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RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF KHERASKOV'S EPIC POEMS

A few authors made a feeble attempt at a national epic poem in eighteenth century Russia, but they did not get very far: Kantemir composed only one book of *Petriada*, Sumarokov only started *Dimitriada*, Maikov wrote some of the *Liberated Moscow*, and Lomonosov wrote only two cantos of *Peter the Great*. Trediakovskii did complete his *Telemachida*, but it was not a national subject. Kheraskov successfully completed (and then modified) two national epic poems, one from the times of Ivan IV, another one from the times of Christianization of Russia. It is interesting to look at these poems from the religious perspective taking into account the fact that Kheraskov, a Christian, was also a committed mason.

The Rossiada

The *Rossiada* is based on Ivan IV's campaign of 1552 to wrench Kazan, a center of the Kazan khanate, from Tatar's hands. To a large extent, Kheraskov relied on historical sources,¹ although, by his own admission, he took some liberties even with historical events and figures to fit the demands of the epic story, warning the reader that historical accuracy should not be sought in an epic (1.xiv).²

Ivan was then at the age of 22, crowned five years earlier as the first official tsar of Muscovy (not just the grand prince) and he want-

(¹) See Г. Кунцевич, "Россиада" Хераскова и "История о Казанском царстве", "Журнал Министерства Народного Просвещения", (1901) 1, pp. 1-15; Наталья Гранцева, *Сказанья русского Гомера*. Журнал Нева, Санкт-Петербург 2012, ch. 3.

(²) References are made to collected works of Mikhail M. Kheraskov, *Творения*. В Университетской Типографии, Москва 1796-1803, vol. 1: *Россиада, поэма эпическая* [1779, 1786]; vol. 2: *Владимир, поэма эпическая* [1785, 1787].

ed to prove himself as a worthy monarch by expanding the boundaries of his land to the east of the Volga river. Ivan tried unsuccessfully to take Kazan twice, in 1547 and 1549, although in the process he was able to build an outpost of Sviazhsk very close to Kazan. The 1552 siege was fairly short and Ivan was leading from behind if at all; thus, it was a rather undistinguished campaign in the Russian history, although consequences for the expansion of Russia have been enormous. However, Kheraskov depicted it in cosmic, natural, and supernatural terms involving all the earthly, heavenly, and hellish forces.

Kheraskov presented thundering God sitting above the stars, “Before whom the sunny world is like shadow, / In whom the worlds are moving, through whom there is life in these worlds, / Who looks at everything the same way, / Forgives, loves, calms and punishes; / The king of flames and of waters recognized the voice of [praying] Russia” (1.8-9). God sent Alexander Tverskii to appear in Ivan’s dream to awake him from royal slumber so that he could become a shepherd and a hero to the nation (12). At that time God decided the fate of Russia – to be victorious, and of Tatars – to be defeated (18). On earth, in the council of boyars it was decided in spite of some opposition and after “the spirit of Heroism” poured fire of vigor into the hearts of boyars (31) to take Kazan, and Ivan decided to lead an expedition himself since he did not want to be a tsar just in name and the needs of fatherland were most important to him (36). From that point on, the outcome of the expedition, before it even started, was a foregone conclusion, particularly after in Kazan a cross could be seen “Drawn in air by an invisible hand. / This is the way the Creator threatens nations / When He prepares their end” (43). The supernatural is omnipresent and frequently overshadows the natural events, although it is not always clear why supernatural events were introduced. Consider the queen of Kazan, Sumbeka’s visit to the grave of her deceased husband, Safgirei.

After Sumbeka’s unsuccessful personal life (it was decided that she should marry strong Astalon, but she was unhappy about it [1.55] since she loved Tatar prince Osman [59] who, in turn, loved her maid, Emira [60]), she called hell for help, but there was no response. God put His seal on gehenna, a seal in the form of the cross (62). She wanted to take poison, but a small voice inside ordered her to go to her hus-

band's grave where she asked about what to do. The grave opened and the shadow of the monarch appeared (73). This apparition was made by the Providence through which prophecy was made. It said: if she chooses king Alei for her husband, there will be peace (75). She should burn the bones of dead kings that are in graves surrounding her husband's (76). She should find a stream under a root of a poplar tree growing there and sprinkle dry grass that she should put first around the graves (77). She then would see how God calls people to judgment (78). At dawn, the sun caused the dry grass to burn and then the bones of the dead (79). Sumbeka saw kings coming from graves as though from water and blown with wind to gehenna (80).³ What is the point of this event? Kheraskov mixed here imagery from different religions. Since Sumbeka and her husband were Muslims, Islam's understanding of hell was meant, but to get there no burning of bones is required. However, Muslims hardly would think that all their rulers end up in hell; thus, Kheraskov meant hell as understood by Orthodoxy, which does not require any preparatory burning of bones accompanied by sprinkling grass by some magical water. Such mixing of Christian, Muslim, and pagan religious imagery raises questions about what Kheraskov's own religious commitments were. In any event, all the Muslim rulers freed up from their graves, along with Sumbeka's husband, ended up in hell, which gave Kheraskov an opportunity to provide its brief description:

As much the heavenly fire is subtler than anything else,
 So is in hell heavier than anything else;
 Three times nine leagues [*числа*] this bottom of the universe
 Is removed from the circle of the stars.⁴
 Eternal fire shows in waves there,
 There the earth can be seen like broken stone;
 Smelly vapor is rising from dense waters [...] (1.80)

Kheraskov spoke here as a narrator illuminated by the Muses (whose help was repeatedly enlisted in the *Rossiada* as it was in many other

⁽³⁾ A need for purification by fire of the souls bound to graves is also mentioned in the *Vladimir* 2.161.

⁽⁴⁾ Or "Three times nine days [...]" Maybe this is a reference to Hesiod's statement that it would take nine days and nights for a brazen anvil falling from the earth to reach Tartarus (*Theogony* 722-723).

of his works), and it appears to be his own view that heaven, earth, and hell differ only in the level of subtlety of matter constituting them, which is an expression of the four-element view rather than the Orthodox view of two different spheres in the universal, material and spiritual (immaterial).

In hell, there is sighing, crying, “There fiery gales, there flaming rains; / There is no sweet hope in this dark kingdom”. There are evil noblemen there living before in glory. “The souls recognize the truth after death [...] There is no joy in suffering: sin by itself is hell! / Desiring to be illuminated by holy faith, / They try to return to earth / To look in the body with repentance at the sun / To die again in peace: / But a mysterious chain like a snake was lying around / And was holding perpetrators locked up”. There are egoists there, lovers of riches (81), lovers of pleasure, particular Tatar rulers (82) whose souls by their vices were before attached to their bodies, but now (85), purified by the fire of the sun, they can go to hell (86).

There is a dark abyss in which the source of evil lives, Godlessness (Impiety, in the first edition) that “Drinks boiling poison, eats snakes” (1.160), obviously Satan himself. Seeing the victorious cross among the stars, Godlessness says that its rule is finished (161). However, this result does not take place without a fight. Godlessness went to the land of idolaters to summon spirits there to help Tatars (164-165). It⁵ also wanted to cut off the way across Volga for Russian army (167). On its urging, the Volga river started to misbehave and many soldiers drowned in the process (168).⁶ Godlessness also darkened the way for the marching army of Ivan causing (the appearance of) an earthquake, and gales caused disarray (171). Ivan prayed, “God! / Are enemies more important to You than Your sons?” (172). Night came, but soldiers could not rest on the ground because it was hot. Then, a very hot day followed accompanied by an attack of snakes (174). Water in streams and lakes became undrinkable (175). A specter with a crescent on its forehead in a vision told Ivan that he would soon perish with his army (185). It was Muhammad (“in the Western country / They worship me as a prophet, [people] bring me offerings”

⁵) Godlessness, *безбожие*, is in the neuter gender, thus “it”.

⁶) Francis Carr, *Ivan the Terrible*. David & Charles, London 1981, p. 80.

[187]), who drew bright prospects and wanted to be worshiped. Ivan for a while pondered upon that; however, the miraculous shield he obtained from Vassiiian darkened to indicate that a serious sin entered Ivan's heart (153) and so he recognized the specter's deception and rebuked it (187). The Godlessness appeared as a snake and promised to torment Ivan's soul and his name would make afraid the entire universe; Ivan would be hated by all (188).

Now, Ivan was lead to a hermit, who turned out to be Vassiiian. Ivan went with Vassiiian to a temple of prophecy (1.195) in which they found a book which described the future. Ivan saw in the book himself taking Kazan, the submission of Caucasus, Astrakhan, Siberia, Sweden, Lithuania, Novgorod, and Poland (202). He also saw his son being killed (203). Future patriarchs and tsars were shown in the book with Peter I so glorious that it was unclear to Ivan, "is it God or a man" (210). There was no mention of Peter's cruel behavior toward those in his close surrounding and to the nation itself, no mention of his suppression of the Orthodox church and making it a department of the state government, but the book showed that "the most illuminated spirit of Peter moved to Heaven" (211). And, of course, the book showed Catherine II in most exalted terms, which included a praise that "by subjugating Sarmatians, she'll bring glory to her age" (213).⁷ So it is, the three partitions of Poland were the cause for gloating over Russia's international successes. However, the prediction that Catherine "will be the refuge for all nations" did not quite actualize.

Another obstacle before taking Kazan was created by wizard Nigrin, who had a personal stake in it, since his beautiful daughter Ramida had participated in the defense of Kazan, which in turn was supposed to have led to the choice of a husband for her from among the bravest (1.304). Nigrin visited Winter, a daughter of Chaos, mother of Nothingness (308), who lived in Caucasus (307). He wanted her help in making Russians abandon the siege of Kazan (309). He got a

⁽⁷⁾ See an opinion that the *Rossiada* is "a legitimation of Catherine's concrete plans to conquer the last, and most stubborn, Tatar Khanate, the Crimea (defeated in 1783), as a legitimation of the Russian-Turkish (cf Christians vs Muslims) wars during her reign in general, and in fact, as the justification of Russia's whole expansionist policy", Michel De Dobbeleer, *The Figure of Vassian as Key to the Interpretation(s) of Mikhail Kheraskov's Rossiad*, "Slavica Gandensia", 31 (2004), p. 51.

chain allowing him to cause severe frost (310), which he did by inciting a sudden attack of winter (312). Ivan ordered raising the banner with a fragment of the cross in it;⁸ priests sang a hymn, incense was burned and winter went away (314). Various miracles took place at night: bells rang in Russian churches,⁹ stars stopped, stars were seen from earth to the sky, and heavenly inhabitants were coming down to assure the Russians about their victory (316). Ivan asked God to save and glorify Russia, “And God stretched toward him His right hand from heaven” and there was an earthquake thunders, gales, “It seemed like the Creator was turning the whole earth into chaos”. Like in Jericho (320), at the sound of trumpets, citadel trembled and lightning breached the city walls (321). Kazan was taken and Russians started to loot the city even killing one another in the process (325). The looters were exiting the city when Ivan was approaching it (327). He ordered his *oprichniki* to kill them, but the looters returned to the city to finish the battle (328).

Righteousness prevailed. When the Muslim Alei wanted to kill a boy who pleaded for mercy, he almost did, if it had not been for Ivan who said that now mercy should flow, not blood. “These words appeared before God like light / God poured blessing to the Tsar, generosity to the troops. / The universe is silent, the course of planets was broken; / It seemed that Ioann/Ivan took charge of the world” (1.334). In this hubristic metaphor, the taking of Kazan acquires cosmic significance with Ivan being very much put on equal footing with God. Also, when the ruler of Kazan, Ediger, wanted to commit suicide, a Heavenly Spirit snatched him when he was falling and urged him to convert to Christianity and “be born through baptism” (335). Ediger said to Ivan that he wanted to accept with his people Ivan’s laws: “Be my Tsar and may your God be my God!” Ivan agreed and from this point on, wanted him to be his brother (336). “Where there was crying, [...] / There is now orthodox triumph” (339).

It is thus clear that the way Kheraskov presented the entire enterprise, God from the very inception was on the side of Russians, sup-

⁽⁸⁾ Jaroslaw Pelenski, *Russia and Kazan: conquest and imperial ideology (1438-1560s)*. Mouton, The Hague 1974, p. 209; Francis Carr, *Ivan the Terrible*, cit., p. 80.

⁽⁹⁾ Jaroslaw Pelenski, *Russia and Kazan...*, cit., p. 220.

ported them all along, and the taking of Kazan took place with His blessing. If Tatars received any supernatural help, it was from the wrong otherworldly side: "Hell is the defender of the Horde, God is the defender of Russians" (1.271).

Historically, other justifications of the taking of Kazan have been tried that included the question whether the Kazan khanate had any political standing:

While it is true that the sovereignty of the Khanate, was limited for brief periods of time after 1487 (the intervals between 1487-1505, 1516-1519, 1532-1535, 1546), Kazan never lost its status as a separate country until its final subjugation. One is, however, justified in speaking of the establishment between 1516 and 1519 of a Muscovite protectorate over the Kazan Khanate which lasted until 1521. It was during this time that Kazan did indeed become a vassal state of Muscovy, but for a limited time only. The same reservation applies to the brief reign of Can Ali in the years 1532-1535, when the new Khan was installed in Kazan under conditions similar to those of the investiture of Sah Ali in 1519. In spite of the fact that the Khanate of Kazan was a virtually independent country in the years 1505-1516, 1521-1532 and 1535-1551 (excepting one month in 1546), when the khans ruled without Muscovy's consent or even in direct opposition to her will, the Russian court continuously adhered to the notion of an alleged investiture prerogative.¹⁰

This means that Kazan khanate was an independent political entity and it was an act of aggressive invasion on the part of Ivan IV to conquer it and incorporate it as part of bulging Russia and "Muscovy's 'conquest' of a foreign state was a tremendous boost to the tsar's authority".¹¹ And thus, Kheraskov wrote his epic poem for people who love their fatherland and admire accomplishments of their predecessors (1.xix).¹² Never mind, at what price these accomplishments were

⁽¹⁰⁾ *Ivi*, pp. 284-285.

⁽¹¹⁾ Matthew P. Romaniello, *The elusive empire: Kazan and the creation of Russia 1552-1671*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 2012, p. 20. The Kazan conquest reflected Moscow's "growing national self-consciousness and self-confidence, together with her new imperial aspirations, and a desire to launch a crusade against an infidel", Andrei Pavlov, Maureen Perrie, *Ivan the Terrible*. Pearson, London 2003, p. 47.

⁽¹²⁾ The *Rossiada* was once called "an inordinately inflated ode", A. P. Vlasto, *A*

actualized, never mind whether some political entities lost their independence in the process, Kazan being only one small example. Even this conquest should be appreciated: “Woe to a Russian who will not feel what important benefit, what sweet quietness, what great glory our fatherland gained by destruction of the Kazan kingdom!” (xviii). After all, “Russians are created for deeds and glory” (129).

All of this was motivated by the desire to conquer Kazan, to extend the boundaries of Russia, its power, its riches, and its glory. Thus, taking pride in the position of Russia leads to the expedition, all of it ostensibly under the divine prompting and Ivan’s apparently selfless interest of Russia in his heart. It is quite remarkable that Kheraskov saw it as a bad thing when it was happening elsewhere. In his view, pride is terrible when it is hidden under sanctity (1.129); “it covered with blood hands that carried the cross / As seen in unfortunate America” (130), where he apparently meant the Spanish conquest of South America. Seemingly, no hands are covered by any blood if a Russian tsar decides to conquer any land to incorporate it as part of Russia. In that case, unlike America, the conquered territories should consider themselves fortunate, as quite explicitly stated in the case of Catherine’s conquests (*Ode* [1793], 7.184).

Although the whole of the *Rossiada* is deeply steeped in religious imagery, this is hardly a religious poem. Religion is used here as a justification of aggressive desires of youngish Ivan IV, who wanted to make a name for himself through a series of conquests, Kazan being only an episode in this series. There is thus very little there concerning personal religious life. If there was any of it, it was in the service of the conquest to speed it up since God already had made His decision that Kazan should be Russian. And thus, Kheraskov completely spiritualized Ivan’s absence on the scene of the invasion. Ivan did not lead, but he prayed fervently – not on the battle field, but securely in his chapel – and in this way spiritually participated in the battle. Kheraskov’s Ivan had also a grand vision of the future of Russia during this time of absence and a vision of heaven. However, in

noble failure – Kheraskov’s Vladimir Vozroshdyonny, in *Горски вијенац: a garland of essays offered to professor Elizabeth Mary Hill*. Eds. R. Auty, L. R. Leviter, A. P. Vlasto. The Modern Humanities Research Association, Cambridge 1970, p. 281.

reality, soldiers and generals were quite upset by Ivan's absence in the battle.¹³

It is interesting that in this lengthy poem ostensibly written through the Christian lens for the Christian audience, Christ is mentioned only once and only tangentially in the already mentioned semi-magical context. A sudden onset of severe winter weather conjured up by the sorcerer Nigrin (with the power which he obtained from Winter after visiting her in the Caucasus) was abated by raising a banner: "In its staff, there was fragment of the life-giving wood / On which the Son of God showing [His] love for us / Poured His precious blood for salvation of sinners / And with this blood saved the world from hell; / There! the holy Cross saves the believers second time" (1.314). Important was a magical aspect of it: a fragment of the cross rather than Christ Himself chased Nigrin's spell away. Christ is in heaven, but Ivan had a fragment of His cross and that was sufficient to save the day. Where an explicit reference would be appropriate, it is missing. In his vision, Ivan was (with Vassiiian) in a heavenly sphere: they saw the city of God where life giving fire flowed like a stream; cherubim stood there in the darkness guarding the city. There was an imperceptible world above them (198), eternal; it was the plan of the universe in the Spirit of God; there was no day and night there; eternal rays of the Most High were there. The place is called the angelic inhabitation; Vladimir lives there, in the third heaven, Olga lives there in eternal joy with those without a body; Boris and Gleb, Alexander (Nevskii), Ivan's grand-father, Ivan III, Ivan's mother (199), and his father (Basil III). Ivan was certain that our souls will be in paradise "When on this earth it was pure, not evil / Any astral darkness will disappear from before it, / It'll know everything, it'll see God's". "There is a way for a soul to heaven; / The soul is an exact image of God, / It lives and moves in His embrace; / Our soul is a living ray, God being its sun!" (200). No mention of salvation through Christ was made, no reference to this

(¹³) See K. Waliszewski, *Ivan the Terrible*. Archon Books, Hamden 1966 [1904], pp. 164-165. Ivan's later exaggerated claims may be taken as indications that "Ivan must have been deeply embarrassed over his passive military behavior during the actual siege and storming of the city, ashamed of the cowardice he had discovered deep inside him", Alexander Dvorkin, *Ivan the Terrible as a religious type*. Oikonomia, Erlangen 1992, p. 66.

central message of the Christian religion. An impression arises that purity of the soul may be accomplished somehow by one's own effort (including, to be sure, conquest of pagan territories) to earn the entry to the paradise. No mention of salvation by grace, of the role of the Passion, and the Incarnation in the life of a believer. Maybe Kheraskov did not want to turn his poem into a devotional book, but he did not spare any effort to present Ivan as exceedingly pious, gracious, bursting in tears at the slightest injustice. Having known the image of Ivan only from Kheraskov, one could wonder why Ivan was not proclaimed a saint. Hardly an explanation can convince that it was due to "foreign writers" who by "putting together absurd fables about his severity" unjustifiably vilified Ivan (xii).

As mentioned, Kheraskov freely mixed religious imagery. It is not certain if each Russian believer could be comfortable with an image that a spirit that engenders enmity, son of Night and Erebus (1.223), induced Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. All evil on earth comes from him (224). The Biblical account is mixed with a Greek mythology, which does not seem to serve any purpose. Poetic license can always be called in defense, but the outcomes of such mixing may be the result if not of ignorance, then at least of carelessness, which happened more than once in Kheraskov's religious references. For instance, Night and Erebus had only two daughters, Day and Light – no son; in a quotation above, Muhammad spoke about himself as being given offerings. A Muslim would be quite surprised to see such a claim. Supernatural effects used by Kheraskov were of a different credibility level, but sometimes they reached the level of the ridiculous. Consider as an example a scene in which three contenders to Ramida's hand killed one another including her beloved Mirsed, after which she killed herself. When her father Nigrin came and saw four bodies, he brought them back to life: "He filled them with frightful words of gehenna / And turned the bodies into winged serpents" (305). True, according to ancient mythologies people were turned into snakes to mention only Cadmus and Harmonia, the protagonists of one of Kheraskov's novels; interestingly, in the *Polydorus*, Kheraskov adamantly refuted such a possibility as a fable (10.11, 13, 67; see 9.365).

If the *Rossiada* intended to have a Christian message, it did it very inconsistently. When Sumbeka wanted to avenge herself on Osman,

Alei, her husband, said that Osman was his enemy, but he gave him freedom to show "how Christians take revenge" (1.106).¹⁴ Although Vassiiian was persecuted by Ivan's father, he avenged himself for the father on his son by love (196). Kheraskov spoke about "the darkness of revenge" (8); he spoke about prince Pronskii who was not blinded by revenge and took hostages instead of killing them (270). On the other hand, the expedition against Kazan was depicted as an act of justified revenge: Russia went against "the enemies of God" not to rob, but to avenge itself (159); Ivan did not want fame, but he wanted to avenge Christians (182, 152, 272).¹⁵ This is a profoundly un-Christian motivation, but it can be turned around by claiming that it was not merely the invaders' revenge; it was God's executed through Russians as Ivan himself said in a letter: "we have revenged this [the Tatars'] hostility [in accordance] with God's will".¹⁶ In Kheraskov's depiction, it is God who incited through Boris and Gleb "the spirit of revenge in the Russian hearts" (139).

In spite of a rich religious content, the *Rossiada* is in no wise a religious poem. It is a political statement promoting the glory of Russia and the majesty of its rulers who, in Kheraskov's eyes, led Russia to its majestic status. Religion is but a means that serves that purpose. God is enlisted in the service of Russia and in His providential care, He gives a hand to its rulers to make it happen. In the *Rossiada*, Kheraskov depicted a saintly image of Ivan IV with no mention of cruelties heaped up by him on the nation. Kheraskov even mentioned *oprichniki* (although they existed a good decade later after the taking of Kazan), "the support and hope of the army" (39) who, as mentioned, were ordered "not to spare those who forgot honor of Russia", i.e., to kill looters although it would be difficult to find worse looters in Russia's history than *oprichniki*. As Kheraskov warned his readers, accuracy should not be sought in an epic, and, in fact, this is the last thing that can be found in his epic. Apparently, this resonated well with the public since in the 18th and 19th centuries the *Rossiada* appeared in

¹⁴) Alei, considered a friend of Russians (1.25, 37) was apparently a Christian (87-88, 191).

¹⁵) Jaroslaw Pelenski, *Russia and Kazan...*, cit., p. 107.

¹⁶) *Ivi*, p. 85.

print eight times in its entirety (only twice separately), not to mention excerpts published in various anthologies.¹⁷

The Vladimir

The *Rossiada* occasionally mentioned prince Vladimir, who “enlightened Russia with the Orthodox law” (1.23), who “purified the darkness of the soul by holy water, / Like the sun, he poured out the light to his people, his subjects” (153), for which he dwells in “the third heaven” (199). This ruler, who by his baptism in 988 made Christianity the religion of Russia, became a main character of the second epic poem, the *Vladimir. The Russian Primary chronicle (The tale of bygone years)* contains some information about Vladimir and to some extent Kheraskov followed it.

According to the *Chronicle*, Vladimir was visited in 986 by representatives of different faiths. Muslims said that he had to be circumcised and abstain from pork and alcohol to get 70 women after death. Vladimir disliked circumcision and abstention from pork, and about alcohol he said, “It is a joy for Russia to drink, to live without it – we cannot”. Kheraskov’s Muslim speaker only mentioned the prohibition of “the hellish drink” and made some vague promise of future women (2.58) to which one Kifar answered that the local gods do not prohibit the drink fitting cold country (59).

Then spoke, according to the *Chronicle*, “the foreigners from Rome [...] sent by the pope”. They just stated that their God is a true God, creator of heaven and earth, and Russian gods are just wood. Also, one should fast according to one’s strength since who eats or drinks, he does it for the glory of God, after which Vladimir sent them back since “our fathers did not accept this”. In Kheraskov’s account, an elder, one of “the Latins”, said: Vladimir’s many accomplishments were possible because their God helped him; however, Vladimir needed the orthodoxy, the faith proclaimed by prophets from the beginning of the world and confirmed by the Son of God who sealed it with His blood and opened the door of paradise (2.60). The pope has “the golden keys

⁽¹⁷⁾ Peter Thiergen, *Studien zu M. M. Cherskovs Versepos “Rossijada”: Materialien und Beobachtungen*. Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn 1970, pp. 11-12.

of heaven", kings bow to him, "he brings people to the paradise, he sends them to hell", and he wants to include Vladimir in his flock. Dobrynia observed,¹⁸ we need a tsar to lead in a battle, not a tsar who has the keys of paradise (61). Also, how can they become subjects of someone they don't know? (62).

Then Khazar Jews presented their case. They believe in God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and must abstain from pork and hare meat, must be circumcised, and observe the Sabbath. However, their fathers angered God so that they have no land of their own. Vladimir asked rhetorically, how come you teach others when you are rejected by God and are spread everywhere; do you want the same for us? In Kheraskov's version, there was no mention of pork, circumcision, and the Sabbath, but when the Jews said that they crucified the Messiah in whom Christians believe (this point was mentioned also in the *Chronicle*), Vladimir asked why; they answered, because it was not time for the Messiah's coming; thus, Christ was blaspheming by calling Himself the Son of God, to which Vladimir observed, that it is possible they miscalculated the time of the Messiah's coming (2.63). Kheraskov's Vladimir was also quite concerned that the Jews did not have the country of their own; moreover, their faith is "stamped with murder" (of Christ); thus, it is unacceptable (64).

Kheraskov extended brief, dispassionate and quite restrained accounts of the *Chronicle*, modified their spirit, and was particularly generous with invectives. Catholics, generally, when they spoke, "had poison in [their] hearts" (2.59). Their political contrivances were adequately depicted by the famous bard of *Henriade* (60), that is, by Voltaire. When "villainous Romans" saw they could not convince Vladimir, they offered him money, of course, unsuccessfully, since "In this still unenlightened age / People [non-Catholics, presumably] valued honesty more than anything else" (62). Jews moved like "muddy waters" hiding by wile their nefarious eyes and hiding their craftiness under the disguise of humility (62). They were "an ungrateful people, / Deceitful and insidious inside their souls" (54); they were "guided by cunning at each hour / Their reason is an unstable scale/gauge"

¹⁸) Dobrynia, Vladimir's uncle, according to the *Chronicle*, "friend of the tsar", i.e., of prince Vladimir, according to Kheraskov (2.187).

(62). Needless to say, Islam (“Muhammedanism”) did not fare any better and it had already been rejected with strong words in the *Rossiada*.

Finally, a philosopher from Byzantium presented his case and the *Chronicle* devoted several pages to his speech. This philosopher became one of the most important figures in the *Vladimir*. Kheraskov gave him the name of Cyril (Кир; he was not named in the *Chronicle*), a clear allusion to the already deceased Cyril (Кирилл), brother of Methodius. Also, in the *Vladimir*, Cyril was the source of information for Vladimir, his guide and mentor, although the version of Christianity he presented did not quite match what can be found in the *Chronicle*. Incidentally, Cyril first gave a speech in which he presented crash Biblical history from the creation of the world until the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity with occasionally some extra-Biblical additions (e.g., in the tower of Babel story, 71 new languages were created¹⁹). The speech was richly illustrated with Biblical quotations. Then a depiction of the life and teachings of Christ followed. Afterwards, the *Chronicle*’s philosopher showed Vladimir a picture of the Last Judgment depicting sinners going to hell and the saved going to paradise. Kheraskov’s Cyril did the same; however, his description of the content of the picture was very elaborate and Vladimir could even recognize there familiar figures, e.g., he saw his brother Iaropolk being consigned to hell (2.139).

Vladimir still could not decide which faith to choose, and in 987, the boyars advised him to send envoys to various countries to see the rites used there. In Byzantium, the envoys were so impressed by the beauty of the church service that they did not know whether they were on earth or in heaven, and it was clear to them that God was there with the people. Besides, Vladimir’s grandmother Olga had accepted Christianity in Byzantium. The decision was sealed. Kheraskov retained only very little of it. He changed the order of these events: Vladimir first sent his envoys to various places and “ordered [them] to find out, ordered [them] to notice, / Where God is worshipped most sincerely”

¹⁹) Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium magnum*, 35.15-18, 71-72, 75; Иван [П.] Елагин, *Опыт повествования о России*. Университетская типография, Москва 1803 [1790], p. 38. In *The threefold life of man*, 9.77-78, Boehme provided a long-winded explanation why the number of languages was 72.

(2.53) and only afterwards did he have his audience with Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish representatives who came with the Russian envoys. No influence of the beauty of the Byzantine rite in Kheraskov's version. The words of Cyril, and various events along the way, were sufficient for Kheraskov's Vladimir to make his decision (this is actually the way it happened according to an early version of the *Chronicle: The Korsun/Kherson legend*).

The *Chronicle* reported that in 988, Vladimir waged a siege of Kherson, and the city surrendered because water was cut off. Kheraskov described the siege and the reason for surrender, adding great deal of detail to that report. Then the *Chronicle* stated that Vladimir wanted to marry Anna, a sister of Byzantine emperor Basil II. He agreed only if Vladimir would convert to Christianity, to which Vladimir assented. Kheraskov changed somewhat the order of events (at least, Anna was much more enthusiastic about the prospect of marriage than in the *Chronicle*), but his baptism and marriage eventually took place in Kherson. Kheraskov ended here. He did not include *Chronicle's* report on teachings given after baptism, many of them specifically Orthodox (icons, relics, church vessels); he did not include the report on removal of Perun's idol in Kiev; neither the report on mass baptism in Dnieper, the report on building churches in all cities, nor the report of paying the tithe to the church of Our Lady in Kiev (in 996) was included. Vladimir, "the new Constantine of great Rome", as the *Chronicle* described him, died in 1015.

The amount of information in the *Chronicle* about Vladimir is thus very modest and even that has not been entirely accepted by all historians. To write a nearly 400-page epic, Kheraskov had to unleash his fertile imagination to make it a readable work, and unleash his imagination he did. He set the epic as a struggle between good and evil forces for the soul of Russia with Vladimir caught in the middle of it. By God's decree, the outcome was known from the outset – and of course, the Christianization of Russia did happen –, therefore, Kheraskov spawned a tale about the stops and turns that eventually led to the baptism. About one half of all action is done by human actors, but they are always very close to the supernatural sphere, where the action is no less intense. Kheraskov used elements of Slavic mythology to present the supernatural world, most prominently Perun, figures from

Christian religion – angels, devils – and figures he invented himself, such as Pseudoholiness (Суесвятство). There are many miracles, visions, prophecies, many transformations from good to evil, from evil to good, from the earthly to the heavenly, many cases when ugliness hides beauty and beauty is a deceptive mask of evil. Spirits fly back and forth, the earthly events impact the actions undertaken by the supernatural sphere, the supernatural, in turn, intervenes – sometimes for good, sometimes for ill – in the earthly events. Even vampire-like behavior is not far off (2.161). It is, however, well nigh impossible to be always certain which supernatural elements Kheraskov considered to be purely literary devices and which reflected his own beliefs.

How about Zlomis's calling "the prince of spirits" from hell (2.25) and his speaking from inside of the statue of Perun to other spirits, "the gods worshipped by Russians" (25), that have been summoned? (26). Christians believe in the existence of Satan and his evil designs and would not find it impossible that one such design included speaking from inside of an idol. Would Kheraskov believe that evil can manifest itself in this way? Maybe, but in a terse remark he demythologized the whole set up to some extent by stating that "What the North /Russia considered to be heavenly divinities, / These were actions and attributes of nature, / Human weaknesses, passions of blind hearts, / Through which the prince of the world held people in [his] power" (26). Still, the existence of Satan is recognized here.

Another example: Rogdai mounted a horse which was really "a hellish spirit" turned into a horse. Full of evil intentions, Rogdai was on his way to Pseudoholiness (2.203). Would Kheraskov consider a complete impossibility for evil to materialize itself in a particular form? As a horse, maybe?

The case is not helped when Kheraskov mixed different religious traditions into one image. For example, he wrote that in the morning, "Rosy forehead of Aurora shined, / Everything in the world was glistening, started to be born again: / The Creator manifests [Himself] in the majesty" (103). The Creator and Aurora are put side by side as religious equals. Granted Kheraskov believed in God, did he also believe in the goddess of the dawn from Roman mythology? If not, when putting her next to God in the same sentence, how serious was his belief in God?

The description of God goes between the sublime and mythological. There is a living God, Creator of all worlds (2.7), Triholy Lord (17). The mystery of the divine is inaccessible to mortals. We know God only as much as we believe in Him. All motion in all the worlds is due to God, all life is His creation. "God exists in Himself, only He has existed. / The heavenly vault did not shine with stars yet / When wisdom of God illuminated the universe". He had a plan of the universe before it was created, "He saw beginning of what is and [its] end, / He saw all clothed with eternal heavens" (125). Having created the world, God created man. Man is a small word;²⁰ "He is a midpoint,²¹ the heart of all nature, / There is in him air and earth, in him are hidden fire and waters",²² he is an image of God (127), although we do not learn in what respect.

Also, an image is presented of a locked palace above the stars where the Creator lives hidden, where even angels have no access, but God is reached by prayers of the just that come to Him like sparks. There is also a temple of God above from which an eternal eye watches worlds and shines like light and burns like fire and from immeasurable heights listens to conversations of the saints (2.15). When apostle Andrew, "the northern Prophet" (15), prayed that God may enlighten Vladimir and Kiev, his prayer appeared to the Creator like fiery letters (16), whereupon God appeared accompanied by maidens. One of them, Faith, held the cross washed in priceless blood. There were Love and Hope with an eternally green palm branch; also a maid with the sacri-

(²⁰) An idea of man being a microcosm was important in masonic and hermetic literature, see Georg von Welling, *Opus mago-cabbalisticum et theosophicum in which the origin, nature, characteristics and use of salt, sulfur and mercury are described in three parts*. Weiser Books, York Beach 2006 [1719], pp. 29, 36, 74, 84, 500; Иван Г. Шварц, *Лекции*. Вебер, Донецк 2008, p. 9; Иван В. Лопухин, *Масонские труды*. Товарищество типографии А. И. Майонтова, Москва 1913, p. 1.27.

(²¹) Man was created between fallen spirits and pure light of God, see Иван Г. Шварц, *Лекции*, cit., p. 117.

(²²) The four Empedoclean elements were accepted as constituting nature, Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium magnum* 7.18-19. The Orthodox theology was not opposed to it: Augustine, *Unfinished literal commentary on Genesis* 18; Basil wrote that fire, water, and air were created in the earth (*Hexaemeron* 1.7), i.e., "without a doubt, [they all were] made at the same time as the universe" (2.3); Феофан Прокопович, *Філософські твори*, 2. Наукова Думка, Київ 1980, p. 284.

ficed Lamb on her bosom and the entire universe wanted to bow before Him and wherever she looked, darkness turned into light (17). God was on the throne that was carried by cherubim sitting on a transparent cloud, cherubim living in fire but not burnt by it, and He said, “Russia will be enlightened!” Living words went to Kiev on wings and they turned there into a cross above Dnieper (18).

When Vladimir, prompted by his conscience, prayed to God whom he did not know (2.49), in the spiritual sphere,

God appeared clothed with the eternal Word,
 Holding in [His] hand the chain binding the world
 And ten principles shined around Him
 From which the great universe is made;
 Their power is imperishable and imperishable is their essence;
 Five Messianic wounds bring about light in heaven
 From them flows life to the entire universe. (50)

There is a spiritual world and a material world, the world of everyday life. However, the material aspect of this world is only its outward appearance due to the dimness of our spiritual sight. Vladimir was allowed to see what really was under this material cover that we think is all the world. He saw nature in its essence, in its full beauty that was hidden from the wise and from common people (2.106): “From darkness is made our cold world / But in this deep darkness the purest Spirit lives” (108). There are Powers in the air that can transform elements and create storms; everything breathes with joy and life in them. We always feel them, but do not see them (111). This world – or true appearance of the world – is not a mirage. As explained by Idolen, “The Spirit turns all places into paradise. / For the pure [even] desert is a garden”. Also in this world the Creator and paradise itself can be found, not only in heaven. Things that look so beautiful and pure like glass are things from which the Word of God took off their carnal clothing. Here is higher knowledge, unknown to the world. “These are secrets of being, but they are open to us, / When sacred fires of faith burn in us (117). / Who wants to come to this temple, / He must abandon everything carnal, / Have no dark doubt in the heart, / And understand laws given by the Divinity” (118). This ties knowledge to spiritual purity, which is the indispensable foundation to truly know the world, which is a tenet strongly stressed by masons.

Kheraskov included in the *Vladimir* some elements of eschatology. After death, there is “darkness for carnal life, light for good life” (2.7), heaven or hell (132, 144), eternal salvation or eternal damnation. The two martyred Varangians, father and son, after preaching the Gospel have been killed (the *Chronicle* also spoke about it) and they went to the sphere of fiery water or watery fire,²³ “Where majesty of the Divine world / Is praised by the heavenly lyre made out of stars” (14). In a vision caused by the guarding angel (66) and partially inspired by the Book of Revelation, Vladimir saw a city in the east with twelve gates lighted by the face of the Lord, with streets paved with jasper and sardonyx. There was there the tree of life and heavenly inhabitants ate its fruit. Inhabitants with lily wreaths on their heads rested and conversed (67). Vladimir wanted to enter the city, but there was a fiery river at its walls (68). He was not ready to enter yet. When could he be ready? When he was saved. And what does it mean to be saved? It is quite remarkable that in Kheraskov's work devoted to Christianization of Russia, the Christian salvation message is vague and confusing. References to salvation are very brief and unclear.

Salvation is necessary because of the existence of sin and sin is the result of two falls, the fall of “a proud light-bearing angel”, that is, Lucifer, who consequently was thrown into hell with his followers (2.126), and then the fall of man. Kheraskov spoke only about the fall of Adam (127), who lost the paradise because he ate a (forbidden) fruit (357), but Kheraskov did not mention Eve. Only in passing, he alluded to a more orthodox view of the subject, when very cryptically he stated that “A fault inflicted on heaven by a woman / In testament, He [God] set up to clean up through a woman. / Pagans knew this truth / When they sang about the box of Pandora” (129). It just says that a woman was involved in a sin, presumably an allusion to Eve (Pandora was believed to be the first created woman), and that a woman will be instrumental in fixing it, presumably virgin Mary. The only time Eve was mentioned by name was in a simile: some hypocrites behave “as though Adam with Eve in their fall / Hide their sins in solitude” (350).

⁽²³⁾ See AdaMah Booz [Adam Michael Birkholz], *Der Compaß der Weisen*. Friedrich Maurer, Berlin 1782, p. 60; Иван Г. Шварц, *Лекции*, cit., pp. 13-14; Georg von Welling, *Opus...*, cit., pp. 5, 17, 19, 33; the concept comes from Kabbalah.

The salvation of man is supposed to be due to Christ, who is “The cosmic spirit, Savior, the Son of God! / Who shows us the Father and the Spirit / He is a chain that binds creation with the Creator”. He is “God and Man, our Savior, Christ” (2.128). “The Savior by [His] death mortified Adam’s sin / Brought to life the universe through resurrection”. “We are purified and born again in the cross”. Who does not know Christ has no salvation (130). There is “a salvific law of Christ” (7). “The cross is salvation and joy of believers” (68). Vladimir was told in a vision that there was a cross on his shoulders that would crush him if he did not have heavenly purity in his heart, and he could enter the city where the saved live when he felt that he was innocent (68). How can one get there? Surely one means would be the same as used to keep away the prince of darkness, namely, by submission of our will to God, by the love of neighbor, and holiness of our works (88). Purity of heart apparently means sinlessness. How can sins be removed? The way saintly Cyril did when he fell into temptation: he washed his sin by repentance and tears (97). Another advice: “Turning away from the world / Is our initial purification in the world” (108). In these statements, the emphasis shifts from the cross to the self and one’s efforts of the self to purify oneself and thus acquire access through the gates of the paradise. Consider Vladimir’s answer to the question asked by an unidentified voice, “What do you seek?”, after he entered a lighted room in a crystal palace: “I seek myself [...] I seek my soul, I seek an access to God”. Lopukhin also described a way of inception of a new member of the masonic order in his book, *The zealous: the [zealous] seeker for the truth or the spiritual knight*, and the question, what do you seek, appears to be an allusion to this book. An element of the ritual was a board with the inscription on it, “Know thyself: find happiness that is [already] in you”.²⁴ Lopukhin stated that on the path to the life pleasing to God one has to know nature and oneself (*Characteristics* 8.1, 8.28-29). On the other hand, self-knowledge was acknowledged as a part of the way leading to salvation also by such Orthodox ecclesiastics as Rostovskii and Platon.²⁵ For them, self-knowledge was supposed to be a path toward God

⁽²⁴⁾ See Иван В. Лопухин, *Масонские труды*, cit., p. 1.5.

⁽²⁵⁾ See Димитрий Ростовский, *Алфавит духовный* [1710], 1.1.4-5; Митропо-

with renunciation of oneself along the way. For Kheraskov, the order was important: seeking oneself, seeking one's soul, and, by the way, seeking an access to the divine. Self-knowledge seems to be for him a goal for its own sake, the struggle with obstacles to better knowing oneself and conquering one's own limitations, limitations of the flesh. There is a spark in the soul "by which a mortal should be born again" (120).²⁶ This is "a divine ray, the light of reason [which] / The fall turned into darkness / But it engenders weak light in the heart of someone / Who lives in the world like a ruler of his passions" (121). However, willingly or otherwise, a realization is made that passions can be destroyed only when one turns to the Creator with all his heart (121).

Salvation is sometimes reduced to the need of ritual of baptism. Vladimir was told to accept baptisms for purification (2.336). This ritual aspect becomes most important in the central – and closing – event of the *Vladimir*: "Vladimir was baptized by water that gives life, / He purified himself, resurrected, Vladimir was born again; / His body was permeated by heavenly dew / Bright heavens opened in his soul" (358). "By the imperishable Maid Messiah is born in him / And in the crib of his ribs was swaddled and placed" (359).

Can the dead be saved? The accepted dogma may have a problem with that point. Catholicism has purgatory, Orthodoxy has prayers for the dead, but bringing back to life to save may be a murky theological problem. Not for Kheraskov. At one point, three women were baptized by Cyril and killed by pagan priest Kifar, his son Zarem, and his son-in-law Stenar, and then all three recognized their wives in these women (2.168). The sons killed themselves, Kifar wanted to kill himself too, but Cyril held his hand saying: "If you swear to be baptized in Christ, / Then the souls will return to the bodies of the dead". Kifar swore to believe in Christ (169). Cyril prayed, the dead came to life and Kifar was baptized with his sons (170). Incidentally, this resurrec-

лит Платон, *Православное учение, или сокращенное христианское Богословие* [1765], 1. §§1-2.

⁽²⁶⁾ See [Christian A. H. von Haugwitz,] *Hirten-Brief an die wahren, ächten Freymäurer alten Systems*. [Böhme, Leipzig] 1785, p. 118; Иван Г. Шварц, *Лекции*, cit., p. 40; Id., *Беседы о возрождении и молитве; Записки; Речи; Материалы для биографии*. Вебер, Донецк 2010, p. 117.

tion was needed not so much for salvation of the three pagans, important for their souls as it was, but to show that Cyril was able to perform miracles and thereby to show the power of Christianity (152, 170).

Kheraskov repeatedly stated that Christ was a savior; His cross has a saving power, but, still, the salvation message is very unclear. The *Vladimir* is clearly a literary work, not a theological treatise, and an explanation always can be made that the reader almost certainly would be a Christian and no lengthy dogmatic lessons are needed to get a point across. On the other hand, if salvation is the most important event that can happen in any person's life, as each believer would agree, then only marginal mentions of the salvation message in the work which makes religious conversion the central topic is at least puzzling. It is interesting to notice that although there are unavoidable references to Christ, there is not one reference to Christ as Jesus, not one in the *Rossiada*, and just one in all the plays he wrote (*Plamena*, 4.100), although many of them very strongly touch upon religious topics, and only four in all of the remaining poetry, all of them in one poem, *The consolation of sinners* (7.29, 33, 44, 66). A talk about Jesus has more intimate tone than speaking about Christ or Lord. This religious intimacy is missing from Kheraskov's epic poems. This is quite in contrast with his Rosicrucian colleagues and he even mentioned one of them in the *Vladimir*.

There are two contemporary Russian literary figures that Kheraskov mentioned in the *Vladimir*.²⁷ One is Lomonosov, who is set next to Homer when Kheraskov lamented that his own description of a battle could not match theirs (2.300). Another one is Lopukhin. In a rather unrelated context, Kheraskov mentioned Kasogs (Касоги) and the fact that Rededia (a mythical strongman) is not among them; however,

The tree of Rededia blooms here.²⁸
A golden bough of the tree, you, my respectable friend
Beloved by Muses, enlightened by Minerva
Whose father reaches full age,²⁹

⁽²⁷⁾ Catherine II was mentioned as well (2.271), but not as a literary figure that she also had been.

⁽²⁸⁾ Lopukhins draw their origin from Rededia.

⁽²⁹⁾ In 1785, the time of the first edition of the *Vladimir*, Lopukhin's father – taken care of by his son – was 80 and he died at the age of 92, Andrej V. Danilov, *Iwan*

Tender son, faithful friend, most honorable man!
 Your conversation, Lopukhin, is to me
 More beneficial than many books, sweeter than honey. (285)

It is, therefore, curious, that the devotional warmth that permeated Lopukhin's writings is missing from Kheraskov otherwise interesting poetry. The same warmth can be found in Novikov's and in Gamaleia's letters, Schwarz's writings – although he was more interested in philosophy than theology – and in Lopukhin's pupil, Kovalkov, who probably was not a mason, but was very strongly influenced by masonry.

Kheraskov was certainly a Christian – by oath, Rosicrucians were supposed to be Christians –, but he stayed on a more generic side of the religious spectrum. It is rather striking that there is hardly any mention of specifics concerning the Orthodox church by a writer in the country so deeply devoted to Orthodoxy: no mention, for instance, of icons, of praying for the dead, or of sacraments. Fleetingly the church was mentioned at the conclusion of the *Vladimir*, when Vladimir had a vision of the future in which the West split from the East and apparently put faith not in the heart, but in the mind, steering toward darkness with their “false interpretations” of dogmas and rites. The church shines in truth and beauty in the East, “Imitating sacred mysteries/sacraments from above the stars, / And represents the inner church” (2.359). The Orthodox church was mentioned, but in a patriotic, even nationalistic setting rather than religious. Also, a reference was made to the inner church, which is a concept – or just a name – introduced by Lopukhin, and so the attention is deflected toward the Rosicrucian understanding of the church and emphasis is placed on the inner state rather than an institutional side of church organization, the latter being just a representation of the former, hardly a statement that an Orthodox theologian would readily accept.

The primary message in the *Rossiada* is patriotic, which uses religion as a tool to show the elevated position of Russia in the world and an assumed saintly rule of Ivan IV, which was instrumental in acquiring this position. Religion becomes a subsidiary of the political role

Lopuchin: Erneuerer der Russischen Freimaurerei. Seine Lehre von der Inneren Kirche als eigenständiger Beitrag zum Lehrgebäude der freimaurerischen Mystik. Röll, Dettelbach 2000, pp. 65, 86.

of Russia notwithstanding the fact of berating politics when used by the Catholic church as presented by Kheraskov (2.59). In the *Vladimir*, Kheraskov went back in the history of Russia and the nationalistic goal was still as strong as in the *Rossiada* by making even more explicit than in the *Rossiada* that God was on the side of Russia whatever aggressive action it undertook (the case of Kherson).³⁰ However, in the times depicted in the *Rossiada*, Christianity was already well entrenched as an official religion and the idea of the Third Rome (and the Second Jerusalem) was in vogue, the idea that, clearly, God is on the Russian side. By reaching to the times of the introduction of Christianity to Russia, Kheraskov added a personal dimension of the struggle between doubt and certainty, temptation and resistance, truth and falsehood, the personal dimension of the spiritual struggle of the grand prince – and then a saint – Vladimir, the struggle that had social and national consequences (“Vladimir transformed and glorified his nation”, 2.1). The patriotic dimension is thus mixed with the personal aspect, in both cases being assured that whatever happens, it is going to lead to positive consequences which are ultimately endorsed by God Himself, who exercised His providential care along the way. However, many a time Kheraskov had a theological tendency to show God as being a helper in actualizing one’s own personal and national choices, an enhancer of personal and national interests rather than a person actualizing that has been providentially decided; God frequently is serving Russia rather than Russia serving God. This is also theologically reflected in presenting Christian theology in a somewhat generic light. In his epic poems, Kheraskov spoke about God as the Creator, not about the Father, never about the Trinity. Christ was invoked as a Savior along with the cross, but it is far from clear how the cross and saving go together. Specificity of the Orthodox church is expunged altogether, the church becoming merely an outer appearance of the inner church. In his epic poems, the masonic aspects of Kheraskov’s beliefs seem to have often overshadowed the Christian side of the overall re-

⁽³⁰⁾ This is as true for the times of Vladimir as it is for Kheraskov’s own age; therefore, he could exclaim in one of his *Odes* (1763), “Rise up, Russian Power / Rise up above clouds! / Thundering glory awaits you / Everywhere, wherever you turn [...] Beyond the Lena [river], beyond Caucasus Mountains: / It awaits you everywhere” (*Ode* [1763], 7.89).

ligious doctrine he espoused, interestingly, in contrast to Lopukhin whom Kheraskov praised.

RIASSUNTO

Michail M. Cheraskov è autore di due poemi epici, la *Rossiade* e *Vladimir*. Sebbene l'intera *Rossiade* sia profondamente pervasa di immagini religiose, non si tratta di un poema religioso. Qui la religione viene usata come giustificazione delle brame espansionistiche di Ivan IV, che pianificò una serie di conquiste, di cui quella di Kazan' rappresentava solo un episodio. Così nel poema ci sono pochi elementi che riguardano la vita religiosa personale. Il messaggio principale della *Rossiade* è patriottico; la religione viene usata come strumento per mostrare la posizione elevata della Russia nel mondo. La religione diviene un elemento accessorio del ruolo politico della Russia. In *Vladimir* Cheraskov torna indietro nella storia russa con un obiettivo nazionalistico forte quanto quello della *Rossiade*. Giungendo fino ai tempi dell'introduzione del Cristianesimo in Russia, Cheraskov aggiunge la dimensione personale della lotta tra dubbio e certezza, tentazione e resistenza, verità e falsità, la dimensione personale della lotta spirituale del gran principe – e poi santo – Vladimir, una lotta che ha avuto implicazioni sociali e nazionali. La dimensione patriottica si interseca così con la componente personale.

