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## Political Theology of Baroque Ruler: The Case of the Coronation Book of Empress Elizabeth of Russia

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**Abstract:** The study analyses the political theology and imagery of a female Russian ruler in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the context of the European political discourses on feminine rulers during the baroque period. The coronation ritual of Empress Elizabeth (ruled 1741–1761, crowned 25 April 1742) reflected in the coronation book (1744) illustrates the transition of European images of a baroque feminine ruler into the semiotics of westernized Russian absolutism. Elizabeth appears in the court media (sermons, engravings in the coronation book, poems, etc.) as the natural, God-given mother of all Russians, saving Orthodoxy from the political chaos of the previous rule, combining both masculine and feminine images of a ruler. The image of Elizabeth in the sermon by Archbishop of Novgorod Ambrosii illustrates a Russian variation of the political liturgy of absolutist culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** absolutism, baroque, mythology, representation, theatricality


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## Политическая теология правителя эпохи барокко: пример из коронационной книги императрицы Елизаветы Петровны

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**Аннотация:** В исследовании анализируются политическая теология и образность русской правительницы первой половины XVIII века в контексте европейских политических дискурсов о правительницах эпохи барокко. Ритуал коронации императрицы Елизаветы Петровны (годы правления 1741–1761, была коронована 25 апреля 1742 г.), отраженный в коронационной книге (1744 г.), показывает переход европейских образов правительницы эпохи барокко в семиотику вестернизированного русского абсолютизма. Елизавета предстает в придворных материалах (проповедях, гравюрах в коронационной книге, стихах и др.) как ниспосланная Богом мать всех русских, спасающая Православие от политического хаоса прежнего правления, сочетающая в себе как мужской, так и женский образы правителя. Образ Елизаветы в проповеди архиепископа Новгородского Амвросия иллюстрирует русский вариант политической литургии культуры абсолютизма XVIII века.

**Ключевые слова:** абсолютизм, барокко, мифология, репрезентация, театральность

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## Introduction

Anna Leopoldovna, the mother of the only male heir to the Russian throne, Ivan VI, was proclaimed the regent to her son in November 1740 and overthrown by Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter I on 25 November 1741. On 28 February 1742, the Archbishop of Novgorod, Ambrosii (Andrey Yushkevich), addressed the new Empress with a festive sermon in the Kremlin. The service was an introductory part of the coronation festivities planned for 25 April of the same year. As one of the main religious elements of the coronation ritual, the sermon combined various important political messages framed in the language of Russian Orthodoxy, supporting the image of a God-given ruler. The sermon's key message focused on the restoration of political order as God's grace upon Russia after the so-called turbulent German rule of Anna Leopoldovna. During the sermon, the physical body of Empress Elizabeth was transformed into a metaphysical body that brought peace and stability and ended the political chaos of the previous rule. The sermon can be analysed as a part of the baroque semiotics of political theology and baroque female ruler glorification.

The festivities, which began on 28 February and lasted until 7 June 1742, became the prime event in the Russian imperial court that decade and were reported in various media. The range of associated media and events included an official coronation book, featuring detailed text descriptions and images of the coronation ritual, festive poems, masked balls and the construction of allegorical statues and triumphal arcs on the ruler's path to and from churches, palaces, and open-air spaces. These spaces became stages of power and, thus, disseminated the new ruler's political message to Russian society, foreign courts, and observers.

Various scholars, such as Baehr, Wortman, Ospovat, Marker, and Zhivov<sup>1</sup> have analysed Russian absolutist political culture positing that Russian imperial imagery and political performance during the first half of the 18th century provide significant evidence of an attempt to westernize Russian absolutist culture. To analyse the political theology of the new Russian Empress's coronation ceremony, it is necessary to place it within the broader context of the representation of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century European baroque rulers.

The authors suggest to approach the topic of the article applying the methodological frame formulated within the so-called performative turn. Formulated within the paradigm of culture as "acted document" by anthropologist Clifford Geertz<sup>2</sup>, the performative turn went further in its attempt to enlarge the understanding of culture as text which is staged and performed in public space, as a result of interaction of various hierarchically structured actors. As Doris Bachmann-Medick<sup>3</sup> suggested, the performative turn interprets culture as a social action, which articulates meanings in discourses which legitimise various aspects of power

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Lessing Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Kirill Ospovat, *Pridvornaya slovesnost': institut literatury i konstruktivnogo absolutizma v Rossii serediny XVIII veka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie Publ., 2020); Gary Marker, *Imperial Saint: The Cult of St. Catherine and the Dawn of Female Rule in Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007); Boris Uspenskij, Victor Zhivov, *'Tsar and God': and Other Essays in Russian Cultural Semiotics* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays* (New York: Basic books, 1973), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Hamburg: Rowohlt's Enzyklopädie, 2007), 107.

relations, such as social hierarchies. These hierarchies are defined and take place in space. Meanings of culture are staged. To analyse culture of the Russian baroque political theology means to interpret meanings which are available in staging, viewing and public reading of symbolic texts. We will attempt to understand meanings of formulas of Russian absolutism power in the frame of European baroque theatricality which is to view as a set of dominant symbolic practices to legitimise absolutism ideological principles. To read a baroque ruler means to approach the language used, dramas staged and festivals directed and enacted in the public frame of a baroque urban space. Monuments, short-term triumphal architecture, Christian and Greek symbols and quotations, their combination or conflict, their hierarchy in the baroque drama of power are to be interpreted as signs which we will attempt to read as political meanings of a period constructed by various authors-priests, academics, courtiers and Elizabeth herself.

In this article, the baroque is understood as a period of political absolutism, lasting from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century towards the end of the 18th century in various regions of Europe, including diverse artistic elements closely associated with the power discourse. As such, the staging of a baroque ruler in Russia should be interpreted as a variation of the absolutism play that dates back to the rules of Louis XIV and Leopold I. These European rulers developed a combination of Christian and Greek mythology in their scenarios of power (to use Richard Wortman's term),<sup>4</sup> creating a formula of ruling masculinity. The case of the late Renaissance ruler, Elizabeth I of England (ruled 1558–1603), represents a feminine version of the idea of a ruler as a source of harmony. Paralleling gods, goddesses enter the political stage of the early modern rulers – among others, Diana, a goddess of chastity, was rediscovered to praise the Virgin Queen in her later years and justify her failure to produce a male heir.<sup>5</sup>

The transfer of Western absolutist concepts and performative practices of court culture, shaped by the Versailles model to Russia, has been intensely analysed in the last two decades by Western and Russian scholars. Following Wortman's key study, which analysed various power scenarios in Russian absolutism,<sup>6</sup> the research has examined the transformation of the Russian Muscovite court after the reforms of Peter I.<sup>7</sup> Among the studied topics is the emergence of the new Western type of public space at the Russian court and in the new capital Saint Petersburg (founded 1703), and the rethinking of European absolutist performativity in the context of the rapid change of the role of Russian nobility. This research followed the pattern of Norbert Elias and, thus analysed the Russian version of the *civilite* paradigm at the court of Peter I and his daughter Elizabeth.<sup>8</sup>

A special field of interest in the present study is the emergence of theatre and court literature in the Russian language, which reveals the Russian version of monarch glorification, using plots and motifs that combine European patterns and local folklore traditions during Elizabethan times (1741–1761). Following Robert Darnton, who defined poetics as politics in 18th-century France, this study predominantly examines how poetic and dramatic texts were created and negotiated in absolutist Russia and how the femininity of the baroque ruler Elizabeth was shaped in masculine terms in plays and verse.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*.

<sup>5</sup> Erzsébet Stróbl, "Queen Elizabeth and the 'Judgement of Paris,'" *Anachronist* 18, no. 2 (2018): 207–228.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*.

<sup>7</sup> Andrei Zorin, *Kormia dvuglavogo orla...: Literatura i gosudarstvennaia ideologija v Rossii v poslednei treti XVIII – pervoi treti XIX veka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie Publ., 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Keenan, *St. Petersburg and the Russian court 1703–1761* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie Publ., 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Vera Proskurina, *Mify imperii: literatura i vlast' v epokhu Ekateriny II* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie Publ., 2006), 14–27, 163–194.

The paradigm of cultural memory, developed by Jan and Aleida Assmann, has recently entered the literature on the Russian absolutist geopolitics in images and texts.<sup>10</sup> During the rule of Elizabeth, who dismissed child monarch Ivan VI from the throne, the politics of memory destruction were developed; the extensive destruction of memories of the boy-ruler and his mother began as early as 1742 through the removal of key elements of the baroque ruler's presence from the public space, including coins, texts, laws and church books.<sup>11</sup> Marcus C. Levitt defined baroque culture that includes the politics of memory and political oblivion in Russia, through various visual texts that were created and scrutinized by monarchs in the political frame. Levitt analysed the visuals dominating 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian culture, widening the terrain of the visual elements from ancient Western history used by Peter I and his heirs to formulate the image of an absolutist ruler.<sup>12</sup>

Most of the works on Elizabeth's rule have been shaped by cultural turns of the early 1990s, taking an interest in discourses of power, gender identities, the intertextuality of literary sources and the multimedia staging of elites in musical theatre<sup>13</sup> and the urban space of an Eastern European baroque city.<sup>14</sup> Social history is also present in the analytical frame of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian history of absolutism. The recent study of the economic and tax policies of 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian rulers has been linked to the analysis of the legitimation of the various coups that shaped Russian politics before 1762.<sup>15</sup> However, this variety of academic approaches has one element in common, that is, the analysis of multiple histories of Russian rulers discovering and adopting Western absolutism. The semiotics of court life, urban planning, and the staging of an absolute ruler in various foreign arts and spaces that were then localized represents a major field of interest not only for contemporary scholars but also for Russian monarchs. Peter I, who initiated the rapid break with the traditional culture of power, was eager to discover and interpret Western concepts of absolutist semiotics.

The Tsar intended to radically reshape the court and the image of a monarch, undertaking a kind of baroque glocalization of absolutism in the frame of Orthodox culture by combining Western absolutism with Russian imagery of a divine ruler. French aristocratic culture, based on a fragile equilibrium of interests and interdependencies between a monarch and the nobility, impressed Peter I with its spectrum of glorifying instruments. From the foundation of St. Petersburg as Russia's new capital, European imagery of male and female rulers was present in the politics of absolutism.

The combination of male functions and tasks in the female political body was another European semiotic formula for a female absolutist ruler and was applied within the Russian imperial discourse to Russian female rulers,<sup>16</sup> who were, thus, staged as a mixture of two genders, the male and female, in the form of a *muzhe-deva* (male virgin).<sup>17</sup> The festive poem 'The resemblance of Anna Ivanovna to Minerva' (1739) was presented to Em-

<sup>10</sup> Vera Proskurina, *Imperiia pera Yekateriny II* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie Publ., 2017); Deniss Hanovs, "Imperial Myth Broadcasted: An Analysis of Putin's Ceremonial Communication on Russia's Past. The Case of Annexation of Crimea," in *The New Heroes. The Old Victims. Politics of memory in Russia and the Baltics* (Riga: Zinātne, 2016), 30–49.

<sup>11</sup> Igor Kurukin, *Epokha 'dvorskikh bur''* (St. Petersburg: Nauka Publ., 2019), 398.

<sup>12</sup> Markus Levitt, *Vizual'naiia dominanta v Rossii XVIII veka* (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye Publ., 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Nataliya Ogarkova, *Tseremonii, prazdnestva, muzyka russkogo dvora* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin Publ., 2004); Anna Korndorf, *Dvortsy khimery: illyuzornaya arkhitektura i politicheskiye allyuzii pridvornoy stseny* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya Publ., 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Marina E. Dmitriyeva, *Italiia v Sarmatii: Puti Renessansa v Vostochnoi Evrope* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie Publ., 2015); Gary B. Cohen, and Franz A.J. Szabo, eds., *Embodiments of Power: Building Baroque Cities in Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Igor Kurukin, *Epokha 'dvorskikh bur''*.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 51, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Vera Proskurina, *Mify imperii*, 17.

press Anna a year before her death as an address by the Academy of Sciences and extended the Minerva image back to the reign before Elizabeth. That reveals the poetic and rhetorical continuity of female glorification from Anna to Catherine and challenges the idea that these image politics began during the early period of Elizabeth's reign. As an example of the military functions of a goddess, the glorifying text in Russian and German produces various examples of similarity between Anna and Minerva. This text also deifies Peter I, who gave birth to the Russians: *novorozhdennomu ot velikogo Petra tvoemu narodu* (newborn from the great Peter to your people).<sup>18</sup> Another interpretative frame necessary to read Elizabeth's scenario as an absolute female ruler is the Russian Orthodox Church and its role in absolutist politics.

### **What did the Archbishop say? The new Golden age announced**

The combination of two semiotic spaces – European absolutism mythology and Russian Orthodox culture – featured in the new Empress's coronation book, published in St. Petersburg in 1744, two years after the coronation ceremonies. The predecessor of this coronation book was dedicated to Anna Ivanovna's coronation. In both cases, the books were published by the Academy of Science in close communication with the court.<sup>19</sup>

Elizabeth's coronation comprised three parts. The first was political, in which the Empress's manifesto was published, explaining why she should be crowned in Moscow, listing the text of Ambrosii's festive sermon. The second was a ceremonial protocol detailing how and where the coronation and subsequent festivities would proceed, which groups could participate and in which order, and who would be remunerated for their services to the crown. The third was the collection of engravings depicting the cavalcade of courtiers to the ceremony in the Kremlin and the temporary allegorical architecture and statues representing various virtues ascribed to the Empress, as well as the balls and fireworks, which later became a regular, multimedia element of court festivities. The fireworks on Grand Duke Peter's (the future Peter III) 18th birthday in front of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg on 10 February 1745 illustrate the variety of baroque festivities at the court. With the help of allegoric figures, such as love, the blossoming garden, hope and divine providence, Peter was glorified as the future ideal ruler.<sup>20</sup>

The coronation book and other festive chronicles aimed to disseminate a complex system of absolutist paradigm, with a structured combination of allegoric meanings aimed at creating and perpetuating ideological theses of the omnipotent ruler (e.g. the title of the 1745 fireworks, 'Description and explanation'). Thus, the court editions may be defined as baroque visual media, which preceded the films, chronicles and cinema journals used by monarchies before WWI and later by the totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The coronation book can be described as an engraved chronicle of a day in the Empress's life (or the many months of coronation festivities).

The introductory words, which preceded the coronation manifesto, described the *coup d'état*, which took place on 25 November 1741 supported by the Archbishops of Pskov and Novgorod, who granted religious legitimacy to the political upheaval. The coup was

<sup>18</sup> *Podobie Minervy v imperatorskom velichestve Anne Ioannovne samoderzhitse rossiyskoi pri vysokotorzhestvennom i vseradostnom dni rozhdeniia eia imperatorskogo velichestva 28 genvaria 1739* (St. Petersburg: Akademiia nauk Publ., 1739), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Elena Stetskevich, "The Role of Academy of Science in the Creation of Empress Anna Ioannovna Coronation Album," *Administrative Consulting* 73, no. 1 (2015): 121.

<sup>20</sup> *Opisanie i iz'yasnenie onago feyerverka kotoryy po vysochayshemu povelenyu ikh imperatorskogo velichestva v vysokiy den' rozhdeniya yego imperatorskogo vysochestva blagovernogo gosudarya Petra Feodorovicha [...] pered imperatorskim zinnim domom v Sanktpeterburge predstavlen byl fevralya 10 dnya 1745 goda* (St. Petersburg: Akademiia nauk Publ., 1745), 2–3.

defined as divine providence: 25 November was a part of God’s plan to re-establish happiness for Russians. This happiness bore the characteristics of baroque history as a royal drama, in which happiness is fragile and can disappear unexpectedly. In Walter Benjamin’s theory of baroque drama, the ruler is the core of history, both tyrant and martyr, and the one who defines reality and can destroy it.<sup>21</sup>



Picture 1: Frontispiece of the coronation book-state portrait of empress Elizabeth with state insignia

Source: *Obstoyatel'noe opisaniye Torzhestvennykh Poriadkov blagopoluchnogo vshestviya v tsarstviuushchii grad Moskvu i sviashchenneyshago koronovaniya Eya Avgusteishago Imperatorskago Velichestva Vsepresveteishiya Derzhavneishiya Velikiya Gosudaryni Imperatritsy Elisavety Petrovny Samoderzhitsy Vserossiiskoi, yezhe byst' vshestvie 28 fevralia, koronovanie 25 aprelya 1742 goda* (St. Petersburg, Imperial Academy of Science, 1744).

Rulers’ sovereignty over human history creates an ambivalent image: a ruler can be dangerous and divine in their ability to act as a solar symbol, granting life. This metaphor was translated at the Russian court into a glorification of Empress Anna, who was compared with the sun, which “saves and decorates the Russian empire,”<sup>22</sup> thus bringing life to her subjects. This solar formula was continued in Elizabeth’s coronation book. Alongside benevolence, the symbolic monstrosity of a ruler is a topical plot in many baroque plays. A perfidious ruler, plotting against the people and natural order of things, such as Macbeth, was a *dramatis persona* from the late Renaissance drama and is widely known in Spanish baroque drama, such as in Pedro Calderon’s play *La Vida es un Sueño* (Life is a Dream).

<sup>21</sup> Valter Benjamin, *Proiskhozhdenie nemetskoj barochnoi dramy* (Moscow: Agraf Publ., 2002), 55–56.

<sup>22</sup> *Podobiye Minery v imperatorskom velichestve*, 18.

In her politics of memory destruction, Elizabeth also acted as a baroque ruler who had power over her subjects' memory. During a discussion between two exiled courtiers in the imagined kingdom of Siberia in the pamphlet brochure "Today You, Tomorrow Me," the sentence "unexpected news of the young monarch Ivan VI dethroned" was redacted in black ink on both pages.<sup>23</sup> The text likely came into the possession of the Russian administration, which carried out a version of memory destruction in ink.

The coup can be treated in the frame of a baroque drama as a sudden change for the good. According to Kirill Ospovat, in 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian court culture, coups were a repetitive reality, and happiness, elaborated in the coronation book, can be defined as the discursive frame of celebrating a happy end to the coup. Such coups were then publicly celebrated as memories of the royal ascension day.<sup>24</sup>

Elizabeth's court book followed the pattern of baroque glorification and sustained the idea of a divine female ruler who acquired the throne due to divine will. The book opens with a statement that God's will is unknown to people but that the Empress ascended the throne by following this 'unspoken will'. In the tradition of hereditary absolute monarchy, the throne was depicted not only as a Russian imperial throne but also as the 'parental' throne of Elizabeth's father, Peter I.<sup>25</sup>

The sermon's language was highly allegorical and shaped in terms of a political drama. There is a *recognition*, which transformed the political drama of the previous two decades into a *lieto fine* (happy ending) of *opera seria* by Metastasio, with a restored justice and a return to legitimate rule by a leader who was awaited by the country. The neglected hero, unrecognized or non-existent in political interplay for a while – in this case, Elizabeth – had been recognized if we accept that the princess' below dialogue with the guards was not an anecdote invented after the coup. It is said that soon after midnight on the eve of the coup, the princess arrived at the guards' premises and asked them, "Do you recognize who I am, boys?" Ambrosii repeatedly used the theme of recognition in his next cardinal sermon at the beginning of the coronation festivities in Moscow.

The sermon of February 1742 can be defined as a liturgical drama of absolutism, co-edited by the Orthodox elite, staging the regained kingdom and the end of history because of its happy return to the final stage: the rule of a just and legitimate monarch would conclude the period of disorder. The sermon can be interpreted in terms of political theology, which, according to Ospovat, was the product of absolutist ideology, transferring God's divine nature into the judicially framed divinity of a monarch.<sup>26</sup> There are also other examples of showing Elizabeth as permeated by the presence of God – in Lomonosov's ode on Elizabeth's birthday in 1757 God speaks of Elizabeth: "I myself appeared in Her person."<sup>27</sup> Contradictions between sacralization of the monarch and Christianity often are removed by avoiding the word "God." Lomonosov regularly calls the Empress, "goddess."<sup>28</sup>

Ambrosii addressed Russia, an anthropological category and the sum of all Russian estates, which were included in the allegorical body of the feminine Leviathan, and the "true mother of the Fatherland" (the Empress), during the coronation.<sup>29</sup> Nature was a source of

<sup>23</sup> *Heute mir, morgen dir: Gespräche in dem Königreich Sibirien zwischen dem Grafen Burchard Christoph von Münnich und dem Grafen Gustav von Biron. Erste Unterredung* (Tobolsk: [N.s.], 1742), 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Kirill Ospovat, *Terror and Pity: Aleksandr Sumarokov and the Theater of Power in Elizabethan Russia* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 35.

<sup>25</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov... sviashchenneishago koronovaniia eia avgusteyskago imperatorskago velichestva... gosudaryni imperatritsy Elisavety Petrovny* (St. Petersburg: [N.s.], 1744), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ospovat, *Terror and Pity*, 148.

<sup>27</sup> Boris Uspenskij, and Victor Zhivov, "Tsar an God: Semiotic Aspects of the Sacralization of the Monarch in Russia," *'Tsar and God': and Other Essays in Russian Cultural Semiotics*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>29</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 11.

the legitimization of Elizabeth, who was also called a “natural heiress and ruler, who happily arrived.”<sup>30</sup> The Archbishop asked the nation to answer the question, “Who has come?” to rescue Russia. The Archbishop’s question had a moral origin because the correct answer, the accurate recognition, was a precondition for Russia’s spiritual renewal, linked to social order and harmony under the absolute ruler as a complete, kind and forgiving mother. The Archbishop offered his assistance in this difficulty and explained in detail the impact of the returned ruler: Elizabeth was described as a source of harmony that would conquer instability and disorder. The elements of this stability were presented in terms of peace and quietness:

Firm and unshakeable basis of your [Russia’s] prosperity has come; the end of your extremely usual and evil changes has come; your quietness and the true hope for your prosperity and other wishes has come; your joy, health, integrity, long life and security and salvation from all negations have come...<sup>31</sup>

The new ruler was not only the source of a prosperous Russia, distributing good qualities with her ascension alone; Elizabeth was also a proactive ruler who acted as a judge. Her ascension was both a miraculous and quick relief from the political “changes” (as the previous rule was described) and was an act of restoring order:

...the loyal and trustworthy [will receive] only mercy, but the evil and shameful, and especially enemies... fear and defeat.<sup>32</sup>

Elizabeth would enact justice and, thus, was linked to images of justice in Greek and Roman mythology. The shortlist of the princess’s divine qualities is characteristic of the image of Astrea, the mythological virgin, who represented the golden age, which, according to Ovid, left the earth plunged into military bloodshed (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book 1, 149).<sup>33</sup> Ambrosii retold the story of Ovid in his version:

To put it shortly, the real and true mother of the Fatherland has come, who has spent fewer days and months on the throne of Russia, than bringing so much goodness, joy, benefit, happiness and security.<sup>34</sup>

Later in the sermon, Ambrosii introduced social details into an allegoric introductory section and specified which social groups were happy to greet the returned ruler and why. The church was elated to see the image of a ruler who promised prosperity. The officials rejoiced because Elizabeth would restore their honour, dignity, justice, and mercy. Likewise, the army was “burning with the flame of love” because the new ruler would avenge its injured dignity and stop internal political disorder. A similar cry for justice was heard from civil servants of the new Empress who believed Elizabeth would grant positions according to merit and dignity, rather than out of “passions and promises.” That likely referred to the favouritism culture during previous reigns, especially that of Anna Ivanovna, well known in Russian oral history, as the time of great favouritism Duke Biron; the term *bironovshina* still means the rule of ethnically foreign, non-patriotic court favourites.<sup>35</sup> The rest of the Russian people, the poor and socially unidentified, also rejoiced because they had finally encountered their ‘merciful mother, true and natural ruler’. The list of miraculous impacts was completed, describing the changes made to the old and dilapidated churches and civic buildings, restored to their former glory before

<sup>30</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk 1: 149, accessed 23 July 2021, <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph.htm#488381095>

<sup>34</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Kurukin, *Epokha ‘dvorskikh bur’*, 245.



the coronation.<sup>36</sup> The goodness of the new Astraea was also linked to her beauty. In such a combination, Ambrosii saw the precondition for an eternal rule (“countless years”),<sup>37</sup> which would begin in the true heart of Russia, Moscow, where the crown insignia were kept, waiting for her ‘natural hands’ to grasp them.

Change became a significant detail of the discourse on the restoration of order and was repeatedly mentioned in the sermon as an example of chaos and troubles. The return to the previous glory and stability and the end of transformations and uncertainties became a predominant vocabulary of the new rule, seen as the end of the movement, the end of history and the beginning of the golden age, previously lost. That loss was explained by the Archbishop in terms of Russia’s collective sin, and Empress Elizabeth was defined as a proof of redemption.

The sermon’s glorifying content was expanded by another text in the coronation book, entitled “Clarification,” which preceded the description of the fireworks. This text can be interpreted as an emotional response by the subjects to the coronation, described as a source of genuine collective jubilation, which was spontaneous and extensive, mixed with hopes, happiness, joy and a firm belief in the future.<sup>38</sup> The concept of recognition finds here another element: not this time the relation to Peter I, which should be recognized, but the individual features of the young princess, whose “humble deeds disguised her natural greatness.”<sup>39</sup> A new element of recognition was added: the people who impatiently awaited the princess, who was not coming for a certain period because such was the divine will. Waiting for the true ruler was the link that connected subjects with the ruler in a community, who, in this construction, was described in the religious terms of a second coming, bringing the light of the crown jewels into the darkness (i.e. the previous rule of Anna Leopoldovna).<sup>40</sup> Waiting also entailed the maturing of a ruler; when the time was right, according to the divine prerogative, Elizabeth would be ready to rule. The crowning ritual was the central emotional part of the ceremonies, and the moment of taking the crown and putting it on the ruler’s head was the semiotic highlight of gaining the divine right. According to the description, Elizabeth took the crown from the pillow brought to her by Ambrosii and put it on her head herself.<sup>41</sup> This symbolic act, stressing the self-legitimacy of the absolute ruler, was included in the “Clarification” as proof of the restoration of social order in the image of brave Elizabeth. Thus, her accession to the throne fit into the semiotics of a brave hero facing peril.<sup>42</sup> The price of this brave act is summed up in the Latin formula of the absolute ruler: *meam mihi reddo coronam* (I myself regain my crown).<sup>43</sup>

In summary, in the sermon, Elizabeth’s biography became the hagiography, comprising a series of miracles, which were natural and thus logical in their supernatural origin, as the concept of power is divine in its ability to act in mythological terms (i.e. the sudden end of evil and the beginning of the eternal golden age). The coronation book includes important evidence of the construction of the new Empress’ image in the form of her ‘own’ manifesto on the coronation ceremony. This can be defined as a staged self-reflection by the new ruler, as her voice in public ceremonial culture. Is there evidence of intertextuality between the stately “self-portrait” of Elizabeth in the manifesto and her image in Ambrosii’s sermon?

<sup>36</sup> *Obstoiatel’noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

## Self-portraits of the ruler as a public message in text and images

The manifesto of 1 January 1742 should be viewed in its continuity with the new Empress' first official message upon her accession to the throne, which was made known to the public on 25 November 1741. In this manifesto, the idea of ending political disorder caused by different 'people' ruling in the name of Anna's grandson, the baby-ruler Ivan VI, is the main reason the new Empress, as the legitimate daughter of Peter I, took power. In this case, a daughter is dominant over a small child, who is linked to Anna, not to Peter I. Elizabeth was asked by all her loyal servants, but especially the military, to re-establish social order and secure it for the future.<sup>44</sup>

The manifesto continued the narrative of the gracious mother of the Russians, who, as the next in line, ascended the throne and accepted the oath of loyalty given by all her subjects. In the manifesto, Elizabeth described the ceremony, planned for April, as a ceremonial taking possession of the royal insignia: 'the imperial crown and other *Kleynodien*' (note that decades after the death of Peter I, there was no official Russian term for other royal insignia like the one directly taken from German *Kleinodien*).<sup>45</sup> The ceremonial completed the legitimization of power on earth, giving her uncontrollable power over society, with the Empress ordering subjects to fulfil their spiritual duty and pray for the health of their ruler. This order to participate in religious service as a form of loyalty to the divine-human being (i.e. the monarch) is a concise formula of the political theology of baroque absolutism in Russia during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

It would be useful to compare Elizabeth's coronation book with a similar book dedicated to the coronation ceremony of Anna Ivanovna on 28 April 1730.<sup>46</sup> Comparing the style and vocabulary reveals many elements from the 1730 book that were reused in the 1742 book. The manifestos of both rulers explained the necessity of the coronation in generally similar wording and allegorical messages, demonstrating the impact of the 1730 book on the structure and content of the 1742 book.

During prayer, the political theology was shaped by the words addressed to the ruler. Asking for God's support for Anna's happy reign, the church formulated a catalogue of 'wishful thinking', depicting an image of an ideal rule, which be long-lasting, wise and prosperous, while the courts would be fair and avoid bribery, and the army victorious and able to defeat all the Empress's enemies.<sup>47</sup>

Intense metaphoric language was used by the Archbishop of Novgorod Theophan addressing Empress Anna after the coronation ceremony had been fulfilled. Among the allegorical figures was an army with a commander who could not achieve victory and a ship that sinks in a storm, a metaphor often used in baroque opera, which Anna introduced to the Russian court later in her rule.

The major difference between the discourses of the two coronations lies in their images of the empire's condition before the coronation. If Elizabeth found the state of affairs dangerous and came to act as a saviour, Anna "found this empire in calm condition"<sup>48</sup> and acted as an allegorical figure of peace, who aimed to sustain international agreements and avoid wars.

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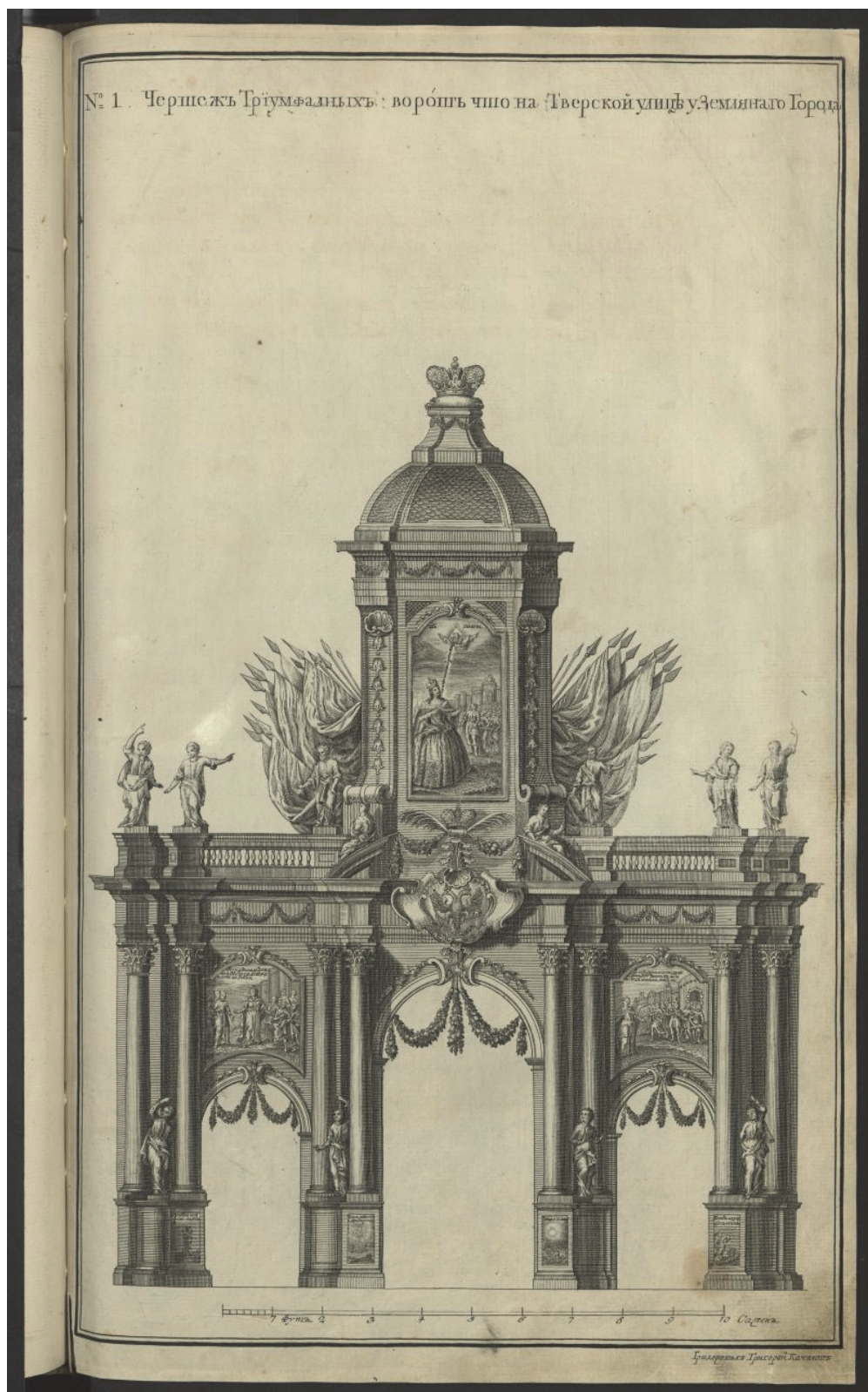
<sup>44</sup> Manifesto "On the Accession to the All-Russian Throne of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna and on Taking the Oath," accessed 23 July 2021, <https://doc.histrf.ru/18/manifest-o-vstuplenii-na-vserossiyskiy-prestol-gosudaryni-imperatritsy-elizavety-petrovny-i-ob-uchin/>

<sup>45</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisaniye torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Description of the Coronation of Her Majesty the Empress and Autocrat of the All-Russian Anna Ioannovna, Solemnly Sent to the Reigning City of Moscow on 28 April 1730. Senate, Moscow, 31 October 1730.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> *Podobiye Minervy v imperatorskom velichestve*, 19.



**Picture 2:** Triumphal arch in Tverskaia street in Moscow erected for the ceremony of entrance of the empress Elizabeth

Source: *Obstoyatel'noe opisanie*, 131.

## Imagined spaces of the baroque Empress: Temporary glorification in statues and edifices

The baroque city is a multilayered space representing a monarch's policies and, as such, it creates a stage including various smaller ones such as promenades, palaces, hills, rivers, and squares. These topoi differ in function and create internal spatial hierarchies within the city walls, delivering a heterogeneous message to different audiences. The anthropologization of spaces and places has helped broaden the academic perspective on space creation within ideological concepts. Baroque architecture and sculptures and their allegoric message were included in debates on baroque urban planning in the mid-1980s.<sup>49</sup> Louis XIV was very concerned about controlling how audiences would visit and view the Versailles palace and royal gardens after his death, and at least six versions of the "Way to present the gardens of Versailles" were written, partly by his hand.<sup>50</sup> Eastern European variations of the French and Austrian absolutist cities and residences have been analysed in the last decade, adding Eastern German, Czech and Russian baroque cities to Western examples.<sup>51</sup>

For a long time, there had been various cultural links to Italian Renaissance culture and architecture in Russia, which were revived during the rule of Ivan III in the last quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and continued in the 16th century. The liberalization of politics towards papal Rome fostered cultural exchanges with the Catholic representative culture.<sup>52</sup> The genealogy of the transfer of Italian representative culture in Russia, dating back to the 16th century, helps broaden the timespan and questions the abrupt beginning of Western urban politics during the rule of Peter I. Undoubtedly, the new capital of the Russian empire created a unique draft of the baroque ruler to shape the city according to his understanding of the representative space. In his detailed overview of the transformations of St. Petersburg from its foundation to 1760, Paul Keenan reflected upon various features of *civilite* discourse as a part of westernization for extensive groups of society, in which monarchs tried to create and control the new capital by shaping its construction works and its inhabitants' movements and habits.<sup>53</sup> One of the crucial roles of the new city was to become the stage for the ruler's display of power. The 18<sup>th</sup> century sources compare baroque capitals with Greek, Trojan, and Roman cities to add mythological glamour to the centres of absolutist political power. The three legendary cities of Athens, Troy, and Rome were used to describe the topography of Russian absolutism;<sup>54</sup> Athens and Troy, in particular, were mentioned to stress Empress Anna's divine image.<sup>55</sup>

Among the global and European tools of absolutism, temporary, ceremonial urban architecture and sculpture were widely used. They were both intertwined in Elizabeth's coronation festivities and were captured in multiple engravings in the coronation book. Which messages of the image of the new Empress were transmitted through the allegoric sculptures and temporary architecture? What were the sources of the messages?

To answer these questions, we must analyse the visual section of the coronation book, entitled 'Description and drawings',<sup>56</sup> containing two major groups of temporary

<sup>49</sup> José A. Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 75.

<sup>50</sup> Louis XIV, *The Way to Present the Gardens of Versailles* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> Howard Louthan, "Religious Art and Formation of a Catholic Identity," *Embodiments of Power* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 53–79.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>53</sup> Keenan, *St. Petersburg and the Russian court*, 47.

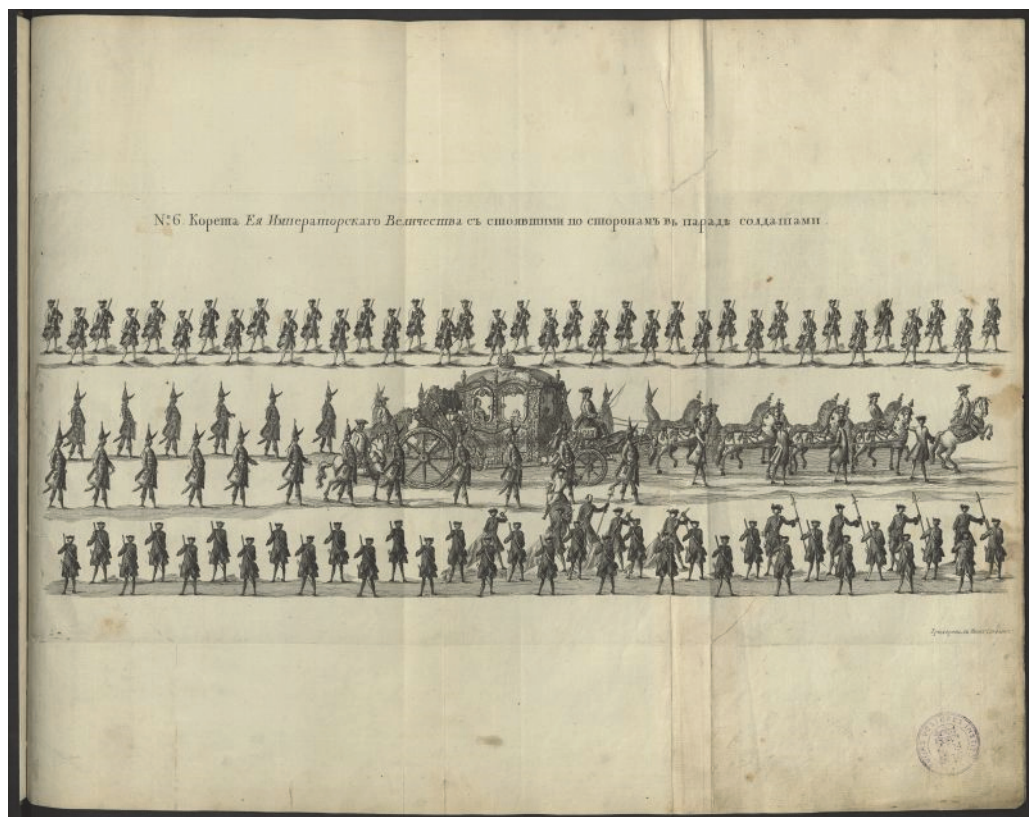
<sup>54</sup> Levit, *Vizual'naiia dominanta*, 56.

<sup>55</sup> *Podobie Minervy v imperatorskom velichestve*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 131.

allegorical objects – triumphal arches and allegorical figures – either as a part of the construction or as singular objects in representative space. The rich, detailed content of arches can be interpreted through three predominant narratives: the Old Testament and Christian myth, Greek-Roman mythology and solar symbolism. Since the total number of arches would exceed this study’s scope, one was selected to represent the details of coronation symbolism and political messages, which are both hidden and open in baroque allegories, waiting to be presented publicly.

Architecturally, the triumphant arches were built in the most elaborate and festive style, the Corinthian.



**Picture 3:** The state carriage of Empress Elizabeth with guards escorting

Source: *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie*, Appendix 6.

The arch in Tverskaia Street featured three entrances surmounted with the image of God, with Elizabeth on the right-hand side and the people on the left. The text “Come and you will rescue my people” was also added, along with Old Testament figures who connoted liberation and salvation, including Judith, Solomon, and Deborah.<sup>57</sup> The main entrance was decorated with the image of Christ and Russian people praying for the new Empress, although Christ points to the insignia and says that Caesar should receive what is Caesar’s.<sup>58</sup> A crown, drawn down from the sky to the head of Elizabeth was added next to text that stated that a true Empress is crowned from sky, not from earth. A sequence of Christian allegorical figures, such as Wisdom, Virginity, Truth and Bravery was added

<sup>57</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 131.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

with text declaring that the Empress was the bearer of all these virtues.<sup>59</sup> The Christian inference of the images stressed the God-chosen character of Elizabeth and her incorporation into the Biblical stories of virgins saving the Jews. Meanwhile, the New Testament level presented the *a deus coronata* version, with Christ granting the princess the symbols of power.

The messages on the arch also introduced Peter I's heiress into the gallery of legitimate Russian rulers: the portrait of her grandfather Tzar Alexey, her father Peter and her mother Catherine I all appear on the shield of Cronos; however, the portrait of Elizabeth is explained through the logic of legitimacy of birth from the crowned second wife of Peter, Catherine.

Christian and Greek mythology were intertwined in the paintings. Saturn proclaimed the start of the Golden age, while his neighbour Gideon admits his weakness and wants to relinquish his rule but is strengthened by God.<sup>60</sup> Various smaller figures depicted cosmogonic elements, turning the coronation into a political *Naturschauspiel* (nature's performance). The moon, the feminine symbol of Diana, is equal to the masculine solar symbol and transmits the image of the ruling Virgin on the Russian throne ('equal to the sun'). The sun is symbolic of the sole ruling power, with no alternatives ('the only one to shine and rule') and, thus, dominates over the feminine (though equal) planet. The statues incorporated into the arch were the classic combination of the Greek Pantheon stressing the virtues of the heiress, her wisdom, and her link to male bravery, combining the masculine and feminine characteristics of Jupiter, Mars, Neptune, Minerva with Truth, Security, Action, Consideration, Prosperous life, Justice, Magnanimity and Mercy, Peace, Loyalty, the Golden age and Glory.

The inclusion of planets in the coronation ceremony should be treated in the broader context of the monarchical semiotics of the early baroque period, in which the image of Orpheus, transcending earthly laws and conquering death, was widely used: Orpheus's marriage is celebrated by nature in its entirety in Stefano Landi's opera *La Morte d'Orfeo* (1619), in which hills, forests, the moon, and the sun rejoice. In the case of Elizabeth, the Orphean element of total universal joy transmits the image of the Empress's heroic dominance deriving from the Christian legitimacy of the ruler. Later during her reign, the demand for the spectacle was growing, and the 1914 volume, *History of the Russian Theatre*, retrospectively described the age of Elizabeth as a period of intense operatic and drama production.<sup>61</sup> The Empress actively used Italian pastoral drama in court festivities, supporting the first Russian opera birth, *Tsefal i Procris* (1755), with a libretto by Sumarokov and music by Francesco Araja.

Smaller elements also feature, such as a pelican as a symbol of sacrifice, a swallow predicting spring, a white lily stressing absolute beauty, and various trees and flowers heading towards the sun, representing absolute good and the source of life. Feminine elements of motherhood, caring and feminine beauty are present,<sup>62</sup> though the dominance of solar-masculine symbolism is evident in the arch's structure, stressing the ruler's military functions.

Elizabeth's image was constructed through three layers of European baroque glorification strategies applied in various arts, demonstrating the intense transfer of Western practices and discourses of absolutism. Images from the Old Testament, such as the bellifluous virgin securing peace and saving her people through symbolic sacrifice by daring to take the throne and the Christian 'medieval section' of the image, connecting the ruler

<sup>59</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 132.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 132–133.

<sup>61</sup> V.V. Kallash, and N.Ye. Efros, eds. *Istoriia russkogo teatra*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Ob''edinenie Publ., 1914), 103.

<sup>62</sup> *Obstoiatel'noe opisanie torzhestvennykh poriadkov*, 134.

with the God in supreme intimacy of the defender of the faith on earth powered by baroque images of immortal male heroes and goddesses who interact with the universe in their hagiography and are both present in the representative body of the Empress. These three parts of the image also produced a double-gendered Empress, a masculine actor in a feminine body, transcending the borders and uncovering and adding feminine virtues to the ruler's two genders.

### **Conclusion: Closing the gap of legitimacy**

The double-gendered image of a new Orthodox Empress, created in the coronation book, especially in the Archbishop of Novgorod's sermon, depicts an absolute ruler who seized power from the legitimate ruler of German origin, Anna Leopoldovna, which was made illegitimate in the discourse of returning to the actual, God-given kingdom of order and stability. This image closed a legitimacy gap for Elizabeth's rule, supported by the church as a natural order of things, and an exodus. Coming to power after a coup, which was interpreted in terms of the recovery of power, promising various marvels to loyal Russians, the new Empress was defined as Astrea, a mythological virgin signifying the return of the Golden Age in a plot close to the Florentine 'infernal' intermedia of early Italian absolutism, also popular at the Russian court. Concurrently, Elizabeth's political body underwent various transformations, formed in the language of Russian Orthodoxy.

Our analysis of the image of the new Empress in the coronation book offers three major findings. *Masculine femininity* in the image of the Empress secured the militant functions of the Russian absolutism, providing stability to the image of a warrior – based on the ancient image of an Amazonian – who is able to expand state borders and secure the empire's growth and enjoys leadership over the army (i.e. guards who helped the princess come to power in November 1741 and who, according to her, called her to come to power, which helped end the disturbances of the previous reign). Through her bond with the army, Elizabeth became masculine in her proactive geopolitical functions as a defender of the peace. That was one of the main mythological functions of Astrea and was present in ruler imagery since Emperor Augustus, who made use of epic verse and created himself an image of a bearer of the peace in his memoirs.

Nonetheless, Elizabeth remained a caring mother to the Russian people through her traditional feminine mercy. As an heiress to the legendary male ruler, Elizabeth regained the stability of westernization that had been established less than three decades earlier by her father, and partly withdrawn by aristocratic elites after his death during the short reign of his grandson Peter II, symbolically returning to the pre-reform period of the Old Moscowite state by leaving St. Petersburg and transferring the court and capital to Moscow. Following the image of the queen virgin, Elizabeth became the absolute ruler as a virgin who secured an heir to the throne. Both Elizabeths secured a male ruler-relative during their own rule without giving up their image of virginity.

Russian Orthodoxy was involved as an additional legitimization instrument to link Western imagery with the local traditional religious culture and secure the enlightened version of the political theology of absolutism. Our analysis identified the interests of various groups and the dominance of terms of nature and happiness in the politics of absolutism. This combination reveals Russian absolutism as a political culture that attempted to create legitimacy of power based on elements of ethnic identity as early as the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This can be defined as cultural and religious proto-nationalism with Orthodoxy as the Russian religion and Moscow as the spiritual center of the absolutism. It shaped a dual space with St. Petersburg as the patrimony of Peter I, the ruler who brought in the new age and whose daughter, as the royal message stated, rescued it from the political chaos. This proto-nationalism had been developed in the frame of the patriotic discourse of the coup, reviving the ruler's Russianness, both in terms of her origin and

her politics. Patriotic elements included ethnicity or stories of an origin from pre-Petrine Russian rulers, loyalty to Orthodoxy and the geopolitical paradigm of the empire expansion. Thus, the political theology of absolutism was integrated into the patriotic discourse on the Russianness and true nature of the new government. The new court party, which carried out the coup, used the baroque poetics of conflicting oppositions to draw a conflict between foreign (German) darkness and native light (the Russian Empress). Both categories were defined in Ambrosii's sermon as religious events, Russia's collective religious guilt, and its return to the true faith, declaring that a collective redemption occurred during the coronation. As an element of patriotic discourse, xenophobia was not among the allegoric statues but was present in the ideology of the true Russian rule of Elizabeth. This study's findings support the need to expand the chronological and cultural borders of Russian nationalism, which has traditionally been associated with the second half of the nineteenth century,<sup>63</sup> into the absolutist period of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In the text and images of the coronation, political change was defined as the source of trouble. The meaning of change was reversed during the coronation rituals: the sermon in the coronation book refers to true and false changes, the former being those established by Peter I, gaining the status of stability which should remain unchanged, and the latter being the result of a troublesome rule before the coup of 1741, that is, the source of chaos.

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<sup>63</sup> Alexei Miller, "The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation," *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 309–368; Aleksandr Etkind, *Vnutrenniaia kolonizatsiya: imperskii opyt Rossii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie Publ., 2013).



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