Euler to Razumovsky
Berlin, 14/25 November 1750

Synopsis: Euler diplomatically declines Razumovsky’s offer to return to St. Petersburg.

[…] the generous intentions of H.I.M that Y.E. has wished to announce to me, penetrated my soul with the greatest respect, and I feel that I am overwhelmed with confusion when I sense on the one hand the eminent advantages that H.I.M. has so graciously offered to me and my weaknesses which render me totally unworthy on the other. As I understand more and more of the happiness to which I can accede by the good graces of your exalted Excellency and of which my spirit is absolutely blinded. I must also consider how much H.I.M. expects of me in regards to the Academy. However, it would be the greatest mortification if I found myself unable to respond to the knowledgeable ideas that Y.E has formed of my capacity, and I must see how the effect of the very particular grace which Y.E. has been willing to dignify me until now in such great abundance. For that matter what value can we place on the work I do in mathematics, even though I am aware of the many faults, I feel enough that my strength diminishes from day to day and as I am advancing with great steps towards 50 years old, I have begun to have the distinct feelings, that we remark of generally, in all those would have dedicated themselves to mathematical studies. Certainly some of the great geniuses having been, Newton, Leibniz, Hermann, Wolf and the Bernoullis, we can see without surprise, that all their beautiful discoveries, to whom we are indebted were produced before their fortieth year and even though they lived for a longer time, and that they were still filled with life, it is surprising, that that all they did after this term does not even come close to their original works, and even by a great deal. This is precisely the case, Monsignor, that I admit is where I actually find myself; for having already passed this limit which puts to rests all of the
mathematicians discoveries, I cannot flatter myself that in the future I will be in a better state to succeed in this subject than my predecessors. Under these circumstances my duty and my zeal for the Imperial Academy requires on my part a sincere oath of my inability to amply fulfill the important charge to which V.E. would like to make my move as gracious as possible and even though this incredible generosity of H.I.M. by which my heart is so heartily struck to place my family at the pinnacle of happiness, I see myself thrust by my indignity to reject such a great goodness, to which Providence prohibits me from appearing to, even despite this having placed myself in a position, where neither my health not that of certain of my children would be able to submit to so long a trip and least of all to a climate so different to the one here, especially after I persuaded my elderly mother to come to us, who having already reached 72 years of age, would be entirely unable to undertake such a change. However, these insurmountable obstacles do not deny me the ability to recognize the inestimable price of the lofty advantages that H.I.M. has deemed to offer so generously by the go-between of Y.E. and as I have been so strongly and infinitely above that I am able to express my feelings of appreciation and respect. I humbly supplicate Y.E. to accept the feeble indications of my most profound submission. It is principally the well-being of the Imperial Academy which necessitates my rejection of these offers as glorious as they are advantageous. I flatter myself to believe that Y.E. will not disapprove of my decision and will not deny me the continuation of your lofty graces, to which I have grown happy to enjoy until now, even though I merit them less and less. Even though my defective capacity which is significantly diminished, I will redouble my efforts to produce from time to time some pieces which will not unworthy of the attention of the Imperial Academy and it will be this way that I will attempt to maintain, as much as it will be possible, the honor. Which Y.E has so graciously bestowed onto me with a place among the foreign members. With this in mind, there remains little else than for me to implore very humbly Y.E. to graciously look upon my feeble efforts and my burning zeal for the interests of the
Imperial Academy. Because of the letter that Y.E. has honored me with, and the contents of which, I will never reveal to anyone, will serve me as a perpetual statement of the beneficence of Y.E. and will only increase the highest veneration and most profound respect in my heart and with which I will be all of my life, Sir, your most noble Excellency’s very humble, very obedient and very submitted servant […]