
LOVE, POLITICS, AND FINE ARTS. THE MECHANICAL AUTOMATON “GOLDEN PEACOCK” OF CATHERINE THE GREAT AND ITS BYZANTINE MODEL

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*Tis you, the bravest of all mortals!
Mind fertile with a host of schemes!
You did not tread the usual paths
But did extend them - and the roar
You left behind to your descendants.
Tis you, Potemkin, wondrous leader!*

The Waterfall. Gavriil P. Derzhavin¹

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Often, when looking into past centuries from the present day, we deny the previous generations the deep knowledge and feelings with disdainful snobbery. It seems to us that the years and centuries separating us, increase our wisdom, and that this allows us to judge them with a haughty skepticism. This applies to the 18th century as well. We often forget (or in some cases simply do not know) many of the facets of culture and the everyday life of the reign of Catherine the Great. We neglect to think that different layers of society lived according to their own written and unwritten rules, and such rules were especially enforced at the court of the Great Empress, where everything was filled with euphemisms, hints, intrigues, gossips, and intimations that even at that time could often be understood only by the informed. It was a time when well-directed and timely said words and jokes could either save one from the wrath of the Empress or on the contrary, could incur the Empress' displeasure. Sometimes it was even enough to make deliberately or thoughtlessly, at first glance, a quite harmless remark, to set in motion palace intrigues with very serious consequences.

¹ Anthology 1967, 298; “Се ты, отважнейший из смертных! // Парящий замыслами ум! // Не шел ты средь путей известных, // Но проложил их сам – и шум // Оставил по себе в потомки; // Се ты, о чудный вождь Потемкин” (Державин 1985, 115).

The eighteenth century in Russia and throughout Europe was a time of grandiose events redrawing the world map, a time of wars and development of new lands, a time of creation and destruction. It was a time when careers were made swiftly and just as swiftly lives were destroyed. The favoritism, that manifested itself in Russia in the most open form, flourished at all European courts. However, one should not judge this from the standpoint of modern day morality. At that time there was also a code of ethics, although it was perceived differently by different strata of society. Documents, memoirs, elegant fine literature of that time and, of course, works of art help to understand the culture and features of the epoch of Catherine the Great. Art works that live lives of their own often acquiring a new significance and meaning through the next centuries. It is not always possible for the modern day researcher to understand and uncover all the circumstances of their creation and original symbolism. One of these mysterious objects is the famous Peacock in the Hermitage Museum, which, as this study shows, was not only a gift to Catherine II from Grigory Potemkin but a splendid mechanical marvel filled with complex symbolism reflecting a love story of these two state personas, Oriental politics of Russia, and the Byzantine heritage.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the mechanical toy Peacock now located in the Pavilion Hall of the Hermitage is one of the most popular exhibits in the largest museum of Russia. Following long-standing tradition it is called “the Peacock clock”. Once a week, usually on a Wednesday night, the Pavilion Hall which always attracts many visitors, becomes extraordinarily crowded, and everyone waits for Mikhail Petrovich Guryev, the museum clockmaster, to wind up this mechanical wonder. And when the desired moment arrives, the spectators freeze, and one can hear the clicks of camera shutters. The movement begins with the cage rotating twelve

times around the owl, while the bells jingle, the owl turns its head and beats in time with its little paw. After that, the main figure begins its move: the golden peacock is fanning out its tail and turning slowly, giving all the opportunity to admire his golden feathers from all sides. It stands still for several moments, then folds the feathers and returns to its initial position. But now the cockerel shakes its head several times and crows. It is exactly for this small but very vivid show so many visitors gather in the Pavilion Hall. The spectacle is so impressive that the channel Culture of the Russian broadcast television (Russia-K) decided to display it during the station breaks. Thanks to this, even those who have never been to the Hermitage Museum are familiar with the Peacock clock. But very few people pay attention to the fact that a beautiful dial face with golden hands was borrowed by the television people not from the Peacock but from another clock. And this was done for the reason, that strictly speaking, the Peacock is not a clock but a mechanical automaton with a clockwork mechanism. The clock indeed is a part of this mechanical wonder, which has an eight-day turn back, a quarter and hour chimes, and the clock dial face located in the cap of the mushroom, where there is a slot for the hourly and minute discs that rotate around the fixed pointer. However, the mushroom-clock is rather plain and barely noticeable against the background of the splendid golden oak and mechanical birds. It looks like a necessary though secondary element of the composition which one does not immediately notice among pumpkins, acorns, mushrooms, leaves, and branches. It is believed that this exquisite mechanical wonder was made by the eighteenth-century English master James Cocks and it was meant to be presented as a gift by Prince Grigory Potemkin to the Russian Empress Catherine II. The story of the Peacock and its arrival to Russia no doubt is connected with the names of these three, in their own way, great figures. As it should be in stories about curiosities, and even those associated with the names of the powerful ones, the fate of the Peacock is full of mysteries and riddles. It is hardly possible to find in the Hermitage a more "iconic" exhibit, which always captures the attention of visitors. How did the idea and programme of exactly this mechanical "toy" arise? Is there any symbolism in it, and if there is, then what does it mean? What role did Serene Count Grigory Po-

temkin and Catherine the Great play in the story of Peacock? How and when did this automaton come to Russia? Answers to these and other questions scholars tried to find for many years but even today not all of them can be resolved with certainty. And it is natural, because such unique pieces as the Peacock are often shrouded in mystery, leading to creation of myths, well-versed legends, and assumptions. The version offered here is just the author's personal view, with which one can agree or reject it completely. It does not at all pretend to be the final and unconditional explanation (Пятницкий 2014; Пятницкий 2016²). The goal of this article is to draw attention to certain details in the history of this remarkable piece, to incite a new interest in it, to raise questions, and present the author's understanding of the Peacock to the reader.

Unfortunately, only a few documents about the Peacock remain preserved, and they belong mainly to the early 1790s. Among those that should be mentioned there are papers from February - July, 1791 from the archives of Ivan Petrovich Kulibin, the famous Russian autodidact mechanic, whom Grigory Potemkin asked to assemble and activate the automaton Peacock that for many years was stored in pieces. A part of them were delivered to Kulibin in baskets and boxes directly from storage rooms of the Tauride Palace, while the others came from the Empress's clockmaker Robert Hynam, as well as from the clockmaker Miklashevsky. Potemkin's death happened on the 5th of October of the same year did not stop Kulibin from working on the restoration of the mechanical rarity because Catherine II wished to see it in motion. On 30th of March 1792, Kulibin received an order from Gavril P. Derzhavin, the secretary of the Empress: "The clock having the peacock on a tree you should repair on the state's account, and place it in the house of His Serene Highness late General Field Marshal Prince Grigory Aleksandrovich Potemkin-Tavrishesky" (Зек 2011, 16).

In December of 1792, Kulibin delivered the plan and estimate for the restoration work in his special "Note," and after receiving 1200 rubles, he fixed the damages and assembled the automaton in the Tauride Palace acquired by Catherine II after the death of Potemkin. The Peacock adorned the Tauride Palace from 1794 till Catherine the

² Compare: Zek, Smith 2005; Зек и др. 2011; Макаров 1960.

Great died in 1796. In 1797, the new Emperor Paul I ordered to move out the rarities, including the Peacock, to the Hermitage, which was done under Kubibin's supervision. Since then, this mechanical toy has been kept in the Hermitage. In August of 1801, the master recorded in the list of his works submitted to N. N. Novosiltsov, the President of Academy of Sciences: “Upon the Highest order of His Imperial Majesty <...> the clock with the peacock and elephant dismantled in the former Tauride Palace, moved and fixed again, and installed in the Hermitage are as before under my care and maintenance” (Малькевич, Раскин 1953, 496).

Quite frequently Kulibin is called “the second creator of the Peacock,” and in patriotic fervor some people often put him even above Cox, attributing to the Russian master all the peculiarities and amazing tricks of this automaton. Of course, this is not true. However, it is Kulibin to whom we should be grateful that he restored the Peacock into the working condition that has been maintained since 1794 to the present. And this in itself is a great rarity.

Brought to the Hermitage, the Peacock was installed in the building of the Raphael Loggias, that architect Giacomo Quarenghi created by order of Catherine the Great. Loggias had several rooms, and among them there was a long gallery with copies of Vatican Raphael's frescoes and three parallel large halls filled with paintings and precious rarities from the collection of Catherine II. The South Room, sometimes also called the Diamond Office because of its content, housed display cases with jeweled adornments and curiosities; paintings by Anthony van Dyck were hang on the walls, and in the center of the Diamond Room, on the floor, was installed the golden oak with mechanical birds (Люлина 1989b, 365).

In 1842, in order to accommodate the expanded collection of the art gallery, construction of the New Hermitage began, the Raphael Loggias were dismantled³, and the paintings and jewels transferred to other rooms of the residence of Russian emperors. The Peacock was moved to the Eastern Gallery of the Small Hermitage. It could be seen in a beautiful watercolor of the 1860s painted by Konstantin A. Ukhtomsky. The Peacock was standing on the floor, and around this mechani-

cal toy was built an octagonal dome, an elegant bronze construction with glass panels. The cover protected the automaton from dust and accidents, and it did not prevent the spectators for enjoying the performance. The base of the dome was covered with a dark red cloth that effectually emphasized the shine of the gilded surface of the oak and birds (Люлина 1989a, 344). The change of location for the Peacock was connected with creation in the Eastern Gallery of an exposition of rarities and precious things. It was called the Eastern Gallery of Treasures because numerous curiosities, rarities, jewelry, silver, porcelain and ceramics, and rear objects of applied art were arranged there in cabinets and showcases. The Eastern Gallery was depicted in V. Sadovnikov's watercolor of the 1860s. The gilded Peacock can be seen at the end of the gallery (Люлина 1989a, 334-335). A small audience visited the gallery saw the automation as a magic garden frozen in a wave, and only “at a certain hour” for a brief moment. Aleksandr N. Glebov, a Russian poet of the Pushkin era (Вацуро 1989, 572), left a poetic verse describing on how the Peacock “revived”:

*The Owl directs its wild gaze
Around itself; the peacock, with its lush
And longish tail unfolded
Will make its turn swiftly;
The cockerel crows...
(A. Glebov)⁴*

In the 20th century, during the era of the Soviet Union, the Peacock was transferred to the Pavilion Hall, one of the beautiful and refined rooms of the State Hermitage located on the first floor of the North Pavilion of the Small Hermitage. Until the mid-19th century there were five rooms that essentially comprised the original Hermitage of Catherine the Great. From 1850-1858, architect A.I. Stackenschneider designed instead one big hall. The hall – airy, full of light, graceful in décor with golden details against the white background, with bunches of sparkling crystal chandeliers – makes an unforgettable impression. A certain “literary” appearance of the Pavilion Hall, with feeling of the romantic spirit in its architecture

³ In the New Hermitage, the Raphael Loggias were restored but only as one long gallery with two small rooms at the ends.

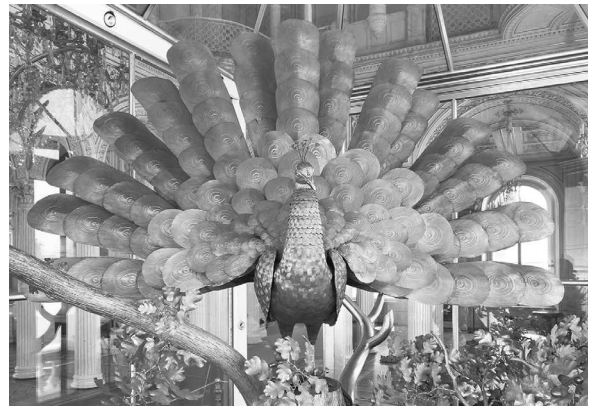
⁴ “Сова взор дикий обращает // Вокруг себя; павлин густой / /И длинный хвост раскинув свой, // Однажды быстро повернется; // Петух кричит...” (А. Глебов, in: Зек и др. 2011, 5).



1. James Cox. Mechanical automaton Peacock, 1781. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

was noted already by contemporaries. Everything here creates a lyrical mood, everything arouses curiosity. And the space of the hall, and the elements of its décor – all sound like a romantic reminder of the elegant literary descriptions of the wonders of the world, of miraculous countries, and of something distant and beautiful. The architect Stackenschneider, as though in the grips of an irresistible artistic impulse, mixed different styles, epochs, and countries; he mixed fantasy and accurate calculation. The Pavilion Hall is proportional, everything in it commensurate and proportional, and at the same time it is picturesquely specious and romantic. Its architecture is evocative, and for this the hall is often called the Oriental or Mauritanian, because it looks like it came down from the leaves of the literary descriptions of the Orient, those descriptions where fantasy and romantic feelings of the authors dominate over the reality of the fact⁵. The Hall and its atmosphere happened to be surprisingly in tune with the mechanical Peacock where East and West, romanticism and logic had blended. Paradoxically, the Peacock, as we shall see below, is

⁵The most interesting research on the Pavilion Hall was done by late Tatiana Petrova, a scholar at the Russian Department of the Hermitage (Petrova 2012, 324-365).



2. James Cox. The peacock with open tail. 1781. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.



3. James Cox and F. Jury (?). The owl in the cage with the bells, a part of the automaton Peacock. 1781. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

equally associative and “literary” filled with memories and symbols. That is why this mechanical toy so harmoniously fitted with the Pavilion Hall and produces an admirable impression on today’s visitors.

Yet let us return to the Peacock’s history. The name of the master who created this wonderful automaton is well known. All specialists credit

James Cox (1723-1800), the English craftsman of the second half of the 18th century as the creator of the Peacock. In June 1745, Cox received the title of Free London master, and became a popular goldsmith, jeweler and toymaker of the English capital city. Since 1752 he owned a workshop at number 103 at the corner of Shoe Lane and Fleet Street and hired a whole staff of assistants, mechanics, and clockmakers. In fact, it was rather a jewellery trade firm. The master advertised that he "makes Great Variety of Curious Work in Gold, Silver, and other Metals: Also in Amber, Pearl, Tortoisshell and Curious Stones" (Le Corbellier 1970, fig. 2). Cox engaged not only his compatriots but also talented craftsmen from other countries to work in his firm. For example, in 1765, upon the permission of the City Authorities, he employed 32 foreigners (Smith 2000, 353). James Cox sold his works at the British and other European markets, and exported them to the Far East, and especially to India and China (Corbeiller 1970; Smith 2000).

The big success came to the master in 1772, when he opened in London a special museum of automata offering for sale, according to the catalog, 23 objects. Almost half of them were sold quickly, and in 1774, the renewed exhibit included 56 automata (Тройницкий 1915, 41; Cox 1774a). One of the curiosities, the silver swan on the mirror pedestal listed as "piece the forty-fifth" in the London catalogue now could be seen in the Bowes Museum in England; besides the Peacock, it is the only life-sized Cox' automaton preserved to this day (Cox 1774a, 35, 36; Camerer Cuss 1965, 330-334).

In the same year, 1774, Cox organized a similar sales exhibition in Dublin. Both exhibitions included the pairs of the life-sized figures of peacocks. However, while the peacock at the London exhibition, in both cases, decorated "A superb Sopha" and did not performed any movements⁶, peacocks at the Dublin exhibition were stand-alone automata, with the peacock standing upon the stem of an oak. It has been suggested that one of the "Dublin" peacocks, listed under numbers

six and eight, was later used in the Hermitage automaton (Zek, Smith 2005, 703-704), because despite the description of peacocks in the Dublin catalogue also shows differences from the Hermitage peacock, there are many similar details as well:

"Piece the six. A Peacock.

Proportioned in size and dimensions in the Bird itself, and copied from a very fine one with the closest exactness. It is of copper richly gilt; the gold thereon appearing of different colours. All the feathers are separately made with their proper imperfections, gradually lessening from the tail to the neck; the plumage is finely wrought, most delicately expressed, and highly finished; so are the head, breast, and wings; their feather are fastened to mechanical parts which communicate themselves to one general force of motion contained in the body. The Peacock stands upon the stem of an oak tree, which is made of copper, not cast but firmed with the hammer; the bark of the tree is curiously imitated and richly gilt. On the top, is a serpent upwards of fix feet in length, formed with inconceivable beauty; every scale is chased with singular nicety: it is gilt to appear like solid gold, twines in its natural form, with the head issuing from between the Peacock's legs, and looking up towards the breast of the Bird. This Serpent is so fixed to the mechanism contained within the body of the Peacock, that by moving it in an horizontal direction, it not only causes the feathers to open and expand, but elevates and raises them like life; even the smallest feathers are set surprisingly into motion, and rise with the greatest regularity; the wings at the same time have their proper animation; the head and neck also move in different directions, and the bill opens and shuts, so nearly to resemble nature, as cannot fail of exciting general admiration. The moving of the serpent, causes the tail, neck, and feathers of the Peacock, to close with a precision actually astonishing; everything is so exactly balanced and counterpoised, and the whole so curiously contrived, that not only the shape of the Bird is preserved, but the exceeding long and fine feathers of the tail are made to stand firm in all directions, and to slide without bending or interrupting each other even from the lowest to the highest degree of Elevation. The Workman, who executed this miracle of Art, was (to borrow expression from the divine Shakespeare) "as another nature," and contrived all his parts with such exquisite ingenuity, that not so much as a single screw is to be seen in the whole construction. The legs of the Peacock are of steel and gold curiously wrought; and though no thicker than just proportion of the Bird itself, support the very ponderous mechanism contained in the body with great security.

⁶"Piece forty-eight. A superb Sopha. <...> The seats and bolsters are of crimson velvet embroider'd with gold. On the top stands in all the beauty of the most exquisite plumage, and the eye of every feather is form'd by a small concave mirror, which has a most pleasing effect. Under the peacock is a temple of christal, wherein is placed a pine apple in a golden basket. At the sides are pedestals supporting pots of hesperian fruit, with enamell'd leaves" (Cox 1774a, 40).

The Trees upon which the Peacock stand, (for the Bird now described has an exact fellow) have three large branches each, wrought in copper as natural as art can execute, and in various places, boughs appear to have been cut or broken off. The tree large branches divide themselves into upwards of fifty smaller ones, on which are leaves of beautiful transparent green, bearing acorns of gold; the ground or terras, on which the Trees stand, is of an oval form about six feet long, of copper richly gilt; upon the ground is a Melon Plant, abounding with leaves, branches, flowers, and fruit, copied from nature; on one side of the ground, is part of an oaken bough, cast in brass, and gilt; the leaves are coloured to represent decayed or withered branches, thrown in there accidentally. On that part of the terras under the Peacock, as if issuing from the ground, is a large Serpent, of copper bronzed; extending in a direct line, and looking up to the Serpent upon the Tree; its tail appears in another part, and with the branches of oak serves for handles; the ground is likewise adorned with reptiles, cast in metal bronzed; it is moreover surrounded with Rock-work, and Moss, of molted brass, not only richly gilt, but set with stones of a ruby colour; the outer border is gilt and burnished – yet between that and the Jewelers work, is an entablature of green, which has a most beautiful effect: in short the whole is finished in a manner truly masterly; whether we speak of elegance, magnificence or ingenuity. The article now described, stands upon an octagonal platform of red Marocco, within a very rich and sumptuous quadrangular Pavilion, supported by four Pillars of white and gold. On every side are pannels in leaves, and open-work; the Pillars and rails of the pannels, are white and gold, richly ornamented; and to render everything complete, blue curtains, bordered, fringed and tasseled with gold, hang in festoons from every Pillar, to enclose the piece to the discretion of the Spectator. A very rich cornish extends from Pillar to Pillar, supporting a magnificent Dome, covered both within and without, to correspond in richness and design with every other part of this Splendid Pavilion. Upon the top stand golden Vases, and on the center of the Dome, is a large Urn, finely carved and richly gilt. This very sumptuous and imperial ornament, with the fellow to it, was intended to adorn the Palace of the Emperor of China, at Pekin” (Cox 1774b, 22-26).

Though no one doubts the attribution of the Hermitage Peacock to James Cox and his workshop, all scholars, however, note that its composition differs from other English-made multi-figure mechanisms and automata listed in Cox’s catalogues. In our opinion (this issue will be dis-

cussed at length below), this difference hints, first of all, that the Peacock was made according to a plan given to Cox by his client. And this client, who ordered the automaton Peacock, was Prince Grigory Potemkin, who gave precise instructions to James Cox on exactly what birds, animals, and plants should be represented in the automaton, and in what sequence the birds should be set in motion.

Different versions on when and how the Peacock got to Russia began circulating as early as the end of the eighteenth century. According to one quite romantic but untrue story, it was brought by Elizabeth Chudleigh (1720-1788). This erroneous version was very popular in the past but even today it has been repeated in many publications, including scholarly articles. This is why a few words should be written about visits of Elizabeth Chudleigh to Russia.

Elizabeth Chudleigh, the Countess of Bristol and the Duchess of Kingston, the famous adventurer, bigamist, and experienced seductress had to flee England after a big scandal. She asked the Russian Empress for protection, and was allowed to come to Saint Petersburg. There is an apocryphal story that Catherine II, wishing to help the Duchess, sent Mikhail Garnovsky, an associate of Prince Potemkin, to London. But this story is highly dubious (Тырнев 2002, 206-207). We know for certain that while leaving her homeland Elizabeth Chudleigh filled her yacht with valuables and art rarities from Thoresby Hall, the estate of the Earl of Kingston (Cross 1977; Mavor 1964). Arriving to the Russian capital in the summer of 1777, the Duchess was at first met by high society with curiosity. While in London, she met some aristocrats and influential persons of the Russian court. For example, she was closely acquainted with Count Ivan Chernyshev, the Russian Ambassador Extraordinary to Great Britain in 1768-1770; Prince Alexander Kurakin visited Thoresby at the end of 1771, and poet Vasilii Petrov, the librarian of Catherine the Great and a close friend of Grigory Potemkin⁷, in 1773 accompanied the Duchess in her travels in Italy (Cross 1977, 391). Also mentioned should be Count Aleksei Musin-Pushkin,

⁷ In his memoirs Sergei Glinka wrote about the friendship between these two men: “The poet did not ask anything from his famous friend, neither gifts, nor privileges; and the prince was sure that the poet values only his emotional reciprocity. Such friendship was beyond the understanding of those society <...>.” (Глинка 2002, 153).



4. James Cox. The cockerel, a part of the automaton Peacock. 1781. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

who traveled over Europe in the first half of the 1770s, and the enormously rich Nikita Demidov, a great lover of fine arts who visited England, France, and Italy in 1771-1773.

The Empress herself received Elizabeth Chudleigh in Tsarskoe Selo twice in 1777 (on August 16th and September 4th). Arranging balls and receptions, continuously gifting art works, jewellery and curiosities to the nobilities, Elizabeth Chudleigh tried to acquire influence and importance at the Russian court⁸. She became close with Mikhail Antonovich Garnovsky (1764-1817), the longtime aid-de-camp, secretary and commercial agent of Prince Potemkin. However, despite all her efforts, she failed to dazzle the capital's beau monde. The

⁸ For example, she presented two rare paintings from the gallery of the Duke of Kingston to Count I.G. Chernyshev, the former Russian Ambassador Extraordinary to England, and several paintings to Catherine the Great. Undoubtedly, Elizabeth Chudleigh was striving to gain the favor of Prince Potemkin with her gifts, as well.



5. James Cox. The squirrel, a part of the automaton Peacock. 1781. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.



6. James Cox. The mushroom with clock mechanism, a part of the automaton Peacock. 1781. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

Empress refused her the title of Statsdame, and on top of everything, a terrible flood happened on September 10th of 1777 threw her yacht ashore. The Duchess had to leave the country by land. Two years later, she again appeared in St Petersburg with a new stock of art rarities and curiosities. This second attempt to conquer Russia's capital also failed, and the “Kingstonsha”, as she was pejoratively called at the court of Catherine the Great, left Russia again. In 1784, she returned there for the last time but finding Garnovsky, whom she treated lovingly and showered with gold and precious possessions, to be unfaithful, in 1785 she left the country for good. The amorous Duchess died in France in 1788, appointing her

Russian lover Mikhail Garnovsky as the executor. She bequeathed to him all her property, art works, and 50,000 rubles⁹. Despite the voluminous writings, in reality the Duchess of Kingston did not have any connection to the arrival of the Peacock to Russia.

By the irony of fate, Garnovsky managed to profit after the death of Prince Potemkin as well. Despite the police ban on moving things out of the Tauride Palace, in 1791 he managed to take out of there a large number of paintings, furniture, sculpture, and even building materials, which he used in his house at Fontanka, 120. His neighbor, poet Gavriil R. Derzhavin ironically wrote about this in his poem “To the Second Neighbor”:

*For what with such passion
Do you build your low inn,
And lo! The treasures of Taurida
On barges taken, you stock in pyramids
Amidst the lawman uproar?*¹⁰

It is known that Potemkin acquired various art works, such as tapestries, paintings, vases, chandeliers, and silverware as directly from the Duchess of Kingston, as well from Garnovsky after her death (Фелькерзам 1913; Карнович 1877). For example, one of the best Hermitage paintings by Pierre Mignard, “The Family of Darius Before Alexander the Great,” previously at the Tauride Palace, was bought by Potemkin from the Duchess (Левинсон-Лессинг 1985, 105; Каталог 1976, 213). Also acquired from her were a big silver wine cooler by Philip Rollos (Dukelskaya 1979, 56, 57), two crystal chandeliers with musical mechanism by William Parker (Firm), and clock Elephant by James Cox – all these rarities adorned the Tauride Palace of Prince Potemkin.

An anonymous contemporary describing the famous Potemkin’s festival held on 28 of April, 1791 at the Tauride Palace specifically noted “two black crystal chandeliers hanging over the vases (made of Carrara marble – Yu. P.). Inside of them (chan-

deliers – Yu. P.), there were clocks that played a pleasant musical tune; they were bought for 42 thousand rubles. <...> In one of the rooms was a remarkable golden elephant: it was a clock of medium size standing in front of mirror on a marble table. The clock itself serves as a pedestal for a small elephant decorated with small precious stones, on which sits a Negro” (Неизвестный автор 2003, 167, 168). Another contemporary – Timofei P. Kiryak, Inspector of the Imperial Educational Society of Noble Maidens, in his letter to Prince Ivan M. Dolgoruky from 6 of May, 1791, also mentioned these curiosities and specified that earlier they were in possession of the Duchess of Kingston: “For the illumination of this spacious portico <...> were hanging next to the columns also <...> thirty two chandeliers and by one at each ends of the gallery, of great artistry and size, with organs inside. These latter of these belonged once to the Duchess of Kingston. On the marble table for mirror of this room stands the very luxurious, once owned by the Duchess of Kingston, clock on the golden or gilded bronze elephant, which while playing the chimes moves its eyes, ears, and tail. The décor of this piece is extremely precious. People say that this cost 15 thousand [rubles]” (Кирьяк 2003, 177, 180).

After the death of Catherine the Great the rarities from the Tauride Palace found their home in the halls of the Hermitage. The clock Elephant were transferred there under the supervision of Ivan P. Kulibin on order of the Emperor Paul I. In 1817, it was sent with an envoy of General A. P. Ermolov to the Persian ruler Fath Ali Shah as a diplomatic gift (Берже 1877a, 259; Берже 1877b, 408). The chandeliers with musical mechanism are housed in the Hermitage to this day¹¹.

⁹ In his letter from the 13th of July 1787 to Vasilii S. Popov, the secretary of Prince Potemkin, Mikhail Garnovsky rather wrote cynically: “The Kingstonsha indeed bought in France an estate for two millions livres. Thus, a part of inheritance I expected has been sacrificed in a temple of Venus to some French cupid, a rival of mine” (Гарновский 2002b 210).

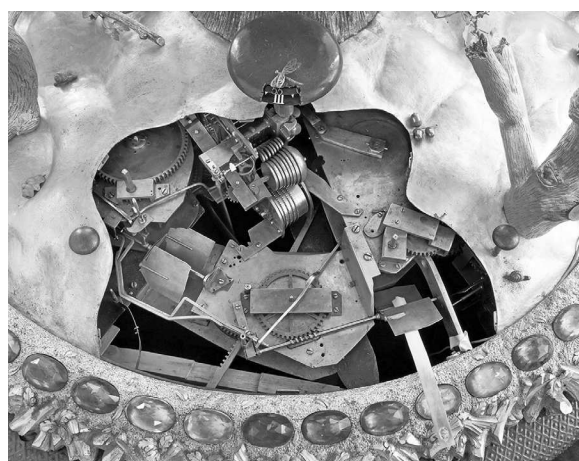
¹⁰ “К чему ж с столь рвением ты безмерным // Свой постоянный строишь двор, // И ах! сокровищи Тавриды // На барках свозишь в пирамиды // Средь полицейских ссор?” (Державин 1985, 121)

¹¹ After the death of Prince Grigory Potemkin, Catherine the Great bought out the Tauride Palace and moved all its contents to the Treasury. Two chandeliers with musical mechanisms were estimated at 16 000 rubles, while the rest 59 rock chandeliers were bought for 9 750 rubles. When Catherine II died, the succeeding Emperor Paul I transferred the musical chandeliers to his new residence, the Mikhailovsky Palace. However, in 1804, the chandeliers were again to return to the Tauride Palace. Moving of these fragile objects with musical mechanisms damaged them, and in the end, they were placed in the palace storage. When architects A.F. Krasovsky and R.F. Meltzer worked on apartments for the Emperor Nicolas II and his wife Alexandra Fedorovna in the Winter Palace, the chandeliers were taken out of the storage, restored, and electrified; one of them was used to decorate the Dining Room, and the second one was hung in a corner the guest room. After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the chandeliers changed their locations several times, and were damaged again. In 1957,

Word about the clock Elephant, which once belonged to the Duchess of Kingston, led to the speculative guessing that the automaton Peacock could also be brought by the Duchess. Professor Vasiliy K. Makarov, who suggested this version, did not provide any documentary evidence and arguments (Макаров 1960, 12-14). To support his version he wrote that until the beginning of the 1790s no one mentioned these curiosities, “although it is difficult to assume that domestic journalists and writers, as well as foreign travelers visiting Saint Petersburg, who were fond of such “rarities”, would left them unnoticed. This was the reason behind Professor Makarov’s assumption that the “clock with a peacock” and the “clock with an elephant” were delivered to St Petersburg in disassembled state, were stored in the palace pantry; and some of the Peacock’s parts were lost during the voyage (Малькевич, Раскин 1953, 377). There were no serious grounds for such assumptions; moreover, they contradicted documented evidence about the Peacock and common sense as well. However, the very aura of a romantic story with the adventurous Kingstonscha in it, and Makarov’s ungrounded version about the disassembled automata were so appealing that they have entered into the consciousness of the popular masses and literary works, though, mostly of a belletristic and pseudo-academic genre (e.g. Гейко 2015, 6-21; Sebag Montefiore 2001, 199¹²).

one chandelier constructed out of the two damaged ones, decorated the Small Dining Room in the former apartments of Nicholas II, the remaining parts of the second chandelier were kept in storage. In 1999, both chandeliers were taken for restoration, and they were skillfully revived by the Hermitage masters. The chandeliers have been attributed to the London manufacturing firm of William Parker, and in 2016 they found their place in ceremonial halls of the Winter Palace, now Rooms № 298 and № 300 exhibiting the objects of British art (Молотков, Гурьев, Зинатуллин 2017, 55-56).

¹²A rather confusing version has been expressed in the books of Simon Sebag Montefiore. The author writes that the Duchess’s last visit to Russia was in 1784, that she finally left St Petersburg in 1785, and died in Paris in 1788. But he also states that the Peacock was brought to St Petersburg by the Duchess in 1788. “When the Duchess died, the Prince bought these objets [the Peacock and organ-clock – Yu. P.] and ordered his mechanics to assemble them in his Palace” (Montefiore 2001, 199). In all prints and editions of the book published over the years under various titles and in different languages (e.g. publications in English include *Prince of Princes: The Life of Potemkin*. London: Phoenix, 2001; *Potemkin: Prince of Princes*. London: Phoenix, 2004; *Potemkin: Catherine the Great’s Imperial Partner*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005; *Catherine the Great and Potemkin: The Imperial Love Affair*. New York: Vintage Books, 2016) the year 1788 is noted as the year of the Duchess of Kingston’s death, and the passage with an unsupported statement on the history of the Peacock has been included.



7. James Cox. Mechanism in the base of the automaton Peacock. 1781. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.



8. James Cox. Pumpkins at the base of the automaton Peacock. 1781. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

Meanwhile, from the first half of the 19th century there was well known another story, according to which the Peacock was ordered by Prince Potemkin in 1780 in England (Бурьянов 1838, 28). In a handwritten inventory book of the Imperial Hermitage compiled by Baron Armin von Foelkersam in the first decade of the 20th century, it is also recorded that the Peacock was ordered by the Prince in London. And this fact was recently confirmed. Yuna Yanovna Zek, being Curator of the State Hermitage Museum, drew her attention to information recorded in the inventory of the Tauride Palace compiled in 1792, “Inventory of Furniture in the Horse Guards House¹³ located, and what they cost”. The document contains a short but extremely important entry: “Oak tree made of

¹³The Horse Guards House – one of the names of the Tauride Palace.

bronze, covered with birds possessing mechanical movement, cost 11,000 rubles” (Zek, Smith 2005, 710). Zek compared this information with a record about a payment in the amount of 11 000 rubles made from the annual budget of the Empress Catherine the Great to the “English clockmaker Jury for a clock brought from England” at the end of 1781. As an experienced researcher, who worked extensively with archival documents, Zek rightly suggested that this coincidence is not accidental. Based on the knowledge of the record keeping procedure at the Ministry of the Imperial Court, it was concluded that when the Inventory was compiled in 1792, earlier documents related to the purchase of the “bronze oak with birds” were used to estimate its price. According to the documents of 1781, the clock had been bought “on a letter from Prince Potemkin” as a surprise gift to the Empress, and that the payment for it was made in two instalments, on September 30th and December 14th. Information from the *St. Petersburg Gazette* published in the autumn of 1781 helped to establish that the money was paid to the clockmaker Frederick (Friedrich) Jury, who came from England and who worked at James Cox’s firm. At that times, in order to expose the debtors foreigners intended to exit the country, St Petersburg had a rule to publish announcement about their future departure in the *Gazette*; such information had to be printed three times. Announcements about Jury’s departure, who stayed at Nevsky Prospekt, No. 81 were printed on October 19th, 22nd, and 26th of 1781 (Zek, Smith 2005, 707). Thus, clockmaker Jury spent in St Petersburg for about two months¹⁴.

What could Frederick Jury do in the Russian capital? Let us recall Makarov’s assumption that the “clock with a peacock” was brought to St Petersburg disassembled, and that some details of it could be damaged or lost during its transportation, and that being arrived in St Petersburg, it remained dismantled for many years in the palace storages. Since 11 000 rubles were paid for the shipped automaton out of the state funds, it is very difficult to imagine that the money was given for boxes with mechanical parts, and moreover, for broken ones, and that after their arrival these details were stocked for a decade in the

palace storerooms. Besides that, if it be a case, a professional clockmaker and mechanic would not be required to accompany the boxes at all. It is entirely different, if we accept that Jury’s task was not only to escort the cargo but to assemble the mechanical automaton, bring it into working condition, and present it to the customer – Prince Potemkin. In this case, both a rather long period of Jury’s stay in St Petersburg and the payment of money in two installments (the first – for the delivery of mechanisms, and the second – for assembling them into working condition) finds their explanation. Surely, the functioning of the mechanisms should have been demonstrated to the customer. Only after that could Jury be paid in full.

Where could the Peacock have been assembled? Of course, in the rooms of Prince Potemkin at the Shepelev House, which was an integral part of the palace of Catherine II’s residence, and connected with the Winter Palace by a gallery. It was exactly there where during one of the Empress’ and court’s visits the Prince could demonstrate his “surprise gift,” as he often did it before. For example, a record in the Kammer-Fourier journal for 1781 informs that on the 6 of November, on Saturday, “before noon, at the end of the 12th o’clock, Her Imperial Majesty, from her inner private apartments through the gallery that runs to the Hermitage, proceeded to the Shepelev House to the rooms of His Serenity Prince Grigory Alexandrovich Potemkin, where then she was pleased to have a dinner in the gallery served at a table for 20 couverts <...> But before the dinner, when Her Imperial Majesty came out <...> from her rooms into the gallery to the table, His Serenity demonstrated to Her Imperial Majesty a water-throwing mechanism installed at the end of the gallery, which showed the rocky mountain with the current above the water, filling the river below and other water places, between which a part of the dwelling of some kind of people was visible, and which during the dinner acted by a current with a noise by the method of a hidden man” (*Журнал* 1781, 675-678). Undoubtedly, it is the description of Kulibin’s work – a mountain with crystal waterfalls and canals with natural water where the glass birds floated. The clock-driven mechanism worked for eight minutes. In 1801, in the “Inventory” of his inventions, Kulibin indicated that he “made for the High grandsons of Her

¹⁴Yu. Ia. Zek suggested that the second portion of his payment Jury could receive upfront, for example, in October through a banker or a merchant middleman. At that time it was a quite common practice (Zek, Smith 2005, 707).

Majesty a machine representing a mountain with glass cascades of imaginary water,” and “another machine in a shape of a windmill, to place it on a table for the amusement of Their Highnesses” (Малькевич, Раскин 1953, 494). Since the document was compiled at the time of Paul I, it does not mention Prince Potemkin, on whose order, evidently, the “glass mountain” was created.

Now it is hard to say why the Peacock was not presented to the Empress. It is possible that some mechanism could stop working, and an attempt to fix then with “local methods and forces”¹⁵ could lead to the breakage of some parts. Meanwhile, it seems quite strange that Potemkin did not ask Kulibin to restore the Peacock, since in 1781-1783, i.e. exactly during this period of time, the master worked on different mechanical curiosities for both the Prince and the Empress. It is possible, though, to suggest an “unpatriotic” version that Potemkin did turn to Kulibin with a request to restore the Peacock but as a result, the mechanical automaton did not function for many years. In this case, it becomes clear, why only ten years later, after repeated unsuccessful attempts to restore the automaton by different St Petersburg clockmakers, the craftsmen came to Kulibin. According to documents, the Russian mechanic received the parts of the “clock with the peacock” from the clockmaker Hynam lived at that time in St Petersburg, and a certain Miklashevsky. Seemingly, they made attempts to put the mechanisms back to work (Малькевич, Раскин 1953, 93, 366-369). In 1854, *Moskvitianin*, the journal issued by the historian Mikhail P. Pogodin, published a romantically embellished biography of Ivan P. Kulibin written by his son. Regarding the Peacock, he wrote that the clockmaker G. G. (i.e. Hynam – *Yu.P.*) asked for its restoration an extremely large amount of 3000 chervonets. Then, the Prince called the Russian mechanic and asked him: “Please, Mr. Kulibin, take my poor small birds and the elephant, revive them and put them back on their feet – it will be honor and glory to you!” (Кулибин 1854, 44). As we know, in reality the mechanisms of the Peacock were “revived” after the death of the Serene Highness, by a special decree of the Empress Catherine II.

¹⁵ As A.S. Pushkin wrote: “the rural Cyclopes in front of slow fire // treat with a Russian hammer // Europe’s article” (Pushkin 1990, 267).

Thus, it is possible to reconstruct the course of events. Around 1780, Prince Gregory Potemkin made a written order to James Cox’ firm for a mechanical automaton with clock, which he intended to present as a gift to the Empress Catherine the Great. James Cox was well known in St Petersburg, thanks to his famous jewels, clocks, and automata, yet also thanks to Russian travelers, especially the members of high society, who visited London and who described in their letters all news and curiosities they learned about in foreign countries in detail. James Cox could be known in Russia from numerous dignitaries, including the above-mentioned Count Ivan Chernyshev, Prince Alexander Kurakin, poet Vasilii Petrov, and Count Alexej Musin-Pushkin. The latter is even mentioned in the London catalogue of James Cox, in the description of piece number 3: “Bust of her Imperial Majesty Catherine II the present Empress of all the Russia, was modell’d for Mr. Cox by that celebrated English artist Mr. Nollekens, from an original pourtrait in the possession of his Excellency Mon. Mouschkin Pouschkin, the Imperial Russian Ambassador at this court, and is esteem’d a striking likeness of that great Princess. The brilliant ornaments that accompany the bust, are a pair of richest Earing that have for many years been seen in this kingdom, and are by far the most capital now on sale in Europe»¹⁶ (Cox 1774a, 13-14). Clocks and mechanical toys by James Cox’s workmanship decorated the palaces of many Russian aristocrats. For example, “Cabinet with clock and musical movement”, which is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, was originally owned by Prince Yousouppoff (Le Corbeiller 1960, 318-324). The Hermitage collection has several similar cabinets and clocks with musical movement that belonged to the Treasure Gallery of the Winter Palace, Count Stroganov, Prince Yousouppoff, Agathon Faberge (Механические 2015, 44-53). Thus, there is no need to assume that Prince Potemkin learned about the curiosities of James Cox specifically from the Duchess

¹⁶ The drawing of the brilliant earrings James Cox included in his catalogue as a separate illustration, and the text states that the earrings were not sent to St Petersburg. The fate of these earrings and the bust of Catherine the Great by the famous sculptor Joseph Nollekens, is unknown. However, three pairs of earrings, extremely similar in shape and décor to those published by James Cox were among the Russian Crown Jewels. They were dated to ca. 1780s, and it is very possible that they were made for Catherine the Great in a workshop of James Cox. In 1927 these earrings were sold by the Bolsheviks at Christie’s auction (Nikitin 2013, 296).



9. J.-B. Lampi the Elder. Portrait of the Most Serene Prince G.A. Potemkin-Tavrishesky. ca. 1791. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

of Kingston, as some researchers indicate (Zek, Smith 2005, 710). In 1779-1780, Prince Potemkin maintained a fairly close relationship with Sir James Harris, English envoy-extraordinary, and Sir J. Harris could not only tell him about the mechanical rarities of James Cox but even assist with the order. In any case, it is unquestionable that the Peacock was made according to Potemkin's commission. It is to be hoped that someday the relevant documents will be found and that will fully clarify the situation. Today we can only suggest that ordering the Peacock, the Most Serene Prince explained a programme that the craftsman had to follow. Indeed, why were the specific mechanical birds were chosen, and their movements were connected in the specific sequence? Taken into consideration the purpose of the gift, its size, and cost, these questions are far from idle. Even if Cox proceeded from automata he had in stock, he could not choose personages arbitrarily at his discretion, without a prior agreement with the client.

The fact that the programme of the surprise gift existed is confirmed by the structure of mechanical components of the Peacock. According to the study of Mikhail P. Guryev, the clockmaster of the State Hermitage, the single composition of the Peacock combines four independent mechanisms (the owl, peacock, cockerel, and the mushroom clock), that is, Cox used autonomous, stand-alone working automata (let's recall the descriptions of "Dublin" peacocks, one of which was possible used in the Hermitage automaton). At the same time, all mechanisms are connected by a system

of levers that, as it was already described above, drive them in a certain sequence: "at the end of each hour the clock mechanism triggers the mechanism driving the owl. The owl's cage starts to revolve, the bells ring, and the owl turns its head, winks its eyes, and taps its right claw. After that the cage revolves twelve times, the owl's mechanism stops <...>. About 1.5 minutes after starting, the owl's mechanism triggers the peacock mechanism." After the peacock's performance, "the peacock's mechanism triggers that of the cockerel" (Zek, Smith 2005, 711-712; Гурьев 2011, 35-38). A long-existing opinion about the Hermitage automaton is that it is a clock symbolizing a mechanical model of the Universe, and the clock's task is "to count" time following the movement of the celestial bodies. Each of the celestial bodies and time of the day are associated with specific birds, which more than others remind about the "air of the Time" (Zek, Smith 2005, 701-702; Зек 2011, 6).

In accordance with this belief the Hermitage automaton was interpreted as a "symbol of the continuation of life," as "a mechanical model of the Universe," while the peacock, the owl, and the cockerel as "personification of the course of time". The birds were also considered through the prism of the "astral symbolism": the peacock – as cosmos, the Sun and the Moon; the owl – as the night, the sign of sorrow, the end of life; the cockerel – as the birth of light and "as an emblem of Jesus Christ". With such an interpretation the sequence of movements of the mechanical birds that Cox put in the automaton clearly contradicts both the "personification of the course of time" and "astral symbolism": the movement of the mechanism starts with the owl – "the symbol of the night"; then the peacock – the "symbol of the Sun" – solemnly spreads its tail, for some reason turns for a moment by the "silver of the night" (the silver surface of the tail's back side), then returns the "solar tail" to its original position of "the golden disk of the sun"; after that the cockerel shakes its head several times and proclaims the sunrise by crowing. The logical absurdity of the existed interpretation is obvious. Moreover, it contradicts the practice adopted for clock design in various countries, when exactly the cockerel marked the start of the time movement (Пипуныров 1982). For example, there is a well-known description of the water clock of 1214 – clepsydra in the tower

of the Hippodrome in Constantinople. The course of time in the water clock signaled 12 peacocks which alternately appeared from 12 doors. The cockerel announced the beginning of the movement and singing of birds, while the owl's appearance silenced them (Зек 2011, 6). Discussing the programme of the Peacock, it should be remembered that the second half of the 18th century was filled with complex associative symbolism. In addition, the automaton supposed to be a "surprise gift" to the Empress from Prince Grigory Potemkin, her companion in state affairs and her secret spouse. Could such a "surprise" imply only so primitive symbolism as the change of day and night?! Certainly, not.

However, before trying to understand the programme and symbolism of the Peacock, we should ask: What is the Peacock really? Is it a clock, where the movements of birds indicate time, or is it a mechanical automaton designed for entertainment? Paradoxically, the answer to this question lies in the mechanics of the Peacock. As it was already mentioned, the owl, the cockerel, and the peacock are the stand-alone automata that can work independently. The clock placed in the mushroom – the eight-day clock mechanism with verge escapement, a quarter hour and hour chimes – is the fourth independent mechanism of the construction (Zek, Smith 2005, 712, 714; Гурьев 2011, 37). Though it is the clockwork mechanism that at the end of each hour gives the movement to the owl and then, accordingly, to all the figures, the automaton's winding mechanism lasts only for 8-10 hours. That is, the movement of the birds was not designed for 24-hour work, and therefore, they cannot be regarded as the elements of a clock mechanism that marks time. It is rather a "wonder toy" for amusement, a clockwork-driven automaton.

Mikhail P. Guryev in one of his latest publications came to the similar conclusion: "The Peacock is a mechanical rarity, a precious curiosity, and a gigantic toy that amazes visitors with an unexpected performance, during which the static life-size figures of metal birds become animated" (Гурьев 2014, 141).

Various mechanical automata with moving figures, often with clock mechanisms, were quite common at royal European courts. For example, they are listed in the Inventory of the Kunstkam-

mer of Rudolf II in Prague, where was "a mechanical device in the form of a peacock, which walked, turned around and fanned its tail of real feathers" (Bukovinská 1997, 203). Another curiosity was designed for King Louis XIV of France. The Russian historian and writer Nikolay M. Karamzin described it in his novel "Letters of a Russian Traveler". When the main character of the "Letters" visited the Palace in Versailles, he recollects: "...with curiosity we looked at the clock made at the beginning of this century by Morand, who like our Kulybin had never been a clockmaker; every hour two cockerels sing and flap their wings; simultaneously, two bronze figures with a tympanum come out of the small door, and two Cupids every quarter beat on the tympanum with a steel hammer. In the middle of the scenery appears the statue of Louis XIV, and the goddess of victory descends from the top on a cloud, and holds the crown over his head; music plays inside, and finally everything disappears" (Карамзин 1984, 294)¹⁷. The Morand's automaton in fact is the clock because it has the large dial in the pedestal base. The repeated movements of the figures took place every hour and started with the crowing of cockerels. That is, it acts typically for the mechanisms that mark time. It should be stressed that the main idea of this performance was glorification of King Louis XIV. Morand's automaton in many respects echoes with the famous clock on the Piazza San Marco in Venice, where the whole show is also played out: the Magi greet the Virgin Mary, and the Moors, striking the bell, mark the past hours (Пинупыров 1984, 132-134).

Mechanical automata and complex clocks with moving figures were known in both East and West since antiquity. In ancient Greece the most famous were the flying dove created by Archytas of Tarentum, the snail by Demetrius of Phalerum, the man by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the flying eagle described by Pausanias. The Arab sources tell us about the water clock allegedly constructed by Archimedes, with moving figures, serpents, and tweeting birds. If the authorship of Archimedes is questioned, the existence of a complex water clock in the Hellenistic world is confirmed by various sources. For example, there is a description of the clock-monument in the Syrian city of Gaza,

¹⁷ Antoine Morand (1674-1757) was an autodidact; this automaton clock was presented to Louis XIV in 1706, it has preserved to this day, and can be seen in the Mercury Salon at the Palace of Versailles.



10. The Pavilion Hall of the Small Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

where every hour one of 12 doors was opened, Heracles came out of there, and accomplishes one of his 12 exploits. In addition, the clock had other moving figures: trumpeter Diomedes, Pan, and satyrs. Traditions of antiquity were adopted by the masters of Byzantium and the Arab world. It is known that in 807, an envoy sent by Harun al-Rashid presented to the Emperor Charles the Great a water clock with 12 knights appeared at noon and at midnight. There are descriptions of other complex water clocks created by Muslim mechanics, including the famous Menganah of 1358 (Пипуныров 1984, 58-60, 73-76, 86-88, 132-134, 141-170; Britten 1922, 26). The distinctive features of all automatic clocks were as minimum a 24-hour stroke, and moving characters in one way or another associated with the designation of time; they indicated the hour and/or time of the day, and announced the beginning or the end of the action. The Hermitage Peacock does not have all these features; it was not intended even for the daily winding cycle, and it is impossible to determine the time by the movement of the figures. The birds could be wound up only for several hours in the morning, in the middle of day, or in the evening, for example, during diplomatic receptions or balls and masquerades.

It is rather interesting that a record in the “Inventory” of the Tauride Palace compiled in 1792

describes the automaton as “the oak tree made of bronze, covered with birds possessing the mechanical movement” (Описи 1892, 68; Zek, Smith 2005, 710). The well-known text about “The Potemkin Festival” of April 28th, 1791 includes very interesting observations. While talking about Cox’s Elephant, an anonymous author remarked: “More worthy of mention than this clock was the clock which I saw after the death of Potemkin in the Tauride Palace. It represented a bronze tree of considerable height, on which were seated the most skillfully made metal peacock, the cockerel, the owl, and various small animals of natural size. Each of these animals, when the clock stroked, made movements, and some also made natural sounds” (Неизвестный автор 2003, 168).

This account echoes with the text of Johann Georgi published in 1794, which is regarded as the first printed mentioning of the Peacock. In the passage about the Tauride Palace Georgi wrote: “In one room of this palace, there is a skilful work of an Englishman; it has the appearance of *kriazh*¹⁸, at which there is a chiming clock, and at this very time the chimes plays, the owl beats in tact, the

¹⁸ In Russian, the word *kriazh* has two meanings: an island or a hard part of something (the pedestal/hillock in the case of the Peacock); also – stump or log. Thus, using one word Georgi describes both the whole pedestal and a piece of wood where the birds sit.

peacock raises its wings, and the cockerel sings” (Георги 1794, 117, 546). What is most interesting in this passage is the sequence of the birds’ movement: the owl, the peacock, the cockerel. This is an additional argument in favor of the hypothesis that such a sequence was laid into the automaton originally.

All cited descriptions portray the automaton as a tree with mechanical birds. An interesting parallel to them can be found in historical sources about the Byzantine Empire. There were many mechanical wonders in Constantinople and its palaces but the most famous were the automata of the throne hall at the Great Imperial Palace. There were described by Liudprand of Cremona (922-972), who in 949 led the Lombard envoy to the court of the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Liudprand said about their arrival to Constantinople: “... it will not be a nuisance to write about the unheard-of and wondrous way in which we were received there”. Thanks to his account, we have the detailed information about the curiosities of the throne room. Liudprand wrote: “For at Constantinople there is a palace next to the Great Palace, of wondrous beauty and size, that is called Magnaura by the Greeks, having inserted a “u” in the place of digamma, as if it were *magna aura*. And so Constantine ordered this mansion to be prepared in due fashion both because of the messengers of the Spaniards, who then were coming there for the first time and because of Liutefred and me. In front of the imperial throne stood a certain tree of gilt bronze, whose branches, similarly gilt bronze, were filled with birds of different sizes, which emitted the songs of the different birds corresponding to their species. The throne of the emperor was built with skill in such a way that at one instant it was low, then higher, and quickly it appeared most lofty; and lions of immense size (though it was unclear if they were of wood or brass, they certainly were coated with gold) seemed to guard him, and, striking the ground with their tails, they emitted a roar with mouth open and tongues flickering” (Liudprand 2007, 197-198).

This narrative echoes with those from the Byzantine sources. Theophanis Continuatus in his *Vita Basilii* wrote that Emperor Basil (867 to 886) found gold in the imperial private treasure left after Emperor Michael III (842-867): “This gold – the previous emperor Michael had had the

most beautiful works melted down; I am referring to the famous and much talked about golden plane tree, to two griffins of pure gold, two lions of hammered gold, an organ of pure gold, and various other objects belonging to the gold plate used at table; the vestments of the emperor and of the empress, and the garments which were destined for high dignitaries, all of which were embroidered with gold” (Chronographiae 2011, 115). The making of these wonders was attributed to the time of Emperor Theophilus (829-842), the father of Michael III. Though the Byzantine historian states that the tree, along with other attributes of the imperial insignia was melted down, it is mentioned again in later sources, from the reign of Emperor Constantine VII (913-959), in particular, in the famous “Book of Ceremonies” by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (Brett 1954, 482). Since mechanisms were usually made of copper, it is possible that only the golden décor was melted down. Constantine VII could order to recreate décor and automata to working condition. But it is also possible that Constantine VII ordered to make new automata that only resembled the lost items “destined for high dignitaries”. In any case, judging by the evidence in written sources, the mechanical curiosities of Emperor Theophilus and Emperor Constantine VII were extremely similar.

Meanwhile, if these automata were constructed at different times, they more likely came from different prototypes. The mechanisms created by Byzantine craftsmen for Theophilus were apparently based on the study and interpretation of the heritage of Heron of Alexandria, who described automata with birds at the fountain or bowl set in motion by water filling the basins. One of these automata, with a very complex composition, deserves our special attention: a bowl filled with water from a wall fountain stood on the pedestal; birds seated on the trees and branches were moved and tweeted around the bowl. When the bowl was filled with water, the owl on the pillar was set in motion, it turned to the birds, at which point the birds stopped singing and the bowl was emptied; after that the whole cycle was repeated again. Thus, the composition with trees, birds and the owl extends back to antiquity (Dolezal and Mavroudi, 2002, 130-133). With the use of mechanical springs, the water bowls and fountains lost their necessity. Unfortunately, the sources



11. J.-B. Lampi the Elder. Catherine the Great. 1793. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

do not disclose the system of the automata in the throne hall of the Byzantine emperors. It could be either water reservoirs hidden under the floor, or mechanical springs. The works by Heron of Alexandria were very popular in Europe, especially during the Renaissance, and therefore they were well known in the 18th century.

The automata of Heron of Alexandria were no less famous in the Orient, especially under the Abbasids. Arab masters developed and perfected Heron's mechanics, and the palaces of Baghdad were filled with outstanding automata¹⁹. The influence of the Orient, always significant in Byzantium, was particularly strong under the Abbasids. In Constantinople there were even direct imitations of the Abbasid residences. For example, Emperor Theophilus built a palace after the Caliph palace in Baghdad. Interest in Oriental culture and curiosities was sparked by the Byzantine mission to the court of Caliph Al-Mobarak in 917. There were even suggestions that Emperor Constantine

¹⁹ One of the most vivid reflections of it can be found in *The Arabian Nights* (Hamori 1971).

VII invited Baghdad craftsmen to construct mechanical automata for the throne hall at his palace (Grabar 1951, 56). Thus, in any case, the writings of Heron of Alexandria served as a basis for the automata at the court of Byzantine emperors. The immediate realization of the ideas, however, could have been either the Byzantine interpretation or the Arabic one (Trilling 1997).

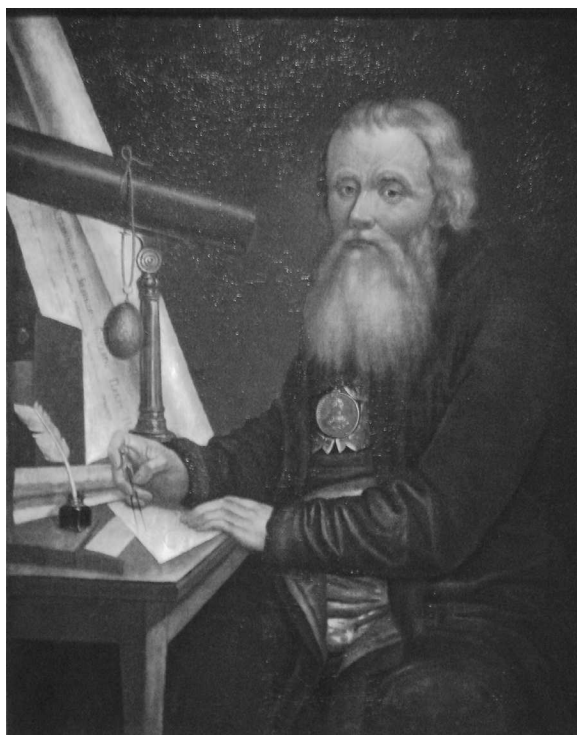
A rather significant fact is that the "golden tree" with mechanical birds was standing near the throne, and it was practically comprised of a single complex of the imperial representation. The origin of this symbiosis lies in the legendary throne of King Solomon supported by griffins, with mechanical birds sat on its back, and roaring mechanical lions at the foot. In the Middle Ages the throne of Solomon was treated as the basis of state power and the way that led to the pastures of Heaven (Ragusa 1977; Soucek 1993).

It is very interesting that golden and silver trees with mechanical birds in the throne hall were present not only at the Byzantium and Abbasid courts but also in Arab Sicily, and even in Central Asia and China. Rui Gonzalez de Clavijo, who in 1405 visited Timur's camp near Samarkand, described a golden tree among treasures he saw there: "In front of this small stand or table, there was a golden tree, made to resemble an oak; with the trunk as big as a man's leg, from which many branches spread out in all directions, with leaves like those of an oak; and it was as high as a man, and overshadowed the table, which stood near it. The fruit of the tree consisted of rubies, emeralds, turquoises, sapphires, and wonderfully large pearls, selected for their shape and beauty. On this tree there were many birds, made of enameled gold of various colours, which were seated on the leaves of the tree, with their wings spread out, and in the act of picking the fruit" (Clavijo 1859, 161). Clavijo does not specify, whether this tree was an automaton or just a precious toy, but the size, presence of the birds, and jewellery indicate its representative character.

Thus, the glittering gilded toy, the automata Peacock at the court of the Russian Empress Catherine the Great finds a very precise parallel in the description of the mechanical tree with birds in the throne hall of the Byzantine emperors. Typologically, the Peacock is similar to the "golden tree with birds" seen in the Middle Ages at the courts in both East and West. The parallel with

Byzantium is not only obvious but also extremely interesting. However, the question inevitably arises: could the Most Serene Prince Gregory Potemkin have had knowledge about the mechanical automata at the Byzantine court? How well-versed were the Prince and Catherine the Great in the details of Byzantine history and diplomacy?

It is necessary to first of all deflate the myth on the ignorance and laziness of the Most Serene Prince, who indulged himself only to sensual pleasures. This image was created by his opponents and, due to the anecdotes and fables translated into foreign languages it began to "travel around the world" quickly turning from fiction into "historical reality". In fact, Gregory Potemkin's contemporaries were impressed by his extensive and exact knowledge in various fields of arts, natural sciences, and humanities. Louis Francois Armand du Plessis, Duke of Richelieu wrote that Prince Potemkin possessed profound knowledge in all spheres learning from people with whom he met, and since his memory served him magnificently, he easily mastered those skills that others acquired by long and persistent work (Richelieu 1886, 148). The French Prince Roger de Damas left a similar account about Potemkin: "He had a supernatural power of giving exact expression to every inward feeling, and while he persecuted those who offended or displeased him, he would flatter and indulge every one he admired and valued. His conceptions were profound, but his methods of developing them inadequate, he was quick and ingenious in his work, but trivial in his amusements. <...> His inconceivable irregularities followed a regular and imperturbable course. <...> He was thorough in nothing, but knew something of everything, and his marvelous instinct helped him to apply his knowledge" (Damas 1913, 20). One of the profound characteristics of the contradictory nature of the Most Serene Prince was given by Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne who knew him closely. De Ligne enthusiastically wrote: "What is his magic? Genius, and then genius, and again genius; natural intelligence, and excellent memory, elevation of soul, malice without malignity, craft without cunning, a happy mixture of caprices, of which the good when they are uppermost win him all hearts; great generosity, grace and justice in his rewards, much tact, the talent of divining that which he does not know, and great knowledge of men" (Ligne 1899, 82).



12. P.P. Vedenetsky (Vedentsev). Portrait of I.P. Kulibin. 1818. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

Everyone who conversed with the Prince unanimously conceded his deep knowledge of antiquities. Francisco de Miranda, who met Potemkin during his travel to Russia, after a discussion he and Potemkin had about architecture, music, painting, and modern French literature wrote: "This person has been endowed with a strong character and exceptional memory, strives, as is well known, to develop the sciences and arts in every way and has largely succeeded in this" (Миранда 2001, запись от 8 января 1787). Potemkin's love for books and interest in science had its roots in his childhood, when he was brought up in the family of his uncle, Grigory M. Kislovsky, President of the Collegium of Economy (Kammerkollegia). The private school of the German pastor Litken, the gymnasium at Moscow University, and then the university revealed his brilliant abilities. Preparing himself for the religious career Potemkin paid special attention to the study of Greek language, theology, and ancient history. Suddenly, he dropped out of school and came to St Petersburg, to the Horse Guards Regiment, to which, according to the tradition of that time, he was assigned from the age of sixteen. From then, Potemkin built his career in the military but until

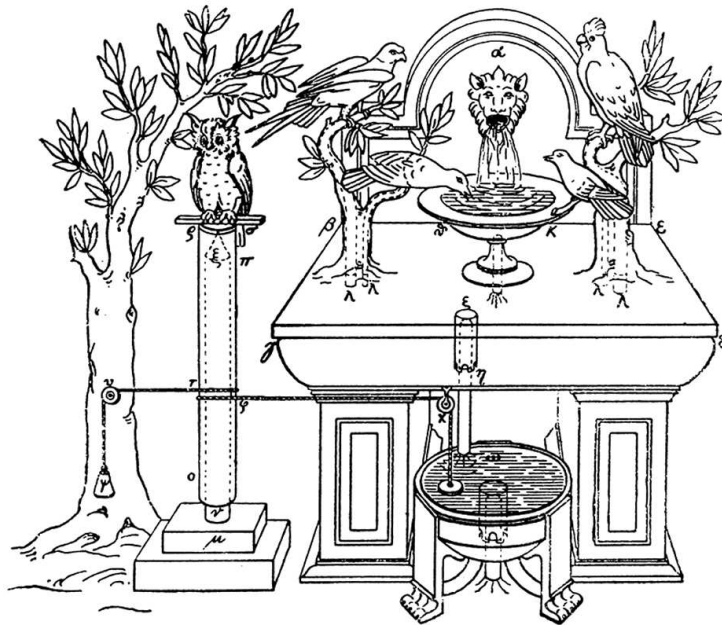


Fig. 3. Heron i, 16, after Schmidt.

13. A reconstruction of an automaton created by Heron of Alexandria (after Brett 1954, fig. 3).

the last days he retained his love for books and knowledge. The prince compiled a magnificent collection of books which included the library of the outstanding Greek scholar and theologian Eugene Bulgaris. There is a remarkable letter from Gregory Potemkin to Catherine the Great about the meaning of the Greek language, where he says: “It is incredible how much knowledge and a delicate taste will be acquired from numerous authors, whose translated works are changed not so much by translators but by the weakness of other languages” (Личная переписка 1997, 189, № 695). Surely, Prince Potemkin was familiar with the descriptions of mechanical wonders in the palace of the Byzantine emperor given in works of Liudprand and Greek authors. Even if he did not read the texts on his own, he could receive this information from Greeks of his circle, where the leading role played such outstanding figures as Eugene Bulgaris and Archbishop Nikithoros Theotokis. His familiarity with the sources is indirectly supported by information that the prince helped Catherine II in compiling the “Chronology of Russian History,” by giving her extracts from Greek texts. In a short note that survived in archives the Empress expressed her gratitude to Potemkin: “Grace a Votre beau livre, la Chro-

nologie de mon Histoire de Russie ou plutot des mes Memoires sur la Russie va devenir la partie la plus brillante. Grandissime merci” (Личная переписка 1997, 189, № 696). To this we should add that from time to time Prince Potemkin was lit up by various ideas, such as to destroy the Ottoman Empire, to put the Grand Duke Konstantin Pavlovich on the throne of Constantinople, or to establish the Kingdom of Dacia. We should not question the knowledge of Byzantine history and culture by Prince Potemkin and members of the court of Catherine the Great. If, for example, we take the poem “Peacock” by Gavriil R. Derzhavin, we will see that it almost literally follows the text of the Greek “Physiologus”. The parallels are so obvious that there is no doubt that Derzhavin knew the Greek manuscript which he used for his poem (Державин 1985, 163, 164). And this example is far from being an exception.

Thus, we have reasons to assume that the Most Serene Prince Potemkin explaining his order for the automaton Peacock to Cox was guided by the description of automata in the throne hall at the palace of the Byzantine emperors in Constantinople. The gilded bronze tree with moving and singing birds made for the Russian Empress should have reminded the spectators that Russia was the

heir of ancient Byzantium; it should emphasize the legitimacy of Russia's rights to the role of the Great Empire. Apparently, it was also the Prince who chose the specific flora and fauna used in the automaton. Once again, we would like to repeat here that even if Cox proceeded with automatic figures he made previously, he could not on his own, without approval of the buyer, select them. In any case, the final decision was made by Potemkin. Choosing the figures and discussing the sequence of their movements, the prince could not ignore the symbols of birds and other elements of the décor of this mechanical toy. So, let us discuss it and offer one of the possible reconstructions of the general idea of the Peacock.

In Russia, from the time of Peter the Great the images and mottos from the book "Symbola et Emblemata" were in wide circulation (SE 1705). The book was indispensable in the preparation of fireworks, festivals, and masquerades, and was often used to make various gifts, select subjects and characters for the decoration of snuff boxes, watches, and jewellery. It is extremely interesting that Kulibin's archive contains "symbols et emblemata drawn from a book printed under the Emperor Peter the First Emperor" used by the master "to design clocks, with page numbers where the emblems are printed" (Малькевич, Раскин 1953, 94).

It is precisely in "Symbola et Emblemata" where it is possible to find images that are very important for understanding the symbolism of the mechanical toy ordered by Prince Potemkin. The Peacock with a fanned tail appears under no. 158 – "No less charitable than proud" (SE 1705, 54-55), and under no. 563 – "He beareth wit him his reward" (SE 1705, 188-189). The owl is depicted only once, as a companion of the goddess Athena Pallada (Minerva), under no. 757 – "The Virgin must be kept in Custody" (SE 1705, 254-255). But the cockerel has several interpretations: no. 197 – "I am dedicated to the Sun and Mars" (SE 1705, 66-67), no. 651 – "When this Cock doth crow, then Love will go away" (SE 1705, 218-219), no. 778 – "Care takes away my sleep" (SE 1705, 260-261).

The Hermitage automaton, besides the peacock, includes one cockerel and one owl; also, there are figures of squirrels, snails, lizards, and one snake. In addition, the "Description of the Details of the Clock with a Peacock" found among Kulibin's papers mentions two frogs (Малькевич, Раскин



14. K.A. Ukhtomsky. The Peacock in the East Wing, the Hermitage. Watercolour. 1860s. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

1953, 365). These animals find their explanations in "Symbola et Emblemata" as well, for example, a squirrel gnawing a nut in no. 207 – "Thon' shall not have it without pains" (SE 1705, 70-71). The snail has two interpretations: a single snail in no. 620 – "He is happy that maketh him not too free" (SE 1705, 208-209), and a snail crawling along the trunk of a tree in no. 622 – "He beareth all wat he hath with him" (SE 1705, 208-209). The mushroom in no. 98 was regarded as a symbol of fleeting time – "Soon come, soon perished" (SE 1705, 34-35). Fleeting time was also emphasized by pumpkins. In the Russian translation of the Bible the pumpkin was the miraculous plant that God made to grow up in one night to shade the Prophet Jonah from the blistering heat, and which in one night was eaten away by a worm and withered the next morning (Jonah, 4: 6-11).

Similar books of symbols made it possible to encrypt in images a rather complex meaning. And

quite often there could be several interpretations, or the explanation of it could have several meanings based on different interpretations. At the same time, there was a fairly steady symbolism related to specific elements which are of interest for us in here. The oak was a symbol of the unshakable Faith and welfare of the State, and pumpkins symbolized abundance and prosperity, while the acorn was considered as a symbol of “male strength”, and the pumpkin was the personification of the feminine beginning (warmth and wet substance). The snail meant modesty (“I carry all my wealth with myself”); the lizard – the desire for true light (the symbol of Apollo conquering the death, the symbol of the Renaissance); the owl and the snake – wisdom (the symbols of the goddess Athena Pallada, or Minerva); the frog – harmony between lovers (as well as eroticism, debauchery, and fertility); the cockerel – an attribute of Mars, the god of war; the peacock – the symbol of the Sun (the sacred bird of the goddess Juno). The golden peacock (or pheasant) in Russian and Western European symbolism was transformed into the Phoenix or the Firebird²⁰.

While talking about symbolism one should also take into account the fascination with chinoiserie which spread throughout eighteenth-century Europe. Catherine the Great did not escape this enthusiasm either: Chinese rooms on entresols in her private apartments in the Winter Palace, pavilions and bridges “in Chinese style” in the park of Tsarskoe Selo, and of course, the collection of Chinese porcelain and precious curiosities. Therefore it is appropriate to mention the Chinese interpretation of the golden peacock (pheasant) and cockerel. According to the symbolism of sounds, the cockerel (kun-khee) makes a scream (min), and thus the traditional cockerel’s scream “kun-min” was interpreted as “Service and Glory”. A peacock (pheasant) not only belonged to the 12 signs of the greatness of the emperor but was also a very specific symbol of the empress. At the same time, the golden pheasant was treated in China as a sign of the dignity of high-ranking officials.

²⁰ For example, Derzhavin in his poem “The Peacock” said: “Is this the feathered tsar? // Is this the divine Firebird, whose rich, majestic coat // Brings awe to savage beasts?” (Державин 1985, 163).

In this regard, it should be recounted that in her private correspondence Catherine the Great called Prince Potemkin “mon faisand d’or” or “mon beau faisand”; the “Indian rooster”, “peacock”, “overseas cat”, “golden pheasant”, “tiger”, or “lion in reed” (Личная переписка 1997, 57, 65, 85).

Thus, it is possible to offer several variants of the symbolism encrypted in the mechanical wonder Peacock. The oak crowned with the golden peacock and pumpkins growing at its base symbolize the flourishing and prosperous state under the reign of the Empress of Russia; this prosperity is created through the personal wisdom of Catherine II, the Northern Minerva (her symbols are the owl and snake), and by military victories gained by commanders she had chosen. Among the latter, the most famous and closest to the Empress was Prince Gregory Potemkin, who was called the Northern Mars (his symbol is the cockerel). The symbols emphasized also the personal virtues of Catherine the Great: her modesty (the snail), diligence (the squirrel gnawing nuts), working capacity (the cockerel, number 778 in *Symbola et Emblemata*), kindness (the peacock with a fanned tail), her striving for truth (the lizard), wisdom (the owl and snake), and harmony in love (the frog). The double time dial with Roman and Arabic numerals (that was not uncommon in the eighteenth-century clocks) could be treated as a combination of wisdom of East and West, and simultaneously interpreted as an allusion to the vastness of the Russian Empire. And the fact that the dial was placed in the mushroom cap had clearly indicated the transience of time, the transience of earthly life. Thus, the symbolism of this mechanical toy made on Potemkin’s request meant, first of all, the “encrypted” (but well transparent) glorification of the deeds and personal virtues of the Empress Catherine the Great. And from this it becomes clear why the movement of mechanical birds begins with the owl, the symbol of wise Minerva: after all, the Empress gives the course to everything in our mortal world. In this aspect the Peacock glorifying Catherine II is similar to the automaton clock glorifying Louis XIV made by Antoine Morand.

In the context of personal relationships between Grigory Potemkin and Catherine II it seems that the Prince could also put in a second, hidden meaning into the composition he compiled. “The tree of a prosperous state” flanks the figures of the

owl and cockerel – the symbols of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin, her secret husband. The union of the owl and the cockerel, that is the union of Catherine II and Prince Grigory, leads the empire to the flourishing and prosperity, widens the empire's borders, and smashes the enemies. Besides that, looking at the peacock while it spreading its tail and admiring itself, the Empress could not help smiling, recalling those affectionate nicknames she bestowed her dear husband, "the beautiful golden pheasant". And golden acorns (the symbols of male power), pumpkins (the erotic symbols of the female beginning), and frogs (both symbols of harmony between lovers and symbols of eroticism and lust) awakened the other equally personal association. And as if the encrypted question and lamentation of the Most Serene Prince was the cry: "When this Cock doth crow, then Love will go away" (no. 651 in *Symbola et Emblemata*). However, allusions to personal ties between the Empress and Prince Potemkin were understood by very few from the tight court circle, and some symbols were, probably, understood by only by these two.

There is another associative aspect in the composition of the Peacock, the literary one. In a splendid fable "Acorn and Pumpkin" by Jean de Lafontaine the philosophizing hero is resting under an oak among growing pumpkins. The very combination of the oak and pumpkin is very eloquent. No less expressive is the basic idea of the fable:

*I see that God had reasons good,
And all his works well understood*²¹.

We would like to express here an idea as to what Prince Potemkin had in mind ordering this spectacular, complex, and expensive automaton.

One more important aspect is related to the automaton Peacock. Before ordering the automaton Prince Potemkin should have an idea on where in the residence of the Russian Empress the Peacock will be placed. It may seem strange but for many years the Winter Palace did not have a throne hall. Due to the resignation of architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli the ceremonial Throne Hall in the northwestern avant-corps was only partially decorated, and was never used for its intended purpose. At first, its functions were performed by

the Avant-salle, and then the Audience-chamber built by Jean-Baptiste Vallin de la Mothe. The relatively small room did not meet the ambitious demands of Catherine the Great, and for the very purpose in 1774 she instructed Yu. M. Felten to rebuild Rastrelli's Light Gallery. The gallery was hurriedly finished in November of 1775 and named the "White Gallery" because of the white columns in it, but the Empress decided that the room looked rather simple. For this reason she supported Felten's suggestion to redecorate the White Gallery with natural colored marble. By 1781, the main tasks were almost completed. According to Felten's project, a special complex architectural and sculptural construction was supposed to be built for the throne in this passage gallery. However, in 1781 finishing works were given to another architect, Giacomo Quarenghi. In an elaboration of Felten's plan, he suggested to face all walls of the gallery with natural colored marble. Despite the fact that it would extend the period of work the idea pleased Catherine II. But in 1785, when works reached the stage of veneering the walls, Quarenghi demanded to dismantle the gallery to its foundation. According to his calculations, the lower vaults would not withstand the increased weight. There was a conflict situation between Quarenghi and Felten, and the proposed options for resolving the situation baffled the Empress greatly because their implementation required several more years of complicated and expensive works; in addition, it would close the passage from her apartments to the Jordan Staircase and the Nevsky Enfilade that was used for official ceremonies. Fortunately for all, Quarenghi proposed a plan to make a separate Throne Hall in a new building constructed in the courtyard of the Winter Palace; this would leave the palace's everyday life unaffected, and the White Gallery would continue to be used as a throne hall (Пилявский и др. 1989, 135-137).

Important in this tangled story is the fact that according to the project of Yury M. Felten, a new color decoration of the throne White Gallery was planned to be finished by the end of 1781/early 1782. If not for the involvement of Giacomo Quarenghi, the project would have been completed on time. The deadline for the finishing work was the time when the clockmaker Frederick Jury with the automaton Peacock arrived to the Russian capital. It seems that Prince Potemkin intended

²¹I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Olga Lavrova, France, who pointed me to this fable.

his gift to be placed exactly in the Throne Hall. In this case it would sound the theme of rightfulness of Russia to be the heiress of Byzantium, and her claims to territorial and political changes on the Balkans would be proclaimed. Of course, the mechanical wonder could also be placed in one of the avant-chambers that preceded the hall from the side of the ceremonial Jordan (Ambassadorial) Staircase. But even in this case the parallel with the hall for diplomatic receptions in the palace of the Byzantine emperors would remain as well.

Surprisingly, a confirmation of the proposed suggestion that more likely the Peacock was intended for the Throne Hall reveals in the documents of James Cox himself. In November 1778, Cox declared bankruptcy, and part of his stock was sold at Christie's auction on 3rd of March, 1779. Among the items offered for sale was a throne "designed for her Imperial Majesty the Empress of Russia" (Smith 2000, 359). Thus, the English master had the order on the precious throne for Catherine the Great; it was already done in 1779, that is at the time when the Throne Hall of the Winter Palace was undergoing reconstruction. It is quite logical to assume that a bronze gilded tree with mechanical birds ordered to the same James Cox should stay near the throne. In this case, the idea of the Byzantine heritage would clearly be seen in the Throne Hall of Catherine the Great, and the Empress herself could be compared with the famous Constantine Porphyrogenitus. The conflict between architects, the change of the project and the timing of the design of the Throne Hall, the sale of the throne at the London auction in 1779

and also, perhaps, the breakage of one of the Peacock's mechanisms prevented the realization of the Prince's idea. As we already know, it was not until 1792, after the death of Prince Potemkin, that the golden pheasant spread his pompous tail and the golden cockerel had crowed again.

In the last years of her life Catherine the Great liked to visit the Tauride Parace, where Kulibin on her order restored the Peacock into working condition. Perhaps, not once this mechanical toy was wound up for the Empress. We can only guess what kind of thoughts and memories came to Catherine II when she looked at the owl twisting its head and beating off the beat with the paw; at the cockerel shaking its head and crowing; at the peacock who stretched its neck, spread out its tail, and rotated. Maybe she remembered the descriptions of banquets held by the Byzantine emperors and compared her reign to the prosperous Byzantine times; maybe she remembered the way she rose to glory, the military victories of Russia, the annexation of the Crimea, the building of new cities ... We can only guess about this. But what she certainly could not stop thinking about, what she could not stop remembering while looking at moving birds was the one who ordered for her this mechanical wonder. She could not forget the Prince Grigory Potemkin, her favourite, secret husband and faithful companion, whom she loved with intense desire and passion, and whom she wrote in the state of the love ecstasy: "...mon faisan d'or. Je Vous aime de tout mon Coeur", "Adieu, mon beau faisan, je Vous aime de tout mes facultes" (Личная переписка 1997, 57, 65).

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Dragoste, politică și arte frumoase. Automatul mecanic „Păunul de aur” pentru Ecaterina a II-a și originile lui bizantine

Cuvinte-cheie: automate mecanice, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj, automatul „Păunul”, James Cox, G. Potiomkin, Ecaterina a II-a, ducesa Kingston, I. Kulibin.

Rezumat: Articolul este consacrat istoriei și simbolistici automatului mecanic „Păunul”, confecționat de meșterul giuvaier englez din secolul al XVIII-lea James Cox. „Păunul” considerat printre cele mai consacrate exponate ale Muzeului de Stat Ermitaj, se crede a fi un orologiu. Această jucărie minunată include cu adevărat un mecanism de ceas, montat în pălăria ciupercii. Totuși figurina secundară a ciupercii pe fundalul splendidei compoziții, precum și examinarea funcționării mecanismului, mișcarea pe rând a figurinelor au permis autorului să concluzioneze că „Păunul” este o jucărie de amuzament pusă în mișcare de mecanismul de ceas. Confecționat la comanda cneazului Grigori Potiomkin în calitate de dar pentru Ecaterinei a II-a, „Păunul”, după cum se arată în articol, are o simbolică complexă ce reflectă și povestea de dragoste dintre cneaz și împărăteasă, și politica Rusiei în Orient, și ideea moștenirii tradițiilor bizantine. „Păunul”, destinat pentru Sala Tronului din Palatul de Iarnă, simbolizează de asemenea valoarea Ecaterinei cea Mare și realizările ei spre gloria statului.

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1. Automatul mecanic „Păunul”, J. Cox, 1871, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
2. Păunul cu coada desfăcută. Automatul mecanic „Păunul” (detaliu), J. Cox, 1871, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
3. Bufnița în colivia cu clopoței. Automatul mecanic „Păunul” (detaliu), J. Cox, F. Yuri, 1871, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
4. Cocoșul. Automatul mecanic „Păunul” (detaliu), J. Cox, 1871, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
5. Veveriță. Automatul mecanic „Păunul” (detaliu), J. Cox, 1871, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
6. Ciupercă cu mecanismul de ceas. Automatul mecanic „Păunul” (detaliu), J. Cox, 1871, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
7. Mecanism din suportul automatului mecanic „Păunul”, 1871, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
8. Dovleci de pe suportul automatului mecanic „Păunul”, 1871, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
9. Portretul marelui cneaz G. Potiomkin-Tavrishesky, J.B. Lampi (senior), cca 1791.
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11. Portretul Ecaterinei cea Mare, J.B. Lampi (senior), 1793, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
12. Portretul lui I. Kulibin, P. Vedenetsky, 1818, Muzeul de Stat Ermitaj.
13. Reconstituirea automatului mecanic de grădină al lui Heron de Alexandria (după Brett 1954, fig. 3).
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Любовь, политика и изящные искусства. Механический автомат «Золотой павлин» для Екатерины Великой и его византийские истоки

Ключевые слова: механические автоматы, Государственный Эрмитаж, автомат «Павлин», Джеймс Кокс, Г.А. Потемкин, Екатерина II, герцогиня Кингстон, И.П. Кулибин.

Резюме: Статья посвящена истории и символике механического автомата «Павлин» работы английского мастера XVIII века Джеймса Кокса. Один из самых популярных экспонатов Государственного Эрмитажа, «Павлин» традиционно считается часами. Конструкция этой удивительной игрушки действительно включает часовой механизм, встроены в головку гриба. Однако второстепенность фигурки гриба на фоне

роскошной композиции, а также анализ работы часового механизма и очередности движения фигур позволили автору придти к заключению, что «Павлин» – это игрушка для увеселения, лишь приводимая в движение часовым механизмом. Сделанный по заказу князя Григория Потемкина для подарка Екатерине II, «Павлин», как показано в статье, наполнен сложной символикой, отражающей и любовную историю князя и императрицы, и восточную политику России, и идею наследования традиций Византии. Символика «Павлина», предназначавшегося, по мнению автора, для тронного зала Зимнего дворца, также отражала личные достоинства Екатерины Великой и прославляла ее деяния во славу государства.

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