

## Why Republics Always Fail: Pondering Feofan Prokopovich's Poetics of Absolutism\*

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### Abstract:

*The article considers Feofan Prokopovich's contribution to redefining Russian monarchical ideology. In the first section, it uncovers an implicit polemic with Samuel Pufendorf's assessment of republican and mixed forms of governance. The second section traces the evolution of the genre of the Pindaric ode, with its attendant poetics of autocratic agency, in Polish Neo-Latin tradition leading up to Feofan's Epinikion, written to celebrate Peter's victory at Poltava.*

### Keywords:

Feofan Prokopovich; Samuel Pufendorf; Pindaric ode; neo-Latin poetry; republicanism; absolutism

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### o. Introduction

In spite of what the etymology of *republic* (from Latin *res publica*, “public matter, commonwealth”) may suggest, modern republics bear little resemblance to the Roman or Ancient Greek polities. Far more importantly, as a worldview and as a conceptual apparatus, European republicanism evolved in an insistent and invariably tendentious engagement with its classical precedents.<sup>1</sup> This relationship was not always that of celebratory emulation or piecemeal ideological appropriation, as has been the case since the late eighteenth century. In the earlier periods, a notion of classical republicanism was necessarily juxtaposed to, and often pitted against, a cross-culturally prevalent royalism. In particular, the fall of the Roman republic and its transformation into an empire was interpreted differently depending on the interpreter's political views and cultural ambience, and any given account of that particular episode was easily extended to other “republican” moments in European history. Whereas Niccolò Machiavelli and James

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\* The author would like to thank Arkady Bliumbaum, Luba Golburt, Kinch Hoekstra, Victoria Ivleva, Yuri Kagarlitskiy, Evgenii Kazartsev, and Evgenii Roshchin, who contributed valuable suggestions at different phases of my work on this article. It was originally presented in December 2012 at a conference at the European University in St. Petersburg “The Republican Tradition: From the Hanseatic League to the Era of Enlightenment” and I thank the organizers and the audience members for their reactions. In November 2012, Viktor Markovich Zhivov read and commented on an early draft of this paper. The debt I owe to him extends far beyond my gratitude for the attentiveness to my work that he displayed on that and countless other occasions.

<sup>1</sup> As a term for a form of government, “republican” is not to be confused with the use of “republican” in reference to a theory of freedom (contrasted with the notion of liberty found in traditional liberalism). The “republican” concept of liberty was initially defined as “neo-Roman” by Quentin Skinner (*Liberty before Liberalism* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998]). While upholding the neo-roman notion of liberty, Machiavelli and some seventeenth-century thinkers, such as John Locke, permit a monarchical element in the governing of a “free state.” Others, such as John Hall and Francis Osborne, pursue a more radical vision, viewing solitary rule as inimical to liberty (Skinner, *Liberty*, 53-57).

Harrington cited the case of ancient Rome to prove that republican governance is most conducive to human greatness,<sup>2</sup> others—like Samuel Pufendorf and Feofan Prokopovich—would point to the instability and short life span of the Roman republic. An ideological stance was thus reflected in the historiographical, or meta-historical, lens.

In a more nuanced mode of engagement with the classical past, certain forms of discourse that had a Graeco-Roman genealogy were propagated and cultivated as a vehicle of a royalist or a republican stance. One preeminent example is furnished by national epics modeled on Virgil's *Aeneid*, which tells the story of the transfer of power from Troy to the newly colonized Italy. From Ronsard's *La Franciade* to Kheraskov's *Rossiada*, Virgil's poem provided a pattern for a particular kind of nationalist rhetoric that claimed a link to the foundational imperial precedent. The standing of the *Aeneid* as a quintessential epic until the early nineteenth century was due to its association with that reusable ideology of *traditio imperii*.<sup>3</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, the genre of epistles—from Petrarch's *Epistolae* to Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letters*—invited, due to Cicero's and Seneca's precedents, a more privatized sensibility, in tune with a republican stance stressing equality between autarkic, self-governing individuals.

The significance of ideological structures embedded within literary genres is largely overlooked by political historians, who divide their attention between the history of institutions and the history of ideas. Yet to understand the viability of a culturally prevalent worldview, we need to go beyond its institutional and intellectual components. It seems undeniable that royalism, for instance, thrives on deeply entrenched conceptual schemata and mythologies, and disposes of powerful means of inculcating them. Viktor Zhivov's work on the history of Russian "state mythology" (*gosudarstvennyi mif*) in the eighteenth century rightly privileges literary sources, particularly poetic forms with high public visibility, such as panegyric, panegyric sermon, and the solemn (Pindaric) ode (*torzhestvennaia oda*).<sup>4</sup> Inasmuch as literature employs semantic elements least capable of transposition into rational argument (such as images, topoi, rhetorical devices, etc.), it provides the most eloquent historical witness to the insidious workings not just of political regimes, but of regimes of meaning and meaning-making.<sup>5</sup>

The following discussion pursues these two lines of inquiry: historiographical and genre-based. Whereas meta-historical commentary often conceives of modern forms of governance in terms of their putative ancient analogues, inherited literary genre conjures a particular *ideological poetics* that, in the case under discussion, also goes back to a

<sup>2</sup> Skinner, *Liberty*, 61-64.

<sup>3</sup> See David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> V. M. Zhivov, "Gosudarstvennyi mif v epokhu Prosveshcheniia i ego razrushenie v Rossii kontsa XVIII veka" (1989), in *Razyskaniia v oblasti istorii i predystorii russkoi kul'tury* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002), 439-460.

<sup>5</sup> For a methodological precedent for merging poetics and cultural history under the rubric of "the politics of meaning," see Leslie Kurke's New Historicist study *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold: the Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999). Whereas New Historicism was spearheaded by literary scholars, a roughly-contemporary literary turn in the discipline of history, associated with the work of Hayden White, while entailing closer scrutiny of different ways of "emplotting" historical narratives, did not lead to a sustained attention to the history of literary forms and their immanent ideologies.

classical precedent. My particular objective is to consider how these two strategies were used in Petrine Russia, at an early stage of the molding of modern Russian absolutist monarchy—a political form that, increasingly referred to as “autocratic” in Western sources beginning in the later eighteenth century, was destined to outlast its European counterparts, holding out successfully against the emerging republican alternatives.<sup>6</sup> In stressing the pertinence of the classical tradition in the making of absolutism in Russia, I am inspired by Zhivov and Uspensky’s path-breaking study of the shifting meanings of Graeco-Roman antiquity in Russia.<sup>7</sup> The classical past is not a self-evident datum; it comes in many forms that are always open to appropriation and reinterpretation by historical agents operating in different cultural milieus.

The central role assigned to Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736)—the most eloquent spokesman for Peter’s reforms and perhaps the most brilliant intellectual of his time in Russia—in a study of the political aspects of Peter’s reign is entirely expected. Nevertheless, the precise nature of his contribution to Petrine ideology is open to debate. A well-established consensus, deriving from Georgii Gurvich’s foundational monograph of 1915, depicts Feofan as a mediator of Western political theories that he put to work to buttress Peter’s claims to unlimited royal power.<sup>8</sup> In a recent highly stimulating piece, Paul Bushkovitch offered a thorough critique of this widespread view, as well as of the basis of Gurvich’s analysis.

As Bushkovitch shows, neither Hugo Grotius nor Samuel Pufendorf—the two figures whose ideas, on Gurvich’s account, Feofan was thought to transplant to Russian soil—can reasonably be described as proponents of absolute monarchies. Moreover, as Bushkovitch goes on to argue, Feofan was not interested in their political theories: Feofan’s use of Grotius is limited to his legal writings on parental rights, cited in *Pravda voli monarshei*, and evidence for his engagement with Pufendorf is lacking. Feofan, according to Bushkovitch, was well aware of the limited relevance of Western political thought to Petrine Russia. Instead, his argumentative tools—such as the Pauline notion of the divine foundation of worldly authority or the need for obedience—operated in a Russian context in which legal tradition was virtually non-existent. What had to be borrowed from the West were practices and “forms of administration,” rather than ideas or theories. Moreover, Bushkovitch claims that no theoretical buttressing for strong royal power in Russia was necessary, as it was well established by custom and unconstrained by laws for the simple reason that there existed no laws. (For the same reason, Bushkovitch

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, the usual translation for Russian *monarkhiia* and *samoderzhavie* (both terms used by Feofan Prokopovich) was the German *Monarchie*, *Souveränität* and the French *souveraineté*. See Isabel de Madariaga, “Autocracy and Sovereignty,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 16.3-4 (1982): 369-387.

<sup>7</sup> V. M. Zhivov and B. A. Uspensky, “Metamorfozy antichnogo iazychestva v istorii russkoi kul’tury XVII-XVIII vv.” (1984), in *Razyskaniia v oblasti istorii i predystorii russkoi kul’tury* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul’tury, 2002), 461-531. Cf. V. Zhivov, *Language and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, trans. M. Levitt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009 [1996]), 346-354. Further exploration of this topic is undertaken in Richard Wortman’s *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> G. D. Gurvich, ‘*Pravda voli monarshei*’ Feofana Prokopovicha i eia zapadnoevropeiskie istochniki (Iur’ev: Mattisen, 1915).

adds, there was also no "legal limit" to the power of the boyars). Bushkovitch dismisses the aristocratic opposition to absolutism in 1730, led by the "verkhovniki," as "too small and too limited in aims to gain much support among the elite."<sup>9</sup>

I summarize Bushkovitch's paper in detail here because I believe that it makes a significant contribution to our understanding of what meaning political theory could and could not have in Petrine Russia. Gurvich's decontextualized vision of Feofan as a promoter of Western political thought in Russia is indeed hypothetical. There can be no doubt that Feofan was interested in practices no less than he was interested in ideas. And he certainly did not understand his chief intellectual mission as consisting in the transplantation of a Western absolutist ideal to Russia. On the other hand, as I will argue in what follows, Feofan's interest in *practical* aspects of theory is itself an ideological principle that he articulated, very likely in opposition to other educated members of the elite. Furthermore, the lack of citations of Pufendorf does not mean that Feofan was not reacting to his work and to its perception among other Russian readers; he most certainly was. And finally, the dangers of "republicanism" and aristocratic opposition—while they may seem slight from the vantage point of our knowledge of the following centuries of Russian history—were perceived by Prokopovich as quite real. In short, while retaining a full appreciation for the specificity of the Russian case, it is important not to isolate it from the broader European context.

Viktor Zhivov has written compellingly on the relevance of the classical Roman precedent for the development of the civic cult of the emperor in Petrine Russia.<sup>10</sup> The meta-historical perspective on Russian monarchy was thus necessarily a part of the political ideology of that period. Moreover, Russia inherited a distinctive ideological poetics that was a common property of Western monarchies during the *ancien régime*. That poetics was presented, in its most concentrated form, in the genre of panegyric, and particularly in its sub-variety, the Pindaric ode. While Feofan never wrote Pindaric odes proper, his *Epinikion*, written to celebrate Peter's victory at Poltava, embeds crucial elements of this genre's powerful poetics of autocratic agency. In the following two sections, I offer some reflections on Feofan's use of these two—the meta-historical and the genre-based—strategies to contest deviations from the absolutist ideal. These reflections are offered as a contribution to the ongoing study of the history of Russian state ideology, a field in which Viktor Zhivov's work has left an indelible mark.

### 1. "A Politics Learned from the Thing Itself": Prokopovich and Pufendorf on Failing Republics

In 1716, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the birth of Peter the Great's son, Feofan Prokopovich delivered a panegyric sermon, in which the prospect of dynastic

<sup>9</sup> Paul Bushkovitch, "Political Ideology in the Reign of Peter I: Feofan Prokopovich, Succession to the Throne and the West," in *Moskauer Vorträge zum 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ingrid Schierle. Published online May 22, 2012:

[http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/vortraege-moskau/bushkovitch\\_ideology](http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/vortraege-moskau/bushkovitch_ideology).

<sup>10</sup> Zhivov and Uspensky, "Metamorfozy antichnogo iazychestva," 479-485.

succession, eventually denied by Petr Petrovich's death in 1719, elicited a *synkrisis*, rhetorical juxtaposition, of different forms of government. Using an approach that is ethnographic and historiographical rather than strictly philosophical, Prokopovich is intent on revealing the near universality of hereditary monarchy:

“Even for one who is unaware of the reasons for the common good that are intrinsic to such government, it would be sufficient to display examples of it from almost all nations and historical epochs. The most ancient Assyrian state, originating from Nimrod and Ninus, was a monarchy, and one bequeathed within a single family. The states of the Medes and the Persians that followed had the same form of power. Nor did God arrange it otherwise with Israel. Nor did the Egyptians govern themselves otherwise, either in the ancient time or more recently, under the Ptolemies. The same could be observed among the Macedonians, the Epirotes, the Illyrians, in the Asian Pontus, in Parthia and on the islands of the Mediterranean and the Aegean sea, the same in ancient Africa, the same (to skip much else) among our ancestors: the Scythians and the Sarmatians. And that is the ancient world. Let us observe the modern world. Begin with Europe—and observe Spain, the Gaul, England, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and other countries. All have the form of monarchy, all have the form of hereditary power. Go to Africa—this regime is shared by Fes, Tunis, Algeria, Tripoli, Barka, and the great Ethiopia—the Abyssinian nation, and other southern states. Go to Asia—such are Turkey, Persia, India, China, and Japan; all the same we hear is found in America, called the new world.”<sup>11</sup>

This ethnographic *tour de force* is followed by a series of dismissive thrusts at states that deviate from the universal norm. The term Prokopovich uses for “republic” is *rech' pospolitaia*—a loan from Polish (*rzecz pospolita*). Aside from being the name of the Polish state, which had an elective monarchy at the time, this collocation, as Feofan was well aware, was a calque from Latin *res publica*. Even at the lexical level, republicanism was perceived through a Polish lens. As a paradigm-setting example, Poland is discussed first:

“The Polish republic is a case apart—and it is not to be envied! We know how robust that state had been under the monarchical regime. It was not long ago that it tore asunder those golden fetters that it had, and it is not for me to judge whether it was since this current license that it began to grow impoverished and hard-pressed.”

In the Polish case, the republican government is an aberration and a recent development that (one infers) cannot last long. In fact, Prokopovich's comparison of different modes of governance begins with a statement on the longevity (*dolgodenstvie*) of the bliss

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<sup>11</sup> Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, ed. I. P. Eremin (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1961), 39-40. All translations of passages in foreign languages are mine unless otherwise noted.

guaranteed by hereditary monarchy, under the sole condition—fulfilled by Peter, as it then appeared—that the monarch's line is not extinguished.

The Venetian and the Genovese republics are discussed next; although their small size in principle allows for republican governance, they are nevertheless marred by instability and factiousness. An altogether different case is that of the Roman republic, which was endowed with "a peculiar divine destiny,

since it also, following the expulsion of the kings, did not find for itself a different permanent government (*postoiannogo pravitel'stva*): after kings there were consuls, after consuls the decemviri, after the decemviri, tribunes, after tribunes, again, consuls, and, in extreme need, dictators were elected, a most potent and fierce kind of power and more fearful than monarchy [...] When [Rome] reached the age of manhood (as the Roman historian Florus says), it could no longer govern itself with that insubstantial rudder of a democracy: there were fierce riots of the Gracchi, Marius, Sulla, Catiline, Antony. As a result of a civil war between Julius and Pompey, it reached the edge of destruction, so that it even transformed, again, into a form of monarchy. Hence it is clear that the monarchical rule, in comparison with others, is the most salubrious one for human cohabitation."<sup>12</sup>

The original and preeminent case of republican politics, that of the Roman republic, is thus dismissed out of hand as a transitory, misguided experiment that preceded the founding of a truly efficient state.

Prokopovich is well aware that the assertion of natural superiority of a particular kind of government jars with the view, mainstream in the political thought of the time, which relates political regimes to the specific conditions of a particular population. Thus, Jean Bodin, whose *De Republica* (1576) is closely associated with the emergent absolutist doctrine, allows for substantial variation in forms of political rule arising first and foremost from differences in geography and—what often comes to the same thing—climate. To cite from the Latin version of that work, which circulated widely in Europe (two different editions made it into Feofan's library),<sup>13</sup> "of all the arcana of commonwealths none is greater than accommodating each state's laws and form to the varying character and constitution of nations" (*de omnibus Rerumpublicarum arcanis nullum maius sit, quam ad varios gentium mores ac naturas civitatis cuiusque leges ac formam congruentem accomodare*).<sup>14</sup> In the most extreme case, Bodin argues that disparity between inhabitants of a single city that is due to some of them dwelling uphill and others downhill often results in civil strife:

... *mirum videri non debeat si seditionibus saepius iactantur urbes inaequali situ positae, quam quae aequabilem planitiem habent: ut Roma ipsa, cuius moenibus*

<sup>12</sup> Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 40.

<sup>13</sup> For an (incomplete) list of books in Feofan's library see "Biblioteka Feofana Prokopovicha (Vitiag z opisu)," in Feofan Prokopovich, *Filosofski tvorci*, 3 vols (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1979-1981), vol. 3, 373-442.

<sup>14</sup> Ion. Bodin[us], *De republica libri sex* (Paris, 1586), 494.



*septem montes clauduntur, idcirco seditionibus praeter caeteras saepissime agitata est, quod locus inaequalis ad id magis opportunus esse videretur.*<sup>15</sup>

One should not be surprised if cities placed in uneven location are more often shaken by seditions than those that occupy a level plane, so that Rome itself, whose walls enclose seven hills, is disturbed by seditions most often because, beside other reasons, uneven location appears to be more conducive to it.

More generally, Bodin points out that, thanks to their balanced constitution, those nations that occupy the middle regions of the world, equally removed from the South and from the North, “exceed others in the knowledge of doing politics and governing states” (*mediae regionis populos rerum gerendarum ac civitatum moderandarum scientia caeteros superare*).<sup>16</sup> By contrast with the blessed *aurea mediocritas* exemplified by France, the inhabitants of the mountains, according to Bodin, are least likely to accept stable royal rule since they, “as well as all nations of the North, prefer either popular state or loose monarchies so that they may grant power to the prince and deprive him of it as often as they wish” (*Amant montium accolae, ac tota natio Aquilonia populares status, aut monarchias liberas* [in French: “les monarchies electives”<sup>17</sup>] *ut principibus imperia tribuere, eaque eripere quotiens velint, possint*).<sup>18</sup> The mountaineers share this political disposition with the Northerners, because both are subject to “bad climate” (*caeli intemperies*). Following this logic, Bodin claims that the “Scythian nations,” such as the Bohemians, the Poles, the Swedes, and the Tartars, all “give power to the kings and reclaim it” (*regibus imperia dare et abdicare*).<sup>19</sup> Here, as Marshall Poe has pointed out, one detects a curious contradiction in Bodin’s argument.<sup>20</sup> The Muscovites clearly belong to the Scythian group; for instance, the discussion of the commendable sexual reserve displayed by Northern nations includes the Muscovites (who do not get to see their brides before marriage).<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, they have to be excluded from the Northern nations that have loose/elective monarchy; in fact, the French edition drops the generic label “Scythian peoples” in that sentence.<sup>22</sup> Why the Russians, as well as the Tartars, should present exceptions to Bodin’s generalization remains unclear. In Book 1, they are predictably described as the only European nations that have monarchy of the tyrannical variety.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere in his work, however, Bodin follows his absolutist convictions and valorizes the Russian monarchy, contravening the most authoritative ethnographic account on

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<sup>15</sup> Bodin[us], *De republica*, 492.

<sup>16</sup> Bodin[us], *De republica*, 512.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la République*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris, 1579), 691.

<sup>18</sup> Bodin[us], *De republica*, 515.

<sup>19</sup> Bodin[us], *De republica*, 515.

<sup>20</sup> Marshall T. Poe, “A People Born to Slavery”: *Russian in Early Modern European Ethnography, 1476-1748* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000), 174-175.

<sup>21</sup> Bodin[us], *De republica*, 507.

<sup>22</sup> Bodin, *Les six livres*, 691-2: “Aussi tous les Rois qu’ils ont sont electifs, et les chaffent s’ils tyrannisent, comme i’ay monstré des Rois de Suede, Dannemarch, Norvege, Poulogne, Boheme, Tartarie, qui sont tous electifs.”

<sup>23</sup> Bodin, *Les six livres*, 274.

Muscovy then available, Sigismund von Herberstein's *Notes on the Muscovites*, which treated the Muscovite government as an illegal despotism.<sup>24</sup>

Bodin's confusion is telling as it shows the limits of the utility of the categories of classical and Humanist political thought. Other Western observers tended to cast Russians as natural slaves (following Aristotle's treatment of Asian despotism in *Politics*), while some admired their obedience and the cultural and political homogeneity made possible by the tsar's absolutist power.<sup>25</sup> In this context, Feofan's decision to generalize hereditary monarchy as a near-universal feature of political government, bypassing further specification of types of monarchy, proves quite effective, as it allowed him to turn the tables: rather than presenting a tyrannical or despotic aberration, Russia is revealed as a quintessential example of absolutism. This generalization, however, depends on the binary opposition between monarchy and all other forms of rule that include a republican component of one form or another—that is, demand that political power is made a shared "common matter."

The likely polemical target for Feofan here is Samuel Pufendorf's *Einleitung zu der Historie der vornehmsten Reiche und Staaten, so itziger Zeit in Europa sich befinden* (first edition 1684, Latin translation by Johann Friedrich Cramer 1693). At Peter's request, this work was translated into Russian by Hieromonk Gavriil (Buzhinskii) and published in 1718 and then again in 1723.<sup>26</sup> The work was very popular throughout Europe. According to Buzhinskii, the virtues of Pufendorf's exposition caused many "princes and governors" to command that their children be taught this book in order that they learn the arts of "good governance." (In fact, Peter much earlier demanded that this work by Pufendorf be used in the instruction of his son Alexei).<sup>27</sup> In 1731, for reasons that remain unclear, Empress Anna Ioannovna ordered that both editions of Buzhinskii's translation be removed from circulation "for requisite corrections" (*dlia nadlezhashchego v onykh ispravleniia*). No changes seem to have been introduced, and in 1743 Elizabeth ordered that the expropriated copies be returned to their owners and allowed the book to be printed again.<sup>28</sup> Lacking other explanations for this failed attempt at censorship, one might

<sup>24</sup> Poe, "A People Born to Slavery", 169-174.

<sup>25</sup> Poe, "A People Born to Slavery", 106-107, 138-144, 153-157.

<sup>26</sup> Buzhinskii's translation was based on the Latin rendering of Pufendorf's text. The translator acknowledged his ignorance of German and complained about the obscurity of Cramer's Latin, which prompted him to follow more "the sense" than "words and forms of expression" (*slovam i slogu*). See *Vvedenie v gistoriiu evropeiskuiu* (St. Petersburg, 1723), 11. This translation, which was published in 900 copies total, was present in many personal libraries (S. P. Luppov, *Kniga v Rossii v pervoi chetverti XVIII veka* [Leningrad: Nauka, 1973], 103, 143-4, 174, 218, 225, 252, 295, 308) and was used in courses at the Naval Academy (Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700-1800* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985], 29). A new translation of this work by Boris Volkov, directly from the German, was published in 1767-1777.

<sup>27</sup> P. Pekarskii, *Nauka i literatura*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1862), 325.

<sup>28</sup> P. Pekarskii, *Nauka i literatura pri Petre Velikom*, vol. 2: *Opisanie slaviano-russkikh knig i tipografii 1698-1725 gg.* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1862), 438. Cf. S. I. Nikolaev, *Literaturnaia kul'tura Petrovskoi epokhi* (St. Petersburg: D. Bulanin, 1996), 28-29. After Prokopovich's death, the Synod would resist the republication of Pufendorf's works (Gary Marker, *Publishing*, 66).



hypothesize that Pufendorf's criticism of Russia's tyrannical monarchy may have been perceived, in the wake of the events of 1730, as incendiary.<sup>29</sup>

Pufendorf's *An Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms* was, at the time, axiomatic for European history, and we can assume Prokopovich's thorough familiarity with it. To cite just one example of the coincidence in their argument: Prokopovich's point that Italian republics can do without monarchies because of their small size may well derive from Pufendorf who, explaining the failure of the rule by kings in early Rome, notes that "the Kingly government could not be durable at Rome: For such States as are comprehended in one great City are more fit for an *Aristocratical* or *Democratical* Form of Government; whereas a Monarchy is fittest to be erected in Kingdoms, where the subjects are dispersed in a considerable Tract and Extent of Land."<sup>30</sup>

A more pertinent example of the appeal to national character is Pufendorf's discussion of Muscovy. He relates the absolute power of the "Czar"—who falls under the classical definition of a tyrant inasmuch as he is not liable to any laws—to the natural constitution of the Muscovites:

"The form of the Government here is an Absolute Monarchy; the Grand Duke, whom they call in their Native Language *Czar*, being not tied up to any Laws or Rules, unto whom his Subjects are obliged to pay Obedience without reserve, so that they are no more than Slaves. And indeed this Condition suits best with their Natural Constitution."<sup>31</sup>

Pufendorf's negative assessment of Russians in *Introductio* was not only known but in fact referred to by Peter himself.<sup>32</sup> In view of the considerable authority Pufendorf's works enjoyed in Petrine Russia, his view of absolutism as a mere Russian aberration was patently at odds with the logic of Prokopovich's reasoning in the panegyric on the birth of Petr Petrovich. In fact, Pufendorf is very likely on Feofan's mind in a later passage of the oration, where relativistic theories appealing to national character are questioned:

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<sup>29</sup> This was not the only time Pufendorf's writings proved disturbing to the Russian imperial family. *De officii hominis et civis*, the second work by Pufendorf that was being translated at Peter's request by Buzhinskii, was only published in 1726. According to a report penned by Archimandrite Markell (Rodyshevskii), Tsarevna Praskov'ia Fedorovna (*née* Saltykova), the widow of Peter's co-ruler Ioann Alekseevich and Anna Ioannovna's mother, had complained to Peter I that Pufendorf's work contains negative remarks (*khuly*) about her late husband. Prokopovich, who lived along with Buzhinskii at the Nevsky Monastery (later the Alexander Nevsky lavra) at the time (1719), is said to have defended Buzhinskii's decision to keep close to the original. See I. Chistovich, *Feofan Prokopovich i ego vremia* (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia nauk, 1868), vol. 1: 329-330.

<sup>30</sup> I quote from a contemporary English translation: S. Puffendorf, *An Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms and States of Europe*, translation J. Cull, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, 1719), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Puffendorf, *An Introduction*, 380. Pufendorf's view accords with the Herbersteinian consensus (Poe, "A People Born to Slavery", 143-144).

<sup>32</sup> Proudly commenting on the peace with Sweden, Peter says "earlier the Swedes were of a different opinion about us and held us to be blind (*za slepykh imeli*), as the famous historian Puffendorf writes in the book of *The Introduction to History* concerning the Russian people." Pekarskii, *Nauka i literatura*, vol. 1, 325.

"Even if teachers of politics reason soundly that various kinds of governance should be assessed not simply by themselves, but with regard to the nations' character, [ascertaining] which is most characteristic/appropriate for which, nevertheless based on the foregoing we recognize that monarchy is natural to nearly all nations, since nearly all are accustomed to rule themselves fittingly in this fashion—a politics that they learned not from philosophical speculations, but from the thing itself, the art itself, and from the need."<sup>33</sup>

Rather than being due to a peculiar Russian "slavish" constitution, absolute monarchy is ingrained in human nature. Favoring practice over theory, Prokopovich rejects armchair philosophizing, instead appealing to a "politics learned [...] from the thing itself." Whatever theories may be put forward by European intellectuals, the wide geographical dispersion of monarchies remains a stumbling block for anyone wishing to uphold the republican ideal as a generally applicable model. That is Feofan's ostensible claim. One may add to this that, ironically, even as he rescues his compatriots from the accusation of being natural slaves, Feofan shows himself to be in greater accord with the natural law theory than its acknowledged master, Pufendorf. In fact, Aristotle's argument on the Asians' naturally slavish constitution was increasingly seen to be inconsistent with the premise of the universality of human nature.<sup>34</sup>

While inimical to tyrannical one-man rule, Pufendorf was also no celebrant of the *demos*. Yet his account of the deficiencies of republican government was more nuanced than that of Prokopovich. Dysfunctional republics arise due to a lack of balance between the "democratic" and the aristocratic component. In an argument that can be traced back to Thucydides, he condemns excessively inclusive governments. Discussing the case of the Roman republic, Pufendorf acknowledges that "[t]he alteration of the Government mainly contributed towards the Increase of Rome"; however, he suggests that the republic, as it was first instituted, suffered from blemishes that led to its eventual deterioration into a malfunctioning empire. The eventual collapse of Rome under the onslaught of "the Northern Nations" was due to "Oversights committed in the beginning, which left a Gap open for future Evils and Troubles."<sup>35</sup> In particular, the founders of the new state, to appease the "common people," had to make "a tacit Confession that the Supreme Power of Rome did belong to them," thus hindering the emergence of an aristocratic constitution. The institution of the tribunes of the People strikes Pufendorf as particularly malignant, since it made "the body of the Commonwealth, as it were, double-headed."<sup>36</sup> It was this intrinsic conflict within the government that brought the Romans into a Civil War, "and they sheathed their Swords in each other's Bowels." Pufendorf's account leaves no doubt that it is the "democratic" component in the Roman republic that caused its downfall. The ensuing empire, founded by Augustus, is deemed "the worst

<sup>33</sup> Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> On this point see Poe, "A People Born to Slavery", 155-157.

<sup>35</sup> Puffendorf, *An Introduction*, 19-20.

<sup>36</sup> Puffendorf, *An Introduction*, 21.

sort of Monarchies, where the Army Exercised Sovereign Authority.” The “Splendor of the Ancient Nobility” extinguished, Rome fell.<sup>37</sup>

Characteristically for Western political historians, Pufendorf summarily dismisses the Byzantine Empire as it “was neither in Power nor Splendor to be compared to the Ancient Roman Empire.”<sup>38</sup> Pufendorf’s account of the decline of Rome, in its basic premises, coincides with that given by Edward Gibbon in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (began publication in 1776). Both stand in a notable contrast with that of Prokopovich, who inherits the East Roman tradition, exemplified by Greek patristic authors and Byzantine historiography, that valorizes the Eastern, Greek-speaking empire, linking its rise to the triumph of Christianity.<sup>39</sup>

In other respects, the positions of Pufendorf and Prokopovich are more closely aligned. In his account of the short-lived British republic, Pufendorf points to the illicit democratic nature of the new power, in particular, to the role played by the army commanded by Cromwell.<sup>40</sup> A similarly negative assessment of Cromwell’s Protectorate is found in *Pravda voli monarshei vo opredelenii naslednika derzhavy svoei* (“The Justice of the Monarch’s will in appointing the heir to his throne,” 1722), an apologia for Peter’s decision to disinherit his first son Alexei, most likely composed by Prokopovich or with his involvement.<sup>41</sup> The subjects have no right to judge the acts of the monarch, and, once a monarchy is instituted, a change of the regime necessarily becomes a transgression of the contract:

“For that reason, most lawless was the act perpetrated by some violent traitors from the British Parliament over their King, Charles I, in 1649, an act condemned by all, and censured by the English themselves annually at a special festival of lamentation (*sleznym prazdnikom*) instituted for that very purpose, and [an act] that does not deserve remembrance from us.”<sup>42</sup>

As represented by Prokopovich, republican rule is violent, volatile, treasonous, and transitory. A democratic irruption is a sin that calls for perpetual expiation, an unnatural act that transgresses both the society’s covenant and divine will. Pufendorf limits this

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<sup>37</sup> Puffendorf, *An Introduction*, 23. As a second explanation for the fall of the republic (going back to Machiavelli), Pufendorf cites the excessive power and wealth accumulated by governors of the provinces.

<sup>38</sup> Puffendorf, *An Introduction*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> On the Byzantine political tradition, see V. E. Val’denberg, *Gosudarstvennoe ustroistvo Vizantii do kontsa VII veka* (St. Petersburg: SPbGU, 2008); B. Maslov, “Zhitie kak grazhdanstvo: o metaforike politicheskogo v pozdnei antichnosti i Vizantii,” *Sotsiologicheskoe obozrenie* 11.1 (2012): 3-18.

<sup>40</sup> Puffendorf, *An Introduction*, 136: “after the death of the king, the outward shew of the Supreme Power was in the Parliament, but in effect it was lodged in the Generals of the Armies.”

<sup>41</sup> *Pravda voli monarshei vo opredelenii naslednika derzhavy svoei...* (S. l., 1722), 31. In this text, the power of the elected monarch is illustrated by the story of the Roman emperor Valentianus, who claimed independence from the will of the people following the moment of election; *a fortiori*, the author continues, a hereditary monarch has an absolute power and discretion over his subjects, since his rights originate from the moment the people initially relinquished their sovereignty. The reference is made to Sozomen Book 6 (specifically, Prokopovich has in mind *Ecclesiastical History* 6.6.8).

<sup>42</sup> *Pravda voli monarshei*, 31.

negative vision to republics with a broad democratic basis. The substantial differences in the views of these two intellectuals all the more clearly reveal their shared view of historical republics—in particular, of the patently imperfect Roman republic and the short-lived British experiment.

Contrary to the widely-held view, Prokopovich was not interested in importing Western ideas. Yet it would be similarly erroneous to isolate his thought from European political philosophy. Feofan should receive credit as an original thinker who engaged in an often polemical dialogue with his contemporaries, which most likely was not lost on the better-educated members of his audience. In this dialogue, we should expect to find moments of convergence and disagreement. Thus, Feofan's anti-democratic views had common ground with the opinions of such a putative republican as Pufendorf. On the other hand, Feofan's upholding of monarchical rule as a universal norm and his sweeping rejection of alternative forms of governance was distinctive. Furthermore, his political philosophy was communicated with the skill of a consummate orator for whom political praxis was paramount—in this regard, the proper comparandum for Feofan is not Pufendorf, but Bossuet. When one ponders the question of the resilience of Russian autocratic ideology, Feofan's eloquently articulated historical vision, which exerted a substantial influence on later eighteenth-century political thought, may well offer a partial yet incisive answer.

## 2. *Feofan Prokopovich's Epinikion and the poetics of autocratic agency*

Royalist ideology comes in many garbs, and historiographical or ethnographic commentary is just one of its manifestations. The following discussion centers on an underappreciated text of Prokopovich, a poem of 174 lines (in its Russian variant), entitled *Epinikion* and published in 1709, in Kiev, in three languages (Latin, Polish, Russian) alongside *Panegyrikos, or Laudatory Oration on the Glorious Victory over the Swedish armies*. Both the prose oration and the poetic appendix celebrate Peter's victory at Poltava. Both describe the triumph of the monarch over foreign forces and internal sedition headed by local aristocrats inimical to autocratic rule. The case for autocracy that Feofan makes in *Epinikion*, however, takes a particular shape, because here Feofan is adopting a form with a long genealogy reaching back to Pindar's odes. This adaptation lacks significant precedents in Russian, and the later uses of the Pindaric form in "the age of empresses" were marked by curious complications, which I can only touch upon below. While *Epinikion* may thus appear to be a kind of literary-historical *unicum*, its relation to earlier and later practices of poetic panegyric have a lot to tell us about the changing definitions and perceptions of autocratic rule in Europe and in Russia.

Behind Prokopovich's text stands a geographically widespread poetics of the Pindaric ode (or, in the British tradition, simply the "Pindaric"). That poetics presents perhaps the best guide to the pan-European royalist imaginary in the early modern period. While loosely modeled on the Greek precedent, the Pindaric ode developed alongside rhetorical genres that included panegyric (any festive piece of discourse),

encomium or *laudatio* (a speech of praise), and ceremonial sermon.<sup>43</sup> All these varieties of discourse tended to morph one into another, as they all had a public and official nature and were written for similar occasions such as military victories, travels and homecomings of the king, and dynastic events, including births, marriages, and deaths. In addition to the members of ruling families, Pindaric poems could be addressed to military commanders or potentates who exhibited a heroic agency that, in a fundamental ideological sense, dwarfed other members of community into the role of passive admirers.

In Fredric Jameson's definition, genre is a "socio-symbolic message,"<sup>44</sup> endowed with an uncanny ability to travel through space and time. Inasmuch as genres can be preserved for centuries and borrowed across linguistic boundaries, they provide ready-made, yet pliable frames for conceptualizing historical and political experience. In this sense, literary genres testify to the historical *longue durée* in a way that is more representative than the thought of any given individual political theorist or philosopher. The challenge is to learn to read texts for their underlying (generic) structure, uncovering formal elements that extend beyond "style" (verbal register, stanzaic form, prosodic features, etc.) into the poem's conceptual structure. Embedded in the grammar of genre that is only partly open to individual innovation, this structure to a large extent dictates the text's political "content."

In spite of the title of Feofan's poem, nothing in it suggests a reliance on Pindar's *Epinikia* (victory odes) composed in the 5<sup>th</sup> BCE.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, most of the essential elements of Pindar's odes—as well as of the work by his more faithful early modern imitators—are lacking in *Epinikion*: such missing elements include rich metaphorical texture, sociopolitical and metaphysical reflection on the inherent limits of human strivings, the speaker's metapoetic awareness and complex self-positioning with respect to the addressee. What is at issue then is not intertextuality but—to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term—"genre memory," which preserved the basic conceptual elements of a Pindaric autocratic poetics while shedding most markers of the associated poetic form.

An excellent starting point for tracing the reception of Pindar in Eastern Europe is furnished by the Latin Pindaric odes of Szymon Szymonowicz (1558-1629), remarkable for their thematic subtlety, the use of various Pindaric motifs, as well as prosodic complexity (they are composed in triads that are meant to replicate Pindar's stanzas).<sup>46</sup> The conceptual skeleton of the Pindaric epinician poetics—one that survives to inform

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<sup>43</sup> On the functions of sermon as the quintessential official-ceremonial genre in eighteenth-century Russia, see Yu. V. Kagarlitskiy, *Ritoricheskie strategii v russkoi propovedi perekhodnogo perioda: 1700-1775* (Ph.D. diss., Moscow, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 141.

<sup>45</sup> Notably, Pindar is also nowhere mentioned in Feofan's *De arte poetica*, which refers almost exclusively to Latin (and Polish) poetic specimens. This occlusion of Pindar's work contrasts sharply with the prominence that Trediakovsky and Lomonosov would assign to it beginning in the 1730s. O. M. Buranok's survey of scholarship attests to the difficulties of interpreting the text of *Epinikion* as an instance of a particular genre (*Lirika Feofana Prokopovicha i istoriko-literaturnyi protsess v Rossii pervoi treti XVIII veka* [Samara: NTTs, 2004], 46-51).

<sup>46</sup> T. Sinko, " 'Pindarus Polonus': Rzecz o lacinskich odach Szymonowicza," in *Szymon Szymonowicz i jego czasy* (Zamość: Komitet Obchodu 300-nej Rocznicy Zgonu Szymona Szymonowicza, 1929), 39-69.

Feofan's *Epinikion*—may be concisely formulated as follows: a violent victory achieved by the honoree brings well-being to the community. This basic idea is also present in Szymonowicz. In one of his Pindaric odes, he praises Jan Zamoyski (1542-1605) by addressing his minor son, Thomas. While the boy is nurturing his "new mind with games" (*mentem novellam lusibus lactans*),

*Tuus interea sator in-*  
*victum sponte offerre periclis*  
*Pectus audet, sanguineam procellam*  
*Belli arcens a patria sua,*  
 [Antistro. I]  
*Aurea unde terras*  
*Pax tegat, illi gloria surgat*  
*Ad plagam volens poli.*<sup>47</sup>

... in the meantime, your sower ventures of his own accord to offer his invincible breast to dangers, warding off the bloody storm of war from his fatherland. Hence golden Peace protects the lands, and for him glory rises, flying up to the regions of heaven.

The "Golden Peace" (*Pax Aurea*), the blessed state of equilibrium enjoyed by the whole country, is assured by the heroic action of a solitary agent chosen for praise. This phrase is a common topos, and it reoccurs in the Latin text of Feofan's *Epinikion*: "And golden Peace is allowed to return from exile on a snow-white chariot" (*At postliminio niveis redit aurea bigis / Pax*).<sup>48</sup> In contrast to the Horatian detached meditation on a peaceful landscape, so effectively imitated by Sarbiewski, both Szymonowicz and Prokopovich aim at conveying a Pindaric narrative of heroic overcoming. Notably, the statement of praise in the above quotation rephrases a passage from Pindar's Isthmian 7, line 27-30: "Let everyone who in this thundercloud wards off the hailstorm of blood in defense of his dear fatherland [bringing?] havoc to the opposing army know clearly that he is making the greatest glory grow for the race of fellow-citizens, when he is alive and also when he is dead" (*ἴστω γὰρ σαφὲς ὅστις ἐν ταύτῃ νεφέλῃ χάλαζαν αἵματος πρὸ φίλας πάτρας ἀμύνεται / ἢ λοιγὸν ἀμύνων ἢ ἐναντίῳ στρατῷ, ἀστῶν γενεῇ μέγιστον κλέος αὖξων / ζῶων τ' ἀπὸ καὶ θανόν*).

Another major poet of the late Polish Renaissance, Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584), addressed an "Epinicion" to the Polish king Stephen Báthory in 1582, praising him for the successful conclusion of the Livonian Wars waged against Ivan the Terrible. This gigantic poem is arranged in 73 stanzas of 12 unequal verses each (this unit, meant to imitate Pindar's strophic arrangement, is designated as a "duodenarius").<sup>49</sup> (On the Russian side,

<sup>47</sup> *Simonis Simonidae Poemata Aurea cum antiquitate comparanda* (Leiden, 1619), 8-9.

<sup>48</sup> On this line cf. n. 69.

<sup>49</sup> *Ioann. Cochranovii ad Stephanum Bathorrhœum regem Poloniae inclytum Moscho debellato, et Livonia recuperata Epinicion* (Krakow, 1582). This edition lacks pagination, so I refer to stanza numbers. On Pindarisms in this poem see J. Nowak-Dłużewski, *Okolicznościowa poezja polityczna w Polsce*, vol. 3 (Warsaw: Pax, 1969), 173-174. On Kochanowski's reception among the Eastern Slavs see R. Radyszewskyj,

the calamitous siege of Pskov by Báthory's forces elicited a text that formally could not be more different, the narrative lament *Povest' o prikhozhenii Stefana Batoriia na grad Pskov*). Notably, Kochanowski's piece, while explicitly titled in a way that refers back to Pindar, is a less consistent imitation of the ancient model. (In a curious pattern, this generic marker, not employed by Szymonowicz, appears to compensate for departures from the form of Pindaric epinikion).

As in the passage from Szymonowicz quoted above, the speaker's attention is focused on the single victorious figure, whose success is closely linked to the prosperity of the entire body politic. The king is "to be equaled to a hero, greater than a mortal man" (*aequandus heroi, viro / mortale maior* [Duodenarius XXX]). Here is the description of Stephen Báthory's triumphal *adventus*:

*postquam socia agmina iunxistis, tuaque  
ora spectari proprius potuere,  
e medio tibi vir  
lectus senatorum choro  
est omnium unus nomine  
congratulatus./  
DUODENARIUS XXIIX/  
utque tibi tuus adven-  
tus, populoque Polono  
faustus, atque prosper esset,  
numina sancta deum  
oravit;*

After you have joined the general crowd, and your countenance could be seen close by, one man elected from the midst of the choir of senators congratulated you on behalf of all, and prayed to the sacred powers of the gods that your arrival bring good luck and prosperity both to you and to the Polish people.

While the social energy is concentrated in the figure of the king, the senate, reflecting the distinctive political organization of the Polish elective monarchy, is also given a role to play: the aristocracy is charged with the task of mediating between the king and the people. This idea is conveyed by the doubling act of representation: the senate stands for the nation, while one member of the senate is elected to represent the "choir" of his peers.

While less committed to the ancient model, Kochanowski also uses recognizable Pindaric devices, such as—in the following passage—the "break-off" and the *koros* (satiety) motifs, which in Pindar accompany the change of topic:<sup>50</sup>

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*Polskojęzyczna poezja ukraińska od końca XVI do początku XVIII wieku*, vol. 1 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Oddziału Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1996), 45-53; S. I. Nikolaev, *Ot Kochanovskogo do Mitskevicha: Razyskaniia po istorii pol'sko-russkikh literaturnykh sviazei XVII-pervoi treti XIX v.* (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo S.-Peterburgskogo un-ta, 2004), 5-58.

<sup>50</sup> See W. H. Race, "Elements of Style in Pindaric Break-Offs," *American Journal of Philology* 110.2 (1989): 189-209. Cf., in particular, Pythian 9.76-79.



*haec mihi, Pieri, paucis  
expedi. paucis enim com-  
prendere multa licet;  
et longa saepe oratio  
ponderis exigui est.  
Moschis genus, atque Polonis est idem  
Slavicum; dispar scidit uniter aptos  
religio, unanimes  
quod scindit et fratres malum. [Duodenarius XXXIX]*

These things, o Pierian one, put in order for me in a few words. For it is permissible to comprehend many things in a few words. And a long speech is often of little weight. The race of the Muscovites, and of the Poles is the same Slavic one; disparity in religion splits them apart who are tied into a unity, an evil that also splits single-minded brothers.

The form of the Pindaric ode, which in contrast to hexameter or elegiac couplet admits frequent enjambment, is handled by Kochanowski with admirable precision, as syntax and line-break placement work in tandem to generate the emphases and the desired semantic effect of cleavage (note the position of "*Slavicum*" and "*religio*"). An aspect of Kochanowski's poem that is not typical of Pindar's epinikia is the inclusion of a detailed description of the battle (the narrative section in a typical Pindar poem is occupied by a myth, not by a description of the athletic event). Feofan's *Epinikion* also contains a lengthy description of the battle, pointing to a drift of the Pindaric ode toward normalized narrative modelled on Latin hexameter epic.

Other Polish Neo-Latin poets who composed works titled *Epinikion* were even less attentive to the Pindaric form. In another poem praising Jan Zamoyski, written in 1588, Stanislaw Niegoszewski (1565-1599) opted for a curiously hybrid composition.<sup>51</sup> The main body of the poem consists of 443 hexameters, followed by a multilingual epilogue comprising 20-line sequences in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, and Polish, spoken by six historical characters in their own language (the Biblical Gideon, Epaminondas, Fabius Maximus, Gonzalo de Córdoba, Marco Antonio Colonna, Jan Grabia).<sup>52</sup> Each of these sequences is followed by six 12 line passages which receive the names (spelled in Greek) "Strophe", "Antistrophe," and "Epode." (Like Kochanowski, Niegoszewski thought of lyric sequences as being composed of "duodenarii"). There are thus two full "triads" embedded in the poem; as a further tribute to Pindar, the Greek "Antistrophe" is in fact an (unacknowledged) borrowing of the lines that open Pindar's Nemean 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ad illustriss. principem Ioannem Zamoiscium regni Poloniae magnum cancellarium... Stanislai Niegossevvii Poloni EPINIKION* (S. l., 1588).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Gosciwit Malinowski, "Stanislaus Niegossevius", at <http://hellenopolonica.blogspot.ru/2014/03/stanislaus-niegossevius.html>.

The poem thus comes with undeniable markers of Pindaricity, although it does not display Szymonowicz's or Kochanowski's control of the Pindaric form or themes. Yet the crucial structural element—the concentration of agency in one heroic individual—is well in evidence. Cf.:

*O quater o quoties non est numerare beatum  
Dis genitum Heroem, viden? ut stetit aspera contra  
Tela virum et ferro venientes depulit ictus?  
UNUS QUI NOBIS convulso cardine lapsam<sup>53</sup>  
Restituit Patriam, regnumque in honore locavit,  
Tot scelerum facies inter, foecundaque fuco  
Concilia, et fictas vario pro tempore fraudes.*

O! four times—o! it is not possible to count how many times—blessed Hero, born of the gods! Don't you see? How he took a stand facing men's sharp missiles and with his sword deterred the coming blows? ONE MAN WHO FOR US restored our Fatherland that fell, its foundation shaken, and who placed the kingdom in honor, amongst so many scenes of crime, as well as amongst agreements fecund with falsehood, and deceits made up depending on varying circumstances.

Zamoyski's heroic effort, in contrast to Báthory's in Kochanowski's *Epinikion*, is essential to the preservation of the state, as it occurs in the context of a civil conflict that brought Sigismund III to the Polish throne. Similarly, Feofan represents Peter as being instrumental in warding off the state's imminent doom threatened by the combined forces of Charles XII and the Ukrainian aristocrats.

The practice of addressing poems titled *epinikia* to successful military commanders was adopted by humanist intellectuals across Europe.<sup>54</sup> In 1649, Antoon Sanders (1586-1664) addressed an *Epinicia* (sic) to the Austrian military commander and the governor of the Spanish Netherlands Leopold Wilhelm (1614-1662). In this later text, Pindar is far from the poet's mind. All the same, we find here the familiar topos of a heroic individual, a *princeps*, whose violent acts ensure peace and prosperity:

*Vivat io Princeps Leopoldus! perpete vivat  
Elogio dignus, per quem victoria felix  
Incipit afflictas Flandorum visere terras.  
Vivat io ! ac tandem pressis hostilibus armis,*

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Michel de L'Hospital, *Epistolarium et sermonum liber IV*, 1.1: "Aut tu rem nobis convulso cardine lapsam..."

<sup>54</sup> Out of the many examples, let me cite a rather unusual one. In 1632 in London, Alexander Gill published an "epinikion" (characteristically spelled in Greek letters: ΕΠΙΝΙΚΙΟΝ) "De gestibus successibus et victoriis Regis Sueciae in Germania 1631" addressed to Charles, the "Most Valiant and Honest Defendor of the Catholic Faith." This poem, comprising 93 hexameters, is an appendage to Gill's astronomical treatise, *The new starre of the north, shining upon the victorious King of Suueden*.

*Aurea pacato nascantur saecula mundo.*<sup>55</sup>

Long live, Princeps Leopold, may he live forever being worthy of a memorial inscription, one thanks to whom blessed victory began to frequent the afflicted lands of the Flandrians. Long live! And let at last, hostile arms pressed down, the Golden age be born for the pacified world.

This residually Pindaric poetics of power was first introduced to Russia by Simeon of Polotsk in a short Latin piece, composed of 12 hexameters, addressed to Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich on the occasion of his entry to Polotsk after a failed siege of Riga. In spite of this military setback, the Russian monarch is invoked as "most valiant victor" (*fortissime victor*) and praised for "snatching those destined to die forever from hydra's gullet" (*faucibus eripiens hydrae aeternum moribundos*), i.e. for fighting the Catholics.<sup>56</sup> This particular monster is overcome in the name of soteriological, not earthly bliss.

In sum, when Feofan chose to supplement his oration on the Poltava battle with a poem, he turned to a well-established pan-European poetic form, whose Pindaric genealogy, while unmistakable from the literary-historical viewpoint, was occluded. The poem was published in three languages, with the Latin original—entitled *Epinicium sive carmen triumphale de eadem victoria nobilissima*—printed next to Feofan's own renditions of the poem into Polish and Russian (the latter with a heavy Old Church Slavonic admixture). While preserving the basic conceptual skeleton of the Pindaric form, Feofan displays no interest in imitating particular Pindaric devices or prosody. Thus he chooses the hexameter (and, in Russian, the stichic thirteen-syllable verse, the closest equivalent to the hexameter), a meter well-fitted for the task of narrating an extended battle-scene which has patent epic resonances.<sup>57</sup>

At this point we may well pose the question of the extent to which such a watered-down "Pindaric" poetics differs from any generic panegyric encomium. These differences are worth rehearsing here in a more systematic fashion.

First of all, an encomium focuses on the individual; it provides an account of his feats or virtues that are united first and foremost by the biographical criterion: these are praiseworthy properties of a particular person. A Pindaric ode, by contrast, is typically centered on the narrative of an isolated encounter that resulted in the success of the addressee, usually a victory of one sort or another. Furthermore, its focus is as much on the individual actor as on the community (or a family, clan, city, state) that (s)he

<sup>55</sup> Antonius Sanderus, *Epinicia serenissimo principi Leopoldo Guilielmo, archiduci Austriae...* (Brussels, 1649), 8.

<sup>56</sup> For the text and commentary see D. L. Liburkin, *Russkaia novolatinskaia poeziia: materialy k istorii (XVII-pervaia polovina XVIII veka)* (Moscow: RGGU, 2000), 28-30.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the classical and Neo-Latin precedents of Feofan's *Epinikion* see Liburkin, *Russkaia novolatinskaia poeziia*, 52-62. For the pioneering discussion of the Latin original see P. N. Berkov, "Russkie – novolatinskii i grecheskie poety XVII-XX vv.," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 18 (1968): 34-37. N. Iu. Alekseeva notes the ostensible difficulty of composing poetry in classical stanzas in Russian in the first half of the eighteenth century, with reference to Feofan's 1727 Latin ode honoring Peter II to which he appended a prose rendition into Russian (*Russkaia oda: razvitie odicheskoi formy v XVII-XVIII vekakh* [St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2005], 51-52).

represents. As a result, the narrative of the victorious overcoming tends to assume the shape of a myth that celebrates the Self (singular or plural) constituted in opposition to the Other—a political antagonist, a foreign enemy, an elemental or beastly force. In a Pindaric ode, humanity is represented by a central heroic agent. Structuralist work on pre-modern narrative draws a distinction between two kinds of character, existing on two different planes: one is the sphere of movement and action, of extreme forms of agency, the other of repose and passivity. In the Pindaric ode, the sovereign is the heroic actor, whereas the populace is immobile, metonymically linked to the land that provides the space in which, and for the sake of which, the sovereign undertakes his movements.<sup>58</sup> He or—more commonly in the Russian eighteenth century—she is never merely the subject of poetic patronage, but always a function in the “communal drama” enacted by the poem.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, in contradistinction to rhetorical encomia, Pindar’s odes rely heavily on the conventions of communal hymn. In early modern Pindarics, this hymnic subtext will invite a rhetoric of second-person address, equally applicable to God and to the sovereign. The hymnic tradition also dictates the inclusion of a mythic narrative that is relevant to the civic identity at large, rather than analogically or allegorically applicable to the particular victor.

Furthermore, the Pindaric ode reveals itself as inherently anti-republican in its privileging of the concepts of order, harmony, and tranquility, contrasted with chaos, discord, and strife. In early modern texts, this binary opposition is buttressed by mythical analogues, historical precedents, and traditional imagery. The narrative underpinning ultimately derives from myths of the civilizing hero (paradigmatically, Heracles), frequently recounted in Pindar’s epinikia. The subduing of the monstrous and the unknown as an act of creation of the political cosmos, brought about by a solitary, divinely-sanctioned agent, provides the arch-plot of monarchical poetics. For example, Heracles’s youthful feat of smothering the snakes, celebrated in Pindar’s Nemean 1, became one of the most frequent mythical comparanda for infant or young princes addressed in early modern Pindaric odes.<sup>60</sup> Another common reference point was the myth of the giant rebellion subdued by the forces of Zeus’s benign realm, based on Pindar’s hugely influential Pythian 1, in which the teeming discontent of Typho, chained in the underworld, is said to be visible in the eruptions of Aetna.<sup>61</sup> Once civil strife—that is, populace in its “active,” rather than passive manifestation—is analogized to such

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<sup>58</sup> On mobile and immobile characters see S. Yu. Nekliudov, “K voprosu o sviazi prostranstvenno-vremennykh otnoshenii s suzhetnoi strukturoi byliny,” in *Tezisy dokladov ko vtoroi Letnei shkole po vtorichnym modeliruiushchim sistemam* (Tartu, Tartu University, 1966), 41-45; cf. Yu. M. Lotman, *Struktura khudozhestvennogo teksta* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970), 280-289.

<sup>59</sup> The term “communal drama” is applied to Pindar’s original epinikia in Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991), 257-262.

<sup>60</sup> Stella Revard, *Politics, Poetics, and the Pindaric Ode: 1450-1700* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 11, 135-7, 165-169.

<sup>61</sup> Revard, *Politics*, 10, 106-121, 192.

monstrous, chaos-inducing forms of being, a potent anti-democratic discourse is in place.<sup>62</sup>

Feofan Prokopovich's *Epinikion* is manifestly built on the conceptual schema and the widely disseminated topoi of the early modern Pindaric ode. Yet it also adapted these elements to a particular task of praising extreme forms of autocratic agency in the context of strong oppositional sentiment directed both at Peter himself, whose reforms were widely detested, and at the very political regime. What Peter faced at Poltava was not only foreign invasion, but civil rebellion that involved a part of the Ukrainian nobility, led by Mazepa, in particular "clans inimical to your kingdom from ancient times" (*роду, царствию твоему / От древле враждебных*).<sup>63</sup> As a result of this attempt at secession, whose ultimate aim was the formation of a principality under the dominion of the Polish king, as Prokopovich acknowledges, "great rumors arose everywhere, and our land shook like a sea" (*И молвы великия повсюду восташа, / И аки море земля потрясая наша*).<sup>64</sup> Peter was faced with multiple tasks: "dividing the troops into many parts and reinforcing many cities, subduing rumors and guarding the borders" (*Требъ бяше на много частей раздѣляти / Воинство и многия грады укрѣпляти, / Укрошѣвати молвы, предѣлы хранити*). "It became," as Feofan puts it in the accompanying *Panegyrikos*, "an internal war, which all wise rulers always guard themselves against as if it were utter perdition."<sup>65</sup>

The designs of the "traitors" were impeded by God, who intervenes in the battle on Peter's behalf in the fashion of a Homeric divinity. The merging of the sovereign and the Christian deity is reinforced rhetorically, as the poem alternates between prayer for future well-being (addressing God) and praise for current success (addressing the monarch).<sup>66</sup> One should stress that this particular parallelism, potentially present in the poetics of the early modern Pindaric ode (but lacking in Pindar's epinikia), assumed special significance in Petrine Russia.<sup>67</sup>

By contrast, the enemy is envisioned as a beastly monster, with Charles in particular emblematically represented as a fleeing Swedish lion:<sup>68</sup>

[...] и уже во силе немногий

<sup>62</sup> Revard, *Politics*, 18-19, 57, 159, 273-4.

<sup>63</sup> Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 213.

<sup>64</sup> Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 209-214.

<sup>65</sup> Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Syntactically, the two are merged in the lines "God, who gave us this bliss through you [i.e. Peter]" (*Бог же, сие блаженство давый нам тобою*) and the lines that cast Peter as a divinely sponsored hero: "Tsar, crowned by God, you who are strong because of God, have crushed and brought the arrogant one down underneath your feet" (*Царю богом венчанный, ты, силен о бозѣ, / Сокрушив, повергл еси гордого под нозѣ*). Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 214, 212.

<sup>67</sup> V. M. Zhivov and B. A. Uspenskii, "Tsar' i Bog. Iazykovye aspekty sakralizatsii monarkha v Rossii," in *Iazyki kul'tury i problemy perevodimosti* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), 47-153.

<sup>68</sup> The sight of the fleeing enemy is a recurrent motif in early modern "epinikia." Cf. in Kochanowski's *Epinicion* for Jan Zamoyski: "they fled in a manner of birds, and the victor was smiting the fleeing backs" (*fugerent avium ri-/tu, fugientia victor / terga caedit* [Duod. LV]; cf. *seque in penitissima regni abdit loca tristior* [Duod. LVII]). Cf. the discussion of Lomonosov's Khotin ode below.

Сам лев, иже многия устрашаше грады,  
В лесы, в чащи побеже искати отрады.  
С малою ли бежиши, звѣре, срамотою,  
Хоботом заглаждая слѣд твой за собою?

[...] and, already weakened in his force,  
The lion himself, the one who terrified many cities,  
Escaped to the woods and thickets in search of relief.  
Are you fleeing, you beast, with no small a shame,  
Blotting out your path behind you with your tail?

Prokopovich's *Epinikion* furnishes a poetics of autocratic agency in its canonical form. The monarch and God are one and the same agent, whose beneficent activity on behalf of the community is rendered conspicuous in the particular event—the battle of Poltava—that motivates the text. The subduing of the beastly enemy confirms and constitutes the body politic in its peaceful stasis, foreclosing the attempt by part of the populace to undermine the regime. After “the traitor, the great enemy of the fatherland, was executed” (albeit it was a mock ceremony, as Mazepa fled to the Ottoman Porte), “joyful Peace returns to us, leading along with it well-provided Health” (*И отступник пріять казнь, отчества враг велий, / Ко нам же возвращенный грядет мир веселй / И безбѣдно здравие ведетъ со собою*).<sup>69</sup> Moreover, in *Epinikion*, Feofan took the opportunity to reverse the common accusation against Russia's putative despotic leanings: it is Charles, the European monarch, who is designated as a “*tyrannus*” (in line 6 of the Latin text), whereas Peter is referred to as “*rex*” as well as a “*ducum regumque decus*”—the “glory of commanders and of kings.” No longer burdened with the legacy of Muscovite despotism, Peter stands revealed as the best of rulers, who brings honor to the very principle of monarchical power.<sup>70</sup>

It is a salutary reminder that during his lifetime, the prospects of Peter's absolute monarchy were much less obvious to his contemporaries than they might appear from the perspective of the two ensuing centuries of hereditary rule in Russia. Feofan lived to see another attempt at undermining absolutism, this time coming from within the Russian elite. The 1730 succession crisis led a group of noblemen, some of whom were inspired by Western republican ideals, to attempt to impose limitations on the authority of the future empress Anna Ioannovna. Following her enthronement, however, Anna Ioannovna, relying on the wider gentry, rejected the “conditions” originally imposed on her and assumed absolute power. In a specially-crafted short poem, Prokopovich celebrates this moment as the monarch's reclaiming “her scepter out of civic hell,” as Russia “thereby becomes joyous and merry” (*И выняла скипетр свой с гражданскаго ада, / и тем стала Россія весела и рада*). Let this, Prokopovich continues, serve as a

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<sup>69</sup> Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 209. In the original Latin, these lines contain an allusion to M. K. Sarbiewski's ode “Cum infestae Thracum...” (Liburkin, *Russkaia novolatinskaia poeziia*, 56).

<sup>70</sup> The Latin and the Polish texts of the *Epinikion* have been reprinted in *Lucubrationes illustrissimi ac reverendissimi Theophanis Prokopowicz* (Warsaw, 1743), 123-134.

warning to all who "ponder the introduction of a false regime" (*кто ни мыслиш вводить строй обманный*).<sup>71</sup> The chaos of the republican "civic hell" was not far from sight, and, as the foregoing analysis suggests, it could easily be seen as the realm of semiotic confusion in which the solid conceptual patterns of pan-European *ancien régime*—the heroic subject of history as a benefactor to the society, the alignment of the political and the religious, the society united in a thankful remembrance of the event of its self-constitution—would lose their validity.

While Russian autocracy would indeed enjoy a lengthy prosperity, the reign of empresses called for a rethinking of the inherited Pindaric form. Whereas Trediakovsky's first poetic panegyrics for Anna Ioannovna are built on topoi of the golden age and the blissful stability that her reign promises, in his Pindaric ode on the capture of Gdansk (1734), he casts the Russian empress as a militant hero, equipped with a spear and a glittering helmet. Resembling Minerva, she is "evidently, sent from heavens, and a goddess in her entire appearance, fearful even without the shield of aegis" (*Явно, что от небес посланна, / И богиня со всего вида, / Страшна и без щита эгида*).<sup>72</sup> By contrast, in his odes for both Anna Ioannovna and Elizabeth, Lomonosov came to emphasize the concept of peace, at the expense of heroic agency, which hardly fitted female rulers who did not take to the battlefield. In the famous Khotin ode of 1739, Lomonosov dedicates the last five stanzas to the praise of peace and prosperity due to Anna's ability to "guard" her realm from enemies.<sup>73</sup> In the battle scene, the Turks are compared, in an image going back to Pindar's Pythian 1, to the erupting Aetna, and described as a leaping tiger, eventually reduced to a wounded, fleeing beast driven by shame and fear (*Он рыщет как пронзенный зверь*).<sup>74</sup> As a stand-in for the lacking autocratic agent, Lomonosov introduces an apparition of Peter, referred to simply as a "Hero," who arrives at the scene to commend Anna's success in a short exchange with another Hero, the "Subduer of the lands of Kazan'," Ivan the Terrible.

Another curious reflex of the Pindaric poetics of power is found in Lomonosov's 1741 ode addressed to the ill-fated Emperor Ivan VI Antonovich, one year-old at the time (*Нагреты нежным воды югом*). The monologue of "joyous Russia"—the entire poem is a prosopopeia of the country—is interrupted by a vision of a rising monster (again, predictably compared to Aetna, as well as to the giant Anteus) that desires to "put its throne above stars and to exceed supreme power" (*Престол себе над звезды ставит, / Превысить хочет вышнюю власть*). All of a sudden, this monster is annihilated by the thunderbolt wielded by the one-year-old emperor, a feat "more wondrous than the one effected by Alcides" when he smothered the snakes sent by Hera. (This topos, as I pointed out above, goes back to Pindar's Nemean 1). This sequence, which paradoxically casts an infant as a hero, is a transposition into the Pindaric medium of the conflict between the regent Ernst Johann von Biron and the parents of Ioann Antonovich, which ended in Biron's condemnation and exile.

<sup>71</sup> Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 217.

<sup>72</sup> V. K. Trediakovskii, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963), 130.

<sup>73</sup> M. V. Lomonosov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1986), 69.

<sup>74</sup> Lomonosov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 65.



As Viktor Zhivov has argued, Russian “state mythology” in the eighteenth century cast the empresses as cosmic, messianic figures, capable of miraculously transforming their realm. That transformation was the preeminent way in which Russian subjects were invited to conceptualize the Enlightenment, insofar as it was initiated and propagated by the state, rather than—as was the case in Western Europe—by a society that placed itself in opposition to the state. As Zhivov shows, the topoi of the golden age that proliferate in Lomonosov’s and Derzhavin’s odes for Elizabeth and Catherine the Great form an important ingredient in that state mythology.<sup>75</sup> Supplementing Zhivov’s discussion, I would add that these topoi enter into a conjunction with a particular inflection of the pan-European Pindaric poetics of autocratic power. What we observe in the mainstream of the eighteenth century Russian odic writing is the privileging of one aspect of that poetics, the *Aurea Pax* strand. The older, underlying conceptual scheme of heroic agency, highlighted by Prokopovich’s *Epinikion*, supplies the background against which the later development of Russian state ideology emerges in clearer light.

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<sup>75</sup> Zhivov, “Gosudarstvennyi mif,” 450-452. On the dominance of the imagery of “happiness” (*fortuna*) in court rituals during the reigns of Elizabeth and Catherine II, see Stephen Baehr, “Fortuna Redux: the Iconography of Happiness in Eighteenth-Century Russian Courtly Spectacles,” in *Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteenth Century: Contacts and Comparisons*, ed. A. G. Cross (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1979), 109-122. On the uses of the topoi of the “golden age” during Elizabeth’s reign, cf. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 87-109. For a discussion of rhetorical tensions detectable in Feofan’s panegyrics for the first empresses, Catherine I and Anna Ioannovna, see Gary Marker, “Godly and Pagan Women in the Coronation Sermon of 1724,” in *Eighteenth-Century Russia: Society, Culture, Economy* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 207-220.