

“The Most Superstitious Christians in the World”: European Travelers and Russian Orthodoxy in
the Age of Enlightenment

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the accounts of thirteen Westerners who traveled to Russia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and argues that their negative perception of Russian Orthodoxy contributed to the notion of a generally backward, alien and un-European Russia. It links these travelogues to prevailing opinions in Western Europe and argues that, from the perspective of Western audiences, the lack of reform within the Russian Orthodox Church and the un-enlightened practices of popular Orthodoxy invalidated other Westernization efforts attempted by the Russian government.

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Introduction

In 1761, the French astronomer Jean-Baptiste Chappe d'Auteroche traveled through the Russian Empire to observe the transit of Venus in the Siberian town of Tobolsk. Although his mission was strictly astronomical, seven years later he would publish his *Voyage en Sibérie fait en 1761*, which was a general account of his travels through Russia, interspersed with all sorts of supposedly reliable information describing the state of this vast empire. In the introduction of his work, Chappe outlines the purpose of his account, succinctly describing the need for more information on this emerging power forcing itself upon the European geopolitical stage:

“Les Russes, renfermés dans leurs Contrées au commencement de ce siècle, n'avoient aucune liaison avec l'Europe civilisée. On savoit à peine qu'il existoit dans ces Climats glacés un Peuple ignorant & grossier. L'influence actuelle de la Russie dans le système politique de l'Europe montre assez les avantages qu'on peut tirer de la connoissance de ce Peuple & du Pays qu'il habite” (Chappe d'Auteroche II).

Chappe's account was not the only one designed to meet the needs of avid Western readers eager to learn about this new and suddenly relevant Russian Empire. Starting with the reign of Peter the Great, but especially in the second half of the 18th and in the beginning of the 19th century, there was a veritable explosion of travel accounts set in Russia, as Western men and women flocked to Russia for all sorts of diverse reasons and published accounts designed to meet the needs outlined earlier by Chappe. However, as Larry Wolff pointed out in his landmark study *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), these accounts did not merely report objective facts or realities. Rather, they contributed to the creation, in the minds of Westerners, of a distinction between Western and Eastern Europe, one civilized and the other barbaric, one enlightened and the other un-enlightened. This came about as these travelers asserted the superiority of Westerners generally in matters of

gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality.¹ More specifically, Katarina O’Laughlin, in her *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century* (2018), argued that female Western travelers presented themselves as superior to Russian women to gain further recognition at home, which reinforced the notion that Eastern European women were fundamentally inferior in dress, habit and hygiene.² Thus, the accounts penned by these travelers not only created notions of difference but, by asserting that Eastern Europeans were inferior, they also excluded them from, and denied their capacity to participate in, a wider Enlightenment process. Western Europe came to be seen as a center of Enlightenment, while Eastern Europe, including Russia, became an un-enlightened periphery according to the mental maps of Westerners.

This thesis will seek to explore a specifically religious aspect of this process and argue that this exclusion occurred not only due to differences ascribed to gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality, but also, in the Russian case, because of religious differences, attributed to the superstitious, primitive and backward nature of Eastern Orthodox religiosity. Specifically, the Russian Orthodox Church was heavily criticized by several Western travelers for its supposed lack of Enlightenment-inspired reforms. In contrast, David Sorkin’s *The Religious Enlightenment* (2011) offered an in-depth explanation of the process by which the Catholic and Protestant churches of Western Europe underwent a series of theological, organizational and educational reforms inspired by Enlightenment ideals. In fact, Sorkin argued that these reforms were a central feature of the

¹ Wolff, Larry. *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994.

² O’Loughlin, Katrina. *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Enlightenment in the West generally.³ Meanwhile, scholars are still divided on whether there genuinely was a religious Enlightenment in Russia, as there appears to have been some profound differences between the religiosity of the clergy and that of the people in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a topic we shall explore further in later sections of this work. In any case, the key argument of this thesis is that, regardless of whether there was indeed a religious Enlightenment in Russia, Western travelers either denied that there were attempts at reform or claimed that these reforms were insufficient. Moreover, in the conclusion we will explore the possibility that, for Western travelers, the lack, or even the failure, of religious reforms in Russia was equated with a general failure to reform. Thus, regardless of the Enlightenment-inspired efforts to modernize Russia in a variety of other spheres, which were attempted by rulers such as Catherine II, Paul I and Alexander I, Russia remained a fundamentally backward and un-civilized country according to the overall perception of Westerners.

It is, however, worthwhile to point out the important role these travel accounts played in creating normative perceptions of Russia among wider Western audiences. As Justin Stagl pointed out in *A History of Curiosity* (2016), travel accounts evolved throughout the Early Modern Period and had acquired a specific role within Western thought during the Enlightenment. Whereas in the Middle Ages traveler's tales, such as Marco Polo's *Travels*, were read mostly for entertainment, by the late 18th century travel literature came to be seen as an entirely objective and factual genre, as firsthand accounts began to be associated with objectivity. Moreover, it is precisely during this period that this sort of literature gained in importance in Western Europe, eventually becoming the

³ Sorkin, David. *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

most authoritative genre that dealt with foreign places and peoples.⁴ As we shall see, the content, tone and character of these accounts could vary widely, with certain accounts designed to suit the needs of a more general audience, while other catered to intellectuals and scientists, but their impact on Enlightenment thought is undeniable. Thus, in his discussion of Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII*, Wolff correctly assessed that Voltaire could write a supposedly accurate and authoritative history of Eastern Europe, despite never visiting the places in question, by referring to these reputedly factual accounts.⁵ The key takeaway is that, by examining the accounts of travelers who went to Russia, we also get a glimpse into Western perceptions of the Russian Empire generally.

From a historiographical perspective, an analysis of these perceptions will seek to deepen our understanding of the relationship between the Enlightenment and religion in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Clearly the hostility with which Western travelers reacted to Orthodoxy in Russia tempers ideas of a lofty religious Enlightenment, which has been much in vogue among scholars since the publication of Sorkin's work. When one considers the disdain with which it was described by Western travelers, Russian Orthodoxy stretched Western notions of religious toleration and cohabitation. In fact, the acrimonious tone adopted by these travelers ultimately excluded Russian Orthodoxy from the mental map of the religious Enlightenment. Unlike the Catholic, Protestant or even Jewish faiths, Orthodoxy was seen as far too primitive, barbaric and backward to be counted among reformed and modern religions. In fact, one could argue that, for

⁴ Stagl, Justin. *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel 1550-1800*. London: Routledge, 2016.

⁵ Wolff, Larry. *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994, 195-234.

some enlightened Western intellectuals, even Islam was more palatable than Russian Orthodoxy, as evidenced by Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*. While Montesquieu's view of Islam was positive enough to produce a work looking at Western society through an Islamic lens, Western encounters with Orthodoxy produced very few works that were sympathetic or self-reflecting. Furthermore, Orthodoxy was often linked with the more unappealing aspects of Islam and was often described as an "oriental" faith, a theme we will explore later in this thesis. Finally, the fact that some travelers analyzed Orthodoxy through a particularly secular lens is especially of note because it lends credence to recent works such as Margaret C. Jacob's *The Secular Enlightenment*, which argued that the Enlightenment resulted in a massive wave of secularism that ultimately transformed Western society.⁶ Throughout this thesis, we will discover that some Western travelers were using Orthodoxy as a sort of extreme example which cautioned against the excesses of religion. Judging by these writings, it appears that secular criticisms of Orthodoxy allowed for the proliferation of secular ideas in the West itself, especially when direct criticisms of Western religious institutions could be prohibited or censored.

To properly examine and contextualize these accounts, the introduction will continue with a step-by-step overview of each travelogue used in this thesis. Then, I will discuss some of the caveats that are inherent to this type of source and offer some concrete examples, which will conclude the introduction. The body of this thesis will be divided in two parts. In part one, we will examine Western perceptions of the Russian Orthodox Church itself, with an analysis of the reactions of travelers to Russian clergymen, monasteries, schools and other official institutions. In

⁶ Jacob, Margaret C. *The Secular Enlightenment*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019.

part two, we will analyze Western interpretations of aspects of Russian Orthodoxy pertaining primarily to laymen, such as ceremonies, beliefs, superstitions, icons, etc. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of some of the wider implications resulting from the overwhelmingly negative perceptions of Western travelers and discuss the process through which certain views of Russia became normative as the tide of public opinion turned and eventually solidified.

The Sources

Having offered a quick introduction into the process by which travel accounts came to play a fundamental role in shaping the perceptions of foreign places and peoples by enlightened audiences, I now wish to offer an in-depth overview of the specific sources used in this thesis. In total, I have analyzed thirteen travel accounts, with nine of them written or translated into English while the remaining four were written in French. Chronologically, Chappe's voyage is the oldest, as he traveled to Russia in 1761, while Mary Holderness' account, who came to Russia in 1815, will be our latest source. I chose this timespan deliberately, as it covers the reigns of three Russian rulers, Catherine II, Paul I and Alexander I, who traditionally represent the Enlightenment in Russia. As we shall see, these accounts could vary widely, as individual travelers had differing backgrounds, opinions and priorities, while contemporary affairs in European politics also shaped the character of some of these works. Notably, three of the sources written in English were authored by women, and their accounts also present some fundamental differences. Finally, it should be noted that, despite their differences, most of these accounts maintained a remarkable point of commonality in that they were fundamentally hostile to Russian Orthodox religiosity, as it was considered backward, primitive and un-enlightened. Although the degree of hostility could vary somewhat, all but one of these sources exhibit this hostility to some extent.

Our first English language source is William Coxe's *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark*, first published in 1784. As a reputed historian, Coxe wrote an account that most closely resembled the ideally objective and factually correct enlightened travelogue. It is then unsurprising that it was highly esteemed by contemporaries, as both English and French travelers often referred to Coxe. Although his travelogue was not focused exclusively on Russia, Coxe's stay in the Russian Empire in the late 1770s covered almost three volumes, and thus its length may have added to its credibility. Perhaps due to his historical inclinations, Coxe, more than any other traveler, seemed genuinely interested in Russia's history and traditions, as he discussed Russia's past at length. In any case, Coxe's conclusions did not fundamentally differ from those of his contemporaries, as he considered Russia to be essentially backward, and viewed Russian Orthodoxy as a key element contributing to this backwardness.

Another notable English account, the *Travels in Russia, Tartary, and Turkey*, was originally published by Edward Daniel Clarke in 1816. This specific account is perhaps the most overtly hostile to Russia generally, and, as a result, is filled with lengthy diatribes chastising Russia for its ridiculous traditions and its degenerate and alien form of religiosity. As an enlightened intellectual, Clarke was especially interested by the connection, dating back to antiquity, between the southern provinces of the Russian Empire and Greece, which is why his route took him from Saint Petersburg to the Black Sea. However, as he performed his tour in 1799, during the reign of the Emperor Paul I, who was challenging British interest in India and the Baltic, as well as seeking an alliance with Napoleon, Clarke's account was clearly colored by disdain for Russia's current ruler and government. In fact, his account consistently lamented the supposedly horrible treatment of British subjects in Russia and even asserted that this awful treatment could be traced back to the Muscovy Company during the reign of Ivan IV. In reality, the attitudes of the Russian

government towards Britons alternated throughout the centuries, but for Clarke, who viewed this complex relationship in simplistic terms, the disrespect offered to the British, a civilized people, by uncivilized Russians was further proof of Russia's un-European and un-enlightened status.

Like Clarke, Reginald Heber followed the same route and traveled to Russia to search for Greek antiquities on the coast of the Black Sea. His account was published posthumously, as Heber died aged only 42, by his widow Amelia, in a collection of his writings entitled *The Life of Reginald Heber*, which consists of a series of entries in his diary. Unlike Clarke, Heber visited Russia during the War of the Third Coalition, by which point Russia, headed by the Anglophile Tsar Alexander I, was an ally of Britain, and so his account is not overtly hostile for political reasons. However, as an Anglican priest in training, Heber was also highly critical of Russian Orthodoxy and considered many of its aspects to be in direct contradiction to the Enlightenment and diametrically opposed to his own, more proper, Anglican faith.

Another account, the *Anecdotes of the Russian Empire*, was published by the Scottish intellectual William Richardson in 1784. Although it was not a cohesive travel account, but instead of a series of letters, this work nevertheless falls within the same supposedly reputable category of eyewitness accounts, drawn from Richardson's stay in Russia in 1768. As the title suggests, Richardson's account is filled with amusing anecdotes, many of which decry the lamentable state of Orthodoxy in Russia. Perhaps this accounts for the many mentions by later travelers such as Clark and Heber.

Our final account written by an Englishman is *A Northern Summer; or, Travels Round the Baltic, Through Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Prussia and Part of Germany in the Year 1804*, published by Sir John Carr in 1805. Carr was a prolific traveler and wrote a series of travel accounts which were eagerly read by the British public. His stay in Russia was not particularly long, as he

only visited Saint-Petersburg as he travelled around the Baltic, but Carr felt it was enough to offer an in-depth description of Russian society, culture and religion. Not unlike Heber, Carr came to Russia during the reign of Alexander I, who was favorable to British interests, and so his account is certainly flattering towards the Tsar and the government. However, like so many others, he was highly critical of Eastern Orthodox religiosity and considered it a direct obstacle in Russia's path towards Enlightenment.

To add to this, we have three accounts written by British women, *New Russia. Journey from Riga to the Crimea, by Way of Kiev* by Mary Holderness, *A Tour, Performed in the Years 1795-6, through the Taurida, or Crimea* by Marie Guthrie and *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople* by Elizabeth Craven, published in 1823, 1802 and 1789 respectively. Holderness came to Russia with her husband and children as part of an agricultural scheme proposed by the Reverend Arthur Young, which stipulated the relocation of several English families to his estates in the Crimea. Holderness began her voyage in 1815, immediately upon the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, and arrived in the Crimea in 1816. As a devout protestant housewife, Holderness echoed the views of many of her male counterparts and often asserted the superiority of Protestant spirituality over the backward and primitive teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church. Meanwhile, Marie Guthrie's account is a series of letters written during her tour of the Crimea with her husband, the Scottish doctor Matthew Guthrie. Although Marie was of French origin, she and her husband spent most of their lives in Russia, which almost certainly accounts for the radically different tone of her work. Unlike the rest of her Western contemporaries, Guthrie was quite sympathetic to Eastern Orthodox spirituality and held entirely different views, the consequences of which we will explore later. Our last female traveler, Elizabeth Craven, came to Russia as a seasoned traveler. In 1780, Craven had separated from, although not officially divorced,

an English baron and then became the mistress of the Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, who allowed her to travel freely throughout Europe. Thus, her *Journey* consists of a series of letters addressed to her lover, in which she criticized Islamic practices but remained surprisingly silent on Russian Orthodoxy.

In terms of French sources, the *Voyage en Sibérie fait en 1761*, authored by the aforementioned Jean-Baptiste Chappe d'Auteroche in 1768, is perhaps the most infamous and notorious account we will explore in this essay. As mentioned previously, Chappe was an astronomer tasked with observing the transit of Venus in Tobolsk by the *Académie Royale des Sciences*, and so his route took him from the Polish border to Moscow and onward to Siberia, before he returned to France through Saint-Petersburgh. Although one might expect a strictly scientific account from such a figure, Chappe's account is filled with amusing anecdotes highlighting the primitive and backward nature of Russia generally and includes plenty of disdain for the Russian Orthodox Church and its traditions. Perhaps the lighthearted and anecdotal nature of Chappe's work contributed to its popularity, since so many of the other accounts examined here make direct references to Chappe's travelogue. Moreover, its impact can be further ascertained by the fact that it was the only such account to merit a direct refutation by the Russian government in the form of the *Antidote*, an anonymous pamphlet systematically rebuking Chappe's work, traditionally attributed either to Count Shuvalov, Countess Dashkova or even Catherine II herself.

Another notorious account is the *Histoire, ou Anecdotes, sur la Révolution de Russie en l'Année 1762*, written by Claude-Carloman de Rulhiere and published, posthumously, in 1797. The delay in its publication can be explained by the censorship of Catherine II, who prevented the printing of the manuscript until her death, by which point de Rulhiere had already died. This work is essentially a firsthand account of the coup that brought Catherine II to the throne and, as such,

it was assumed to be as authentic as firsthand travel accounts, although it is not in actuality a travelogue. De Rulhiere's account was highly critical of Catherine and presented the overthrow of Peter III as a tragic betrayal. He too was quite disparaging of the Russian Orthodox Church, which he presented as an insidious accomplice supporting Catherine's unlawful usurpation due to concerns over a series of crypto-Protestant reforms instituted by Peter.

Next, we have the *Voyage de deux Français en Allemagne, Danemarck, Suède, Russie et Pologne, fait en 1790-1792* published by Alphonse de Fortia de Piles in 1792. de Fortia de Piles traveled to Russia as a nobleman in exile, fleeing the most radical phase of the French Revolution, although, from his writings, it is evident that he fell into the same category as Lafayette, since he was a nobleman who supported its less radical and more liberal aspects. This can be further ascertained from the fact that he returned to France after the fall of Robespierre and the Thermidorean reaction, unlike many committed monarchists who preferred to remain in exile until the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. Thus, his account presents Russia as a backward and reactionary power seeking to extinguish revolutionary ideals both externally and internally. Naturally, he presented the Russian Orthodox Church as a key conspirator in Russia's anti-revolutionary stance and considered it fundamentally opposed to the Enlightenment.

Another French source is the *Observations d'un voyageur sur la Russie, la Finlande, la Livonie, la Curlande et la Prusse* published by Abel Burja in 1785. A Protestant priest from Prussia, Burja came to Russia as a governor for a Russian noble family and even served as a minister in one of Saint-Peterburg's Protestant churches during his stay. As a cleric, he was particularly impressed with the degree of toleration exhibited by the Russian Orthodox Church, but also highly critical of its more un-enlightened aspects. For Burja, the process of Enlightenment that had occurred in Western churches, as described by Sorkin, simply did not take place in Russia.

Finally, I am also using Arthur Machen's English translation of *The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, 1725-1798*. Casanova is easily the most infamous traveler of the era, and this thesis would be incomplete without his inclusion. Casanova stayed in Russia in 1764-5 and his account is filled with amusing, raucous and indecent anecdotes. Although, as always, Casanova was mostly focused on his sexual adventures, he also found the time to ridicule and criticize Russian Orthodoxy. For him, Russian marriages and sexual habits revealed the backward and primitive nature of Russian religiosity.

The Travelogue: A Reliable Source?

Although enlightened audiences thought that the writings of travelers were filled with irrefutable and accurate facts, some scholars have argued that many of these accounts rely more on the perceptions and impressions of travelers rather than on certitudes. For instance, the aforementioned Justin Stagl argued that many accounts written during the Enlightenment were of dubious accuracy, as evidenced by the continued proliferation of fabricated accounts throughout the 18th century, which were nevertheless thought to be entirely accurate. For instance, although the *Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*, published in 1704 by a Frenchman named George Psalmanazar, was in fact completely fabricated, British audiences considered it a reliable source until 1706, when Psalmanazar's increasingly erratic behavior eventually revealed the falsehood of his account.⁷

Another scholar, Nikita Khrapunov, authored an article analyzing some of the very same sources we will be using in this thesis, such as Clarke and Heber, and found that British travelers

⁷ Stagl, Justin. *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel 1550-1800*. London: Routledge, 2016, 171-208.

held preconceived notions of Russia and cautioned against seeing these sources as purely objective.⁸ Thus, this thesis will not seek to discover some objective truth about the religious Enlightenment in Russia, but will instead seek to understand how the perceptions, impressions and opinions of Western travelers shaped the place occupied by Russia within Enlightenment thought, regardless of whether this position accurately reflected realities in Russia.

Furthermore, Khrapunov also argued that many of these accounts followed a self-reinforcing pattern, in the sense that they built upon one another to create established literary norms.⁹ The more travelers included anecdotes highlighting the primitive nature of Russian Orthodoxy, the more Western audiences craved and demanded other entertaining examples of Russian otherness, creating a cascade of stereotypes and pre-established “facts” and “truths”. I would argue that this self-reinforcing pattern even transcended linguistic barriers, which can be ascertained from the example of two specific anecdotes which these travelogues often include as negative examples of Russian Orthodox superstition, and which are present in both English and French sources.

The first of these is the commonly recounted anecdote concerning the Archbishop of Moscow, Ambrose, who was unceremoniously lynched in 1771 for denying access to a specific

⁸ Khrapunov, Nikita. “The Image of Crimea among British Travelers Edward Clarke and Reginald Heber at the Turn of the 18th-19th Centuries.” *Journal of Russian History* 18, no. 4 (2019): 883–903.

⁹ Khrapunov, Nikita. “Russia in the Crimea: Civilizer or Oppressor? Images of the Imperial Power in the Dispute of the Late 18th and the First Half of the 19th Century’s Travelogues.” *Historia Provinciae: Журнал Региональной Истории* 7, no. 1 (2023): 190–237.

icon while a plague raged in Moscow. Numerous accounts report this incident and, every single time, it is used to stereotype Orthodox worship as barbaric, primitive and fundamentally unenlightened. For instance, Edward Daniel Clarke clearly emphasizes the inhumanity required to perform such an act, while the bishop is portrayed as a “venerable prelate”. This latter portrayal is especially interesting because, and this will become apparent later, Clarke is usually very critical of the Russian Orthodox clergy. Naturally then, the inclusion of a “venerable prelate” here is only warranted insofar as it serves the specific purpose of this passage. Clarke writes:

“A picture was placed in one of the streets of the city, to which the people eagerly thronged upon the earliest intelligence of it. The archbishop Ambrose, finding that the danger of spreading the infection increased as the people crowded to this picture, ordered it to be removed, and shut up in a church, the doors of which were forced open by the populace; and the venerable prelate being dragged from the Convent of Donskoi, was inhumanly put to death” (Clarke 51).

The intention behind this passage becomes immediately clear when Clarke follows it up with a diatribe criticizing Orthodoxy as an entirely superstitious and primitive faith. He states that: “All that has been said or written of Roman Catholic bigotry, affords but a feeble idea of the superstition of the Greek Church. It is certainly the greatest libel upon human reason, the severest scandal upon universal piety, that has yet disgraced the annals of mankind” (51). Then, Clarke pushes this notion of Orthodox superstition even further with the following statement: “The wild, untutored savage of South America, who prostrates himself before the sun, and pays his adoration to that which he believes to be the source of life and light, exercises more rational devotion than the Russian, who is all day crossing himself before his Bogh, and sticking farthing candles before a picture of St. Alexander Nevsky” (Clarke 51). Clearly, the direct comparison to other supposedly

superstitious faiths and the claim that Orthodoxy is, all things considered, even more barbaric, superstitious and alien is designed to highlight its un-European and un-Enlightened character.

This anecdote is also recounted by William Richardson, who was supposedly in Russia at the time, although he was not in Moscow. He reports the same narrative as Clarke, except that he also blames the lower clergy for instigating the whole affair, since it falsely claimed that the icon in question had healing properties, and was hoping to profit from the clearly superstitious population:

“The people were driven to distraction...they had recourse to superstition. A certain image of the Virgin Mary was reported, by some mercenary priests, to possess singular efficacy in curing and preventing the distemper. Crowds both of healthy and diseased persons flocked to this hallowed physician; nor were they niggardly in their gifts and oblations. So that some of the inferior clergy...derived inhuman gains from the miseries of their fellow-citizens” (Richardson 447).

The superstitious rabble produced by this greedy clergy proceeds to confront the archbishop over the icon, which Richardson refers to as an “idol”. Again, the whole anecdote and explicit references to a mob driven by a primitive and barbaric faith is clearly designed to elicit a negative reaction from Richardson’s “enlightened” readers. The contrast between superstition and rationality is made explicit when physicians and surgeons, representatives of the Enlightenment are explicitly targeted by the mob and the clergy:

“The people were enraged; their rage was exasperated by the instigation of the priests; they exclaimed that the archbishop was a Jew and a heretic; and that he was engaged in a hellish conspiracy with the physicians and surgeons, against whom their wrath was also kindled, to

destroy them...They insisted that he should come out, and restore to them their favourite idol” (Richardson 448).

Meanwhile, Abel Burja dedicates an entire section of his *Observations*, entitled “Fanatisme”, to this anecdote. Apart from relating the event generally, he includes an “Oraison funebre” by a “jeune Orateur” which echoes Clarke’s proposition about Orthodox superstition being worse than paganism. The anonymous author quoted by Burja addresses the Orthodox zealots thusly: “Vous êtes donc pires que les plus aveugles des Payens, pires que les plus sauvages des barbares, qui jamais n'ont commis des abominations pareilles contre les choses qu'ils regardent comme sacrées” (Burja 96). Burja ends this section with his own verdict on the subject, which echoes that of Clarke and Richardson. Simply put, this incident clearly indicated that the Orthodox faith in Russia was generally dogmatic, fanatical, superstitious and un-enlightened: “On voit que cette tirade part d'un cœur indigné au dernier point des ravages qu'avoient faits un aveugle fanatisme & une superstition cruelle” (Burja 97).

The second anecdote commonly recounted by Western travelers is even more emblematic of the self-reinforcing nature of these sources. This is because Casanova, Richardson and Carr all claim to have either witnessed or heard of it personally in 1764-5, 1771 and 1804 respectively. The essence of the anecdote is always the same: an Orthodox priest is baptizing children on the banks of the frozen Neva in Saint-Petersburg when one of them slips and sinks into the water. The parents rejoice and, in a display of superstitious fervor, consider that the child has gone to heaven. Interestingly, the language used by these three authors is almost exactly the same. Thus, we have Casanova recounting this specific incident:

“On the day on which I was present the priest happened to let one of the children slip through his hands. “Drugoi!” he cried. That is, “*Give me another.*” But my surprise may be

imagined when I saw that the father and mother of the child were in an ecstasy of joy; they were certain that *the babe had been carried straight to heaven*. Happy ignorance!” (Casanova 2342).

In an eerily similar passage, John Carr claims to have witnessed the following scene: “a woman supplicated a priest to immerse her newborn child; the priest consented, but in dipping the miserable little sufferer, his fingers were so benumbed, that he irrecoverably dropped it under the ice; the parent, with a smile of delight, exclaimed, *“He is gone to “heaven”*” (Carr 265).

Allegedly, William Richardson also heard of this particular occurrence: “I have heard that a priest, in immersing a child, for baptism is performed here by the immersion of the whole body, let it slip, through inattention, into the water. The child was drowned; but the holy man suffered no consternation. *“Give me another,”* said he, with the utmost composure, *“for the Lord hath taken this to himself.”*” (Richardson 336).

It is hard to ascertain the origin of this anecdote, but perhaps Casanova really did witness such an event. In any case, the linguistic similarities and the repetition of “give me another” and the priest’s assertion that the child has “gone to heaven” clearly indicates the self-reinforcing nature of these travel accounts. As rumors and anecdotes spread, it became increasingly easy to stereotype Russia generally, and the specific examples provided here certainly confirm the assertions of historians such as Stagl and Khrapunov.

Although the repetitive and self-reinforcing nature of these accounts will be a theme recurring throughout this thesis, I am by no means asserting that every single account was exclusively repeating preconceived notions. As mentioned earlier, many of these travelers had personal animosities towards Russia due to individuals (Clarke and de Rulhiere) or events (de Fortia de Piles). Some travelers even feared Russia’s rise as a geopolitical entity (Chappe

d'Auteroche). Thus, many of the criticisms leveled at Russian Orthodoxy found their origins in personal grudges. However, this further reinforces the notion, asserted earlier, that these sources, despite being seen as such at the time, were not fundamentally objective. Again, since these travelogues can hardly be seen as factual, this thesis will deal with the perceptions of Western travelers first and foremost, rather than “facts”, something that we ought to remember as we explore their views on Russian Orthodoxy in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter I: The Structures of the Russian Orthodox Church

Overall, French and British travel accounts presented the institutions and representatives of Russian Orthodoxy in a decidedly negative manner. Its reforms were regarded as either lackluster or entirely non-existent. In turn, these accounts informed Western notions of a backward, un-enlightened and un-European Russia and relegated it to the status of an “Eastern” nation. This is particularly intriguing, as recent scholarship has demonstrated that the Russian Orthodox Church evolved throughout this period and introduced several innovations inspired by the Enlightenment. For instance, Andrey Ivanov, Irina Khruleva and Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter argued that the Orthodox Church pursued reforms which were similar to those instituted in Western Churches, both Catholic and Protestant. Ivanov’s book, *A Spiritual Revolution: The Impact of Reformation and Enlightenment in Orthodox Russia* (2020), emphasized the impact of these changes on the Russian Church generally,¹⁰ while Kimerling Wirtschafter’s book, *Religion and Enlightenment in Catherinian Russia: The Teachings of Metropolitan Platon* (2013), and Khruleva’s article, “Western European Intellectual Practices of a New Type in Russian Everyday Life at Early 18th

¹⁰ Ivanov, Andrey. *A Spiritual Revolution: The Impact of Reformation and Enlightenment in Orthodox Russia*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020.

Century (Case of Feofan Prokopovich)” (2022), used the respective cases of Metropolitan Platon, a high-ranking cleric at the court of Catherine the Great, and Feofan Prokopovich, a theologian close to Peter the Great, to highlight the changes occurring within the hierarchy of the Church.¹¹¹² A concrete example, investigated by Ekaterina Kislova in “Sermons and sermonizing in 18th-century Russia: at court and beyond” (2014) is the spread of sermons preaching Enlightenment ideals, which were introduced into Russian Orthodoxy by Platon during Catherine’s reign.¹³

If these changes did indeed occur, they were either ignored or downplayed by French, British, Italian and German travelers flocking to Russia. In fact, the invective they directed at the Russian Orthodox Church is so extensive that it can be broadly divided into three categories which will form the sections of this chapter. First, although these travelers occasionally admitted the erudition of some of the high-ranking Orthodox clerics, the clergy as a whole, and especially the parochial priesthood, was derided and presented as contributing to a general lack of Enlightenment among the wider population of Russia. Second, monasticism and its components (monasteries, monks, etc.) was presented as a decadent institution directly stifling the growth of enlightened ideals within the Russian Empire. Curiously, Western travelers barely commented on the state of

¹¹ Kimerling Wirschafter, Elise. *Religion and Enlightenment in Catherinian Russia: The Teachings of Metropolitan Platon*. DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2013.

¹² Khruleva, Irina. “Western European Intellectual Practices of a New Type in Russian Everyday Life at Early 18th Century (Case of Feofan Prokopovich).” *Vestnik Mgimo-Universiteta* 15, no. 6 (2022): 166–78.

¹³ Kislova, Ekaterina. “Sermons and sermonizing in 18th-century Russia: at court and beyond.” *International Journal of Slavic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2014): 175-193.

nuns and nunneries in Russia, but this could be due to the male-dominated nature of the genre, as men would not have access to female religious institutions. Third, the educational institutions (seminaries, libraries and schools) of the Orthodox Church were considered inadequate and without the means to disseminate the ideas of the Enlightenment among both the clergy and the wider public. Finally, the figure of Metropolitan Platon is of particular note. Although the works of Kimerling Wirschafter, Kislova and Ivanov portray him as great reformer inspired by the Enlightenment, Western travelers who encountered him throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries envisioned a contradictory character representing an amalgamation of East and West, Enlightenment and un-Enlightenment, knowledge and ignorance. Thus, even the main reformer of the Russian Church generated mixed feelings among Westerners, whose ideals he attempted to emulate. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of some of the potential reasons explaining the inability of Western travelers to perceive or acknowledge any sort of meaningful change within the structures of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Section I: The Clergy

It is perhaps unsurprising that, as a priest, William Coxe thought that the parochial clergy was the most essential demographic of any Church, for they “may and ought to be the most useful members of society,” (Coxe 327). However, he was sorely disappointed with Russian parish priests, dedicating a section of his work to their criticism:

“The parochial clergy...are generally in Russia the very refuse of the people. It is literally true, that many of them cannot even read, in their own language, the Gospel which they are commissioned to preach...Nor is it in the least surprising that some are so illiterate, when we

consider the scanty maintenance which they derive from their profession...they have only a wooden house, scarcely superior to that of the meanest among their parishioners, and a small portion of land, which they usually cultivate with their own hands...As the parish-priests are undoubtedly the principal sources from which learning and improvement must be generally diffused among the lower class of people; if they, who ought to instruct and enlighten others, are so ignorant, how gross must be the ignorance of their parishioners!" (Coxe 327-328).

The last point is especially poignant and highlights the main criticism of Western travelers: an un-enlightened clergy cannot enlighten a nation. So much so, that Coxe claims that the enlightening mantle which should technically be held by the clergy is in fact held by Catherine II who is "endeavouring to promote among the clergy a zeal for liberal science, and to rouse them from that profound ignorance in which they are plunged" (Coxe 328-329). It is no wonder then, that Russia figured as an Eastern entity within the mental map of "enlightened" Europeans. Although one might assume that the shared living conditions of peasants and parish priests to be a uniting factor, it was actually seen as an impediment to the propagation of Enlightenment ideals, almost as if the ignorance of the peasantry and clergy is constantly transmitted back and forth. In fact, Coxe claims that this ignorance is evident from the clergy's inability to mingle with the higher orders of Russian society:

"I cannot omit mentioning, that, during the five months we passed at Petersburg, and the almost constant intercourse in which we were daily engaged with the nobility and gentry, I never once saw in company a single person of the sacred profession. It must be allowed indeed, that the parish-priests are for the most part too low and ignorant to be qualified for admission into genteel societies ; while the dignitaries, being a separate order and restrained by several strict regulations,

reside chiefly in their palaces within the monasteries; and contract an aversion, perhaps an unfitness, for social intercourse” (Coxe 330).

Curiously, in the very same passage, Coxe contradictorily admits that these broad notions do not necessarily apply to all priests: “This general character of the Ruffian hierarchy does by no means comprehend all the individuals; as some of them with whom I occasionally conversed were men of liberal manners and enlightened understandings” (Coxe 330). In fact, Coxe is able to converse with the Archbishop of Rostov in Latin and is shocked to find that this priest is well versed in English theologians, while Coxe himself knows nothing of Orthodox theology: “He appeared to be a sensible well-informed man, and well versed in various branches of literature: he had perused the works of several of our best divines, either originally written, or translated into Latin, and mentioned their compositions with great applause” (Coxe 332). However, these specific individuals were clearly unable to dispel Coxe’s views on the Russian clergy as a whole, and so it was bound to remain consigned to a position of inferiority. If anything, they were exceptions that proved the wider ignorance of the clergy.

Reginald Heber also expressed many of the same opinions in his own travelogue. For him the Orthodox clergy was “generally in a very low station, and miserably ignorant, though greatly beloved by the common people” (Heber 106). Again, the connection shared by the clergy and the peasantry is not seen as particularly worthwhile, while their ignorance is emphasized. Not unlike Coxe, Heber admits to the erudition of some specific individuals:

“The ignorance and despised state of the Russian clergy, of which we had heard so much, we found to be partly, but not entirely true...We met at Troitza one monk of very superior manners, with the appearance and deportment of a person of genius, who spoke good French, and said he had travelled. Plato himself, and perhaps most of the higher orders, are also well bred, and well-

educated men; they are, however, as monks, shut up for the greater part of their lives in convents. We have also found the secular clergy, generally speaking, not entirely ignorant of Latin, though but few could converse in it fluently” (Heber 168).

However, Heber also echoes Coxe’s proposition that a closer connection to the nobility, instead of the middle and lower classes, would result in a more enlightened and civilized priesthood. He laments that it is only in provincial towns that the clergy mingles with the higher orders of society:

“They fill very nearly the same rank in society that is held by the Roman Catholic priests; and, like them, have much influence among the middle and lower classes, with whom they entirely associate. In the remoter provinces they seem more respected, and fill a higher rank in society than in Petersburg and Moscow...In the more elevated societies of the capital, they never enter the house, unless they are professionally wanted” (Heber 168).

It follows that the clergy is said to be somewhat insulated from the rest of Russian society and, since it mingles only with peasants, it also stifles the propagation of the Enlightenment amongst the peasantry:

“The clergy throughout Russia, are, I believe, inimical to their government; they are more connected with the peasants than most other classes of men, and are strongly interested in their sufferings and oppressions, to many of which they themselves are likewise exposed. They marry very much among the daughters and sisters of their own order, and form almost a caste” (Heber 170).

According to Edward Daniel Clarke, the Russian clergy was not only poor and ignorant, but also vain and pretentious. For instance, when visiting a church library, Clarke appears to meet a dishonest priest who is characterized as a boastful imposter:

“The priest...conversed with me in Latin, and affirmed, that among the Sclavonic, or as he termed them, the Ruthenic manuscripts, there was a copy of the works of Virgil, and one of Livy. He was not, however, able to find either of them, and I imputed the whole story to his ignorance and vanity...The priest translated, or pretended to translate, some of their titles, from the Sclavonic language into Latin” (Clarke 81).

Like Clarke, William Richardson considered the Russian priesthood fraudulent and deceitful because their long beards, which enlightened audiences associated with wisdom and ancient philosophers, are instead used to hide their ignorance. Moreover, rather than enlightening the Russian population, Orthodox priests behave like Silenus, the companion of Dionysus synonymous with debauchery: “They had, in general, a very venerable appearance, with grey locks and long beards: they seemed like so many Socrates and Zenos; though, ever and anon, you might have seen an excellent Silenus, appearing rather surprised at his becoming a bishop” (Richardson 18-19). Richardson also presents several anecdotes in his work, in which priests refuse to give absolution or provide some service unless presented with a bribe, emphasizing the duplicitous character of the priesthood.¹⁴ The common theme of a generally ignorant clergy, with a few exceptions, is also reprised: “I mentioned to you, that the Ruffian Clergy were, for the most part, very ignorant. I also suggested, that this general censure was not to be received without limitation;

¹⁴ Richardson, William. *Anecdotes of the Russian Empire; in a series of letters, written, a few years ago, from St. Petersburg*. London: 1784. 63-65 and 224-225.

and that among them were some persons of learning, and of great moderation” (Richardson 416). For Richardson, like so many others, the example of a few educated priests did not exempt the majority of Russian clergy from scorn and criticism:

“They are, in general, very ignorant. There are, no doubt, among them men of some learning and ingenuity; but their number is very small. No more learning is usually required of common officiating parish Priests, or Popes, as they call them, than that they be able to read the old Russ or Sclavonian language. They seldom or never preach: and their chief duty consists in the knowledge of forms, and in reading prayers and portions of scripture.” (Richardson 62).

Meanwhile, John Carr ascribed to the Russian clergy such a profound ignorance that, as a result, it ranked so low in Russian society. Its lack of Enlightenment was thus not only a result, but actually a cause of its low status:

“It is somewhat singular, that with all their religious enthusiasm, the Russians pay their priests more miserably than we do our curates; but perhaps it may be traced to the extreme ignorance of the former. After wealth and birth, knowledge awakens respect, and perhaps the Russian populace would revolt at the idea of making their ministers independent before their minds were cultivated: to their saints they would devote their lives; to their priests they give black bread” (Carr 266-267).

Casanova also echoed many of these sentiments by asserting that the ignorance of the clergy was deliberate, since it resulted in a very vile and un-enlightened form of control over the wider population: “Their liturgy is in Greek, of which the people understand nothing, and the clergy, themselves extremely ignorant, gladly leave them completely in the dark on all matters connected with religion” (Casanova 2358).

French travelers also tended to echo the views espoused by Englishmen, as they too attributed to the Russian clergy a multitude of negative connotations. For instance, Claude Carloman de Rulhiere presented the clergy's greed as the catalyst for the rise of Catherine II, as the reforms of Peter III, which aimed at confiscating its wealth as part of a wider program of Enlightenment, greatly upset both the priesthood and the peasantry, the latter of which is presented as a co-conspirator always willing to support the clergy's superstitious ways: "Il était utile à son Empire de dépouiller les prêtres de leurs immenses richesses...Mais Pierre III...choqua ces peuples superstitieux; et les prêtres, dont la principale richesse consistait en paysans esclaves, les excitaient à la révolte, et promettaient aux séditieux des prières et l'absolution" (de Rulhiere 39). Later, the hypocrisy of the clergy is highlighted when its ostentatious displays of divine power are used to support Catherine II's violent usurpation: "Les chefs du clergé Russe...montèrent au palais pour sacrer l'impératrice et cette vue imprimait dans tous les cœurs je ne sais quel mouvement, qui semblait légitimer la violence et l'usurpation" (de Rulhiere 102-103).

In a similar vein, Abel Burja also considered the parochial clergy to be as ignorant as the peasantry and clearly echoed the propositions of other travelers thusly: "Leurs Popes ou Prêtres ne sont guere plus instruits dans les villages que les Paysans; toute leur science consiste à savoir lire passablement leur rituel" (Burja 23-24).

Meanwhile, Jean-Baptiste Chappe d'Auteroche considered the Russian clergy to be full of contradictions. For example, his account presents the Archbishop of Tobolsk as both a relentless persecutor of heathens, possessing little knowledge in non-ecclesiastical matters, and a pleasant and polite man: "Ses connoissances n'étoient pas étendues; mais il possédoit parfaitement la Langue Latine & la Bible. Son zèle pour sa Religion étoit un fanatisme des plus outrés. Il ne cessoit de persécuter les Mahométans & les Païens des environs de Tobolsk, pour les convertir à la

Religion Grecque. Il étoit d'ailleurs très poli, & très aimable dans la société” (Chappe D’Auteroche 252-253).

Moreover, the denial of heliocentrism by this Archbishop and his nonexistent astronomical knowledge are presented in Chappe's account as especially strong indicators of his lack of Enlightenment: “Le mouvement de la Terre fur-tout, le mettoit toujours en fureur. Il me citoit des Passages, qu'il disoit de l'Apôtre S. Paul: je lui proposois des vérités Astronomiques; mais en Astronomie ce Prélat étoit un hérétique” (Chappe D’Auteroche 222). Again, enlightened clergymen are presented as a rarity with only the Archbishop of Kazan considered educated enough to understand Chappe d'Auteroche's astronomical mission: “C’est le seul Prêtre que j’aie vu, dans ces vastes Etats, qui ne parût pas étonné qu'on se transportât de Paris à Tobolsk pour y observer le passage de Vénus fur le Soleil” (Chappe D’Auteroche 544). Moreover, like many other authors, Chappe d’Auteroche considered the low status of the clergy within Russian society an indicator of its degeneracy, which he attributed to drinking and sexual debauchery, the latter of which he blamed on the Orthodox tradition of priestly marriage:

“Les Prêtres ont peu de considération dans la Société...L'ignorance, l'ivrognerie & la débauche avec les femmes, font l'appanage du Clergé de Russie. Les Evêques & les Prêtres sont à ce dernier égard les moins déreglés...ils s'en dé-dommagent par la boisson...J'ai rencontré, dans la Société, des Prêtres, & particulièrement des Moines si ivres, qu'on étoit obligé de les emporter fur des brancards: leurs actions & leurs discours faisoient rougir les honnêtes-gens. On ramasse souvent dans les rues des Ecclésiastiques, hors d'état de se conduire chez eux” (Chappe D’Auteroche 210-212).

The ignorance and corruption of the clergy is also emphasized and attributed to the close ties that the clergy shares with the peasantry, while the Russian priesthood is said to have degenerated overall:

“La Noblesse n'entre jamais en Russie dans le Sacerdoce: on n'y connoît point de tiers Etat. Le Corps Ecclésiastique est donc composé en entier, de personnes du Peuple, ou d'enfants de Prêtres, souvent plus corrompus: les uns & les autres n'ayant reçu aucun principe d'éducation, l'ignorance & la dépravation des mœurs du Clergé de Russie, sont dans l'ordre des effets moraux” (Chappe D’Auteroche 213-214).

Chappe D’Auteroche also presents a series of anecdotes highlighting the intolerance, naivety, drunkenness and harshness exhibited by Orthodox clergymen. For instance, a quite comical anecdote features a clergyman who “après avoir bien bu” attempts to convert Chappe’s Lutheran servant. It is the much more civilized Chappe who must intervene: “Je retins Mgr., & lui représentai que je n'avois point lu dans l'Ecriture, que les Apôtres abattissent la mâchoire de personne, pour le faire aller en Paradis. J'envoyai dîner mon Domestique: quelques verres de crematum rétablirent le calme dans l'Assemblée.” (Chappe D’Auteroche 223).

However, it is Alphonse de Fortia de Piles who is arguably the most vicious French critic of the Russian clergy. His account paints the Orthodox priesthood in an entirely negative light, claiming the complete ignorance of all its members, without acknowledging an educated minority or any progress whatsoever. In fact, the Russian clergy is presented as an associate of Russia’s despotic government, willingly stifling and suppressing the growth of Enlightenment ideals:

“Le clergé russe a été de tout temps, et il est encore plongé dans la barbarie: il n’a ni émulation, ni crédit, ni lumières; sa composition s’oppose à ce qu’il sorte de cette apathie, de cet

état honteux, ou peut-être il est de l'intérêt d'un gouvernement despotique de le laisser languir...on en a éloigné toutes les grandes familles de l'empire, dont l'influence auroit pu devenir un jour toute puissante sur un peuple ignorant et superstitieux: cette politique, si cruelle par ses effets, a nécessairement influé sur l'éducation des Russes, en refusant aux prêtres les moyens d'enseigner ce qu'ils n'ont pu apprendre eux-mêmes, et en perpétuant d'âge en âge une ignorance bien honteuse pour le clergé" (de Fortia de Piles⁷²).

Overall, the Russian Orthodox clergy, as presented by both French and English travelogues, can be said to have greatly contributed to the notion of an un-enlightened, backward, Eastern and un-European Russia. Moreover, the myriad of negative traits Western travel accounts attributed to clergymen, such as ignorance, debauchery, baseness, deceitfulness and immorality, were thought to have infected the entirety of Russia's population, partly as a result of the influential position of such a corrupted priesthood within such a fundamentally primitive and superstitious society. Western travelers believed that the Orthodox clergy was a sort of anti-Enlightenment agent, deliberately blocking the growth of Enlightenment ideals among the wider population of Russia. Some authors attributed this to a conscious desire to control the Russian population through ignorance, while others claimed that this came as a result of the close connection shared by the clergy and the peasantry, and so then-enlightened state of the clergy could be attributed to external causes forcing the Russian clergy into such a lowly position. Although a multitude of travelers were clearly attuned to the changes occurring within the Russian clergy as a result of the Enlightenment, none considered these changes valid or significant. Naturally, the institutions staffed by members of the clergy, such as monasteries, libraries and church schools, were also bound to be treated as catalysts of un-Enlightenment.

Section II: Seminaries and Libraries

As Reginald Heber visited a seminary at Troitza, he outlined a perception that was shared by many of his contemporaries. Chiefly, Orthodox seminaries, such as this one, were considered lackluster institutions due to the generally negative circumstances of the students. The very nature and outdated structure of the Orthodox Church naturally stifled any attempts at furthering the education of future clergymen: “Having, however, no great stimulus to their ambition, and no other prospect before them than a scanty and miserable pittance for life, as the only reward of their studies, few of them are very diligent...Plato, the archbishop, confessed to us, that from the idleness and poverty of most of the young men, it was as good a use as they could be put to” (Heber 166).

Chappe D’Auteroche also highlighted the lamentable state of Russian seminaries in his own account. In fact, he claims the further deterioration of such institutions since the time of Peter I, as he finds one neglected and almost abandoned: “Pierre Ier. avoit ordonné l’établissement d’une Ecole, où l’on devoit instruire la Jeunesse dans les Langues Latine, Allemande, Italienne, dans les Mathématiques & le Dessin: je n’y ai trouvé ni Maîtres ni Ecoliers; le Clergé même ne sait pas le Latin” (Chappe D’Auteroche 520).

Another symptom of the supposed lack of consideration given to education and learning in Russian Orthodoxy was the awful state of Church libraries, as reported by a several travelers. Of one library, Alphonse de Fortia de Piles says, “nous n’avons jamais vu de livres aussi à l’abandon...Les manuscrits grecs sont les uns sur les autres, câblis en piles sur des planches, et couverts de poussière” (de Fortia de Piles 285). Meanwhile, when visiting the apartments of the Metropolitan of Moscow, de Fortia de Piles finds a fairly impressive library that is, however, neglected and dilapidated. Moreover, the uneducated cleric guarding the institution is said to be unable to read most the volumes contained in the library:

“Celui qui nous l’a montrée ne savoit que le russe, pas même le latin, quoique presque tous les livres soient en cette langue; il y avait à-peu-près 5000 volumes qui paroissent fort négligés, pour ne pas dire abandonnés; ils étoient couverts de poussière, et une partie ça et là par terre: ce n’étoit pourtant pas la place qui leur manquoit, car la moitié des armoires étoit vide...Dans une petite tribune qui règne autour de la coupôle le même désordre et le même vide...le garçon bibliothécaire (nous ne pouvons nous figurer que ce fût le bibliothécaire lui-même, vu son extrême ignorance) nous a dit qu’on les feroit venir du séminaire de Novogorod” (de Fortia de Piles 73-74).

An even more glaring, and somewhat comical example, is reported by Chappe. When a cleric invites him to visit his personal library, Chappe’s excitement quickly turns to disappointment as the library has been repurposed into a cellar filled with alcohol. The contrast established between the enlightened and knowledgeable Chappe and the drunken cleric is especially emblematic: “Un de ces Prélats...me proposa d’aller voir sa Bibliotheque...Je le suivis, très empressé de connoître les livres qu’il possédoit...Le Prélat en ouvrit les portes, & je reconnus des tonneaux à chaque guichet. Ces tonneaux, remplis de différentes liqueurs, & entourés de glace, occupoient tout le bâtiment, & formoient sa Bibliotheque” (Chappe d’Auteroche 211-212).

Finally, Abel Burja also presented the Russian clergy as almost entirely devoid of linguistic and theological knowledge, a testament to the lack of educational institutions able to teach these skills, considered essential to an enlightened clerical education in the West: “En général les Russes s’en tiennent presque à l’usage des Langues, fans approfondir les regles: ils manquent de patience pour cela...Les Russes ne raffinent pas beaucoup fur la Théologie, & il est difficile même d’apprendre au juste quels font les dogmes qui les distinguent des autres communions Chrétiennes” (Burja 100-103).

It is evident then, that Western travelers tended to present the seminaries and libraries of the Russian Orthodox Church as deficient and backward. Rather than help the spread of enlightened ideals among the clergy, these institutions were considered mismanaged, misused and ultimately useless. As we shall see, the different trappings of monasticism were perceived in a similar light.

Section III: Monasticism

As historian, William Coxe was especially interested in Russia's past. Naturally, his account is filled with historical digressions that, upon closer inspection, reveal Coxe's views on contemporary issues. For instance, when discussing the exile of Patriarch Nikon in the 17th century, Coxe tacitly reveals his disapproval of Orthodox monastic practices in the late 18th century. Nikon was a reformer of enormous importance in the Russian Orthodox Church, and although Coxe clearly approved of his reforms, he was disappointed to find that he did not abolish or reform monasticism in Russia, as he himself was subjected to its wasteful and useless practices: "We cannot without regret observe a person of his enlightened understanding submitting to these mortifying penances, which the most ignorant and superstitious cenobite was no less capable of performing: he did not, however, waste his whole time in the performance of frivolous austerities" (Coxe 388-389). Later, Coxe discusses the preservation of antique knowledge in Early Medieval monasteries, and again, his historical digression reveals his distaste for monasticism, almost as if there is no place for such an institution in a modern and enlightened Church: "Thus each of these mansions of bigotry and superstition then fortunately became an asylum for the preservation, though not for the diffusion of knowledge" (Coxe 426). Paradoxically and contradictorily, despite claiming that monasteries are "mansions of bigotry and superstition", Coxe laments the recent decline of monasteries in Russia, because he considers them the main source of ecclesiastical

knowledge. Clearly these contradictions were unable to dispel Coxe's predetermined and negative views on Orthodox monasticism:

"The abolition of monasteries must be acknowledged a very beneficial circumstance in most countries; yet there is one evil to be apprehended from it in Russia: they were the only seminaries of education for those persons designed for the sacred function; and the monks are, if I may so express myself, almost the sole proprietors of the learning which subsists among the clergy" (Coxe 325-326).

Meanwhile, for Edward Daniel Clarke, a visit to the Convent of the New Jerusalem in Moscow was a perfect opportunity to decry the supposed ignorance of monks and the folly of monasticism overall. This monastery is presented as a sad imitation of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in which the monks, the relics and "boorish devotion" all contribute to an atmosphere of backwardness and un-Enlightenment:

"The love of mimicry, already mentioned as characteristic of the nation, has been carried to a great excess in the Convent of the New Jerusalem, which is not only an imitation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, but...contains representations of all the relics consecrated in that edifice...Finding, however, some difference between the representation made of the original building in the Holy Land, and its model here, I asked the monks the reason of the alteration, they replied, "Our building is executed with more taste, because it is more ornamental, and there are many good judges who prefer ours to the originals."-thus most ignorantly implying, that the church at Jerusalem, so long an object of adoration, has been so, rather on account of its beauty, than any thing contained in it. But nothing can prove with more effect to what an extent of mental darkness the human mind may fall, than that the trumpery here, not having the empty title to reverence which relics may claim, but confessedly imitations, should receive the veneration and the worship

of the originals. A fat and filthy priest, pointing to a hole in the midst of Russia, exclaims, "Here stood the holy cross!"-while boorish devotion shed over it tears of piety" (Clarke 62-63).

The emphasis on the filthy and corpulent appearance of monks is especially intriguing because Clarke later recounts being presented to the head of the aforementioned convent and claims that he was "the most greasy monk, without exception, [he] ever beheld" (Clarke 64), while Mary Holderness, during her stay in Polotsk, lamented that "There was little in the town to beguile the time, or attract our attention; some churches, a monastery (of which its immense kitchen was the most remarkable part, and spoke the easy condition of its owners)" (Holderness 32). Again, this is indicative of the attitude expressed towards Orthodox monks, as they are associated with gluttony rather than learning or Enlightenment.

But beyond the corpulence of monks, Holderness also echoes Clarke's propositions about the generally superstitious and un-enlightened nature of monastic institutions, especially when it comes to the far-fetched nature of the relics contained wherein. Furthermore, Holderness appears to lament the wealth poured onto the Pechersky monastery in Kiev by devout pilgrims, clearly hinting that it ought to be spent on more enlightened pursuits:

"The monk accompanying us, related such incredible and ridiculous stories of the saints whose relics lay there, that we must have had a more than common share of credulity to have believed them...this, however, they can well afford to do, as [they] brings a considerable share of the riches of the Convent" (Holderness 64).

Clearly, the monastic aspects of Russian Orthodoxy were perceived as negatively as its clergy and educational institutions. All of these elements were thought to be lacking the very essence of what constituted an enlightened church in the West, such as education, learning,

sobriety, civilization, etc. However, even the most vocal supporter of the Enlightenment in the Russian Church, Metropolitan Platon, did not escape criticism.

Section IV: Metropolitan Platon

The Western travelers who met Russia's greatest Church reformer of the late 18th century tended to view him as a contradictory man, embodying a mix of backwardness and innovativeness peculiar to the Russian clergy overall, rather than a man entirely devoted to the Enlightenment. For instance, Reginald Heber called Platon a "distinguished literary acquaintance" but also considered his library somewhat unimpressive and his linguistic skills rather basic: "He...showed us his Greek books, which were not very numerous, and consisting entirely of the Fathers...He speaks tolerable French and Latin, but Greek more readily than either" (Heber 160). He is also shown to exhibit a degree of intolerance towards Catholics, although Heber admits that this digression seemed out of character: "He expressed great horror of popery, and said the English government had done a very wicked thing in tolerating it. This was, however, quite in a different tone from his general sentiments, which were candid and tolerant" (Heber 160). Ultimately, however, Platon seemed to Heber a rustic priest more than anything: "He coincided very much, both in appearance and manner with our ideas of a primitive bishop; and unfortunately, his circumstances seemed primitive too" (Heber 160).

As pointed out by Kislova, Platon was instrumental in the introduction of sermons as a standard practice in Russian Orthodoxy. Heber was certainly aware of this, but still considered some of Platon's sermons to be of mediocre quality. Heber also asserted that in spite of Platon's efforts, sermonizing remained a rare phenomenon in Russia:

“We heard great praises of Plato's homilies, which the empress caused to be read on particular occasions in all Churches. He was the first person who introduced a habit of preaching into the Russ Churches, though even now they do not preach regularly except in Cathedral Churches; the sermons are always read. Plato's catechism for the grand dukes is famous for its liberality, but his celebrated coronation sermon is but a poor composition” (Heber 171).

As a sidenote, Abel Burja echoed this proposition, stating that “L'Archevêque Platon est bon Prédicateur...Mais comme on prêche très-rarement, l'exercice manque aux Orateurs” (Burja 100). If we return to Heber's account, we find the author making the rather surprising claim that Platon, unable to apply his enlightened ideas in Russia, has turned him into a resentful supporter of Napoleon Bonaparte, so much so, that he refuses to bless Russian troops sent against him:

“Plato seemed to contemplate [Napoleon's] success as an inevitable and not very alarming prospect. He refused to draw up a form of prayer for the success of the Russian arms: ‘if’, said he, ‘they be really penitent and contrite, let them shut up their public places of amusement for a month, and I will then celebrate public prayers.’ His expressions of dislike to the nobles and wealthy classes were strong and singular, as well as the manner in which he described the power of an emperor of Russia, the dangers which surround him, and the improbability of any rapid improvement. ‘It would be much better’, said he, ‘had we a constitution like that of England.’ Yet I suspect he does not wish particularly well to us in our war with France” (Heber 170-171).

Heber's statement is in direct contradiction with the claims made by de Fortia de Piles, who also visited Platon, and asserted that, although the Metropolitan is an educated man, he despises the French Revolution and, in fact, blames it for many of Russia's ills, while simultaneously denouncing the works of Voltaire and Rousseau: “L'archevêque Platon...nous a parlé de notre révolution, qu'il n'approuvoit pas et, comme il est naturel d'attribuer les malheurs

ou les fautes à ses ennemis, il a prétendu que le pape étoit la cause de tout ce qui se passoit en France; quoique nous trouvassions cette opinion un peu erronée, nous n'avons pas essayé de la combattre, ce qui nous eût entraînés dans une discussion interminable. Un grand personnage, demandant un jour à ce même archevêque, quelle avoit été la cause de l'expoliation du clergé russe, il répondit que c'étoit Rousseau et Voltaire; ce qui doit paroître étonnant dans un pays où le nombre des lecteurs est si peu considérable, mais où certains principes germeroient facilement." (de Fortia de Piles 287).

When compared to Heber's account, Edward Daniel Clarke's meeting with Platon presents further contradictions. For instance, While Heber paints Platon as a supporter of Bonaparte who is somewhat hostile towards Britain, Clarke attributes to Platon an exaggerated and almost excessive admiration of England, the superiority of which the Metropolitan acknowledges by asking the purpose of Clarke's stay in Russia, which is presented as an obviously inferior country: "He desired to know who we were; and being answered, Englishmen-"What!" said he, "all English? I wonder what your countrymen can find sufficiently interesting in Russia, to bring you so far from home, and in such times as these?" (Clarke 88). Later on, Platon continues to exalt Englishmen, by recounting the enlightened and liberal education his brother received at Oxford, and regretting his inability to freely preach in Russia, as a result of Russian despotism and narrowmindedness:

"Afterwards he inquired where we were going; and being told to Kuban Tartary and to Constantinople-"God preserve me!" he exclaimed, "what a journey! But nothing is difficult to Englishmen; they traverse all the regions of the earth. My brother," continued he, "was a traveller, and educated in your country, at Oxford...He laughed, however, at the result of his brother's education. "The English" said he, "taught him to declaim in their way: he used to preach his fine flourishing sermons, to us Russians; very fine sermons, but they were all translated from the

English. Some of your divines write beautifully, but with inconceivable freedom. It was once discussed in an English sermon, whether a people had power to dethrone their king." "Your grace may say more," said I; "we had once a prelate, who, preaching before his sovereign, felt himself at liberty to discuss his conduct to his face." "I wish," said he "we had such a fellow here!"-but, aware of the interpretation which might be put upon his words, and perhaps not daring to end with them, he added, after a pause, "we would send him to enjoy the full liberty of preaching in the free air of Siberia"" (Clarke 89-90).

Platon's affinity towards the English is further emphasized when, during a funeral service, Platon directly addresses Clarke and his fellow travelers in Latin, at the expense of his Russian congregation, which, lacking in education, remains completely clueless: "When the archbishop turned to give his benediction to all the people, he observed us, and added, in Latin, "Pax vobiscum!" to the astonishment of the Russians, who, not comprehending the new words introduced into the service, muttered among themselves" (Clarke 91).

Finally, like many other travelers, Clarke was confused by Platon's rustic appearance, which contrasted greatly with his learning, and which evoked contradictory images in the minds of Western travelers, who found it hard to reconcile that a cleric of such merit ought to dress in such a manner: "I could scarcely believe my eyes when they told me it was Plato: for though I had often seen him in the archiepiscopal vestments, his rural dress had made such an alteration, that I did not know him" (Clarke 88).

Overall, it is evident that the picture that Western travelers painted of Metropolitan Platon, the main architect of Enlightenment-inspired reforms in the Russian Church, was not universally positive. Rather, the picture that emerges is contradictory and complicated. He is both a supporter and detractor of the French Revolution, an Anglophile and an Anglophobe, a rustic old man and

an educated cleric. The fact that the most enlightened representative of Russian Orthodoxy was, at most, a contradictory figure according to Western travelers, reveals the explicitly negative views they held towards Russian religiosity in general, underscoring that any notion of a potential religious Enlightenment within Orthodoxy remained a highly controversial topic.

Section V: The Lost Enlightenment of the Russian Orthodox Church

If the reforms described by scholars such as Kislova, Ivanov, Khruleva and Kimerling Wirtschafter did indeed occur, why were they not noticed by Western travelers who started flocking to the Russian Empire in the second half of the 18th century? The answer to this question is essentially twofold. On one hand, as mentioned in the introduction, a different strain of scholarship (Khrapunov, O’Laughlin, Wolff and Stagl) has consistently emphasized that, by the Enlightenment, Western travel literature had become a fundamentally self-reinforcing and self-confirming genre. Thus, these travelogues simply tended to regurgitate the views and opinions commonly held in France, England, etc. It is therefore not at all surprising that Western travelers purposefully ignored, obfuscated or downplayed the Enlightenment-inspired reforms occurring in the Russian Orthodox Church, as this would have contradicted the narrative that their audience was eagerly expecting. The more these travelers reported an un-enlightened Russian clergy, the more these views became established and expected by Western audiences. Perhaps this notion of Orthodox inferiority became so established that it was seen as a necessary prerequisite for any account of Russia to be considered authentic and accurate. It is difficult to accurately date the emergence of this self-reinforcing phenomenon, but the drop in Russian prestige occasioned by two sources from the 1760s (Chappe, de Rulhiere) must have been serious enough to prompt Catherine II to publish the *Antidote*, a refutation of Chappe’s travelogue, and she would also take steps to prevent the publication of de Rulhiere’s account. The fact that, after these unsuccessful

measures, the Russian government made no further attempts at silencing this overwhelmingly negative travel literature indicates that the stereotypes it was propagating had become an integral part of the intellectual map of Western Europeans.

On the other hand, the concept of agnotology might also explain why Western travelers remained silent on the reforms occurring within the Russian Church. Broadly speaking, this concept was introduced into historical practice by Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger in *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (2008) and defines the historical study of ignorance due to political, cultural, economic, social or other reasons.¹⁵ Schiebinger's earlier work, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (2004) used this concept to explain why knowledge of New World abortifacients, such as the Peacock Flower, never made it to Europe. Although some colonial bio-prospectors, such as Maria Sibylla Merian, were certainly aware of the plant's abortifacient properties, their knowledge was ultimately silenced by prevailing medical notions back in Europe.¹⁶ The same concept might be applied here, in the sense that European travelers did not report the Enlightenment of the Russian Orthodox Church simply because of prevailing Western opinions.

In any case, whether it was deliberate silence, self-reinforcement or even both, Western travelers tended to paint a generally negative picture of the Russian Orthodox Church in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and seem to have mostly ignored or downplayed its Enlightenment-

¹⁵ Proctor, Robert N., and Londa Schiebinger. *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*. Stanford University Press, 2008.

¹⁶ Schiebinger, Londa. *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

inspired reforms. Its representatives (monks, priests) and structures (monasteries, seminaries) were perceived as backward, un-European and un-enlightened. As will be noted in the conclusion, this tarnished the image of Russia generally but, for now, a discussion of Orthodox practices (ceremonies, marriages, superstitions, etc.), which Westerners found to be even more alien and “Asiatic”, will follow.

Chapter II: The Practices of Russian Orthodoxy

Unlike in the specific case of the Russian Orthodox Church itself, the common and basic practices of Russian Orthodoxy, those performed by laymen, do not seem to have evolved much throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In a way, it is almost as if two Orthodoxies coexisted in Russia at the same time, that of the higher clergy and that of the people, and numerous scholars have attested to the fact that Enlightenment ideas did not fundamentally reshape the religiosity of Russian commoners. For instance, Daniel Kaiser analyzed the usage of icons by 18th century townsfolk in Moscow in *“Icons and Private Devotion among Eighteenth-Century Moscow Townsfolk”* (2011) and found that the common people tended to prefer icons of the Theotokos, which were associated with miracles, demonstrating a traditionally “contractual” religiosity.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Elena Smilianskaia in *“Witches, Blasphemers, and Heretics: Popular Religiosity and ‘Spiritual Crimes’ in Eighteenth-Century Russia”* (2007) examined witchcraft trials and found that most of the accused regularly went to confession and took communion, indicating that Russian commoners did not see their Orthodoxy as fundamentally incompatible with sorcery. In fact, their testimony indicates that, instead of being seen as a leftover from the pagan days, they believed

¹⁷ Kaiser, Daniel. “Icons and Private Devotion among Eighteenth-Century Moscow Townsfolk.”

Journal of Social History 45, no. 1 (2011): 125–47.

witchcraft to be a core part of their Orthodox faith.¹⁸ In “*Making Sense of the Empire’s Others: Mikhail Chulkov’s Dictionary of Russian Superstitions and the European Enlightenment*” (2023), Forrest Holden investigated the *Dictionary of Russian Superstitions* authored by Russian bureaucrat Mikhail Chulkov in 1782, and found that Russian high society considered itself enlightened specifically because it did not follow the superstitious practices of the lower classes.¹⁹ In this regard, they echoed the views of Western travelers, who also considered superstition the defining trait separating civilized and non-civilized nations. Even the supposedly enlightened monarchy of Catherine II did not follow the secularizing patterns of the West, as evidenced by the state’s increasing reliance on un-enlightened and religious forms of criminal punishment, such as penance, throughout the late 18th century, as discussed by Elena Marasino in “*Punishment by Penance in 18th-Century Russia: Church Practices in the Service of the Secular State*” (2016).²⁰

All of these elements ultimately offered Western travelers plenty of opportunities for presenting Russia as a backward, un-enlightened, “Eastern” nation and they did this in a number

¹⁸ Smilianskaia, Elena. “Witches, Blasphemers, and Heretics: Popular Religiosity and ‘Spiritual Crimes’ in Eighteenth-Century Russia.” *Russian Studies in History* 45 (2007): 35–85.

¹⁹ Holden, Forrest. “Making Sense of the Empire’s Others: Mikhail Chulkov’s Dictionary of Russian Superstitions and the European Enlightenment.” *ВИБЛИОФИКА* 11 (2025): 142–62.

²⁰ Marasino, Elena. “Punishment by Penance in 18th-century Russia: Church Practices in the Service of the Secular State.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 2 (2016): 305-332.

of ways. First, they criticized Russian marriage customs, which were seen as barbaric in a multitude of ways. Second, they found Orthodox ceremonies gaudy and antiquated, with most of the attendees displaying either a zealotry uncharacteristic of the Enlightenment or hypocritical disinterest, while religious feasts and fasting were seen as mere excuses for primitive debauchery. Discussions of superstition form the third, and arguably largest, body of criticism directed at Russian devotees, while charges of idolatry and excessive icon worship were also leveled. In fact, Western travelers went further by directly associating Orthodox ceremonies and icon worship with pagan traditions from antiquity and with quasi-oriental Islamic practices.

Section I: Russian Marriage Customs

To begin with, Western travelers considered Russian marriage customs to be fundamentally indecent, immoral and barbaric. For instance, William Coxe thought that Russian marriages were incestuous because of the relationships that would often develop between step-fathers and step-daughters, and Coxe's recurring tendency of decrying the Russian parochial clergy reemerges, as he believes that the parish priests allow such uncivilized marriages specifically because they are unenlightened. Curiously, Coxe mentions that these practices are now in decline, but this does nothing to alleviate his disgust, as he believes that this practice will end only sometime in the future, when Russia is *finally* enlightened:

“These incestuous marriages, sanctified by inveterate custom, and permitted by the parish-priests, were formerly more common than they are at present; but as the nation becomes more refined, and the priests somewhat more enlightened, and as they have lately been discountenanced by government, they are daily falling into disuse; and it is to be hoped, will be no longer tolerated” (Coxe 24).

Whereas Coxe insisted on the incestuous nature of Russian marriages, other travelers found them to be encouraging, if not inadequate in preventing, infidelity. For instance, William Richardson thought this to be the product of the backward tradition of arranged marriages, which not only result in infidelity, but even discourage the proper education of children, ultimately resulting in a less civilized population overall:

“Marriages of this sort must produce little happiness; neither husband nor wife are very studious of conjugal fidelity: hence the lower classes are as profligate as can possibly be conceived; and, in such circumstances, we cannot expect that they will have much care of their children” (Richardson 199).

Another practice which appears to have been greatly disparaged by Western travelers is the supposed intermingling between Russian wives, husbands and prostitutes. In remarkably similar passages, both John Carr and Edward Daniel Clarke describe festivities held by Russian peasants where husbands enjoy the company of prostitutes while their wives are also mingling with other men or even with the prostitutes. Neither party appears to be bothered, and this scene naturally evokes images of an Eastern harem. Ultimately, Carr, like Richardson, believed that this obscene reality also stemmed from the uncivilized practice of arranging marriages: “Many of the lower Russians married, as they frequently are, against their inclinations, make no scruple in taking their wives to such a scene of festivity as the one I have just described, and letting them out to prostitution for hire” (Carr 384), while Clarke states:

“In the middle of the room, the Russian boors and tradesmen were dancing with prostitutes, while their own wives and daughters were walking about...The female dancers and assistants in this ball were many of them prostitutes; but the wives and daughters of the peasants and lower

tradesmen mingled with them, dressed in their full national costume, and apparently not displeased with such society” (Clarke 41-43).

Carr’s account contains another anecdote worth mentioning. While recounting a situation in which a jealous husband, in a fit of rage, kills the lover of his wife, Clarke is evidently surprised that it is the husband that is ultimately exiled to Siberia, while the wife is asked to do penance. Clearly, he doubts the efficacy of such a punishment as it simply reinforces the wife’s “bigotry”, and his assertion that it is the wife that would have been prosecuted in England clearly highlights the inversion of proper European norms in Russia:

“The laws of England would have protected the miserable man, but by those of Russia he was knouted and sent to Siberia; and his wife, who was the authoress of this bloody tragedy, was ordered by her priest to prostrate herself six hundred times a day for two years, before the Virgin. Her conscience and her bigotry enforced punctual observance of the prescribed mortifications” (266).

Certain travelers, such as Casanova, even took advantage of these loose marriage practices. When Casanova notices an attractive Russian peasant girl, he is surprised to find that his Russian friend quickly strikes a deal with her father, which would see her become his mistress for a hundred roubles, while the simplicity and normality of such a custom is emphasized, especially in regards to the ease with which parental consent is given. In fact, the vulgarity of the situation becomes apparent when Casanova is surprised to learn that the girl would essentially become his slave.²¹ Later, the association with “Asiatic” sexuality is explicit, as his Russian friend even inquires

²¹ Casanova, Giacomo. *The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, 1725-1798*. Translated by

Arthur Machen. London: 1894. 2344.

whether Casanova would like multiple girls to form a Seraglio: “I called on Zinowieff, who said he was delighted to do me this small service. On the way he said that if I liked he could get me a perfect seraglio of pretty girls in a few days” (Casanova 2345). The whole affair even acquires a form of religious legitimation when the father gives thanks to Saint-Nicholas and Casanova is asked to examine the girl and testify to her virginity, while others are called in to witness the ceremony:

“The father thanked St. Nicholas for the good luck he had sent him. He spoke to his daughter, who looked at me and softly uttered the necessary yes. Zinowieff then told me that I ought to ascertain that matters were intact, as I was going to pay for a virgin. I was afraid of offending her, and would have nothing to do with it; but Zinowieff said the girl would be mortified if I did not examine her, and that she would be delighted if I place her in a position to prove before her father and mother that her conduct had always been virtuous. I therefore made the examination as modestly as I could, and I found her to be intact. To tell the truth, I should not have said anything if things had been otherwise...My servant and coachman were then called in to witness as arrangement of which they knew nothing” (Casanova 2345).

The same simplicity and normality that accompanied the purchase of the girl is then repeated when Casanova tires of his Russian mistress, while another Italian becomes infatuated with her. Ultimately, the Russian girl simply asks to be returned to her family so that the process can be repeated, with Casanova’s Italian friend acting as her next suitor.²² Again, rather than being

²² Casanova, Giacomo. *The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, 1725-1798*. Translated by Arthur Machen. London: 1894. 2375.

disgusted by the process, the girl's family is grateful and even deferential towards Casanova, and has no scruples with Casanova's acquaintance visiting the house on the very next day:

“When I restored her to her father, the whole family fell on their knees around me. Alas for poor human nature! thus it is degraded by the iron heel of oppression...Rinaldi took everything in good part. He told me that since the daughter would make no objection he had no fear of the father doing so. He went to the house the next day, but he did not get the girl till I had left St. Petersburg” (Casanova 2375).

However, it is Chappe D'Auteroche who is by far the most vocal critic of Russian marriage practices. He begins his lengthy digression on this subject by stating that the jealousy of Russian men is so excessive, that they rarely permit their wives any sort of interaction with the rest of society, while they themselves spend the day drinking. This thus reduces the moral and civilizational status of women:

“Les hommes sont extrêmement jaloux de leurs femmes à Tobolsk, & dans la plus grande partie de la Russie: ils restent cependant peu avec elles au-delà de Moscou; ils passent la plus grande partie de la journée à boire, & rentrent chez eux communément ivres. Les femmes sortent peu: elles vivent seules dans l'intérieur de leur maison, livrées à l'ennui & à l'oisiveté, source de la corruption de leurs mœurs” (Chappe d'Auteroche 259).

In fact, Chappe relates that many civilized and enlightened Europeans who travel to Russia make the mistake of addressing women without the approval of their husbands, which he considers a great mistake which nevertheless underscores the barbaric nature of Russian gender relations:

“J'ai vu à Tobolsk des Etrangers, qui y étoient depuis le commencement de la dernière guerre. Ignorant les usages du Pays, ils ont souvent éprouvé les suites fâcheuses du préjugé où ils étoient, qu'il étoit permis d'être poli, & d'avoir des égards pour ce sexe, ainsi que dans le reste de

l'Europe. Plus instruits dans la suite, ils connurent qu'il ne falloit faire aucun cas des femmes, en présence des maris...C'est ainsi que la corruption de ce sexe en Russie est une suite de la tyrannie des hommes” (Chappe d’Auteroche 260-261)

Further, Chappe argues that it is precisely because Russia is not a European country that husbands tyrannize their wives and that the delicate sentiments which inform an enlightened conception of love do not exist in Russia. Curiously, Chappe is not referring to any sort of marital bliss, but rather laments the lack of passionate love affairs with mistresses that one might expect in Europe:

“Un amant n'y jouit jamais de cet état enchanteur que fait sentir la volupté, de devoir à ses soins & à l'excès de son amour, l'embarras, le trouble & l'égarement d'une amante, qui voudroit être vertueuse...Ces situations sont inconnues en Sibérie & dans la plus grande partie de la Russie, où les mœurs policées du reste de l'Europe n'ont pas encore pénétré. Dans ces contrées barbares, les hommes tyrannisent leurs femmes, qu'ils regardent & traitent comme leurs premières Esclaves...Abusant plus que par-tout ailleurs, du droit du plus fort, ils ont établi les Loix les plus injustes...D'après un pareil traitement, il n'est pas étonnant qu'on n'y trouve pas la délicatesse de sentiments des Pays policés” (Chappe d’Auteroche 259-260).

As a result, the extramarital relations of Russian women are entirely carnal, lacking the refinement that civilized feelings might bring into an affair: “Les femmes ne connoissent d'autres plaisirs que celui des sens: elles se livrent souvent à leurs Esclaves, qui ne sont pas eunuques: la bonne constitution & la vigueur déterminent toujours leur choix” (Chappe d’Auteroche 261).

In truth, Chappe believes that the excessive jealousy that Russian husbands give to their wives should instead be directed towards their daughters, who often lose their virginity at a prepubescent age because of moral and parental oversights. When their marriage approaches, fake

experts are called in to appraise the girls and testify to their virginity, a practice Chappe considers barbaric and outdated:

“Si les hommes exercent la plus grande sévérité envers leurs femmes, ils sont beaucoup plus indulgents à l'égard de leurs filles. Ils prétendent qu'une femme ayant un mari, ne doit être occupée que de lui; au-lieu que les filles doivent jouir d'une plus grande liberté pour s'en procurer: elles ne manquent pas d'en profiter de bonne heure, sans consulter les parents ni l'Église...mais l'inconséquence des hommes est si extraordinaire, qu'en accordant aux filles cette liberté, qu'une bonne éducation devoit diriger, ils exigent qu'elles conservent leur virginité: ils prétendent s'assurer de cet état, par des Experts qui y apportent l'examen le plus sévère, & qui seroit le plus indécent partout ailleurs” (Chappe d’Auteroche 261-262).

A lengthy description of a typical Russian marriage ceremony follows, a few parts of which are especially curious. For instance, although the bride and groom “ont été mariés par un Prêtre, ainsi que dans notre Église”, a sorcerer “dont l'objet est de détruire tous les sortilèges que d'autres Magiciens peuvent mettre en usage pour empêcher la consommation du mariage” (Chappe d’Auteroche 262) is still present for the rest of the ceremony, which naturally evokes associations with paganism and underscores Orthodox religious hypocrisy. The rest of this passage is especially interesting because of the emphasis with which Chappe describes the many ways in which the bride’s virginity is both ascertained and displayed, which evidently would have evoked images of barbarism and uncouthness among an audience of enlightened Europeans. A committee of women is selected to evaluate the virginity of the girl while an old matron and Orthodox icons are present within the nuptial room itself to grant the ceremony a form of religious legitimation: “Les femmes nommées pour Experts sont communément au nombre de trois ou quatre...L'appartement nuptial ne contient communément qu'un lit, ordinairement très propre, & sans rideaux, les Images que le

parain & la maraine ont données aux jeunes mariés...auprès duquel est une vieille Matrône” (Chappe d’Auteroche 262-263).

Again, the magician takes center stage once the assembly reaches the place of consummation. At this point, the bride is undressed and forced to kiss the assembly, images which certainly evoke licentiousness and lack of modesty: “Le Sorcier fait tous ses sortilèges, & l'on deshabil le jeune mariée, lui laissant seulement un petit jupon & une camisole; mais l'un & l'autre arrangés pour ce jour de cérémonie, où doit régner la volupté... la jeune mariée embrasse alors toute l'Assemblée sur la bouche” (Chappe d’Auteroche 263).

Everyone leaves the room except for the matron, which is present throughout the entire consummation. Once it is finished, the virginity committee enters and assesses the girl. Chappe relates that a bloody white cloth is seen as an especially good sign and that the family proudly displays it to all those who are present, as well as their neighbors. Again, these practices would have seemed hopelessly outdated and backward to Chappe’s enlightened audience, which would have perceived them as entirely immodest:

“Les jeunes mariés restent seuls avec la Matrône, qui préside à cette cérémonie...Après la consommation du mariage, on fait rentrer les femmes, qui deshabillent la jeune mariée toute nue, pour juger de sa virginité. Parmi les différentes preuves, ils regardent comme la plus certaine, celle où le linge a été ensanglanté, & dans ce cas on place sa chemise dans une cassette...On montre pendant ce concert à tous les convives, les marques de la virginité de la mariée, & pendant plusieurs jours on transporte la cassette chez tous les voisins” (Chappe d’Auteroche 263-264).

Immediately following this lengthy description, Chappe leaves a footnote which directly compares these practices to those of the Turks, evidently attributing to these Russian customs a

decidedly Eastern character.²³ The ridiculousness of these customs is further underscored when Chappe asserts that he was barred from attending any weddings in Tobolsk because an influential Russian lady was afraid that their description would be leaked to the wider world: “Il y eut plusieurs Mariages à Tobolsk pendant le séjour que j'y fis: je ne pus jamais obtenir d'être admis à leur Fête; une femme sur-tout, d'ailleurs fort aimable, s'y opposa constamment, dans la crainte, disoit-elle , que je ne trouvasse leur cérémonie ridicule, & que je n'en fisse part au Public” (Chappe d’Auteroche 265).

When Chappe is finally able to attend a Russian wedding in-person, his eyewitness account differs in some respects, highlighting the fact that his pervious description was clearly filled with preconceived notions. For instance, he admits that “il n'y avoit point de Sorcier” and that most of the archaic practices he described earlier are now disappearing, especially in large cities and among the nobility: “parmi les Grands on se contente communément d'enlever la chemise de la mariée, pendant qu'elle est couchée avec son mari, & cette chemise offre toujours des preuves authentiques de sa virginité” (Chappe d’Auteroche 271). However, as in so many cases, this is not enough to dissuade Chappe, who ultimately insists that the traditional marriage ceremonies he described earlier “se pratiquent avec la plus grande rigueur dans toute la Russie, au-delà de Moscou” (Chappe d’Auteroche 271).

Overall, Russian marriage customs were described in a decidedly negative manner by Western travelers. However, it is difficult to consider the accuracy of these reports as they are full of contradictions. Somehow, Russian wives engage in scandalous behavior, mingling with

²³ Chappe d’Auteroche, Jean-Baptiste. *Voyage en Sibérie, fait par ordre du roi en 1761*. Tome I.

Amsterdam: 1769. 265.

common prostitutes, but are also extremely prudish and rarely leave the house. Some authors claim that Russian women are clearly licentious and promiscuous, while others assert that they never become mistresses and do not have affairs. Despite these contradictions though, it is evident that, one way or another, Russian marriages were considered alien, “Asiatic”, un-European and un-Enlightened. Again, the self-reinforcing nature of these accounts is evident, because when Western authors encountered firsthand evidence which directly contradicted their views, such as the lack of a magician in Chappe’s case, they continued to insist that, overall, Russian marriages were decidedly backward.

Section II: Ceremonies, Feasts and Fasting

One of the facets of Russian Orthodoxy, which was much derided by Western travelers, might best be labeled as “ceremonial hypocrisy”. In essence, although Orthodox ceremonies certainly impressed these travelers, they complained that Russian devotees paid little to no attention to the liturgy. Depending on the author, this was attributed either to a lack of genuine faith, insufficient interest in religious instruction or an overzealous and mindless repetition of rituals such as bowing or crossing. For example, Mary Holderness saw this as one of the main symptoms of Russia’s un-Enlightenment, stating that “The splendour and ceremony of the Greek Church is very imposing; and it is not much to be wondered at, that over minds so barren and uninformed, the craft of priesthood has attained such sway” (Holderness 67), while John Carr simply asserted that the “abstract mysteries” of Orthodoxy are “but little known, even to its followers” (Carr 213) and Reginald Heber, while attending an Orthodox service, found that “There was much crowd and much crossing and bowing, but no great appearance of devotion” (Heber 212).

In this regard, Reginald Heber was especially apprehensive of a general lack of interest among Orthodox believers, in spite of the awe-inspiring nature of Orthodox liturgical practices. Moreover, when he later attended a service in the presence of Elizabeth Alekseyevna, the wife of Alexander I, he again singled out the Russian clergy as a negative force:

“The chapel was crowded, and the singing the most beautiful I ever heard...and never was more delightful harmony produced by vocal performers...But little attention was paid to the service by the greater part of the audience, though some continued bowing and crossing themselves the whole time. After the bishop had given the final blessing, I was surprised to see the beautiful young empress, for I really think her very much so, kiss his hand, which he returned on her hand and cheek; and his example was followed by the whole tribe of ecclesiastics, a race of as dirty monks as ever ate salt fish” (Heber 125-126).

In fact, the beautiful singing which so enthralled Heber was ultimately seen as a net negative, since Moscow churches famous for their singing supposedly attracted loiterers and delinquents, and the very notion that a church might be a place of “amusement” or “resort” would have gone against Heber's enlightened ideals, which saw churches as places of instruction first and foremost: “There are particular Churches at Moscow which are famous for their music, and are crowded by the idle and the dissipated as places of amusement. The Chapel of Gallitzin's hospital is one, and the church of Nicetas the martyr another of these favourite places of resort” (Heber 157).

In a similar vein, John Carr found the constant ringing of bells in Orthodox Churches, especially during feasts or ceremonies, to be entirely distracting from proper worship: “I have hitherto omitted to mention the terrible annoyance of the bells of the Greek churches, the most deep-toned of any I ever heard...To a stranger, the alternate clashing and jingling of these deep-

mouthed tenants of the steeple, for an hour without any interval, is very harassing...The Russian saints are said to be very fond of this matin music; and many was the time and oft that I wished it confined exclusively to their ears” (Carr 286).

The notion that the average Russian exhibits a sort of “religious indifference” can also be found in Casanova’s writings, where it is even attributed to Catherine II herself: “She did not evidence the least devotion during mass...Now she smiled at one of her suite, now at another, and occasionally she addressed the favourite” (Casanova 2356). William Richardson also witnessed a church ceremony attended by Catherine II and found the empress trying to hide her displeasure at having to kiss the empire’s leading ecclesiastics: “The whole ceremony concluded by the Empress allowing the dignified Clergy to kiss her hand...[which] seemed rather happier with such an opportunity, than her Imperial Majesty herself, notwithstanding her smiles” (Richardson 22). Naturally, such accounts cast doubt on the potential success of any “civilizing” or “enlightening” mission, if the empress herself is fundamentally indifferent or even unsympathetic towards Orthodoxy.

On a different note, Western travelers also found that Orthodox feasts were often excuses for primitive debauchery, which, in the eyes of many travelers, underscored the barbaric and uncivilized nature of Russian religiosity. For instance, John Carr asserted that Orthodox feasts were nothing more than mere excuses for hedonism and that, considering their number, this made the common Russian constantly debauched: “This propensity [for debauchery] is much encouraged by the extraordinary number of festivals which occur in this country, particularly at the end of Lent...a feast for every day in the year, and some over” (Carr 289-290). Later, Carr asserts that this propensity towards drunkenness, which is ultimately sanctioned and justified by an improper and un-enlightened religiosity, sometimes leads to fatal consequences: “The common Russians

frequently indulge themselves to such excess, that death is the consequence of their intemperance” (Carr 381).

Many examples of this line of thinking can also be found in Edward Daniel Clarke’s *Travels*. For instance, he asserts that Moscow’s Easter celebrations dwarf the debauchery of Rome or Venice during *Carnevale*: “The most splendid pageants of Rome do not equal the costliness and splendour of the Russian church. Neither could Venice, in the midst of her carnival ever rival in debauchery and superstition, in licentiousness and parade, what passes during this season in Moscow” (Clarke 36).

Later, Clarke admits that Russian Easter festivities are exceptionally civil but, as always, this does little to change his generally negative perception, which is that a proper, enlightened form of religiosity would not be prone to these excesses:

“On Easter Monday the most gaudy but fantastic buffoonery of splendour fills every street in the city...and riot and debauchery instantly broke loose. The inn where we lodged became a Pandemonium. Drinking, dancing, and singing, continued through the night and day. But in the midst of all these excesses, quarrels hardly ever took place. The wild, rude riot of a Russian populace is full of humanity. Few disputes are heard-no blows are given-no lives endangered, but by drinking” (Clarke 38-40).

In fact, the Orthodox practice of fasting was perceived by Clarke as a crucial element encouraging this behavior. Clarke clearly thought that rigorous periods of fasting compounded this propensity towards debauchery through excessive withdrawal and prohibition. Thus, the Orthodox faith was considered fundamentally unbalanced insofar as it was either too rigorous or too lax, and ultimately unable to maintain a balance characteristic of other, more civilized, enlightened and

modern religions. Moreover, the eagerness with which Lent was observed by most Russians was not seen as a sign of genuine devotion, but rather a sad example of misplaced fanaticism taken to the extreme:

“There are no people who observe Lent with more scrupulous or excessive rigour than the Russians...but in proportion as this rigour has been observed, so much more excessive is the degree of gluttony and relaxation, when the important intelligence that " Christ is risen," has issued from the mouth of the archbishop. During Easter, they run into every kind of excess, rolling about drunk the whole week, as if rioting, debauchery, extravagance, gambling, and drinking, were as much a religious observance as starving had been before, and that the same superstition which kept them fasting during Lent, had afterwards instigated them to the most beastly excesses” (Clarke 36).

Meanwhile, Mary Holderness, considered the gradual abandonment of the practice of fasting a sure sign of Enlightenment: “perhaps it may be considered one proof that the present age is becoming more enlightened, since the younger part of families are beginning to look with a very doubtful eye at the efficacy of that self-denial which aboundeth unto evil, rather than to good” (Holderness 184). She also relates an anecdote in which a Russian priest is hypocritically extolling the virtues of fasting while he himself drinks profusely, a clear example indicating that even the clergy is unable to conform to these “asurdly long” periods of withdrawal which ultimately result in uncivilized excesses:

“He said, “we understand as well as you the nature of fasting; not that which goeth into the mouth defileth the man...but yet it is not necessary that all should see so clearly.” His own clearness of sight I was told, was more frequently impeded by drinking than eating; however, those who are less liberal than he, never think of abstinence from drink, or any other intemperate desire; and that

self-denial which can abstain for five or six weeks from animal food, is expected to make amends for the breach of all the remaining catalogue of sins” (Holderness 185).

In fact, Holderness also relates another anecdote, in which the guilty conscience of a murderer is appeased through fasting, which is clearly designed to highlight the supposedly immoral and irrational nature of fasting: ““Thank God,” said the murderer of the Jew’s family at the Karagoss tracteer, devoutly crossing himself as he spake “thank God, I never broke the fast!”” (Holderness 185).

Returning to Clarke’s *Travels*, we find other passages which further highlight Russian “religious hypocrisy”. Clarke’s underlying perception is that the ritualistic aspects of Orthodoxy are ultimately irrelevant, especially when one considers the inadequate morality of Russian believers. For instance, his friend is supposedly robbed, right in the middle of a church service, by a Russian devotee. With one hand in the Englishman’s pocket, the Russian uses the other to furiously cross himself, in a scene clearly designed to highlight the hypocrisy of Russian Orthodoxy: “My attention was for a moment called off, by seeing one of the Russians earnestly crossing himself with his right hand, while his left was employed in picking my companion’s pocket of his handkerchief... the spectators had continued bowing their heads, and crossing themselves; insomuch, that some of the people seemed really exhausted by the constant motion of the head and hands” (Clarke 39).

Later in his account, Clarke further reinforces the notion of an irrational and superstitious Orthodoxy when, on the Day of the Ascension, he is apprehensive of a crowd of “religious fanatics” which is so zealous that it almost causes a stampede. Again, their crossing and bowing is considered excessive, and the clergy is portrayed in a negative light when one of the priests is characterized as mindless worshiper of spurious relics:

“I was carried in by the crowd, which rushed forward like a torrent; and...beheld...a throng of devotees, in which there was danger of being pressed to death; all of whom were in motion, crossing themselves, bowing their heads, and struggling who should first kiss the consecrated pictures... Observing a crowd particularly eager to kiss the skull of an incorruptible saint, I asked a priest in Latin, whose body the sepulchre contained. "Whence are you," said he, "that you know not the tomb of St. Demetrius!"” (Clarke 83).

Finally, Clarke was also critical of Orthodox prayer, as he found it too monotonous and unintelligible. Evidently, he saw this as another piece of evidence indicating that the Orthodox Church did not concern itself with the proper education of its average believer. For Clarke, this was a further example of “religious hypocrisy”, for although the adherents of Orthodoxy might exhibit ritualistic fervor and zealotry, they ultimately cannot understand its prayers, and are thus unable to comprehend the very essence of their own faith:

“The method of reading, in all the Russian churches, is ridiculous beyond description. The young priests who officiate, pique themselves upon a talent of mouthing it over with all possible celerity, so as to be altogether unintelligible, even to the Russians, striving to give a whole lesson the appearance of a single word of numberless syllables” (Clarke 158).

William Richardson also expressed the view that Russian Orthodoxy can essentially be abstracted to mindless repetitions without any moral concerns. In fact, he explicitly states that the practical Orthodoxy of the masses is entirely irrational:

“I may tell you of pompous ceremonies, magnificent processions, rich dresses, showy pictures, smoking censers, and solemn music; but I cannot tell you that the clergy in general are exemplary, or the laity upright. On no consideration would a Ruffian peasant omit his fastings, the

bending of his body, and the regularity of his attendance on sacred rites...you cannot oblige him to cross himself with more more than three fingers; but he has no scruple to steal or commit murder...I could scarcely conceive it possible, that men should...fancy they are rendering acceptable service to Heaven by the performance of many idle ceremonies, while they are acting inconsistently with every moral obligation” (Richardson 59-60).

Again, like so many authors, Richardson singled out the remarkable debauchery which preceded and followed periods of fasting and hinted that this was further evidence of Russian religious immorality, which made Orthodoxy incompatible with enlightened notions of religious propriety:

“The following week [after Easter] is spent in revelry and rejoicing...for the Russians of all ranks and opinions...betake themselves with the utmost licentiousness to the pleasures of the table...every person who chuses, goes into the churches, rings the bells as long as he thinks fit, and believes that he is thus glorifying God, or making expiation for his sins. The week before Lent is in like manner dedicated to riotous diversion” (Richardson 61).

Later, when attending an Orthodox funeral procession, Richardson found the outward expressions of grief expressed by the crowd to be so excessive, that it ultimately eliminated any possibility of a solemn reflection. Evidently, these expressions of faith appear entirely thoughtless, ritualistic and primitive: “I need not add, that the parade was excessive; and the lamentation so loud, as totally to destroy the pleasing melancholy, and the disposition to solemn thought, which such ceremonies ought to produce” (Richardson 118).

Like Clarke, Richardson also criticized the excessive zeal of Orthodox believers. When attending the Blessing of the Waters, he admonished the “crazed crowd” for rushing onward and

almost causing a stampede, in a passage that evokes the same images as Clarke's account of the Day of the Ascension: "The multitude...rushed with ungoverned tumult to wash their hands and their faces in the hallowed orifice. What pushing and bawling, and scolding and swearing - to get rid of their sins!" (Richardson 334). The object of this commotion, holy water, is ultimately lambasted by Richardson. Accordingly, the ridiculous notion that this water has divine properties is associated with ignorant mothers who give to their sickly infants:

"A Lady...had a child ill of a fever; many medicines were tried, but without effect: she was at length prevailed with to administer holy water: it was many months after the time of consecration; the water was spoilt; but she did not believe it was so: for such water is reckoned incapable of spoiling...she administered a copious draught; and the child died. But having been poisoned by the waters of Jordan, the mother could not repine" (Richardson 335).

Moreover, in Richardson's *Anecdotes*, this passage is immediately followed by a letter addressed to a certain reverend, tellingly entitled *Concerning the Effect of Pompous Religious Rites on the Devotion of the Worshipper*. In it, Richardson admonishes the Orthodox ceremonies discussed in this section and begins by highlighting the primitive and unsubstantiated nature of Orthodox worship: "Pompous ceremonies, glaring pictures, and even ravishing music, have, no doubt, very pleasing effects; but they rather tend to produce wild enthusiasm, than meek religion" (Richardson 338). Richardson continues by recounting his personal experience in a Russian church and admits that the effect produced by these mystical elements was so grand that he had to stop himself from being engrossed in this ultimately superfluous and irrational faith: "At a very magnificent ceremony of the Greek church...every thing was contrived to work on the senses, and inflame the imagination...I was struck! 'tis a false religion', said I to myself: but still I was amazed at what I felt; and almost joined in worshipping the glaring Saint" (Richardson 338).

However, Richardson goes even further by drawing a direct comparison between the service he attended and pagan practices one might find referenced at the opera: "I was next night at an exquisite opera...In one part, a Priestess of Diana, accompanied with a chorus, consisting of an hundred Priests and Nymphs, sung hymns to the Goddess; it was affecting. "It is strange, thought I; yesterday I was of the Greek persuasion; and I am this night a Pagan"" (Richardson 338-339).

This specific context is especially telling, as Richardson includes this comparison in a letter written to some unnamed reverend (probably an Anglican pastor), which seems to be designed as a poignant criticism of the un-enlightened and un-European nature of Russian Orthodoxy, which is, on the one hand, contrasted with proper enlightened religiosity and, on the other, associated with "Dionysian" paganism.

Returning momentarily to Clarke's account, we also see an explicit association between Orthodoxy and paganism. During his description of Easter celebrations, Clarke inserts a footnote which asserts that exclamations of "Christ is risen!" are nothing more than a repurposed pagan tradition, somehow imported from ancient Egypt: "The whole of this pretended search for the body of Christ, and the subsequent shout of "Christos voscress!" is a repetition of the old Heathen ceremony respecting the Finding of Osiris. Plutarch describes the same sort of procession and ceremony; adding, "Then all that are present cry out with a loud voice, OSIRIS IS FOUND!" (Clarke 40)

As we shall see later in this chapter, Richardson and Clarke made other allusions to paganism, especially when it came to Orthodox icons, but, for now, it suffices to say that the association between Orthodox and pagan worship in these accounts certainly would have evoked images of backwardness and superstition among enlightened Western audiences.

Meanwhile, French travelers leveled the exact same charges at Russian Orthodoxy. They claimed that most churchgoers did not truly understand Orthodox precepts, that the debauched behavior accompanying religious feasts was excessive, that the supposed emphasis on performative religiosity was misguided and they also highlighted the fundamentally immoral state of Orthodox believers. Thus, de Rulhiere asserts that Catherine II was only able to gain the admiration and devotion of her subjects through the mindless observance of Orthodox precepts: “Elle s’était fait aimer du peuple par une rigoureuse dévotion, par une fidélité scrupuleuse à observer toutes les pratiques de leur religion grecque, plus chargée de cérémonies que de morale” (de Rulhiere 48). Meanwhile, Abel Burja reinforced this notion by asserting that a Russian peasant would rather commit murder than break the fast, another supposedly mindless and performative aspect: “Un Paysan Ruffe eft fermement persuadé que Dieu lui pardonneroit plutôt un meurtre que la violation du Carême” (Burja 23). Chappe d’Auteroche echoed this proposition, stating that most Russians lack a sense of morality because they prioritize fasting over their own conduct: “Ils n’ont aucun principe de morale: ils craignent plus de manquer au jeûne du Carême, que d’assassiner leur semblable, surtout un Etranger: ils prétendent & croient qu’il n’est pas du nombre de leurs freres” (Chappe d’Auteroche 311-312). In another passage, he considers fasting a form of religious fanaticism, both because children are required to participate and because most Russians consider breaking the fast a most serious offense, which highlights the ridiculous nature of this practice: “Tous ces Habitants m’ont paru attachés à la Religion Grecque, jusqu’au fanatisme: ils sont si rigides pour les jeunes du Carême, qu’ils les font observer aux enfants de deux ou trois ans, & ils ne s’écartent jamais de ce devoir, lors même qu’ils commettent les plus grands crimes” (Chappe d’Auteroche 70). Later, in a passage that is remarkably similar, Chappe offers a verbatim

reassertion of this religious fanaticism, but goes even further by claiming that Russian Orthodoxy has utterly degraded the common people, so much so, that even paganism would be preferable:

“Le Peuple est attaché à la Religion Grecque jusqu'au fanatisme...ce Peuple est si peu éclairé sur sa Religion, qu'il croit en général en remplir les devoirs, en s'acquittant de quelques pratiques extérieures, & sur-tout en observant avec la plus grande rigueur, les jeûnes du Carême. Il se livre d'ailleurs à la débauche & à tous ses penchants vicieux. Les bonnes mœurs sont plus rares parmi les Russes que chez les Payens leurs voisins. La façon de penser des Russes sur le Christianisme est si extraordinaire, qu'on croiroit que cette Religion, si conforme au bonheur & à l'ordre de la Société, a servi à rendre le Peuple Russe plus méchant” (Chappe d’Auteroche 215).

This section is immediately followed by an anecdote in which a killer asserts his innocence by claiming that he never broke the fast. Although Chappe admits that such cases are rare, he nevertheless considered this inclusion appropriate because, for him, it highlights the misplaced Orthodox emphasis on practice rather than conscience:

“Un assassin ayant été pris...on lui demanda...s'il avoit observé les jeûnes du Carême; ce scélérat fut aussi étonné de cette question, que le pourroit être un parfait honnête-homme...Il répondit avec vivacité, qu'il étoit incapable de manquer aux devoirs de sa Religion...De semblables faits font rares en Russie; aussi n'ai-je rapporté celui-ci, que pour faire connoître que dans cette Nation on s'est moins attaché dans la Religion, à donner des mœurs au Peuple, qu'à lui faire observer certaines pratiques de Religion, qui ne rendent pas toujours l'homme meilleur” (Chappe d’Auteroche 215-216).

French travelers also asserted that this immorality was due to an improper emphasis on ritual during ceremonies, and they argued that church services should instead be used for the

dissemination of proper behavior among the masses through sermons. For instance, de Fortia de Piles laments the impossibility of hearing sermons in church due to the loud and overbearing singing accompanying Orthodox worship: “Il est bien certain que de notre vie nous n’avons entendu jeter des cris aussi inhumains. Quarante à cinquante personnes, dont les trois quarts étoient des enfans, chantoient à tue tête des paroles que nous avions le malheur de ne pas entendre, et cela dans un espace infiniment circonscrit” (de Fortia de Piles 77). It is no wonder then, that de Fortia de Piles thought that the attendees seemed to have gained no satisfaction whatsoever from the service: “L’affluence du peuple qui assistoit à cette cérémonie, nous a paru peu considérable, et nous n’avons pas remarqué qu’il témoignât aucun sentiment de plaisir ou de satisfaction” (de Fortia de Piles 83). Meanwhile, Chappe d’Auteroche was equally apprehensive of Orthodox ceremonies, which he called “ridiculous”, and he was particularly displeased with the distracting presence of small infants: “Ces représentations font la plus grande impression sur le Peuple: mais deviennent ridicules lorsqu’elles font mal rendues...On fait approcher dans l’Eglise Grecque, les enfans de la Sainte Table...on éveilla un petit enfant pour cette action sainte; il fit connoître par ses cris & par les pleurs qu’il répandoit, qu’on auroit pu l’en dispenser” (Chappe d’Auteroche 225-227).

As French travelers complained about the lack of care put into the enlightening and civilizing of the Russian population, they found that it resulted in debauchery and abandon, especially on feast days, which typically coincided with the end of fasting periods. For instance, de Fortia de Piles asserted that most Russians waste their feast days in mindless debauchery: “Les innombrables fêtes du calendrier, sont autant de jours consacrés à la crapule” (de Fortia de Piles 325-326). Meanwhile, Abel Burja made the connection between drunkenness and Orthodoxy explicit by stating that it is concretely connected to the worship of Saints: “Les Paysans

Russes...sont souvent ivres, sur-tout les jours de fête: ils croiroient ne pas honorer leurs Saints, s'ils ne se grisoient à leur honneur” (Burja 20). Finally, Chappe d’Auteroche asserted that travelling in Russia before Lent was entirely impossible, since the mob was simply too drunk and unruly: “Je partis dans la semaine de Maslinitza: elle précède le grand Carême; les Russes se mettent alors rarement en route, de la débauche du Peuple: il ne cesse d’être ivre pendant ce temps, & se livre à toutes sortes d’excès” (Chappe d’Auteroche 45).

To be entirely fair, not all Western travelers advanced these arguments and repeated these tropes, but those contradicting such statements were usually outliers. For instance, William Heber was alone in his assertion that “All the stories of the impossibility of travelling in Russia during a feast time are greatly exaggerated; and are probably chiefly drawn from the excessive profligacy of a Petersburg mob. I do not think that the people in the other parts of Russia are more given to intoxication than the English” (Heber 232). In any case, it is hard to judge these accounts as entirely reliable both because of the amount of recycled and self-reinforcing material and because Western opinions of Orthodox feasts, ceremonies and fasting were fundamentally contradictory. Somehow, Russian worshippers were simultaneously characterized as either too zealous or entirely indifferent towards their faith. Regardless, it is undeniable that these perceptions were fundamentally negative and that these performative aspects of Russian Orthodoxy were seen as entirely un-civilized, un-enlightened and un-European.

Section III: Idolatry, Saintly Worship and Allusions to Islam and Paganism

The Orthodox worship of saints, which manifested itself through the veneration of icons and relics, was equally condemned by Western travelers who came to the Russian Empire in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Generally, they tended to equate this form of worship with idolatry, and many of the same themes found in the section on Orthodox ceremonies and practices

are applicable here. These include associations with paganism, superstition, irrationality, etc. For instance, William Coxe thought that the worship of Saint Alexander Nevsky underlined the superstitious and ignorant nature of the Russian people, even though he considered the reverence shown to this saint somewhat excusable considering his great deeds: “He shewed such prowess, and performed such almost incredible acts of valour, that it is no wonder ignorant and superstitious people should consider him as a superior being, and should consecrate his memory; indeed, of all idolatry, that which is paid to real merit, and in gratitude for real services, is the most natural, and the most excusable.” (Coxe 330). Meanwhile, when discussing the worship of icons, Coxe made an explicit allusion to idolatry by asserting that the type of icon found in the houses of Russian peasants, “frequently resembles more a Calmuc idol, than the representation of a human head” (Coxe 21). Ultimately, as an Anglican priest, Coxe thought that this emphasis on painted images was an example of a misguided and fundamentally incorrect form of religiosity. Like so many other aspects of Orthodoxy, Coxe considered the simultaneous prohibition of sculptures, coupled with the focus on painted images, a simplistic and literalistic interpretation of the Bible, making the Orthodox faith primitive and backward in its interpretations.²⁴

Similarly, Casanova asserted that the Russian fondness for icons is so extreme that, upon entering a house, “A person coming in makes first a bow to the image and then a bow to the master, and if perchance the image is absent, the Russian, after gazing all round, stands confused and motionless, not knowing what to do” (Casanova 2358). Naturally, the comical and absurd nature

²⁴ Coxe, William. *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark*. Volume I. Dublin: 1784. 347-352.

of this scenario is designed to highlight the ridiculous nature of Orthodox icon worship to Casanova's enlightened Western audience.

Meanwhile, Reginald Heber was of the opinion that the attachment exhibited by most Russians towards their icons is somewhat hypocritical, especially when one considers that "A Russian professes never to sell the images of his saints; he, however, hawks them about the streets, and exchanges them for other saints, or money to buy them" (Heber 121). Mary Holderness also considered this attachment hypocritical because she thought the Russian worshiper too distracted by icons, negating any sort of contemplation. Thus, even though the Russian worshiper excels at performing all sorts of technicalities, his morals remain tarnished specifically because these icons do nothing to correct immoral behavior:

"A Russian thinks it not needful to enter his closet, to offer up his morning or his evening orisons to the great Being he worship; but does it through the intervention of some saint, whose picture hangs suspended in a corner of his sitting-room...This...has decidedly its disadvantages; and I have frequently remarked, two at least of his senses not occupied by the ceremony he was performing...The Russian never passes...the image of the saint to whom the church is consecrated, without crossing himself; yet the inefficacy of this outward bearing of the cross is abundantly testified in all his works" (Holderness 185-186).

William Richardson also thought that this attachment to icons was hypocritical and that it ultimately offered no incentives to proper moral behavior. In one instance, he recounts that their presence did not deter sexual immorality: "Though the Ruffians have such sacred witnesses of their conduct, they soon...hazard the performance of any act whatsoever before them; and I have not heard of any but some of the fair sex, who, in cafes of irresistible temptation, have thought of veiling with an apron the face of the blushing saint" (Richardson 208).

Moreover, as in the case of Orthodox ceremonies, Richardson argued for an explicit connection between the worship of saints and paganism. Thus, the particular attention given to a certain saint depending on one's date of birth was equated to a similar tradition that was supposedly practiced in ancient Egypt. This association underscores Richardson's perception of Orthodoxy as an "Asiatic", un-European, primitive and backward faith:

"The Russians are convinced that every individual is under the peculiar protection of that holy person, on whose day he happened to have been born...Herodotus...gives a similar account of the Egyptians. He tells us...that they were under the peculiar protection of that divinity on whose day they were born...So much alike are all superstitions" (Richardson 15-16).

Edward Daniel Clarke also equated the Orthodox worship of saints to paganism. For instance, in a section describing the Saint Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod, he considered its many icons and images to be reminiscent of a pagan temple. Simultaneously, the reverence and emphasis given to icons of the *Theotokos* was also criticized and considered "absurdly superstitious". Clarke was especially apprehensive of the icon of the Virgin with Three Hands because he considered it an idolatrous misunderstanding of the concept of the Trinity:

"In the dome...are seen the representations of monsters with many heads: and such a strange assemblage of imaginary beings, that it might be supposed a pagan rather than a Christian temple. The different representations of the Virgin throughout Russia, will show to what a pitch of absurdity superstition has been carried...These are, principally the Virgin of Vladimir; the Virgin with the Bleeding cheek; and...the Virgin with Three hands...I believe it to have been originally painted as a barbarous representation, or symbol, of the Trinity" (Clarke 20-21).

Furthermore, Clarke explicitly states that these “absurd” icons are directly linked to the “idols of Paganism”. For Clarke, the very presence of such icons, not only in the churches, but in every single house, was further evidence of this backward and barbaric link between Orthodoxy and Paganism. He also characterized the veneration of such “idols” as absurdly intense, with the bowing and crossing of Orthodox believers being compared to “Chinese mandarin images”, which is another explicit reference to Orthodoxy as an “Asiatic” faith:

“Many of those absurd representations are said to be the work of angels. In the Greek church they followed the idols of Paganism, and have continued to maintain their place...for it is not only in their churches that such paintings are preserved, every room throughout the empire has a picture of this nature...to which every person, who enters offers adoration...and this adoration consists in a quick motion of the right hand in crossing, the head bowing all the time in a manner so rapid and ludicrous, that it reminds me of one of those Chinese mandarin images...which, when set a-going, continue nodding” (Clarke 21).

Later in his account, Clarke dismisses the miracles attributed to certain icons by arguing that the idiot, credulous and ignorant Russian believes in miracles simply because he does not understand probabilities. Naturally, the argument is that such a superstitious population will find any excuse to erect venerative spaces and, again, Orthodox places of worship are directly linked to paganism by means of a comparison with the shrine of Diana at Ephesus:

“The particular picture to which reference is now made...has great celebrity, from the numberless miracles it has wrought...Now, supposing only four persons present themselves before this image...in the compass of a single minute, no less a number than 2880 persons will be found to visit it in the short space of twelve hours. It would be indeed a miracle, if out of this number, one or two did not occasionally experience relief either from sickness of body, or sorrow, or some

pleasing accidental change in circumstances...Upon such ground an idiot might be the occasion of as vast a superstructure of ignorance and credulity, as any which even Russia has witnessed...any object in their prodigious catalogue of superstition-might occasion a resort of devotees, give rise to a church...as famous as the shrine of Diana of Ephesus” (Clarke 50).

Following this passage, Clarke relates an anecdote in which a dishonest merchant uses the naivety and superstition of the Russian population to fraudulently claim the discovery of the body of some saint, with the un-enlightened populace eagerly falling for the scam. Crucially, despite the merchant’s own admission of the fraud, the church built to honor this supposed saint remains open, a clear indicator of the backwardness of Russian Orthodoxy, while Clarke asserts that such scams are quite frequent:

“A merchant of Moscow, more renowned for speculation than piety...caused a coffin to be dug up, with the supposed body of a saint...It was moreover said that his saintship was very passionate, that he was angry at being disturbed: and insisted upon having a church built over him, to ensure his future repose...although it was well known in Russia, that the merchant...frequently avowed and laughed at the fraud he had committed” (Clarke 50-51).

Ultimately, Clarke also attributed the Orthodox worship of icons and saints to a so-called Russian “national character”. Supposedly, just as Russian people never dare to offer petitions to their monarch directly, instead favoring intercourse with “court parasites”, so is their worship full of intermediaries in the form of icons and saints. Naturally, he considered this emblematic of a disingenuous faith, almost as if Orthodox worshipers are afraid to confront God in a direct, rational and enlightened way:

“In the adoration paid by this people to their saints and virgins, we may discern strong traces of their national character. The homage they offer to a court parasite or to a picture, are both founded on the same principle...A deity, or a despot, by the nature of the one, and the policy of the other, is too far removed from their view to admit of any immediate application. All their petitions, instead of being addressed at once to a spiritual or temporal throne, are directed to one or the other by channels which fall beneath the cognizance of sense. Thus, we find favouritism the key-stone of the Russian government, and adoration of saints the pillar of their faith” (Clarke 51).

Throughout this section, we have seen numerous allusions to paganism made by a number of travelers, but Reginald Heber, who was briefly quoted earlier, also connected Orthodox art and architecture to Islam and other forms of “Eastern” and “Asiatic” religiosity. For instance, he asserts that many of the churches in Moscow used to be mosques, as their spires still contain crescents. This is, of course, false, but it reveals Heber’s underlying assumptions about Russian Orthodoxy, which he considers a fundamentally alien and exotic religion. Moreover, as he visited an Orthodox Church in the Kremlin, Heber’s imagination appears to have been flooded by explicitly “Eastern” stereotypes such as the “talking-bird”, the “singing-water” and the “black slave with his golden club”:

“Kitai-gorod is still surrounded by its old Tartar-wall...the gates are ornamented in the same oriental style, and several of the older Churches have been originally mosques...As I...looked round on the terraces and towers, and the crescents which yet remain on their gilded spires, I could have fancied myself the hero of an eastern tale, and expected...to see the talking-bird, the singing-water, or the black slave with his golden club...On each side of the Michael tower is a Christianized mosque, of most strange and barbarous architecture” (Heber 143-144).

French authors also heavily criticized the worship of icons and saints, as they lamented its integral role within Russian Orthodoxy. For instance, Abel Burja saw the burning of candles in front of icons as the main cause of accidental fires in Russian peasant households and claimed that, when such fires did occur, Russian peasants would remain inactive and focus their efforts on praying to their icons in an ultimate display of superstition and ignorance. The icons are thus presented as a great evil which both causes fires and then stifles the rationality needed for proper firefighting measures:

“Arrivé à Klin, je trouvai cette petite ville à moitié consumée par un incendie...Ils viennent souvent des bougies qu'on offre aux Saints...les villageois & les habitants des petites villes...prennent peu de précautions contre le feu. S'il prend à leur maison, ils tâchent de sauver leur image, la tiennent dans les mains devant la maison brûlante, lui montrent le feu, la prient de les secourir, & se plaignent amèrement de son insensibilité, si elle ne le fait pas” (Burja 26).

Later, Burja claims that the attachment to icons is taken to such an extreme degree in Russia, that both the Orthodox and Old Believer peasants alike were terrified of tobacco and would not permit its smoke to touch their icons. For Burja's audience, it would have indicated a clear lack of reason underscored by ridiculous superstitions:

“Je m'arrêtai plusieurs fois dans des villages habités par des Sectaires qui se disent Staroversi...Ce sont de bonnes gens & ils vous reçoivent bien, pourvu qu'on ne fume pas de tabac dans leurs huttes & devant leurs images: car cette plante leur est en horreur, ainsi qu'aux autres Paysans Russes, qui ne l'aiment pas non plus...S'ils ne peuvent empêcher que leurs images ne soient parfumées de tabac, ils vont aussitôt les laver & les purifier” (Burja 33-34).

Meanwhile, Chappe D'Auteroche also discussed this extreme attachment to saints particular to Russia and found it ridiculous and overblown. For instance, he participated in a drinking ceremony in which he was supposed to offer a toast to the Russian besides him. This ceremony also required Chappe to list all the baptismal names of his neighbor, which he could never do due to the sheer number of these names, which derive from the many saints associated with particular days in the calendar. Ultimately, Chappe found himself unable to fit in because of this absurd requirement, which would have seemed ridiculous to his enlightened audience: “En remettant le couvercle à son voisin, on lui dit le nom de Baptême & de famille de celui à la santé duquel on va boire...ce qui devient assez embarrassant pour un Etranger, parce que les Russes ont trois ou quatre noms de Baptême...J'oubliois la multitude des Saints qu'on me nommoit, & dont la plupart n'avoient jamais été dans la Liste des nôtres” (Chappe d'Auteroche 306).

Later, Chappe relates another example highlighting the ridiculous nature of saintly worship in Russia. He claims having met, in Paris, a Russian priest who believed all sort of incredible miracles supposedly performed by Saint Andrew in Russia. The details of these miracles are quite lengthy and will not be quoted here, but Chappe's relates his surprise upon witnessing the priest's credulous and unwavering belief in all of these tales. For Chappe, the worship of saintly relics was another regrettable element contributing to the lack of Enlightenment within the wider Russian population: “J'ai vu à Paris un Archimandrite qui...auroit plutôt renoncé à perdre sa barbe, que de douter du plus petit détail. J'en fus étonné, parce qu'il...n'étoit pas Abbé du Monastère où résident les Reliques de ce prétendu Saint. Ces Reliques...y contribuent à augmenter les revenus des Moines, à la honte de la Religion” (Chappe d'Auteroche 221).

In his account, Chappe is also highly critical of Orthodox icons. For instance, he offers a humorous anecdote in which a Russian peasant, bowing and praying to the icon of the house, ends

up badly hurting himself in a fit of excessive devotion. All the other peasants are entirely unbothered and Chappe alone comes to the poor man's rescue, in a scenario clearly designed to highlight the *literal* harms of performative worship: "Je vis un jour un de ces Paysans, qui, dans l'enthousiasme de ses inclinations, se donna...un coup de tête si violent...il continua cependant ses prieres. Tout le monde le regardoit, sans lui prêter aucun secours; je fus à lui, & l'obligeai de s'asseoir...heureusement son excès de dévotion n'eut pas de suite plus facheuse" (Chappe d'Auteroche 70-71).

Chappe also recounts an anecdote which is eerily similar to the one related by Richardson earlier, with a Russian mistress rushing to offer a quick prayer to the icon of the titular saint of the house before falling into the hands of her lover. Again, the main takeaway is that this performative worship of icons does not fundamentally dissuade improper and immoral behavior: "Un Russe...étoit enfin parvenu à pénétrer dans l'appartement de la jeune femme: elle se rappelle le Saint de la Chapelle, dans les moments qu'on regarde en amour comme les plus précieux; elle court aussitôt faire sa priere au Saint, & revient entre les bras de son amant" (Chappe d'Auteroche 71-72).

Overall, the Western travelers who came to Russia saw the worship of saints, and especially icons, as a decidedly negative factor hampering the enlightenment of the Russian population generally. This is especially true when one considers the many associations, comparisons and allusions made to paganism, which further highlight the notion of a backward, un-enlightened, un-European and fundamentally alien Russia.

Section IV: Russian Superstitions

For the Western travelers who came to Russia, the supposedly extreme superstition exhibited by Orthodox believers was indicative of a general lack of Enlightenment among the wider Russian population. As Casanova succinctly put it: “As a general rule the Muscovites are the most superstitious Christians in the world” (Casanova 2358). Depending on the author, this superstition was attributed to different sources, but it was universally seen as an element which directly stifled the progress of the Enlightenment in Russia and contributed to a great deal of ignorance. For Edward Daniel Clarke, this superstition was to be observed among Russian devotees generally, for “They are all, high and low, rich and poor, alike servile to superiors; haughty and cruel to dependents; ignorant, *superstitious*, cunning, brutal, barbarous, dirty, mean” (Clarke 28). Specifically, it was manifested through excessive bowing and crossing, which Clarke considered ridiculous, mindless and unnecessary:

“Devotees, during the whole day, may be seen bowing and crossing themselves. A Russian hardly commits an action without this previous ceremony. If he is to serve as coachman, and drive your carriage, his crossing occupies two minutes before he is mounted. When he descends, the same motion is repeated. If a church is in view, you see him at work with his head and hand, as if seized with St Vitus's dance. If he makes an earnest protestation, or enters a room, or goes out, you are entertained with the same manual and capital exercise” (Clarke 25).

This ridiculous obsession with crossing oneself is even repeated in private, as Clarke has the opportunity to witness it while staying in a peasant household. The entire scene is designed to emphasize the un-enlightened and irrational nature of this practice:

“Then the bowing and crossing began, and they went to dinner...they went regularly to bed...crossing and bowing as before...one of the young women...called her father...The man then rose, and a complete fit of crossing and bowing seemed to seize him, with interludes so

inexpressibly characteristic and ludicrous, that it was very difficult to preserve gravity...with all the attendant circumstances of ventriloquism and eructation-the apostrophes to his wife, to himself, and to his god” (Clarke 27).

For Clarke, another example of Russian superstition was not only the credulity with which Russians eagerly believe even the most ridiculous miracles, but also the ignorance which makes them venerate specific objects, such as, in this case, an enormous bell which Clarke is unable to assay due to the fact that “The natives regard it with superstitious veneration, and they would not allow even a grain to be filed off” (Clarke 76).

Moreover, these obstinate superstitions often have disastrous consequences. For instance, the Russian peasant is supposedly so superstitiously afraid of corpses, that people in need of reanimation are often left for dead. Instead of acting immediately, all he is able to do is cross himself, in a scene similar to the one presented by Burja, in which Russian peasants implore their icons to stop conflagrations instead of actively dousing the flames:

“The horrid practice of burying persons alive often takes place in Russia, from the ignorance of the inhabitants....A poor woman in bathing, during our stay at Woronetz, got out of her depth...and she became apparently lifeless...No endeavour on our part...could induce the spectators to touch the body, or suffer any remedy to be attempted for her recovery. They seemed afraid to approach what they considered a corpse...They stood at a distance, crossing themselves, and shaking their heads” (Clarke 124).

For Mary Holderness, Russian superstition manifested itself in the reticence with which peasant mothers viewed the possibility of having their children vaccinated. Again, the

consequences of these delusional superstitions are disastrous and Holderness, much like Clarke was especially critical of the resignation with which the average Russian viewed death:

“I endeavoured...to have their children vaccinated also...the prejudices of the mothers could not be overcome, and the consequence was, the loss of one of the steward's children soon after, by this virulent disorder. The reason assigned, was of course founded upon their belief in predestination - "That which God ordains," they say, "will happen." Thus in a very mistaken kind of resignation to divine power, they tempt the fate which threatens them, instead of using such means as...might be expected to avert impending calamity” (Holderness 154).

John Carr also found that “The superstition of the Russians is very great” (Carr 265). For him, this was chiefly manifested in the extreme attachment of Orthodox believers to their churches. Carr, like Holderness and Clarke, saw this attachment as a direct antithesis of proper enlightened and European conduct, which is evident by the contrast established between the Russians and the English in the following passage: “The Russians are fanatically attached to the very stone, brick, wood, and plaster, of their churches: they have a remark, that whilst the Russians build their churches first and their towns afterwards, the English never think of a temple until they have erected their own dwellings” (Carr 266).

Much like their British counterparts, French authors considered superstition a staple of Orthodox religiosity. For example, de Rulhiere saw this superstition as both a cause and instrument of Russia's despotic government, with each entangled in a sort of mutual dependence: “On ne connaît sur la terre aucune puissance plus absolue que celle des souverains de Russie...leur puissance...est obligée d'obéir aux; instrumens qu'elle emploie, aux milices, à la *superstition*, aux préjugés publics” (de Rulhiere XV-XVI).

To illustrate this point further, De Rulhiere attributes this superstition not only to the peasantry or clergy, but even to the Catherine II herself: “une princesse douce, irrésolue, *superstitieuse*, qui, un jour, signant un traité d’alliance avec une cour étrangère, n’acheva point sa signature, parce qu’une guêpe vola sur sa plume” (de Rulhiere 23). The key takeaway is that, if the empress herself ascribes to these superstitions, then it is entirely safe to assume that any Enlightenment project in Russia is bound to failure.

For Chappe d’Auteroche, this superstition came from the very nature of Russian believers and he considered it a constant hurdle throughout his travels: “Dans toutes les circonstances où le seul naturel des Habitants avoit agi...j’avois encore à craindre la superstition d’un Peuple ignorant” (Chappe d’Auteroche 119). Chappe was also apprehensive of the distrust that Russian peasants expressed towards his scientific instruments, and his account underscores the contrast between their superstitions and Chappe’s enlightened and scientific outlook. For instance, some Russian peasants are so shocked by Chappe’s thermometer, that they consider it a form of magic, which for Chappe is a clear indicator of a fundamentally ignorant people: “Ils attribuerent du merveilleux à cet instrument...Je m’aperçus bien-tôt de la fermentation que produisoient l’ignorance & la superstition dans toutes ces têtes” (Chappe d’Auteroche 121). In a similar vein, Chappe recounts the superstition with which the Russian peasantry viewed the observatory he established in Tobolsk. Again, he is taken for a magician by most of the town’s inhabitants, who constantly bombarded him with “impertinent absurdities” and blamed him for the flooding of a local river:

“Les Habitants de cette Ville...ne douterent plus que je ne fusse un Magicien...Le Gouverneur & quelques autres personnes furent seuls convaincus que l’observation du passage de Vénus sur le Soleil étoit le sujet de mon voyage: tout le reste de la Ville étoit livré à la superstition. Les moins ignorants débitoient sur cette observation les impertinences les plus absurdes, tandis

que les autres attendoient ce moment comme le dernier du genre humain. Ils me regardoient comme l'auteur du débordement de l'Irtysz" (Chappe d'Auteroche 126-127).

I conclude this section with one final and quite emblematic anecdote. On the day that Chappe is due to witness the transit of Venus, he decides to augment his guard, fearing a rabble of curious people. This is a needless precaution as "Tous les Habitants s'étoient enfermés dans les Eglises & dans leurs maisons" (Chappe d'Auteroche 132). Whereas such an event would have interested a multitude of enlightened Europeans, the superstitious Russian is content to lock himself up in a church. This entire episode can be read as a metaphor, with Orthodox superstition presented as the eternal suppressor of the Enlightenment in Russia.

Conclusion

Although we have seen that Western travelers viewed Russian religiosity in an almost entirely negative light, one of its aspects was positively received by some authors. Specifically, several Westerners were surprised at the degree of religious tolerance exhibited by the Orthodox majority towards other faiths. For instance, we have John Carr praising this spirit of toleration, he writes: "Here sectarian fury never disfigures the temple of the Almighty: the Greek and the Protestant, the Armenian and the Catholic, here quietly pass to their respective places of devotion, and unite in sending up to the throne of heaven...the most acceptable homage, the harmony of religion" (Carr 236).

However, Carr did not attribute this positive aspect to sound theology or anything of the sort. For him, it was simply an extension of Orthodox naivete and primitiveness: "In his religious notions, the Russian knows not the meaning of bigotry, and what is better, of toleration. He

mercifully thinks that every one will go to heaven, only that the Russians will have the best place” (Carr 246).

Carr’s assertion about the supposed belief that the best places in heaven will be assigned to Russians probably comes from William Richardson, who also mentioned this in his discussion of toleration. Although he is normally quite critical of the Russian Orthodox clergy, this was the one positive trait he was willing to concede: “But, with all the superstition and ignorance of the Russian clergy, it must be acknowledged in their favour, that they are tolerant, and very charitable to those of a faith different from their own. They say, all men may go to heaven; but that the chief place will be assigned to the Ruffians” (Richardson 65).

French authors also praised Russian religious toleration. Thus, we have de Fortia de Piles asserting that “il y a, en général, dans ce pays un esprit de tolérance très-remarquable” (de Fortia de Piles 245), and Abel Burja asserted that the clergies of the different denominations were able to discuss and debate theology freely and respectfully. Being present at such debates, he writes: “On voit à une même table des Archevêques & Evêques Grecs, des Archimandrites Arméniens, des Moines Catholiques, des Pasteurs Luthériens & Réformés...J’ai assisté deux fois à ces dîners: on s’y entretenoit...toujours dans la plus grande paix, & sans aigreur” (Burja 50-51). Overall, Burja asserted that the Orthodox majority was entirely capable of a great degree of tolerance and coexistence: “Malgré la différence des Religions, ils vivent dans la plus grande concorde entre eux...Les Ecclésiastiques des diverses Religions se fréquentent amicalement” (Burja 70).

It is hard to discern whether these examples of Orthodox religious toleration were included by these travelers to contextualize contemporary debates on toleration in Protestant England or Catholic France as, apart from some general praise, these authors do not elaborate substantially on the subject. What is certain, however, is that Orthodox tolerance *could* have provided Westerners

with a genuine point of sympathy with Russia. Alas, the sheer volume of negative connotations explored throughout this thesis completely drowned out this one positive aspect that *could* have become associated with Orthodox religiosity. Regardless of the few voices that praised Orthodox tolerance, it was bound to remain a fundamentally alien, different and barbaric faith in the eyes of Westerners due to the overwhelmingly negative impressions of most travelers. As these accounts built upon one another in a self-reinforcing pattern, it became increasingly difficult for positives to emerge. Only four of these travelers mention tolerance at all and, even then, the perception of these specific travelers remained negative overall.

On a different note, the accounts of female travelers also somewhat contradict this overwhelmingly negative and predominantly male view of Orthodoxy and Russia. We have seen Mary Holderness mostly support the views of male travelers but, as we shall see, she did not consider Russia incapable of achieving Enlightenment *generally*, unlike most of her male counterparts. In fact, she was quite optimistic, writing:

“That civilization will not raise the Russian boor to a more respectable rank in the scale of human existence, who can doubt? It is the want of light, and not the incapacity to receive it, which makes him what he is...Knowledge, though she slowly dawns in the Russian horizon, will yet spread increasing brightness over their hemisphere. The bigot bonds of the priesthood will be broken” (Holderness 126).

In fact, she sees Christianity and, presumably, a reformed Orthodox Church led by an enlightened hierarchy, as a direct participant in this process: “May we not with sanguine expectation look for such a result, when we see Christianity assisting, by her pure and energetic light, to dispel the gloom of ignorance, and find the cause supported...by the...dignitaries of the

church, who with a most honourable zeal have given their sanction, and lent their aid” (Holderness 127).

Moreover, if we analyze two other accounts, written by Elizabeth Craven and Mary Guthrie respectively, both of whom traveled to Russia in the late 18th century, we find that Craven does not categorize Russian Orthodoxy as backward or barbaric at all, unlike Islam,¹ while Guthrie praises Orthodox monastic practices and, in fact, argues that monks are healthier, both morally and physically, than many of their detractors: “Surely these sensible men must return to their sacred duty with more vigorous minds than many of their dosing brethren in other parts of the world, and be less troubled with visions, and other infirmities of human nature, both moral and physical, which have but too often thrown a ridicule on a very useful asylum” (Guthrie 105).

In fact, she believes that this “very useful asylum” extends to certain women. For Guthrie, female monasticism in Orthodoxy represents a specific kind of femininity, which is a healthy alternative to recent changes in attitudes towards womanhood arising out of the French Revolution. She writes:

“The wife regulations of Catherine II. of Russia...permit any one that pleases to take the veil after she has passed the age of child-bearing...What a contrast does this...form with the late conduct of a nation which certainly held itself much superior in policy and polish to this rising empire! Will it be believed, that while Russia was offering a willing asylum to helpless women...France was ignominiously scourging with rods...in the name of liberty and reason, the same description of females” (Guthrie 105).

However, as in the case of the few travelers who mentioned Orthodox toleration, female voices who viewed Orthodoxy in a positive light were drowned out by established opinions and

views. Again, the tide of perception was carried by predominantly male accounts, which functioned in a self-reinforcing manner, and which built upon one another and presented a fundamentally negative view of Russian Orthodoxy.

Unlike Holderness, who genuinely believed that Russia's Enlightenment was imminent, most French and English travelers did not share her optimism. The essence of this thesis then, is that most Western travelers not only invalidated Russia's religious Enlightenment, which they considered mostly non-existent due in large part to the many supposedly un-enlightened elements of Orthodoxy, but some authors even advanced the categorical notion that, with the presence of backward elements such as the Orthodox faith, Russia's eventual Enlightenment was, in fact, a complete impossibility.

For Edward Daniel Clarke, Russia would never become enlightened because "it being a maxim in the policy of that country, that "to enlighten, is to betray"" (Clarke 155) and, at most, Russian people are only capable of primitive mimicry, which is best evidenced by their repetitive liturgies, a theme explored in Chapter II. I will only add here that Clarke evidently applied this specifically religious phenomenon to the people of Russia generally, writing that they are "characterized at this day by a talent of imitation, though without a spark of inventive genius" (Clarke 19). How is such a primitive nation, only capable of imitation, without original thought, ever to achieve Enlightenment? In fact, Clarke asserts that Russian attempts at achieving this Enlightenment are nothing more than a facade: "Peter the Great might cut off the beards of the nobles, and substitute European habits for Asiatic robes, but the inward man is still the same. A Russian of the nineteenth century possesses all the servile propensities, the barbarity of manners, the cruelty, hypocrisy, and profligacy, which characterised his ancestors in the ninth" (Clarke 65-66).

Later, Clarke encounters a Swedish lord-lieutenant who conveniently shares Clarke's convictions about Russia and asserts that it is a fundamentally barbarous nation which has taken on a superficial varnish of civilization. The Swede states that: "It instructs the world...to describe their conduct, inasmuch as it determines their national character; and determines, with historic truth, that with barbarian slaves the character remains unchanged, notwithstanding the varnish put on by a sort of external humanizing, produced by intercourse with civilized nations" (Clarke 173).

In fact, Clarke asserts that, although he tries to feign Enlightenment, the natural barbarity of the Russian will always transcend this "varnish of civilization". He writes: "They are a people who cannot be duly appreciated, excepting by those who have not only actually resided among them, but who had seen them when removed from intercourse with civilized nations, and divested of that external varnish" (Clarke 195).

For Clarke, Russia is not only an enlightened imposter, but also an "Asiatic" nation. Upon arriving at Azov, he offers this clearly defined dual distinction between Europe and Asia: "We advanced towards Azof; and the consciousness of sailing with all Europe on our right hand, and all Asia on our left...the refinement, the science, the commerce, the power, and the influence of the one; the sloth, the superstition, the effeminacy, the barbarism, and the ignorance of the other" (Clarke 185).

It is also evident that Russia falls into the latter category because of its religious customs. In describing a specific mourning ritual practiced in Russian Orthodoxy, Clarke uses the term "oriental" explicitly: "Among the graves and tombs we saw several women of the country practising a custom strictly *oriental*, that of visiting the sepulchres of friends long buried, bowing their heads to the ground, touching the graves with their foreheads, weeping loud, and uttering short prayers" (Clarke 104).

Moreover, this division between East and West can be felt immediately upon crossing the Russian border: “The passage of a small rivulet, which separated the two countries of Sweden and Russia...the mere crossing of a bridge, conducted the traveller from all that adorns and dignifies the human mind, to whatsoever, most abject, has been found to degrade it” (Clarke V).

William Heber also claimed that this general lack of Enlightenment in Russia could be perceived by any superficial traveler upon entry into the country for “In Russia you see an immediate deterioration in morals, cleanliness, wealth, and every thing but intelligence and cunning” (Heber 92). The fact that Heber is making such an assertion almost immediately upon his arrival in Russia not only underscores the preconceived nature of his account, but also clearly indicates that Russia has already been relegated to the status of an un-enlightened and un-European nation.

Meanwhile, Casanova’s writings contain another excellent example of the correlation, so vividly asserted by Western authors, between Orthodoxy and Russia’s eternal backwardness. During a conversation with Catherine II, Casanova suggests: “Would it not be worthy of your majesty to put Russia on an equality with the rest of the world...by adopting the Gregorian calendar?...All Europe is astonished that the old style should be suffered to exist in a country...whose capital contains an academy of science” (Casanova 2366). Catherine’s response, whether real or embellished by Casanova, is quite emblematic of the role that Orthodoxy supposedly played in stifling the growth of new and enlightened ideas in Russia: “I would rather bear with this small mistake than grievously afflict vast numbers of my subjects by depriving them of their birthdays. If I did so...they would say in secret that I was an Atheist, and that I disputed the infallibility of the Council of Nice” (Casanova 2367).

Catherine also asserts that, essentially, her subjects are simply too superstitious compared to other Europeans, even in Italy, to attempt such a reform: “The Pope, however, had much less difficulty in carrying out his reform than I should have with my subjects, who are too fond of their ancient usages and customs” (Casanova 2369). Finally, the Orthodox clergy again reemerges as a direct obstacle to reform, with Catherine stating: “Imagine the grief of my clergy in not being able to celebrate the numerous saints’ days, which would fall on the eleven days to be suppressed. You have only one saint for each day, but we have a dozen at least. I may remark also that all ancient states and kingdoms are attached to their ancient laws” (Casanova 2369).

We may also find many of these conclusions echoed in William Coxe’s account. He flatly disproves the notion that Peter the Great transformed Russia, arguing instead that any changes aimed at Westernization were, at most, highly superficial:

“Much has been written concerning the great civilization which Peter I. introduced into this country...that he made a total change throughout each part of his extensive empire...but the pompous accounts of a total change...seem to have been the mere echos of foreigners, who have never visited the country, and who have collected...the most partial information” (Coxe 317).

He continues by stating that the little progress made by Russia pales in comparison with other nations in Europe and that this progress can only be felt among the nobility, while the rest of Russian society remains utterly “barbaric”:

“That improvement, if put in competition with the refinements of other nations, seems scarcely to exist; yet...exaggerated accounts...made me expect a more polished state of manners than I found, I must own I was astonished at the barbarism in which the bulk of the people still

continue. I am ready to allow that the principal nobles are perfectly civilized...But there is a wide difference between polishing a nation, and polishing a few individuals” (Coxe 317-318).

But what exactly is the cause of this supposed backwardness which persists among most Russians according to Coxe? In his account, the Orthodox faith is clearly listed as one of the main elements responsible for delaying the growth of the Enlightenment in Russia: “There are many impediments arising from the government, *religion*, and particularly from the absolute vassalage of the peasants, which would tend to check the diffusion of the arts and sciences in this empire” (Coxe 423).

French travelers also echoed these sentiments and considered Russian society hopelessly backward due to its attachment to Orthodox traditions. For instance, Alphonse de Fortia de Piles asserted that Peter’s reforms ultimately failed to produce any meaningful change in most of Russian society specifically because the Orthodox clergy continually stifled the growth of the Enlightenment in Russia. He writes: “Pierre-le-Grand...n’a pu obtenir que les paysans quittassent la barbe: tous l’ont encore, et les prêtres n’y ayant jamais renoncé, leur exemple a suffi pour consolider cet usage antique. Le Russe est ennemi de la nouveauté il fait ce que faisoit son père, et ne perfectionne rien” (de Fortia de Piles 327).

In Chappe d’Auteroche’s account, we find a single sentence which is quite emblematic of this perspective: “Ce Pays ne fera jamais policé tant que les femmes y vivront dans l’esclavage , & qu’elles ne serviront point à l’agrément de la Société” (Chappe d’Auteroche 261). The assertion that women in Russia “live in slavery” is interesting because it is, in fact, another hint at the backwardness of Orthodoxy and its role as a delayer of progress in Russia. In Chapter II, we saw Chappe ridicule Russian marriage customs and make an explicit link between the status of women

and Orthodoxy, and this association returns here to clearly indicate a sort of perennial barbarism, perpetuated in Russia by Orthodox clergymen and superstitious laymen.

In fact, the relegation of a Russia to an un-Enlightened, “Asiatic” and un-European power, is further evidenced by its direct association with other supposedly backward nations. For instance, William Daniel Clarke drew a direct comparison between the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Naples, stating that “The grandees of Palermo, are exactly like those of Moscow, and even the peasants of the two countries have a certain degree of resemblance...vicious and despotic, ignorant and superstitious” (Clarke 51-52).

I would argue that this specific comparison opens a potential avenue for later research to further investigate whether certain religious elements could be responsible for a perceived lack of Enlightenment in other nations, as we have seen in the case of Orthodoxy and Russia. As Clarke’s comparison suggests, Russia was not the only the only country which, although situated geographically in Europe, was considered un-European. We have seen here the example of the Kingdom of Naples, and Italy was indeed another place that was derided by British travelers. An infamous example is Tobias Smollett’s *Travels Through France and Italy*, originally published in 1766, in which the author poured so much invective on the Italians especially, that he was caricatured and satirized by Laurence Sterne as *Smelfungus* in one of his novels: an ungrateful traveler filled with “spleen, acerbity and quarrelsomeness” towards the places and peoples he was visiting. Interestingly, in a new edition of Smollett’s *Travels* published in 2010, Ted Jones’ foreword mentions that Catholicism was one of the main factors contributing to Smollett’s very negative view of Italy.²⁵ If the specific Catholic elements contributing to this negative view can be

²⁵ Smollett, Tobias. *Travels Through France and Italy*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.

correlated to certain Orthodox elements that contributed to a negative view of Russia (an uneducated priesthood, lack of enlightenment, superstition, etc.), then the position argued earlier in this thesis, that these supposedly unenlightened places acted as negative examples, defining the Enlightenment in Western Europe whilst simultaneously drawing borders, lines and distinctions between enlightened and un-enlightened can be confirmed in a different geographic and cultural setting.

The further study of other Orthodox regions, especially in the Balkans, would yield useful examples allowing for a comparative study of the connection between Enlightenment and Orthodoxy in other contexts. Larry Wolff's excellent *Inventing Eastern Europe*, mentioned earlier in the introduction, offers an excellent overview of Western travelers in the Ottoman Empire and its Balkan territories, but focused mostly on Western impressions of Islam. But what were some of the Western impressions of Orthodox peoples and places in Ottoman lands? I am thinking, for example, of Greek Orthodoxy, whose less savory elements clearly did not dissuade Western public opinion from overwhelmingly supporting the Greek War of Independence (1821-1829), which happened almost immediately after the period covered in this thesis. We have seen that a profound hatred of Orthodoxy could be politically informed, such as in the case of Edward Daniel Clarke, and comparisons between Russia and other Orthodox lands could shed light on whether the invective directed at Russian Orthodoxy, was specifically due to political factors, such as a fear of Russia as a newly risen power aspiring to the status of a "civilized" nation. Was Balkan Orthodoxy, as practiced by Christians who were seen as oppressed by the "eastern", "decadent", and "Asiatic" Ottomans, viewed more favorably by Western travelers and audiences?

Finally, I think there are two other opportunities for further research relating to these travel accounts and their reception by Western audiences. First, there is plenty of room for an in-depth

exploration of the impact that travels accounts had on Western thought about Russia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. As mentioned previously, Justin Stagl demonstrated that travel literature acted as an important source of supposedly reliable information in the West generally, and so this connection could be explored further in the Russian case. Larry Wolff hints at this connection in his analysis of Voltaire's *History of Charles XII*, which clearly contained many of the same tropes about Russia that were reported by travelers such as Chappe d'Auteroche. What other Western works on Russia were informed by travel literature and what were some of the stereotypes that they both subsumed and helped perpetuate? On another note, I think there is further room for the exploration of later travel accounts of Russia. Dimitrios Kassis covered many later accounts, and even some of those found in this thesis, in *Deconstructions of the Russian Empire in Western Travel Literature*,²⁶ but there is one account, of particular interest, which has been avoided by recent scholarship. I am referring to Astolphe de Custine's *La Russie en 1839*, another equally negative and influential account, akin to that of Chappe d'Auteroche, which seems to have rehashed many of the tropes seen throughout this thesis, especially vis-a-vis Russian Orthodoxy. However, due to the author's primarily romantic dispositions, the work was not fundamentally concerned with demonstrating a lack of Enlightenment in the Russian Orthodox Church, although it was still characterized as decidedly backward and a perpetual delayer of progress in Russia.²⁷ Why did the Orthodox Church continue to be portrayed so negatively? Were the practices of the

²⁶ Kassis, Dimitrios. *Deconstructions of the Russian Empire in Western Travel Literature*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020.

²⁷ Cuistine, Astolphe-Louis-Léonor. *La Russie en 1839*. Actes Sud, 2005.

Russian Orthodox Church as incompatible with Romanticism as with the Enlightenment? Had the tide of public opinion already disgraced Russian Orthodoxy in the eyes of Western audiences?

In the introduction, I wrote at length about the exclusion of Orthodoxy from a wider European religious Enlightenment, but having reached the end of my analysis I would argue that so many religious traits, such as superstition, idolatry, and paganism, attributed by Western travelers to Russian people, were seen as quasi-racial attributes. This is intriguing because extensive scholarship on racism in the Enlightenment has so far focused on arguments, formulated in the 18th century, that other races were fundamentally inferior to white Europeans primarily due to their physical features.²⁸ This thesis shifts this dynamic somewhat, as it appears that religion could also factor into notions of racial inferiority. The Russian case is especially interesting because most of the authors I analyzed considered the physical attributes of Russian people entirely European. However, there was also a prevailing sentiment that Russia was so backward specifically because of certain quasi-racial traits which materialized not in the physical appearance of a Russian person but, among other things, through their religion. Thus, the Enlightenment did not simply create a division between Eastern and Western Europe. Instead, it relegated Russians, and other Eastern Europeans as Larry Wolff pointed out, to a position of fundamental racial inferiority vis-a-vis Westerners. Therefore, I end this thesis with one final question: how can we reconcile the perspectives of these travelers, who we have seen asserting Russian inferiority throughout our analysis, with an ideology that supposedly proclaimed the equality of all mankind?

²⁸ Vartija, Devin. "The Historiography of Race in Enlightenment Thought." *Utrecht University Repository* (2022).

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