochaishie ukazy), l.15 verso, l. 186.

25 RGIA, f. 468, op. 1, ch. 2, 1778, d. 3893 (Imennye i vysochaishie ukazy), l. 104 verso.

26 Ibid., l. 33, 55 verso.

Stanislaus Augustus described the Chesme palace portrait gallery as “odd,”²⁷ and Bellerman was of the same opinion.²⁸

The problem still presents itself how the portraits were presented in the gallery. According to Georgi, they were hung in rooms which encircled “the room of the Cavalry Duma” on the second floor, i.e. the central circular domed hall, which got this name after the palace was dedicated to the Order of St. George in 1782.²⁹ Georgi does not mention the exact location of portraits except for those of the Russian imperial family – Catherine II, Paul I and both his wives which, Georgi asserts, were displayed in the last room. This does not accord with the information provided by Svetlov who was the only author to take pains to describe which portraits were in each particular room. He writes that they were located “in room №1 from the entrance from the grand staircase.” Terms such as “first” and “last” are to some extent ambivalent and these depend on one’s chosen direction: two of the rooms have entrances from the staircase situated in the tower in one of the corners of the palace triangular in shape and its galleries around the central hall form a through passage.

So Svetlov and Georgi might well have meant the same room. However, we can deduce that a visitor was supposed to start his tour through the gallery from the room containing the bas-relief portraits of Riurik, Oleg and Igor, as they were the progenitors of the Riurikid dynasty and hence of Russian history; in the next rooms portraits of Russian rulers continued in chronological order. And it was in this very room with the bas-relief of Riurik that the portraits of Catherine II, Paul and his wives were hung. Therefore, Svetlov is evidently accurate when describing the location and destination of the room with portraits of the Russian imperial family which greeted guests in the entry hall of the palace.

Which portraits were originally in the central hall? The choice could not be accidental as it was the compositional and semantic center of the palace. As Svetlov noted, the portraits here were of the Austrian ruling house and of the offspring of the French house who intermarried with them. According to the hierarchy of European monarchs the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire could have been considered the chief secular sovereign and the location of portraits of the Austrian house may have suggested its leading position in the European political system. Even the portrait of Louis – later Louis XVI of France – was located with portraits of the house of Austria and not with the house of France on the grounds that his wife Marie Antoinette was an Austrian princess. In other cases, portraits of a couple were placed together with the family of the husband. The placement of Louis’ portrait in the central hall with portraits of his wife’s family demonstrated the supremacy of the house of Austria. Because of this, portraits of members of the French house were scattered: the portrait of Louis XV was with portraits of the Swedish house, and those of his daughter Maria Adelaide and his grandsons Louis Stanislaus, Count of Provence (1818-1824

27 Goriainov, “Khudozhestvennye vpechatleniia,” 602.

28 Bellermann, *Bemerkungen über Russland*, 269. Approximate translation: “A gallery of this kind is unusual for a Gothic palace. So much effort has gone into it, and all in the name of producing an effect, a surprise.”

29 Georgi, *Opisanie*, 495.

– later the French King Louis XVIII), and Charles Philip d’Artois (from 1824–1830 – King of France Charles X) were hung with portraits of the Sardinian house. The predominance of other houses over the French in these rooms made the latter seem completely overshadowed.

Nevertheless, the location of portraits of the Austrian imperial family in the central hall should be regarded as a diplomatic gesture towards Austria. During the late 1770s and early 1780s Catherine II embarked on the so-called “Greek Project,” a plan to expel the Turks from Europe and the Balkans and to establish an independent Greek empire that would be ruled by her grandson, Grand Duke Constantine, under the auspices of Russia. Asen Kirin has convincingly argued that the creation of the Chesme Palace was conceived to express the idea of the revival of an Orthodox empire in the East and Russia as a natural successor to Byzantium, and this by means of its ensemble of art and architecture. The palace was devised to be a counterpart of the Byzantine ensemble of Hebdomon, a suburban palace near Constantinople associated with Justinian and destroyed sometime before 1260; this was reflected in the Chesme Palace’s location and in the dedication of its main church.³⁰ These features were supplemented by the visual material contained in the portrait gallery. As part of the “Greek Project” Catherine II was seeking to forge an alliance with Austria. In 1780, the Austrian Emperor Joseph II arrived in St. Petersburg incognito under the name of Count Falkenstein, and the Chesme church was consecrated in his presence. After this the august guest was invited to the Chesme Palace. The dining table in the central hall was set with the famous “Green Frog service” – exactly where the portraits of the Austrian ruling house were displayed.³¹ This was a gesture of hospitality to Joseph II who dined as if in the company of his relatives, to say nothing of the fact that the central location of the portraits clearly indicated the exceedingly high evaluation of Austrian status. Even though the palace was not initially conceived as a monument specifically to the Chesme victory, this idea fit perfectly into the political program it expressed. The portrait gallery implied Russia’s lofty position in Europe, while the concept of the architectural ensemble as a whole suggested the idea that Russia was the heir to Byzantium. The Chesme victory, one of the most decisive in the first Russian-Turkish War (1768-1774), offered the real possibility of implementing the “Greek project.” Hence the placement of the portraits of the Austrian family in the central hall for Joseph II, Catherine’s desired ally, was thus both a symbolic act and a calculated diplomatic gesture.

As E. Anisimov has remarked, Catherine II “ambitiously and jealously kept track [of her status and that of Russia] on a European and global scale,”³² and she could not have liked like the idea of placing portraits of the Austrian royal house in the center of her gallery. Soon after the visit of Joseph II, when the intended diplomatic effect had

30 Asen Kirin, “The Edifices of the New Justinian: Catherine the Great Regaining Byzantium,” *Approaches to Byzantine Architecture and Its Decoration: Studies in Honour of Slobodan Ćurčić* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 277-304.

31 M. K. Filosofov, “K istorii serviza s zelenoi liagushkoi,” *Sredi kollektionerov* 5-6 (1924), 18.

32 E. V. Anisimov. *Zhenshchiny na rossiiskom prestole* (St. Petersburg: Norint, 2003), 369.

been achieved, they were removed to other rooms. We can reach this conclusion from descriptions recorded after 1782 when the palace was given over to the Cavalry Duma of the Order of St. George; now mention is only made of Catherine's portrait over a canopy in the central hall but not of any Austrian portraits.

Another issue concerning the grouping of portraits is the placement of that of Pope Clement XIV. The time when the pope was considered the supreme overlord of Western Europe had long passed. Nonetheless, in Catholic countries he was still highly regarded. For Orthodox Russia the pontiff was not as important as for Catholic Europe, and therefore his portrait was not hung in the central hall, although this might have been conceivable. Rather, he was put in the room with the portraits of the Spanish royal family. This choice may be ascribed to the fact that Spain was a country still faithful to Catholicism, but this was obviously not the only reason. Clement XIV had been elected pope under pressure from the kings of France and especially of Spain who wanted to place a dependent on the Papal throne and have him dissolve the Order of the Jesuits, which he did in 1773 (via the papal decree "Dominus ac Redemptor"). Catherine II did not recognize this decree and provided the Jesuits a refuge in Russia. Thus the location of this portrait of this pope with the Spanish royal family indicated his close and perhaps narrowly political and religious link with Spain.

The total number of bas-relief portraits of Russian rulers in the Chesme palace is fifty-eight, almost as many as the painted portraits (fifty-nine). Such quantitative equality suggests that both aspects – the succession of power in Russia and the prestige of the country abroad – appeared equally important. The retrospective line – the portraits of past Russian rulers – and the modern one – contemporary European rulers – were differentiated by the use of different materials and techniques. The bas-reliefs of Russian rulers were, like the paintings, life-size depictions, although only half- and not full-length. The use of color makes the paintings look animated, while the medium of marble bas-reliefs creates greater distance between the viewer and the image. The bas-relief portraits were placed in the rooms in chronological order and how many of them were in a room depended basically on the room's size. But in the central domed hall which had a symbolic aura, the selection of portraits was used to illustrate a certain idea. Predictably, there were portraits of the ruling dynasty, the Romanovs, with a total of nine (Mikhail, Aleksei, Fedor, Ioann, Peter, Catherine, Peter II, Anna and Elizabeth); for obvious reasons, there was no image of Peter III, nor was there any of Ioann VI or his regent Anna Leopoldovna.

However, the presence of a portrait of Vasilii Shuiskii in the central hall is surprising as he was not representative of the Romanov dynasty and his rule was associated with the Time of Troubles. What could be the reason for placing it here? This might be attributed to Catherine's desire to emphasize that the autocratic form of rule is natural for Russia, something she used her utmost ingenuity to persuade Europe of. In her anonymously published *Antidote* (1770) Shuiskii's overthrow is explained by the fact that he had "wanted to change the form of [Russia's] government," and the election of Tsar Mikhail Romanov is described as having "ended the trials and tribu-

lations of the fatherland.”³³ This idea is reinforced by the inscriptions on the frames of the bas-reliefs, which recorded not only names, but dates and events of the reign, and also how each tsar got to the throne.³⁴ As L. Gavrilova argues, these inscriptions were extracts from M. V. Lomonosov’s *Kratkoi Rossiiskoi letopisets s rodosloviem* (Short Russian Chronicle with a Genealogy) of 1760 and repeated those on the reverse side of the medals of the so-called “portrait series” (which depicted portraits of Russian princes and kings).³⁵ Hence on Vasilii Shuiskii’s portrait frame must have been written: “elected to be the tsar,” while the frame of Mikhail Romanov’s portrait must have had “unanimously elected to the tsar’s throne.”³⁶ Given the fact that all of the inscriptions are short and similar, this difference seems noteworthy.

The concept of the Chesme Palace might have been devised personally by Catherine II, but we lack direct evidence of this. The only source making this claim is by Bellerman, who asserts that “She created the whole idea.”³⁷ Catherine II wanted to promote the high status of the Russian Empire as governed by a legitimate ruler and united by ties of kinship with other European ruling houses. Campenhausen mentions that the frames of both painted portraits and medallions “were expensive, heavily gilded and partly decorated with coats-of-arms and insignia.”³⁸ The rhetoric of the formal portraits and the lavish decor of the gallery thus created what G. V. Vdovin has called “a space devoted to the expression of glory.”³⁹

The same idea was expressed by Catherine II in a literary piece dedicated to the gallery entitled “The Chesme Palace: A Conversation between Portraits and Medallions” (*Le Château de Tchesma: L’entretien des portraits et medallions*) – but this time by completely different means, this time through irony.⁴⁰ In Russian literature of the time there are no other examples of literary works containing a conversation between animated portraits. Such a form closely resembles the “Dialogues of the Dead,” a genre which emerged in antiquity and enjoyed great popularity in European and Russian literature of the eighteenth century.⁴¹ Bringing together characters from different

33 L.M. Gavrilova, *Russkaia istoricheskaia mysl’ i medal’ernoie iskusstvo v epokhu Ekateriny II* (St. Petersburg: Gornyj Institut im. G.V. Plekhanova, 2000), 161.

34 When the medallions were transferred from the Chesme Palace to the Moscow Kremlin Armory the frames were replaced with new ones with more concise inscriptions.

35 The history of the portrait series needs further research. No documents revealing the author of the series or anything about the process of the work have yet been found. Gavrilova asserts it was started in 1768. Gavrilova, *Russkaia istoricheskaia mysl’*, 48-49, 53-55.

36 Smirnov V.P. *Opisanie russkikh medalei* (Moscow: S.-Peterburgskii Monetniy Dvor, 1908), 19. Gavrilova rightly argues that the inscriptions on the frames of bas-reliefs in the Chesme palace (we know them from Svetlov’s description of the palace) were the same as on the medals of the Portrait series. But in the case of Vasilii Shuiskii and Mikhail Romanov in Svetlov’s description inscriptions they are the same, both “elected to be the tsar”, whereas in the Medals of the Portrait series as well as in Lomonosov’s *Kratkoi Rossiiskoi letopisets* they differ. Is this a discrepancy between the sources or Svetlov’s error?

37 Bellerman, *Bemerkungen über Russland*, 267.

38 Campenhausen, *Auswahl topographischer*, 164.

39 G. V. Vdovin, “Portretnoe izobrazhenie i obshchestvo v Rossii XVIII veka: Neskol’ko tezisov o funktsii zameshcheniia,” *Voprosy iskusstvovedeniia* 2-3 (1994), 245-287; these words are on 260-261.

40 *Sochineniia Imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. A. N. Pypina, 12 vols (St. Petersburg: Akademiia Nauk, 1901 – 1907), 12: 583-594.

41 See Nicoletta Marcialis, *Caronte e Caterina. Dialoghi dei morti nella letteratura russa del XVIII secolo* (Rome:

epochs and countries lends itself perfectly for historical apologia or critique by giving them the chance to explain their actions. Needless to say, the past was projected into the present and often reflected the burning political problems of the day.

“The Conversation between Portraits and Medallions” opens up the same possibilities. Catherine II writes gracefully, with a touch of irony. Disconnected phrases, half-dreams, half-reality suggest that the discussion is being overheard at night in an old ancestral castle – which the Chesme Palace must have appeared to be, even though it had just been built. In an unobtrusive way, Catherine II uses this form to express her ideas. She brings to light the shortcomings of certain European monarchs and of her immediate Russian predecessors in order to prove her own superiority. At the same time she spotlights the virtues of the ancient Russian princes and of Peter the Great.

This literary piece also adds new shadings to Catherine’s understanding of kinship. In the conversation, Catherine has Peter the Great call her his “granddaughter,” but evidently not as wife of his grandson Peter III, but as a successor to his daughter Elizabeth. However, actual kinship still does matter, and Catherine seizes the chance to mention the familial links of the Riurikid ruling house to European dynasties. The fact that Catherine did not belong to the Romanovs by blood certainly played a role in such an artful presentation of family ties. Her conception of these relationships can be further enriched by examining the correspondence of Catherine II who kept in touch with many European monarchs. Tellingly, she often addresses a royal recipient as “brother” or “sister” and signs her letters as “sister,” although this did not necessarily imply a direct blood relationship. In the secularized eighteenth century the Christian overtones of the words “brother” and “sister” were gradually fading away. “Kinship” was associated with proximity, friendship, and equal status. Such a loosely interpreted “kinship” became a main principle of the Chesme Palace ensemble.

This assertion leads us to examine how the Russian monarch’s power was reflected in art before the creation of the Chesme Palace, in whatever the medium, and how it presented the idea of Russia as a part of Europe. This problem requires special exploration, and here I can only outline similarities and distinctions between two key monuments, comparing the portrait gallery of the Chesme Palace to an important source work for these ideas in Russia, the *Tituliarnik* (book of titles), a reference book listing the titles of Russian and foreign rulers and political figures. The portrait gallery, in our opinion, marks the climax of the evolution of the monarchial idea whose origin may be traced back to the *Tituliarnik*.

The *Tituliarnik*, also known as “Bol’shaia Gosudareva Kniga” (the Sovereign’s Great Book) or “Koren’ Rossiiskikh Gosudarei...” (Roots of Russian Sovereigns), is a manuscript volume dating from the time of Aleksei Mikhailovich, created in 1672 in the Posol’skii prikaz (Foreign Office) as a diplomatic reference book. Richly ornamented with illustrations, it contains thirty portraits of Russian princes and tsars from Riurik to Aleksei Mikhailovich, thirteen portraits of Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs, including Moscow ones, and twenty-two portraits of contemporary foreign rulers.⁴²

Bulzoni, 1989).

42 This refers to the copy of the *Tituliarnik* in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts. In a copy from the Russian

M. Maksimova established that these portraits were an iconographic source for the series of dynastic portrait cameos by I. Dorsh circa 1723, namely for the part of it which depicts medieval Russian princes, and that it also provided the model for most portrait groups of Russian rulers regardless of the medium.⁴³ The *Tituliarnik* also played a role in representing images of the Russian tsar in the company of foreign rulers. In this regard, the following should be noted:

1. The *Tituliarnik* was sumptuously decorated. Although it was meant for the tsar, it was decided to keep it in the Posol'skii prikaz – clearly, not only to be used as a diplomatic reference book, but also to be shown to foreign ambassadors. Two smaller copies of the book were made for Aleksei Mikhailovich and his son Fedor Alekseevich.

2. The *Tituliarnik* had an all-embracing character. It offered not only portraits of all Russian rulers, but also of contemporary monarchs of all the countries with which Russia had diplomatic links.

3. It also had a “Eurocentric” character, as noted by M. Lukichev.⁴⁴

4. It focused on contemporary foreign monarchs. The captions beneath the portraits in the *Tituliarnik* always name the rulers of the time when the book was created, although in some cases the portraits actually represent not them, but their predecessors who were already dead. This was due to the lack of material at the disposal of the artists.⁴⁵ However, the very fact of emphasizing through captions that a modern ruler is being depicted is telling.

Notably, at the same time as the *Tituliarnik* another book appeared which indicated the place of a Russian monarch in the world by asserting that his power was inherited from biblical kings and Roman emperors. In the years 1672-73 a book entitled *Vasiliologion, or Listing of Assyrian, Persian, Hebrew, Greek, Roman and Pious-Greek Tsars and Russian Princes and Tsars the Most Valiant and Courageous in Battles* (*Vasiliologion, ili Soischeslenie tsarei assiriiskikh, perskikh, evreiskikh, grecheskikh, rimskikh i blagochestivo-grecheskikh, i velikikh kniazei i gosudarei, kotorye vo branekh doblestneishie i muzhestvenneishie*) was created which was accompanied by twenty-six portraits by Bogdan Saltanov (which, however, have not been preserved).⁴⁶

Although the Chesme Palace appeared more than a century after the *Tituliarnik*, as a programmatic complex or representations it is marked by the same major features: 1) the serial depiction of a contemporary Russian emperor or empress together with both his Russian predecessors and contemporary foreign rulers; 2) a Eurocentric orientation that only increased by the time of the Chesme Palace, which unlike the *Tit-*

National library there are seventy-four portraits and a copy from the State Hermitage contains fifty-four. See the recent publication: *Tsarskii tituliarnik*, ed. Iu. M. Eskin, 2 vols. (Moscow: Fond Stoliarova, 2007).

43 M. Maksimova, “Portrety russkikh kniazei i gosudarei raboty rezchika Ioganna Dorsha,” *Sbornik Gos. Ermitazha* 3 (Leningrad, 1926), 133-149.

44 Iu. M. Eskin, “Tituliarnik – teksty i illiustratsii,” *Tsarskii Tituliarnik*, vol. 2: *Teksty, issledovaniia, materialy* (Moscow: Fond Stoliarova, 2007), 13.

45 *Ibid.*, 12-33.

46 O. P. Sviatukha, “Seriinost’ v russkikh portretakh XVII veka,” *Gumanitarnye issledovaniia v Vostochnoi Sibiri i na Dal’nem Vostoke* 3 (2008), 43-47; see esp. 44. On the political importance of the work, see Paul Bushkovitch, “The *Vasiliologion* of Nikolai Spafarii Milescu,” *Russian History* 36, no. 1 (2009), 1 – 15.

uliarnik contains no portraits of oriental rulers and which focuses totally on Europe. Portraits of a Russian ruler within in a series of images of foreign rulers did not have wide circulation in Russia, whereas dynastic suites of Russian rulers did. Such cycles illustrating the contemporary ruling emperor's inheritance of the throne from past Russian rulers confirmed the legitimacy of power – a top-priority issue for a century of coups d'état. Another factor in their popularity was the old tradition of serial images of Russian princes and tsars in the frescoes of cathedrals and in depictions of the royal family tree in the parvis of churches – a tradition which presupposed a whole set of ideas about power. On the other hand, the idea of depicting a Russian monarch in the circle of European sovereigns was new. Significantly, it appeared in the time of Aleksei Mikhailovich, which once again proves the continuity of Russian culture of the seventeenth century into the eighteenth. But it took time for the idea to develop. The Chesme Palace ensemble demonstrates how the Europeanizing trend had become such a significant component in the Russian concept of power that it gained powerful expression in art.