Vigilius Eriksen's and Stefano Torelli's Portraits of Catherine II in Russian Dress: Two Competing Images of Russianness? Part I*

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A series of two articles offers an interpretation of the two portraits of Catherine II in Russian dress painted by Vigilius Eriksen and Stephano Torelli in the light of the conceptual fields of the terms "people" (French)/"Volk" (German) which was translated into Russian, as Ingrid Schirle revealed, as "народ" implying sociological meaning and "nation" (French)/"Nation" (German) translated into Russian as "государство" or "отечество". A present paper examines Vigilius Eriksen's portrait. Comparison with period visual material together with newly discovered textual evidence categorically proves that Vigilius Eriksen's portrait, as well as Russian court dress, offers an image of boyar attire, though the elements perceived as Russian were, as shown by Svetlana Amelekhina and Daniel Green, characteristic for both pre-Petrine elite dress, some types of period folk dress and some even for European dress. Such dress implies and glorious centuries-long history of the state — the same ideas as those promoted in academic history painting. The paper offers analysis of the artistic traits of Eriksen's portrait and ways of dissemination of the portrait which make it an efficient instrument of implementing Catherine's idea.

Keywords: Catherine II, Vigilius Eriksen, Russian court dress, folk dress, portrait of a ruler, people, nation.

Art historians interpret Vigilius Eriksen's and Stefano Torelli's portraits of Catherine II in Russian dress, i. e. a multirow pearl necklace, a *rubakha* (skirt), plain in the first painting and with a floral pattern in the latter, a sleeveless upper garment (of a different fashion in each case) and, on her head, a *kokoshnik* with a veil, as an attempt by the German-born Empress to fashion herself as a genuinely Russian ruler, in other words to demonstrate her commitment to the traditions of the country. Such interpretation was first formulated in the early 20th century by Nikolai Vrangel who described Vigilius Eriksen's portrait as "an ultimate transfiguration of the Anhalt princess into a Russian monarch" [1, p. 65][1]. Contemporary scholar Elizaveta Renne, the main expert on Vigilius Eriksen, construes this portrait in a similar way: "Catherine, who was Ger-

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[1] All the citations are originally in Russian and are translated into English by the author.

man in origin and did not have direct rights to the Russian throne, always emphasized her **devotion to tradition**…" [2, p. 150] (see also: [3, p. 101; 4, p. 118; 5, p. 72]). Other researchers retreat into general assumptions about representation of Catherine as "a master of the Russian land" obviously implying a similar meaning [6, p. 380]. Stefano Torelli's portrait of Catherine, which has gained less attention, is described in a recent monograph by Elizaveta Renne as "similar" to Eriksen's [5, p. 72]. As the dress in the portraits is not similar (with the exception of the necklace), Elizaveta Renne's comment appears to suggest the comparable choice of the dress associated with Russia and similar format of the paintings (both are half-length).

The established interpretation of Catherine's portraits contradicts both literature on the European practice of using dress as a means of representing a monarch's unity with their people and on Catherine's introduction of Russian court dress which was another way of her dealing with specific Russian elements and their meaning in clothing. Raisa Kirsanova, Tamara Korshunova, Nina Tarasova, Svetlana Amelekhina, Daniel Green and Xénia Borderioux regard Russian court dress as an innovation (rather than adherence to tradition) of Catherine synthesizing European fashion trends with distinctive elements typical of old-Russian costume (an open outer layer, often fur-trimmed at the early stages of its development, decorated open armholes, long false sleeves hanging from the back of the costume on the outer layer, and horizontally pleated sleeves), some of which were preserved in festive kinds of 18th-century folk costume and were not characteristic of Russian elite costume since at least the Petrine period, that is to say already for half a century [7; 8, p. 11–2; 9, p. 54–6; 10, p. 192–4; 11, p. 162; 12, p. 192, 194; 13, p. 18]. The interpretation of Catherine's dress in Eriksen's and Torelli's portraits as a demonstration of her commitment to Russian traditions ignores the fact that the traditions which it embodied were not contemporary traditions of the nobility, whereas the usual European practice was that a ruler from a foreign dynasty put on dress currently worn by the local elite, thus using it to build a symbolic contact primarily with it [14]. Catherine's idea was rather the establishment of a new image of the elite based on reimagining the traditions of the past. Victor Zhivov in his ground-breaking paper on the journal "Vsiakaia Vsiachina" argues that the Empress promoting certain views on its pages implicitly entered into competition with Peter the Great, questioning the benefits of his forced reclothing of elite Russians into European dress — the act which was strongly symbolically charged — and turned clothing reform into an all-embracing metaphor presenting her rule as a more reasonable cultural hybridization [15, p. 257]. Victor Zhivov's ideas were further developed by Victoria Ivleva on the same material [16, p. 31–5] and recently by Anna Korndorf on the material of history painting [17].

The interpretation of the portraits in question is complicated by several factors. First, the portraits are half-length and, as a consequence, we do not know whether the garments depicted are waist-length or floor-length and consequently whether it is a shugai or a sarafan in Torelli's case and whether it is a bezrukava or some sort of long dress in Eriksen's case. Another problem is that some elements which were perceived as Russian were, as shown by Svetlana Amelekhina and Daniel Green in their work on Russian court dress, characteristic for both pre-Petrine elite dress and some types of period folk dress (and some even for European dress) [12, p. 194–7]. This dichotomy makes it difficult to conclude what the idea was behind such elements — were they associated with the old image of the elite, or with the contemporary peasant population, or both? Finally, no firm textual

evidence has yet been found to confirm the circumstances in which Catherine wore the dresses depicted.

My research offers an interpretation of the two portraits of Catherine II in Russian dress painted by Stephano Torelli and Vigilius Eriksen in the light of the conceptual fields of the terms "people" (French)/"Volk" (German) which was translated into Russian as "народ" implying sociological meaning and "nation" (French)/"Nation" (German) usually translated into Russian as "государство" or "отечество" [18]. The present article examines Eriksen's portrait, it provides a critical survey of the existing versions of the "reconstruction" of the dress from the half-length depiction and of the events for which such dress could be prepared. Further, on the basis of comparison with visual materials and textual sources, it offers an attempt to define which element — period folk dress or pre-Petrine elite dress — was prevalent, to specify the contexts in which it should be interpreted, reveal the ideas it embodies, and examine artistic traits which make it an efficient instrument of implementing certain ideas. A sequel to this article would examine Torelli's portrait in the light of similar questions.

The earliest mentioning of Catherine's portrait in Russian dress by Vigilius Eriksen belongs to Jacob von Stäehlin: "A German engraver Roth made a print after a pastel [portrait], [in which the Empress is depicted] in old Russian costume" [19, p. 83]. Konstantin Malinovskii equates this portrait with that enthusiastically praised by Jacob von Stäehlin in another manuscript thus shedding light on its dating: "In spring 1769 [he paints] the best likeness of the Empress, the finest portrait of her with pastels" [19, p. 83]. Current location of the original pastel is unknown.

An oil copy of the portrait was given by Catherine as a gift to English doctor Thomas Dimsdale together with the title of baron and other presents for the successful inoculation of her and her son against smallpox [20, p. 314; 21, col. 795–6]. The portrait is in Dimsdale family collection in London (Fig. 1). Simon Houfe considers it to be Eriksen's own work, though less successful than his other portraits of the Empress [22, p. 81]. Elizaveta Renne rejects Eriksen's authorship [3, p. 100–1]. Another copy — a delightful miniature (ivory, watercolour, height 3,5 cm, State Kremlin Museums, Moscow, reproduced in: [5, p. 204; 10, p. 192])[2] — was given by Catherine as a present to Grigorii Orlov. Elizaveta Renne acknowledges it as Eriksen's original [23, p. 793–4]. There are numerous other copies, both canvases and miniatures, and, though we do not always know to what purpose they were made, they prove the huge popularity of this type of iconography[3].

"Spring 1769" is the dating of the portrait based on Jacob von Stäehlin's evidence, and this became established as fact in the literature [24, p. 70; 6, p. 382]. Aleksandra Müller

[2] "Vigilius Eriksen. Portrait of Catherine II. Moscow Kremlin Museums". Accessed May 13, 2024. https://www.kreml.ru/exhibitions/russian-exhibitions/vigilius-eriksen--portretist-imperatritsy-k-300-letiyu-so-dnya-rozhdeniya.

[3] Grigorii Serdiukov, 1773, 71 × 57 cm, oil, canvas, State Historical Museum, Moscow; unknown artist, last quarter of the 18th century, oil, canvas, 60 × 47,7 cm, State Museum-Reserve "Tsaritsino"; unknown artist, mid-19th century, oil, canvas, 70 × 60 cm, State Hermitage, St. Petersburg; unknown artist, last third of the 18th century, oil, canvas, State Borodinskii Military-History Museum-Reserve; Louis Joseph Maurice, drawing, 6,9 × 5,5 cm, Versailles; unknown artist, end of the 18th century, 3,6 × 2,8 cm, copper, enamel, State Historical Museum, Moscow; unknown artist, miniature, Saratov State Art Museum of A. N. Radishchev; unknown artist, miniature, ivory, watercolor, 4 × 3,2 cm, Novgorod State United Museum Reserve.

Fig. 1. Unknown artist after Vigilius Eriksen. Portrait of Catherine II in Russian dress. After 1761 — before December 1768. Oil, canvas. 58 × 46 cm. Dimsdale collection

dates it to 1768, but with no argumentation [25, p. 52]. The portrait can be dated certainly no later than 1772 as this year an engraving after it appeared. A compelling earlier terminus ante quem is December 1768 — the date when Thomas Dimsdale left St. Petersburg for Britain already with a copy of portrait[4].

Elizaveta Renne proposes as a terminus post quem 1767, connecting the portrait's creation with Catherine's reception of the title of "Mother of Fatherland" which was presented to her by the Legislative Commission on August 12, 1767. An extra argument for this version put forward by Elizaveta Renne is Karl's Leberecht 1779 medal with Catherine's portrait in similar clothing as in Eriksen's portrait and an inscription "To Mother of the Fatherland" on the avers side [3, p. 101; 10, p. 190]. This is an attractive hypothesis, however the medal was made more than a decade later and there is no textual evidence either to link the medal to the event of presenting Catherine the title or of the fact that Catherine appeared in such dress in connection with it, leaving the possibility that this was a later association.

The circumstances in which Catherine put on the attire in which she is depicted in Eriksen's portrait and the very sort of the dress depicted is also debatable. It bears sim-

[4] The exact date of Thomas Dimsdale's departure cannot be specified. An announcement in the newspaper "Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti" was not made. Thomas Dimsdale mentions that Catherine released him of this obligation [20, p. 320]. Lucy Ward in her recent monograph dates his departure from St. Petersburg to December 1768 [26, p. 197].

Fig. 2. Unknown Russian artist. Portrait of Empress Catherine II. 2nd half of the 18th century. Oil on canvas. 92.5 × 116 cm. Photographer — V. S. Korolev © The Peterhof State Museum Reserve, photo, 2024

ilarity with Russian court dress as it consists of an outer garment and undergarment. However, the first appearance of the Empress in a dress called "Russian" is recorded in the Kammerfourier journal on the anniversary of her coronation on September 22, 1770, more than a year and a half after the latest date when Eriksen's portrait could be created. There are no Russian court dresses of this period in museum collections and researchers try to reconstruct their appearance by analogy with regimental dresses (Empress's female dresses corresponding to uniform of different regiments) which also have specific Russian elements (an open outer layer, open armholes, false sleeves, vertical decorative line at the center of the inner layer) and later samples of Russian dresses [8, p. 11–2].

The earliest case when naming "Russian dress" in period texts could be hypothetically linked to a particular period visual image is Jacob von Stählin's mention of Dmitrii Levitskii's "lebensgroße Bildnis der Kaiserin in scharlachfarbenem russischen Kleid … die Monarchin nicht nur ähnlicher als auf allen bisherigen Porträts zu treffen, sondern auch 'seine besondere Stärke in der Expression und dem clairobscur sowohl als in der Draperie zu zeigen'" [27, S. 277] (Fig. 2). Levitskii's original should be dated before 1772–1773, as Jacob von Stählin mentions that that year the artist created another life-size image of the Empress. D. Migdal in 1962 hypothesised that the original might be a painting now in State Museum-Reserve "Pavlovsk" (inv. no. 3539-III), but this was not proved by research

into the painting technique carried out in 1987 [28, S. 26][5]. Still, the type of iconography is firmly linked to Dmitrii Levitskii [29, p. 55].

The half-length portrait does not allow us to ascertain whether Empress's red outer garment is long or reaches only her waist. Following Nikolai Vrangel, who was the first to describe it as a "shugai" [1, p. 65], today most researchers identify it as a sort of a sleeveless waist-length garment, however there is no consent about its particular type. Liudmila Zaionts proved that "shugai" is a false designation as it has a completely different cut [30]. The authors of the catalogue "Enlightenment Gothic" call it "dushegreia" or "bezrukava", conflating different types of garment [6, p. 379–82]. Elizaveta Renne rejects "shugai" as a false designation, in an earlier article preferring the term "moldavan" [3, p. 101] and in the most recent monograph — "bezrukava" which is in fact more like what we see in Eriksen's picture if we believe that the garment is short [5, p. 71].

Iurii Epatko links the Empress's dress in Eriksen's portrait with a description provided by Mikhail Pyliaev, a 19th-century writer and journalist whose research focused on the 18th century: "…The Empress invented for herself a costume resembling an old Russian one with a veil and open armholes. She wore a fur-coat with a waistline, a multirow pearl necklace on her breast. Later the Empress's costume was man-like: a loose kaftan with no waistline (moldavan) and a Hungarian fur hat with a tassel" [31, p. 31] (see also: [32, p. 181]. Mikhail Pyliaev gives no reference to particular sources and it cannot be ruled out that his description might in some respects be based on Eriksen's portrait.

It was Liudmila Zaionts who first suggested that the garment depicted could be floor-length, rather than short. Her assumption is strengthened by Narcisse Lecomte's print (engraving, etching) after Alexandre Joseph Desenne's drawing (c. 1818–1825. Engraving, etching, paper; published in: [33, p. 64] (Fig. 3) which has yet not been mentioned in this context and which presents the Empress full-length in the same characteristic pearl necklace, a veil and a long fur-trimmed outer dress the upper part of which is identical to that depicted by Vigilius Eriksen. This piece produced in Paris and dating from the early 19th century could be based either on some unknown source or at least to some degree on the design of Russian court dress. Whatever the case, it is important as it brings attention to the close similarity of the upper part of Russian court dress and the dress of Catherine in Eriksen's portrait.

Liudmila Zaionts argues that the dress depicted by Eriksen, like Russian court dress, was partly inspired by Polish examples and originated soon after Catherine's accession to the throne. She compares the dresses of Catherine in an oval profile portrait by Vigilius Eriksen (under question, 1760s, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg) and in Evgraf Chemesov's print after Pietro Rotari's original (1762, paper, etching) with the dress of Maria Józefa, wife of August III, in a portrait from the National Museum in Warsaw (18th century)[6], stating their similarity and considering them a starting point for the development of the fashion for Russian dress [30]. If the likeness of Catherine's dress in the abovementioned paintings with Polish examples cannot be doubted, her Russian dress in Vigilius Eriksen's portrait is rather different. It has parallel front sides, unlike the Polish examples, where they diverge in the upper part forming a triangular cut. The illusion of

[5] Still, in this catalogue the painting is ascribed to Levitskii, while in others to Vigilius Eriksen ["Vigilius Eriksen (?). Portrait of Catherine II. State Museum-Reserve Pavlovsk". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/collections?id=35893348], in both cases under question.

[6] "Pietro Rotari. Portrait of Wife of August III. National Museum in Warsaw". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/en/catalog/505070.

Fig. 3. Narcisse Lecomte after Alexandre Joseph Desenne. Portrait of Catherine II. Engraving, paper. 25.5 × 17.5 cm. © Государственный Эрмитаж, Санкт-Петербург

close similarity is created by fur trim which was actually a leitmotif not only of Polish and Russian, but also of Turkish garments. Interpretation is therefore entirely contingent on the circumstances. This is taken into account by Liudmila Zaionts who connects the choice of dress in Eriksen's portrait with the first partition of Poland in 1772. Yet the link is challenged by an earlier dating of the portrait. Intermingling contemporary Polish and old Russian dress, rather than accentuating a specific Polish message, is evident in Charles Warren's engraving after Richard Corbould's original (1789, etching, made for Percival Barlow's "General History of Europe", 1791) in which Catherine is depicted full-length, her head and upper part of her dress copied from Chemesov's engraving, however, the outer dress is loose and reaches her knees in stark contrast to the Polish examples and the skirt is similar to a Russian sarafan in its use of a decorative vertical line.

Some researchers link Catherine's dress with Moldavia. Catherine's dress called "moldavan" was first mentioned by Pavel Sumarokov in his "Overview of the Reign and Features of Catherine the Great" (1832): "Her usual dress was a capote or Moldavan of her own design, with no special decoration" [34, p. 160]. Later, a more detailed description was given by Mikhail Pyliaev. Presumably these sources made Troels Andersen call Catherine's dress in Vigilius Eriksen's portrait "Moldavian" [24, p. 70]. The catalogues "Russian Fine Arts of the 18th — early 20th centuries in the collection of Novgorodian Museum-Reserve" and "Enlightenment Gothic" mention "notes" of courtiers, without specifying them: "…In household use before 1769 the Empress followed fashion, but from that year started to wear moldovan, a dress with a wide bodice and long sleeves which concealed the fullness of her body" [6, p. 380] (see also: [35, p. 32]. Olga Khoroshilova furthermore con-

Fig. 4. Fedot Shubin. Portrait of Catherine II. 1794. 53 × 38.1 cm. Paper, pencil, ink, chalk, brush, pen. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

nected the choice of such dress to the victories on the territory of Moldavia during the Russian-Turkish war [36].

Contemporary researchers ignore the details of Mikhail Pyliaev's description which separates "a costume resembling an old Russian one" and "moldavan" (the former with a waist and the latter without). Grigorii Gennadi, a 19th-century author like Pyliaev, used the term "moldovan" to describe an attire worn by Catherine in her later years — the one in which she is portrayed in M. Young's 1792 engraving (mezzotinto)[7] after Fedot Shubin's 1790 drawing (Fig. 4)[8] — and synonymized "moldavan" with the "Empress's historical fur-trimmed doloman" [37, p. 204–5]. The breast-length portrait does not allow us to ascertain whether the costume is loose or fitted, but the Hungarian hat makes it likely that this is a garment which Pyliaev calls "moldovan". There is another portrait by Mikhail Shibanov (1787, State Russian Museum) in which Catherine is shown in the same hat but different dress which could be for that reason also supposed to be the dress meant by Pyliaev. But it is again impossible to imagine what the whole dress looked like due to the head-and-shoulders format of the portrait. Interpreting Catherine's dress in Eriksen's portrait as a glorification of Russia's victories over Turkey through association with Moldavia

[7] "John Young after Fedot Shubin. Portrait of Catherine II. The British Museum". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2010-7081-3603.

[8] State Russian Museum possesses 1794 drawing by Fedot Shubin which is very close to the engraving. Shubin's 1790 drawing remains unknown today.

Fig. 5. Anton Losenko. Vladimir and Rogneda. 1770. 211.5×117.5 cm. Oil, canvas. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

as a core battlefield also seems unlikely due to its later strong link with Russia revealed in Carl Leberecht's medal.

Despite the existence of Moldavian and Polish versions, most researchers agree that Catherine's dress in Vigilius Eriksen's portrait is some variant of Russian image. The discussion of whether the dress is short or long brings us to the numb of this issue here as different types of a waist-length sleeveless garment were a widespread folk garment in the 18th century, whilst a long garment was typical old Russian elite dress. Xénia Borderioux pointed to the similarity of Catherine's outer dress with that of Rogneda in Anton Losenko's history painting (1770, State Russian Museum) [13, p. 24] (Fig. 5). This important observation should be further developed. Not only is the cut of the outer dress and its fur decoration similar, but so is the decoration of Catherine's underdress, namely floral ornamentation composed in horizontal stripes. Comparable decoration would be used in the costume of a mother giving a bride away at the marriage of a *kniaz'* drawn several decades later by Ivan Ivanov after Aleksei Olenin's sketch for the album "Selected Old Russian Costumes" ("Izbrannye starinnye russkie kostiumy", paper, watercolour, St. Petersburg State Theatre Library).

The colourscheme — a red outer dress trimmed with black fur and a glittering silverish underdress — is also the same in Catherine's and Rogneda's attire. Judging from 17th-century portraits, the colour red was typical for female dress of the upper class (Unknown artist. Portrait of Marfa Matveevna Apraksina (?), 1682 (?), State Russian

Fig. 6. Roman Nikitin. Portrait of Maria Stroganova. Between 1721 and 1724. 111 × 90 cm. Oil, canvas. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Museum; Unknown Russian artist. Portrait of Marfa Matveevna Apraksina, December 1681 — February 14, 1682, State Russian Museum; Unknown artist (Matthäus des Angles?), Portrait of Marpha Fedorovna Matveeva (formerly identified as tsarevna Sophia Alekseevna) [38], 1699 (?), Château de Versailles). But there is neither direct written evidence that any of these portraits were used as models, nor is their early provenance known (which could prove whether they were accessible at the relevant time).

The more significant in this context is "Portrait of Maria Stroganova" by Roman Nikitin (not earlier than May 1724, State Russian Museum, Fig. 6) which was kept in the Grand Palace (Bol'shoi Dvorets) at Oranienbaum, the residence of Grand Duke Petr Fedorovich and Catherine and therefore certainly known to her. In 1765 the portrait was transferred to the Academy of Fine Arts [39, p. 136, no. 343]. Although the portrait dates from the 18th century, Maria Stroganova is dressed in old Russian dress or, rather, one in the manner of it, but slightly Europeanized (on her head is fontange [40, p. 11], and her naked hands are peeking out from loose sleeves). Out of special respect to Maria Stroganova, Peter the Great allowed her to wear such dress at court [41, p. 113]. The upper dress is red with gold and silver embroidery and black fur trimming, under it is a silverish dress with a golden pattern. Indirect evidence that this portrait was used as a model for old Russian elite

dress in art is a later history painting by Ivan Akimov "Velikii *Kniaz'* Sviatoslav Kissing his Children and Mother after his Returning from the Danube to Kiev" (1773, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow)[9] in which *kniaginia* Olga is depicted in a dress of similar fashion, but different color. In Eriksen's portrait of Catherine, by contrast, the model of the dress is different, but the color scheme is the same. Another example of the characteristic combination of red outer dress, black fur trimming and silver-and-gold coloured underdress in Russian court costume of the early 1770s is Pierre-Etienne Falconet's portrait of Grand Duchess Natalia Alekseevna (1774, State Tretyakov Gallery).

The comparison reveals the remarkable similarity of Catherine's dress in Vigilius Eriksen's portrait with what was considered to be old Russian dress, on the one hand, and early examples of Russian court dress, on the other.

No less important is the absence of any similarity with contemporary folk costume. In this context, by folk costume I mean both peasant and merchant dress which had some specific features [42, p. 420–2; 43, p. 37], but held similar principles and formed an opposition to contemporary fashionable dress. The undergarment has no analogues among folk dress at all. Catherine's headdress vaguely resembles a kokoshnik (the closest analogue of its form is a virgin's headdress "*chelka*" or "*poviazka*"), but not any period regional type in particular which make Elena Madlevskaia, a specialist in ethnographic costume, describe it only as "resembling a kokoshnik" [43, p. 40]. The color black is not typical for folk headdresses at all. The only elements of Catherine's dress which have direct analogues in peasant dress are a head kerchief and the lower part of a kokoshnik consisting of four dense rows of pearls (compare with: illustrations "Kalugian merchant wife in summer dress" and "Kalugian girl" from Iogann Gottlieb Georgi's "Description of All the People Inhabiting the Russian Empire" [44, ill. 92, 94]; unknown artist, "Portrait of Peasant Woman in Blue Sarafan", first half of the 19th century (State Historical Museum, Moscow) [45, p. 54, no. 21] — although this dates from a later period, it can be considered a counterpart taking into account the longevity of the traits of folk costume). Still, the latter element can also be found in boyar headdress (for example, in "Portrait of Marfa Matveevna Apraksina", State Russian Museum).

The predominance of elements associated exclusively with boyar dress, distancing from regional ethnographic models reveal Catherine's orientation to pre-Petrine privileged nobility dress. The same can be said about Russian court dress. Svetlana Amelekhina and Daniel Green tended to think that Russian court dress was inspired by boyar dress, but paradoxically their analysis did not prove this as further they demonstrated that characteristic elements of Russian dress are present both in pre-Petrine elite dress and in period folk dress and some of them even in European dress providing no proof how it was perceived by contemporaries. An important textual source confirming this are admiral Pavel Chichagov's (1767–1849) "Notes". Although he was not a contemporary of the early years of Catherine's reign, his assessment has validity as he belonged to the immediate next generation, being a son of admiral Vasilii Chichagov who rose to fame in the time of Catherine. In Pavel Chichagov's words: "She did not feel compelled to stick to the idea of Peter I who prescribed them German costume; **even less could it be her intention to clothe them as peasant women as it happened after her reign. What would they say if**

[9] "Ivan Akimov. Velikii Kniaz' Sviatoslav Kissing his Children and Mother after his Returning from the Danube to Kiev. State Tretyakov Gallery". Accessed May 8, 2024. https://my.tretyakov.ru/app/masterpiece/130617.

the French king would accept for his court a dress of Norman villagers? The sense of grace which she had to such a high degree and her reason the flight of which was unattainably higher than such measures, made her **give preference to costumes which in the old days were used by boyar wives**" [46, p. 266].

Chichagov's passage leaves no doubt that the overall image was based on boyar dress. It was a far cry from what Pavel Divov would later describe as the "Frenchified saraphan" of the time of Nicolas I which was a variation of the most iconic type of folk dress and entailed a completely different set of ideas [8, p. 20–1; 12, p. 201].

Taking late 1768 — early 1769 as the terminus ante quem for the creation of Vigilius Eriksen's portrait, i. e. earlier than Catherine's appearance in Russian court dress on September 22, 1770, mentioned in the Kammerfourier journal, raises the question as to when and under which circumstances Catherine first wore a dress of this fashion. Svetlana Amelekhina refers to the 19th-century researcher Ivan Bozherianov who writes that during the masquerade "Minerva Triumphant" in 1763 that followed Catherine's coronation, "the Empress was sitting in a gilded carriage in a scarlet velvet Russian dress studded with big pearls, with a star on her breast and a brilliant diadem on her head" [47]. This curious mention is rather late to be fully trusted, but it is not alone.

There is an ivory miniature portrait of Catherine II by Louis Joseph Maurice (6.9 × 5.5 cm) of exactly the same type of iconography as Eriksen's in Versailles[10]. On the verso of the frame there is an inscription according to which the author of the portrait is Louis Joseph Maurice rather than Vigilius Eriksen and the portrait was executed in 1763 rather than 1769[11].

This appears rather improbable. Apart from Jacob von Stählin's mention, a principal argument in favor of Eriksen's authorship is Christian Melchior Roth's 1772 engraving (engraving, stipple, etching). The inscription underneath states that the original was made by Vigilius Eriksen from nature ("ad vivum pinxit") and was not a copy of another artist's work. Furthermore, in Louis Joseph Maurice's portrait Catherine looks older than 33 — the age of her accession to the throne. Finally, Maurice's portrait differs significantly from all known portraits of such iconography (see footnote 3): the face is less elongated, the turn of the head is slightly different, the forehead is narrower, the nose and the fold of the lips are shorter — hence, this portrait cannot be their iconographic source. The inscription on the frame of Versailles portrait must be incorrect, but its source and date of execution are still to be ascertained — a task complicated by the fact that today next to nothing is known about the artist [48, p. 182; 49].

Another version of the occasion when Catherine II put on old Russian dress which also emerged in the 19th century belongs to Sergei Glinka who wrote that the Empress visited relatives of tsaritsa Natalia Kirillovna in such a costume [50, p. 86].

An intriguing hypothesis has recently been formulated by Anna Korndorf. She suggests Vigilius Eriksen's portrait was one of the series commissioned from the artist after the "Carousel" arranged in St. Petersburg in 1766. Vigilius Eriksen's equestrian portraits of Grigorii Orlov, the leader of the Roman quadrille, and Aleksei Orlov, the leader of the Turkish quadrille (after 1766, both — State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg) provide

[10] "Maurice, Louis Joseph. Portrait of Catherine II. The Louvre". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020208788.

[11] "Portrait de l'Impératrice Catherine II de Russie peint d'après nature, par Louis Joseph Maurice, son premier peintre, à l'époque de l'avènement au trône de cette Princesse. C'est d'après cet original que les copies destinées aux souverains de l'Europe ont été exécutées par Maurice".

an idea of the spectacular costumes prepared for the festival. Portraits of other participants commissioned from the artist seem not to have been completed. Catherine was initially planning to be at the head of the Slavonic quadrille, however eventually abandoned the idea. Anna Korndorf argues that Vigilius Eriksen portrayed her in Slavonic dress already prepared for the festival [17, p. 315–8]. There are two principal counter arguments to this hypothesis. Firstly, after Anna Korndorf's article came out, Elizaveta Renne published archival documents revealing that members of the Slavonic quadrille wore costumes of green taffeta. In addition, Laure Junot, Duchess of Abrantès, retelling someone else's impressions of the carousel, wrote that the Empress was among spectators in green silk dress of Muscovite fashion (and not red, as in Eriksen's portrait) [5, p. 61]. Secondly, in a list of his works, Vigilius Eriksen mentions a sketch of a portrait of Grigorii Orlov "in Carousel costume", a "portrait of Her Excellency Daria Petrovna in the time of the Carousel" and "a portrait of Catherine in Russian dress" [5, p. 115, 139] with no reference to the Carousel which he would surely have made had they been connected.

In short, none of the hypotheses concerning the occasion at which Catherine appeared in the dress she wears in Vigilius Eriksen's portrait can be categorically proved today. The very search for some particular occasion at which Catherine could appear in the dress in question is predicated on the belief of such a dress was extraordinary. This belief in turn is to some degree shaped by the long tradition of thinking that what Catherine wears is a sleeveless jacket. If we accept that this is a long dress and take into account its remarkable similarity with early models of Europeanized Russian court dress, we can imagine her wearing it without any special reason which indirectly supports Mikhail Pyliaev's account that Catherine wore such dress for household use before introducing it as a ceremonial one.

This becomes less surprising if we consider other cases of wearing old Russian dress in the 18th century. As well as the case of Mar'ia Stroganova from the 1720s mentioned above, there are examples dating from the early years of Catherine's reign. Jean Chappe d'Auteroche, a French astronomer who traveled to Russia in 1761, described in his book "Voyage en Sibérie…" (Paris: Debure père, 1768) the "French-Russian dress" of a daughter of a rich merchant combining old Russian dress and European fashion, and mentioned "several local noblemen and other distinguished persons clothed in Russian dress, but very elegantly" at her marriage [51, p. 146].

Another instance concerns the Court and no one else but the Orlovs who were then among Catherine's closest circle. Count Fedor Golovkin, litterateur and memoirist, writes that Catherine "wished to make use of the love which the Orlov showed to folk customs, love which resulted from their ignorance of foreign customs rather than from any definite decision to return to old costumes. They, as well as some other courtiers, appeared in these long costumes, fitting bodies of the young and endowing the old with such a majestic air. The rarest furs only increased the sumptuousness of marvelous textiles, while the stars and order ribbons seemed even more worthy of envy; but the Chernyshevs, the Shuvalovs and the Stroganovs pushed forward by Elizabeth revealed such sheer frustration, crying about sacrilege that it was imperative to reject" [52, p. 371]. While Fedor Golovin, born in 1766, was not an eyewitness, he was close to Catherine in the 1780s and could have heard talk about signal events that had taken place two decades previously.

An important question is: what was the potential audience of Catherine's scenario of self-representation in Russian dress? Believing that Catherine appeared in such dress at

the masquerade "Minerva Triumphant", Svetlana Amelekhina sees in it an appeal to the people and refers to Catherine's later attestation that: "Power without people's trust means nothing to the one who wants to be loved and glorified" [11, p. 159].

In Europe the practice of a monarch dressing in local costume was characteristic of composite monarchies but was also conducted in states not included in such formations when the ruler came from some new "foreign" dynasty. In each case, the costume and the practice had certain specifics. Despite the differences, in each case the dress carried keen signifiers of identity, with a long history, true or invented, and, most importantly, was worn by the elite at the time in question [14].

The case of Catherine has a dual character. Although old Russian dress was not then worn by the nobility, if we believe Fedor Golovkin and Sergei Glinka, certain nobles liked it; in this respect, Catherine's act echoes the European practice of flirting with the elite. Even though Fedor Golovkin writes that the attempt to flirt with the nobility ended in failure, in fact Catherine did not give up the idea and in time cleverly transformed it into Europeanized Russian court dress — an act that aligns with her original plan of coining a new image of Russia as a country with a centuries-old rich history, and which started to be realized in art already in the early 1760s. Eriksen's portrait appears to be an important element in this chain, an effective instrument used by Catherine to implement her idea.

The special role of Vigilius Eriksen's portrait in Catherine's program predetermined its specific features. One of the most important formats for embodying the idea of unity with the elite through dress in 18th-century Europe was an imposing, large-size, full-length ceremonial portrait. Salient examples are portraits of John II Casimir Vasa, king of Poland, by Daniel Schultz (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm) and August III Sas, king of Poland, by Louis de Silvestre (c. 1737, National Museum, Krakow); numerous portraits of Maria Theresa as King of Hungary, such as the one by Daniel Shmiddeli (1742, City gallery, Bratislava). The rhetoric of the ceremonial portrait corresponded to the publicity surrounding the very act of wearing such dress at the coronation (Poland, Hungary).

Yet Vigilius Eriksen's portrait of Catherine — half-length against a neutral background with no conventional splendid entourage — suggests informal, leisurely communication with the person depicted. The technique in which the original was created — pastel — encouraged such an effect. In the 18th century, pastel, perceived as "painting in the dry manner", could be used on a relatively large scale but in dimensions nonetheless suited for display in domestic interiors, rather than palace halls. Rapid draftsmanship and bold facture also contributed to the informal quality of these spirited pieces [53, p. 27, 45]. Oil copies of Vigilius Eriksen's portrait differ in size from 60 to 70 cm vertically and from 47 to 60 cm horizontally — the size not implying considerable distance between the model and the viewer. Miniature copies suggested even more intimate contact with the model.

Such a format was perfect for a gift. Today we know several copies of the portrait which were surely created for this purpose. One, now in the collection of State Moscow Kremlin, is a miniature given by the Empress as a gift to Grigorii Orlov in 1771 to recognize his role in stabilizing the situation in Moscow during the plague uprising and, perhaps, to ease the pain of his forthcoming resignation as her favorite. It is shaped as a heart and was originally covered with a diamond-encrusted cover [23, p. 791–5]. A symbolic form of a heart increased the meaning of the gift in both an honorary and a personal respect.

There is a pastel copy of the portrait in the State Russian Museum (38 × 33 cm, parchment, pastel) framed in passe-partout together with a facsimile of the Empress's handwritten note addressed to Count Ivan Grigorievich Chernyshev: "Thank you, Count Ivan Grigorievich, for your zealous congratulation on the successful conclusion of peace. I rejoice in this. With kind regards. Catherine. August 5, 1790"[12]. It is unknown whether the original note was mounted on the portrait by Catherine, or by the owner[13]. Nonetheless, it confirms the established notion of a portrait enabling some form of private communication between the "*matushka-imperatritsa*" and one of her subjects.

An oil copy of the portrait was gifted by Catherine to doctor Thomas Dimsdale certainly with the intention of promoting such an image of herself abroad (Fig. 1). This portrait from the Dimsdale family collection, approved by the Empress for this very task, appears especially significant in the absence of the confirmed original portrait by Eriksen in pastel or oil. It was reproduced once only in a relatively small size, hindering its full appreciation [22, p. 80]. Although it can hardly be Vigilius Eriksen's original (Eriksen had great flair in painting textiles, whereas the folds in this portrait are brittle), it is without doubt the best of the known easel copies of the portrait. The only rival is a miniature from Moscow Kremlin Museums[14] outshining it in purely artistic qualities, but providing a slightly different image of the Empress.

In the miniature Catherine's features are perfectly correct and comely, her countenance is calm, slightly animated by the light in her eyes. In Dimsdale's portrait she looks a bit older due to a fold under the chin (this feature is preserved in all other copies). More characterful are her nose with a mildly lowered base, lips with a benevolent half-smile implying the calm sentiment of her exceptional dignity, and downturned eyes accentuated by eyebrows that arch downwards. A tiny double flare produces the effect of a discerning, lively gaze, which is lost in all other oil copies. This is a compelling image of the Empress who is both majestic and approachable, dignified and affable — a perfect image for a private gift which the owner would certainly proudly show to his guests.

To appreciate Catherine's daring and well-calculated decision to choose this portrait to promote her image abroad through a private channel, we should remember that it was exactly at this moment that old Russian costume and other attributes of Russian history where charged in Europe with negative connotations due to the influential frontispiece of Chappe d'Auteroche's book "Voyage en Sibérie…", published in 1768, which presented the image of an undeveloped country with a barbarous present and past. Jean-Baptiste Tilliard's engraving after Jean-Baptiste Le Prince's drawing shows the personifications of four countries. Russia, in a fur-trimmed kaftan and holding a berdysh, is coupled with Poland depicted with a characteristic hairstyle, a bow and a quiver with arrows. Juxtaposed to them are France and the Holy Roman Empire in ancient draperies and feathered helmets, the former in a mantle with a pattern of lilies and the latter with a double-headed eagle decorating her headdress. France holds a spear, the Holy Roman Empire rests her hand on fascia — an attribute of power of ancient Roman tsars and, later, of higher magistrates. The inscription "La France et l'Empire, la Pologne et la Russie" coupling the countries

[12] "Unknown artist. Portrait of Catherine II in Kokoshnik. State Russian Museum". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/painting/17_19/neizvestniy_hudozhnik._portret_ekaterini_ii_v_kokoshnike._ne_ranee_1790._zh-8775/.

[13] Letter no. 01/1-38-11078, State Russian Museum (accessed August 10, 2022).

[14] See footnote 2.

corresponds to the visual contradistinction of the two Enlightened countries and the two countries beyond the boundaries of the civilized world. The antithesis rests on references to the history of the countries — noble antiquity in the case of France and the Holy Roman Empire and a barbarous distant past in the case of Russia and Poland (the berdysh on one hand and quiver with arrows on the other).

Jean Chappe d'Auteroche's book infuriated Catherine who initiated (or personally wrote) a riposte in a form of a book called "Antidote" (1770). We cannot assert that "Voyage en Sibérie…" was known to Catherine immediately after its publication in 1768, especially as we do not know the month when it appeared. But Jean Chappe d'Auteroche seems to have been known in Russia as a detractor long before its publication that (as Alexander Pypin assumes) [51, p. 442]. Whatever the case, the fact that Catherine mentions the prints of Jean Chappe d'Auteroche's book in her "Antidote" displays the importance she attached to the visual images accompanying the book [51, p. 235, 237, 248]. Catherine also touches on the topic of old Russian dress several times, emphasizing its beauty ("there is nothing more majestic than old Russian clothes, which are just itching to be painted") [51, p. 348, 233, 392]. Similar idea is expressed in her letter to Voltaire from December 17 (28), 1768 accompanied with a gift to the philosopher — a fur-coat. Catherine also promised to send him "beautiful cloth in Greek taste with fur lining" as soon as Constantinople would be taken and claimed that such cloth is much more comfortable than European one in which none of the sculptors can dress his statues being afraid to make them ridiculous [54, p. 114].

Sending the portrait of herself in a dress inspired by old Russian examples, Catherine obviously aspired to recharge the image of old Russian dress with new, positive, respectable associations and present herself as the monarch of a country with a long and glorious history. Another present she gave to Baron Dimsdale was a muff of black Siberian fox fur, "the most expensive in the world" [20, p. 320], which rhymed with Catherine's dress trim in Vigilius Eriksen's portrait, thus inviting the recipient and any further viewers to appreciate the outstanding qualities of specific Russian materials and items.

Catherine's plan paid off. Not only were Baron Dimsdale's acquaintances able to see her portrait in his home, but it also reached a much wider audience thanks to an engraving made from it by William Dickenson (mezzotint, 1772)[15]. Another copy of the portrait was in the collection of the Russian ambassador, an engraving after which was made by in 1783 [21, p. 796]. Later, more engravings appeared: by Gustav Georg Endner (1773, engraving)[16], George Murray ("Pocket Magazine", 1795, engraving and etching)[17], and Jean Denis Nargeot (first half of the 19th century, engraving, stipple)[18] making it one of the most iconic and long-living images of Catherine.

Comparison with period visual material together with textual evidence by Pavel Chichagov, introduced into this context, categorically proves that Vigilius Eriksen's portrait as well as Russian court dress, offers an image of boyar attire which implies, in Richard

[15] "William Dickinson. Portrait of Catherine II. The British Museum". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2010-7081-3001.

[16] "Gustav Georg Endner. Portrait of Catharina II. Royal Collection Trust". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://www.rct.uk/collection/search/15/collection/614322/catharina-ii-empress-of-russia.

[17] "George Murray. Portrait of Catherine II. The British Museum". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1875-1211-89.

[18] "Jean Denis Nargeot. Portrait of Catherine II. The British Museum". Accessed May 17, 2023. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1900-1231-213.

Wortman's words, "glorious history of Russian elite who conquered the Empire" [55, p. 186] and glorious centuries-long history of the country — the same ideas as those promoted in academic history painting. The meaning of "Russianness" embodied in these visual forms is gravitating to the conceptual field of the words "nation" (French)/"Nation" (German) usually translated into Russian as "государство" or "отечество". Whereas Russian court dress and academic history painting were meant primarily for the audience inside Russia (we can hardly imagine paintings on subjects of Russian history sold abroad) and for foreigners visiting Russia, Eriksen's portrait was an efficient instrument of spreading these ideas both in and outside the country as the likeness of the Empress was a desired gift.

* * *

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