

Presenter: Alexander Droznin, Harvard University

Title: The Princely Syllabicist: Antioch Kantemir's *Anacreontea* and the Italian Influence on Early Russian Versification

Abstract:

Although known best for writing satires and codifying one of the earliest theories of Russian syllabic versification, Antioch Kantemir (1708-1744) left an oeuvre that is noticeably marked by Classical Greek and Latin influences. His translation of the *Anacreontea* – a collection of poems attributed pseudepigraphically to the Greek lyric poet Anacreon – into Russian numbers fifty-five individual poems, but the manuscripts were lost and remained unpublished until the mid-19th century. Moreover, no extended scholarly work has been done on this translation, which is especially striking given Kantemir's position among the major reformers of Russian literary language. Kantemir was indeed trained from a young age in Classical Greek and Latin, which made him “the one man in Russia whose education and inclination fitted him to translate the *Anacreontea*” (Drage, 1962). However, there is ample evidence that the Italian connection is just as important. Besides the simple fact that Kantemir was a natural polyglot – by his own account, he was comfortable in Classical Greek and Latin, Russian, German, French, English, Spanish, and Italian – he also moved in Italian circles and had close Italian friends while on diplomatic assignment in London. Furthermore, in his treatise on versification, he notably praises Italian poetics for allowing more freedom of lexical transposition and not shunning enjambment, unlike the competing French and German models. Finally, Kantemir was aware of the publication of a Greek-Latin-Italian edition of the *Anacreontea* in Venice in 1736 (the same year that he began his translation), likely because of his Italian circle in London and frequent correspondence with French and Italian intellectuals. His own *Anacreontea* is a prime case study of this Italian literary influence (specifically regarding rhyme, syllabics, and meter) and therefore complicates the traditional narrative of early Russian versification as a dialectic between French, German, and Slavonic modes.