Semen Bobrov’s long poem in which the conquest of Crimea is interpreted not as a stage in the “Greek Project” but as the symbolic apotheosis of Russian expansion in the south was only published after Catherine II’s death. The late empress would hardly have approved of this kind of revision of her cherished plans. Until her last days the empress remained convinced both of their feasibility and of their benefit for Russia (see Ragsdale 1988). At the same time her notion of how long it might take to realize them fluctuated, depending on changes in the political situation. One of these changes occurred during 1789. On January 26, after having ordered that triumphal gates be built for Potemkin in Tsarskoe Selo, Catherine commanded that they be inscribed with the line from Petrov’s ode “On the Taking of Khotin”: “You will descend to the Temple of Sophia amid applause.” While giving these instructions, the empress commented that “He [Potemkin] will be in Tsargrad [i.e., Constantinople] this year” (Khrapovitskii 1874, 245). However, on October 10 of the same year she made quite a different prediction: “On the Greeks: they can be revived. Constantine is a good boy; in thirty years he will go from Sevastopol’ to
Tsargrad. Now we are breaking the horns [i.e., Ottoman power] and then it will be easier for him to smash them” (ibid., 312).

Thus the time frame for realizing the “Greek Project” grew from one to thirty years, clearly far beyond the time the empress could aspire to rule. This change might have been caused by a variety of circumstances—the not very auspicious course of the Turkish and Swedish wars, the start of the Revolution in France, and the revived hostility of European powers toward Russia’s expansionist plans. But the main factor was apparently the danger that Catherine perceived in the events transpiring in Poland. In the words of S. M. Solov’ev, “the Eastern question lost its importance for a while [and] then Polish question took first place” (Solov’ev 1863, 251).

In the second half of the 1780s, Poland, which it seemed had completely vanished from the European stage due to the partitions and to inner strife, suddenly acquired political existence once again. At the opening of the Sejm in late 1788, the patriotic party that demanded the replacement of the archaic aristocratic system with a more effective governmental system, as well as political and social reforms and the creation of a national army, acquired enormous influence. The leaders considered the only solution to be an alliance with Prussia. The Sejm demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from Poland and prohibited Russia from using Polish territory for communicating with the army fighting the Turks.

Russia, which was waging war on two fronts, had to accept these demands. In May 1789 the occupying Russian garrison was ordered to leave Poland, where it had been quartered for a quarter of a century. Before concluding peace with the Turks and Swedes, Catherine strove to avoid yet another open armed conflict. Nevertheless, it was clear to her that the empire would be acquiring yet another hostile neighbor on her western border, and one which at any moment might demand a review of the results of the partition (see Lord 1915, 92–111). Russian diplomacy had to work out a new course that would take into account the newly changed power alignments. This task also demanded a fundamental ideological reorientation.

The new points of reference for Russian politics were again outlined by Potemkin. However, his significant loss of influence on the empress and then his sudden death evidently prevented the official and conclusive formulation of his ideas. Still, Potemkin’s exceptionally interesting projects defined the
symbolism of the celebration that he organized for the empress in the Tauride Palace on April 28, 1791.

Richard Wortman dedicated several pages of his study *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in the Russian Monarchy* to Potemkin’s celebration (Wortman 1994, 143–146). His analysis centers on the extremely detailed “Description of the Celebration in the House of Prince Potemkin” by Gavriil Derzhavin. Wortman comments that the personal intonations characteristic
of Derzhavin only became usual for ceremonial texts in the nineteenth century (ibid., 143; for an analysis of the philosophical and cosmological ideas reflected in the celebration, both in the Tauride Palace’s architecture and in Derzhavin’s “Description,” see Pogosian 1997). This “personal slant” of Derzhavin’s “Description” might be connected with the fact that Potemkin’s celebration, despite its scale, characteristic of the prince, and despite the participation of the royal family, was not, strictly speaking, official. Its extent and program were clearly marked as belonging to a faithful subject of the great sovereign, one who was offering her a tribute of love and thankfulness for her unparalleled beneficence. On the other hand, the pretext for the celebration was an event of utter state importance—a great victory of Russian arms. “The lord of all-powerful Rome … could not have created a bigger house or have presented greater magnificence for his celebration. It seemed that all the wealth of Asia and all the art of Europe were combined to adorn the temple of celebrations for the Great Catherine. There is hardly [another] private person [living] today who has such a vast building as his dwelling place,” wrote Derzhavin (I, 391, note). In 1808, when editing the “Description” for the fourth volume of his works, the poet changed this phrase to: “There is hardly [another] ruler [living] today. …” It was precisely the opposition and connection between “private person” and “ruler” that constituted the main tension in the celebration’s meaning.

By celebrating the taking of Izmail in his own home, Potemkin was declaring himself the single party responsible for the victory. Suvorov, the one who had been in direct command of the assault, had been sent off to inspect the Swedish border. “The prince [Potemkin] urged mistrust of the Swedish king,” Catherine’s secretary Khrapovitskii wrote in his diary. “They say that this was to keep Suvorov away from the celebration and from displaying the captured pashas” (Khrapovitskii 1874, 362; cf. Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 455). However, Potemkin’s initiative also had another possibly even more

1 V. S. Lopatin, who has done much to clarify the true facts of Potemkin’s biography, falls into excessive apologetics for his hero when he asserts that Suvorov’s departure from Petersburg was not connected with Potemkin’s desire to exclude his renowned subordinate from the celebration but due to military necessity (see Lopatin 1992, 230–231). There was no such crucial necessity that would have prevented delaying Suvorov’s departure for three days, and furthermore, there was nothing to keep Potemkin from mentioning Suvorov’s role in storming Izmail during the celebration.
important aspect. The “privatizing” of the celebrations allowed their organizer to affirm not only his version of the Izmail triumph but also of Russian politics as a whole in the minds of the empress and of elite Petersburg society.

Potemkin sent Catherine his first dispatch about the taking of Izmail on December 18, 1790, and on January 11 he began to lobby for permission to return to Petersburg (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 444, 447). But His Serene Highness (as Potemkin came to be called) could not wait, and two days later informed her that he was going to inspect shipbuilding on the Dnieper “so that once I receive your permission I shall already be that much farther along on the way to Petersburg, and shall thus shorten my journey” (ibid., 449; Catherine 2004, 3782). However, Potemkin did not leave Iassy and continued to bombard Catherine with pathetic requests that he be allowed to come. Having received permission to leave the theater of military action as long as his departure would not harm the start of peace negotiations, the prince set off for the capital, where he arrived on February 28 (Khrapovitskii 1874, 358). According to contemporary memoirs, reports concerning Platon Zubov, Catherine’s latest favorite, and his increasing influence on the empress were what hastened his arrival in Petersburg. As Derzhavin recalled, Potemkin, “on leaving the army told his retinue that he was unwell and was going to Petersburg to pull some teeth [zuby dergat’, i.e., to remove Zubov]” (Derzhavin IV, 617).

Despite the recent successes in the Turkish War and the already signed peace with Sweden, Russia’s political position in the winter and spring of 1791 was far from satisfactory. She was threatened with an incalculably more powerful coalition. The English fleet was preparing to sail to the Baltic, Prussia had declared a mobilization, and in Poland anti-Russian sentiments were growing. Many of Catherine’s closest advisors tried to convince her to yield to this pressure and accept unfavorable conditions in the peace with Turkey. Potemkin, who was well-informed about the true condition of the army and who did not believe in the possibility of “recruits battling Englishmen” (Khrapovitskii 1874, 361), added his voice to this chorus. While still in the South, he advised her to cede territorial acquisitions in Moldavia to Poland, open talks with Prussia, and to “stroke” England by enticing her with profitable

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2 References to Catherine 2004 indicate that the translations of the Catherine-Potemkin correspondence have been taken from this edition.
trade agreements (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 402, 442–43). After arriving in Petersburg, he used all of his influence to force Catherine “to correspond with the Prussian king,” and together with Chancellor Bezborodko he also compiled a “memorandum to prevent war” (Khrapovitskii 1874, 359, 361).

Catherine, however, was able to withstand both domestic and foreign pressure. As Robert Lord writes, Catherine “won a complete victory, perhaps the most brilliant of her reign, thanks to her own splendid courage and constancy” (Lord 1915, 190). Finally, due to strong opposition to war with Russia that was deftly boosted by Russian diplomacy, the English government backed down from its ultimatum and agreed to accept conditions for peace that were much more acceptable to Catherine, and these were quickly approved by the Turks as well (see ibid., 153–191; Madariaga 1981, 416–421; and others). “A courier with the news that England apparently … will not begin war” arrived in Petersburg on April 30, two days after the celebration in Potemkin’s residence (Khrapovitskii 1874, 362).

It was in these extremely dramatic personal and political conditions that Potemkin anxiously prepared for the celebration. The completion of the construction of the house, the outfitting the park and space in front of the palace, the digging of canals, the interior decoration of the space being prepared for theater and ballet—all took place under the direct supervision of His Serene Highness over the course of two months following his arrival in Petersburg. The celebration was originally planned for Catherine’s birthday, April 21, which in 1791 fell on St. Thomas Monday, the second Monday after Easter. But even Potemkin’s organizational genius could not overcome all obstacles, and it was necessary to put it off for a week. Nevertheless, by April 28 all preparations had been completed.

In the words of Ia. K. Grot, this “festival, whose unprecedented magnificence was supposed to eclipse all earlier celebrations of this type” was conceived by His Serene Highness as “the final word to prove to the empress that no one could compare with him in his devotion to her” (Derzhavin I, 378). However, for all of Potemkin’s love for luxury and for hyperbolically rich ceremonies, he could hardly have counted on blinding Catherine with it. His goal was to once again snatch the political initiative away from the new favorite and to show that he was capable as before of dreaming up and carrying out the most grandiose undertakings. Of course, he could share the main idea of these
undertakings in his correspondence with the empress as well as in personal conversations. At the same time, a celebration could do away with the suggestion of his projects’ immediate diplomatic or court jockeying and reveal their fundamental ideological dimension. Potemkin’s conception of Russia’s state mission was to acquire visual and graphic embodiment. Considering the fact that His Serene Highness died less than six months later, one could say that the celebration of April 28 represented his last political testament.

Potemkin’s rise in the mid-1770s was connected with his “Eastern System,” on which basis Catherine II’s “Greek Project” took shape. In order to impress the empress just as strongly with his new conceptions, he had to propose ideas that were qualitatively different from his former project yet retaining definite continuity with it.

In 1779, on the occasion of the birth of Grand Prince Konstantin Pavlovich, Potemkin had staged a celebration in honor of Catherine at his dacha in Ozerki. This was wholly staged in the spirit of stylized antiquity characteristic of “Greek Project” imagery. Ia. K. Grot described it on the basis of V. P. Petrov’s description:

The place where supper was prepared represented a cave in the Caucasus Mountains (i.e., one of the territories that had been entrusted to the host); the cave was decorated with myrtle and laurel trees, among which roses and other flowers were entwined; a stream that rushed down from the top of the mountain and crashed into cliffs cooled the air. During supper, which was arranged according to ancient customs, to the sounds of an organ a chorus sang stanzas composed in the Hellenogreek language in honor of the glorious visitor; Petrov, who enjoyed Potemkin’s special patronage, translated them into Russian. (Derzhavin I, 379)

The role that Potemkin had played in the “Greek Project” created a persistent reputation among contemporaries and affected the perception of all his plans and actions. In his ode “On the Taking of Izmail” written in early 1791, Derzhavin addressed the European powers who were trying to intercede on behalf of Turkey. His admonitions were fully in keeping with Catherine’s long-time dreams of a resurrected Greece and a renewed Christian republic that had once been prophesized by Henry IV and M. de Sully:
<…> Ross рожден судьбою
От варварских хранить вас [европейцев] уз,
Темиров попирать ногою,
Блесть ваших от Омаров муз,3
Отмстить крестовые походы,
Очистить Иордански воды,
Священный гроб освободить,
Афинам возвратить Афину,
Град Константинов Константину
И мир Афету4 водворить.

Афету мир? - о труд избранный,
Достойнейший его детей,
Великими людьми желанный!

(Ross [the Russian] is born by fate / To preserve you [Europeans] from barbarian bonds, / To trample the Tamerlanes underfoot, / To protect your muses from Omar, / To avenge the crusades, / To purify Jordan’s waters, / To liberate the Holy Sepulchre, / To return Athena to Athens, / The city of Constantine to Konstantin / And to establish peace for Japeth. // Peace for Japeth? O chosen mission / Which is most worthy of his children, / Desired by great men!)

Later, while compiling the “Explanations” to his own works, Derzhavin indicated that “the city of Athens should be returned to the goddess Minerva, by which is understood Catherine,” and “Constantinople should be subject to the rule of Grand Prince Konstantin Pavlovich.” He also clarifies that “Henry IV and other great men wanted to establish peace in Europe” (ibid., 357). At approximately this time a Russian translation appeared of The Peace of Europe… or A Project for Universal Conciliation by Ange Goudar, completed “in the encampment near Ochakov in 1788” (SKRK I, 262, № 1662).

Somewhat unexpectedly for a military ode, but fully foreseeable given the political situation at the beginning of 1791, when everyone was nervously expecting an attack by England and Prussia, “On the Taking of Izmail”

3 Caliph Omar (or Umar) (579–644), who led a Muslim army to conquer Alexandria, reportedly had its famous library burned in 642.
4 Noah’s son Japeth, commonly believed to be the father of the Europeans.
culminates with an apotheosis of universal peace in which victorious Russia occupies its worthy place.

When he received the order to describe Potemkin’s celebration, Derzhavin in general interpreted it in this key. “In surprise one seems to find oneself in flourishing Greece,” he wrote, “where the odeum, lyceum, stages, exedras and theaters from various cities and places gathered in this building have been restored to life” (ibid., 390). The basic cluster of metaphors associated with the “Greek Project” again appeared in the choruses that he wrote for the occasion. Fourteen years earlier Catherine had not been able to take her grandsons on the Crimean journey; now their presence at the celebration seemed to sanctify the ideas that had been connected with them:

Кто Александр великий. 
Кто будет Константин,…
Тот громы к персам несть. 
Сей вновь построит Рим. (Ibid., 402)

(Who is Alexander the Great, / Who will be Constantine,… / This one will take thunder to the Persians / That one will again build Rome.)

The subject here is the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire—Constantinople. The mythology of resurrected Greece was also the mythology of the earthly paradise that Potemkin was still trying to recreate in his Tauride and “New Russian” territories. Now the task was to reproduce this theoretical Edenic Greece in the Tauride Palace. It was no accident that, when presenting the palace to Potemkin, Catherine wrote that she was giving him “an earthly paradise, as you call this dacha that you requested of me” (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 436; Pogosian 1997, 459–460).

The celebration in classical taste that Potemkin had arranged twelve years earlier in Ozerki took place in late June, while the celebration of the taking of Izmail—at the end of April (in New Style, early July and May, respectively). Considering St. Petersburg’s climate, the difference is quite substantial. In the words of one memoirist, “for the whole day” of the celebration “it was raining and the cold was appreciable” (Kir’iak 1867, 679–680; on Kir’iak as memoirist, see Fomenko 1999). Of course, it was much harder and more costly to imitate lush southern nature in the “cold, partly rainy, partly snowy” Baltic spring
(ibid.) than in the middle of summer, but this also emphasized the creative, transformative will of the celebration’s organizer and demiurge.

Derzhavin (I, 409) exclaimed:

The highest possible palms, with their stately, regular stalks wrapped to the very tops with what looked like stars, burn like flaming columns. Aromatic groves with trees laden with bitter oranges, oranges and lemons; green, dark red and yellow grapes, hanging by their stems in flaming clusters, and in the shadows along black flowerbeds, lilies and tulips, pineapples and other fruits whose colorful blaze offers the astonished gaze indescribable variety and wonder. ...

T. Kir’iak, describing the celebration in a private letter, left a more prosaic interpretation of this spectacle:

The garden consists of several knolls, thickly planted with lemon, bitter orange and other similar trees, of which several have fruit; but on the majority of trees there were fruits fabricated from glass, for example plums, cherries, and grapes of various colors of which whole clusters were also made of glass, like lanterns. From among the flowerbeds rise imitation cedars the tops of which, covered with leaves, support the ceiling; without them, judging by the size of the building, it seems like it would not hold. The pathways, whose sides were covered with turf, also attracted the eye. All of them were covered with pineapples, water-melons and other melons that were of a natural color, shape and size. Their leaves and stems were made of tin, and the fruit of glass; all of the fruits had a fire inside. (Kir’iak 1867, 687)

It is obvious that neither Potemkin, who ordered all of these imitation fruits, nor Derzhavin, who praised them, had any idea of deceiving anyone. The point was to symbolically transform the space, to create a kind of theatrical decoration that would let the guests feel like participants in a mythological performance (see the analogous interpretation of the so-called “Potemkin villages” in Panchenko 1983). The southern plants decorating this winter garden testified that the opulent land that had produced these fruits was also part of imperial space. In the words of another memoirist, “the abundance and taste reigned everywhere, and the fruits that one saw in the winter garden made of glass appeared on the tables in their natural form, in great profusion” (Derzhavin I, 416; for the full texts of memoirs published in 1808 by the Hamburg journal Minerva, see Potemkin 1852; Potemkin 1991). Derzhavin, who in one of the poems that went into the “Description” described the celebratory feast as a
joint production of the various parts of boundless Russia, reserved a special line for “the sweet fruits” of Taurus, the land Potemkin had won for the empire (Derzhavin I, 417).

Apropos, the living plants and trees that were abundantly planted in the garden required a special controlled climate. The air was heated by stoves “of which the winter garden required no small number” and which were “hidden behind a proliferation of mirrors that were of one size and of extraordinary cost” (Derzhavin I, 388, note). The incredible number of mirrors that all who wrote about the celebration noted not only hid the practical necessities but also contributed to the illusion of amplified space. “A facing colonnade separates the garden from the gallery, whose ornaments are the more brilliant because a great number of them are made up of mirrors. At both ends of this colonnade great mirrors adorned with greenery and flowers were placed between the last two pillars. They made it seem three times longer,” wrote Kir’iak (1867, 685). With the help of this pattern of infinite reflections that multiplied the light of 140,000 lamps and 20,000 wax candles (Derzhavin I, 408, note), the garden and palace were symbolically expanded to represent the universe.¹

According to Kir’iak, the main hall of the festivities represented some kind of temple. To lend magnificence to this temple and its entryway, in the last week the prince gave the order to place two huge columns painted to look like red marble in front of the aforementioned gates. This was done with a kind of creative flair. … The temple or pantheon itself is in the shape of a square with cut corners, but there are only two main walls, on the right and left hand, while the other sides are taken up by columns holding up small choruses with a vault. (Kir’iak 1867, 682–683)

The entrance to the hall recalled “the royal gates in the big court church” (ibid.).

The motifs of a classical temple were again exploited and intensified in the center of the festivities’ conceptual space: “In the garden facing the very center of the gallery was erected a kind of altar on eight columns of more than an arshin [c. 28 inches] in diameter and as tall as the columns in the gallery. On top was a cupola, and the floor was of grey marble. In the middle of this altar, on a pedestal of red marble, stood a full-sized image of Catherine, carved

¹ On the metaphor of the garden as the universe, see Pogosian 1997, 456–471; on the mirrored grotto and mirrored pyramid and the optical effects they created, see Kir’iak 1867, 687–688.
out of the purest white marble, in the guise of a goddess and in long Roman robes” (ibid., 686).

In the more expressive if less clear description by Derzhavin, a guest at the celebration “imperceptibly approaches a round altar raised on steps and surrounded by eight columns that support its dome. Around it are fixed jasper chalices on stands, and above hang lamps and chains of flowers, and wreaths; on a pedestal of porphyry amid the columns shines the image of a goddess of

Figure 10 and 11
Catherine II the Legislatress (1789) by F. I. Shubin. Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. Below – The winter garden of the Tauride Palace (1792) by F. D. Danilov.
pure marble and with a golden inscription, the one through whose generosity this home was built” (Derzhavin I, 286).

During the first Russo-Turkish War, Petrov had written that the liberated Greeks “in a temple of freedom, peace and joy ... should honor the image of this Athena [Pallada, i.e., Pallas] for an age” (Petrov I, 77), and Voltaire had predicted that “Phidases and Zeuxises” would cover Hellas with images of Catherine II (Ekaterina 1971, 71). Twenty years later, in the absence of a liberated Hellas, a temple of peace and joy was put up in the northern capital, and the image of Athena for the altar—in the place of the Greeks Zeuxis and Phidias—was fashioned by the sculptor from Archangel, Fedot Ivanovich Shubin.

Caught up in the circle of classical associations that he knew so well, Derzhavin touched on other symbolic aspects of the celebration, although with less detail. Nevertheless it is these aspects that lent the entire event its distinctive conceptual dynamics. The celebration, which began with the appearance of the royal family, was opened with a quadrille “composed of twenty-four pairs of the most famous and most beautiful women, young ladies and young men” (Derzhavin I, 395). According to Derzhavin, “they were dressed in white clothing” (ibid.). Kir’iak writes that “the cavaliers were clothed in Spanish dress, the ladies in Greek” (Kir’iak 1867, 691). The quadrille began with a “Polish dance” to whose melody Derzhavin wrote his celebrated chorus “Thunder of Victory Resound” (Derzhavin I, 395–398). Then this “march became a Greek (dance)” that “lasted less than a quarter of an hour,” after which “the theatrical performance began” (Kir’iak 1867, 692).

After the performance the dancing was renewed, and an elegant quadrille choreographed by the famous ballet-master Charles Le Pique was succeeded by “dances to Little Russian and Russian folksongs (prostym pesniam), in which one followed another”; Derzhavin adds that “Since those who love their fatherland love their own folk singing more than the foreign, it was very satisfying to see the monarch’s approval of this entertainment” (Derzhavin I, 412). Potemkin also organized a similar amusement for his guests in a distant part of the garden.

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6 We do not touch here on the whole circle of “Orientalist” imagery that is very important for understanding both this celebration as well as the “poetics” of Potemkin’s behavior, but which is not directly relevant to the current discussion (see Pogosian 1997, 459–462).
where “many sailors and rowers, richly dressed” were to perform rowing songs out on the ponds; but as Kir’iak notes, “the bad weather did not permit this” (Kir’iak 1867, 694).

Derzhavin explains the changeover to folk music with exclusively patriotic considerations, but it is characteristic that in the first place he lists “Little Russian” (Ukrainian) songs. It is natural to assume that this type of song was sung most often. Moreover, Derzhavin included in his “Description” an example of Little Russian song lyrics, “Na berezhku u stavka” (On the Shore by the Pond) (Derzhavin I, 413). According to Ia. K. Grot, “one may find this Little Russian song in I. Gur’ianov’s ‘Songbook’ (part IV, Moscow, 1835, p. 114), where it is listed under the title ‘A Cossack Rewarded [by a Kiss] for Saving a Girl from Drowning’” (Derzhavin I, 413).

It is not fully clear if this was the same song that Kir’iak had in mind when he wrote that “after the departure [of the empress] they sang, with all of the instruments [as accompaniment], a certain Little Russian song that was the favorite of the prince [Potemkin] and now of the whole city” (Kir’iak 1867, 694). In any case, there is no doubt that the Ukrainian element was significant in the structure of the celebration. The movement from classical to folk motifs, especially Ukrainian ones, had in part already been prefigured by the earlier theatrical performance.

“The curtain opened,” wrote Derzhavin. “The stage and place of action was illuminated by a radiant sun, in the midst of which shone Catherine II’s monogram in green laurels. Dancers representing male and female peasants performed. Raising their hands to this noble luminary, they demonstrated their most heartfelt feelings with their movements” (Derzhavin I, 405). The performance’s further presentations clearly demonstrated the main reason for their gratitude.

According to a contemporary account published in the Hamburg journal, the first comedy performed at Potemkin’s celebration was called “Les faux amants” (The False Lovers). There is no such play listed in the bibliography of

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7 In the article “On Russian Folk Singing,” published about the same time, Derzhavin’s close friend N. A. L’vov made a clear distinction between Great and Little Russian songs: “The character of Little Russian songs and melodies are quite different from the Russian: there is more melody in them than in our dancing songs; but I do not know of any Little Russian choral (armonicheskaia) song that could equal our ‘drawn-out’ (protiazhnye) songs” (L’vov 1994, 314).
eighteenth-century French plays, but there is one called “Le faux amant” (The False Lover). Its full title is “The Servant-Aristocrat, Or the False Lover, or Pride Punished,” and belongs to the pen of Madame A.-L.-B. Beaunoir; it was first staged in Paris in 1776 (see Brenner 1947, 175, № 3538). Unfortunately, we have not been able to locate a copy of this play, but there is another work whose performance at the celebration can be established with complete certainty.

The author of the play “Le Marchand de Smyrne” (The Smyrna Merchant) was the famous French playwright and aphorist Nicolas Chamfort. Written in 1770, it had been performed in the Comédie Français, enjoyed great success and provoked sharp criticism from Grimm and La Harpe (Arnaud 1992, 50–51; Téppe 1950, 100–101). The main feature of the comedy was its radically anti-feudal and egalitarian pathos. In fact, much later, Chamfort, who had become one of the most popular publicists of the French Revolution, was accused during the Jacobin terror of sympathy for aristocrats, and in his justification he cited this very play. He wrote:

Chamfort—an aristocrat!—those who know me would burst out laughing. ... Aristocrat! One whose love for equality was always the reigning passion, an inborn, unconquerable and automatic instinct! One who more than twenty years ago brought “The Smyrna Merchant” to the theater, which even today is often performed on stage and in which nobles and aristocrats of any kind are sold cheap, because they are worth nothing. (Arnaud 1992, 246).

For all of the excessive rhetoric of these declarations, made under compulsion, Chamfort’s essential point is true (and literally so). The plot of his comedy is quite uncomplicated. The noble Turk Hassan, whose freedom had once been purchased by an anonymous altruistic Frenchman, takes an oath to buy a Christian out of slavery once every year. In fulfilling his oath, by chance he buys out his benefactor Dorval, whose ship had been captured and who had been sold into slavery together with his companions. On the same day, Hassan’s equally noble wife buys the freedom of a Christian woman who unexpectedly turns out to be Dorval’s beloved. Hassan, touched, purchases all of Dorval’s companions in misfortune and gives them their freedom, and together they all celebrate the union of the newly liberated lovers.

At the center of the play is the scene of the slaves being sold by the merchant Kaled. The price for which the greedy slave trader sells his goods paradoxically
reflects the actual worth of each person. A German baron, a Spanish hidalgo, a jurist from Padua, and learned connoisseur of genealogy are all worth nothing because they are incapable of genuine labor. On the other hand, the servant “able to work, till the land, and ... [who] is no nobleman” is truly worth good money. The moralist Hassan cannot believe that among Europeans there exist “such people who do not study anything, relying on their natural right to lead their lives in idleness at the cost of their near ones” (Chamfort 1789, 43).

It would be very tempting, especially in view of the possible connection to the title of Madame Beaunoir’s comedy, to see the choice of repertoire for the celebration as the “upstart” Potemkin’s challenge to the aristocratic conceit of his more pedigreed rivals at court. However, such a suggestion must only be put forward with great caution, insofar as it is quite unclear what exactly the audience saw on the stage that had been set up in the palace.

An anonymous memoirist from the journal Minerva calls “The Smyrna Merchant” a “comedy” (see Derzhavin I, 404, note), while Derzhavin speaks of it as a ballet and only remarks on the scene when the slaves are sold. It is not impossible that this is not a slip. As early as 1771 the German composer Georg Joseph Vogler had written an operetta of the same name based on Chamfort’s play, which was “in the popular Italian style with brilliant arias, two bravura arias, a duet and trio” (Schafhäutl 1979, 14). One of the overtures to the operetta earned very broad popularity and was often sung separately.

It is doubtful that Derzhavin would have confused a ballet with an operetta, but it is possible that at the celebration it was not Volger’s complete work that was performed, but only a balletic divertissement. However, here we encounter another contradiction. In Minerva the performance is described as consisting of “two French comedies and two ballets” (Derzhavin I, 404, note), whereas Derzhavin’s “Description”—depending on how we qualify “The

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[8] The history of “*The Smyrna Merchant*”’s reception in Russia is unique and very interesting. The first reworked version of the play appeared almost immediately after the original’s appearance, in 1771, under the title “Good Deeds Gain Hearts” (Blagodeiania priobretaiut serdtsa). V. S. Sopikov ascribes this translation to A. S. Shishkov. Then in 1780 a comedy entitled “The Smyrna Merchant” (Smirinskoi kupets), translated by V. V. Lazarev, appeared in the journal *Chto-nibud’* *(Something).* Finally, in 1789, another anonymous translation with the title “A Good Deed Returned” (Vozvrashchennoe blagodeianie) was published by the University Typography (see SKRK I, 106, № 591; III, 484, № 591; I, 172, № 1045; III, 485, № 1045; Pukhov 1999, 183–184). We do not discuss these texts here insofar as at the Potemkin celebration the comedy was presumably performed in French.
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Smyrna Merchant”—notes two ballets and one comedy or two comedies and one ballet. The contradiction disappears only if we count Chamfort’s play twice and suggest that the performance of the comedy ended with the ballet, for which the impressive scene of the slave market was chosen.

The interpretation that Derzhavin gives to the story of the “Smyrna merchant who trades in slaves of all nationalities” is unambiguous:

To the honor of Russian arms there was not one of our fellow Russians who was taken prisoner by this venal barbarian [in the play]. What a change in our political situation! Has it been so long since Ukraine and its lower reaches were subjected to the incessant raids of predatory hoards? Was it so long ago? Oh, how pleasant is the recollection of past misfortunes when they have passed by like a horrible dream! Now we take pleasure in a most joyous celebration of our well-being. Oh, posterity! Know that all of this is the creation of Catherine’s spirit. (Ibid., 405–406)

Thus the ballet that demonstrated the peasants’ gratitude to the “radiant sun,” as well as Chamfort’s comedy (independent of the question what the select public saw), were taken to glorify the joint achievement of Potemkin and Catherine—freeing the southern territories of the empire from Turkish overlordship and the threat of Tatar raids. Four years earlier, during the empress’s journey to Crimea, the Ukrainian element had been virtually absent in the symbolic presentations that Potemkin staged. At that time he was more interested in the possibilities of a Greco-Scythian synthesis. Now focus had shifted precisely to “Ukraine and its lower reaches,” that is, the territories where Cossack troops had been settled.

We do not know whether the balletic peasants who thanked the empress were dressed in a conventionally idyllic way or in folk—Russian or Ukrainian—costumes; Derzhavin does not say, and the more observant but less eloquent Kir’iak did not attend the performance (Kir’iak 1867, 692). He did, however, notice the uniforms of the “extremely huge footmen” (gaiduki) who served the guests during the feast who were dressed “in Polish or Greek” dress (ibid., 693). Like the characters in others of Potemkin’s masquerades, these footmen lead us to the very center of the political problem that was occupying Potemkin.

Potemkin’s position on the Polish question is almost impossible to untangle. During the whole of this period he proposed various, sometimes mutually
exclusive, plans of action, and with his characteristic energy and decisiveness quickly set about to realize them. Moreover, if some of his ideas succeeded one another, he would undertake other steps in opposite directions, as if wanting to have responses at the ready for any contingency.

In 1787–1788 Potemkin’s main idea was to conclude a Russian-Polish alliance under which a significant part of the Polish forces would merge into the Russian army, then fighting Turkey under his command. In return Russia would make financial subsidies available to Poland and agree to several important government reforms there. Potemkin simultaneously held negotiations with the reform-minded King Stanisław Poniatowski and with leaders of the aristocratic opposition, such as Hetman F. Branicki, who saw dependence on Russia precisely as a guarantee against any kind of change. Most likely, in maintaining contacts with both sides Potemkin saw a way to preserve his future freedom of action. At the same time, this policy indicates that Poland’s internal problems seemed of little importance to him compared with the possibility of uniting military forces and having Polish forces under his command.

One may get a general notion of the way Potemkin saw the Russian-Polish union from two notes he wrote to Catherine (Ekaterina 1874, 269–280). These memoranda are undated, but according to their content probably relate to the same period. Still, we do not have enough basis for a firm dating, insofar as Potemkin kept producing many plans of this type from 1787 practically until his death. Potemkin proposed beginning by forming Polish national brigades on whose basis a pro-Russian confederation could arise. Potemkin had attempted to realize this idea already at the time of Catherine’s journey south in the spring of 1787 (see Lord 1915, 515). In a letter to Catherine of December 25, he recalled his achievement in creating the alliance with Austria and emphasized that his current proposals were a continuation of the same policy:

You deign to mention that the alliance with the [Austrian] emperor is my doing. This proceeded from my zeal. It was from this as well that the Polish alliance in Kiev also sprang. … You may see what sort of alliance this would have been from the plan enclosed herewith. They would already have been fighting for us by now, and would have been helpful, for the harder we come down on the enemy, the easier we’ll achieve our goal. My counsel always proceeded from fervor. If I am out of place, then, of course in the future I’ll only speak on those matters that have been entrusted to me. (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 257–258; Catherine 2004, 215)
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The tone of this letter indicates that Potemkin knew that his plans were not supported by Catherine, who was extremely skeptical toward the Poles and the utility of an alliance with them. However, he continued to insist, arguing that he could and must head a Polish national armed force. He wrote on February 5:

How good it would be, matushka, if we could quickly come to a decision about the Poles. And so, to entice the entire nation, they must be promised parts of the Turkish lands, for without this it cannot be done. When you deign to approve new brigades for their nation’s army, order that the one given to Count Branicki be attached to my army. What marvelous people and, one might say, horsemen. It is a pity that you are not favorably disposed to giving me command, if not over the cavalry of the entire nation, then at least over one brigade. I’m as much a Pole as they are. I would do much good. (Ibid., 265; cf. 260, 268; on the plan for a “people’s militia,” put together by Branicki, probably with Potemkin’s participation, see Ekaterina 1874, 274–280; Catherine 2004, 230)

As V. S. Lopatin justly remarks, “by calling himself a Pole, Potemkin is referring to his descent from Smolensk szlachta” (i.e., Polish gentry) (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 807). Of course, in emphasizing the Polish element of his genealogy so hyperbolically, Potemkin did not cease to think of himself as Great Russian. Most likely, he meant that he could play the role of a link between the two peoples, the more so since the above-named Count Branicki was married to one of his nieces.

Potemkin bought up estates in Poland with tremendous eagerness and became one of the largest landholders in the republic, which gave him the right to vote in the Sejm and the status of a Polish magnate. In the already-cited letter of December 25, he wrote that he had purchased Liubomirskii’s estate in Poland, “since by becoming its proprietor this conferred upon me the right to participate in their affairs and in the military command” (ibid., 257; on Potemkin’s Polish properties, see Lord 1915, 514–515; Catherine 2004, 215).

Catherine was not at all convinced by her correspondent’s argument. Partially following Potemkin’s urgings, at the same time she wrote that: “… Benefits may be promised; [but] if we oblige the Poles like this and they stay true to us, this will be the first instance of fidelity in their history. … Accepting them into the army and putting them in positions of responsibility should be under [your] personal supervision, because among them reign frivolity, a lack of discipline, and the spirit of revolt” (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 271). Potemkin tried to object: “As far as discipline,” he wrote, “matushka, be
assured that I am telling you the truth: in their military institutions it is observed even to the point of pedantry. On the personal level they have people of exceptional courage and no few outstanding people in the other services” (ibid., 274).

He was not, however, able to convince the empress. The project for an agreement did not contain any substantive concessions to Poland and could not put a stop to the growing anti-Russian feeling. “Things are bad in Poland, which, of course, they wouldn’t be had my plan been followed,” Potemkin wrote to Catherine at the end of 1788, after the opening of the Sejm. “But so be it” (ibid., 327; cf. 334–335; Catherine 2004, 271).

The lack of success in this undertaking moved Potemkin to act in other directions with increased ardor. Presuming, as before, that “a national army necessarily demands expanding the militia” (ibid., 340), that is, creating a civilian home force, he transferred his main hopes from the Polish cavalry onto the Cossack troops. Potemkin had actively concerned himself with forming Cossack units ever since the start of the Russo-Turkish War (see ibid., 258, 266, 329, 341, 353, and ff; for more detail, see Petrov A. I, 125–129). Potemkin needed these forces on the Turkish front but also made plans for them of a completely different kind. At the end of 1789 he sent the empress “a plan concerning Poland” (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 381). Excerpts from this plan were recently published by V. S. Lopatin. Potemkin wrote:

On Poland. It would be good if it were not divided, but if it is, it would be better to destroy it completely, [because] its neighbors have already closed in. In this case the evil will be less if there were no mediators between us, because it would be more difficult for them to start a war with us than act by intrigues, instigating a third party against us, thus making it hard for us without losing either people or property. And so—leave Poland only the kingdom of Mazowieckie + a bit of Lithuania. If the first Prussian King took it, this would be even more useful, [because] then we would be able to involve the *tseartsy*. ... 9

In Potemkin’s words, the inhabitants of the Polish republic’s Eastern voivodeships (voevodstva) desired

to renew their former condition when they were under their own hetmans; now they all insist that they need to be the way they were, awaiting assistance

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9 This refers to Austrians (Translator’s note).
Potemkin thus planned to become hetman of Eastern Poland, which was inhabited by a significant number of Orthodox Ukrainians.

As we know, Potemkin’s propositions somewhat troubled Catherine. “Naming you Hetman of the troops of the Ekaterinoslav province is not difficult,” she responded, “and drawing up a rescript on this won’t take long. But one thing holds me back from signing such a document, and this I entrust to your own judgment: won’t the use of this title in Poland provoke the untimely attention of the Sejm and cause alarm that will harm our cause?” (ibid., 387). It is possible that this response to his ideas led Potemkin to conclude that the empress herself or his enemies at court interpreted his desire to receive the hetman’s mace as a manifestation of his excessive and far-reaching ambitions. In his answer, Potemkin counters not only what Catherine said but the arguments his imperial interlocutor had woven in between the lines:

This will increase both the Poles’ troubles and fear. An unexpected weapon always startles the enemy. The plan will be secret. It will be made known at the right time, and its name should not give anything away. I am not seeking anything for myself with this; if your benefit did not demand it, would I adopt this position, which is more ridiculous than distinguished? It’s a means to achieve our goal, however, and there is one thing I can say: however we resolve matters, we cannot give up Poland. Thus, it must, of course, be weakened or, better, destroyed. (Ibid., 394; translation adapted from Catherine 2004, 330)

Catherine accepted Potemkin’s conclusions. “Pray toil away, Sir Grand Hetman,” she wrote to him indulgently. “You are a most intelligent, good and loyal man, and as for us, we love and honor you” (ibid., 396; Catherine, 332). The ukase naming Potemkin Great Hetman of the Imperial Ekaterinoslav and Black Sea Cossack forces was signed on January 10, 1790, and was quickly disseminated by Potemkin to all of the affected territories (ibid., 901–902). It is hard to say to what degree Potemkin really considered the new title “more ridiculous than distinguished.” At least he deemed it important to appear in a quickly tailored hetman’s uniform, in which dress he long remained in the memory of contemporaries and posterity (Engel’gart
1997, 82–83). It was in this costume, incidentally, that he appeared in the pages of Gogol’s story “The Night Before Christmas” (Gogol’ I, 235).

Potemkin’s plans to incite a rebellion of Ukrainian residents of Poland and, with the help of Cossack troops, to incorporate Poland’s Eastern regions into his hetmanate date to the end of 1789. But as Robert Howard Lord perceptively suggested, they had probably existed even earlier when Potemkin formed the Cossack units and bought up Polish land (Lord 1915, 516). An indirect but important confirmation of this may be found in Derzhavin’s humorous poem “To Fortune” (Na Schastie), written in the spring of 1789, precisely during Potemkin’s first arrival to Petersburg from the south. In this poem Derzhavin allegorically depicted the situation in the then present-day Europe, exhibiting how well-informed he was about all of the nuances of Russian diplomacy. In the opinion of Ia. K. Grot, the poet’s sources of information could have been both Catherine’s secretary, his old acquaintance A. V. Khrapovitskii, as well as his very close friend N. A. L’vov, who served under Chancellor Bezborodko (see Derzhavin I, 247). When listing Fortune’s various acts, which in the poem emblematize Catherine and Russian politics as a whole, Derzhavin in particular wrote that Fortune “swells the Uke in Warsaw” (khokhol v Varshave razduvaet). The meaning of the line becomes transparent if we compare it to Derzhavin’s self-commentary on the line “I v’etsia lokonom khokhol” (and the Uke’s hair is curled) from the same poem. Derzhavin explains that “khokhol” stands for Bezborodko and other Ukrainians “who happily played exalted roles” (ibid., 255).

Insisting on the union with Poland, at the same time Potemkin—“just in case”—prepared to unleash a civil war there. In the very same way, while actively putting forward plans for an intervention by the Cossacks and the partitioning of the kingdom, he kept in reserve a variant of the plan for a Russian-Polish union. “My behavior in Ukraine attracts all of the Poles,” he wrote to the empress in March 1790 (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 401), and six months later he assured her that “the majority” of the Polish nation “is inclined towards us” and that only the “Prussian” Sejm was an obstacle to this natural inclination. At the very end of the year, already having sent Suvorov to storm Izmail, he again

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10 “Khokhol” is a pejorative Russian term for a Ukrainian and refers to the tuft of hair it was customary to leave after having one’s head shaved. (Translator’s note)
insistently urged Catherine to gain the Poles’ sympathy by promising them Moldavia (ibid., 442, 443; Catherine 2004, 361).

The question naturally arises: what was the relationship between these mutually exclusive projects? Can one uncover a single strategic plan in them? In other words, did Potemkin change his vision of Russia’s political goals for opportunistic reasons, or was it a question of finding the best way of implementing these goals? Many contemporaries and later historians have presumed that Potemkin’s motives were mostly of a personal nature, and that he was trying to create an independent power base for himself in Poland in case of Catherine’s death (and in view of the heir Pavel Petrovich’s well-known hatred for him). In 1787 the English emissary Fitzherbert wrote to London that “Perhaps Prince Potemkin will make a Tertium quid11 out of his newly-purchased lands in Poland that will be independent of both Russia and Poland” (Khrapovitskii 1874, 28). Discussions about Potemkin’s similar hopes during the last year of his life are repeated in reminiscences of such varied people as the Polish aristocrat M. Oginski (I, 148) and Potemkin’s relative L. N. Engel’gart (1997, 95).12 According to Engel’gart, rumors of Potemkin’s plans began with his forming the regiment of the Great Hetman’s Mace (Bulava, Polish Bulawa) which was so well equipped that, in essence, it comprised an entire army: “Some supposed that he wanted to become king of Moldavia and Walachia, others—that he wanted to declare himself an independent hetman, and still others thought that he wanted to be king of Poland” (ibid., 94–95).

Potemkin of course knew of these rumors and rejected them with indignation. “Do you really suspect me? It is forgivable for a weak king to think that I want his place. As for me—the devil take them. And it’s a sin if they think I act out of any interests except those of the state,” he wrote to Bezborodko (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 920). Of course one must take any declarations of this sort, especially coming from such a major and experienced politician, with a large dose of caution. Still, Potemkin’s words deserve a certain amount of trust. As the historian A. N. Fateev emphasized (without knowing of this letter), “there is no basis whatsoever … to speak of Potemkin’s secret

11 “Third thing,” i.e., a third element that changes an equation or formula. (Translator’s note.)  
12 For a survey of the sources and literature on this question, see Lord 1915, 512–515. Lord misinterprets the cited passage from Khrapovitskii’s diary and attributes the argument taken from a perlustrated letter of the English emissary to Catherine.
intention to wear the crown of the Piasts. Potemkin bought up Polish land and received the status of a Polish noble in the Sejm. [But] he was hardly so simple-minded as to think that he could get along without Catherine, and he did not ignore the interests of his country. ... [Furthermore,] the king of Poland could only be a Catholic, and Potemkin did not resemble an apostate” (Fateev n.d., 90).

However, if we suppose that the issue was not about the Piasts’ crown but instead concerned hetmanship over the territory of Ukrainian lands in Poland and a series of south-western provinces of the Russian Empire, then that would change the equation. Potemkin himself wrote to Catherine about similar intentions, and consequently had a basis to hope that she would go along with them. Moreover, given the political structure of Poland at the time, with the constantly changing map of confederations and reconfederations, this kind of hetmanship would have had significant independence. This interpretation helps us understand the idea behind the somewhat strange testimony of Potemkin’s niece Countess Branicka, who said that the prince intended “to rule all of the Cossacks, to unite with the Polish army and declare himself king of Poland” (Lord 1915, 513).

In formulating this kind of plan, Potemkin certainly displayed characteristic ambition, but he definitely believed that he was acting in Russia’s highest state interests. In a possible complex union of Russia and Poland, the Ukrainian Cossacks that were under Potemkin’s control would have played a central role, geographically and politically. The proposed structure distinctly recalled the one that was to have arisen as the result of enacting the “Greek Project,” which had foreseen the creation of the kingdom of Dacia between the resurrected Greek and Russian Empires; moreover, its throne at one time had also been earmarked for Potemkin (see Madariaga 1981, 377–388). Now the prince came forward with a new initiative in which he was allotted an even greater role.

If the basis for the “Greek Project” or “Eastern System” that Potemkin advocated as an alternative to Panin’s “Northern System” had been the religious unification of Russia, Greece, and the Danube princedoms, from which it was proposed to create Dacia, the new project (which by analogy one could call the “Western System”) made its basis the fraternal unity of the Slavic peoples. Its living embodiment was the figure of His Serene Highness, who combined in
himself a Polish magnate, a Ukrainian hetman, and the closest associate (according to some, the secret husband\textsuperscript{13}) of the Russian sovereign.

Throughout Potemkin’s career the bard for his victories, celebrations, and undertakings had always been Petrov. But this time Potemkin turned to Derzhavin, which as Grot rightly noted, “is easily explained by the latter’s poetic fame at the time” (Derzhavin I, 407). It was during these years that Derzhavin began to be welcomed at court, and his ode “On the Taking of Izmail” found favor with the empress, who upon meeting the poet said, “I did not know until now that your trumpet is just as loud as your lyre is pleasant” (ibid., IV, 614). This response established the singer of “Felitsa”’s status as an official poet and confirmed his universal popularity on the part the reading public, which had never been especially well-disposed toward Petrov.

I. I. Dmitriev, who became close to Derzhavin at this time, later recalled the somewhat jealous attitude toward the older poet that characterized Derzhavin’s circle of friends: “His [Petrov’s] odes were then greatly respected at court and among many literary folk; but the public hardly knew him, only by hearsay, and Derzhavin and the poets around him, while they didn’t deny Petrov’s lyric talent, emphasized the harshness of his verses rather than their rich ideas, exalted feelings or force of intellect” (Dmitriev 1986, 302).

Taking up Potemkin’s request, Derzhavin felt the need to rely on Petrov’s precedent. In any case, he copied out by hand the ode that Petrov had written for Potemkin’s masquerade in Ozerki in 1779, and also sketched out one of the choruses for the Izmail celebration on the other side of the paper (Derzhavin I, 407). In truth, the task set before Derzhavin was both unfamiliar and complex. While he may have had significantly greater general recognition than Petrov,

\textsuperscript{13} V. S. Lopatin, offering substantial arguments in favor of the old version of Catherine’s secret marriage with Potemkin, calls him her “husband and co-ruler” (Ekaterina i Potemkin 1997, 531, 540 and passim). Earlier, A. N. Fateev used the same terms in his Prague reports (n.d., 34–46). But even if we agree to the first label, one cannot concur that Potemkin was ever “co-ruler” with Catherine. Of course the empress trusted him and valued his talents, but neither according to her ideas, her character nor her political style did she have any need for co-rulers, and she would not have tolerated them at her side. And indeed the material so scrupulously gathered by Lopatin leaves no doubts on this score. In his letters Potemkin proposes, petitions, insists, and begs, but it is Catherine alone who makes all of the decisions, and at times she acts in ways that were not at all pleasing to her correspondent.
and probably a more powerful poetic gift, he did not possess the solid education nor was he such a deep and independent political thinker as his predecessor. And most importantly, he did not have the decades of close communion with Potemkin that Petrov had behind him. In his “Lament on the Demise of Potemkin,” Petrov wrote of the “debates” (pren’ia) he had had with the prince “about Providence and fate, about death and being, about the course of the whole world” (Petrov II, 111; cf. Kochetkova 1999, 425–428).

It is not surprising, then, that the fuller reflection of Potemkin’s late ideas may be found not in Derzhavin’s “Description,” which was still fully oriented on the “Greek Project”\(^\text{14}\) that was already familiar to the author, but rather in Petrov’s odes, written both during the prince’s last years of life as well as after his death. Petrov’s ode “On the Taking of Ochakov” is made up of a monologue by the allegorical Dnieper River which is celebrating the liberation of its estuary from Turkish domination:

> Я сам подвержен был несчастью,  
> Мой желтый брег судьбы властью  
> Постыдной сделан был межой;  
> Поитель Россов, друг их славе,  
> Я с радостью в их тек державе,  
> Неволей кончил век в чужой.  
> Но ныне вполне я восстановлен,  
> О Россы, силой ваших рук.  
> Ог поношения избавлен  
> И нестерпимых сердцу мук.

(I myself experienced misfortune: / By force of fate my yellow shore / Was made a shameful boundary; / Provider of water to Rosses, friend of their glory, / I joyfully flowed through their land, / [But] was forced to finish my course in an alien one. / But today I am fully restored, / Oh. Rosses, by the strength of your hands, / Saved from abuse / And from intolerable torments to the heart.)

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\(^\text{14}\) As is well known, the “Description” aroused Potemkin’s ire. After reading it, wrote Derzhavin, “he ran out of his bedroom in a fury … and galloped off God knows where” (Derzhavin IV, 619–620). Derzhavin, his contemporaries (see Dmitriev 1896, 299) and biographers (see Grot 1997, 397–398; Khodasevich, 1988, 169–170) all gave different explanations for his anger. With necessary caution, one may add to their various hypotheses the suggestion that, at least in part, Potemkin may have been unhappy that Derzhavin did not fully understand his thoughts and intentions.
This stanza describes the transfer of the Dnieper estuary from Turkish to Russian control. With the capture of Ochakov, located in this estuary, the process was completed. However, for a long time the Dnieper still served as the Russian border, or in Petrov’s words, as a “shameful boundary,” not only with Turkey but also with Poland.

Petrov celebrated the final transformation of the Dnieper into a river fully within Russia in 1793 in the ode “On the Integration of Polish Regions into Russia,” written after the Second Partition of Poland, which he interpreted as the fulfillment of the cherished hopes of his late friend Potemkin. Catherine did not want large-scale celebrations on the occasion of the Second Partition. In the foreword to the first edition of the ode, Petrov notes that “concerning this event, however salvific, no service was held, no salutes fired from cannons,” and he is overcome by doubts whether it is necessary “to load ideas with poetic thunder in describing a matter that was completed without any noise,” and whether it would please the empress “to broadcast everywhere with amplification that which is evidently considered of little importance.” The poet was freed from this doubt by the appearance “of the Dnieper, a grandiose god with a wreath on his head, in triumphal garments, holding a long scroll in his hands on which the villages, cities and peoples through which he flows were depicted.” As Petrov writes, “the quality or weakness of the song which I sang [i.e., wrote] rests with the Dnieper—I did not take part in [writing] it and only copied it down” (Petrov 1793, n.p.). Like the Ochakov ode, this poem is structured as an apotheosis of the Dnieper which is celebrating its complete liberation:

Услышав Днепр веленье рока,  
Дабы, сколь логом ни далек,  
Он весь от моря до истока  
Во области Российской тек,  
Чело венками увивает,  
Пресветлу ризу надевает  
И должную воздав хвалу  
Великой Севера Богине,  
Его веселия причине,  
Восходит спешно на скалу.
(The Dnieper, having heard fate’s command, / That however long or remote its channel / From sea to source, he will flow / In the Russian realm; / He drapes his forehead in wreaths, / Dons most bright garments / And, giving deserved praise / To the Great Goddess of the North, / Due to his joyfulness / He hurriedly mounts a crag.)

The final reference is probably to Smolensk, Potemkin’s native city, located in the upper reaches of the Dnieper. Downriver lies Ekaterinoslav, the city founded by His Serene Highness as Russia’s southern capital. It was also along the Dnieper that Catherine had begun her journey to Crimea in 1787, which was the high point of Potemkin’s career and recognition of his achievements as the creator of a new state. Celebrating the annexation to the empire of the last regions bordering the Dnieper, Petrov recalls the empress’s river cruise that heralded the Dnieper’s future position in the heart of the country and transformed its banks into an earthly paradise:

Каков величествен в вершине,  
Коль славен в устии моем,  
Таков теперь в моей средине  
Я живо движусь телом всем.  
Весь с матерью, нет части сирой,  
Весь красной оттенен порфирой;  
Со дня как Боги принесли  
На брег Тя мой, сладчайша Мати,  
Предзнак грядущей благодати  
На ней оливы проросли.

(How majestic at the source, / How glorious in my estuary, / So too am I in my center; / I move vigorously with my entire body. / All within my mother[land], no orphaned part, / All tinted with beautiful porphyry; / Since the day the Gods brought / You to my shore, sweetest Mother, / Olives have grown all over it, / A sign of future plenty.)

It was precisely the Dnieper, uniting the Great Russians, Little Russians and Poles that in Petrov’s rhetoric symbolizes the Russian Empire and that can therefore prophesy about the future Slavic brotherhood, in which Russia is destined to play the leading role:
Приидет некогда то время,
Днепр если может то проречь,
В которое все славянско племя
В честь Норда препояшет меч.
Росс будет телеси главою,
Тронув свой род побед молвою,
Он каждый в рассеяны член,
Собрав в едино, совокупит
И тверд родствами гордо вступит
Меж всех в подсолнечной колен.

(The time will come one day / If the Dnieper can foretell it / On which the entire Slavic tribe / Will gird on sword in honor of the North. / Ross will be the body’s head / Rousing its clan by news of victories, / Every dispersed member / He will gather into one, he will unite / And will proudly take his place, strong with his kin, / Amid all of the tribes in the universe.)

This panslavic utopia of the future unification of Slavs around Russia reserves a special place for Poland which became part of the Russian Empire earlier than the other peoples of one blood:

Но вам, наперсники России,
Поляки, первородства честь;
Вы дни предупредили сии,
Вам должно прежде всех расцвести.
Став с Россом вы в одном составе,
Участвуйте днесь первы в славе,
В блаженстве имени его.

(But to you, confidants of Russia, / Poles, the honor of primogeniture; / You anticipated these days, / [So] you should blossom before the rest. / Having become one entity with Russia, / Enjoy your glory first today, / In the happiness of its name.)

In his summons to Polish-Russian fraternity Petrov achieves truly ecstatic inspiration:
The reality of the Second Partition of Poland had nothing in common with these dreams. Even earlier Catherine had received Potemkin’s ideas with great caution. She did not approve of a Polish-Russian union, or in any case did not think that Russia should make any concessions because she didn’t trust the Poles. Fearing the Cossacks’ anarchy, she thought that Potemkin’s Ukrainian plan could only be set in motion if Prussia and Poland attacked Russia. She did not see particular advantage in the planned partition because she did not want to allow the strengthening of Russia’s worst enemy, whom she believed to be the Prussian king. Apparently, she considered the best variant to be the restoration of the status quo of 1788; if Poland remained a weak and anarchic republic incapable of influencing European politics, Russia would continue to exert unimpeded influence. However, developing events made such a reversion to the past impossible.

On the day after the celebration in the Tauride Palace, a courier from the Russian envoy in Warsaw, Ia. I. Bulgakov, arrived in Petersburg to report that a revolution had taken place there on May 3 (New Style) (AGS I, 851). This revolution was completely unacceptable to Catherine, both because as a result of the political changes the Polish patriotic party that was inimical to
Russia had triumphed and because the empress saw this as the French revolutionary infection coming dangerously close to the Russian border (Madariaga 1981, 420–424). In May and July Catherine wrote two rescripts for Potemkin, who was preparing to go south, regarding the plan of proposed action. In the first of them she sanctioned his projects in principle, while modifying the order and conditions of their realization. Catherine tasked Potemkin with “bringing the nation around to our side” with promises “of helping to unite Moldavia to Poland ... insisting [that it will only happen] at a convenient opportunity.” At the same time, they both knew that such a “convenient opportunity” would not occur insofar as Russian diplomacy had already rejected the demand that Turkey yield Moldavia. In precisely the same way, His Serene Highness’s planned Cossack invasion and the uprising of the Orthodox population of Eastern Poland were supposed to take place only after war with Prussia, Poland, and possibly England, began. In the opinion of some historians, the phrasing of Catherine’s refusal was meant to soothe Potemkin’s pride, since by the time of Catherine’s writing the rescript she already knew that war had been completely taken off the agenda (see Lord 1915, 247; cf. Łojek 1970, 580–581).

The second rescript considered preparation of a confederation of pro-Russian Polish aristocrats who would oppose the decisions taken by the Sejm. Such a confederation would have to turn to Catherine for help in restoring the old constitution, whose guarantor during the First Partition had been Russia. In the extreme version of events, Catherine considered a new partition possible (cf. Ekaterina 1874, 246–258, 281–289).

As the empress had assumed, Russian intervention in Poland began right after signing the peace with Turkey in May, 1792. This occurred at the summons of the so-called Targovitskii Confederation, whose formation Potemkin had begun in Iassy and Bezborodko had continued after Potemkin’s death. However, the role of the Targovitsians was purely formal.

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15 According to J. Łojek, there were arguments in Catherine’s circle about whether it would be preferable to accept the results of the May 3 revolution, that Catherine herself experienced major vacillations on this question, and that it was only the traitorous indecision of the Polish leaders, and first of all that of King Stanisław-Augustus, that drove her to intervention (cf. Łojek 1986, 172–182). Unfortunately, there are no documents that support this hypothesis, including those first published by the historian himself.
Guaranteeing Catherine a pretext for invasion, after that they basically followed along in the rear of the advancing Russian army. And of course, all military actions were carried out by regular Russian troops; Potemkin’s ideas about national Polish brigades and Cossack units that Catherine had refused to sanction had been buried with him.

As for the role in Russian policy on the part of loyal Polish magnates, the makers of the Targovitskii Confederation were simply and cruelly deceived. Having promised them the revival of the former szlachta freemen, Catherine conducted negotiations behind their backs about a new partition with Prussia and Austria (Lord 1915, 271–282; Madariaga 1981, 427–440). In a rescript to Ia. E. Sivers of December 22, 1792, the empress formulated her position on the Polish question with extreme clarity:

We do not concern ourselves so much with this mighty event as much as with the disposition of the current destructive French doctrine that [has spread] so far that in Warsaw have sprung up clubs like those of the Jacobins where this despicable teaching is blatantly preached and from which it could easily spread to all parts of Poland, and consequently also touch the borders of its neighbors. ... By past experience and according to the current disposition of things and minds in Poland, that is, according to the inconstancy and capriciousness of this people, by its proven maliciousness and hatred toward ours, and especially due to the propensity they have shown for the depravity and brutalities of the French, we will never have in them either a tranquil or a safe neighbor unless we lead them into utter impotence and debility. (Solov’ev 1863, 303–304; cf. Bulgakov 1792)

The uprising led by Tadeusz Kosciusko and the Third Partition that followed, which erased Poland from the map of Europe, strengthened just this kind of interpretation of events (Madariaga 1981, 441–454; Lord 1924/1925).

Petrov’s ode that was written on this occasion no longer contained eloquent hopes for Slavic brotherhood. Rather, the final elimination of Poland is figured here as necessary to eradicate the influence of revolutionary France, which was menacing the entire world. Precisely twenty years after the ode on the Kutchuk Kainarji peace, Petrov intensified his earlier framework, but the role of conductors of evil French schemes was now played by Poles and not Turks:
Подобья сущие детей
Им лестны новые за теи.
И были б только чародей,
Они есть жертва их сетей …

В чудовищей преобразились,
Секванским (парижским. — А. З.)
духом заразились.

Like absolute children / New capers flatter them. / And if there only was a sorcerer / They’d be victim to his traps … // They have been turned into monsters, / They’ve been infected with the Sequana [i.e., Parisian] spirit.

This revolutionary spirit that came from France and seized Poland is depicted as a worldwide catastrophe that threatens altars, thrones, people’s personal safety, and ultimately, the existence of the universe:

Поправ священные права,
Грозят срыть храмы и расхитить,
Чужим имуществом насытить
Их алчны руки, рты, чрева.

Грозят во все края достигнуть,
Царей с престолов низложить,
Восстать на Твердь, Творца в ней сдвинуть
И в век законом уложить.
Чтоб все на свете были равны;
Все наглы,хищны, зверонравны.
Когда не так: весь дол трясти,
Поделать пропасти ужасны,
И, кои с ними несогласны.
Живых во аде погрести.

(Petrov II, 165–167)

Having trampled sacred rights / They threaten to plunder and raze temples, / To glut their greedy arms, mouths, bellies / On others’
property. // They threaten to reach all lands / To depose tsars from their thrones, / Rise up against Creation, displace its Creator / And to establish a law forever / That everyone on earth is equal; / They are all rude, predatory, beast-like. / And if not, shake up the entire world, / Create horrible pits / And in this hell bury alive / Those who don’t agree with them.)

The only force able to avert this fatal threat to the whole world order turns out to be Russia who, dependent on the historical experience and mystical support of its heroes, had already once, at the start of the seventeenth century, brought the Sarmatian hydra to heel:

Блеснул, как новых луч светил.  
На мгле, несомой от Эфира,  
Великолепный Михаил [Романов]  
Спускается, и с ним Пожарской,  
Восстановитель власти царской,  
Простерт взор долу обоих;  
И Минин (зри, небесны круги  
Не знатность ставят, но заслуги),  
И Минин смотрит из-за них. (Ibid., 171)

(In the mist brought by the Ether, / Magnificent Mikhail [Romanov] / Shone forth like a ray from new luminaries; / He descends, together with him Pozharskii, / Restorer of tsarist power. / The gaze of both extends to earth; / And Minin (look, the heavenly circles / Value not celebrity but merits) / And Minin looks out from behind them.)\(^{16}\)

Again, ideological intuition did not fail the aging poet. The inventory of metaphors that Petrov left behind was to be actively exploited by Russian politicians and publicists of the next, nineteenth, century.

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\(^{16}\) Prince Dmitrii Pozharskii and the merchant Kuz’ma Minin were heroes of the Time of Troubles who rallied the Russians against the Polish invaders and helped establish the Romanov dynasty (Translator’s note).