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Sara Dickinson

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Articles

Russia's First "Orient": Characterizing the Crimea in 1787

Sara Dickinson

Russian culture discovered its first "Orient" in the late 18th century when Catherine II extended the boundaries of her empire to Southern Ukraine and the Crimea. While Russians had interacted for centuries with their Asiatic neighbors, they had not systematically characterized them as Oriental "others" until Catherine's reign.¹ The 1783 conquest of new territory on the shores of the Black Sea, which coincided with the rising popularity of Oriental fashions in West European literature and culture, provided an opportunity to do so. Accordingly, these southern borderlands were the first landscapes in the empire to be elaborately imagined according to the Western parameters of Oriental stylization.² An especially powerful stimulus to representations of the Crimea as an "Eastern" or "Oriental" territory was Catherine II's trip to the Crimea in 1787. Commentary on the journey, written by the empress herself, members of her entourage, and her various correspondents, illustrates the initiatory formulation of an exotic Crimean imaginary – a year before Byron's birth and 12 years before Pushkin's.

This was not yet the full-fledged Orientalism of Said's classic model.³ A concerted institutional effort at the political and cultural control of colonial territories would develop only in the 19th century, largely in response to the Russian empire's conflicts further south and east with the peoples of the Caucasus.⁴

¹ For a historical overview of Russia's relationship with Asia and the East, see Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *Russia and Asia: Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972).

² Russia annexed these lands fairly peaceably after compelling the Tatar khan of the Crimea, a Turkish vassal, to abdicate his throne. For details, see Elena Ioasafovna Druzhinina, *Severnoe prichernomor'e v 1775–1800 gg.* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1959), 92–146; Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1772–83* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

³ According to Said, West European "modern Orientalism" began in the last third of the 18th century. The more "free-floating Orient" that characterized various cultural vogues in the late 18th and early 19th century was "severely curtailed" by this more academic approach (*Orientalism* [New York: Vintage, 1979], 22, 118–19). On the development of Russian institutions for the study of the Orient, see Richard N. Frye, "Oriental Studies in Russia," *Russia and Asia*, 30–51.

⁴ Accordingly, most discussions of Orientalism in Russian literature focus on somewhat later texts addressing the Caucasus. See, for example, Peter Scotto, "Prisoners of the Caucasus: Ideologies of

While there is a direct link between Catherinian descriptions of the Crimea and later Orientalist characterizations of the Caucasus, Russia's encounter with the Crimea is better described as a preliminary process of "otherization": the production and circulation of images and stereotypes that expressed the region's "otherness" or ontological difference from the norms of the dominant culture, in this case those of Western Europe. In order to promulgate such distinctions, of course, Russia needed to claim West European cultural standards as its own. Not surprisingly, initial forays into Orientalist literary discourse were complicated by the fact that Catherine's empire was hardly a typical Western power at all: geographically, politically, and culturally defined by its position on Europe's periphery, Russia itself had often been cast in the role of the West's Oriental other.⁵ The annexation of the Crimea provided a welcome opportunity for Russia to more assertively claim the status of a Western-style empire.⁶ By adopting Western techniques of "otherization," Russia was able to describe itself as

Imperialism in Lermontov's 'Bela,'" *PMLA* 107: 2 (1992), 246–60; Katya Hokanson, "Literary Imperialism, Narodnost' and Pushkin's Invention of the Caucasus," *Russian Review* 53: 3 (1994), 336–52; Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Ian M. Helfant, "Sculpting a Persona: The Path from Pushkin's Caucasian Journal to *Puteshestvie v Arzrum*," *Russian Review* 56 (July 1997), 366–82. A rich and less geographically specific treatment of Russian Orientalism may be found in Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 108–55. Several studies of Pushkin's work have addressed the significance of the Crimean setting. See Stephanie Sandler, *Distant Pleasures: Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 163–85, and Katya Hokanson, "Pushkin's Captive Crimea: Imperialism in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*," in *Russian Subjects: Empire, Nation, and the Culture of the Golden Age*, ed. Monika Greenleaf and Stephen Moeller-Sally (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 123–48. On the 18th-century roots of Russian Orientalism, see Boris Stepanovich Vinogradov, "Nachalo kavkazkoi temy v russkoi literature," in *Russkaia literatura i Kavkaz*, ed. Veniamin Mikhailovich Tamakhin, et al. (Stavropol: Ministerstvo Prosveshcheniia RSFSR [Stavropol'skii Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskii Institut], 1974), 3–25; Harsha Ram, "Russian Poetry and the Imperial Sublime," in *Russian Subjects*, 21–49.

⁵ See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Wolff points out that the Crimea represented "Eastern Europe at its most Oriental" for the West (66); for his analysis of Catherine's trip in this context, see 126–41.

⁶ Explicit interest in following a Western model in this regard dates back to the reign of Peter I (1689–1725), the first Russian sovereign "who, in his dealings with the Orient, behaved wholly as a West European monarch" (Frye, "Oriental Studies," 34). On Russia's self-positioning as a Western nation with respect to its eastern and southern neighbors, see also Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, "Asia Through Russian Eyes," *Russia and Asia*, 3–29, and Mark Bassin, "Russia Between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space," *Slavic Review* 50: 1 (Spring 1991), 1–17.

comparatively "more European" than peoples such as Ottoman Turks and Crimean Tatars.

The three-way dynamic between Russia, the South, and the West might be described as one of "triangulation." This term, taken from popular psychology, refers to interpersonal relationships in which an absent third party conditions the interaction between two others. René Girard's elaboration of "triangular desire" is relevant here as well: his analysis of *Don Quixote* illustrates how the would-be knight's admiration for the legendary Amadis of Gaul (the absent third party) defines his own projects and desires much as Western Europe determined those of Russia.⁷ Another important dynamic appears in these texts as well: descriptions of Catherine's trip do not simply emphasize local exoticism in order to indicate that the Crimea was essentially different from European Russia, but also frequently combine an interest in Oriental detail with what might be called "Occidentalism," or the attempt to imagine this territory in ways that forged more direct (rather than triangular) links with the West. In particular, the travelers underlined a connection between the Crimea and ancient Greece, the very source of Western civilization. Thus, the rhetorical construction of Russia's first Orient was to provide compelling evidence of Russia's Western pedigree.



If Western Europe's supposedly "Oriental" colonies were located as far south as east of the imperial capitals in London and Paris, Russian geopolitics transposed the opposition between "West" and "East" onto a strictly north-south axis: the Crimea and Black Sea coast lay due south of St. Petersburg; parts of the area were

⁷ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 1–52. These dynamics resemble those found in contemporary Serbia and former Yugoslavia and described by Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden, "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics," *Slavic Review* 51: 1 (Spring 1992), 1–15; Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54: 4 (Winter 1995), 917–31; and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). The idea of triangulation differs from the related concept of "nesting Orientalisms" described by Bakić-Hayden in that it emphasizes the continued importance of a West European standard and audience for Russia's descriptions of subaltern others. This general triangular scheme was subject to local complexity and nuance. As Edward J. Lazzerini points out – using Gail Hershatter's conception of "nesting subalterns" – subalternity took a great variety of forms in the Crimean context ("Local Accommodation and Resistance to Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century Crimea," in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997], 175–76). Following Western Europe's lead, Russia also used triangular paradigms to discredit Turkish influence in the Black Sea region and thus legitimize Russia's own territorial and political aims.

even slightly to the west of the older capital in Moscow.⁸ Russia's experience of its first "Orient" also differed from Said's paradigm in that Russia's colonies were geographically contiguous with the empire's mainland. The consequent difficulty of establishing clear distinctions between colonizer and colonized may help to explain the heightened significance assumed by various types of boundaries in descriptions of the Crimea.⁹ More importantly for our purposes here, the proximity of the peninsula enabled the sovereign herself to visit the area.

Although Catherine's itinerary included extended sojourns in Kiev and Moscow, her ultimate destination was Russia's recently acquired territories in southern Ukraine (dubbed *Novorossia*, or "New Russia") and the Crimea.¹⁰ Her journey, which lasted almost eight months, was a self-conscious, theatrical progress designed both to acquaint the empress with her new dominions and to highlight Russia's presence on the Black Sea to "l'Europe étonnée."¹¹ Catherine was attended by an enormous retinue that included a large portion of the Russian court, the English, French, and Austrian ambassadors to St. Petersburg, as well as foreign notables and even heads of state.¹² Her most prominent companion was Joseph II of Austria, Russia's ally against the Ottoman Porte, who joined her for the one-month visit to the Crimea. His participation underscored the political and military implications of Catherine's venture. The mobilization of soldiers and arms that accompanied the joint parade of "the two empires" along the Black Sea coast served to increase tensions with the Ottoman state, which then culminated in the outbreak of war shortly after Catherine's return to Petersburg.¹³

Catherine's foreign guests provided an important link to various constituencies abroad. While traveling, she conversed with them frequently about their impressions of the trip and about general foreign perceptions of her government and person. Since these courtiers and correspondents strove to articulate and repeat what the empress herself wanted to hear, their versions of the trip were thoroughly interconnected with her own. The social atmosphere that reigned in

⁸ See Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 158.

⁹ See Sara Dickinson, "Space and the Self: Russian Travel Writing and Its Narrators" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1995), 125–69.

¹⁰ Catherine had hoped to visit the new Azov province as well, but was prevented from doing so by an outbreak of plague.

¹¹ Ligne to Catherine II, 1 August 1784, *Figures du Temps passé*, 126, quoted in *Les lettres de Catherine II au Prince de Ligne (1780–1796)* (Brussels: Librairie Nationale d'Art et d'Histoire [G. Van Oest], 1924), 49–50.

¹² Catherine's fellow travelers included the foreign ministers Cobenzel from Vienna, Fitzherbert from London, and Ségur from Paris. She met briefly en route with Stanislaw Poniatowski, her appointee to the throne of Poland who had been an imperial favorite 30 years earlier.

¹³ The Russo-Turkish War of 1787–91 began in August.

Catherine's traveling party further encouraged members of the retinue to formulate their ideas of the Crimea collaboratively. They discussed their ideas of the journey together, composed poetry for one another on "Crimean" topics, and possibly read each other's travel accounts as well. Evidence of the interdependence of their ideas abounds in surviving texts – the personal letters, memoirs, light verse, and literary facetiae that were written in anticipation of, during, and after the journey. Indeed, the wide overlap of themes and imagery found in these works makes it impossible to determine an original source for any individual remark: many concepts and phrases were rapidly transformed into clichés that various members of the group would repeat virtually word for word.

At the heart of many such examples is the Belgian Prince Ligne, whose active role in the traveling party stimulated much verbal exchange and, with it, the repetition of humorous and aphoristic conceptions of the journey and of the Crimea. An enthusiastic man of letters, Ligne generated a stock of written images as well. The French ambassador Count Ségur later recalled that Ligne wrote him daily letters from an adjacent cabin during their boat trip down the Dnieper:

In the mornings, he would knock on the thin partition that separated his bed from mine and wake me to recite impromptus in verse and song that he had just composed; and, shortly afterwards, his footman would bring me a letter of four or six pages, where wisdom, folly, politics, gallantry, military anecdotes, and philosophical epigrams would be mixed in the most original manner.¹⁴

Ligne was also an adept courtier who often aimed to please Catherine with his numerous remarks – and generally succeeded. As she wrote to the Baron von Grimm:

The Prince of Ligne says that this is not a journey, but a series of fetes (*des fêtes continues*) – continuous and varied in a manner such as you can see nowhere else. They will say he is a flatterer, that Prince Ligne, but perhaps he is not wrong.¹⁵

Catherine's satisfaction with Ligne's comments is no guarantee of their originality, however. The Prince of Nassau-Siegen uses a similar phrase in a letter to his wife written at about the same time: without giving credit to his Belgian

¹⁴ Comte Louis Philippe de Ségur, *Mémoires ou souvenirs et anecdotes* 3rd ed. (Paris: Alexis Eymery, 1826), 136. The original text, like that of the others cited in this article (except for Aleksandr Vasil'evich Khrapovitskii below, note 73), is in French; all translations are my own.

¹⁵ Between Kiev and Kaniev, 21 May 1787, "Pis'ma Imperatritsy Ekateriny II k Grimmu (1774–1796)," in *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* 23 (1878), 411. Grimm was a prominent member of Parisian literary circles and author of a newsletter for sovereigns and nobility that kept them abreast of literary developments in Paris.

comrade, he describes the trip as “truly a continuous fete (*une fête continuelle*) and one of the most superb.”¹⁶ The obvious interrelation between these remarks suggests the extent to which the conceptualization of the Crimea was the fruit of an international group effort. While neither of these men was Russian – like the German-born empress herself – their conceptions of symbolic geography were intertwined with official Russian rhetoric, shared with Russian companions, and thus belong to Russian literary and intellectual history. Indeed, the role played by these Western aristocrats in Russia’s initial experiments with Orientalism illustrates the triangular dynamic described above.



Catherine ostensibly traveled to the southern edges of her empire at the invitation of Grigoriï Potemkin, whom she had appointed Governor-General of the new territories. His elaborate preparations for her visit – historically vilified as “Potemkin villages” (*Potemkinskie derevni*) – ensured that she would find evidence of Russian potential (if not actual) prosperity in the new territories. Tradition has it that Potemkin’s creations were mere façades which Catherine naively mistook for reality; detractors have spoken of cardboard houses posing as more solid constructions and of the same settlers and herds of cattle being represented in different places to demonstrate the thriving local economy. Such judgments about the extent of Potemkin’s intent to deceive the empress, or of his success in doing so, are quite speculative.¹⁷ In Russia, as elsewhere, elaborate preparations and entertainments were customary accompaniments to a sovereign’s travels. Even the least substantial of Potemkin’s creations could be appreciated as theater – and, therefore, “real” as a symbolic demonstration of the Russian empire’s wealth and power. The travelers were keenly aware of the huge expenditures required to sustain their fantastic voyage, but this did not prevent

¹⁶ Nassau-Siegen, to his wife, 21 April/2 May 1787, in Marquis Louis Albert d’Aragon, *Un Paladin au XVIIIe siècle: Le Prince Charles de Nassau-Siegen d’après sa correspondance originale inédite de 1784 à 1789* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit and Co., 1893), 145.

¹⁷ While several of Potemkin’s projects did fall short of their projected goals – the new port constructed at Kherson in 1778, for example, was already superseded by the more convenient Odessa in the 1790s – claims that Potemkin’s efforts were empty mystification actually *preceded* Catherine’s trip and were the result of the political frictions that the highly favored prince continually inspired (Aleksandr Mikhailovich Panchenko, “Potemkinskie derevni kak kul’turnyi mif,” *XVIII vek* 14 [1983], 93–104). It is also possible that the subsequent outbreak of war between Russia and Turkey caused Potemkin to abandon several of his projects prematurely (Emmanuel Waegemans, “Un Belge dans les villages de Potemkine. Le prince de Ligne dans la Russie de la Grande Catherine,” *Nouvelles Annales Prince de Ligne* [1992], 135).

them from enjoying it as such – from being, in the words of one scholar, “delighted to be duped, with no doubt of it, by Potemkin’s mirages.”¹⁸

Moreover, Potemkin’s real achievements astonished the travelers as much as any subterfuge or *coups de théâtre* could have: he constructed towns, palaces, and triumphal arches, built military facilities (including the naval port at Sevastopol’) and a Crimean fleet, laid English gardens, and staged entertainments ranging from mock battles to fireworks to musical performances. In particular, he strove to highlight Russia’s military strength together with agricultural and commercial developments. These were Catherine’s interests as well, and she awarded Potemkin the honorary title “of Tauris” (*Potemkin-Tavrisheskii*) for his efforts.¹⁹ The Prince of Nassau-Siegen, who previewed Catherine’s route with Potemkin several months before her arrival, was particularly struck by the area around the newly founded city of Kherson: “The banks of the Dnieper are beautiful and beginning to become fairly populated. Kherson has astonished me. I could not believe that so much work had been done there.”²⁰ Ligne noted evidence of Potemkin’s improvements even when he left the retinue on solo side trips, where he would find “many things that even the Russians do not know about: the beginnings of superb establishments, manufactories, and military settlements built on parallel streets, surrounded by trees, and crossed with streams.”²¹

As noted, Catherine’s trip ushered into Russia an unprecedented burst of Oriental imagery and rhetoric; Potemkin’s creations only enhanced perceptions of the Crimea as a fabulous land in which reality and fantasy could hardly be distinguished. Accordingly, descriptions of the trip made wide use of themes and motifs taken from Western genres such as the Oriental tale (*conte oriental*) and accounts of travel to exotic, Eastern locales.²² Catherine’s companions readily

¹⁸ Ibid., 138.

¹⁹ On Catherine’s plans for economic development in this area, see James A. Duran, Jr., “Catherine II, Potemkin, and Colonization Policy in Southern Russia,” *Russian Review* 28: 1 (1969), 23–36; Roger P. Bartlett, *Human Capital: The Settlement of Foreigners in Russia, 1762–1804* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 109–42.

²⁰ Nassau-Siegen, 110.

²¹ Ligne, *Lettres à la Marquise de Coigny*, Édition du centenaire, ed. Henri Lebasteur (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, Edouard Champion, 1914), 86.

²² These genres were combined in Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721), which digested and popularized the travel writing of Tavernier (*Nouvelle Relation de l’intérieur du serail du Grand Seigneur*, 1675; *Les Six voyages en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes*, 1676) and Chardin (*Voyages en Perse et autres lieux de l’Orient*, 1671–1711). Other Western texts may have been familiar to Catherine and her entourage as well, such as N. E. Kleemann’s *Reisen von Wien über Belgrad bis Kilianova durch die Butschiack-Tartarey über Kauschan, Bender ... in die Crimm ... in den Jahren 1768, 1769 und 1770. Nebst einem Anhang von den besondern Merkwürdigkeiten der crimmischen Tartarey, in Briefen an einen Freund* (Vienna: Ghelen, 1771). On the possible influence of Lady

associated qualities such as indolence, prurience, despotism, and fanaticism to the local Tatar population, often discovering resemblances between their surroundings and *The Thousand and One Nights*.²³ Attention to Crimean exoticism was a testament to the breadth and grandeur of Catherine's empire, to its significance and comparability with the colonial empires of Western Europe. As she wrote to Ligne, "if Louis XIV thought himself the greatest king in the world, it is because everyone fell over himself repeating it to him. But by what measure was he judged? Certainly a geographical one was not the most favorable."²⁴

Since the reign of Peter I, official Russian self-description had construed the empire as straddling two continents. Many direct links with Western tradition appeared in the parallels that Catherine's companions and correspondents eagerly drew between the Russian empress and historical sovereigns of note, including not only Louis XIV, but also Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Henry IV, and the Westward-looking Peter I.²⁵ Catherine was pleased to be associated with the "East" as well: if in Kiev her courtiers spoke of Vladimir as Catherine's predecessor, an elaborate procession down the Dnieper brought Cleopatra to mind. The empress often pointed out such Eastern connections herself: from a trip along the Volga in 1767, she had written to Voltaire of traveling "in Asia";²⁶ a letter to

Craven, who traveled through the Crimea in 1786 on her way from Petersburg to Constantinople and afterwards shared her maps with Joseph II, see Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 121–22. Craven's account, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, was not published until after Catherine's trip in 1789 (London and Dublin).

Descriptive and scientific texts had been generated in Russia as well: in 1784, the Russianized German scientist Karl Hablitz wrote a "physical description" of the area (*Fizicheskoe opisaniie tavrisheskoi oblasti, po ee mestopolozheniiu, i po vsem trem tsarstvam prirody* [St. Petersburg: Imp. tip. u I. Veitbrekhta, 1785]), and in 1786, an informational guidebook was produced in connection with Catherine's upcoming trip (*Puteshestvie Eia Imperatorskago velichestva v poludennyi kraj Rossii, predpriemlemoe v 1787 godu* [St. Petersburg: Gornoe uchilishche, 1786]). On Hablitz's contribution, later translated into French (1788), English (1789), and German (1789), see Andreas Schönle, "Garden of the Empire: Catherine's Appropriation of the Crimea," *Slavic Review* 60: 1 (2001), 7.

²³ See, for example, Catherine II, "Pis'ma k Grimmu," 412; Ligne, *Lettres à Coigny*, 29; Ségur, *Mémoires*, 159. *The Thousand and One Nights* was introduced to Western Europe by Antoine Galland's French translation of 1704.

²⁴ Catherine II to Ligne, 23 March 1786, *Lettres au Prince de Ligne*, 56–57.

²⁵ Catherine's taking and transformation of the south was often compared with Peter's parallel activities in the north: she extended Russia's boundaries to the Black Sea as he had to the Baltic; her creation of a fleet there echoed his founding of the Russian navy; her development or "transformation" of the south was compared to his founding of Petersburg.

²⁶ Kazan, 29 May/9 June 1767, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great: Selected Correspondence*, ed. and trans. Antony Lentin (Cambridge, Eng.: Oriental Research Partners, 1974), 48. As John T. Alexander notes, such claims helped Catherine to "publicize her venturesome spirit" (*Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1989], 103).

Frau Bielcke from the same journey cast Moscow in the role of an Oriental city, albeit derogatorily, by suggesting its resemblance to Ispahan (after Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*).²⁷ In a letter to Ligne from 1780, Catherine characterized herself as "neighbor of the Tatars" and complained of a consequent thirst for West European conversation and society.²⁸ Two years later, she again underlined Russia's position on the boundary between East and West by speaking of "the emperor of Byzantium, my good friend" and "that of China, my good neighbor."²⁹ The conquest of the Crimea and its Islamic inhabitants further underscored Russia's foothold in "Asia." In 1787, a Western correspondent described the traveling Empress as "a soul that is now holding the tiller of Europe and of Asia" before whom "so many nations prostrate themselves."³⁰

The annexation of Novorossiiia and the Crimea also meant that Russia now controlled areas on and near the Black Sea coast that had been ancient Greek colonies; in some of these locations Greek communities continued to survive.³¹ While Russia's historical connection to Greek culture was based primarily on an Orthodox and Byzantine heritage, descriptions of Catherine's journey frequently focused on earlier periods. Official rhetoric surrounding the trip presented Catherine's government as the savior of a Greek culture that had unjustly suffered on the shores of the Black Sea at the hands of Scythians, Goths, Huns, and other barbarians. Her travel companions frequently recalled the Pontic ruler Mithridates VI Eupator, who defended the Crimean Greeks against their Scythian enemies in the second century B.C. While they do not often explicitly link Mithridates to Catherine – perhaps due to his demise by suicide – the activities of the Pontic ruler clearly parallel Catherine's vague intentions to "liberate" the Greeks from the Ottoman empire and to establish a new Greek empire with a capital at Constantinople. Her grandson Constantine, named in anticipation of a future career there, applied himself to the study of Greek while

²⁷ *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* 10 (1872), 180. The comparison survived until 1787 when it found its way into one of the letters written by Ligne (*Lettres à Coigny*, 89).

²⁸ Catherine II to Ligne, 1 October 1780, *Lettres au Prince de Ligne*, 33.

²⁹ Catherine II to Ligne, 11 July 1782, *Lettres au Prince de Ligne*, 44.

³⁰ Johann Georg Zimmerman to Catherine II, 12 June 1787, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen der Kaiserin Katharina II von Russland und Job. Georg Zimmermann* (Hannover: Hahn, 1906), 45, 47.

³¹ Catherine encouraged new immigration to the area as well. Notwithstanding a policy of religious toleration towards the empire's Islamic inhabitants, she was eager to ensure continued Russian tenure on the Black Sea coast and to exploit the economic advantages offered by Russian domination of the area. Catherine favored settlement of the area by non-Tatars or "Christians," such as Russians, Greeks, Armenians, and others by whose economic activities the empire hoped to profit.

she toured the south.³² The travelers' attention in this context to a conflict with the "Scythian" illustrates the application of a Western perspective in order to clearly distinguish between the Russians and another "more" Oriental other: in 18th-century Western Europe, "Scythian" was often used to describe Russians and other inhabitants of Eastern Europe;³³ Catherine, like Mithridates, pointedly sided with the Greeks.

Catherine's interest in underlining a link with classical Greece was evident in her reestablishment of Greek place names throughout Novorossia and the Crimea. She replaced Russian or Turkic variants with those used in antiquity: the Dnieper river was rechristened the "Borysthenes," the Black Sea became the "Euxine," and the Crimea itself was renamed "Tauris" (*Tavrida* in Russian).³⁴ Catherine's extension of Russian rule to the *Taurian* peninsula advanced the claim that Russia was the rightful heir to ancient Greek civilization.³⁵ The Taurian setting also allowed Russia to discover a classical heritage of its own as Catherine and her companions enthusiastically discussed ancient sites of legend located on the northern shores of the Black Sea, including the haunts of Mithridates, the area where Ovid had spent his exile, and the spot where Iphigenia had supposedly served as priestess. More often than not, such classical subject matter was styled so as to provide yet another source of exotic imagery. In the words of Ségur, "Iphigenia, [her brother] Orestes, and [his friend] Pylades seemed to reappear before our eyes and embellish for us the history of those barbarian times with the happy colors of the fable."³⁶

³² On Catherine's Greek project, see Hugh Ragsdale, "Russian Projects of Conquest in the Eighteenth Century," in *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Hugh Ragsdale (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1993), 75–102.

³³ In Wolff's words, "[t]he designation of Scythians was extended in the eighteenth century to cover all of Eastern Europe, until Herder appropriated another identification from among the barbarians of ancient history, and gave Eastern Europe its modern identity as the domain of the Slavs" (*Inventing Eastern Europe*, 11). Strabo, a key source of Black Sea history for Catherine and her companions, offers much detail on the Scythians and describes the Crimean peninsula's early inhabitants, the Tauri, as a Scythian people (*The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones [London: W. Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967], 7.4.2.)

³⁴ During the reign of Catherine's son Paul (1795–1801), most of these Greek place names reverted to their Turkic variants.

³⁵ This recalls a technique of Orientalist discourse later used in Napoleonic Egypt: by inventing and emphasizing their own role as guardians of ancient culture, the French argued that present-day Egyptians were inadequate custodians of this historical legacy; such an approach also allowed the French to rhetorically circumvent issues of contemporary politics that were raised by their presence in Egypt (Said, *Orientalism*, 84–86). In the Russian case, however, the disenfranchised local inhabitants were more often Muslim Tatars than modern Greeks.

³⁶ Ségur, 186.

Iphigenia ranks among the mythical characters most frequently cited in accounts of Catherine's trip. In the tragic version of her story, made famous by Euripides as "Iphigenia in Aulis," the young woman willingly agrees to be sacrificed by her father, Agamemnon, in order that the goddess Artemis permit his fleet to sail against Troy. An alternative dénouement appears in Euripides's "Iphigenia in Tauris," where Artemis rescues Iphigenia by substituting a deer under the knife of her unwitting parent and whisks the girl away to serve as a priestess in one of her temples: "And then," recalls Iphigenia, "She set me down / Here in this town of Tauris, this abode / Of savage men ruled by their uncouth king."³⁷ She remains in Tauris until being discovered by Orestes and Pylades, who take her back to Argos. Catherine and her companions were undoubtedly familiar with more recent recensions of Iphigenia's tale as well. A popular figure in West European literature, music, and painting during the 17th and 18th centuries, she appeared in Racine's 1674 "Iphigénie," the playwright's most popular work during his lifetime, and Gluck's well-known operas "Iphigénie en Aulis" (1774) and "Iphigénie en Tauride" (1779).³⁸ The story of Iphigenia's sojourn on the Black Sea had also been recounted in Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto*, written during his exile there: his opening lines describe the tale's setting as Scythia.³⁹

According to Catherine and her associates, the alleged location of Iphigenia's temple to Artemis – whom they referred to as Diana – was on the southernmost tip of the Crimean peninsula in a spot known as "Parthenizza."⁴⁰ This site was

³⁷ Euripides, "Iphigenia in Tauris," in *Euripides II*, ed. David Grene and Richard Lattimore, trans. Witter Bynner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 124, lines 29–31.

³⁸ Racine's drama reworked the Iphigenia in Aulis plot: Agamemnon's daughter is spared and a substitute goes to the chopping block. Goethe's drama "Iphigenie auf Tauris" was completed in January 1787, the same month that Catherine departed for the South; the text would thus not have influenced the planning of her trip, although, as Wolff notes, it may have affected its reception (*Inventing Eastern Europe*, 138).

³⁹ "Est locus in Scythia..." (*Publii Ovidii Nasonis Tristia, Epistulas ex Ponto latine et germanice editi* [...] *Georgius Lück* [Zurich, 1963], 3.2.45, quoted in Hans-Joachim Lope, "Sur les traces d'Ovide: Présences de l'Antiquité dans les Lettres de Crimée," *Nouvelles Annales Prince de Ligne* [1987], 186).

⁴⁰ The name, derived from the Greek *parthenos* ("virgin"), refers to the religious cult in which Iphigenia served as priestess. *Parthenizza* is Ligne's spelling; Nassau-Siegen writes *Parthénitza*; and Ségur, *Parthénion*. Their common source is most likely Strabo, who uses the term *Parthenium* to describe a site at Chersonesus, near present-day Sevastopol' (*Geography*, 7.4.2). A Russian equivalent *Partenit* appears in the 1799 account of Pavel Sumarokov, who offers a corrective to Catherine's entourage by locating Iphigenia's temple at the site suggested by Strabo (*Puteshestvie po vsemu Krymu i Bessarabii v 1799. S istoricheskim i topograficheskim opisaniem vsekh tekhn mest* [Moscow: V Univ. Tip. u Ridigera i Klaudivia, 1800; reprint in *Landshaft moikh voobrazhenii: Stranitsy proza russkogo sentimentalizma*, ed. Valentin Ivanovich Korovin (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990), 331, 340]).

the property of Prince Ligne, having been given to him by Catherine in 1785 when she had extended her travel invitation:

I have given some lands [in Tauris] to those who have served me well and to my friends. As you number among both and I can count on your friendship, I have ordered the Marshal Prince Potemkin, Governor of the Province, to put you in possession of the spot where Iphigenia officiated at the temple of Diana in Tauris, but I do not want you to see that beautiful country and climate without me.⁴¹

She raises the name again six months later when informing Ligne more specifically of her travel plans:

I will use the month of May to visit the region where they say Iphigenia once lived. It has been established that the name of that region alone animates the imagination; and that there is no type of fabrication that has not been uttered about my [upcoming] voyage and my sojourn in Tauris.⁴²

“The name of that region alone,” of course, had been changed by Catherine precisely to inspire such fictions.

Ligne’s felicitous description of traveling with Catherine comprises seven travel letters to the Marquise de Coigny and a variety of later memoirs. If the literary record of Catherine’s trip finds its most lyrical voice in these letters, Ligne’s own lyricism peaks in his epistle from Parthenizza. Blending tropes of exoticism with classical thematics, Ligne describes himself in a landscape as fabulous as it is ancient:

It is on a silvered shore of the Black Sea, it is on the edge of the largest of the streams where all the torrents of the Chatyrdag tumble down, it is in the shade of the two largest walnut trees that exist and that are as old as the world, it is at the foot of a rock where you can still see a column – the sad ruin of the Diana’s temple so famous for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, it is to the left of the rock from which Thoas [the Taurian king] would hurl strangers, finally, it is in the most beautiful and most interesting place in the entire world that I write this.⁴³

⁴¹ Catherine II to Ligne, 12 September 1785, *Lettres au Prince de Ligne*, 50.

⁴² Catherine II to Ligne, 23 March 1786, *Lettres au Prince de Ligne*, 57.

⁴³ Ligne, 45. According to legend, the Taurian cult of Diana required that all strangers be sacrificed.

Ligne adopts the role of a character in an Oriental tale. Surrounded by fruit trees and the strange looking Muslim cemetery, he plays this hackneyed part with great relish:

I am on some tiles and a Turkish carpet, surrounded by Tatars who offer me that act of hospitality of watching me write and raising their eyes in admiration as if I were another Mohammed ... Behind me through the leaves I can see the amphitheater of dwellings of my savage types – smoking on their flat roofs which serve them as salons for their guests. The variety of all these kinds of spectacles, which incline one to think, makes the pencil drop from my hands. I stretch out over my tiles and reflect.⁴⁴

The gesture is strictly rhetorical, for Ligne does not release his pencil, but launches into a long, impassioned recounting of the course of his life and the causes for its direction.

The witty and controlled tone which shapes the majority of Ligne's epistles gives way in this setting to a more contemplative, introspective note:

No, everything that is occurring in my soul cannot be conceived. I feel myself a new being ... At last I enjoy myself. I ask myself where I am and by what chance I find myself here. That gives me the chance to return to myself and, without realizing it, I review all the inconsequential events of my life.⁴⁵

At Parthenizza, the furthest reach of Ligne's thoughts serves to return him to himself. Musings on European history, for example, merge with reflections on his own role within it, beginning with the moment of his being "sent to the French court in the most brilliant age and on the most brilliant occasion."⁴⁶ The melancholy contemplation of architectural ruins moves him to lachrymose self-pity: "Is it the spectacle of my heart or that of nature which transports me outside of myself?" he asks, in tears.⁴⁷ Such self-absorption infuses the entire letter. As in Rousseau, whom Ligne much admired, "the entire topography becomes a metaphor for the self."⁴⁸ His persona accordingly requires a mirror vast as the sea:

⁴⁴ Ligne, 45–47.

⁴⁵ Ligne, 47.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 48–49.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁸ Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 121. Ligne's connection with Rousseau has been noted by several critics; Françoise Lecomte compares the letter from Parthenizza with Rousseau's prome-

The night will be delightful. The sea, tired by that bit of movement it produced during the day, is so calm that it resembles a great mirror in which I see myself to the depths of my heart. I have never had a more beautiful evening and I feel the same clarity in my ideas that is in the sky and on the waves.⁴⁹

Ligne ingenuously professes to have undergone at Parthenizza “one of those charming annulments that I so love where the spirit rests completely and one hardly knows that he exists,” although his closing again suggests that the site’s primary value lies in its having provided him an opportunity for self-discovery: “O, Parthenizza! O, enchanted spot which has recalled me to myself! O, Parthenizza, you will never leave my memory.” Ligne’s celebration of the self, while often taken as evidence of decidedly pre-Romantic tendencies that heralded literary fashions to come, has roots in Ovid as well – as he himself was aware: “Perhaps it was from here that Ovid wrote,” he notes in Parthenizza, “maybe he was seated where I am.”⁵⁰

The Crimean coast offers Ligne an escape from his customary arena of action: in Parthenizza, he “attempted to forget all the powers of the earth, the thrones, kingdoms.”⁵¹ He contrasts this opportunity for reflection with the demands of traveling in Catherine’s retinue, claiming to have left it behind because “I needed to rest my spirit, my tongue, my ears, and my eyes.”⁵² His opposition between Parthenizza and the outside world is based both on the site’s exotic re-*alia* and on the fantastic quality of this meditative opportunity. Such a peaceful characterization of the Crimea shares little with the martial spirit that runs through later Russian Romantic and Orientalist renditions of the Caucasus. Although military concerns underlay much of Catherine’s activity in the Crimea, Ligne ignores them completely in his letter. Perhaps her own tendency to avoid explicit references to such topics encouraged Ligne to suppress them, too. As she wrote to him before the trip: “You can look as hard as you like for some combat in Tauris, but be sure that you will not find it there now any more than else-

nades (“Le prince de Ligne à Parthenizza [1787]: A propos d’une lettre à la marquise de Coigny,” *Les Lettres romanes* 38: 4 [1984], 289–90).

⁴⁹ Ligne, 54.

⁵⁰ Ligne, 59–60, 68, 55. See also Lope, “Traces d’Ovide.” Another refutation of Ligne’s preromantic genius may be found in Lecomte, who characterizes his writing style as essentially different from that of later Romanticism (“Ligne à Parthenizza”). The actual site of Ovid’s exile was in Tomis (Costanta, Romania) on the western shore of the Black Sea.

⁵¹ Ligne, 59. The use of the past tense here would seem to indicate Ligne’s later editing of this letter, discussed below.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 42–43.

where, the fashion for it has passed..."⁵³ Nonetheless, his failure to mention even the possibility of a Russo-Turkish war is striking, especially given that Ligne himself was an experienced military officer and quite alive to the possibility of a large-scale conflict on the Black Sea coast. Indeed, his martial inclinations and close affiliation with Joseph II point to some of the advantages that Catherine saw in cultivating his friendship. When war did erupt between the Russian and Ottoman empires in August 1787, Ligne revisited the Black Sea coast as a commander in Catherine's service. War with the Turks even provided the subject for a novel that he published that same year, *Memoirs of the Campaigns of the Prince Louis de Baden against the Turks in Hungary and on the Rhine* (*Mémoires sur les campagnes du Prince Louis de Baden contre les Turcs en Hongrie et sur le Rhin*).⁵⁴

Had he so desired, Ligne could have added foreshadowing of the upcoming war at a later date, since his letters to the Marquise de Coigny were quite probably written or reedited after his actual trip.⁵⁵ In fact, the time elapsed between 1787 and the letters' first publication in 1801 may help to explain their eloquence, polish, and remarkably modern quality. Their tone of reverie has also been seen to reflect the difficult experiences of the intervening years, such as the French revolution and Ligne's loss of a son, his social position, and family estate. Nonetheless, the letter from Parthenizza offers little hint of these "future" events, indicating that in 1787, the Crimea itself was felt to be adequate inspiration for his reflective meditations. In later Russian poetry, a tradition that Ligne was likely to have influenced, this aura of quiet contemplation was developed further: "Tauris" became "a land historically linked with ancient culture, embodying beauty, happiness, peaceful repose (*bezmiatezhnost'*) and responding to the theme of poetic isolation."⁵⁶

Indeed, Ligne's writings on Catherine's trip played an important role in the development of an imaginary Crimean geography. In the early 19th century, his letters (together with other memoirs) were to prove a literary sensation: they first appeared in 1801 as part of his 24-volume *Memoirs and Historical and Literary Miscellanies* (*Mémoires et Mélanges historiques et littéraires*, Dresden, 1795–1812)

⁵³ 23 March 1786, *Lettres au Prince de Ligne*, 56.

⁵⁴ On this fictional memoir and other novels by Ligne, see Basil Guy, "The Prince de Ligne's Practice and Theory of the Novel," in *Dilemmas du roman: Essays in Honor of George May*, ed. Catherine Lafarge et al. (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1989), 175–88.

⁵⁵ Lebasteur suggests that Ligne's letters were written nearer to 1801 than 1787 (*Lettres à Coigny*, xiii). Waegemans has proposed that they might have been a post-revolutionary attempt to present Catherine's autocratic government in a favorable light ("Un Belge," 138–39). Lecomte points out that Ligne's letter from Parthenizza "seems to have been the most reworked" of the lot and uncovers a few passages in close reading that evince later rewriting ("Ligne à Parthenizza," 287–88).

⁵⁶ Vinogradov thus characterizes Batiushkov's 1815 poem "Tavrida" in his outline of the development of a Taurian theme in Russian literature ("Nachalo kavkazkoï temy," 10).

and were quickly reprinted several times, most notably in popular editions reworked by Madame de Staël.⁵⁷ Ligne's descriptions of the Crimea may well have fueled Pushkin's own approach to Russia's southern frontier. Pushkin himself, generally considered to have initiated Russian literary Orientalism with his Southern Poems of the 1820s, relied on West European tradition in formulating his motifs of both the Caucasus and the Crimea. Evidence may be found both in his well-known debt to Byron and his reworking of Xavier de Maistre's 1815 *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (*Prisonnier du Caucase*) into his own (*Kavkazkii plennik*, 1822).⁵⁸ Pushkin's available sources on the Crimea – the setting for his “Fountain of Bakhchisarai” (1824) – included several texts by Ligne: both de Staël's revised and expanded 1810 edition of the *Letters and Thoughts of the Marshal Prince de Ligne* (*Lettres et Pensées du Maréchal Prince de Ligne*) and several volumes of Ligne's *Memoirs and Miscellanies* belonged to his library.⁵⁹ Pushkin also owned two separate editions of Ségur's *Memoirs*, another key source of information on Catherine's journey that had been published after Ligne's texts and was strongly influenced by them.⁶⁰

Another version of the trip to Parthenizza appears in the record of Ligne's travel companion, the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, who described the experience in a series of letters to his wife. Nassau-Siegen's account sheds light on several assumptions of symbolic geography that the two princes shared. At the same time, it lacks many of the literary conceits found in Ligne's letter, including the attention to Oriental detail and romantic emphasis on the self. In general, Nassau-Siegen demonstrates a strong interest in the economic development of the Crimea, especially of the various properties in Novorossia and the Crimea that belonged to him. Having established a friendship with Potemkin and having received several lands from the Crown, the entrepreneurial prince was eager to stimulate commercial and agricultural activity in the area; he asks his wife to send

⁵⁷ De Staël's edited versions of the letters eclipsed the original texts until their republication by Lebasteur in 1914.

⁵⁸ On Byron and Pushkin, see Viktor Maksimovich Zhirmunskii, *Bairon i Pushkin: Iz istorii romanticheskoi poemy* (Leningrad: Academia, 1924) and Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion*, 108–38.

⁵⁹ While the volumes of *Memoirs and Miscellanies* that Pushkin subsequently owned were from a later edition (Paris, 1827–28), he could easily have been familiar with previous versions as well. The same holds true for his collections of Ségur (see note 60). Pushkin also had first-hand experience of the Crimea from his southern exile (1820–24).

⁶⁰ Pushkin owned two different editions of Ségur's *Mémoires ou souvenirs et anecdotes*: Paris, 1827 and Brussels, 1826–27. (Vadim L'vovich Modzalevskii, *Biblioteka A. S. Pushkina: Bibliograficheskoe opisaniie* [St. Petersburg: Tip. Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1910], 274–75, 335).

cattle, tools, and manpower for setting up both farms and a brewery.⁶¹ Nassau-Siegen's more practical orientation further illuminates the gap between Ligne's stylized rendition of the journey to Parthenizza and the actual travel experience. While Ligne insists upon the exclusive use of the first person pronoun, for example, Nassau-Siegen reveals that the two not only traveled together, but with a sizable accompaniment:

Prince de Ligne and myself ... had for a guide a young Italian, major of the alpine infantry, who had mapped all those mountains. We had as escort 12 Cossacks and 12 Tatars from the regiment, and my valet as the only domestic.⁶²

Nassau-Siegen's letter betrays a persistent note of irritation and litigiousness toward Ligne, whom he characterizes as impatient, capricious, and unrealistic. Leaving the Belgian prince in Parthenizza – because “he was too tired to go further”⁶³ – Nassau-Siegen rides off to survey his own new estate at nearby “Massoudre” (present-day Massandra?). Upon returning, he finds Ligne “composing verses to put on the monuments that he wants to have raised to the empress and to Prince Potemkin.” “He was enchanted with his Tatars,” the letter scornfully pronounces, “who meanwhile all wanted to leave Parthenizza.”⁶⁴ Nassau-Siegen voices frustration with the overblown reputation of Ligne's mythical plot of land; perhaps he was annoyed at the central role played by both Ligne and Parthenizza in the social conversations of the imperial retinue. Arguing that his own holdings are of greater aesthetic and economic value, Nassau-Siegen even attempts to appropriate the legend of Iphigenia for his own property: “if Iphigenia ever officiated at the temple that was on the cape, she surely went often to Massoudre, which is the most beautiful place in the area.” According to Nassau-Siegen, Ligne himself eventually agrees that Massoudre “was worth much more” than his own holdings.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Nassau-Siegen, 118–19. Nassau-Siegen had several properties in southern Ukraine and the Crimea; his letters offer an interesting insider's perspective on the process of economic development in these areas (*Un Paladin au XVIIIe siècle*).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 167.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 168–69.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 170. After 1783, large numbers of Crimean Tatars left the peninsula for lands further south or east: “the influx of European colonists – Serbs, Greeks, Germans, Balts, Moldavians – and the requisition or acquisition of the best lands by the Russians, encouraged the Tatars to emigrate to Turkey” (Alexandre Bennigsen, “The Muslims of European Russia and the Caucasus,” in *Russia and Asia*, 147–48). See also Druzhinina, *Severnoe prichernomor'e*; Fisher, *Russian Annexation of the Crimea*; and Lazzarini, “Local Accommodation and Resistance.”

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 169, 172. The “temple on the cape” would appear to be a second shrine linked to Iphigenia's cult; see Strabo, *Geography*, 7.4.2.

Catherine herself did not visit Parthenizza, but stayed behind at Bakhchisarai since her imperial carriage could not negotiate the mountain track that joined the two princes' new seafront property to the rest of the peninsula. Their coastal sojourn was therefore brief. Ligne describes his departure with regret:

I look around me with emotion at those beautiful places which made me spend the most delicious day of my life and which I will never see again. A few tears flowed from my eyes. And having been repelled by the sudden rise of a cool wind from the sloop which was to have taken me by sea to Theodosia [near Sudak], I mount a Tatar horse and, preceded by my guide, plunge again into the horrors of the night, of the road, the torrents, to cross again the famous mountains.⁶⁶

Quite a different version appears in the account of Nassau-Siegen, who preferred to avoid the precarious mountain trails (which he had earlier described in detail) and to travel by boat instead:

The wind was favorable for going to Sudak where I have some vineyards and where it was uncertain if the empress would come to dine on the next day. I proposed to Ligne to leave right away, but he wanted to go to bed. I agreed to wait for him until three in the morning when we would go to the shore of the sea. It was pouring rain; the sea was less calm. Ligne thus claimed that we would run the risk of not arriving at our destination. In vain I told him that we would find villages from place to place along the coast, where we would have horses in the case of a contrary wind, that we would go under both oar and sail; since he is no seaman, I could not convince him. He renounced seeing Sudak and returned by the same route that he had taken in coming ... I kept only my valet and an interpreter and two Tatars.⁶⁷

Nassau-Siegen's version indicates that Ligne's "guide" comprised all 12 of the Cossack escort and ten of the Tatars, and that his sensational "horrors of the night" had their basis in an actual thunderstorm. Ligne himself mentions neither quarrel nor Nassau-Siegen, but focuses on his own emotional drama and its reflection in the difficult trek ahead. Leaving Parthenizza meant abandoning the calm world of private reverie and readjusting to the agitated pace of outside reality – an experience that finds embodiment in the dramatic mountain crossing. Ligne exploits the mood suggested by the oncoming storm without clarifying any link to meteorological reality. After all, the onset of rain contradicts his earlier

⁶⁶ Ligne, 68.

⁶⁷ Nassau-Siegen, 170–71.

prediction that "the night will be delightful"⁶⁸ and he chooses instead to retain the image of the placid sea as the mirror of his soul. Nonetheless, his letter points towards the Romantic and Orientalist approaches to landscape and climate that later flourished in literary descriptions of the Caucasus: in Russian texts from the 1820s and 1830s, tortuous mountain scenery and inclement weather often served as doubles for proud Byronic protagonists. Through his influence on writers such as Pushkin, Ligne may well have contributed to the development of such conceptions in the Russian tradition and to their link with the southern landscape.



Despite their differences, both Ligne and Nassau-Siegen emphasize the liminal quality of the Crimea's coastal strip and treat its physical inaccessibility as a metaphysical quality; the distinction between coast and peninsula replicates on a smaller scale the gap that was felt to inhere between the Crimea and the rest of the empire or Western civilization itself.⁶⁹ For both travelers, crossing the mountains to the sea enables and provokes a contemplative mood. If Ligne revels in unbounded introspection at Parthenizza, the reflections of Nassau-Siegen strike an uncharacteristically poetic note in this area as well. While his letter reaches neither the level of rapture nor the degree of self-consciousness found in Ligne, he too is aware that the Crimea's imaginary geography represents an alternative to the demands of "real" Western life: "If I ever want to flee from the world," Nassau-Siegen fantasizes on the southern coast, "Sudak is the place where I will retreat."⁷⁰ Like Ligne, he ruminates on questions of his very essence, his being, and his death:

I have chosen a charming place here where I am going to have a kiosk built. That is where I want to be taken when I have ceased to be. I will be there forever – near to the sea that I love! – in a very delightful place.⁷¹

Catherine's own writings also reiterate this sense that the Crimea's geographical position corresponded to abstract, intuitive boundaries. Like Ligne and Nassau-Siegen, she underlines the sharp contrast between this exotic dreamland and the realm of normal experience. She, too, describes the Crimea's location as the edge of the familiar world and sees it as equivalent to a limit or border of knowable reality itself. Catherine illustrates such ideas in a playful piece entitled

⁶⁸ Ligne, 54.

⁶⁹ See Dickinson, "Space and the Self," 125–69.

⁷⁰ Nassau-Siegen, 121.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

“Authentic Relation of a Journey Overseas that Sir Léon the Grand Equerry Would Have Undertaken in the Opinion of Some of His Friends.”⁷² Taking the form of a parodic chapter outline for a longer work of travel writing, “Authentic Relation” demonstrates with great wit the various rhetorical poses, generic clichés, and assumptions about the Crimea that circulated in Catherine’s retinue. The text appears to have been written *en route* before the traveling party had reached the Crimea and may have been a group effort.⁷³ At any rate, it was clearly intended to provoke general merriment among the travelers by teasing Lev Naryshchkin (“Sir Léon”), the imperial equerry and a member of the Crimean traveling party who was known for his sense of humor.

At the outset of Catherine’s sketch, Sir Léon decides to visit Tauris and then “takes leave of his wife and family” in “a touching scene lifted from the good-byes of Orestes and Pylades.” When “obliged to stop for two times 24 hours in Sevastopol’,” Sir Léon “employs the time usefully to study in depth the history – fabulous, profane, ecclesiastical, and natural – of Tauris” and “proposes,” like the commercially savvy travel writer, “to present news of it to the public at his return.” Sir Léon then boards a ship heading for Constantinople, upon which he takes a final and predictably idyllic look behind at the Crimean coastline: “Poetic description of the coasts of Tauris, its charming valleys, rolling mountains, etc., etc., etc.”⁷⁴ Just beyond Tauris, however, his ship crosses an invisible line that motivates a transition from idyll to fantastic adventure story: “As Sir Léon moves away from the shore, the wind becomes stronger, the sea more agitated, the sun grows dark, the thunder rumbles, lightning strikes very near to the ship, he abandons it in fright.” The wind soon “doubles in force,” blowing Sir Léon ashore near Constantinople 36 hours later. His continuing voyage becomes increasingly fabulous and absurd: in Constantinople, Sir Léon meets the Sultan and spends some time in prison before sailing through the Greek isles, to Algiers, and finally around Europe to Kronstadt where he nearly drowns, before being rescued by the Newfoundland dogs of “Admiral Gr[ieg].”

⁷² Catherine II, “Relation authentique d’un voyage outre mer que sir Léon Grand Ecuyer aurait enterpris par l’avis de quelques uns de ses amis,” *Sochineniia Imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Pypin (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia nauk, 1903), 5: 253–68. On other examples of Catherine’s writing about the Crimea, see Dickinson, “Space and the Self,” 125–69.

⁷³ On 14 March 1787, during the long and somewhat tedious stay in Kiev, Catherine’s secretary recorded that he had “recopied ‘Relation authentique d’un voyage [d’]outre-mer’ de sir Léon” (*Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo s 18 ianvaria 1782 po 17 sentiabria 1793 goda*, ed. Nikolai Platonovich Barsukov [Moscow: V Universitetskoi Tipografii, 1901], 16). Citations herein have been taken from the copy in Khrapovitskii’s hand (*Sochineniia Ekateriny II*, 5: 254–59).

⁷⁴ As Ségur put it, “[t]he view of those coasts of Tauris, consecrated to Hercules, to Diana, re-awakened in us fabulous recollections of Greece as well as more historical remembrances of the kings of the Bosphorus and of the exploits of Mithridates” (*Mémoires*, 180).

Preposterous voyages and storms were characteristic of the fantastic adventure stories and parodic travel accounts popular in 18th-century Europe, such as Voltaire's *Candide* (1758) and Raspe's *Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia* (1785),⁷⁵ texts which undoubtedly encouraged the spread of similar tropes among the members of Catherine's retinue. The empress was not the only traveler inspired by the Black Sea setting to contemplate maritime tempests and their transportational powers. "What am I doing here?" mused Ligne at Parthenizza: "Have I been cast here by a storm at sea?"⁷⁶ For these travelers, the Crimean storm functioned as a *deus ex machina* that helped to justify their presence in a land defined by its exotic difference.



The conception of the Crimea as an ontological borderland was not simply an 18th-century invention of Russian or West European symbolic geography. In fact, the Crimean coast had served as a boundary for defining the "other" long before the existence of imperial Russia and its Western contemporaries. The idea may be traced back at least as far as the fifth century B.C., when Aeschylus characterized Asia as other in "The Persians" and Herodotus cast the Black Sea's Scythian inhabitants in the role of barbarians.⁷⁷ The Crimea represented a political and metaphorical border for Euripides as well: "Iphigenia in Tauris" characterizes the peninsula's location as on the edge of the civilized world, "beyond Europe's land / And Europe's sea ... [in] the alien wilderness of Asia."⁷⁸ Euripides's perspective even resembles that of Ligne and Nassau-Siegen in linking the Crimea's distance and differentiation with immortality, seen when Artemis's divine reprieve transforms the ritual sacrifice of Iphigenia into an "afterlife" on the shores of the Black Sea.

As reports of Catherine's journey indicate, Tauris continued to play the role of an exotic Eastern borderland after the center of Western civilization had moved further north and west. Thus, the 18th-century traveler's attention to the Crimea's difference reflected both the perspective of contemporary Western Europe and the vantage point of ancient Greece. This resurrection of a Greek conception of the Crimea fit nicely with Catherine's attempt to present Russia as a Western imperial power by emphasizing the classical heritage of the Black Sea

⁷⁵ While in Russia, the Baron fights against the Turks; on his relevance for Western perceptions of Russia, see Wolff, *Imagining Eastern Europe*, 100–6.

⁷⁶ Ligne, 58. Playful speculation about the possibility of being carried off to Constantinople by storm appears in Pavel Sumarokov's later account of visiting Parthenizza as well; his thoughts stem from reports of the violent tempests known to beset the area (*Puteshestvie po vsemu Krymu*, 331).

⁷⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 56; Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 11.

⁷⁸ Euripides, "Iphigenia in Tauris," 136–37, lines 396–99.

area and claiming the cultural legacy of ancient Greece which underlay West European self-description. Moreover, this invented link with classical civilization allowed Catherine to formulate her own cultural achievements in modern West European terms: her spectacular journey to the south was a case in point.

If accounts of Catherine's voyage depicted the Crimea as a land of ancient Greeks and Oriental others, they also posited Tauris as a local Russian equivalent to Western Europe's Italy. Explicit comparisons of the two peninsulas were motivated by the similarly warm climate and the presence of Mediterranean waters: "On the other side of the [Crimean] mountains," wrote Ségur in his memoirs, "one experiences the heat of Naples and Venice."⁷⁹ Catherine actively defended this southern climate against charges that it was the source of various diseases, encouraging a tactful correspondent to graciously accede that such "a very great quantity of old people" as she had described in an earlier letter "could not be seen at all on the road between Rome and Naples."⁸⁰ Even Ligne's term "Parthenizza" would seem to combine notions of Greek antiquity with the Italian city of Nizza (now the French Nice).

Italy's cultural and historical importance for 18th-century Western Europe was manifest in the practice of the grand tour. In the words of Samuel Johnson, "a man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority, from not having seen what it is expected a man should see. The grand object of traveling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean."⁸¹ More specifically, the extended continental trips that elite Northern Europeans undertook in the 18th century ideally culminated in a visit to the Greek ruins in southern Italy (Pompeii, Paestum, etc.) – in recognition of antiquity's fundamental role for contemporary Western civilization. Catherine's journey to the south carved out a similar itinerary that also illustrated a prestigious connection to the classical world. Her trip proposed an all-Russian version of the grand tour, demonstrating both that such experiences were available in Russia and that they could be had within the confines of the empire itself.

Descriptions of Catherine's trip to the Crimea stand as Russia's first experiments with the systematic application of Oriental stylization to a specific landscape. In order to establish both triangular and direct connections between Russia and the West, these texts present Russia as a Western-style empire by characterizing the Black Sea region as exotic and fundamentally distinct – not only through the "otherization" of colonized peoples, but also through the

⁷⁹ Ségur, 163.

⁸⁰ Zimmerman to Catherine II, 4 September 1787, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Katharina II und Zimmerman*, 52.

⁸¹ Quoted in Anthony Glenn Cross, *"By the Banks of the Thames": Russians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1980), 231.

creation of Russian links to classical history and legend. Incorporating both classical perspectives on the Orient and contemporary perspectives on antiquity, these accounts must construe ancient Crimean history in terms exotic enough to fully justify the trip. The combination of Oriental fantasy, classical history, ancient myth, and culturally oriented travel does more than simply satisfy the demands of Oriental fashion: these texts reveal an articulated and multi-layered effort to absorb and incorporate into Russian tradition some of the most central ideas and enduring practices that lie at the heart of modern European cultural identity.

Dept. of Slavic and East European Languages and Literatures
The Ohio State University
232 Cunz Hall
1841 Millikin Rd.
Columbus, OH 43210-1215 USA
Dickinson.27@osu.edu