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The activity of Count Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont in the Russian Empire, with a focus on his St. Petersburg salon¹

Anežka KOTOUČOVÁ

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to analyse the activities of the Imperial Envoy Count Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont in the Russian Empire during the first half of the nineteenth century, with a special emphasis on his salon in St. Petersburg. This salon, which Ficquelmont ran in the years 1829–1840 with his Russian wife Darya Fyodorovna (Dolly), was located in the building of the Austrian Embassy in St. Petersburg and was the centre of not only cultural but also diplomatic life in the Russian capital. Interestingly, the cultural and artistic level was combined with the diplomatic and political level, which testifies to Ficquelmont as a host with a truly broad intellectual scope. The paper examines how these levels interacted, while pointing out that Ficquelmont made extensive use of his privileges as an influential diplomat and one who was loved at the court to help guests in his salon circumvent some Russian obstructions, including the severe censorship of that time. Ficquelmont's most famous guest was the poet Alexander Sergejevich Pushkin, who gained inspiration from the Austrian Embassy building for one of his famous works. In addition, Ficquelmont has connections with the Czech lands, as he and his wife are buried in Teplice, where his daughter married. Overall, the aim is to introduce Count Ficquelmont as an educated and cultured diplomat who naturally ran one of the most influential Russian salons of the first half of the nineteenth century. Within the source base, diplomatic reports (Ficquelmont sought greater rapprochement of the Austrian Empire with the Russian Empire) as well as various ego-documents, including the extensive diary of Darya Fyodorovna von Ficquelmont, and, marginally, contemporary Russian fiction are used equally. It was the salons that provided a large number of stimuli for the formation of Russian culture, and it was here that important socio-cultural topics of the time were discussed. It can thus be stated that the salons stood at the very birth and beginnings of Russian public opinion.

Keywords: Salon, Russian Empire, Count Ficquelmont, Austrian Embassy, Diplomacy

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Social literary salons were an important means of communication for civic engaged society from the end of the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. It was in the period analysed by us that Russian salons flourished and later became the dominant centres of social life during the golden age of Russian culture. If we help ourselves with a reference to the magnum opus of Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy, it is precisely the image of Anna Pavlovna Scherer's chic salon that opens his famous *War and Peace*.² Astolphe de Custine, a very far-sighted observer of Russian life, declared in 1839 – exactly at the time of Count Ficquelmont's salon – that if a word didn't fall in a Russian salon, “*then it would hardly fall elsewhere*”.³

The purpose of my paper is to analyse the extremely important cultural phenomenon of St. Petersburg society in the first half of the nineteenth century, specifically in the 1830s. In addition to his diplomatic activities, the Austrian envoy in the Russian Empire Karl Ludwig Count Ficquelmont was a very sociable man and the salon he ran with his wife Darya Fyodorovna (also known as Dolly) was an integral part of his life in Russia during the reign of Nicholas I simply because the Saltykov Mansion housed the salon of the couple and the Austrian Embassy at the same time.

In this paper, the functioning of the salon will be analysed, and space will be dedicated to its guests, including the most important one, Alexander Sergeyeovich Pushkin, as well as its cultural and social potential. The question of whether and how Ficquelmont used his diplomatic position and the favour of Tsar Nicholas I within the salon and whether the salon was a purely cultural space, or whether his host used this place for the diplomatic goals of the country he represented, will be answered.

With regard to the source base, a large quantity of miscellaneous materials on Ficquelmont's diplomatic activities in St. Petersburg can be found in the Haus – Hof- and Staatsarchive in Vienna⁴ and also in the family archive in the city of Děčín in the Czech Republic.⁵ Information relating to the activities of the salon is contained primarily in published correspondence, diaries, and memoirs.⁶

The most recent literature on the topic of social literary salons includes the work of the Russian expert Vlada Vadimovna Bunturi, who deals with the phenomenon of the nineteenth-century St. Petersburg literary salon in an analysis that compares it with the

2 Compare Lev Nikolaevich TOLSTOY, *Vojna a mír*, Praha 2010, pp. 5–28.

3 Astolphe DE CUSTINE, *Dopisy z Ruska. Rusko v roce 1839*, Praha 2015, pp. 143–144.

4 Various materials from the archival fund AT-OeStA/HHStA StAbt Russland.

5 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen.

6 For example F. DE SONIS, *Lettres du comte et de la comtesse de Ficquelmont à la comtesse Tiessenhausen*, Paris 1911; Dolly FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik 1829–1837. Ves' puškinskij Peterbug*, Moskva 2009.

French salon,⁷ or the work of the Russian Irina Arkadyevna Muraveva.⁸ There are a number of studies and separate monographs on Alexei Nikolayevich Olenin's salon, such as the one by Lev Valentinovich Timofeyev.⁹ Conceptually, the author's approach to Russian salons is based on the numerous and still valid and enriching works of the famous Russian semiotician Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman.¹⁰

When it comes to the state of historiographic research, perhaps the greatest attention of scientists is attracted by the connection between the Ficquelmonts and the most famous Russian poet, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin. We can name especially the works of Nikolay Raevsky on this topic; however, in the Czech sphere, studies on this topic already existed in the 1950s.¹¹ Sylvie Ostrovská is an important Czech researcher who dealt with the issue of Pushkin's relationship with Count and Countess von Ficquelmont and her work is based particularly on sources from the family archive of the Clary-Aldringen house in the city of Děčín.¹² Two unpublished dissertations by Wera Kantor and Florian Lorenz, created in the last century, which primarily draw on the Viennese archives, are dedicated to Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont.¹³ However, these works concentrate particularly on Ficquelmont as a diplomat and statesman and there is not a single mention of his salon or social activities in Russia. No study in the Czech or foreign spheres has yet been devoted to the topic of the literary salon and the activity of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont and his wife in this area. The aim of this study is therefore to fill this gap.

The Austrian Embassy was located in the Saltykov Mansion, then at the address Martovo pole, number 3, and afterwards at the very prominent address of Palace Embankment, number 4 in St. Petersburg. The palace was built in 1787 according to the project of the popular architect of the Empress Catherine's era Giacomo Quarenghi for the merchant Philipp Grooten, who never used it. The house changed its owners very frequently. It was owned by Thomas Sievers from 1790, and Princess Ekaterina Petrovna Baryatinskaya from 1793 and three years later the house was donated by Empress Catherine II to General and

7 Vlada Vadimovna BUNTURI, „*K prijutu tichomu besedy prosvěščennoj*.“ *Literaturnyj salon v kulture Peterburga*, Sankt-Peterburg 2013.

8 Irina Arkad'evna MURAV' EVA, *Salony puškinskoj pory: očerki literaturnoj i svetskoj žizni Sankt-Peterburga*, Sankt-Peterburg 2008.

9 Lev Valentinovich TIMOFEEV, *V krugu družej i muz: Dom A. N. Olenina*, Leningrad 1983.

10 For example Yuri Mikhailovich LOTMAN, *Kultura a exploze*, Brno 2013.

11 Nikolay RAEVSKY, *Pushkin i prizrak Pikovoj damy*, Moskva 2014; Nikolay RAEVSKY, *Pushkin i Dolli Fikel'mon*, Moskva 2007; Nicolay RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, Alma-Ata 1980; A. V. FLOROVSKIJ, *Puškin na stranicach dnevnika grafiņy D. F. Fikel'mon*, in: *Slavia XXVIII*, Praha 1959, pp. 555–578.

12 Sylvie OSTROVSKÁ, *Po stopách Puškinových přátel*, Praha 1989.

13 Wera KANTOR, *Karl Ludwig Graf Ficquelmont: Ein Lebensbild mit bes. Rücksicht auf seine dipl. Mitarbeit bei Metternich*, Wien, Univ., Diss. 1948; Florian LORENZ, *Karl Ludwig Graf Ficquelmont als Diplomat und Staatsmann*, Wien, Univ., Diss., 1966.

Field Marshal Nikolay Ivanovich Saltykov as a reward for the upbringing of her beloved grandchildren Alexander and Konstantin Pavlovich. The building was rebuilt during the 1820s by the architect Karlo Rossi. After Saltykov's death, the house was partially rented out; for example, in the years 1817–1825, Prince Konstantin Petrovich Obolensky lived in it. In the second half of August 1828, according to the announcement in the Saint Petersburg News of 10, 14 and 17 August 1828, the Austrian Embassy rented the house from Nikolay Ivanovich's grandson, Prince Ivan Dmitryevich Saltykov.¹⁴ Ficquelmont was the first Austrian diplomat to reside at this address. He and his wife lived here from 12 September 1829, although they arrived in Russia at the end of January.¹⁵ The building “with all the furniture, bronze, marble, and other equipment” was the seat of the Austrian Embassy until 1855.¹⁶

At this point, it is appropriate to briefly mention both hosts. Count Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont came from an old, yet not very rich aristocratic family in Lorraine. In his youth he emigrated from France and served in the army, where he won promotion to Major-General. Subsequently, in 1815 he entered the diplomatic service. He worked first in Switzerland and then in Florence, where he met and then married Dorothea von Tiesenhausen (in the Russian milieu known as Darya Fyodorovna), a Russian aristocrat of German Baltic descent and also the granddaughter of the most famous hero of the Patriotic War, Mikhail Illarionovich Golenishchev-Kutuzov-Smolensky. In the 1820s he was the diplomatic representative of Austria in Naples. For a long period from 1829–1840 he was an ambassador to the Russian Empire. During the Revolution of 1848, he was a member of the first constitutional cabinet, briefly headed the Council of Ministers, and served as Foreign Minister. He left office as a result of further unrest in the revolutionary year of 1848 and no longer involved himself in politics. He died in Venice and what is interesting for us is that he found his final rest with his wife in Bohemia. Specifically, he is buried in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Dubí near Teplice, as his daughter married into the Clary-Aldringen family and Teplice became the most famous Czech estate of this family.¹⁷

In January 1829, Ficquelmont was commissioned to undertake a mission in St. Petersburg, where he was instructed to thwart dangerous anti-Austrian tendencies as a special ambassador, because relations between St. Petersburg and Vienna had deteriorated

14 Anthony CROSS, *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The British Embassy in St Petersburg, 1863–1918*, *The Slavonic and East European Review*. Personality and Place in Russian Culture, vol. 88, 2010, no. 1–2, pp. 332–333.

15 HHStA, Russland III, Berichte, 1829, box number 86, fol. 31, Report of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 29 January 1829.

16 D. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, pp. 49, 428.

17 Sylvie OSTROVSKÁ, *Po stopách Puškinových přátel*, Praha 1989, pp. 19–24.

significantly since 1825.¹⁸ Ficquelmont's great experience, his absolute credibility, and, last but not least, the excellent social connections of his wife Darya Fyodorovna with high court circles in St. Petersburg predestined him to the difficult diplomatic task of stabilizing, strengthening, and improving, the trust and relationship between the Vienna and St. Petersburg courts.

On 14 September 1829, Darya Fyodorovna wrote in her diary: "*We have been staying in the Saltykov Mansion since the 12th – it is a beautiful, spacious, and pleasant building to live in. I have a beautiful raspberry cabinet (un cabinet amarante), so cosy that you don't even want to go out of it. My rooms have windows to the south; there are flowers – in the end, that's all I love. I started by lying sick for three days, but I don't take it as a bad omen, and I hope I will fall in love with my new home.*"¹⁹ It is probable that Countess von Ficquelmont, accustomed to the previous Italian climate, did not tolerate the sharp and cold Nordic air of St. Petersburg in the autumn.

Along with Count and Countess von Ficquelmont, Ficquelmont's mother-in-law, Elizabeth Mikhailovna Chitrovo, a very agile and vigorous lady who also earned a diplomatic position through permanent lobbying for her son-in-law Ficquelmont, also lived in the Saltykov Mansion. Ficquelmont gained the position of Austrian ambassador thanks to the great influence of the persistent Chitrovo and the Tsar's personal wishes.²⁰ It is important to note that Chitrovo also ran her own salon. Although the gatherings at her salon were called "mornings" according to Peter Andreyevich Vyazemsky, specifically, the meetings began at one o'clock and lasted until four o'clock in the afternoon. The Ficquelmont salon, on the other hand, took place mainly in the evenings. So we have a completely unique model of a social salon even for progressive Russian conditions, which can be considered as a "double salon", where, in one house, at different times and in different rooms, the mother and her daughter and her husband ran their different salons. In addition to the salons, the house often hosted various balls, masquerades, musical evenings, and banquets. Of course, a certain obstruction in the life of the Count and Countess von Ficquelmont was posed by their ignorance of the Russian language. The Countess mentions this on 15 October 1829: "*My mother took me to Metropolitan Filaret. [...] There is a minor problem – I speak French with him and he answers me in Russian [...].*"²¹ The Austrian ambassador and his wife studied Russian under the guidance of the writer and journalist Orest Mikhailovich

18 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 384, fol. 567–568, Letter of Klemens Wenzel von Metternich to Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont from 20 January 1829.

19 D. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, p. 68.

20 HHStA, Russland III, Berichte, 1829, box number 86, fol. 67, Letter of Klemens Metternich to Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont from 17 January 1829.

21 D. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, p. 72.

Somov.²² However, it should be noted that both Darya Fyodorovna and her husband remained faithful to predominantly French culture and the language they both mastered for the rest of their lives. So they probably spoke Russian only to a minimal extent.

Shortly after the first entry, already on 21 September 1829, Darya Fyodorovna confides in her diary: “*In the evenings, guests began to meet with us. I receive them in my red boudoir, and tea and dinner are served in the green drawing room.*”²³ On 25 September, Countess von Ficquelmont writes: “*We are seeing Mortemart more and more – he is now kinder and more talkative. In the past, one did not hear a word from him, but now he is trying to please and he is quite successful.*”²⁴ Casimir-Louis-Victurnien de Rochechouart de Mortemart, to give him his full name, was the French ambassador to the St. Petersburg court at the time, which means that the Ficquelmonts very quickly enriched their social network in the Russian capital with diplomats as well as the staff of other embassies, including the most important ones, i.e. France and the United Kingdom.

In December 1829, a note appeared in Darya Fyodorovna’s diary: “*Yesterday, the 10th, we had our second big diplomatic lunch. Now we have enough visitors on our evenings on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. I don’t like the St. Petersburg company yet. The writer Pushkin talks in a charming way, without exaggeration, with enthusiasm and fiery, he cannot be uglier – he is a mixture of monkey and tiger, comes from African ancestors. There is still a certain amount of black in the colour of his face, and there is something wild in his gaze.*”²⁵ Darya Ficquelmont’s diary is full of information about the events leading up to Alexander Sergejevich Pushkin’s last years, duel, and death. On the pages of the author’s short story *The Queen of Spades* from 1833, passages appear that are so strikingly specific and concrete that they evoke a legitimate impression of Pushkin’s apparent inspiration by the Ficquelmont house and its layout to describe the Countess’s house in St. Petersburg, whose rooms, corridors, and stairs the main hero of the story, Herman, walks through.²⁶ When Pushkin describes how in this house the old Countess “*received the whole city*,”²⁷ or when he mentions two portraits in the house, one of which “*represented a man of about forty years old, blushing and full, in a light green uniform with a star; the second – a young beauty with an eagle nose, with her hair combed and with a rose in her powdered hair*,”²⁸ cannot fail to gain the impression that the Ficquelmonts and their salon are meant here. It

22 S. OSTROVSKÁ, *Po stopách Puškinových přátel*, p. 68.

23 D. FIKEL’MON, *Dnevnik*, pp. 68–69.

24 *Ibidem*, p. 69.

25 *Ibidem*, p. 81.

26 See N. RAEVSKY, *Puškin i prizrak pikovoj damy*, pp. 272–290; A. CROSS, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, p. 334.

27 Alexander Sergejevich PUSHKIN, *Piková dáma*, Praha 1955, p. 22.

28 *Ibidem*, p. 36.

is no coincidence that Pushkin captured Darya Fyodorovna in one of his famous realistic drawings just as a woman with a distinctive eagle nose.

In addition to Pushkin, many other intellectuals of the time were guests at the salon, such as the poet Vasily Andreyevich Zhukovsky, the educator of the heir to the throne, Alexander Nikolayevich. The statesman and historian Alexander Ivanovich Turgenev, his brother Nikolay Ivanovich Turgenev, a key ideological founder of the Decembrist movement and its Northern Society, were also present.²⁹ Darya Fyodorovna was painted by the important Russian painter Alexander Pavlovich Bryullov. Among others we can name, for example, the blind poet Ivan Ivanovich Kozlov or the ironic commentator on St. Petersburg life Pyotr Andrejevich Vyazemsky. He also captured the atmosphere of this St. Petersburg “double salon” most aptly: *“Her name has remained as irreplaceable as it has been attractive for many years. The mornings in her salon, which lasted from one to four o’clock in the afternoon, and the dinners of her daughter, Countess Ficquelmont, are indelibly inscribed in the memory of those who were fortunate enough to attend. All current European and Russian life, political, literary, and social, had a credible response in these two related salons. There was no need to read newspapers, like the Athenians, who also did not need newspapers, but lived, studied, philosophized, and mentally enjoyed themselves in the porticoes and in the square. So in these two salons one could stock up on information about all the issues of the day, from a political pamphlet and a parliamentary speech by a French or English speaker to a novel or dramatic work by one of the darlings of that literary era. There was also a review of current events; there was also an editorial with its own judgments and sometimes condemnations; there was also a light feuilleton, moral, descriptive, and picturesque. Best of all, this worldwide spoken word newspaper was published under the direction and under the editorship of two amiable and lovely women. And what ease, patience, politeness, and freedom that was self-respecting and respectful of others there was in those diverse and controversial conversations. Even when controversial opinions were being expressed, there were no tumultuous quarrels. It was a calm exchange of ideas, an evaluation of opinions, a free trade system added to the conversation. Not like in other societies in which a prohibitive system reigns obstinately and shyly: before releasing your product, your thought, deal with the tariff; everywhere outposts and customs. [...] In the European-Russian salon of Ficquelmont, diplomats and Pushkin were at home.”*³⁰ These last words express the unprecedented openness, free-spiritedness, and tolerance of this social platform, where at the same time politicians or diplomats very close to the Tsarist court and its supporters and sympathizers or even former members of the Decembrist

29 S. OSTROVSKÁ, *Po stopách Puškinových přátel*, pp. 68–69.

30 Cit. Nicolay RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, Alma-Ata 1980, p. 267.

movement, including Pushkin and Nikolay Turgenev, could debate.³¹ Despite the diverse range of its guests, the Ficquelmont salon had quite a family atmosphere. Among the members of the salon that Pushkin knew were other employees of the Austrian Embassy, such as the attaché Friedrich Liechtenstein or another official, František Lobkovic.³² Pushkin, who began his civil service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was obviously interested in various diplomatic affairs and often conversed in the salon with numerous members of other embassies. It was right there, in the salon of Count and Countess von Ficquelmont, that the poet met one of the councillors from the British Embassy, Arthur Magenis, later his second in the infamous duel with Georges D'Anthès.³³ The salon in the Saltykov Mansion was therefore a place where the “corps diplomatique” and the cream of St. Petersburg high society mingled. The content of the salon was determined not only by its host, but also by its guests. It follows from the above that diplomats working in St. Petersburg were frequent visitors to Count Ficquelmont. This is another unique feature of the salon. It was therefore not only a standard social and literary salon, but we can call it a socio-diplomatic salon, which is rather a rarity in the Russian milieu. The discussion of foreign affairs in the salon was much more than ever the everyday standard here and was compatible with classical social issues.

Moreover, unlike other socio-literary salons of the time, thanks to the important position of the host, there was also space for political debates. Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin apparently used the Ficquelmont salon alongside the famous English Club as his main source of information about politics, as evidenced by his mention in a letter to his wife Natalia Nikolaevna: “*I was at Ficquelmont's. I haven't been going anywhere since you left to understand, except for the club and this salon.*”³⁴ [...] *Write me the political news. I don't read newspapers, I don't go to the English Club, and I don't see Chitrovo.*”³⁵ At a time when the Russian press and journalism in general were not yet so developed and did not have such an impact, it was the salon that played the role of the information centre in society and thus compensated for this lack. At the same time, having an influence in one of the salons meant having an influence on Russian social and cultural events. In the opinion of the author of this paper, the fact that the Decembrists did not fully and organically

31 Count and Countess von Ficquelmont were also related to the Decembrists. It is little known that the family was related through Darya Fyodorovna to the exiled Decembrist Vasily Karlovich Tiesenhausen, who was active in the Southern League; see S. OSTROVSKÁ, *Po stopách Puškinových přátel*, p. 45.

32 N. RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, p. 221.

33 A. CROSS, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, p. 334.

34 Alexander Sergeevich PUSHKIN, *Letters*, vol. 9, Prague 1958, letter to N. N. Pushkina from 5 May 1834, p. 344.

35 A. S. PUSHKIN, *Letters*, vol. 9, Prague 1958, letter to N. N. Pushkina from 29 September 1835, p. 386.

participate in the activities of these social platforms and that the social significance of the salons was somewhat nihilistically overlooked by them affected the outcome of the events of 14 December 1825.

The 1830s in St. Petersburg were rich in events of various kinds. In the summer of 1831, a cholera epidemic hit St. Petersburg. In this context, Darya Fyodorovna writes in her diary: *“Since yesterday, St. Petersburg has been in turmoil. People who are dissatisfied with the strict regulations because of the cholera have revolted. About 1,500 people took part in the riots yesterday. They smashed hospital doors and carried out infected people, shouting that there was no epidemic and that all the measures were being taken just to upset people.”*³⁶ This record is more than interesting, given some current events. Count Ficquelmont also paid close attention to the cholera events. He monitored the situation very closely, took extensive notes, and collected various treatment tips, including a homeopathic approach, in his documents.³⁷ The year 1831 gave Ficquelmont, because of the ongoing Polish November uprising and especially the cholera epidemic, a large number of impulses for various observations about internal developments in the empire and the reign of Tsar Nicholas I: *“The events that take place every day before the Tsar’s eyes allow him to learn of many of the evils of his government, but will they help him to finally know the causes and remedies? He seeks in people the evil that is in these things, because they corrupt people or make their efforts impossible. The Tsar is dissatisfied with those who serve him. Revolts, storms, a mess of all kinds that the police could not have foreseen or prevented meant the loss of his favour to General Benkendorf. The Tsar is poorly served everywhere; he feels the need to replace the men who are in the lead. The St. Petersburg storms have shown the weakness and inability of the Governor-General and the Chief of Police. There have also been movements in Tver, Moscow, Orel, and Kharkov, and the disease serves as an excuse everywhere. The Tsar went to Novgorod; the military settlements were calm, but he wanted to appear there to consolidate and assess the degree of severity that will need to be applied to the perpetrators. The question is serious. Since this is a military population, it is necessary to find out whether it was only a momentary insanity or a pre-arranged resistance. The need to set in motion additional sections indicates the harmfulness and danger of this settlement system.”*³⁸ Here Ficquelmont

36 D. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, p. 165; compare State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 384, Observations sur le Cholera faites à St. Petersbourg 1831, fol. 172–203.

37 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 384, Observations sur le Cholera faites à St. Pétersbourg 1831, fol. 172–203.

38 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 383, diplomatic reports of Karl Ludwig Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 25 July/6 August 1831, fol. 88–97.

criticizes the system of military settlements from the reign of Alexander I. The cholera epidemic serves the Austrian diplomat as an indicator of many weaknesses in Russia's internal development: "*The interior of the Empire presents a picture of suffering. The peasants show a spirit of independence, which is new. The former governor-general of St. Petersburg, Kutuzov, was sent to Nizhny Novgorod to take action against the cholera at market times. He spent several weeks there and saw several governorates. Upon his return, he told the Tsar, whom he trusted, that he should pay serious attention to the internal situation, because a spirit hitherto foreign to the Russian was manifested.*"³⁹

The Ficquelmont salon was also one of the last places Alexander Pushkin visited before his death in 1837, and the events of those days are very well captured by Darya Fyodorovna in her diary. Alexander Turgenev describes one of Pushkin's last evenings in the salon: "*Two days ago we had a charming evening with the Austrian ambassador; this evening reminded me of the most intimate salons in Paris. A small circle formed, in which there were Barante, Pushkin, Vyazemsky, the Prussian ambassador, and your humble servant. The conversation was very varied, excellent, and remarkable, because Barante told us spicy things about Talleyrand's memoirs, the first parts of which he read. Vyazemsky, for his part, said words worthy of his original reason. Pushkin told us anecdotes, features from the life of Peter I, Catherine II. [...] Pushkin's short story The Captain's Daughter was so popular here that Barante suggested in my presence to the author that he translate it into French with his help.*"⁴⁰

Like Ficquelmont, his wife was very talented, interested in literature, politics, and music, and her views excelled in insight and logical structure. In addition, she was considered an "Austrian beauty" and a very kind and selfless woman who is able to sacrifice herself for everyone.⁴¹ We can say that Countess von Ficquelmont was a real star of St. Petersburg society: "*Everyone is running after her. Ladies and gentlemen gather around her in the park.*"⁴² Even for the blind poet Ivan Ivanovich Kozlov, who had never seen Countess von Ficquelmont but knew her character all the more, Darya Fyodorovna was someone "*who was given to the sight and heart by joy thanks to heaven.*"⁴³ When Ficquelmont was succeeded by a new Austrian envoy, it was Darya Fyodorovna who advised him on how to become familiar with St. Petersburg society. During the revolution in 1848, the Countess helped the wounded in Milan.⁴⁴ However, it should be noted that this kindness of the salon hostess

39 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 383, diplomatic reports of Karl Ludwig Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 13 November 1831, fol. 100.

40 N. RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, p. 292.

41 Ibidem, p. 122.

42 Archive of Ostafievo of Vyazemsky's family, volume II, p. 354.

43 Cit. N. RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, p. 128.

44 Ibidem, p. 129.

was focused almost exclusively on people from her own social class. At the same time, this lack of openness to other social classes represents a major shortcoming of the salons on their way to becoming a full-fledged civil society platform. Unfortunately, there are only a few passages in Darya Fyodorovna's diary that deal with serious topics or problems. It can be concluded that this was probably and mostly the case even for the debates in the salon itself. The Countess in particular did not seem to have a tendency to discuss really important topics of the time, whether these were social issues, revolution, or slavery. Among the discussion topics, general, secular, or rather superficial topics prevailed. Exceptions in the Countess's diary and thus in the salon's debates included, for example, the wave of cholera in the year 1831, the Polish uprising, or the publication of *Philosophical Letters*.

The handicap of poor knowledge of Russian did not prevent the couple from conducting extensive discussions on topics concerning the Russian language and literature. One of the most important features of this salon is its essentially dual and double effect on the Russian public. Thanks to Ficquelmont and his profession, the salon was also a place where, among other things, diplomatic meetings took place. Visitors to the Tsar's family and various diplomats and politicians were visitors here, as Ficquelmont was close to the Tsar's court and the Tsar himself, as evidenced by one report of Ficquelmont to Vienna: "*The Tsar continues his good dealings with me. Everything contributes to my situation in society being solid and influential [...] The court honoured me this winter by coming to my ball. The Tsar was extremely kind to us; he danced a lot, which he does only at small balls hosted by the Empress.*"⁴⁵ It is known that Nicholas I was especially kind to Ficquelmont. After all, he was the one who asked for him as the new Austrian ambassador in 1829. Ficquelmont spoke of his first audience with the Tsar in 1829 as follows: "*His Majesty received me with great kindness, held out his hand to me, and told me that he was very glad to see me, that he knew me by reputation and that he had been waiting for me for a long time.*"⁴⁶ Until the end of his activity in the Russian Empire, Ficquelmont had better-than-average good relations with the Tsar, and very often they met outside official diplomatic occasions. Similarly, Darya Fyodorovna had a very friendly relationship with the Empress, as she describes it in the diary on the occasion of her first audience with the Empress: "*When she saw me, she called: 'Dolly! The Lady Ambassador!'*" Then she added: "*I must kiss this Lady Ambassador,*" and she embraced me with tenderness and kindness and said a lot of kind and serious words to me. I must admit that I was moved to tears. [...] On the same day, I met the Empress out for a ride in the company of the Tsar. The Tsar

45 HHStA, Russland, IV, Berichte, administrative Weisungen, 1832, box number 95, fol. 86, Report of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 21 February/9 March 1832.

46 HHStA, Russland, III, Berichte, 1829, box number 86, fol. 35, Report of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 29 January 1829.

came to me to tell me that it would be a pleasure for him to see me in St. Petersburg for such a long time. Then he remarked: "Let me show you my face." He took off his cap and gave me a chance to admire his handsome head. He lost weight and had features similar to Tsar Alexander."⁴⁷ This unusually warm welcome extended to the "Lady Ambassador" by the imperial couple is due to the fact that Darya Fyodorovna already knew Alexandra Fyodorovna and Tsar Nicholas from before. The Ficquelmonts were also often received in the intimate circle of the imperial family, which was seen as an honour that diplomats received only in very rare cases. The closeness of Count and Countess von Ficquelmont to the imperial couple was truly unprecedented in view of their position. For example, just before the Empress entered a ball held at the Austrian Embassy, she changed her clothes in Darya Fyodorovna's private rooms.⁴⁸ In 1830, Darya Fyodorovna writes in her diary: "*On the third day I saw the Empress. She received me almost conspiratorially in her chamber, because the protocol forbids her to accept the wife of an envoy other than according to the ceremony.*"⁴⁹ It was these cordial friendly relations between the ambassadorial couple and the imperial couple that were the cornerstone of the clear proximity between the Winter Palace and the seat of the Austrian Embassy in the Saltykov Mansion.

At the same time, however, the Embassy was spoken of in a spirit that probably would not have been much liked by the Russian Tsar, the court, or the Austrian Chancellor. After the devastating suppression of the Polish uprising, Darya Ficquelmont writes forcefully in her diary: "*I am not entirely in favour of the measures taken by the Tsar. I will say right here that my independent spirit sees a despot in him, and as such I strictly judge him without any enchantment, but I cannot refuse. [...] To find something noble in him, I am sure that this man, guided by his instinct and supported by good and wise advice, would always act for the good! However, he is young, he is surrounded by bad advisers, he is on the throne, which is dangerous for the character of the monarch, because everything here is absolute and despotic.*"⁵⁰ Darya Fyodorovna visited the mother of Roman Sanguszko, who was expelled for participating in the November uprising and who was condemned to go into exile in Siberia on foot, daily: "*I go to her almost every day. She needs so much care and comfort! [...] God, how many moments of life we spend in nothingness and frivolity. And it is here, as we dance and wander, who do we resemble so close to the land that is covered with the shadows of death? Yes, this is exactly what it is like in Poland now! And that long line of exiles who leave their homes to populate the icy desert of Siberia! They are passing through Russia, taking with them the happiness of so many families; isn't that*

47 D. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, p. 54.

48 N. RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, p. 141.

49 N. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, p. 136.

50 *Ibidem*, p. 174.

*a sad and terrible thing? When I dance at a ball and my eyes accidentally fall on the Tsar, I always have a painful feeling. Such an imposing figure, such a noble and beautiful face undoubtedly testifies to an unusual soulfulness. [...] But the hard expression of that beautiful forehead speaks with something else – his soul is forged by bronze shackles, unable to rise, is cruel, suppresses him, and does not allow him to be weak. His gaze cannot be softened, and it is necessary to have great courage, great independence of the spirit, to endure him when you meet him. What a pity that this beautiful and dazzling personality, who could gain nothing more than praise, evokes such fear, tears, and lamentation!”⁵¹ In a very similar tone, at the same time admiringly but critically, Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont speaks of the Tsar in his diplomatic report, mentioning the importance the Tsar attaches to the army and the military: “*The importance he attaches to this, the joy he feels when showing how he personally chooses his regiments, could lead to the idea that behind this boundary lies the ambition to shine. He wants to prepare for larger events and force the idea of his personal command on the army. It is important for the future; therefore the Tsar’s military passion has always been the subject of constant observation for me; this passion, as it manifests itself, seems to me to be an ardent zeal in a character that is otherwise so exalted. The Tsar needs great manoeuvres like Napoleon’s great battles.*”⁵² Ficquelmont evaluates the Tsar with an equally critical and sober tone even after the Polish uprising of 1831 in a letter to Chancellor Metternich: “*Undoubtedly, we must regret that the Tsar does not have high-powered and more skilful servants. It is a great pity that not a single day of his reign could be devoted to investigating and suppressing the evils of the internal administration. His character is strong and noble, but he does not have the degree of flexibility needed to deal with difficult matters. We will always be able to count on the Tsar’s political principles; in this respect he will be immutable. But will we find here the skilfulness with which you, my prince, defend our doctrines?*”⁵³ The trickiness of official diplomatic reports is reflected in Ficquelmont’s evaluation of the Tsar. While in an official diplomatic report to Vienna he describes the Tsar’s charming appearance,⁵⁴ in a secret letter to Metternich he is already sincerely critical: “*The Tsar has little experience in big affairs [...] in youth softness is often mistaken for politics, and his character perhaps makes him inclined to cunning. The care he takes to win approval, and even more so to capture it, is another sign of it. The Tsar possesses mental abilities; that is undeniable;**

51 Ibidem, p. 191.

52 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 383, draft of the letter of Karl Ludwig Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 25 September 1835, fol. 317.

53 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 383, private letter of Karl Ludwig Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 24 June 1831, fol. 579–589.

54 HHStA, Russland III, Berichte, 1829, box number 86, fol. 39, Report of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 29 February 1829.

there is a youthfulness in his commands and a weakness in his reasoning. In the absence of this, cunning and secretiveness have been used."⁵⁵

The sharply critical letters of the famous Russian philosopher and Decembrist Pyotr Yakovlevich Chaadayev were also read here, and the couple probably played a role in spreading the third, sixth, and seventh letters of his *Philosophical Letters*, which were never officially published during the Tsarist era and were not published until after the October Revolution. Ficquelmont wrote of Chaadayev's work in one of his diplomatic reports to Vienna that "*it fell like a bomb in the midst of Russian vanity and the beginnings of the spiritual and political primacy to which they tend in the capital.*"⁵⁶ The issue of Chaadayev's work was thoroughly discussed in the Ficquelmonts' salon. The couple even agreed with Chaadayev's view of the pernicious influence of the Byzantine Church in Russian history.⁵⁷ In a private letter to Prince Metternich, Count Ficquelmont writes: "*Russia is a country where it is necessary to live long in order to assess the impact that events abroad may have on it. The Tsar has such an extraordinary character that he needs to be seen many times and this needs to be done so carefully so that it is possible to explain all the contradictions that create him.*"⁵⁸ This passage testifies to how well Ficquelmont knew Tsar Nicholas I because the Tsar himself claimed that it was necessary to live in Russia for at least two years in order to get to know the Empire well enough. It is also possible to see from the quotation that the envoy did not idealize the Tsar in spite of the exceptionally good and friendly relationship that bound them. He perceived him as a man full of contradictions and was able to separate the positions of Nicholas I as a ruler and a man very well. Both spouses were great long-lasting friends of the imperial couple and enjoyed the Tsar's great favour.⁵⁹ However, this did not prevent them from looking very sincerely, openly, and objectively at the Tsar and various events of the 1830s, such as the Polish uprising or the reverberations of the Decembrist uprising. They were certainly not afraid to speak or write about the Tsar's character, the manner of his government, or conditions in Russia in a surprisingly serious and critical tone. It is possible that it was just the friendly closeness that bound the Count and Countess to the Tsar that allowed them to speak so openly critically without fear of any punishment.

55 HHStA, Russland III, Berichte, 1829, box number 86, fol. 69, Secret letter of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 28 February, 1829.

56 HHStA, Russland III, Berichte, administrative Weisungen, 1836, box number 106, fol. 179, private letter of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 7/19 November 1836.

57 N. RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, p. 133.

58 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 383, private letter of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich, sine dato, fol. 315.

59 N. RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, p. 317.

It is obvious that during this period, which was well known for the intensive activity of the secret police, Tsar Nicholas surely must have learned about the critical comments that Count and Countess Ficquelmont made about his person and government in their salon. Because of previous events, at this time the Austrian Embassy logically must have been monitored much more closely than ever before. It was exactly in the house of the Austrian envoy that the leader of the most dangerous uprising during the life of Nicholas I took refuge. Prince Sergei Petrovich Trubetskoy hid here with his brother-in-law, the then Austrian envoy Ludwig von Lebzeltern, during the Decembrist uprising.⁶⁰ The reason why the Tsar did not intervene against criticism in the salon of Count and Countess Ficquelmont probably lies in the very close, intimate, and friendly relationship of Karl and Darya Fyodorovna with the imperial couple.⁶¹ Moreover, the Tsar did not obviously seem to perceive the criticism in Ficquelmont's salon as dangerous to the Tsarist regime, so he remained passive in his position.

Petr Andreevich Vyazemsky wrote in one of his letters to the Austrian envoy: "*May God reward you for your persistent requests in favour of Glinka. Since the whole thing, as you say, is not hopeless and you do not refuse to be his lawyer, I am happy to believe that it will be won sooner or later.*"⁶² Darya Fyodorovna writes in her diary: "[...] *I am obliged to make friends with General Jermolov, so famous for his military merits, acumen, and disgrace, into which he fell as a result of December 14th, 1825.*"⁶³ A hero of the Napoleonic Wars, General Alexei Petrovich Jermolov was another of the sympathizers with the Decembrist movement, which found support in the Ficquelmonts' house. Pushkin wrote in his diary: "*I was at the Anichkov Palace. [...] I started talking to Lensky about Mickiewivz and then about Poland. He interrupted the conversation with the words: 'My dear friend, there is no place to talk about Poland here, let's choose neutral territory, for example in the house of the Austrian ambassador.'*"⁶⁴ As can be seen, Marshal Kutuzov's granddaughter and her husband allowed a very liberal and free-spirited atmosphere through their salon in the then highly conservative Saint-Petersburg during the rule of Nicholas I. Such liberal surroundings at that time existed perhaps only in the similarly influential salon of Alexey Nikolayevich Olenin, and even there it was far from possible to speak with such freedom as in the salon of the Ficquelmont family.⁶⁵

60 F. LORENZ, *Karl Ludwig Graf Ficquelmont als Diplomat und Staatsmann*, p. 81.

61 It is known that Darya Fyodorovna also had a very close relationship with the deceased brother of Tsar Nicholas, Alexander I, N. RAEVSKY, *Puškin i prizrak pikovoj damy*, pp. 56–57.

62 N. RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, p. 115.

63 D. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, p. 190.

64 A. S. PUSHKIN, *Polnoje sobranije sočiněnij*, volume 5, Moskva 1950, p. 565.

65 Although Olenin's salon was called "Noah's Ark" because of its free-spirited atmosphere, Olenin himself was a genuine conservative, so it was not possible to meet any more radical or liberal views

As the Austrian envoy to the Russian Empire, Ficquelmont used his position quite pragmatically. Thanks to his influence, a large number of members or guests of his salon, including Pushkin, obtained books that were otherwise on the index in the Russian Empire, and the correspondence of salon guests abroad was sent by the Austrian diplomatic mail to avoid careful Russian censorship. Darya Fyodorovna also took part in this activity, providing her guests with a large number of various French books, which, as the ambassador's wife, she obtained without censorship. For example, in 1831, Pushkin asked her in a letter: "*I am taking this opportunity, madame, to ask you for a favour. I have entered the study of the French Revolution. I urge you to send me Thiers and Mignet if possible. Both these works are forbidden here [...] Thank you, madame, for the Mignet revolution, I got it through Novosilcov.*"⁶⁶

Ficquelmont was thus thrown onto thin ice by this extremely tricky activity, as on the one hand he helped the emerging Russian intelligentsia and liberal opposition, while on the other hand he still remained a high-ranking person at court and a man very close to the imperial family. At the same time, however, the Austrian diplomat was aware of the dangers, for example from the servants, as stated in one of his draft letters to the Embassy staff member Maximilian von Kaiserfeld: "*It is possible that there are things in my behaviour and in my salon that you do not like, but I am too old and mature a human to adjust my character and habits. I appear to be what I am without wanting to be better than I am because of human judgment and just as I perceive other people. [...] In my salon, I am always happy to welcome all the topics that are considered good for discussion; however, the first characteristic of a diplomat is caution, so it is impossible to speak before the servants. I cannot be compromised by the reckless political position that it is important for us to maintain.*"⁶⁷ This sentence is literally the essence of Ficquelmont's work in the Empire. As a diplomat, he was aware of the difficult Austrian position at the imperial court, which he did not intend to thwart by carelessness at any cost. Therefore, he consistently separated the premises of the embassy with the local staff, which could receive a visit at any time the III department of the Tsarist office with the news, and the free and tolerant ground of his salon. However, because of the obvious openness and the truly large fluctuating number of guests at the Ficquelmont salon, the question arises as to whether the "information boundary" was always adhered to by the hosts.

on current issues, such as the issue of the Decembrists, in his salon; see Anežka KOTOUČOVÁ, *Literární salony v Ruském impériu v první polovině 19. století jako místa svobody?*, in: Radomír Vlček (ed.), *Oppression, Despotism and Totalitarianism in Culture and Cultural History*, Praha 2021, p. 194.

66 A. S. PUSHKIN, *Letters*, volume 9, Praha 1958, p. 255.

67 State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 385, draft of a letter from Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Maximilian von Kaiserfeld, sine dato, fol. 5–10.

It is Ficquelmont's relatively tricky and dangerous controversial and contradictory activity in the Empire that is definitely, in the author's opinion, the most interesting feature of the entire salon of the diplomatic couple. Despite Ficquelmont's position, the salon apparently served as a refuge for many members of the liberal intelligentsia. It should be emphasized that this was only because of the unique nature and apparently liberal thinking of the hosts. Peter Ivanovich Bartenev explains Ficquelmont's popularity as a diplomat in St. Petersburg and his relationship with Pushkin as follows: "*There was no German clumsiness or exaggerated French recklessness in him. Like Count Voroncov, he believed that cunning was not at all a reliable weapon for a diplomat who would win more in his affairs if he soon gained respect in society by the qualities of his reason and heart. Ficquelmont was popular in St. Petersburg, and we are convinced that Pushkin, who adored his wife, found great satisfaction in discussing conversing with this versatile and talented man.*"⁶⁸

Ficquelmont and his wife differed from all the other Austrian diplomats in the Russian Empire, as well as from other Russian salons of the time, in their unusually "civic" activity, which was performed literally a few hundred metres from the Winter Palace. The salon is also unique in terms of gender studies, as both the ambassador and his wife played equally dominant roles in it. Darya Fyodorovna was thus always described as a "Lady Ambassador" by guests.⁶⁹ As the ambassador's wife, she had other important social duties in addition to the salon, and she was very agile in these. The marriage was mutually enriching for both the Count and the Countess. The young Darya Fyodorovna became more deeply acquainted with the rules of politics from her husband as a capable diplomat. Count Ficquelmont, on the other hand, could be enriched by the social and artistic realm of St. Petersburg life, which Darya Fyodorovna dominated. Even when one compares the Count's diplomatic reports and the diary of the Countess, it is possible to find almost identical opinions and evaluations of people or events. That is how much the couple lived in mutually enriching harmony and that is why we can consider their joint salon so successful, famous, and long-lasting.

Ficquelmont used his salon primarily as a free-spirited support platform for its guests, but through other invited diplomats from other countries certainly also for the realization of his diplomatic intentions. It was a truly multifunctional space. Ficquelmont did not limit himself to his diplomatic mission, as would have been usual, but engaged in Russian public life and culture with his family ties, agility, kindness, and social demeanour. In 1832 and especially 1837, Ficquelmont travelled to the southern Russian provinces and the Crimea. Thanks to this, we find in his relations, letters, and notes a large number of

68 N. RAEVSKY, *Portrety zagovorili*, p. 121.

69 D. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, p. 54.

observations about Russia and its history, current state, and problems. These observations are unusually far-sighted for any foreigner, let alone an Austrian ambassador of French descent. Ficquelmont was actively and in detail interested in Russian history, about which he read and wrote his own treatises.⁷⁰ Developments in the Russian Empire did not elude the sight of the Count and Countess von Ficquelmont even after their return to Vienna. Ficquelmont continued to think regularly about solving Russia's key problems: "*What is happening in Russia cannot lead to any good result, and I am very sad about that, because the whole future is about the nobility and the peasants. The land area in Russia is so large that it is enough for all, and for the crown its ownership is a futile right when it cannot cultivate it itself. The simplest way of administration would be to hand it over to the peasants for fees and agriculture would make more progress because the peasant will never feel interested in learning to be a farmer when he knows that he will never own anything.*"⁷¹ His extensive personal knowledge of Russian society, people, and life was the result of many years of careful study and travel around the country, and it may be noted that in terms of foresight and judgment, Ficquelmont's impressions gained while travelling around the Empire are very similar to those of another foreign visitor at the time, Astolphe de Custine. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that Ficquelmont expressed himself very harshly and critically about all of Custine's work as a mischief full of hateful thoughts.⁷² It can be said that the otherwise completely correct Count Ficquelmont was wrong in evaluating Custine's book *Letters from Russia* as a hateful pamphlet as it has been proved to be a very good and far-sighted work over time, while Ficquelmont's own intellectual analyses and ideas have, unfortunately, been forgotten over time.

The Ficquelmont salon was literally a symbol and essence of St. Petersburg in the 1830s, with all its politics, diplomacy, culture, everyday life, and beauty and also with its internal problems. It is not for nothing that the commentator Vyazemsky wrote in a letter to his wife that he "*merged with St. Petersburg*" in the salon. The Saltykov Mansion was described as a "*place of wisdom and intelligence*" and as "[...] *the setting for the two most illustrious salons of the period (the 1830s), reigned over by Ficquelmont's wife*".⁷³ The diplomatic, political, literary, and artistic levels were positively intertwined in the Ficquelmonts' salon.

70 For example, State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 384, letter of Sergey Sergeevich Uvarov to Ficquelmont about a new book of the history of Russia, 30 January 1837, fol. 733–734.

71 F. DE SONIS, *Lettres du comte et de la comtesse de Ficquelmont à la comtesse Tiessenhausen*, p. 30.

72 Karl Ludwig von FICQUELMONT, *Pensées et réflexions morales et politiques du comte de Ficquelmont*, Paris 1859, p. 267.

73 Cit. Simon DIXON, *Personality and Place in Russian Culture. Essays in Memory of Lyndsey Hughes*, London 2010, p. 341.

Ficquelmont's and Darya Fyodorovna's social, diplomatic, and cultural influence in Russia was truly unprecedentedly long-lasting and as a sign of his appreciation, Emperor Nicholas I awarded the Austrian envoy the Orders of St. Andrew, St. Alexander Nevsky, St. Vladimir, and St. Anna.⁷⁴ Both spouses maintained very warm and intense relations with Russian society even after their departure. The couple's influence in Russia attained such an extent that, upon their return, it caused trouble for the Count, as, according to his wife, he was accused of favouring the Russian side.⁷⁵ Ficquelmont's diplomatic experience and activity resulted in 1830 in the best improvement in Austro-Russian relations since the Napoleonic Wars.⁷⁶ Last but not least, his successful socio-diplomatic salon also contributed to the significant stabilization and improvement of mutual Austro-Russian relations, which lasted until the Crimean War. It should be noted that especially the Order of St. Andrew, which Ficquelmont received from the Tsar in November 1833, was one of the highest Russian honours and one that foreign envoys operating in Russia received only in very rare cases.⁷⁷

As can be seen, the topic is very interesting not only because of the salon that has been analysed, but also in terms of studying the life of Alexander Sergejevich Pushkin, the development of mutual Austrian-Russian relations in the first half of the 19th century, to which Ficquelmont undoubtedly, made a very positive contribution, and mutual Czech-Russian relations, thanks to the ties of the Ficquelmont family to the Czech city of Teplice. It thus remains a breeding ground for further research in various fields.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Russian salons developed into major centres of cultural and intellectual emancipation and information centres where the communication system and its standards were formed. The salon of Count and Countess von Ficquelmont is unique in this respect, because thanks to the very influential and high position of its host, its character and content can be described as political rather than purely literary. In this respect, this socio-diplomatic salon differs from the salons run by the Russians. In the case of the Ficquelmont salon, it is also possible to point out how Russian salons gradually became influential platforms of freedom. Neither did their close, almost friendly relationship with the Tsar, prevent Count and Countess von Ficquelmont from being relatively very open in their thoughts and critical of both the Russian conditions and problems of the time and the policy of Nicholas I. At the same time, however, we

74 See, for example, State District Archives Děčín, Family Archive of Clary-Aldringen, inv. number 591, box number 382, appointment as a knight of the order of Saint Andrew, fol. 898–899.

75 Darya Fyodorovna's letter to Ekaterina Tiesenhausen from 22 April 1848, *Lettres du Comte et de la Comtesse de Ficquelmont à la Comtesse Tiesenhausen*, Paris 1911, pp. 156–157.

76 See HHStA, Russland, Berichte, administrative Weisungen, 1830, Letters of Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont to Klemens Metternich from 19 January, 5 and 24 March, and 8 and 10 June 1830.

77 D. FIKEL'MON, *Dnevnik*, p. 293.

cannot forget the fact that their salon still had, logically, a very limited effect. The theses and principles of freedom and the minor features of a democratic society were intended only for a defined group of the population, especially the dominant educated nobility and, to a lesser extent, the *raznochinty* class. For the majority of the Empire's population, the term "freedom" and its content remained taboo for many subsequent decades.

Mgr. et Mgr. Anežka Kotoučová

Institute of World History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University

kotoucova@mua.cas.cz