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Catherine II's *The Early Reign of Oleg*: Sarti, Canobbio and Pashkevich Working Towards an Ideal

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Catherine II's *The Early Reign of Oleg* (1790) as a demonstrative performance of the sovereign's policy. In the context of Catherine's early nationalistic pride and her 'Greek project', the performance is understood as a synthesis embodying in music the vision of Russia as an Empire ready to receive the heritage of Byzantium, thanks to Sarti's use of modes combined with the Russian folk elements introduced by Canobbio and Pashkevich. In this context, Nikolay L'vov represents the joining link, having theorised that Russian folk music originated from ancient Greek music.

Keywords

Catherine II, Oleg, Russian opera, opera seria, Greek project

For a long time the history of 18th-century Russian musical life was understood as the history of Italian music in Russia, until the appearance of Mikhail Glinka, who was posthumously presented as a lone genius with no predecessors in his country, who single-handedly gave Russia the gift of art music. The watershed position of Glinka's output, in particular of his first opera *A Life for the Tsar* (1836), is still recognized, together with its outdated ideological underpinnings: we have 'true history' only after 1836, while everything before is just 'prehistory.' As a consequence, pre-Glinka music theatre was considered 'imitative', 'pseudo-Russian', and of no real aesthetic worth. This scheme of understanding was perpetuated with particular zeal by the critic Vladimir Stasov, who strove to promote the activities of his fellow countrymen over the foreign *maestri di cappella*, who had certainly dominated the Russian musical life for a long period. This frame of mind faded in the early years of the 20th century, but it was given a new lease of life by Stalin-era musicologists, once nationalism became an important ideological prop for the Soviet Union from the mid-1930s onwards. Moreover, it was established in standard works of Soviet musicology on pre-Glinka opera (e.g. Rabinovich, Gozenpud), and was welcomed almost uncritically by 20th-century scholars such as Rosa Newmarch (1914), Michel-Dimitri Calvocor-

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essi (1944) and Rubens Tedeschi (1980), who inherited their ideas from uncritical readings of Russian secondary sources, and thus became the heirs and spokespersons of Stasov's ideas in the West.

Among the different genres of music practiced in Russia, this traditional vision affected the history of opera most of all, conditioning music historiography in the field of 18th-century opera in Russia. Recent discussions of historiography of opera in Russia (e.g. by Taruskin 1993; 1997 and Frolova-Walker 2007) have spearheaded the revision of this traditional scheme, hence the position according to which the Russian elite was interested in fostering only foreign productions (Calvocoressi 1944) is nowadays overturned (Kostyukhina 2010; Giust 2014).

In my research in the field of opera in the 18th century I have noticed that Catherine II not only supported *opera komicheskaya* as an equivalent of Italian opera *buffa*, French *opéra-comique* or German *Singspiel*, but also contributed directly to the enlargement of its repertoire by writing her own librettos in this genre, a fact that is itself evidence of her support to the development of Russian national theatre. Catherine was the author of five librettos of comic operas: *Fevy* (1786), *Boeslavich, the hero of Novgorod* (1786), *The brave and fearless knight Arkhideich* (1787), *The ill-fated knight Kosometovich* (1789), and *Fedul and his children* (1791).

These librettos, often written in collaboration with the tsarina's secretary Aleksandr Khrapovitsky (who was the author of at least one libretto – *Pesnolyubie*, 1790), have often been judged to be feeble attempts of dramaturgy, also due to the scant knowledge of the language by a woman of German origins, for whom Russian was not a native language. Due mostly to the mentioned prejudices against 18th-century music, combined with the Soviet bias preventing any evaluation of the production of Imperial Russia, these librettos have not been fully understood, so that much work remains to be done by musicologists with regard to this production. Catherine's output deserves to be studied, for instance, as a manifestation of the cultural and political trends of her reign, notably as evidence of the growing national consciousness in its official declination.

Trying her hand at the specific brand of Russian comic opera, she was undoubtedly aware of the resonance her librettos would have as the product of a sovereign, so that they worked as a message about the role she wanted this genre to have in public performances.² The impression that one gets is that the tsarina expected more than “trifles, means of distraction” from her political responsibilities, as Karlinsky wrote (Karlinsky, 1985: 90). This is particularly true if applied

² This idea is supported by Mooser, who acknowledges that her librettos helped in establishing the genre *opera komicheskaya* among the Russian audience (Mooser (II) 1951: 239).

to the two historical dramas written in 1786, *Nachal'noe upravlenie Olega* (The early reign of Oleg) and *Istoricheskoe predstavlenie iz zhizni Ryurika* (Historical representation from the life of Ryurik). Both of these were not only successfully staged, but also printed and translated into French and German, to be acknowledged internationally. On the one hand their conception was possibly influenced by the renewed taste for archaeology and Classical antiquities that had spread across Europe, anticipating Romanticism. On the other hand, they are a further manifestation of Catherine's interest towards history, which she considered to be a means of transmitting the sovereign's ideological message and the image of the State. According to the historian Hans Rogger, alongside language and literature, history had been one of the Russian Academy's primary concerns since the beginning of Catherine's reign, and the collection and publication of treasured memorials of the deeds of ancestors were among its foremost tasks (Rogger 1960).

This paper focuses Catherine's *The Early Reign of Oleg*. As stated in the complete title, it is an "imitation of Shakespeare without observing the usual rules of theatre". In the play the classical unities are completely ignored, in particular the unity of place, the action being set in Moscow, Kiev, and Constantinople. However, this freedom from the rules of classical theatre seems to be exactly what, according to Khrapovitsky, casts the performance in the genre of opera. On 6 September 1789, he noted in his journal: "Nous verrons quel succès aura Oleg? Il n'y a pas d'unité de lieu. C'est plutôt un opéra" (Gennady 1990: 205). The collocation of the play in this genre is nonetheless limited by the absence of the typical forms of aria and recitative. It comprises rather a quick and heterogeneous succession of spoken dialogues interspersed with music numbers, often in the form of choruses or instrumental pieces.

The performance was premiered on 15 October 1790³ at the Hermitage theatre, in the presence of a very select audience, and with an extraordinarily pompous staging (Daudet 1907). It was accompanied by the publication of the libretto, issued in Saint Petersburg in 1791 at the government's expenses, together with the full score of the play (Canobbio et al. 1791). This publication, as we shall see, is at the same time a rare printed testimony to the coeval musical production and a declaration of intent. In 1893, the score was reprinted by Jurgenon in Moscow (Canobbio et al. 1893).

³ In other sources *the first staging is dated 26 October 1790*. Findeyzen gives 22 October 1790 (Findeisen 1933: 338). According to Larisa Kirillina, the first three stagings took place on 25, 27 and 29 October. In November and December 1791 the opera was played six times at the Kamenny (Stone) Theatre for a wider audience (Kirillina 2013: 53).

The Early Reign of Oleg is a celebration of pre-Petrine Russia, in line with the new form of nationalism, or rather discovery (or re-discovery, or creation *ex novo*) of national values that characterized the second part of Catherine's rule.

In the plot, after the death of Rurik, his son Igor', prince of Novgorod, rules under the regency of his uncle Oleg. The play rapidly presents the foundation of Moscow by Oleg (Act I), his journey to Kiev in order to respond to the city's emissaries who reported Oskold's will to instil Christianity in the realm without the authorization of the central power; Oskold's departure from Kiev (Act II); the wedding between Igor' and Prekrasa (Act III); Oleg's campaign against Constantinople (Act IV), his victory, and the celebrations organized by the Greek Emperor Leo in his honour, with dances and the staging of three scenes drawn from Euripides's *Alcestis* (act III, scenes 1, 2 and 3). In the final scene, Oleg hangs the shield of Igor' in the hippodrome, so that it can be admired by his descendants, and Emperor Leo declares him to be wise and courageous ruler.

The material for the text was drawn, as stated in the anonymous introduction that precedes the score (Canobbio et al. 1791: *Preduvedomlenie* /Foreword/: pages not numbered), from Catherine's *Notes on the Russian History* (1787). This suggests that the performance was intended to represent the tsarina's vision of history, and thus, of politics. Indeed, the performance extolled Russian military power – the recent victories in the second Turkish War of 1787–91 and the preparation of the invasion of Constantinople: in 1792 the Yassy treaty was to be signed, establishing the Russian rule in Bessarabia and Caucasus and the political liquidation of the Crimean Khanate, which was annexed to the Russian Empire as a buffer zone serving to protect the southern boundaries from the Turks.

The expansion of the Russian Empire during Catherine's reign was one of the main criteria of identification of the country that the Empress tried to put emphasis on. According to the historian Richard Wortman, "Imperial patriotism with a Great Russian coloration was a theme of late eighteenth-century history and literature. Catherine the Great, the only Russian ruler since Rurik to have no Russian parent, extolled the glory of the Great Russian elite, who had achieved the conquest of empire" (Wortman 2006: 66). The emphasis on conquests was part of the image of Russia that Catherine kept constructing during her reign. The annexation of the Southern territories was celebrated with the six-month journey she undertook in 1786–87, during which the tsarina dramatized the military and cultural successes of her reign. In the synthesis offered by Wortman,

Catherine believed that such displays would refute foreign beliefs that Russia was a great desert. [...] The spectacle of happiness and transformation was presented to an audience of court dignitaries and foreign envoys – of Britain, France, and Austria.

On the way to and from the new territories, Catherine participated in numerous staged demonstrations of mutual fealty between herself and the Russian nobility (Wortman 2006: 70).

The expansion was accompanied by emphatic statements of Russia's equivalence with ancient Empires. According to Wortman, "Russia's expansion to the south was glorified not merely in terms of national greatness of interest, but as a recreation of Hellenic antiquity. Poets invoked Greek referents to glorify the southern conquests" (Ibid: 68).

This trend was possibly recognized and carried on by Western authors in order to pay homage to Russian sovereigns: on the occasion of their journey undertaken in 1781–82,⁴ Catherine's son and heir Pavel Petrovich and his spouse Mariya Fyodorovna were greeted in Parma with the staging of *Alessandro e Timoteo* (Mocchetti 1816; Pasolini Zanelli 1883). The opera was written by Count Carlo Castone Della Torre di Rezzonico⁵ and set to music by Giuseppe Sarti, who at that time was working as *maestro di cappella* at Milan Cathedral, before leaving for Saint Petersburg in 1784 (Pasolini Zanelli 1883).⁶ The urge to establish a link with Greek musical culture was expressed by the librettist himself on two occasions. The former is the opera's *Argument*, a preface to the libretto printed in 1782, and reprinted in the full collection of the poet's work edited in the 19th century by Francesco Mocchetti (Mocchetti 1816). The latter is a commentary by the author himself, entitled *Observations on the 'dramma' Alessandro e Timoteo*, printed in the same collection (Ibid: 243-318). Moreover, in an ar-

⁴ In September 1781 the Grand Duke of Russia Pavel Petrovich and his second wife, the Grand Duchess Mariya Fyodorovna, undertook a journey in Western Europe, which was to last fourteen months. The royal couple travelled under the pseudonym of 'the Count and Countess Severny' (of the North). The couple were well known to be enthusiastic about music, and so they were honoured with important musical events: among the most famous works dedicated to them there figure Joseph Haydn's String Quartets Op. 33, nicknamed the 'Russian Quartets', premiered on Christmas Day 1781 at the Grand Duchess Viennese apartment. A day earlier in Joseph's palace in Hofburg the couple assisted in a rivalry in keyboard virtuosity between Mozart and Clementi (Brover-Lubovsky 2013: 68; Macek 2012; Murara 2011).

⁵ A polymath with profound knowledge in archaeology, mathematics, physics and philosophy, Carlo Castone Della Torre di Rezzonico (1742–1796) was the most outstanding local figure in letters, and a good violin player too (Brover-Lubovsky 2013: 70).

⁶ I would like to thank Professor Andrea Chegai of the Department of Greek-Latin, Italian and stage-musical studies of University La Sapienza of Rome for the reference to this opera and its correlated texts.

ticle advertising the forthcoming premiere, the *Gazzetta di Parma* of March 29, 1782 stated that

The ancient Greek modes will be presented with all the modern knowledge, and will be joined, as in those distant times, with poetry and dance. Thus it can be said that this drama can be defined as an effort of the music and of Italian arts to approach that of the Greeks, and also to acquire confidence in those marvels reportedly done by Timotheus in the epoch of Alexander (Brover-Lubovsky 2013: 68).⁷

Political motivations are not mentioned in these texts, but references to great rulers of the past were a typical way in which *opera seria* celebrated modern sovereigns, and the references to the similarity between ancient tragedy and opera in the libretto recalls the aesthetic choices Sarti was to apply in *Oleg* almost a decade after *Alessandro e Timoteo*. Moreover, it was after being highly impressed by Sarti's opera in Parma, that the Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich suggested to his mother to offer Sarti a position as director of the imperial chapel in Saint Petersburg in order to replace Giovanni Paisiello, who was to leave Russia in 1783.

Even though the couple's voyage had no political aims, the idea of recalling the Eastern question and Russian rivalry with Turkey for dominance on the southern territories possibly also inspired the commission of Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail*, which was initially foreseen as part of the festivities planned at Viennese National Singspiel for the visit of the Russian couple scheduled for the middle of September. Even clearer is the reference to ancient Greece in the operas that were actually performed on that occasion: Gluck's *Iphigenie en Tauride* and *Alceste*.

Depicting an event taken from the early history of Russia (Rus'), *The Early Reign of Oleg* dramatized Catherine's preparation for the famous but yet unrealised "Greek project", which was intended to revive the Greek Empire from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, and to put Catherine's grandson Konstantin Pavlovich (1779–1831) – Pavel Petrovich's son – on the Greek throne. The idea never received public

⁷ In the *Argomento*, Della Torre di Rezzonico recalls the use of Greek modes, namely the Phrygian and the Lydian, with which the ancient Greek poet Timotheus used to arouse emotions in Alexander the Great (Della Torre di Rezzonico 1782: viii). Brover-Lubovsky and Kirillina demonstrate in their essays that in order to respond to the Greek modes mentioned in Rezzonico's text, Sarti used the ethical and emotional qualities of the dithyramb and ode, coupled with their inherent poetic meters, but he did not actually recreate the authentic tonal structures – an approach that was common to the contemporary aesthetics of the revival of ancient music (Brover-Lubovsky 2013; Kirillina 2013; some discussion Sarti's use of Greek modes can be found in Levidou-Romanou-Vlastos 2016, notably in the contribution authored by Marina Frolova-Walker).

formulation, but was fully expressed by Catherine in her letter to Joseph II, dated 10 September 1782, and discussed by the tsarina in her correspondence with her former favourite and secret husband Grigory Potyomkin, particularly during the second Russo-Turkish war. As evidence of the existence of the project, and in accordance with it, the birth of Konstantin Pavlovich was celebrated with the forging of a new coin showing the image of the Saint Sophia Cathedral on the reverse; Greek poetry was recited in the original on special events dedicated to his birth. The Grand Duke was raised by a Greek nanny, and his first servants and childhood friends were Greek. These circumstances underline the concreteness of Catherine's project: since his birth, her grandson was prepared to become the emperor of the restored Byzantine Empire.

As I will try to demonstrate, the music of the play reflects these two thematic moments present in the play: the proto-nationalism of the second part of Catherine's rule and the reference to ancient Greek as an ideal empire.

The Empress commissioned the music from her *maestri di cappella*. As Khrapovitsky recalls in his memoirs, the music was initially requested from Domenico Cimarosa. In 1789 he composed a *Chorus of warriors*, possibly intended for this performance. On 5 September, 1789, Khrapovitsky records in his diary that the Empress did not appreciate the chorus, and decided to send the text of *Oleg* to Potyomkin, in order to have it set to music by Sarti.⁸ The music was finally entrusted to Giuseppe Sarti, Carlo Canobbio⁹ and Vasily Pashkevich.

⁸ Cimarosa's chorus for *Oleg* was not appreciated: "Cela ne peut aller: I have sent *Oleg* to the Prince, in order for Sarti to compose it" (Gennady 1990: 205). Moreover, a reference to the commission can be read in a letter to Potyomkin dated 3 December 1789: "Moreover, my friend, I beg you to remember, in your free time, to order Sarti to set to music the choruses for *Oleg*. I have one of his choruses and find it very good, while here they cannot compose so well. Please, do not forget" (Lopatin 1997: No. 1020). In November 1790 Sarti was paid for the music on the occasion of the third performance of the opera: "With this courier I send to Sarti 10000 roubles and a present for the music for *Oleg*. Today *Oleg* is going to be staged for the third time in the city, it has a great success, and on Sunday all the places were sold out. The performance is, as everyone acknowledges, really unprecedented" (Lopatin 1997: No. 1092).

⁹ Violin player, composer and music director, Carlo Canobbio was probably born in Venice (in 1741?), where he was initially associated to Luigi Marescalchi as a publisher, and later as a ballet composer. In 1773 he gave two ballets for S. Samuele Theatre: *L'eroico amor d'Alceste* and *La pastorella impertinente*. Two years later (1775) he gave *Andromeda e Perseo*, and in 1776 *Andromaca*, a ballet included in Sarti's opera *Farnace*, again for S. Samuele Theatre, where he worked as a music director and violin player. In 1778 he composed the ballet *La schiava fedele* on G. Amendola's scenario, and some other small vocal works. When, on 24 February 1779 he performed as a violin player together with the singer Anna Morichelli-Bosello in Trieste, he was announced as future artist of the Russian empress's theatre, as annotated by a contemporary. He was engaged by the Russian Court on 30 May 1779 as director of the Italian opera and composer of ballet music. He wrote the music score for the ballet that were introduced

Canobbio composed the music for the overture, the five entr'actes and a march in the third act; Pashkevich composed the three choruses of act III, whereas Sarti was the author of the four great choruses and the final scenes of act V, that is the scenes drawn from Euripides' *Alceste* (Act III, scenes 1, 2 and 3 of the tragedy).

Canobbio was responsible for the most stylistically neutral elements of the score. In any event, he introduced Russian folk themes, such as the traditional tune *Kamarinskaya* in the entr'acte to act III. Here is an excerpt from the 1893 piano reduction, which shows that the composer presented the tune in the rhythm of a regular court minuet. The theme is worked out in variations that anticipate Glinka's custom known as 'changing-background' or 'ostinato' variations ('Glinka variations' to Russian and Soviet musicologists), as showed for instance in his *Overture* for orchestra of the same name (1848):

Example 1. C. Canobbio, *The Early Reign of Oleg*, Entr'acte to act III, bars 1–4 (Canobbio et al. 1893: 27).



in Paisiello's *L'idolo cinese* (Tsarskoe Selo, 30 August 1779) and *Alcide al bivio* (Court theatre at the Winter Palace, 6 December 1780). In 1781 he gave the great ballet *Don Juan*, in three acts, on a scenario by Francesco Rosetti. After a period of activity in Italy, during which he created the ballet *Cupido trionfatore* for Antonio Pio's *Nettuno ed Egle* (Venice, 1783), and *La discesa d'Ercole all'Inferno*, danced during the staging of Francesco Antonelli's *Catone in Utica* (Naples, 1784), Canobbio went back to St. Petersburg in 1784 and created some music for the 'dramma giocoso' *Amore artigiano*, on Goldoni's libretto. The indication on the libretto, issued in St. Petersburg in 1785, suggests that Canobbio composed the music for the opera, but it is more likely that he composed, as usual, the music for the ballets. In fact, the *Archives of the Imperial Theatres* record an opera with the same title, the music of which was ascribed to the Czech composer Florian-Leopold Gassmann, given in Vienna in 1767 and in the Russian capital in 1785–86. On 20 November 1789 Canobbio set to music the ballet *Arianna e Bacco*, in one act, the scenario of which had been conceived by Giuseppe Canziani. After composing the music of *Oleg* Canobbio created the ballet *Piramo e Tisbe*, in four acts on a scenario by Giuseppe Canziani (St. Petersburg's public theatre, 20 September 1791). In the same period, due to the difficult financial conditions of the Court's theatres, Canobbio lost his position of music director, while keeping those of ballet composer and first violin in the Court's orchestra. When in 1795 the Italian composer Gennaro Astaritta arrived in the capital and took with him the new private troupe of opera *buffa*, Canobbio continued to work as a music director for that troupe's stagings. In 1797 he issued his *Six sonates pour la guitarre accompagnées d'un violon avec sourdine, oeuvre II*, whereas in 1803 he gave his last work, the 'ballet héroico-pantomime en 5 actes' *Castor et Pollux*, by Charles Le Picq, the scenario of which was issued the same year in St. Petersburg. He died in St. Petersburg on 6 March 1822.

Pashkevich's three-part female choruses, which set to music the wedding between Igor' and Prekrasa (Act III), recall other similar moments of *devichnik* (a hen party) in some of the coeval comic operas, such as Ablesimov's *The Miller Magician, Cheat and Matchmaker* (1779) or his *Saint-Petersburg Bazaar* (1782):

Example 2. V. Pashkevich, *The Early Reign of Oleg*, Act III, First chorus – vocal parts, bars 1–10 (Canobbio et al. 1893: 28)

Larghetto.

Сопрано 1. ЖЕНСКИЙ ХОРЪ

Сопрано 2.

Контральто.

1 Пе - ре - кат - но крас -
 2. - ре - хо - жа на -
 3. - дилась за ду - бо - вый столъ за

Пе - ре - кат - но крас -
 Пе - ре - хо - жа на -
 - дилась за ду - бо - вый столъ за

- но сол - ныш - ко, пе - ре - кат - но, и
 - ша по - дру - жинь - ка, гор - ни - цы во гор - ни -
 скатертьми за бра - ны - ми, си - дю - чи о - на за

- но сол - ныш - ко, пе - ре - кат - но, и
 - ша по - дру - жинь - ка, гор - ни - цы во гор - ни -
 скатертьми за бра - ны - ми, си - дю - чи о - на за

Russian tunes could not have been excluded from the most Russianized section of the plot, and in order to give the piece the necessary *colour locale* Pashkevich included three folksongs in the choruses. The use of folkloric elements by Canobbio and Pashkevich is not only due to the coeval vogue of popular tunes. It serves also as a display of the aforementioned political trend of Catherine's rule. *Oleg* can thus be considered as a sort of manifesto of an ideological moment in the reign of Catherine II.

Within this proto-nationalistic frame, *Oleg* shows some peculiar features that cast the staging in the more precise ideological moment of the mentioned "Greek project". These features can be found in the music by Giuseppe Sarti.

The composer was responsible for the four solemn choruses of Act V, whose texts were borrowed from Mikhail Lomonosov's poetry,

as well as for the scenes drawn from the Greek tragedy – Euripides’s play within the play staged at the hippodrome of Constantinople. In his music setting, Sarti resorted to the ancient Greek modes. In modern times, his choice was criticised by Calvocoressi, who, perhaps recalling the recollections of count Esterházy, stated that the composer gave “proof of considerable rigidity and certain arrogance” (Calvocoressi 1947: 32). And yet, according to Bella Brover-Lubovsky,

Notwithstanding the Russian subject matter and those folk musical elements deliberately employed by Sarti’s colleagues in order to construct a national identity, this stylized representation of ancient Greek music was conceived as the artistic apex of the entire work (Brover-Lubovsky 2007: 275)

Calvocoressi must not have fully understood the reasons that stood as the basis of Sarti’s choice, which I am going to suggest here. Sarti’s idea and its legitimacy are declared in an explanatory note that precedes the score, apparently written by the composer himself and translated into Russian by the ethnographer, writer and architect, Nikolay A. L’vov. This commentary exists in two versions – French and Russian. The former is the manuscript entitled *Eclaircissement sur la Musique composée pour Oleg* (Clarification of the Music composed for *Oleg*), housed at the Civic Library of Faenza – Sarti’s hometown (Sarti, without date). The latter is printed as an introduction to the full score published in 1791. It carries the Russian title of *Ob’yasnenie* (Explanation), and it is the exact translation of the French text. In this commentary, the author upholds his choice stating that: “The scene from Euripides, for its place and nature, must be represented according to the ancient Greek taste, so that also the music must observe that character; therefore I have composed completely Greek music, in regard to the vocal parts [...]” (Canobbio et al. 1791: iii). Further in the text the author clarifies single dramatic moments and the relative modes chosen for their music setting, with abundant references to ancient sources.

Sarti’s artistic maturation had occurred in a local spirit that developed a cultural tradition of glorifying ancient music and blaming the progress of modern music for losing both the moral purpose to which the ancient Greeks had destined it and the quality previously reached by means of “pureness and simplicity”.¹⁰ Described by his contemporar-

¹⁰ For instance, the author of *Alessandro e Timoteo* Carlo Castone della Torre di Rezzonico, wrote in the preface to the printed libretto (*Argomento*), that “the distinguished maestro [Sarti – A. G.] will make evident the impossibility of reaching the Greeks, until the powerful melody which dominated the souls with its pureness and simplicity, will be corrupted by the simultaneous harmony”. Moreover, in the same text the Italian poet recalls that “the most learned Brown with an exact series of incontrovertible facts proved that the three sisters Arts [melody, dance and poetry – A. G.], which for a long time were not being divided by the ancient people, were separated by the development

ies as one of the most learned composers of his epoch, he had studied with Francescantonio Vallotti, who represented the Pythagorean branch in North-Italian musical thinking, and later with Giambattista Martini (Padre Martini), the foremost adept of ancient music revival. As Brover-Lubovsky points out, as a disciple of such maestros Sarti was well acquainted with the Greek heritage (Brover-Lubovsky 2007, 2013).

Meanwhile, other reasons, more consistent to the content of the text, explain the Greek element of *Oleg's* music.

In his article *M. I. Glinka's Ruslan and Lyudmila. For the 50th anniversary of this opera on the stage*, published in the same year of the 19th-century edition of *Oleg's* score, Vladimir Stasov pointed out Sarti's attempt at introducing in the themes features belonging to the ancient melodies – Greek and sacred. Although considering Sarti's attempt a failure, due to the insufficiency of the composer's talent and creative strength (!), Stasov pointed out his merit toward the history of Russia, and saw it as an important precedent to the use of *kant* in 19th-century opera, suggesting the possibility that the Italian maestro exerted some influence on Glinka (Stasov 1893)¹¹.

Moreover, the Russian critic casts serious doubts on Sarti's actual authorship of the idea, suggesting that Nikolay L'vov was not a simple translator of the explanatory note, but its real creator, the composer being a simple executor of his idea (Stasov 1893). In modern times his theory was definitely accepted by Mooser and Margery Stomne Selden (Mooser 1951 (III); Kirillina 2013). Nowadays there is no evidence, as far as I know, to attest or deny this theory, apart from some considerations: on the one hand hardly Sarti could have supported his cultivated introduction while being 'exiled' in Crimea as he was when the music was written¹²; on the other hand, the manuscript actually exists, and, although it carries no autograph signature, it attests that the composer edited the text himself. If we assume that

of the civilian society; therefore the Music among Modern people lost its force and honour, of which it was charged by the laws of the Maestros – the simplicity of costumes and the tempered balance of the parts that formed it". The poet considers opera as the only way to get closer to that "unreachable excellence in which the Greeks stand out" (Della Torre di Rezzonico 1781: *Argomento*, pages not numbered).

¹¹ Both this late publication of *Oleg's* score and the link established by Stasov between Greek (mediated by Sarti) and Russian music are in line with the second flowering of ancient Greece that Russian culture experienced from the 1890s on, which has been pointed out by Marina Frolova-Walker, who also consider Catherine II's *Oleg* as part of the trend of 'imagining antiquity' that characterized the late 18th century. Frolova-Walker, Frolova-Walker 2016: 2–34.

¹² At this time Sarti, who had been hired as Kapellmeister in St. Petersburg in 1784, held no position at the Court chapel, having left the city due to the rivalry with the singer Luisa Todi (Pasolini Zanelli 1883, Mooser 1951). In 1787 he was hired by Prince Potyomkin, and followed him in his estates in the South of Russia. After the success gained with *Oleg* and Potyomkin's death, occurred in the following year, he returned to the capital, and in 1793 was taken on again as court Kapellmeister (Kirillina 2013, Pasolini Zanelli 1883).

L'vov is the inventor or co-author of the text, some considerations emerge that deserve our attention.

In the years when the opera was prepared and staged, L'vov was working on his *Collection of Russian Popular Songs*, published in 1790, for which he gathered tunes that were to be arranged by Johann Pratsch, and prepared the introductory text. L'vov was a great admirer and connoisseur of ancient Greek culture and of its music, and in the introduction to the collection (*On Russian Folk Singing*) he draws a parallel between the Russian tunes he was studying and their possible origin from Greek music:

The ancient Greeks developed music from the Egyptians, together with other arts, taking it to such perfection, [...] that its effect seems to us a miracle or the mirage of a miracle. They divided their music into Theoretical or Intellectual, and Practical or Performed. The latter was in turn divided into two branches, Melody and Rhythmic, that is Melody and Harmony. This distinction of the music made by the ancient Greeks fits much naturally also to our popular singing. We call Harmonic the drawn-out songs [*prot'yazhnye* – A. G.], and Melodic the dance songs [*plyasovye* – A. G.].

[...] For the pleasure of the lovers of ancient music Father Kircher and Mr Burette, after long and hard research found and transcribed in modern notation two fragments of ancient Greek music – the Hymn of Nemesis and Pindar's Ode. Having deeply studied the latter, we find out with wonder that in our popular singing we inherited from the ancient Greeks not only its distinction into two parts, but also considerable similarities of their Melody and composition of the drawn-out songs: because our ancient song No. 34 ["The hawk soars aloft" "Vysoko sokol letaet"] and many others begin with the entry of one voice, and then the whole chorus responds. Pindar's Ode is structured like this, having the character of singing, which the Italians call 'Canto fermo'. A great part of our drawn-out songs have the same character (Belyaev 1955: 38–9).

L'vov points out the similarity of other genres of popular songs to Greek ancient music:

Our *svyatochnye* and *podblyudnye* songs demonstrate once more that in our popular singing we absorbed much from the Greeks. The ancient Greek game and song still known nowadays under the name of Klidon is the same as our *podblyudnye* songs. [...]

To the Russian Klidon the Slavs added their favourite refrain, which the Greek did not have: they repeatedly sang, and we too, "slava" [glory], which is the main divinity of the Slavic people, the name of which they inherited from their great deeds, and which they often used not only in songs, but also in proper names for people. "Zhiv zhiv kurilka" [The ember is alight, is alight], too, is a Greek game (Belyaev 1955: 41).

This idea was later continued by Guthrie in his *Dissertations sur les Antiquités de Russies* (1795), in which the myths, rites, and other Russian customs were, as the full title reads, “compared to similar objects among the Ancients, and notably among the Greeks” (Guthrie 1795). In the preface to his work, Guthrie expansively refers to the considerable personal interest Catherine herself had in scholarly research, focusing on the relationships between ancient Greek and Russian art. In turn, these theories recall similar research that was being developed in the field of linguistics, which aimed at demonstrating the relationship between the Russian and the Greek language.

The relationship between ancient Greek music and Russian folksong, in which L’vov and Guthrie believed, appears to be used in *The Early Reign of Oleg* in order to embody Catherine’s own interest in the cultural link between Russian and Ancient Greek empires, which was a legitimization of her geopolitical project. The passage from folk quotation to its Greek ancestor in the opera seems to represent a wider vision of Russia as the Empire it was to become, folksong having ascended to a wider, *universal* dimension. According to Lurana Donnels O’Malley, notably the performance of *Alcestis* “reveals the apparatus of Catherine’s ownership of the display”:

By emphasizing the containment of Euripides within *Oleg*, she also emphasizes the containment of Russia’s historical past within her own contemporary Empire. One has only to raise a curtain to be drawn into ninth-century Byzantium, and to raise yet another curtain to be transported to ancient Greece. Time, culture, space, style – all are collapsed and contained by the boundaries of the performance of *Oleg* for which Catherine herself raised the curtain (O’Malley 2006: 166).

In this sense, the idea of combining Greek modes with Russian folksong appears consistent with the entire project of the opera, and more generally with the wider idea of kinship between the two Empires that characterized Catherine’s ideology.

The form of this performance too, staged with magnificence and including large masses of extras and singers for the choruses, recalls that of a Baroque spectacle and the manner of Gluck’s *tragédie lyrique*. At the same time, it testifies to the widened concept of ‘people’ that had developed from Anna Ioannovna’s time on, which was gradually including the nation in the rhetoric of happiness and love as addressee of this early idea of Empire.

By the end of the century, Russian Opera – it being understood that *Oleg* can only partially be included in the genre, – seemed to have replaced Italian *seria* and its most distinguished exponents in

its function as a vehicle for the ‘scenario of power,’ and in the celebrative role it played when it was imported to the country. A process that explains also the non-exclusively Italian commission for the music, which included the composer Pashkevich as the leading figure of Russian musical identity. While the most distinguished Italian maestros had left Russia and the Italian Court troupe had been disbanded in 1791 due to financial troubles, by the end of the 18th century a first loop seems to close down in the history of Italian opera at the Russian Court. Even if Italian music was going to play a key role for some time still in the musical life of the Russian country, this was going to be achieved by different protagonists in different ways.

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Ана Ђусић

РАНА ВЛАДАВИНА ОЛЕГА КАТАРИНЕ II:
САРТИ, КАНОБИО И ПАШКЕВИЧ
У СТРЕМЉЕЊУ КА ИДЕАЛУ

(Резиме)

Опера *Рана владавина Олега* је други покушај Катарине II на пољу историјске драме. Постављена је у Ермитаж театру 1790, на музику Карла Канобија, Ђузепе Сартија и Василија Пашкевича; њено извођење било је праћено објављивањем оркестарске партитуре. У оквиру партитуре штампано је *Објашњење*, које је потписао Сарти (а на руски вероватно превео Николај Љвов), у којем је елаборирана употреба античких модуса у музици ове опере, тачније у сцени из Еурипидове *Алчестје* укључене у пети чин као „представа у представи”.

Сматран једним од најученијих композитора своје генерације, Сарти се интересовао за рестаурирање наслеђа античке грчке музике. Сарти је већ претходно користио античке модусе 1782. године, када је компоновао музику на либрето *Alessandro e Timoteo* грофа Карла Гастонеа дела Тора ди Рецоника у Парми. Овом приликом, референце на грчку културу биле су у вези са руским интересовањем за јужне територије, а само извођење је уприличено поводом посете Катариноног сина Павела Петровича са супругом.

У опери *Олеџ* позивање на античку културу је још јасније, а употребу модуса је могуће објаснити демонстративном природом опере, која је изражавала царску политику. Извођењем је слављена руска војна моћ, скорашњи успеси у рату против Турака и припрема за инвазију на Константинопољ, а са дугорочним циљем реализације Катариноног „грчког пројекта”, који је подразумевао рестаурацију Источног римског царства и постављање Константина Павловича на његов трон. На плану културе, овај политички тренд охрабрио је истраживање аналогичности између Руског царства и античких империја – што је био један од одлучујућих фактора позитивне самоидентификације руске државе, као и легитимизације власти њене „немачке царице”.

Из ове визуре, употреба грчких модуса, комбинованих са руским народним темама инкорпорисаним у Канобијеву партитуру и са женским хоровима у руском стилу које је Пашкевич компоновао за сцене венчања у трећем чину, могу се интерпретирати као конзистентни са идеолошком садржином либрета. Фигура Николаја Љвова такође се указује као спона између руских и грчких елемената, пошто је Љвов у предговору своје *Збирке руских народних њесама* спекулисао да руска народна музика потиче од античке грчке музике. Упркос томе што је компонована „шесторучно”, музику за *Олега* не треба посматрати као пастиш, већ као синтезу која је требало да демонстрира сродност између две државе, односно визију Русије као царства спремног да прихвати културно и политичко наслеђе Византије.

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