Catherine II and the Masonic Circle of N. I. Novikov

Ilikolai Ivanovich Novikov (1744-1818) grew up on the family estate far from Moscow and studied at the dvorian skaia gimnazia to the recently established University of Moscow. In 1762 entered the Izmailovskii Guards' Regiment and in 1767 was appointed to the staff of the Legislative Commission. In 1768 Novikov red from state service and began, in St. Petersburg, the publication of a series of satirical journals. The available evidence on this period Novikov's life suggests a deep motivation to be of "service to my fatherland" and a growing conviction that such service could most actively be rendered in the areas of publishing, education and philanthropy. Initially, Novikov's efforts in these areas were limited a lack of funds and assistants. In 1775, however, Novikov took on a job that put him in touch with persons of influence and wealth by opening a lodge in St. Petersburg of the Society of Freemasons.  

The student of Novikov's activities is deeply indebted to M. N. Lontchak, Novik and moshkovskie martynisty (M., 1867), which remains an indispensable ce. It is supplemented by his Sochineniya, I (M., 1915). Equally indispensable is Bogolyubov, N. I. Novikov i ego vremya (M., 1916), still the most satisfactory study of the intellectual foundations and remarkable range of activities of Novikov Circle. The book's usefulness is limited, however, by the absence of index or scholarly apparatus. The brief G. Verhadskii, Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov (P., 1918), was intended for publication in the relevant volume of the zhurnal biograficheskiy slovar'. It includes a valuable and comprehensive biblio-

1 The chief source on freemasonry, not limited to Russia, is the ambitious and rously illustrated Masonisme et son histoire (Brussels, 1900); and the single article in 1922. Also valuable among older works are: A. N. Polskiy, Russkie masonostvo XVIII i pervaya chetvartya XIX v. (M., 1916); G. Verhadskii, Russkoe masonostvo v tsarevnitve Ekateriny II (P., 1917); and I. G. Finkelshtein, Istoria frank-masona v velikom ovosnovania i poiskovoye ieroglyficheskoy tsarskoy vremeni (SPb., 1874). T. A. Bakounine's Le répertoire biographique frances-macons russes (Brussels, 1940), is a rich fund of information.  

2 The Soviet period both Novikov and the masonic movement underwent an al period of neglect — a neglect embracing eighteenth-century studies as well. In the 1930's and 1940's, however, a new generation of Soviet scholars rged, largely under the guidance of G. A. Gukovskii, and the major Soviet y of Novikov and his masonic ties was written by one of Gukovskii's pupils,  

A recent Soviet study is A. Zapadov, Novikov (M., 1965).
is unknown. Despite a semi-legendary account which holds that first Russian lodge was founded in Kronstadt at the command of Peter the Great, it seems more likely that the Order was introduced into Empire by West Europeans — particularly Englishmen and Scots resident in Russia. Some of these foreigners, active members of masonic lodges in their homelands, continued to meet in their new environment. In time, members of the Russian elite came in touch with the movement some as guests of the foreigners, others in the course of study travel in Western Europe.

Through most of the reign of the Empress Elizabeth masonic lodges remained something of an alien growth on Russian soil, although increasing numbers of Russians, chiefly young Guards' officers, entered the lodges. Most of them, however, seem to have been attracted to Order out of curiosity — in the words of Miliukov, masonry in the years was in large part the "superficial pastime of désœuvrés gens." At banquets, which then played a considerable part in the activities of the lodges, the brothers would bellow discordant and incomprehensible songs, generously lubricated with draughts of wine, "so that gathering which began with an invocation to Minerva would end in toasts to Bacchus".3

If Russian masonry had limited itself to the superficial and the exotic it might have some passing interest as an illustration of the earlier stages of cultural westernization in the Empire, but it would scarcely have sustained attention. However, in Russia as elsewhere, masonic lodges far from homogeneous. If, for some, the colorful regalia of sumptuous banquets continued to provide diversion, others sought answers to the problems that cultural westernization was bringing to the fore.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the exposure to Western philosophical thought, and in particular to the teachings of the philosophes, had seemed to many young Russian nobles to be a liberating force from tradition and the tenets of the Russian Orthodox Church. The psychological stresses inherent in the abrupt break with traditional values were, however, very great, particularly for some of the more sensitive youth. By the 1770's an increasing number of the serious-minded young nobles sought in freemasonry a way out of their doubts and of the contradictions that existed between received tradition and the thought of the Enlightenment. For e

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