

Sex in the City that Peter Built: The Demimonde and Sociability in Mid-Eighteenth Century St. Petersburg

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On June 28, 1750, in Peterhof, Empress Elizabeth instructed her privy secretary, Vasilii Demidov, to go to St. Petersburg and “find an indecent woman [*nepotrebnuiu zhenku*],” a foreigner called “the Dresdener” (*Drezdensha*) who “rents upscale houses and keeps there debauched [*skvernykh*] women and girls . . . and to put her under arrest at the [St. Peter & St. Paul] Fortress along with her entire crew.” Demidov was also to search for other “indecent ones” and arrest them as well.¹ This order launched what turned out to be a large-scale campaign against all sorts of unacceptable sexual behavior in the imperial capital. Its active phase lasted for five months and resulted in the arrest and detention of over two hundred women and some men in the so-called Kalinkin House. The *Drezdensha* affair was apparently widely discussed in

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1. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (hereafter, RGADA), fond 8 “*Kalinkin dom i dela o prestupleniakh protiv npravstvennosti*” (The Kalinkin house and the cases regarding the crimes against morality), op. 1, d. 2, ll. 1–1 ob. (Investigation of all loose women in St. Petersburg, 1750). This episode has been covered in M. I. Pyliaev, *Staryi Peterburg: Razskazy iz byloi zhizni stolitsy* (St. Petersburg, 1887), 146–48; L. N. Semenova, *Ocherki istorii byta i kul'turnoi zhizni Rossii. Pervaia polovina XVIII v.* (Leningrad, 1982), 205–6; Paul Keenan, *St. Petersburg and the Russian Court, 1703–1761* (Basingstoke, 2013), 53–57. The most thorough discussion of this affair is to be found in works by Irina A. Roldugina, and especially in her recent article “Otkrytie seksual'nosti: Transgressiia sotsial'noi stikhii v seredine XVIII v. v Sankt-Peterburge: po materialam Kalinkinskoi komissii (1750–1759),” *Ab Imperio* no. 2 (2016): 29–69. Also, I. A. Roldugina, “Kalinkinskaia komissii i Kalinkinskii dom: Opyt bor'by s sotsial'nymi deviatsiami v Peterburge v seredine XVIII veka” (Undergraduate Thesis, Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, 2006); I. A. Roldugina, “An Attempt at Social Disciplining in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Kalinkinskii House. A Case Study” (M.A. Thesis, Central European University, 2010); I. A. Roldugina, ““Bliatskie domy i nepotrebnye zhenki i devki”: vzniknovenie subkul'tury prostitutsii v Sankt-Peterburge v seredine XVIII veka,” in *Gendernye aspekty sotsiologicheskogo znaniia—II. Materialy Vtoroi Vserossiiskoi nauchnoi konferentsii studentov, aspirantov i molodykh uchenykh*, ed. D. B. Vershinina (Perm', 2013), 223–31. Vasilii Ivanovich Demidov (1697–1761), Elizabeth's secretary, was a priest's son, not related to the famous dynasty of mining tycoons. Andrei Demidov, “Iz istorii dvorian Demidovykh,” *Rossiiskii nekropol'*, May 12, 2010, at www.necropol.org/demidovy-dvorjane.html (last accessed 9 September 2017). See also A. D. Rittikh, “Imperatritsa Elizaveta Petrovna i ee zapisochki k Vasiliuu Ivanovichu Demidovu,” *Russkii arkhiv* no. 1 (1878): 10–15. On the Privy Cabinet under Elizabeth, see O. G. Ageeva, *Imperatorskii dvor Rossii. 1700–1796 gody* (Moscow, 2008), 142–46.

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the city and made quite an impression on contemporaries. In his oft-quoted memoirs, Major Mikhail Danilov, who was posted in St. Petersburg at the time, recalls that the impact of this affair was such that he chose to renounce his own budding romance with a young German girl, the daughter of a coachman whose master was renting an apartment in the same building.²

The Kalinkin Commission, as the ad hoc body that conducted this campaign came to be called (after a linens workshop that it eventually occupied), produced voluminous files filled mostly with minutes of the interrogations of suspected “indecent women” and other individuals implicated in “fornication.” These materials allow for fascinating insights into the social and sexual life of mid-eighteenth century St. Petersburg. These are also unique sources: whereas the Paris police of that era, most famously, developed a highly-sophisticated network of surveillance that penetrated deep into the capital’s underworld, the very workings of the Kalinkin Commission underscore the primitive nature of policing in the Russian capital and the absence of regular routinized channels for monitoring the behavior of the city’s populace.³ In that sense, the rich material produced in the course of the Drezdensha investigation is invaluable when exploring the history of sexuality, social and cultural life, and the attempts at enforcing social discipline in eighteenth-century St. Petersburg. While extremely vivid and often salacious, many of the episodes related in these documents are also truly tragic, revealing stories of abuse and suffering.

This article does not seek to offer an exhaustive study of this episode, much less a comprehensive overview of prostitution and moral regulation in eighteenth-century Russia. Rather, it focuses on the insights provided by the Commission’s materials into the sociable practices of the Russian elite. First, it maps out the demimonde, or “sexual underworld,” of mid-eighteenth century St. Petersburg.⁴ It sketches out the institutional, social, and economic dimensions of the so-called “parties,” or perhaps, “soirées” (*vecherinki*, from *vecher*, “evening” in Russian), the informal, privately-run commercial venues for mixed-sex socializing. These parties also serve as a window onto a variety of other forms of illicit relationships, from prostitution to concubinage and unmarried cohabitation, as intertwined and hard to disentangle as these often were. Prince M. M. Shcherbatov, an eighteenth-century historian and social critic, famously decried the “corruption of morals in Russia” in the post-Petrine period, and memoirs, including those of Catherine II, bear witness to the widespread practice of adultery and extra-marital liaisons in

2. M. V. Danilov, “Zapiski,” in *Bezvremen'e i vremenshchiki: Vospominaniia ob "epokhe dvortsovykh perevorotov" (1720-e–1760-e gody)*, ed. Evgenii V. Anisimov (Leningrad, 1991), 315–17.

3. On the St. Petersburg police in this period, see Keenan, *St Petersburg and the Russian Court*, 39–42; O. E. Kosheleva, *Liudi Sankt-Peterburgskogo ostrova Petrovskogo vremeni* (Moscow, 2004), 41–46. On the policing of prostitution in Paris, see Erica-Marie Benabou, *La prostitution et la police de moeurs au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987); Philip F. Riley, *A Lust for Virtue: Louis XIV's Attack on Sin in Seventeenth-Century France* (Westport, Conn, 2001), 15–48; Nina Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges: The World of Elite Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Ithaca, 2013), 14–45.

4. See George Sebastian Rousseau and Roy Porter, eds., *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Chapel Hill, 1988).

court circles.⁵ The existing literature on sexuality in Russia, however, mostly focuses on what we might call the traditional family and concentrates on either the pre-Petrine period or on the more “modern” nineteenth century.⁶ In this sense, the anecdotes portraying Peter I’s own relationships with women from Anna Mons to Catherine I, as well as the sexual habits of those at the courts of Elizabeth and Catherine II lack context in the literature. By reconstructing the realities of the eighteenth-century “sexual underworld” in Russia, this article seeks to fill this gap.

Second, this article employs the materials of the Drezdensha affair as a window into the evolution of sociability in Russia. It is exactly in the middle of the century that Douglas Smith discerns the proliferation of such forums as commercial (rather than sponsored by the state or by magnates) theatrical productions or, especially, masonic lodges in Russia.⁷ More recently, the Free Economic Society (founded in 1765) has attracted special attention as a key site of the emerging Russian associational sphere.⁸ Of course, such institutions are

5. M. M. Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia*, ed. Antony Lentin (London, 1969); [Catherine II], *Zapiski imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoroi* (St. Petersburg, 1907).

6. Some of the key works are: Judith Vowles, “Marriage à la russe,” in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, J. T. Costlow, S. Sandler, and J. Vowles eds., (Stanford, 1993), 53–74; N. L. Pushkareva, “A se grekhi zlye, smertnye. . .”: *liubov’, erotika i seksual’naia etika v doindustrial’noi Rossii: X—pervaia polovina XIX v.: teksty, issledovaniia* (Moscow, 1999); Wendy Rosslyn, “Women in Russia (1700–1825): Recent Research,” in *Women and Gender in 18th-Century Russia*, ed. W. Rosslyn (Burlington, 2003), 1–34; Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000* (Cambridge, Eng., 2004); N. L. Pushkareva, *Chastnaia zhizn’ zhenshchiny v Drevnei Rusi i Moskovii: Nevesta, zhena, liubovnitsa* (Moscow, 2011); Nada Boškowska, *Mir russkoi zhenshchiny semnadsatogo stoletia*, Trans. R. A. Gimadeeva (St. Petersburg, 2014). On sexuality in the context of courtship and marriage in this period, see Anna V. Belova, *Chetyre vozrasta zhenshchiny: povsednevnaia zhizn’ russkoi provintsial’noi dvorianki XVIII-serediny XIX v.* (St. Petersburg, 2010), 249–91. Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700* (Ithaca, 1989) still provides the best overview on the subject in pre-Petrine period, while for the nineteenth century see Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca, 1992). Notably, a recent study of libertinage in Russian literature does not have much to say on the subject prior to Nikolai Gogol’ and Aleksandr Pushkin. Alexei Lalo, *Libertinage in Russian Culture and Literature: A Bio-History of Sexualities at the Threshold of Modernity* (Leiden, 2011). On prostitution see A.A. Il’iukhov, *Prostitutsiia v Rossii s XVII veka do 1917 goda* (Moscow, 2008), 88–99, and, for later periods, Barbara Alpern Engel, “St. Petersburg Prostitutes in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Personal and Social Profile,” *The Russian Review* 48, no. 1 (January 1989): 21–44; Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia’s Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1995). For the most recent general overview, see Philippa Hetherington, “Prostitution in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia,” in Magaly Rodriguez Garcia, Lex Heerma van Voss, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s* (Leiden, 2017), 138–170.

7. Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb, 1999), 54–90, esp. 56–59. Most recently, see Andreas Önnersfors and Robert Collis, eds., *Freemasonry and Fraternalism in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Sheffield, 2009).

8. Colum Leckey, *Patrons of Enlightenment: The Free Economic Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Newark, 2011); Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), 38–55.

also the most obvious sites to be studied, as they left a paper trail—because they were composed of highly literate and articulate individuals, or perhaps, were even sanctioned by the state. As a result, however, it is the loftier dimensions of sociability that are privileged in standard accounts: “Westernization” and “Enlightenment” in Russia tend to be associated with highbrow practices, with joining the ranks of the “reading public,” with reflecting on the public good, and, generally, with becoming more civil and polite, with “curbing . . . base desires and passions.”⁹

It is, however, fairly clear that the birth of sociability and associational life was not driven by elevated pursuits alone, and that the early nuclei of “society” were not anodyne oases of sophisticated politeness. The very coffeehouses and taverns that have been singled out as important early sites of sociability and the public sphere in western Europe were blurred, liminal spaces of transgression, bodily indulgence, and social inclusiveness; in fact, initially they formed a single continuum both with the emerging masonic lodges and clubs, on the one hand, and with the early, non-institutionalized brothels, on the other.¹⁰ In Russia, of course, the roots of modern sociability and associational culture can be traced to Peter I, most striking, perhaps, to his (in)famous All-Drunken Assembly. With its pointed rejection and inversion of social and cultural norms and the taboos performed, inter alia, through the use of explicitly sexual imagery, it was not only an element, but also a key instrument of the tsar-led “transfiguring” of society.¹¹ In 1718, Peter also began to promote mixed-sex, socially inclusive “assemblies,” designed to initiate his elite subjects into new, “polite” forms of entertainment and social interactions; after the tsar’s death these assemblies allegedly morphed into the much more formal and socially-exclusive *kurtagi* at court and the rigidly-ritualized balls at aristocratic houses.¹² Still, these more refined and subdued formats were only one facet of the wider universe of post-Petrine “westernized” socializing.

This article argues that the parties, with their “cold-blooded debauchery,” to use Pushkin’s phrase in “Eugene Onegin,” had important social and

9. Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 5.

10. On the historical debates regarding the realities of the early modern public sphere more generally, see Andreas Gestrich, “The Public Sphere and the Habermas Debate,” *German History* 3, no. 24 (July 2006): 413–30. For an overview of this sphere’s various institutional sites, see James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 2001), 226–50; Michael Schaich, “The Public Sphere,” in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Peter H. Wilson (Malden, 2008), 125–40; Scott Breuniger, “Introduction,” in Scott Breuninger and David Burrow, eds., *Sociability and Cosmopolitanism: Social Bonds on the Fringes of the Enlightenment* (London, 2012), 1–4.

11. Ernest A. Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom: Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great* (Ithaca, 2004).

12. Keenan, *St. Petersburg and the Russian Court*, 24–26; Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 65–66. By the 1730s, according to a Swedish traveler, assemblies were no longer held, with the exceptions of gatherings hosted by some foreign ambassadors, while Russians “prefer[ed] drinking and playing cards in their own company behind closed doors.” K. R. Berk [Carl Reinhold Berch], “Putevye zametki o Rossii,” in *Peterburg Anny Ioannovny v inostrannykh opisaniiakh: Vvedenie, teksty, kommentarii*, trans. Iu. N. Bespiatykh (St. Petersburg, 1997), 166.

cultural meaning. Certainly, young Russian nobles drank and whored both before and outside of such parties. Yet, the universe of parties had two important dimensions to it that, arguably, place these venues among the earliest recorded sites of truly autonomous and emancipated elite sociability in the empire.¹³ On the one hand, the parties in mid-century St. Petersburg, just like the coffee houses in Paris or London, provided increasingly institutionalized and publicly accessible forums for regular and voluntary interaction outside the domain of state service and outside the emerging “polite” society with its rigid hierarchy. Chronologically, the world of the sexually-charged “parties” preceded the emergence of more obvious forms of public life; notably, the clientele of Drezdensha’s events came largely from the same social circles as that of would-be masonic lodges and voluntary associations. In that sense, both the parties and the lodges reflect the elite’s search for an autonomous social space.

On the other, it is the realities of this social space that also provided some of the themes that members of elite concerned themselves with intellectually and artistically, thus also contributing to the creation of a common ideational space. In western Europe, the role of lowbrow and explicitly-pornographic literature in driving the development of publishing and reading has been widely acknowledged ever since Robert Darnton’s pioneering work.¹⁴ More generally, “it is in a variety of forms of sexual talk and action, as much as anything, that enlightenment vernacularized and dispersed itself, finding new ways into new public spheres.”¹⁵ Scholars emphasize the role of a “libertine enlightenment” in which “sexual freedom and dissident behavior allowed for a broad range of social and intellectual formations to be disturbed and refashioned in the eighteenth century.”¹⁶ As this article demonstrates, it was largely through discussion of debauchery and the foppish ways of the *petimetry* (*petit-mâitres*), intimately and directly linked to the “sexual underworld” as these were, that mid-eighteenth century Russians began to enter into a quasi-public intellectual dialogue with each other and to articulate their (critical) reflections on the west and on the Petrine transformation.

Nests of Indecency

Having received the order from the empress, Demidov instructed Assessor Beketov of the Police Chancellery to establish Drezdensha’s whereabouts, to detain her, and to interrogate her regarding other “indecent women” in the capital. By July 5, Demidov was reporting directly to Elizabeth that Drezdensha

13. For a useful overview of different ways of defining and approaching sociability in the eighteenth century, see Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670–1789* (Princeton, 1994), 28–38.

14. Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York, 1996).

15. Peter Cryle and Lisa O’Connell, “Sex, Liberty, and License in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty, and License in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Peter Cryle and Lisa O’Connell (New York, 2004), 2.

16. *Ibid.* On libertinage, see also materials in “Libertinage and Modernity,” *Yale French Studies* no. 94, (1998).

and two other women of her household were in custody. Torture (first, the *batogs*, and then the cat o' nine tails) was applied to some of them, and the unfortunate women "revealed many other nests of indecency." On the basis of their confession the investigators detained over fifty fornicators (*bludnitsy*) and pimps (*svodnitsy*), "in various places, households, and taverns, hiding in wardrobes and under the beds." Drezdensha in particular provided the names of scores of potentially suspect girls including those whom she had helped to find employment as maidservants and advised others to confess. Demidov was hoping "to gather a sizable herd of them, as . . . many places at the Admiralty Side, and on Vasilievskii Island are full [of indecent women], and there are some at Milionnaia Street." Some women went into hiding on the smaller islands on the Neva, so teams of soldiers had to be dispatched there.¹⁷

It is clear from the documents that Elizabeth was very intensely involved with the investigation: she followed the reports closely, decided how to proceed if an important dignitary or foreign envoy was involved, and used her own information channels to monitor and steer the investigation.¹⁸ Overall, Demidov reported to Elizabeth almost daily.¹⁹ She also requested additional information: for example, on July 11 she ordered a census of all the private rental dwellings along the Moika and Fontanka Rivers and their inhabitants.²⁰ The Empress did not provide, however, any clear definition of "indecency" for Demidov to operate on. If anything, the ever-widening scope of the investigation reflected the fact that the boundaries of "indecency" were being renegotiated as the campaign unfolded. By July 12 the investigators reported having seventy individuals under lock already and projected that the number might grow to 500.²¹ In fact, the round-up was so successful that the Peter and Paul Fortress could not accommodate all the detained women, and the Commission had to be transferred to the Kalinkin House.²² Eventually, Demidov's July projections proved to be too optimistic, but still by September 26 the Commission had 178 individuals in its custody, while a further thirty-seven suspected pimps and thirty-six fornicators were still at large.²³ All the detainees were interrogated by the commission, which sought to establish whether indeed

17. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 8–8 ob., 10, 92; *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Pervoe sobranie. 1649–1825* (St. Petersburg, 1830), (hereafter PSZ), vol. 13, №9789. For reasons of space, the women detained by the Commission could not be profiled here in any detail. For detailed profiles, see Roldugina, "Kalinkinskaia komissiia," 75–82; and Roldugina, "An Attempt at Social Disciplining." The Commission's scribes mercilessly distorted and Russified the names of most of the foreign detainees, to the extent that guessing the original spelling is often impossible. Additionally, some detainees were referred to by nicknames derived from their place of origin, such as Drezdensha, or Kenigsbersha. In other cases, a *-sha* ending was added to their husbands' names, as in Gaksha, or Berensha. In still other cases, rather than calling the girls by their father's last names, the scribes made up a patronymic of sorts derived from the Russified names of their fathers, while the girls' own first names were also Russified. Thus, there appeared "Maria Semenova, a foreigner," and so forth.

18. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 8–11 ob., 110

19. *Ibid.*, ll. 10–10 ob., 13, 15, 45, 47, 52, 55, 60, 72.

20. *Ibid.*, ll. 52–52 ob.

21. *Ibid.*, ll. 50–55 ob.

22. *Ibid.*, ll. 49, 55.

23. *Ibid.*, l. 137.

fornication took place, the circumstances in which it had taken place, whether anyone had facilitated or encouraged fornication, or whether the accused knew of any other fornicators. In practice, the Commission detained all sorts of women, ranging from streetwalking prostitutes to someone like Charlotte Garp, who lived in a sort of concubinage with the architect Carlo Giuseppe (Osip Petrovich) Trezzini (1697–1768) and bore a child acknowledged by him. Rather than enforcing specific norms and boundaries, the Commission was creating them in the course of the investigation, marking hitherto routine forms of behavior as illicit.²⁴

Arguably the most fascinating among the social practices reflected in the materials of the Kalinkin Commission are the “parties.” Certainly this was only one among many formats of unofficial socializing in the capital. A description of St. Petersburg composed at about the same time claimed that the city had close to two hundred drinking establishments of different kinds. While occasionally one finds evidence of a “comedy” being performed at such modest venues, the government—probably, rightly so—tended to associate them with debauchery. Thus, in June 1732, Field Marshal von Münnich sought to prevent the cadets and officers of the Cadet Corps from visiting taverns and coffee-houses “where there are billiard tables and other entertainments” because of the “quarrels and fights and other indecencies” supposedly endemic there.²⁵ Social gatherings at private homes were, apparently, also wide-spread, and one such event held at a private residence on Milionnaia Street in November 1744 turned into a large brawl involving officers and NCOs of the guards, artillery, and the Cadet Corps. In response, St. Petersburg *General-Politsmeister* (police chief) António Manuel de Vieira, or Devier (1682?–1745)—the very same man who twenty years earlier had drafted Peter I’s decree introducing the “assemblies”—decided to regulate the matter. As he acknowledged, it was “widely known that in St. Petersburg in certain places many [residents] stage puppet-plays and other comedies and organize parties.” Now this practice was declared potentially disruptive of public order: all those who wanted to hold “parties” had to obtain permission from the police, who would issue a “ticket” and dispatch soldiers to keep order.²⁶ The Kalinkin Commission naturally turned its attention towards these “parties,” since it emerged that Drezdensha and some of her colleagues in “indecency” were among the prominent and frequent hosts of such events.

Organized by private entrepreneurs to provide a forum for mixed-sex socializing, the “parties” investigated by the Commission were explicitly commercial ventures intended to earn income for the hosts, as they themselves emphasized. To some extent, this insistence on profit-seeking motives

24. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 119, ll. 1–25 (The case of Osip Trezzini).

25. 121 *kabaks* selling vodka as well as 65 *piteinyi pogrebs* selling “grape drinks” (i.e. wine). Andrei I. Bogdanov, *Opisanie Sanktpeterburga*, eds., K. I. Logachev, and V. S. Sobolev (St. Petersburg, 1997), 198–200; Kosheleva, *Liudi sankt-peterburgskogo ostroma*, 375–77; Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voenno-Istorcheskii Arkhiv (RGVIA), f. 314, op. 1, d. 1632, l. 64; PSZ, vol. 8, №5333, §48; vol. 9, №6947.

26. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 10, 21–21 ob. (Regarding parties held in St. Petersburg with the permission from the police). A sample of a permission ticket issued by the police is in *ibid.*, l. 29.

reflect, no doubt, the hosts' efforts to present the parties as a legitimate and innocent enterprise. In many cases, organizing parties was a source of supplementary income in addition to some other trade: the vast majority of such entrepreneurs identified by the Commission were "foreigners" of lower-middling status, such as artisans, bankrupt merchants, former domestics, non-commissioned officers, and so forth. A good example is a native of Abo, "of Swedish nation," listed in the records as Andrei Pomlin: he identified himself as a tailor; previously, he had also served as a domestic in the households of the Ambassadors to Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire. One Ivan Ferschter (Försher) explained that he decided to hold parties since "many of his comrades also held them . . . hoping to make profit."²⁷ For some, however, Drezdensha herself being the most outstanding example, this was their main occupation. Similarly, while some hosts appear to have rented special facilities for holding parties, most organized them in their own apartments.²⁸

The business model was based on charging the male patrons an admission fee: in exchange, they got an opportunity both to enjoy socializing on the premises and to meet female guests willing to engage in illicit sex. The hosts also provided entertainment: at Maria Vintslersha's parties, guests were "entertained with grape drinks, tea and coffee, and dancing."²⁹ Sometimes, guests could also play cards, and in a few instances a lottery draw took place. Musicians were invited from various regiments, especially the Guards: at one party, the band is reported to have included an alto, an oboe, and a violin.³⁰ Entrepreneurs nearly unanimously reported paying the musicians three rubles per night. Other costs included an unofficial honorarium of thirty to fifty kopeks per night paid to the soldiers appointed by the police to keep order. Male guests paid an entry fee that varied from fifty kopeks to one and one half rubles; females were admitted for free. The scale of these parties varied widely. While some events allegedly attracted about a dozen guests, others are described as drawing "multitudes." One Ivan Kristophorov, "a foreigner," claimed to have lost ten rubles on each of the two parties he organized due to the low attendance.³¹

Naturally, when under investigation, entrepreneurs tried to minimize the scale of their activities, or even presented them as one-off, isolated events. Ivan Ferschter claimed having organized a party only once, "about six months ago" (that is, early in 1750), at his own apartment. Johann Gendel'man (Heideman) recalled holding only four parties in 1747 in two different places, he held three in 1749, and one in 1750. Pomlin claimed to have organized only a "few" events, although he also confessed to having held a further "seven or eight" parties without obtaining a ticket, on the basis of informal permission from a police officer. Maria Vintslersha, however, admitted organizing about twenty parties in 1746 at the Admiralty Side, as well as "many" parties

27. *Ibid.*, l. 12.

28. On living arrangements and rental practices among the lower classes in St. Petersburg in a somewhat earlier period, see Kosheleva, *Liudi sankt-peterburgskogo ostrova*, 133–39, 363–79.

29. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, l. 6 ob.

30. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, l. 8.

31. *Ibid.*, l. 19.

in 1747 on Vasil'evskii Island.³² Georg Gak (Haack), a tavern-keeper, and his wife reported that both Pomlin and Vintslersha “often” held parties, while Drezdensha claimed that Vintslersha, Gendel'man, Pomlin, Corporal Fedor Podenskii of the Semenovskii Guards, and Uliana Maksheeva, known as *Udachka* (“Lucky”), ran such events “often, and almost every Sunday and on holidays.” According to her, Podenskii in particular “always had parties.”³³

The diversity of social types who patronized these events is striking. On one end of the spectrum were the parties run by Drezdensha herself and attended by “the officers of the guards, the regiments of the line, and those from the nobility.”³⁴ Parties organized by other entrepreneurs had a much more mixed audience: “officers and NCOs from various regiments, merchants, skippers, and clerks,” “officers, merchants, and other people,” “palace lackeys and other people,” and “a multitude of people of various ranks.” To give an example, guests of Johann Peter Gints, a regimental assistant medic, included: Prince Meshcherskii and another officer; an assistant medic from the Astrakhan Infantry Regiment; an infantry sergeant and his wife; a few males with Russian-sounding names whose ranks were not identified; the wives of Gints and Ensign Ulrich, his partner and an apparent pimp; a tavern-keeper's maid; and soldiers' wives residing in the same building. Another male guest is identifiable: it is John (or Ivan Fomich) Truscott (1721–1786), son of an English merchant and a student at the Academy of Sciences.³⁵

Obviously, the key attraction of these parties was an opportunity for male patrons to meet women who were potentially available sexually. One detainee claimed that female guests at such events were really “whores and pimps” (“*bliadi i svodnitsy*”), and that the patrons were coming in order to arrange sexual encounters “for indecent affairs and whorish amours, where they could better meet each other for this end” (“*dlia nepotrebnikh del i bliatskikh amurov, gde b komu s kem dlia togo spoznanie lutshee vozymet'*”).³⁶ Drezdensha described Podenskii's operation: “to put it simply, a public house of whoring,” and he reportedly “kept there for fornicating” such women as Florentina, Greta, Katerina “the Little,” “Lotta, his own fiancée,” Barba, Christina, and Marichen.³⁷

And yet, reality appears to have been somewhat more ambiguous. For one thing, all the attendees insisted that no sex took place at the parties themselves. Ferschter, to give an example, adamantly denied that fornication was allowed at his parties, but whether the girls “voluntarily went elsewhere” with the patrons for this purpose he would neither confirm nor deny; Pomlin took the same line. Moreover, some of the women were brought along by the guests

32. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 1–1 ob., d. 10, l. 7.

33. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 4 ob., 5 ob., d. 31, l. 8 ob. (The case of Maria Pashkeeva).

34. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, l. 4.

35. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 132, l. 13 ob. (The case of Johann [Peter] Gints).

36. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 13, 23; Lidia. N. Semenova, *Byt i naselenie Sankt-Peterburga: XVIII vek* (Moscow, 1998), 126. Not surprisingly, recent studies treat them as a straightforward case of organized prostitution; see Keenan, *St Petersburg and the Russian Court*, 55–56; Roldugina, “‘Bliatskie domy i nepotrebnnye zhenki i devki,’” in *Gendernye aspekty*, ed. D. B. Vershinina.

37. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 31, l. 8.

themselves. While Ivan Ferschter admitted that there were “wenches residing at his premises for whoring,” he also claimed that many patrons came accompanied by “girls, their so-called fiancées.”³⁸ Indeed, this indicates that picking up a potential sexual partner was not the only purpose of the parties. Entertainment provided at Pomlin’s events included tea and dancing that could last until ten o’clock in the evening, or later.³⁹ At Gint’s, musicians were hired from the Preobrazhenskii Guards, and the dancing continued until after four in the morning.⁴⁰ Thus, the parties were also sites for genuine merrymaking and socializing both for the males who already had a kept woman and for those men and women who were themselves involved in the business of the demimonde.

We do not know exactly how potential guests were informed about the upcoming events; many of the detainees, however, referred to the “general echo,” “public rumors,” or other similar notions denoting informal networks of communication. Thus, Volemutsha reported “having heard the public rumor” regarding Gints as a keeper of “indecent houses.” Many other men and women also referred to “having heard” about one or another operator of an “indecent house”—the names Drezdensha, Vintslersha, Gendel’man, Pomlin, and Corporal Podenskii come up most often. One detainee in particular pointed to “Drezdensha, Volemutsha, Gaksha, and Kenigsbergsha, for they are the most knowledgeable about each other.”⁴¹ It is through these informal communication channels that the word would have been spread; some entrepreneurs stressed under interrogation that their female guests included both the women they themselves had invited and those who came without any invitation. Drezdensha claimed that she was not personally acquainted with all of her aristocratic guests, “but only five or so of them, yet I asked them to invite others, so all these [guests] came having talked to each other.”⁴² Individual establishments and entrepreneurs were thus interconnected by numerous horizontal linkages and, it seems, unwritten norms. Natalia Selivanova, a prominent player in the demimonde, specifically noted that “the female sex is never charged by anybody [for attending such events], for they engage in dancing”—together with a nearly uniform fee for attendance, her wording indicates that there were well-known conventional rules for operating parties.⁴³

A Jolly House on the Moika

At the heart of the investigation were, naturally, Drezdensha and her establishment. Both in terms of the social profile of its patrons and the facilities employed, this operation really stood apart in the capital’s demimonde. The story of this woman and the profile of her numerous clients also provide the

38. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 12, 2.

39. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 128, ll. 2–7 (The case of Andrian Pomlin).

40. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 132, ll. 13 ob.–15 ob., 27–27 ob., 38–39 ob.

41. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 29, l. 3 (The case of Charlotte Stein).

42. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, l. 23 ob.

43. Ibid., l. 26. The institutionalization of this domain is emphasized in Roldugina, “Bliatskie domy i nepotrebyne zhenki i devki,” in *Gendernye aspekty*, ed. D. B. Vershinina.

best insights into the workings of the parties and into their role in the social life of the capital. Anna-Cunegonda Felkner, a native of Dresden (hence her nickname), was allegedly 38 in 1750. She claimed to have arrived in St. Petersburg in 1734 and found employment as a maid at the household of Karl Biron, brother of Empress Anna's favorite and a Major in the Horse Guards. Biron "persuaded her towards fornication and defiled her," and this was the beginning of Drezdensha's career in vice. After quitting Biron's house, she moved to that of Colonel Sokovnin, but after three months there, married one Lieutenant Felkner (in 1735), who soon left for the war against the Ottomans, failing to provide for the maintenance of his spouse. So, Anna-Cunegonda bought a billiard table, rented a house, and started a business, in which she was assisted by two servants, a "foreigner" and a Russian soldier's wife. Her establishment was patronized by "officers, as well as merchants and government clerks," and Drezdensha claimed that at this stage her business did not involve "whoring."⁴⁴ Soon, however, she made a trip to Germany and brought back four girls from Berlin to prostitute them. In 1740, her husband divorced her on account of her "fornication," and in 1741 she was brought to the Main Police Chancellery on charges of living in "indecentcy," the only such arrest in the entire capital that year.⁴⁵

One of the places where Drezdensha had been renting premises for her business was the house of Vice Admiral Prince Mikhail Andreevich Belosel'skii (1702–1755) by the Blue Bridge on present-day St. Isaac's Square.⁴⁶ The records of the investigation indicate that besides her, over a dozen other procuresses practiced their trade at this site, employing altogether close to fifty women and girls.⁴⁷ These catered mostly to low-ranking clients and seem not to have been in the business of organizing parties; they also rented appropriately-modest rooms, usually shared by at least a few women. The apartment rented by Drezdensha, however, was much more spacious: there was an antechamber with a lackey and separate rooms for dancing, for playing cards, and for dining. These quarters cost her fifteen rubles a month. The entry fee of one ruble, though, was also rather moderate, given the sort of clientele she catered to; it cost two rubles, for example, to enter the "public" masquerades organized at that time by Charles Serigny, the head of the French theatrical troupe, with Elizabeth's permission.⁴⁸ According to another entrepreneur, Drezdensha had a "great number of people" on her premises "every day," but just as other

44. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, l. 1 (The case of Anna Felkner, also known as Drezdensha).

45. *Ibid.*, ll. 1–3 ob.

46. For more on Belosel'skii, see N. V. Berkh, *Zhizneopisaniia pervykh rossiiskikh admiralov ili opyt istorii rossiiskogo flota*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1832), 377–90; B. Alekseevskii, "Belosel'skii Mikhail Andreevich," in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, vol. 3: *Betankur-Biakster*, ed. A. A. Polovtsov (St. Petersburg, 1908), 651–52; I. V. Kurukin, *Biron* (Moscow, 2006), 118–215. Belosel'skii's own extremely laconic life chronicle has been published as "Zapisnaia knishka pokoinogo kniazia Mikhaila Andreicha Belasel'skogo," *Rossiiskii arkhiv: Istoriia otechestva v svidetel' stvakh i dokumentakh XVIII–XX vv.*, vol. 14 (Moscow, 2005), 71–73.

47. A detailed list of these women was provided by one Matvei Kosulin, a pimp. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 129, ll. 20–22 (The case of Matvei Kosulin).

48. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 22–23 ob.; Keenan, *St Petersburg and the Russian Court*, 109.

detainees, she vehemently denied that her guests engaged in fornication, “for in any case, there was no room for that.”⁴⁹

Drezdensha claimed that her guests were “nearly all aristocrats” (*znatnye*) and kept records of sorts, apparently. Not all the names she mentioned during the interrogation could be deciphered, and not all individuals could be identified, but the list is certainly impressive, a “Who’s Who” of St. Petersburg society. It included not only people who visited her parties, but also those with whom she “fornicated” personally. Some of her patrons she could identify by their first name, others by their last name only. She described one of her personal clients simply as Major Iazykov, “and what’s his [given] name, she does not know.”⁵⁰ The most high-ranking on Drezdensha’s list were Brigadier Count Grigorii Grigorievich Chernyshev (1717–1750) and Colonel Petr Ivanovich Panin (1721–1789) of the Izmailovskii Guards. Chernyshev was the brother of Zakhar, Ivan and Petr Chernyshev, who would become influential ministers during the Catherinian era. Panin was to become a leading general under Catherine, and was also the brother of Nikita Ivanovich Panin, of “Panin Party” fame. Similarly, Ivan Illarionovich Vorontsov (1719–1786), a lieutenant in the Preobrazhenskii Guards, was the brother of Roman and Mikhail Vorontsov, two leading ministers and courtiers of Elizabeth’s era, while Ensign Petr Alekseevich Tatishchev (1730–1810) was the son of St. Petersburg’s current *General-Politsmeister*.⁵¹

The list of Drezdensha’s notable clients also included numerous other junior members of the most illustrious aristocratic families. Among these were lieutenants Prince Shakhovskoi and Tolstoi and *vakhmeister* (NCO) Izmailov of the Horse Guards; Prince Golitsyn, a lieutenant in the Preobrazhenskii Guards; two unidentified sons of Prince Boris Vasil’evich Golitsyn—presumably Vladimir Borisovich Golitsyn (1731–1799) and Aleksei Borisovich Golitsyn (1732–1792). Clients also included diverse other guardsmen from some of the best families: Ivan Kropotov; Sergeant Kolychev, Prince Iurii Dolgorukov, Prince Sergei Trubetskoi, *kaptenarmus* (NCO) Prince Volkonskii, Rzhevskii, Volynskii, Apraksin, Neledinskii, Voieikov, Koshelev; two Mamonov brothers, two Kologrivov brothers, a son of Major Veliaminov of the Guards. Additionally, imperial *Kamer*-pages and pages Aleksandr Ivanovich Naryshkin, [Petr] Sheremetev, Ivan Neronov, Vasilii Kar, and sergeants Nepluiev and Olsufiev of the Cadet Corps were among the clientele. Finally, officers of the most prestigious regiments of the line were also clients: Captain Shtok, lieutenants Korsakov, Siyvers, and Efim Durnovo of the Ingermanland Regiment, Captain Mishukov of the Astrakhan Regiment, and Lieutenant Ivan Siniavin and Ensign Nikolai Siniavin of the navy.⁵² These cadets, pages, and guardsmen were the first post-Petrine generation of the Russian elite. Born around 1730, they would benefit from the emancipation of the nobility in 1762 and would also comprise the political and cultural elite of Catherine II’s reign.⁵³

49. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, l. 9; d. 10, l. 23.

50. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, l. 5.

51. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 3 ob.–4.

52. *Ibid.*, ll. 4–4 ob.

53. On the social composition of cadets and the guards, see Igor Fedyukin, “Nobility and Schooling in Russia, 1700s–1760s: Choices in a Social Context,” *Journal of Social*

Besides these blue-blooded guardsmen, Drezdensha's clients also included many members of the professions, merchants, and even skilled artisans. One such client was Dr. Abraham Kaau-Boerhaave, professor of anatomy and physiology of the Academy of Sciences and brother of Hermann Kaau-Boerhaave, director of the Medical Chancellery. Young guardsmen also mingled at Drezdensha's with French and German merchants, as well as the secretary of the French embassy, court musicians, the cook and the majordomo to Baron Wolf (the banker), a palace upholsterer, the *tantsmeister* (dancing teacher) of the Cadet Corps, and Russian merchants, including those from Jaroslavl' and Toropets.⁵⁴

Given the sort of clientele she had, Drezdensha's parties were not clandestine events. These parties were certainly not a secret for Drezdensha's landlord, Prince Belosel'skii, who likely tolerated and abetted them, while the marines assigned to him for guard duty maintained order at the events.⁵⁵ Furthermore, his own sons and aides-de-camp were among the attendees. A naval band entertained Drezdensha guests, and Belosel'skii's majordomo was relied upon to settle frictions with the police.⁵⁶ Indeed, Drezdensha seems to have enjoyed rather open business relationships with her clients. Among her documents, one finds a promissory note from Prince Volkonskii (who apparently died "the previous year"), confirming that he owed "Madam Felkner" eighty rubles to be paid a month later.⁵⁷ Drezdensha also provided girls for cohabitation ("accepted into his house for fornication") for Baron Petr Shafirov; Prince Dolgorukov; Ludwig Siegfried Vitzthum von Eckstädt (1716–1777), the Saxon envoy from 1746 to 1747; Lieutenant-General Count Fedor Andreevich Apraksin (1703–1754); and Baron Sergei Grigorievich Stroganov (1707–1756), and she appears to have been summoned often by these dignitaries to commission her to find girls to their liking.⁵⁸

In a sense, this "sexual underworld" was another dimension of more legitimate forms of social life and social connections. For example, one of Drezdensha's most high-ranking clients, Brigadier Grigorii Grigorievich Chernyshev, was Prince Belosel'skii's brother-in-law. Another client, Prince Vladimir Borisovich Golitsyn, years later married Natalia Petrovna Chernysheva, who was Chernyshev's and Belosel'skii's niece (as well as the prototype for the "Old Countess" from Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*). Petr Panin was married to Anna Tatishcheva, the sister of Ensign Tatishchev, still another patron of the establishment, while a few years later, the son of Sergei Grigorievich Stroganov would marry the niece of Roman and Ivan Vorontsov. In that sense, socializing at Drezdensha's and similar venues went parallel to the more polite socializing that took place at aristocratic parlors,

History 49, no. 3 (Spring 2016): 558–84. On the Emancipation, see Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility, 1762–1785* (Princeton, 1973); Irina V. Faizova, "Manifest o vol'nosti" i sluzhba dvorianstva v XVIII stoletii (Moscow, 1999).

54. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 3 ob.–6.

55. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 4, 22 ob., 23.

56. *Ibid.*, ll. 22–23 ob.; also RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 35, l. 16 (The case of Ekaterina Izvoshchikova); d. 129, l. 22.

57. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, l. 44.

58. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 2 ob.–3, 6–6 ob.

and Drezdensha's clientele was likely recruited through family and service networks. We can even see how attending such parties could help to cement important social connections, or to establish them to begin with. In her memoirs, Catherine II described the way in which one Brockdorf, an enterprising nobleman from Holstein, attained access to the Russian elite in the 1750s: at his St. Petersburg hotel he befriended another foreigner, who introduced him to "three German girls, quite attractive, called Reifenshtein."⁵⁹ It is while visiting these girls at their apartment that Brockdorf managed to make an acquaintance with Count Petr Shuvalov, the leading minister of the era, a meeting that he used as a launching pad for subsequent political machinations. (Catherine II remarks, pointedly, that one of the sisters later became Shuvalov's kept woman).

Jealousy Most Sovereign

As is usually the case with *causes célèbres*, to have had such a broad resonance this affair had to have been located at the intersection of multiple phobias and anxieties. The exact circumstances that pushed Elizabeth to launch the investigation are unclear. Contemporaries suggested that it might have been triggered by complaints from jealous wives, or perhaps, by entreaties from the sovereign's confessor.⁶⁰ Personal jealousy on the ruler's part might have also been at play, since many courtiers were involved with the parties: it was probably not by chance that she ordered one of the women whipped "mercilessly" until she revealed "which one of the Korsakovs she was cohabiting with."⁶¹

But there are also signs of jealousy of another sort. In particular, vice in the Commission's documents became unequivocally associated with foreignness. Certainly, many of the entrepreneurs and dames of the demimonde were "foreigners," that is, the German-speaking natives either of the recently conquered Baltic provinces, or as was the case with Drezdensha herself and many others, of various territories in Germany proper (but also of Sweden, Poland, and other foreign lands). We might surmise that their foreignness gave these women certain qualities that made them more desirable in the eyes of their Russian patrons (the ability to dress, converse, dance, or play musical instruments in western ways, perhaps). In fact, on one occasion, potential concubines were rejected by a potential patron on account of their "lack of comprehension in manners."⁶² Notably, the inventory of Drezdensha's possessions listed "two drawings of a shepherdess"—an echo of the contemporary fashion of painting allegories of gallantry and courtship in pastoral settings.⁶³ Another woman prostituted two daughters, one of whom is reported to have skillfully played a

59. Catherine II, *Zapiski*, 369.

60. Danilov, "Zapiski," 317. For a different version, see Pyliaev, *Staryi Peterburg*, 146.

61. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, l. 110

62. *Ibid.*, 1. 8.

63. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, l. 123 ob. (cf. Jean-Honoré Fragonard's "The Shepherdess," for example).

bandura (a plucked string instruments), and another a clavichord.⁶⁴ Visiting such women could clearly also include a cultural experience.

To an extent, this foreignness possibly placed these women outside the accepted social boundaries and gender roles that applied to Russians. Major Danilov asserts in his memoirs that the Commission detained not only the low-born “whores,” but also the “wives who came to Drezdensha’s house to choose for themselves consorts to their liking”—in other words, that some aristocratic women, too, enjoyed the opportunities for sexual license offered by the underworld.⁶⁵ Yet, the Commission’s records do not seem to confirm this point, although there are references to a certain pimp who prostituted a “daughter of an aristocratic (*znatnogo*) father” and to a Colonel’s wife who used Drezdensha’s premises to illicitly meet with Dr. Kaau-Boerhaave and other lovers.⁶⁶ Overall, unlike the more obviously “Enlightened” formats for sociability such as salons and aristocratic balls, the parties implied the exclusion of women, or more specifically, of “respectable” women. Drezdensha’s venue played a role not unlike that of Moscow’s German Quarter to Peter I: that of a social and cultural oasis where Russian elite men could experiment with new forms of sexual behavior.

While their foreignness might have placed these women outside of certain social and cultural boundaries, it also made them more visible to the authorities, who described “parties” and whoring in terms of moral contagion. The very first order from Elizabeth to Demidov explicitly stresses Drezdensha’s identity as a “foreigner” who invited “indecent women” from overseas. Besides Drezdensha, Demidov was also to search for “other, similarly indecent women and girls who arrived here from Gdansk and other foreign places,” to whip them, and to extradite them from the empire.⁶⁷ The commission, apparently, seriously considered investigating the behavior of *all* the females who had arrived by sea to the capital, and Russian consuls abroad were instructed to prevent suspicious foreign women from entering the country.⁶⁸ Eventually, of course, home-grown “whores” were also targeted by the investigators, but the very idea of turning the commission’s attention towards Russian women came almost as an afterthought. It was only on July 12, two weeks after the beginning of the investigation, that Demidov put forward a proposition which, in his eyes, was so questionable that it required approval from his superiors: he suggested “searching for Russian [indecent women] as well.”⁶⁹

64. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 55–55 ob.

65. Danilov, “Zapiski,” 316.

66. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 12, l. 3 ob.

67. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 1–1 ob.

68. The Commission even requested the statistics on the numbers of foreign passengers who arrived in St. Petersburg by sea in the previous five years, and the data emphasizes the surprisingly negligible scale of passenger traffic between Russia and Europe: 137 women arrived in 1746, 56 in 1747, 50 in 1748, 37 in 1749, and only 8 in the first six month of 1750. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 13–13 ob., 17–25 ob., 55, 65, 76 ob.–77, 78, 116.

69. On July 10 the Commission reported that it had detained around seventy individuals, including fifteen Russians. By September 26, the Commission had 90 “foreigners” and 88 Russians under lock, while a further 12 Russian “whores” and 23 foreign ones were still

Indeed, Elizabeth appears to have perceived the alien women of the *demi-monde* as contesting her monopoly in the social and cultural arena. Her reign was marked by efforts to organize official public events, balls, and especially masquerades: following in her father's footsteps, the Empress personally prescribed the ways in which such events should be conducted at court and in the houses of her most prominent subjects. Paul Keenan notes a "conscious attempt to create a forum for certain social and cultural changes," where the court played the leading role in "promoting and regulating the city's cultural life."⁷⁰ The initiative in the cultural domain is thus presented as emanating from the top, sometimes against the wishes of the public, while "other respectable social groups" (besides the nobility) were granted access to the new formats of socializing only occasionally and conditionally.⁷¹ As we have seen, however, in reality there existed by the late 1740s a vibrant universe of unofficial, privately-run venues for socializing—with drinks, music, dancing, and illicit sex—catering to a fairly broad section of the capital's populace that was willing to pay money to attend them. In this sense, rather than "promoting" new forms of socializing, Elizabeth was trying to assert her control over this sphere, to suppress unauthorized appropriation by her subjects of those cultural forms that she herself promoted and patronized.

The masquerades were an especially sensitive matter in that regard. Insofar as they provided anonymity, gave women opportunities for choosing partners, made gender identities ambiguous, and hence had considerable destabilizing power, the masquerades were a source of fascination and anxiety all over eighteenth-century Europe.⁷² In mid eighteenth-century Russia that was also the case. The masquerade organized by Elizabeth in 1741, right after her accession, had an explicitly political goal: it was meant to parody the previous reign. By the end of the 1740s, Elizabeth directed her courtiers to host masquerades for the elite in their own residences "on the appointed days," while also authorizing Serigny to organize "public" masquerades for a broader audience.⁷³ Masquerades could also include cross-dressing. V. A. Nashchokin, a guards officer, noted in his diary that on February 24, 1750 "from five in the afternoon on, there was a *metamorphosis* at the court, that is,

at large. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 49, 59, 137. "Foreigners" eventually made up 36% of all those arrested by the commission. Roldugina, "An Attempt at Social Disciplining," 102.

70. Keenan, *St Petersburg and the Russian Court*, 4.

71. Keenan, *St Petersburg and the Russian Court*, 93.

72. Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford, 1986); Catherine Craft-Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women* (University Park, 1993); Elizabeth Hunt, "A Carnival of Mirrors: The Grotesque Body of the Eighteenth-Century British Masquerade," in Katharine Kittredge, ed. *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, 2003), 91–111.

73. Jelena Pogosjan, "Masks and Masquerades at the Court of Elizabeth Petrovna (1741–1742)," in *Russian and Soviet History: From the Time of Troubles to the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, eds., Steven A. Usitalo, and William Benton Whisenhunt (Lanham, 2008), 35–50; Keenan, *St Petersburg and the Russian Court*, 93, 105–13. In the winter of 1746 there were "carnival and masquerading amusements" ordered by the Empress to be held in the houses of dignitaries of the top two ranks and attended by three to four hundred masked guests each. A. P. Bestuzhev-Riumin to M. I. Vorontsov, January 1746, *Arkhiv kniazia Vorontsova*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1871), 142–43.

the males were all in female dress, and the females were all in the male one.”⁷⁴ Elizabeth herself is alleged to have enjoyed wearing male dress, which fit her well, while her elderly dignitaries looked clumsy and comically awkward in their elaborate female attire. The most consequential episode of Elizabeth’s cross-dressing was her coup of 1741, when she put on a military uniform to claim the crown (as Catherine II would also do twenty years later).⁷⁵ Against this backdrop, Demidov had already reported to the Empress on August 2 regarding “such women who put on officer uniforms to visit honest houses and taverns, introduce themselves as officers and indulge in indecency (*nepotrebstvovali*) at Drezdensha’s.” This issue must have touched a raw nerve with the Empress: detainees were routinely asked whether the parties they attended involved cross-dressing or wearing masks. At the end of the investigation, Demidov specifically requested instruction as to what should be done with “those whores who wore officer uniforms and masks” to attend entertainment at “honest houses” and a certain bankrupt merchant from Riga who tricked a cadet into giving him a Cadet Corps uniform to be worn by a “public whore.”⁷⁶

Of Fops and Masons

Thus, Drezdensha and her “company” became a tangible embodiment of an alternative social and cultural sphere that was emancipated from the state and did not fit the established hierarchies. This sphere, in fact, has been linked to what appears to have been a very specific category of elite youth and a very specific subculture. The investigators claimed that (unnamed) grateful subjects thanked the Empress for taming

the indecent ones, for from their sailing at night in their boats on rivers with horns and other music, and from their yelling on the streets, there was no respite; and now it has all calmed down. And so it was that the *petimetry* [*petit-mâîtres*, or fops] multiplied to such an extent that lads of 19 or 20 years old walked shamelessly around with their hats cocked, and with tall walking sticks, in large companies, so that it was offensive even to look at them; and now this is not to be seen anywhere.⁷⁷

As best we can tell, these “lads” had to be precisely the same mixture of cadets, pages, subalterns and NCOs of the guards that patronized Drezdensha’s parties; their dress (or rather, the way of wearing it), paraphernalia, and foppish behavior are presented here as signs of moral decay and subversion of public order. Thus, “whores,” loud noises, music, and irreverent youth with cocked hats who presumed to idly walk the streets in daylight were all intertwined

74. V. A. Nashchokin, “Zapiski,” in *Imperiia posle Petra: 1725–1765* (Moscow, 1998), 273.

75. Catherine II, *Zapiski*, 309–10; Keenan, *St Petersburg and the Russian Court*, 153.

76. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, l. 96, 137 ob.–138; d. 128, l. 5; d. 42, l. 3–4 ob. (The case of Maria Brinken); d. 10, l. 22. While the theme of cross-dressing was stressed during the interrogations, intriguingly, I could find nothing in the documents that could be read as references to homosexuality, either in the interrogators’ questions, or in the detainees’ answers.

77. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, l. 97.

as expressions of general nonconformity, amorphous yet clearly alien, that provoked nothing but shame in the spectator.

The reference to *petit-maîtres* is highly significant here. While it appears in the materials of the Kalinkin Commission, it is striking that it is precisely in 1750 that we have the first recorded use of this term in Russian literature.⁷⁸ It appears in A. P. Sumarokov's comedy *The Monsters (Chudovishchi)*, in which one of the main protagonists, *Del' iuzh*, is introduced disparagingly as a *petimetr*. According to Sumarokov, he wrote this comedy in June 1750, and its one and only recorded performance took place right in the midst of the Drezdensha investigation. It was staged by a group of cadets from the Land Noble Cadet Corps in Peterhof, in the presence of Elizabeth herself, on July 21, 1750. The term also appears in Sumarokov's *Empty Quarrel (Pustaia ssora)*, another comedy from 1750.⁷⁹ Sumarokov, well on the way toward establishing himself as the leading poet and playwright of the era, must certainly have been aware of the Drezdensha investigation, both because of his proximity to the court and his numerous personal connections with the Cadet Corps (where he had previously studied) and the Preobrazhenskii Guards (where he presently served).⁸⁰ Given this context, the reference to the proliferation of irreverent *petimetry* in the Commission's papers is notable, as neither the investigators nor the playwright felt compelled to explain the term's meaning, indicating that by that time it had already gained wide circulation.

The notion of *petimetry* played an ever more important role in subsequent cultural debates. Three years later, Ivan Elagin (1725–1794), another guardsman and graduate of the Cadet Corps, wrote a “Satire on *petit-maîtres* and coquettes” (*Satira na petimetrov i koketok*), while other young amateur authors from among St. Petersburg's elite responded by attacking or defending the *petimetry*. These texts circulated in manuscript, and it was probably the first instance of such a literary exchange with a relatively broad, by the standards of its day, circle of participants in the history of secular Russian

78. On *petimetry* and fops in eighteenth century Russia in general, see V. I. Pokrovskii, *Shchegoli v satiricheskoi literature XVIII veka* (Moscow, 1903); V. V. Sipovskii, “Iz istorii russkoi komedii XVIII v.: K literaturnoi istorii ‘tem’ i ‘tipov,’” *Izvestiia Otdeleniia russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti Rossiiskoi akademii nauk* 1 (St. Petersburg 1917): 205–74; E. E. Birzhakova, “Shchegoli i shchegol'skoi zhargon v russkoi komedii 18 veka,” in *Iazyk russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka*, ed. Iu. S. Sorokin (Leningrad, 1981), 96–129; Kira S. Mirutenko, “Evolutsiia tipov shchegolia i shchegolikh v komediinykh zhanakh russkoi dramaturgii i teatra vtoroi poloviny XVIII-nachala XIX vv.” (Candidate diss., State Institute of Linguistic Studies, Moscow, 2007); Sergei L. Ivanov, “Istoriia shchegol'skoi leksiki v russkom iazyke XVIII-XX vv.” (Candidate diss., Moscow State Pedagogical University, Moscow, 2003); Ol'ga V. Nikitina, “Petimetr: shchegol'skaia kul'tura v Rossii vtoroi poloviny XVIII v.” (Candidate diss., State Institute of Linguistic Studies, Moscow, 2010).

79. A. P. Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia* (Leningrad, 1990), 315.

80. P. N. Berkov, “Neskol'ko spravok dlia biografii A. P. Sumarokova,” in *XVIII vek. Sbornik 5* (Moscow 1962), 364–75; P. Berkov, *Aleksandr Petrovich Sumarokov* (Leningrad, 1949); V. P. Stepanov, “Sumarokov v Shliakhetnom korpuse,” *Russkaia literatura* no. 4 (2000): 83–87; most recently, Kiril Ospovat, *Terror and Pity: Aleksandr Sumarokov and the Theater of Power in Elizabethan Russia* (Brighton, 2016).

literature.⁸¹ It is traditionally accepted that Elagin aimed his satire at the young francophone Ivan Shuvalov (1727–1797), who was entering Elizabeth’s favor exactly at that very moment. The responses that Elagin’s text provoked, however, indicates that in the eyes of his readers it might have been about much more than Shuvalov only. Against the backdrop of the Drezdentsha affair the *petimetry* debate also appears to have served as a commentary on the actual everyday experiences of scores of young nobles in the capital, a commentary that could include both the rejection and affirmation of sexual license. It is not by chance that few years later, Lomonosov famously sought to disparage Sumarokov by claiming that the latter was “quite happy that all the youths, that is, pages, collegiate *iunkera*, cadets, and corporals of the guards, follow him,” a portrayal of the presumed readers of Sumarokov’s writings that also fits well the social profile of attendees at Drezdentsha’s parties.⁸² While in their contributions to this debate on *petimetry* Russian authors were certainly drawing on literary clichés borrowed from western Europe, the materials of the Kalinkin Commission also indicate, even if indirectly, that *petimetry* were not just a literary trope but a real subculture in mid-century Russia.

More generally, the 1750s were marked by heightened attention to the themes of love (including illicit love) in Russian poetry, and these literary debates were central to the evolution of Russia’s cultural imagination and its search for cultural identity.⁸³ As O. A. Proskurin has pointed out, while the rejection and ridicule of Peter I’s “Europeanization” as such was politically impossible at this stage, criticizing its “extreme” forms, such as *petimetry*, was permissible.⁸⁴ Not coincidentally, Prince Shcherbatov’s *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia*, the first fully articulated critique of Peter’s regime, focused on the very same themes of luxury and sexual license. Again, the Drezdentsha affair provides broader social context for these attempts to spell out attitudes towards “foreign” cultural and sexual practices.

Finally, some of the denizens of this “sexual underworld” later played an important role in attempts to build more institutionalized structures of an autonomous elite sociability and associational life. The very first anti-masonic investigation conducted by the government in 1747 implicated none other than Zakhar and Ivan Chernyshev, Belosel’skii’s brothers-in-law—and the brothers

81. Ivanov, “Istoriia shchegol’skoi leksiki,” 56–64; Aleksandr V. Zapadov, ed., *Poety XVIII veka: A. Kantemir, A. Sumarokov, V. Maikov, M. Kheraskov: literaturnye ocherki* (Moscow, 1984); P. N. Berkov, *Lomonosov i literaturnaia polemika ego vremeni: 1750–1756* (Moscow, 1936), 117–46; I.F. Martynov, I.A. Shanskaia, “Otvzuki literaturno-obshchestvennoi polemiki 1750-kh godod v russkoi rukopisnoi knige (Sbornik A.A. Rzhevskogo),” in *XVIII vek. Sbornik 11. N.I. Novikov i obshchestvenno-literaturnoe dvizhenie ego vremeni*, ed. G.P. Makogonenko (Moscow, 1976), 131–48.

82. M.V. Lomonosov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 9 (Moscow 1955), 635.

83. Note also the tradition of writing and/or translating obscene poetry emerging at about the same time within pretty much the same circle (among the authors of *barkoviana* were Sumarokov and Elagin), as well as the availability of commercially available imported pornography. I. Barkov, *Devich’ia igrushka, ili Sochineniia gospodina Barkova*, eds., A. Zorin and N. Sapov (Moscow, 1992), 35; as well as the materials in Marcus C. Levitt and A. L. Toporkov, eds., *Eros i pornografiia v russkoi kul’ture* (Moscow, 1999), 45, 201–4, 224–25.

84. O. A. Proskurin, *Poeziia Pushkina, ili Podvizhnyi palimpsest* (Moscow, 1999), 304.

of Grigorii Chernyshev, listed among Drezdensha's clients, who allegedly joined a lodge while in Prussia. The next investigation, launched in the late 1750s, discovered one of the first ever lodges in Russia made up overwhelmingly of Russian nobles, rather than resident foreigners. The capital had hundreds, if not thousands, of young nobles. It is striking, therefore, that among the forty known members of this first lodge, there was a notable number of those who previously had been listed among Drezdensha's clients and attendees of her parties. These included the lodge's grand-maitre himself, Roman Vorontsov, as well as Ivan Kropotov (himself a writer), Princes Vladimir and Aleksei Golitsyn, Prince Sergei Trubetskoi, and Petr Tatishchev; some other members were also their fellows from the Cadet Corps and the guards. These were joined by some of the key participants of the literary debates on *petimetry* and the corruption of morals: Elizabeth's one-time favorite Nikita Beketov, who in her presence starred in Sumarokov's *The Monsters*, Sumarokov, Prince Shcherbatov, and Ivan Shuvalov himself.⁸⁵

To a modern reader, masonic lodges with their focus on conscious self-improvement, and sexually-charged parties at Drezdensha's are likely to look as radically different and incompatible formats of socializing. This, however, might be an anachronistic view. In fact, it appears that different modes of elite fraternizing were not fully differentiated at this early stage: the key was the opportunity to socialize and to become socialized. Ivan Elagin, the author of *Satire on petit-maîtres and coquettes*, who would also become one of the most prominent masons of Catherine II's reign, later described his own early masonic experiences as simply "an amusement for people who want to entertain themselves, sometimes inexcusably and indecently."⁸⁶ Elagin alleged that he was initially drawn to the meetings by their promise of social equality ("seeming equality, so flattering to one's ambition and pride"), but also by what he saw as a chance "to obtain patrons and friends from among dignitaries through this brotherhood."⁸⁷ For many members, however, it was but an occasion to indulge in shouting "unintelligible and disharmonious songs at the ceremonial banquet, to become intoxicated on good wine at a brother's expense, and to end this dedication to Minerva with a worship to Bacchus."⁸⁸ Robert Collis observes that in that sense "it appears that there was little to distinguish [the early lodges] from the earlier fraternal societies of the Petrine era"—or, we should add, from Drezdensha's parties.⁸⁹ Nor was the mixing of the high-minded and the mundane typical of the earliest lodges only. The 1775 minutes of the *Urania*, probably the most important lodge of its day, reveal

85. Andrei I. Serkov, *Russkoe masonstvo: 1731–2000: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Moscow, 2001), 200–1; 251–52, 436–37, 788–89, 812, 874–75, 964–65. For the reflections of a scion of a freemason on the same topic a generation later, see A. L. Zorin, *Poiavlenie geroia: Iz istorii russkoi emotsional'noi kultury kontsa XVIII-nachala XIX veka* (Moscow, 2016), 258–71.

86. I. P. Elagin, "Zapiski o masonstve I. P. Elagina," *Russkii arkhiv* 1 (1864), 100.

87. *Ibid.*, 99.

88. *Ibid.*, 100.

89. Robert Collis, "Hewing the Rough Stone: Masonic Influence in Peter the Great's Russia, 1689–1725," in A. Önnertors and R. Collis eds., *Freemasonry and Fraternalism*, 52. On Elagin's masonic activities, see Raffaella Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N.I. Novikov* (Dordrecht, 2005), 16–27.

that its premises were to feature a billiard table (five kopeks per game), cards (so-called “commercial” games only, not those of chance), dinners, and a bar with “red and white wines [sold by] by half-bottles, Danzig vodka by the glass, and English beer by the bottle.”⁹⁰

The picture that emerges from the materials of the Kalinkin Commission is that of an extensive and increasingly institutionalized domain of unofficial socializing in the Russian imperial capital. By the 1740s, privately-run “parties” offering opportunities to meet sexually available women were a standard, recognizable format of social gatherings, with individual venues in St. Petersburg coalescing into a broader underworld of entertainment and fraternization. Importantly, this domain of socializing was commercially-driven and autonomous from the state, even though it was inhabited by the very same set of servitors who also made up the court society and administrative elite; these parties were also sites of considerable social mixing.

Certainly, illicit sex and prostitution by themselves were nothing new in Russia. Yet, the examination of these parties allows us to place the eighteenth-century nobleman’s quest for “heartless pleasure” into its proper historical context, as integral for “living the Enlightenment” in the context of post-Petrine Russia. The sexual underworld provided important opportunities for socialization for the post-Petrine generation of young Russian servitors as they were working out the formats and genres of fraternizing, experimenting with different associative modes, and searching for venues to connect and interact informally with their peers. Eventually, they forged ties and customs of sociability. In fact, it was precisely members of the same social and cultural milieu in mid-century St. Petersburg that patronized Drezdensha’s and other parties—often, literally the very same people—who a few years later would also give rise to more institutionalized forms of associational life. Not surprisingly, this produced tension with a monarchy that sought to assert its monopoly over the domain of socializing. So, just as the antics and sexual escapades of Peter’s All-Drunken Assembly prefigured the emergence of associational culture later in the century, so Elizabeth’s anxieties regarding Drezdensha’s parties prefigured Catherine II’s moves to suppress autonomous sites of “serious” social interaction decades later.

The more institutionalized forms of associational life, such as masonic lodges, voluntary associations, or aristocratic salons, are privileged in scholarly accounts for encouraging and serving as forums for rational and critical discussion of public issues. Certainly, there is no direct evidence in our records that the attendees at Drezdensha’s debated the sciences or arts, much less political theories or government policies. Yet, insofar as these parties were linked to a subculture of *petimetry*, they also provided the fodder and the social context for increasingly articulate self-examination by the Russian elite. It is through writing (and likely, talking) about foppery and sexual license associated with this subculture that some of the

90. Otdel pis'mennykh Istochnikov Gosudastvennogo Istoricheskogo Muzeia (Moscow), f. 17, op. 2, ed. 304, ll. 54–55 ob. I am grateful to M.B. Lavrinovich for making me aware of this document.

members of the elite began reflecting on and developing a critique of the contemporary cultural regime. Later on, these societal issues—including that most potent public topic of the era, the consequences of the Petrine transformation—would be debated in a much more explicit way at the emerging, loftier forums for socializing, produced, as we have seen, by many of the very same people.

Obviously, the parties did differ tremendously from these loftier forums that dominate our traditional vision of the eighteenth-century “lived Enlightenment,” most notably, in their focus on sexual license.⁹¹ And yet, our fascination with salons and the sophisticated *salonnières* of the French capital notwithstanding, we must keep in mind that elite socializing in western Europe itself was not limited to highbrow pursuits only. Expansion of the associational culture there is inseparable from the history of seedy taverns and coffee-houses, sex clubs, “hell-fire” clubs, and even “molly houses”—sites of homosexual socializing—that played a similar role in the development of sociability, in the articulation and the communication of common identities among like-minded people.⁹² In fact, in his recent magisterial study, Antoine Lilti persuasively rebelled against the rarefied notion of the Paris salons as the institutional basis of the Enlightenment: according to him, they were first and foremost about aristocratic sociability as such, focused on food, amusement, and flirting, not on philosophical debates.⁹³

The worlds of polite socializing and those of the sexually-charged demimonde were not necessarily separate. Take the eighteenth-century Venetian practice of keeping *casinos* (sing. *casini*), small apartments or rooms rented in the vicinity of St. Mark’s Square, as private venues for entertaining one’s acquaintances. Offering refreshments (“coffee, lemonade, and fruit”) and such amusements as “conversation and cards,” *casinos* also became associated in the public imagination and in the eyes of the authorities with sex: there, allegedly, “licentiousness was taken for gallantry, impudence for politeness, and vice for pleasantness.”⁹⁴ According to the police, there were *casinos di conversazione* for conversation, *casinos di gioco* for gambling, and *casinos di bagattine* for meeting prostitutes; already by mid-century the authorities sought to suppress the *casinos* as possible sites of political intrigue.⁹⁵ While a huge gap undoubtedly separates the Paris salons from the Drezdensha parties, the distance between the latter (tolerated and likely encouraged by Prince

91. The classic works are Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York, 1991); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, 1994).

92. Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2007), 205. On the Parisian demimonde, see, most recently, Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*.

93. Antoine Lilti, *Le monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2005).

94. Marianna D’Ezio, “Sociability and Cosmopolitanism in Eighteenth Century Venice: European Travellers and Venetian Women’s Casinos,” in *Sociability and Cosmopolitanism: Social Bonds on the Fringes of the Enlightenment*, eds., Scott Breuninger and David Burrow (London, 2012), 45–57, here 52.

95. *Ibid.*, 52.

Belosel'skii and patronized by his social circle) and the Venetian *casinos* is much shorter.

In that sense, the parties in St. Petersburg might conceivably serve as a missing link between Peter I's carousing "assemblies"—including the mother of them all, the boisterous All-Drunken Assembly—and the first fully-formed institutions of the public sphere that emerged in Russia in the second half of the eighteenth century. Examination of this sexually-focused sociability, made possible by the materials of the Kalinkin Commission, allows us to shift focus from the familiar, polite, and high-minded (and therefore, better documented) forms of associational life to what were likely the extensive domains of informal and unrecorded social practices that emerged spontaneously, without any sanction from "above," driven by "low" desires and interests, and that do not otherwise register on historians' radars. Arguably, such ambiguous, socially and culturally undifferentiated and transitory forms of socializing were especially important at the "fringes" of Enlightenment Europe, such as in Russia.

The Drezdensha affair wrapped up as suddenly as it began. Already in the fall of 1750 Demidov was getting apprehensive: the scale of "indecent" he discovered was such, he realized, that "it would be quite impossible to [successfully] conclude the business of this Commission any time soon and to uproot all the indecency at once."⁹⁶ Besides, he claimed that the campaign had already provoked "all sorts of rumors, not only here and in Moscow but also abroad, empty and completely unfounded as they are."⁹⁷ In fact, Demidov suggested, the persecution organized by the Commission had already sufficiently impressed the populace, and the impact of this work was visible on the streets, so much so that both Russians and resident foreigners thanked the Empress for "taming the indecent." Therefore, it was possible to end the active phase of the investigation.⁹⁸ His recommendations were agreed to, and only three new arrests are recorded for the year 1751, and none in the subsequent years.⁹⁹

While short-lived, the campaign certainly left a heavy mark on the fate of the women involved. Some managed to obtain pardons by converting to Orthodoxy, others were rescued by foreign diplomats, or by their husbands and fiancés who agreed to marry them. Many, however, were subjected to harsh punishments; foreigners were extradited, and Russian subjects exiled to Orenburg. Some women, including Drezdensha herself, died in detention, while others were exploited, sexually and otherwise, by their guards at the Kalinkin House, who turned the confinement facilities into a veritable brothel, collecting admission fees from eager men. None of the dignitaries implicated in the affair seem to have suffered the consequences, however. In December 1750, in response to "petitions from the inhabitants of St. Petersburg," the empress allowed them "to hold private gatherings and

96. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 133–133 ob.

97. *Ibid.*

98. RGADA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 133–133 ob.

99. Roldugina, "An Attempt at Social Disciplining," 57.

parties for their entertainment with polite music and Russian comedies.”¹⁰⁰ The petition was presented by the *General-Politsmeister*, General Tatishchev, whose son Petr, as previously noted, was an avid patron of Drezensha’s establishment and would also go on to become one of the leaders of Russian masonry in the 1780s.

100. PSZ, vol. 13, № 9824.