A short outline of the reception of Pufendorf’s “jus naturae et gentium” in Tzarist Russia

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The history of the reception of Pufendorf’s natural and international law in the last decades of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth is marked by its ample use in very different, if not opposing, political directions. In fact, the profound ambivalence of his conceptual system and his aim of providing a theoretical explanation for a wide range of practical experience made the ideas of Pufendorf “the standard vehicle of a diffuse political aspiration”. In short, “Pufendorf’s influence on political theory and practice was enormous. In the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth, he was, with Grotius, the authority par excellence in the field of the law of nature” and nations.

So far, however, the attention of critics has been directed mainly towards the reconstruction of Pufendorf’s theses on natural liberty and the original rights of man, thus examining their spread particularly in the French and Anglo-American cultural areas. Conversely, the reception of Pufendorf’s theory of natural and...
international law by the enlightened monarchs of the eighteenth century, especially those of Eastern Europe, has so far received less historiographical attention.

Except for some brief references in the works of Bazzoli, Denzer, Krieger, Venturi and Welzel, only scholars of Slavic culture, and not Pufendorf scholars...
per se have made further mention of the German philosopher also in Polish and Russian cultural spheres. Especially in Russia, from the time of Peter the Great and throughout the reign of Catherine II, Pufendorf’s historical works and his writings on natural law were much translated, mainly on the initiative of the Tzar, and were well received among the Russian *intelligencija*. In particular, Peter “set up a programme of translation of texts from other languages”, especially technical works useful to the army and for architecture and fortification. In this programme pp. 3-56. Lastly, see also Hans Welzel, *Die Naturrechtslehre Samuel Pufendorfs. Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte des 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1956), p. 2, note 2a.

6 On Polish territory, an example of the reception of Pufendorf’s methodology has been found in the works of the seventeenth-century historiographers of the middle class. In fact, concerning J. Pastorius, J. Schultz-Szulecki and K. Hartknoch, Polish historians of the baroque era, it has been observed that “it is enough to analyze the output of J. Pastorius and J. Schultz-Szulecki from Danzig or K. Hartknoch from Toruń to detect their connections with trends present in German, French, and English historiography as represented by J. Bolland, K.S. Schurzelflesch, J. Bodin, D. Papebroch, J. Scaliger, G. Buchanan, S. Pufendorf, T. Hobbes, and J.A. de Thou, etc.”: Lech Mokrzecki, *Middle Class Historiography in 17th century Poland (on the example of Royal Prussia)*, *Europa orientalis. Studi e ricerche sui paesi e le culture dell’Est europeo*, 5 (1986), p. 174.


8 Isabel de Madariaga, *La Russia da Pietro I a Caterina II*, in *La Storia*, directed by Nicola
– one that fuelled the nascent, but still restricted publishing industry – the Tzar also included “texts on theory and jurisprudence in support of his idea of the well-ordered State, such as the writings of Puffendorf [sic!] and Grotius, [as well as] history and diplomatic practice manuals, books on etiquette”\(^9\). It should be borne in mind, in this regard, that “it was not in its Polish Catholic form that the natural law tradition (…) made its greatest impact in Russia. [Rather], it was to the version espoused by contemporary German Protestants that (…) Peter turned”\(^11\).

What attracted (…) the Tzar (…), to “the writings of Samuel Pufendorf (1632-94), Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), and Christian Wolff (1679-1754) was their stress on the duties and obligations of the subject to the state, and their view of the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), which they interpreted as a straightforward justification of unlimited sovereign power”\(^12\). In particular, the revival of interest in Pufendorf coincided with the period – at the turn of the eighteenth century – when Russia opened up to an auroral Enlightenment, characterised by a reaction against rationally unfounded traditions and reflecting the legacy of the Western culture of the previous three centuries. Even before Peter, in fact, Russian culture had rediscovered the Greek and Roman traditions, mediated by the Polish and European Renaissances, at the same time taking on board German, Dutch and French natural law theories. This may be confirmed by the fact that – as mentioned above – during the reign of Peter the Great, the


\(^9\) On this cf. Lauri Mälksoo, Russia – Europe, in Bardo Fassbender and Anne Peters, eds., Simone Peter and Daniel Högger, assistant eds., The History of International Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), on Pufendorf’s influence in Russia esp. pp. 767 ff. This critic opportunely underlines that “Tsar Peter was eager to modernize Muscovy. One of the things Muscovy needed was European law. It seems that by this he meant [both] legal philosophy and constitutional and international law. At that time, these fields were seen as part of (…) natural law [itself] – consider, for example, the ideas of Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-94). Peter was so impressed by Pufendorf’s intellectual influence in Europe that he even called himself ‘Russia’s Pufendorf’. If anything, this moniker demonstrates how important the project of legal modernization of Muscovy was to Peter the Great”: idem, p. 772.

\(^10\) Isabel de Madariaga, La Russia da Pietro I a Caterina II, cit., p. 608. On the character of Peter the Great’s editorial policy, De Madariaga notes, “it is typical of Peter’s substantially pragmatic approach that he was not interested in a faithful reproduction of the original nor in its literary qualities. Works could even be cut down and stylistic refinements eliminated”: ibid. The opposite view is held by Frank T. Brechka, Peter the Great: The Books He Owned, The Journal of Library History (1974-1987), vol. 17, no. 1 (Winter, 1982), pp. 1-15. He notes, for example, that “when Peter realized that the translator of Samuel Puffendorf’s [sic] European History had omitted some of the author’s disparaging opinions of Russia and the Russians he became very angry and demanded fidelity to the original. ‘It was not to flatter my subjects that I have ordered this book translated and printed’, he roared, ‘but to correct them. …’”. More specifically, in this context, “it was [Bužinskij] who incurred the royal wrath for his initial bowdlerization of Puffendorf [sic]”: idem, p. 6.


\(^12\) Idem.
spread of European culture was largely the work of scholars from Protestant Northern Europe. “The German hegemony became even more pronounced after the foundation of the Academy of Sciences (upon Leibniz’s suggestion to Peter). The current of thought that exerted more influence was that of Cartesian rationalism, together with the natural law of ‘Puffendorf’ [sic!], Leibniz and especially Christian Wolff”13.

At the dawn of the age of Enlightenment, there was a strongly felt cultural need to make known to the Russians themselves – at a time of rapid historical transformation – the deeper meaning of their past, not least through a review of the methodology which had been applied to Russian historiography until then. From these socio-cultural grounds arose an interest in the specifically historiographical and internationalistic aspects of Pufendorf’s work. In fact, “the first stages of this process of cultural policy [were] represented by the translation of the Introduction to the History of Europe by Samuel Pufendorf, whose solidly anti-Catholic attitude [was] much appreciated”14. And it is conceivable in this regard that one of the sure reasons for the Tzar’s interest in spreading Pufendorf’s Einleitung throughout Russia was the appearance in this work – in the context of a realistic view of relations between States – of changing roles in seventeenth-century international politics. In the latter, in fact – in addition to the recognition of the supremacy of France and the start of the rise of English power, together with the decline of the Spanish – “we [undoubtedly] perceive the importance of the new Russian power”15. For this reason, throughout the course of the eighteenth century, also Russian politicians and diplomats “would refer” to this historiographical work of Pufendorf “as far as the type of knowledge and evaluation of international politics [was] concerned”16.

More precisely, thanks to Peter the Great, two Russian translations were published in the space of a few years: the first in 1718, the second in 1723 of Pufendorf’s Einleitung, which he “had composed” in particular “for those students

13 Isabel de Madariaga, La Russia da Pietro I a Caterina II, cit., p. 625. It is no coincidence that it was precisely on the German doctrine of natural law that was founded, for example, the conception consolidated among the Russian sovereigns “that Tzarist power was only a human institution and that it was based on a sort of contract with the subjects”: Dmitrij Tschiżewskij, Russische Geistesgeschichte: Rußland zwischen Ost und West. 18.-20. Jahrhundert, vol. II, cit., p. 46. On the receptivity of Russian culture to the European Enlightenment, cf., on the other hand, Marc Raeff, “The Enlightenment in Russia and Russian Thought in the Enlightenment”, in John Gordon Garrard, ed., The Eighteenth Century in Russia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), part 1., pp. 25-47, and Karl A. Papmehl, Freedom of Expression in Eighteenth-Century Russia (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971) and, further, Hans Rogger, National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).


of his [at the University] of Lund, who envisaged a diplomatic career. And confirming the constant attention of the Crown to Pufendorf’s internationalistic view and his theory of the reason of State is the fact that a new edition of the same work was published during the reign of Catherine II, and was released in two parts: the first in 1767, and the second ten years later. And it may be assumed that it was precisely the remarkable spread of the Einleitung that would ensure that eighteenth-century Russian historians and politicians could access and make use of the historical and internationalistic methodological canons developed by Pufendorf.

Of historiographical importance would in fact be the reconstruction of the influence of Pufendorf’s methodology and theoretical postulates on one who may be considered the first Russian historian in the modern sense, namely Vasilij Nikitič Tatiščev. Author of the Istorija Rassiojskaia s saných drevnejščich vremên (Russian History Dating Back to the Most Ancient Times) – a work that, composed in 1768-’69, reflects an Enlightenment spirit – Tatiščev presented a complex “cultural background, [being] heir to different aspects of the (...) rationalist tradition dating back to Humanism, which evolve[d] from the close of the sixteenth century and across the seventeenth throughout [the whole of] Europe, and particularly in Germany and Flanders, that produce[d] thinkers such as Lipsius, Grotius and Van Dale, Pufendorf, Arnold, Leibniz and Wolff, and, in France, Bodin and Fontenelle, to mention only a few names also known to Tatiščev, plus the great Descartes.” In particular, among the German scholars of natural law “he admired Christian Wolff more than the others, but only Pufendorf was available in Russian translation, and [Tatiščev] relied on him.” As a matter of fact, in his Istorija Rassiojskaia (Russian History), he develops, for example, a political philosophy based, in turn, on an anthropology that has aspects probably derived from Pufendorf. For instance, in the natural state of individual human beings in relation to themselves – that is, what is more, a mere logical fiction – Pufendorf’s man is seen to be alone and, as such, weak and helpless (imbecillis), namely incapable of acquiring arts, crafts and techniques to satisfy his own needs without the aid of his fellow humans.

18 In his Istorija Rassiojskaia (Russian History), Vasilij Nikitič Tatiščev (1686-1750) showed great openness to Enlightenment thinking, especially in the importance he gave to science, in his defence of the Copernican and Cartesian revolutions, and the spirit of religious tolerance that runs through all of his work.
21 On the anthropological characteristic of weakness and natural helplessness (imbecillitas atque naturalis indigentia) and the natural state of individual human beings towards themselves (status naturalis in ordine singularum hominum ad seipsum), see Samuel Pufendorf, De Jure Naturae et Gentium, libri octo cum integris Commentariis Joh. Nicolai Hertii atque Johannis Barbeyracci, recensuit & Animadversionibus illustravit Gottfridus Mascovius, (Lausanne & Geneve, 1744), bk. II, eh. II, para. II, pp. 151-54; Idem, De Officio Hominis et Civis, secundum legem naturalem, libri duo, cum observationibus Everardi Otii (Trajecti ad
Similarly, in his greatest work, “[Tatiščev] began his own political philosophy not with Hobbes’s ‘war of all against all’, which is a collective experience, but with the idea of a solitary man. By himself, man is helpless; he cannot obtain ‘pleasure, peace, or profit’.”

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Tatiščev was certainly also familiar with Pufendorf’s theory of the reason of State, from which he took other internationalistic historiographical criteria too, such as the importance for a sovereign to know neighbouring peoples and their histories. One may also suppose knowledge of Pufendorf’s *Einleitung* on the part of other leading figures in eighteenth-century Russian culture. It may be supposed, for example, that Michail Vasil’evič Lomonosov, as historian, would have had access to this work by the author from Saxonia.

If it is possible to discern Pufendorf’s success as a historian of international politics in eighteenth-century Russia, bringing a sense of renewal to the historiographical methods of the period, it is also evident that the aspects of his work specifically related to the law of nature and nations were not neglected either. In this way, both areas of interest in Pufendorf’s thought, which concurred to produce his overall concept of *jus gentium*, namely international history and international law, found fertile soil in Russian culture during the course of the eighteenth century.

So much so that in 1724 Peter I ordered the edition of an official translation of Pufendorf’s *De Officio*, followed by another, which – despite having been commissioned by the sovereign himself – was completed only in 1726, i.e., during the brief interregnum of his wife, Empress Catherine I. Then, particular interest was aroused during the reign of Catherine II by the *De Jure Naturae ac Gentium*, Rhenum, 1711), bk. II, ch. I, para. II, pp. 394-95; and lastly, also by Samuel Pufendorf, *De Status Hominum Naturali*, in Idem, *Dissertationes Academicae Selectiores* (Londini Scanorum, 1675), paras. 1 and 2, pp. 582-87.


25 In fact, Pufendorf “developed his constitutional doctrine into a demonstration of the primacy of the state’s international position in the determination of its political structure. (…) He had now to deduce from his system the unitary rules that would make sense of international relations, but he had also to deal with the recalcitrant facts of human variety which he had exported out of the internal structure of his sovereign state. The first requirement led him to international law, the second to international history”: Leonard Krieger, *The Politics of Discretion*, cit., p. 164.

26 This translation of Pufendorf’s *De Officio* is also mentioned by Paul Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great*, cit., in whose reconstruction it is said that “one of his [of Peter I] last acts (11 September 1724) was to order the Holy Synod to find a translator for Samuel Pufendorf’s *De Officio Hominis et Civis* of 1673, a popularization of rationalist political theory in its absolutist variant. Five months later Peter the Great was dead”: idem, p. 444.
a translation of which may be consulted at the Lenin Library in Moscow. It is in duplicate manuscript copy, imprecisely datable to around the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1765, in fact, the Tzarin – in an attempt to modernise Russian legislation, which had by then become difficult to apply – began to draw up the Instruction (Наказ), containing the nucleus of the general guidelines of a code to be issued at a later date. In realising this project, Catherine took, sometimes word by word, whole sections of the Esprit des Lois of Montesquieu and from On Crimes and Punishments by Beccaria. “Also from other Enlightenment authors she borrowed important [ideas]. The Institutions politiques of Biifeld, Pufendorf’s De iure nature et gentium, [and] De iure belli ac pacis of Hugo Grotius served her as models”27. The openness of the sovereign to German theories of natural law, and in particular that of Pufendorf, is further illustrated by Catherine’s idea to continue the translation plan of his works. The historian of Russian literature, Vladimir Petrović Semennikov, in fact – in reconstructing the history and the activities of the Society for the translation of foreign works (the first step of Catherine II’s Enlightenment cultural programme) – identified a list of works intended for official translation, which was however never carried out. Particularly significant for our purposes is the fact that this list also included two works by Pufendorf, namely the Historia Sueciae (Istorija Švecii) and the De Officiis28.

Eighteenth-century Russia saw the spread of Pufendorf’s vision not only through the initiative of the Tzar, but also in the private sphere, as demonstrated by the composition of a number of libraries belonging to intellectuals and men of culture, who sometimes had translations of this author’s works done for their personal use. An example of this interest is the presence in the library of prince Dmitrij Mikhailovich Golyein (1663-1737) of Pufendorf’s De Statu Imperii Germaniæ of which he had personally ordered a print in Russian language. In this regard, Russkie biblioteki i ich čitatel’ (Russian libraries and their readers) describes how “that same prince D.M. Golyein, self-appointed advocate of the preservation of Russian cultural heritage, seems very interested in foreign literature, from which he chose for himself and had translated what caught his attention, [namely] Pufendorf’s De Statu Imperii Germaniæ, Grotius’s De Iure Belli ac Pacis, Locke’s Two Treatises of Government and the Political Testament of Richelieu29. Also the library


28 Vladimir Petrović Semennikov, Sobranie starajusceja o perevode inostrannykh knig, ucrezdennoe Ekateriny II (1768-1783), Spb, 1913/Society with the aim of translating foreign books, founded by Catherine II (1768-1783) (Saint Petersburg: Sirius, 1913), p. 88.

29 Sergei Pavlovich Luppov, “Izučenie istorii bibliotek i charaktera čitatel’ skich zaprosov različnych sloev obščestva kak odna iz važnych zadac, stojaščich pered issledovateljami v oblasti istorii kul’tury (na primere izučenija istorii russkich bibliotek epochi foedalisma)” / “The study of the history of libraries and the characteristics of the requests of readers belonging to different social strata, regarded as one of the important tasks that scholars of cultural history have to address (on the example of Russian library history in feudal times)”, in Boris B. Piotrovskij i Sergei Pavlovich Luppov, eds., Russkie biblioteki i ich čitatel (Russian libraries and their readers) (Leningrad: Nauka, 1983), p. 27. This work is one of the
of Prince Golycin, “consisting of 2,600 books”\textsuperscript{30}, did not lack an edition of Pufendorf’s greatest work. Indeed, this collection, in addition to demonstrating “a wide curiosity about European literature and history” perhaps also revealed “a special interest in political theory. This suspicion is bolstered by the fact that, in Kiev, [Golycin] commissioned members of the Kievan academy to translate for him Aristotle’s \textit{Politics}, Grotius’s \textit{De jure pacis et belli}, Pufendorf’s \textit{De jure naturae et gentium}, and Locke’s two treatises on civil government”\textsuperscript{31}.

On the subject of Pufendorf’s favourable reception in Tzarist Russia, here follows a more detailed bibliographical description of the Russian translations of this author’s works on international history and the law of nature and nations to which we have referred in this essay.

1) \textit{Vvedenie, v gistoryju evropskikh \u0416rez samnala pufendorfija, na nemeckom jazyke složennoe, Taže \u0416rez ioanna friderika kramera, na latinski prelozennoe. Nyne že poveleniem velikago gosudarja carja, i velikago knjazja, petra pervago, vserossiiskago imperatora, na rossiiskim s latinsago prevedennoe. Pečatano v sanktpiterburche, 1718, Dekabria v 5 den’} / Einleitung zur Historie der vornehmsten Reichen und Staaten in Europa, written by Samuel Pufendorf in German, and translated by Johan Friederich Kramer into Latin. Now, by order of the Great Sovereign Tzar, and Great Prince, Peter I, Emperor of All the Russias, translated into Russian from the Latin. Printed in St. Petersburg, December 5, 1718/other ed. 1723\textsuperscript{32}.

2) \textit{Vvedenie v istoriju znatnejšich evropskich gosudarstv s primečanijami i političeskimi razsuždenijami. Perevedena s nemeckago Borisom Volkovym} . Spb., pri imp. Akad. Nauk, Č. 1, 1767; Č. 2, 1777, 8° / Einleitung zur Historie der vornehmsten Reichen und Staaten in Europa, with political notes and reflections. Translated from the German by Boris Volkov. St. Petersburg, at the Imperial Academy of Sciences, Part I, 1767; Part II, 1777, in octavo\textsuperscript{33}.

miscellaneous periodical publications of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad, aiming to reconstruct the history and composition of Russian libraries, both public and private.


\textsuperscript{31} Idem, p. 298.

\textsuperscript{32} Valentin Pavlovič Vomperskij, \textit{Slovari XVIII veka (XVIIIth Century Dictionaries)} (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), with added critical note by the author. The work, which catalogues the few Russian dictionaries of the eighteenth century, also notes under the heading \textit{Vvedenie ... (Introduction)} a glossary (\textit{Tolkovanie}), which – printed along with the editions of Pufendorf’s \textit{Einleitung} of 1718 and 1723 – explained the most difficult recurring terms in this work. In the critical note, the author states: “It was translated by Gavriil Bužinskij. The edition includes a ‘dictionary’ (\textit{Tolkovanie}) of some difficult terms mentioned in this work, for example, an explanation of the place where the Boeotii or the Celts dwell, or the definition of some forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy, democracy”.

\textsuperscript{33} Svodnyj Katalog Russkoj Knigi Graždanskoj Pečati XVIII veka, 1725-1800 / General Catalogue of Russian books, written [using] the secular alphabet in the XVIII century, 1725-1800 (Moscow: Kniga, 1963-1967), 5 vols., with the note, under \textit{Vvedenie} (Pufendorf’s \textit{Einleitung}), concerning this work: “chapter 11 of the first part (pp. 409-63) is dedicated to Russia. The translation of the second part was carried out by B.A. Volkov with the participation of
3) O dolžnostjach čeloveka i graždanina / De Officiis Hominis et Civis, trans. by Gavriil Bužinskij, 1724 (Lenin Library, Manuscript Section, Moscow, ms. 919, Sin. 1013, 196 ff.) 34.


5) O zakonach estestva i narodov / De Jure Naturae ac Gentium, translation of Gavriil Bužinskij, only two books (dve knigi), datable back to around the second half of the eighteenth century. The manuscript also contains a contemporary translation of Justus Lipsius by a monk named Kachovskij (Lenin Library, Manuscript Section, Moscow, ms. 1050, Sin. 115, 505 ff.) 36. Another copy of the manuscript is mentioned under: Lenin Library, Manuscript Section, Moscow, ms. 920, Sin. 255, 546 ff. 37.

A.Ja. Polenov and V.G. Kostygov. The text was edited by the academic S.Ja. Rumovskij, who was requested “to correct the translation and to revise the final proofs at the time of publication”. Impression of the first part: 2,433 copies, and of the second: 2,445.


35 Valentin Pavlovič Vomperskij, Slovari, cit., p. 20, where he notes that “[t]he first five unnumbered pages of the book contain “Reestr pamjatstvuemych rečenji, v knize cej obretajuÊcsja” (Russkolatinskij Slovarj / A Register of terms to remember mentioned in this work (Russian-Latin Dictionary)”. Concerning the same edition of De Officio, the above-mentioned General Catalogue notes that “on pages 1-18 of the first book there is a dedication to Catherine II, a premise by the translator, Archimandrite Gavriil Bužinskij, addressed to Catherine I and lastly a second premise to Russian readers “who love the truth” (“pravdoljubivomu rossijskomu čitatelu”). The translation of Pufendorf’s book was undertaken on the initiative of Peter I and carried out by the official printer of St. Petersburg, Iosif Krečetovkij. Editing of the translation was entrusted by Peter I to the Protektor, Gavriil Bužinskij, who had – by request of Peter himself – not only to make sure that the translation was carried out “as soon as possible”, but also that the book “be translated not carelessly, but (...) in a clear and elegant style”.

36 Tat’iana Nikolaevna Protas’eva, Opisanie, cit., p. 113.

37 Idem, p. 57.