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The Russian Musical Society under Royal Patronage

The patronage of the Russian Musical Society from the Romanov imperial family presents an important but insufficiently studied cultural-historical phenomenon. In pre-revolutionary historiography the picture of royal patronage was demonstrated in an idealized vein, while all the negative sides were suppressed. During the Soviet period as the result of the ideological orientations the attitudes toward this phenomenon were entirely negative and biased: its role in the support and development of professional musical education in Russia was totally ignored. At the present time, along with the disclosure of previously inaccessible archival sources, there appeared the opportunity to reveal in new light the role of the royal patrons in the formation and development of the Russian Musical Society, its concert and musical enlightening activities, personal aid to separate performers and composers and to musical ensembles. The main aim of the present article consists in a complex characterization of the activities of the representatives of the grand-ducal family of the Konstantinoviches, who during the course of thirty-six years fulfilled the functions of patrons and took up the post of chairmen at the Russian Musical Society. The author analyzes the mechanisms of transmission of the full commanding powers from one member of the family to another, and examines various administrative styles. Methods of comparative source study are applied. The conclusion is arrived at that, depending on the situation and on the conditions of affairs at the Russian Musical Society and the conservatories, the patronage tended to acquire unexpected means of inactivation.

Keywords: Imperial Russian Musical Society (IRMS), royal patronage, the St. Petersburg Conservatory, the Moscow Conservatory, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, Grand Duchess Alexandra Iosifovna, Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich.

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**Русское музыкальное общество
под августейшим покровительством**

Патронат Русского музыкального общества со стороны императорской фамилии Романовых – важный, но недостаточно изученный культурно-исторический феномен. В дореволюционной историографии картина августейшего покровительства преподносилась как идеализированная, отрицательные стороны замалчивались. В советский период по причине идеологических установок отношение к нему было негативно-предвзятым: как фактор поддержки и развития профессионального музыкального образования в России оно игнорировалось. В настоящее время с открытием ранее недоступных архивных первоисточников появилась возможность по-новому раскрыть роль августейших покровителей в становлении и развитии Русского музыкального общества, его концертной и музыкально-образовательной деятельности, персональной помощи отдельным исполнителям и композиторам, музыкальным коллективам. Основная задача настоящей статьи состоит в комплексной характеристике деятельности представителей великокняжеской семьи Константиновичей, которые на протяжении тридцати шести лет выполняли функции покровителей и занимали пост председателя в Русском музыкальном обществе. Автором проанализированы механизмы передачи властных полномочий от одного члена семьи к другому, рассмотрены разные управленческие стили. Используются методы сравнительного источниковедения. Делается вывод о том, что, в зависимости от ситуации и состояния дел в Русском музыкальном обществе и консерваториях, покровительство приобретало неожиданные проявления.

Ключевые слова: Императорское Русское музыкальное общество (ИРМО), августейшее покровительство, Санкт-Петербургская консерватория, Московская консерватория, великий князь Константин Николаевич, великая княгиня Александра Иосифовна, великий князь Константин Константинович.

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The issue of the interactions of the Russian Musical Society / Imperial Russian Musical Society (RMS/IRMS) and its activists with the imperial family has lately drawn heightened attention from researchers. This has been evoked by the high concentration of “round number” anniversaries and the wide-scale scholarly conferences connected with them: the year 2009 marked the celebration of the establishment of the IRMS, in 2012 and 2016, respectively – the founding of the St. Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories; in 2013 – the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the reign of the Romanov dynasty¹.

Compilations of scholarly articles have been published from the materials of these conferences in which the indicated issues have assumed a conspicuous position [1; 3; 5; 18]. By their means a serious step has been taken to the comprehension of the Romanov pages of the history of the Russian Musical Society. A massif of archival sources has become available to researchers, which they still have to study. At the same time, the challenge has arisen of comprehending them from new methodological positions, since in the historiography of the Soviet period the images of patrons were construed in invariably negative tones, while in the texts of the pre-revolutionary historiographers they were inevitably idolized [7; 11]. The apologetic tone, the extrusion of the “benevolence” of the august personages, the passing over their negative features in silence, the tendentious distortion of facts – all of it is likewise characteristic to some contemporary Russian authors [2]. Such an approach impedes the disclosure of an objective picture.

In 20th and 21st century musical scholarship outside of Russia the subject of “music and patronage” has been actively developed on the material of various different time periods, in diverse angles and forms [13; 15; 17]. At the same time, the phenomenon of musical patronage in the Russian Empire has almost never been reflected in them [14, pp. 53, 60, 153; 19, pp. 56–59, 224–225]. Bearing in mind the fact that during the time of the founding of the RMS and the first conservatories, their founders oriented themselves on Western European models [6, p. 253–264], we can

hope that the filling in of the existent lacuna would provide a distinct contribution to worldwide musical historiography.

The productive activity of such a colossal cultural-enlightening organization as the RMS, initially conceived as representing musicians throughout all of Russia (1859), inevitably presumed patronage on the part of the members of the royal family. The functions of the patron consisted, on the one hand, in the advancement and protection of the interests of the organization aided by him or her in the highest level of the government (solicitation before the emperor, interaction with the ministries and committees, the ruling senate, the state treasury, etc.); on the other hand, it provided a sort of guarantee of the Society’s allegiant devotion to the patron.

In the mid-19th century an efficient means of attracting attention to any kind of new initiative and incentive for Russian society to beneficiary support was provided by the initiating contributions from the members of the royal family. In the first year of the activity of the RMS Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna conferred 1000 rubles in silver to it; the imperial couple supported it with annual payments: 500 rubles came from Emperor Alexander II, and 150 rubles – from Empress Maria Alexandrovna². By means of their initiative, they attracted potential philanthropists. For an organization which was just recently established this was a vitally necessary step, since from the start it functioned by means of private contributions.

Subsequently the representatives of the tsar’s family seldom contributed large sums from their personal finances (an exception to this was, once again, Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna). The narratives appearing on the internet about the generous contributions supposedly coming from the Romanov family do not correspond to reality. In the second half of the 19th century the sole fact of the involvement of the tsar’s family in any philanthropic initiative whatsoever was in itself a significant circumstance [9, pp. 20–21].

The first Statute of the RMS (1859) provided that “persons contributing a rather significant capital (no less than a thousand rubles in silver) at any one time, or pledging to provide no less than a hundred rubles

in silver annually are granted the title of honorary member”³. In the first year of the existence of the RMS three members of the royal family were chosen as honorary members: Grand Duchess Ekaterina Mikhailovna (1827–1894; the daughter of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna), her husband Duke Georg August of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (1824–1876) and Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich (1827–1892; the brother of Emperor Alexander II, a progressive political figure of the era of the Great Reforms, a general-admiral, and an enthusiastic amateur musician)⁴. This choice, made by Elena Pavlovna, turned out to be providential, since these young Romanovs presented the two most “musical” branches of the imperial family of that time – the Mecklenburgs and the Konstantinoviches, who later played a decisive role in the subsequent fate of the RMS. The Mecklenburg branch has become a frequent object of study on the part of researchers [18], so our subsequent attention will be focused on the Konstantinoviches.

The head of this family, *Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich*, headed the RMS for 19 years, starting from January 1873. But long before then he already had close connections with its leading activists. He collaborated with Prince Vladimir Odoyevsky and Prince Dmitri Obolensky in the frameworks of the “Commission for Church Singing in People’s Schools” (having been its chairman during the years 1865–1866). In January 1869, when the St. Petersburg Conservatory transferred to “a new format” [11, p. 46–47], Konstantin Nikolayevich, upon an assignment of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, carried out negotiations with Eduard Napravnik, convincing him to take up the post of director⁵. Starting from the spring of 1872 he began patronizing the “Russian String Quartet” – a new performing ensemble founded as part of the St. Petersburg Section of the RMS [4]. In the summer of the same year the Grand Duke solicited from the emperor an annual subsidy of 20 thousand rubles for the Moscow Conservatory. All of this bore witness to the deep connections of Konstantin Nikolayevich with the musical worlds of both capitals.

After the unexpected death of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna in January 1873 the Grand Duke turned out to be not only quite prepared to take charge of the Russian Musical Society, but the most promising candidate for this post. Soon after his taking office, the Society was granted “the title of ‘Imperial’ (April 6, 1873)” [7, p. 15]. This presumed an elaboration of the refurbished Statute, a consolidation of the Society’s financial base (by means of governmental subsidies, incidentally, quite modest ones – 88 thousand a year),

and, most importantly, further development throughout the country, covering new regional sections of the entire Empire (this was the particular meaning which was put into the word “Imperial”).

Supporting the useful endeavors initiated by the foundress of the Society, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich brought to function a number of previously uncompleted administrative and artistic projects, including the opera competition (1875). From all appearances, this member of the royal family conceived it to be a part of his own project of connection of the IRMS and Russian opera. This idea fermented the Grand Duke as far back as the late 1860s. Although in the long run it was never realized, a number of its initiatives influenced the development of Russian music: the history of the creation and performance of such operas by Piotr Tchaikovsky as “The Oprichnik,” “The Blacksmith Vakula,” and “Eugene Onegin” carries in itself the imprint of this idea (see: [16, pp. 12–16]). The guardianship of some of the young Russian vocalists (Maria Slavina, Evlalia Kadmina, Maria Makharina, Anna Belokha, Nikolai Unkovsky, Ippolit Pryanishnikov) taken by the Grand Duke elevated them to the level of outstanding opera singers.

The Grand Duke’s aspiration to a harmonious mode of interactions between the various sections of the Society was manifested in his personal participation in the formulization of new statutes of the IRMS (1873) and the conservatories (1878), which were in effect during the course of several subsequent decades. With the support of the Grand Duke, Nikolai Rubinstein returned to his position of a leading public figure (the culmination of his career was his guidance of the Russian Concerts in Paris in 1878). Up until his death (1881) he was one of the main assistants of the royal director. In St. Petersburg the closest consultants of Konstantin Nikolayevich regarding the RMS were Eduard Napravnik (the organizer of the Society’s concerts in St. Petersburg from 1869 to 1881) and Karl Davydov (the director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory from 1876 to 1887), who also regularly kept him updated about the affairs in the realm of musical theater⁶.

After the assassination in 1881 of Emperor Alexander II, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich resigned from all his governmental positions and began spending most of his time outside of St. Petersburg. For this reason, starting from 1882 the duties of the chairman of the IRMS were partially passed to the vice-chairman, senator Andrei Markevich. However, he obviously lacked powers of authority: the absence of the royal benefactor presented a reason for instability

in the musical world – administrative conflicts, the advancement of institutions which were rivals to the IRMS (for example, the Piotr Shostakovsky Music School in Moscow). The year 1887 became lynchpin, when Karl Davydov unexpectedly left the position of director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and that vacancy was taken up by Anton Rubinstein. At that same time, Konstantin Nikolayevich's spouse, *Grand Duchess Alexandra Iosifovna* (1830–1911), tacitly expressed her willingness to bestow support and patronage upon the Society⁷. Thus, by gradual means the transfer of authority from the Grand Duke to his wife began, the latter constantly being present in the capital city and enjoying “excellent relations” with “Gatchina” (i.e., with Emperor Alexander III)⁸.

From the moment Grand Duchess Alexandra Iosifovna assumed the position of patroness, her relief from administrative duties was provided. The executive duties were carried out by vice-chairmen, senators Andrei Markevich (until 1891) and Nikolai Stoyanovsky (from 1891 to 1897). A powerful impact on the IRMS was exerted by Anton Rubinstein during the period of his directorship (1887–1891), since he advanced new radical projects of restructuring the statutes of the Society and of the Conservatories (1887, 1891) and suggested the Grand Duchess to “move the Moscow Conservatory in its entire structure to one of the southern centers of Russia... (Kiev, Kharkov or Odessa),” redesigning it into a vocal-opera institute [8, pp. 62–63]. This plan did not find support from the royal patroness.

The acquisition by the St. Petersburg and the Moscow Conservatories of new buildings is connected with the name of the Grand Duchess. As the result of her solicitation to Emperor Alexander III significant sums of money were allotted from the state treasury for their reconstruction, which was completed already during the reign of Emperor Nicholas II. Formally the presidency of Alexandra Iosifovna continued from 1892 to 1908. However, from the summer of 1897, she practically passed her authority to her son, *Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich* (1858–1915), who became the vice-president of the Russian Musical Society. Having been the eldest member of the Imperial Family, Grand Duchess became something similar to an “honorary chairwoman” of the Society (although such a position did not exist formally).

The situation when the Society was simultaneously headed by two members of the royal family, who also were the closest relatives to each other, was unprecedented. By that time Konstantin Konstantinovich was already the president of the St.

Petersburg Academy of Sciences (since 1889), which gave additional weight to the newly taken-up position and symbolized a union of academic discipline, the music and poetry (he was known as “the poet K.R.”). This type of combination satisfied the Grand Duke greatly. This is testified, for example, by the entry in his diary about writing for an academic competition the text of the cantata in memory of Alexander Pushkin (February, 1899)⁹. At that time the poet K.R. in effect won the competition, and his artistic collaboration with Alexander Glazunov (who composed the music for the “academic cantata”) received a convincing continuation in their subsequent joint work on K.R.'s dramatic play “The King of the Jews” (1913). The number of art songs and choral compositions written by Russian composers on the poetry of K.R. – which altogether was 300 – speaks of itself. Here his contribution is incontestable. On the contrary, the activities of Konstantin Konstantinovich as the head of the IRMS and the patron of the conservatories is in need of objective critical evaluation.

Due to the efforts of his parents, Konstantin Konstantinovich had been drawn into the musical milieu from the beginning, having communicated with performers, composers and the leading activists of the IRMS – Anton Rubinstein, Herman Laroche, and Piotr Tchaikovsky, with whom he maintained an epistolary dialogue in the 1880s and 1890s. In one of his last letters (October 31, 1891) Piotr Tchaikovsky, remembering the patronage bestowed to him by the Grand Duke father, unassumingly convinced Konstantin Kostantinovich to engage in similar types of activity in regard to the young composers of that time period [12, p. 258]. This subject is resumed again in Modest Tchaikovsky's letter written on December 2, 1893, soon after the death of his venerable brother. It contains a request for assistance of young Moscow-based composer Georgy Konyus (1862–1933)¹⁰. Konstantin Konstantinovich perceived this request as a posthumous behest. He immediately passed it on to Emperor Alexander III, who satisfied this request (on February 1, 1894) and allotted to Georgy Konyus a personal annual stipend of 1200 rubles from His Majesty's cabinet.

The moral splendor of Grand Duke Konstantin Konstanovich's deed is not subject to doubt. However, everything was cancelled out by the subsequent discharge of the tsar's stipend recipient from the Moscow Conservatory initiated by its director Vassily Safonov and supported by the Grand Duke, at that time already the vice-chairman of the IRMS (the so-called “Konyus affair,” 1899).

In the late 1890s and beginning of the 1900s Vassily Safonov was the most influential musical public figure in the IRMS. He possessed furcated connections in the world of civil servants and the royal court of St. Petersburg and was in close contact with the immediate assistants of both of the royal patrons – with senators Avgust Gerke and Nikolai Stoyanovsky, Minister of Finances Eduard Pleske, generals Pavel Keppen and Alexander Kireyev, and others. For Grand Duchess Alexandra Iosifovna and Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich, who supported virtually all the initiatives of the director of the Moscow Conservatory, he appeared as “the right man on the right place”¹¹. To this it must be added that Vassily Safonov inalterably posed himself as a fervent monarchist in life and in art.

An emphatic illustration of how one of the crucial episodes of “the Konyus affair” at the Main Directorate of the IRMS under the chairmanship of the Grand Duke is contained in the diary of Sergei Taneyev (a supporter of Georgy Konyus and an opponent of Vassily Safonov and Konstantin Konstantinovich). The session of February 1–2, 1899 was supposed to involve the participation of member of the Main Directorate Modest Tchaikovsky, but the management “forgot” to invite him, while Konstantin Konstantinovich, haven taken “the side of Safonov,” expressed his satisfaction “that the affair will be resolved without Tchaikovsky” [10, p. 22]. After we become acquainted with the episode, the “ideal image” of the august patron-poet becomes noticeably tarnished.

Another episode, aggravating the “image characteristics” of the august vice-president, has to do with the dismissal of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov from the St. Petersburg Conservatory (upon the decision of Konstantin Konstantinovich) during the period of the revolutionary unrest and student strikes of 1905. As in the case of Georgy Konyus, in the story with the author of “Kashchey” what draws our attention is the absurd incoherence of the actions of the members of the royal family – eight months prior to his dismissal, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov was honored with the tsar’s favor: Emperor Nikolas II (upon recommendation of the patron of the IRMS) bestowed upon the composer the title of Honorary Professor.

The student demonstrations at the St. Petersburg Conservatory were documented in detail by Konstantin Konstantinovich in his personal diary, which has remained unpublished up to now: “March 19. I thought before that very soon we would make up our minds about the discharge of the rampaging students, but that is not how it has turned out. <...>

The decision has also been made to dismiss Professor Rimsky-Korsakov (the main ringleader of the strike [sic!]) for his bold expression of condemnation of the actions of the direction and opposition to their efforts to resume the class studies in print”¹². Having taken such a radical step, the august vice-chairman could not envisage what the response of the cultural community to this repressive action: “March 27. We are attacked in the newspapers for the dismissal of Rimsky-Korsakov, who is receiving expressions of sympathy from everybody, addresses of commiseration, etc. Of course, everybody started reacting here, even those who had no concern for music and had no idea or anything in common with Rimsky-Korsakov”¹³. The absurdity of the dismissal of the great composer became apparent in the autumn of that same year, when Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov returned to teaching at the Conservatory. The price of such a rash step became the shaken international reputation of the IRMS – Camille Saint-Saëns, Joseph Joachim and Eugène Ysaÿe resigned from the ranks of its honorary members.

Judging from his diary, Konstantin Konstantinovich understood quite well the demands set by the conservatories of the two capitals: similar to the universities, they wished to receive so-called “autonomy.” But one cannot fail to notice here that he attributed the protest moods on “the Jewish element” in the students’ milieu and perceived the revolutionary moods as “anarchist agitation”¹⁴ which had to be suppressed by police measures. When the situation became heated, the Grand Duke departed from “restless St. Petersburg” to find himself “in a cadet milieu, which is always happy to see me, and which gives me the highest of all pleasures familiar to me by its affection”¹⁵. The custodianship over the cadet corps became one of the duties of the Grand Duke starting from 1900, having become the main work of his life. In the cadets he saw the hope of Russia. The conservatory musicians, in the eyes of the Grand Duke, had not realized these expectations, having succumbed to the temptations of revolutionary moods, having made their choice in favor of political activism against the service of pure art.

After the affirmation by the Ministry of Interior Affairs “of changes in the Statutes of the conservatories which they requested, having wished to obtain a certain amount of autonomy,” the Grand Duke noted: “I wish to withdraw from the vice-presidency in the Society”¹⁶. However, having taken the advice of his assistant Prince Alexander Obolensky, he decided not to do this¹⁷, apparently out of apprehension of another scandal in the press, and continued to hold this position for another three years.

The diary conveys to us Konstantin Konstantinovich's unswerving inner distancing from the institutions he patronized (very characteristic are the notes: "tedious session of the Main Directorate of the Musical Society," "most boring, lengthy session")¹⁸. On February 12, 1908 he attested the St. Petersburg Conservatory in an extremely negative manner: "In this institution impounded with politics the policies are bad to an extremity. Glazunov is an excellent composer, but a very bad director, appeasing towards political demagogues. The students established their own library within the walls of the conservatory's building. The police made a search and found there not only revolutionary editions, but also dynamite. Moreover, the students have their own council of wardens. When he is presented with the demand to put a stop to all of this, Glazunov is almost completely inactive"¹⁹.

In April 1908 the Grand Duke turned to his cousin Princess Elena Georgievna Saxe-Altenburg (née Duchess Helene of Mecklenburg-Strelitz) with the request to take the IRMS under her patronage: "I informed her that I wanted to withdraw from the Musical Society and asked her, as the grand-daughter of Elena Pavlovna, its foundress, to give her consent to assume the position of chairwoman, replacing Mama [Grand Duchess Alexandra Iosifovna. – *G. M.*]. Elena, not having expressed her consent at once, did not refuse either. I hope that she agree"²⁰. In January 1909 Elena Georgievna answered in the affirmative, and soon Konstantin Konstantinovich, without hiding his emotions, wrote down: "I am so glad that I am done with Society; now I have one bothersome affair the less"²¹. Thus, after 36 years, the patronage of the Russian Musical Society once again returned to the "Mecklenburg branch" of the Romanov house.

NOTES

¹ In addition, the jubilees of the Moscow Section of the IRMS (2010), Vassily Safonov (2012), Anton Rubinstein (2014), Piotr Tchaikovsky and Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich (2015) were also given attention.

² *Otchyot Russkogo muzykal'nogo obshchestva za 1859–1860 gg.* [Report of the Russian Musical Society for 1859–1860]. St. Petersburg: Printing Office of the 3rd Section of the Administrative Office in Possession of His Majesty, 1860, p. 3.

³ *Polnoye sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii* [Complete Compilation of Laws of the Russian Empire]. No. 34441. 1859. May 1. *Vysochayshe utverzhdennyy ustav Russkogo Muzykal'nogo Obshchestva* [Statute of the Russian Musical Society Consolidated by the Imperial Court]. URL: http://nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php (Access Date: 10.09.2018).

⁴ *Otchyot Russkogo muzykal'nogo obshchestva za 1859–1860 gg.* [Report of the Russian Musical Society for 1859–1860]. St. Petersburg: Printing Office of the 3rd Section of the Administrative Office in Possession of His Majesty, 1860, p. 2.

⁵ State Archive of the Russian Federation (GA RF). F. 722. Inv. 1. D. 95, pp. 84 backside–85.

⁶ Eduard Napravnik was the conductor, and Karl Davydov – the principal cellist of the orchestra of the Mariinsky Theater.

⁷ GA RF. F. 722. Inv. 1. D. 563, p. 34 backside.

⁸ The Manuscript Division of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskij Dom) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RO IRLI RAN). No. 10741, p. 12.

⁹ See Diary from February 6, 1899: "I continue imagining how on the 16th the entire Section of the

R[ussian] Language and Philology will meet into an assembly to which also the Permanent Secretary, Senator Koni and composers Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov, the latter is expected to compose the music of the cantata, were invited. <...> And, unexpectedly, they may approve my text. And no matter how I will make myself lose faith, it still seems to me that preference will be given to my words. This is pride and self-flattering confidence in my superiority" (GA RF. F. 660. Inv. 1. D. 46, p. 15).

¹⁰ GA RF. F. 660. Inv. 2. D. 491, p. 2 backside.

¹¹ The Manuscript Section of the Russian National Library. F. 676. Inv. 1. No. 8. pp. 1–2 backside.

¹² GA RF. F. 660. Inv. 1. D. 56, p. 80.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–84 backside.

It must be noted that the connections of the Konstantinoviches themselves with the composer and his family were longstanding and furcated. They arose as the result of their mutual affiliation with the navy and with music. The composer's elder brother Voin Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1822–1871) was for a brief time the tutor of the boy Konstantin Konstantinovich. In his youth K.R., judging from his diary, was well acquainted with the operas of Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, etc.

¹⁴ GA RF. F. 660. Inv. 1. D. 56, p. 77 backside.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85 backside.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* D. 55, p. 119.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* D. 57, p. 93 backside; *Ibid.* D. 58, p. 37 backside.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* D. 59, p. 134.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 163–163 backside.

²¹ *Ibid.* D. 61, p. 22 backside.

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